

Memorable debut for Coco Crisp in A's uniform

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Coco Crisp looked as though he was making up for lost time Friday night at the Oakland Coliseum.

After missing the A's first 42 games with a fractured left pinkie, Crisp was a surprise addition to the lineup and made his presence felt in a 6-1 victory over the Giants before a crowd of 33,369.

Crisp, signed to a one-year \$5.25 million deal in December to take over center field, contributed a sacrifice fly, added an RBI double in the seventh and finished 2 for 3 in his A's debut.

More than anything, his presence was a morale boost for a team that's accustomed to seeing key players exit the lineup with injuries rather than vice versa.

"Our offense has been up and down the last 10 games," A's manager Bob Geren said before the game. "Having somebody to jump-start up top is going to be nice."

Geren mentioned as recently as Thursday that Crisp and second baseman Mark Ellis, on the disabled list with a strained left hamstring, would both play at least one game with Triple-A Sacramento before being reinstated to the active roster.

The plan changed with Crisp.

He was in the leadoff spot when the A's lineup was posted Friday afternoon. Crisp played in an extended spring training game Monday in Phoenix, then went 5 for 6 in two games with Single-A Stockton before being called up.

"I told them my timing was right, that's the main thing," Crisp said. "I was just grateful to be here. Excited, nervous."

Crisp, a switch hitter who's spent the majority of his career batting leadoff, gives Oakland a proven presence atop the lineup. That allows Geren to bat Cliff Pennington and Rajai Davis eighth and ninth, respectively, as he did Friday, giving the A's two speedy players at the bottom of the order.

Pennington and Davis hit consecutive bloop doubles in the third inning to key a three-run rally that gave the A's the lead. Davis stole third and scored on Crisp's sacrifice fly.

The A's led 5-1 in the seventh when Crisp ripped a run-scoring double high off the wall in left-center, chasing Giants starter Barry Zito (6-2).

Aside from Ellis missing at second base, the defense that backed starting pitcher Trevor Cahill (2-2) was the one the A's envisioned back when spring training began. That included a strong outfield of Davis, Crisp and Ryan Sweeney, playing left to right.

"It felt like the outfield shrunk tonight," Geren said.

Six runs were more than enough for Cahill, who went 6²/₃ innings and allowed one run on six hits. He was backed by solid defense, including two standout plays by Pennington at shortstop.

Ellis might return as soon as today. Geren said he wanted to see Ellis play a full nine innings with Sacramento before reinstating him. Ellis played the entire game and went 1 for 4 Friday in the River Cats' 9-2 loss to Memphis.

Crisp was happy to bypass the Triple-A experience.

"I didn't want to go to Sacramento," he said, before joking: "Ellie didn't want to go either. This is where I want to be."

With Crisp back in center, Geren will juggle time in left field between Davis and Jack Cust, who served as designated hitter Friday. Geren said he still plans to use Eric Chavez at DH against right-handers. In that case, the left-handed hitting Cust is a good bet to play left field.

A's update: Justin Duchscherer to try throwing off a mound

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Injured Duchscherer will try to throw off a mound

Justin Duchscherer won't concede to season-ending left hip surgery just yet.

Duchscherer said Friday that he'll travel to Phoenix on Sunday and begin throwing off the mound. If his hip feels OK, Duchscherer said a tentative plan would eventually have him making two rehab starts before possibly returning to the A's rotation.

That's an optimistic plan for the right-hander. After he was scratched from his start last Saturday, Duchscherer acknowledged the possibility that he could require surgery. He's been told he has the same structural problem in his left hip as in his twice-operated on right hip.

But multiple surgeries have already bitten a big chunk out of his career, so Duchscherer will try to resume pitching without an operation.

"I've got to try," he said. "I know the option (is surgery) if I don't do it, and I don't like that option. I wish I was still 20 years old but I'm not."

Duchscherer had his hip examined in the Bay Area on Thursday and was given a shot of Synvisc, a thick fluid that acts as a joint lubrication. "We'll see if it can get rid of some of the friction I get when I throw," he said.

It was a bittersweet day for catcher Landon Powell, who was optioned to Triple-A Sacramento to clear a roster spot for Coco Crisp. But before leaving the Oakland Coliseum, Powell took part in a pregame ceremony to honor Dallas Braden's May 9 perfect game. Powell was behind the plate for the historic outing.

Manager Bob Geren presented Powell a glass case containing the glove he used to catch the game.

The A's elected to keep Jake Fox, who is out of options, as Kurt Suzuki's backup. "It's hard to swallow. I'm disappointed," Powell said before the ceremony. "Fortunately, I still have a job. It was a good month (with) the perfect game."

Gunnar Sandberg, a Marin Catholic High pitcher who was critically injured when he was hit in the head with a line drive in March, will throw out Sunday's first pitch. Catching it will be De La Salle's Zac Byers, who hit the ball that struck Sandberg. A \$5 donation will be made to the Gunnar Sandberg Fund from each Field Level ticket purchased for the game through oaklandathletics.com/Gunnar.

The A's presented Braden a ring that included 27 diamonds around the edges (for the 27 batters he retired in his perfecto) and 51 diamonds on the face of it (for his uniform number). Braden caught the ceremonial first pitch from his grandmother, Peggy Lindsey. ... The A's released Chad Gaudin and outrighted Edwar Ramirez to Sacramento. Both relievers had been designated for assignment.

Without 'The Gran,' Dallas Braden's life may be far different

By Jon Wilner, Bay Area News Group

STOCKTON — Peggy Lindsey walked into a local bookstore last week to buy a few copies of Sports Illustrated — the issue with her grandson, A's pitcher Dallas Braden, on the cover.

"You're the grandma!" a customer exclaimed.

"Yeah, I'm the grandma."

Lindsey has become a celebrity in her hometown since Braden pitched the 19th perfect game in major league history. It happened on Mother's Day with Lindsey, who helped raise him, in the stands.

The day after Braden's 4-0 domination of Tampa Bay, a television reporter showed up at her door and stuck a microphone in her face. Then she flew to Texas to appear live with Braden on the "The Early Show" on CBS.

Friday night, Lindsey threw out the first pitch at the Oakland Coliseum as part of the A's celebration of Braden's masterpiece.

Lindsey, who raised Braden after his mother, Jodie Atwood, died of skin cancer, was well-known in Stockton athletic circles long before the perfect game. She ran the Little League snack bar, attended Braden's Pop Warner football games and rarely missed one of his starts for Stagg High.

Known to family friends as "The Gran," Lindsey lived with Braden and Atwood and served as the bad cop for the sometimes wayward teenager, who was twice booted off his high school team for cutting class and other transgressions. (Braden has no siblings, and his father isn't involved in his life.)

"His mom let him do what he wanted. I was the one who always said, 'Where is he? What's he doing?' " Lindsey recalled. "Between the two of us, it balanced out."

Lindsey also was the central player in the make-or-break moment in Braden's career.

At the time of Atwood's death, in May 2001, he was living in the Stockton motel that Lindsey managed — a Quality Inn abutting the southbound lanes of Interstate 5.

Braden had just graduated from Stagg and was registered at San Joaquin Delta College in Stockton. Depressed and lost, he wanted nothing to do with school, with baseball, with anything.

"I don't want to go to college in Stockton," he told Lindsey. "Every time I turn a corner, I see my mom."

So Lindsey picked up the phone and called the baseball office at American River College in Sacramento.

"We get a lot of calls like that from parents and even grandparents. But she says he's a left-handed pitcher, and that gets me a little interested," recalled head coach Doug Jumelet, an assistant at the time. "And then she says he'd been drafted by the Atlanta Braves, and that makes me perk up."

The Braves never signed Braden, who eventually enrolled at American River. After two years, he transferred to Texas Tech.

"It was hard on Peggy — she would have rather he been (in Stockton)," said Julie Swanson, a longtime family friend. "But she knew the best thing for Dallas was to give him a little shove."

In 2004, Braden was drafted in the 24th round by the A's. He spent three years in their minor league system. When the call to the majors finally came, Braden and Lindsey flew together to Baltimore for his debut: six innings, one run and a victory.

Lindsey has attended games in Boston and New York and never misses his starts at the Coliseum. On Mother's Day, she was joined by four carloads of friends for a pregame tailgate, then took her seat in Section 121.

It wasn't until the seventh inning that she first thought about a no-hitter. "I didn't even know what a perfect game was," she said.

In the eighth, she started crying.

With two down in the ninth, she walked through the stands and took a seat on top of the dugout. After the final out, Lindsey was escorted onto the field and embraced her grandson.

"I've seen where, since the perfect game, Dallas has talked about how he would have been pumping gas if not for his grandmother, and he's telling the truth," Jumelet said.

"She took control of his life after his mom died and said, 'I'm not giving up on you.' If not for her, I don't know what would have happened to him."

Chin Music: A little on Cahill's outing, and Crisp's impact

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 5/21/2010 11:42PM

Most of my game story from the A's 6-1 victory over the Giants focuses on Coco Crisp and what his addition means to the team. Trevor Cahill's fine outing definitely deserved more space. The right-hander went 6 2/3 innings, allowing one run on six hits with four strikeouts and one walk. He's now given up three runs or less in his past four outings, after he was hit hard

in Toronto in his first start after his call-up. After tonight's game, manager Bob Geren mentioned that Cahill was popping the glove with his four-seam fastball, which was clocking in the mid 90's at times. The A's want Cahill to use his four-seamer more. Typically, Cahill leans heavily on his two-seamer (sinker), which he said was also working well for him. "I thought my sinker was good," he said. "I mixed in some breaking balls and change-ups and it worked out for me."

–Not that we should make too much out of one game, but a healthy Coco Crisp makes this a much more flexible and effective lineup, wouldn't you say? I like Rajai Davis and Cliff Pennington hitting at the bottom of the order. Even if they're not hitting, they provide some speed at the bottom of the lineup. And if they're struggling, it's not quite as glaring as if they're hitting up top.

Time to head home, check in w/you before tomorrow's game ...

Coco Crisp makes A's debut; Duchscherer heading to Arizona, hopes to return without surgery

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 5/21/2010 6:55PM

There's a surprise addition to the A's lineup tonight: Coco Crisp, playing center field and batting leadoff. Just yesterday, manager Bob Geren said Crisp and second baseman Mark Ellis would both play rehab games for Triple-A Sacramento. Crisp wound up skipping that step, so tonight marks his A's debut after he was sidelined the first 42 games with a fractured left pinkie. "I didn't want to go to Sacramento," Crisp said, before adding with a smile. "Ellie didn't want to go either ... heh heh."

Crisp mentioned more than once that he expects Ellis to rejoin the A's on Saturday. But Geren hedged his bet, saying that Ellis needed to show his strained left hamstring is healed by playing a full nine innings in a minor league game. "He could be back shortly, or it could be a few days," Geren said. Geren was also asked if Crisp lobbied hard to be activated tonight, considering that just yesterday the plan was for him to play at least one game at Triple-A. "Lobbying had nothing to do with it," the manager said. "The positive thing is he's healthy and ready to play. Being that his timing is (good), and he has no pain swinging the bat, that's how I made the decision."

This offense could sure use a shot in the arm. Will Crisp have an immediate impact? He had a four-hit game in Single-A action on Tuesday. We'll see how he reacts to big league pitching. Defensively, Crisp's extended DL stint probably benefited him, just because it gave more time for both of his shoulders to heal. Remember, he had surgery on both shoulders last summer.

As for the trickle-down effect, catcher Landon Powell was sent to the minors to make room for Crisp, so the A's have six outfielders now. Geren has a juggling act at the DH/left field spot between Jack Cust, Eric Chavez and Rajai Davis. Geren said Chavez would still be his DH against right-handers. I'd expect the left-handed hitting Cust to play left field over Davis in that situation, unless Davis catches fire with the bat. Against lefties, I see the right-handed hitting Davis playing left field and Cust DH'ing over Chavez, just because I think Cust is more likely to deliver offensively. That's the setup tonight against Giants lefty Barry Zito.

At some point, you figure another roster move will force the A's to make a tough call w/their outfield logjam. Davis and Eric Patterson are both out of options, so it's a risk sending either of them through waivers. Could the A's cut ties with Gabe Gross at some point? I could see it happening.

–Justin Duchscherer is not conceding he'll need hip surgery just yet. He told me before the game that he's heading to Phoenix on Sunday to throw some bullpen sessions. If he feels good, he said the plan would be to make two rehab starts and then see if he can return to the A's rotation. Is this extreme optimism? Yes. But I don't blame the guy for exhausting every option before undergoing season-ending surgery. As he put it: "I wish I was 20 years old, but I'm not."

Finally, tonight's lineups:

A's

Crisp CF, Barton 1B, Sweeney RF, Suzuki C, Kouzmanoff 3B, Cust DH, Rosales 2B, Pennington SS, Davis LF; Cahill RHP.

Giants: Rowand CF, Sanchez 2B, Sandoval 3B, Huff 1B, Molina DH, Uribe SS, Bowker LF, Torres RF, Whiteside C; Zito LHP.

Fremont happy to get Tesla, unlikely to get the A's

The auto firm is open to having a neighboring ballpark, but the team is looking elsewhere.

By Matthew Artz, Oakland Tribune

With Tesla Motors planning to move into the shuttered NUMMI auto plant, Fremont can stake claim to being a leading center for green technology.

But it looks increasingly unlikely that the city also will stake claim to baseball's green and gold.

Tesla Chief Executive Elon Musk tantalized Fremont stadium boosters Thursday, saying the company didn't foresee any conflict between its planned operations at the NUMMI plant and Fremont's proposal to bring the Oakland A's to a nearby parcel owned by New United Motor Manufacturing Inc.

But A's co-owner Lew Wolff said Friday that a Fremont stadium plan isn't viable, even with Tesla's support.

"We can't finance a ballpark in Fremont without the ability to sell residential entitlements," he said, referring to team's original Fremont stadium proposal that included development rights for 3,150 housing units.

Wolff doesn't envision the market bearing the magnitude of new housing needed to help pay for a Fremont stadium.

"I think we missed our chance," he said. "We need to be in an established downtown."

Fremont officials nevertheless were ecstatic to learn that Tesla and Toyota had struck a deal to get assembly lines rolling again at the south Fremont auto plant, which closed in April, putting 4,700 employees out of work.

Not only will the city once again have an operating auto plant, but Tesla made clear that, unlike NUMMI, it will not oppose major development near the plant.

"It sounds like the best of both worlds," Mayor Bob Wasserman said.

The agreement between the two auto companies allows NUMMI — a former partnership between Toyota and General Motors — to sell about 170 vacant acres north of the plant.

Musk said that Tesla wouldn't oppose offices, stores or even a baseball stadium so long as the company had unimpeded access to the nearby rail corridor.

Tesla's arrival in Fremont comes as several of the city's green technology companies, including solar panel makers Solyndra and Solaria, have begun expanding.

"When I look at the number of firms that we have, and I look at Solyndra and Tesla, I'm beginning to think that we're the national focal point for green technology," City Manager Fred Diaz said.

Earlier this year, Fremont received a federal loan to study redeveloping the NUMMI site and adjacent land, which have easy access to two freeways and a BART station scheduled to open in 2014.

The city is postponing meeting with prospective consultants until it learns more about Tesla's and Toyota's plans for the property, said Lori Taylor, the city's director of economic development.

With Tesla on board, Wasserman envisioned the surrounding land having fewer shopping outlets and more manufacturing plants.

"Tesla is going to need suppliers just like NUMMI did," he said. "Maybe we can amass some of those instead of them being spread all over the region."

Meanwhile, the A's still are awaiting permission from Major League Baseball to move to downtown San Jose.

Fremont Councilmember Anu Natarajan was surprised to hear that Wolff didn't think a Fremont stadium was viable without the housing component.

"To me, that's just an excuse not to look at Fremont," she said. "I think there are other ways to do it."

Zito's hot start ends in Oakland

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

The first time Barry Zito pitched at the Coliseum as a Giant, it was his first year - and ninth start - in orange and black. He was crazy wild on May 18, 2007, issuing seven walks in four-plus innings in a 15-3 loss, and no one knew exactly what would come of that seven-year, \$126 million contract.

More is known now. After posting three straight losing seasons and a combined 4.56 ERA, Zito is off to his best career start.

But three years and three days after his first Giants go-round in Oakland, Zito gave it another try and fizzled again. The A's, still the only team Zito hasn't defeated, beat the Giants 6-1 before 33,369, the largest and most energetic crowd of the year at the Coliseum.

"It was like any other park pretty much," said Zito, apparently over any apprehension about pitching in Oakland. "I didn't have thoughts like I did in '07, like, 'It's weird to be on this side of the field,' and that kind of stuff."

But no matter how far Zito has rebounded from the depths of his career, he still can't solve the team that he once represented and for whom he won a Cy Young Award. Zito was out-pitched by Trevor Cahill, 22, who surrendered one run in 6 2/3 innings to win the opener of the three-game interleague series.

Zito walked only one batter, but he surrendered nine hits and was charged with six earned runs, one fewer than in his '07 appearance.

On the other hand, as A's manager Bob Geren said, "We didn't exactly crush the ball."

The A's scored their first three runs on consecutive bloop doubles by Cliff Pennington and Rajai Davis in the third inning. Both hits landed in right field just inside the foul line.

"You can't do anything about that stuff. I threw two good sliders," Zito said. "That's just baseball. I felt better than the results. That happens."

After that, the A's hit the ball a little harder. Daric Barton doubled in the sixth and scored on Ryan Sweeney's single, and the A's added two in the seventh on Davis' sacrifice fly and a double by Coco Crisp in his A's debut, ending Zito's night and leaving him with an 8.85 ERA in four starts against Oakland.

Giants manager Bruce Bochy wasn't concerned about Zito as much as he was his hitters, who went 0-for-9 with runners in scoring position. The Giants had men on second base with no outs in both the third and fourth innings and did nothing about it. Their only run came on Andres Torres' two-out double in the seventh.

Zito was replaced by former A's teammate Santiago Casilla, who was making his Giants debut after being promoted from Triple-A Fresno earlier in the day. Casilla struck out Barton, but the damage was done. Zito's record fell to 6-2, and he has lost two of his past three starts.

"He's pitched great all year," Oakland's Jack Cust said. "It's just that in the (third) inning, I don't think we hit any ball particularly hard. It was just the way things fell."

Beating Barry

Barry Zito, who entered the game 6-1 with a 2.15 ERA, remains winless against his former team. He was 102-63 with a 3.55 ERA with the A's. His numbers against them haven't been so impressive.

Record 0-4

Innings pitched 20 1/3

Hits allowed 27

Walks 13

Strikeouts 10

ERA 8.85

Coco Crisp gives A's a boost in 1st game back

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Coco Crisp couldn't hide his delight about rejoining the A's a day or two early, even though he'd come back without rehab cohort Mark Ellis.

"I didn't want to go to Sacramento," Crisp said of his scheduled game with Oakland's Triple-A team Friday. "Elly didn't want to go either. Ha ha!"

Crisp left Ellis to pay for the minor-leaguers' postgame meal on his own, rather than splitting the bill. Crisp made his Oakland debut, instead, in the A's 6-1 victory over the Giants at the Coliseum. Crisp went 2-for-3 with a double, two RBIs and a sacrifice fly, helping, as hoped, spark the A's stalled offense.

Signed as a free agent during the winter, Crisp had successfully returned from surgery on both shoulders by the middle of spring training, but his left pinkie was fractured on April 2 during the Bay Bridge series. He was caught stealing, and Juan Uribe's glove knocked Crisp's finger sideways on the play.

The A's need him. Not only is Crisp a superb center fielder, but also he is an established leadoff hitter, and Oakland's offense has been more ineffective than not lately. Cliff Pennington, who started the season swinging the bat well (.272 in the first month), had been hitting leadoff, and he was batting .169 in the past 15 games. Combined, Oakland's leadoff men this year had an on-base percentage of .289 entering Friday's game, the lowest mark in the league by 17 points.

Crisp had no problems hitting in his two rehab games with Class-A Stockton, going 4-for-4 with a homer one night and tripling in his first at-bat the next.

"I had a career .299 minor-league average, and that gave me something to shoot for," Crisp said. "So I was game-ready. And it worked. Now I'm a career .301 minor-league hitter. I can always say I'm a .300 hitter and if nobody asks me where, I'm fine."

One reason he was brought back early and Ellis was not is that Crisp was able to do almost all physical activity, including conditioning, while he was on the disabled list.

Ellis had tried to rehab his hamstring tendinitis and then play in a game on April 20, but he had to come out after feeling the leg tighten up again. The A's want to make sure he plays nine innings in a game at least once before he returns, so he was scheduled to do so Friday. There's a decent chance he'll be brought back to Oakland today.

That would necessitate a move; the A's have six outfielders on the roster, including sometimes-designated-hitter Jack Cust, but Eric Patterson is out of options and the team has been loath to expose him to waivers.

Powell honored, then sent to Sacramento

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Landon Powell caught the 19th perfect game in major-league history this month, but that didn't save his job.

Powell was sent down to Triple-A Sacramento in order to make room for outfielder **Coco Crisp** to come off the disabled list, leaving utility player **Jake Fox** as the A's backup catcher.

Whenever Powell gets sent out, the team tells him he's done everything asked of him, and Friday, Powell said, "They commended me and said, 'It's just a roster move.' I told them what I feel, which is that I think I should be here."

Powell did stick around for the pregame ceremony, which honored **Dallas Braden** for that May 9 perfect game. Powell got some recognition, too - he was presented with the glove he used to catch the perfect game, now in a glass case.

The A's gave Braden a ring that includes 27 diamonds on the base for the 27 outs, and 51 diamonds on the face for Braden's number. His grandmother, **Peggy Lindsey**, received a matching pendant. A new logo on the left-field wall honors Braden's accomplishment.

Braden was feeling much better after being sick the previous three days. His blood work was fine, so he presumes he had food poisoning. He slept 14 hours Thursday.

Briefly: Justin Duchscherer said he received an injection of joint-cushioning Synvisc for his left hip, an effort to stave off surgery until the offseason. When he had a similar problem with his right hip in 2007, he had a cortisone shot and a Synvisc injection, but still required season-ending surgery. He'll know soon if it worked; he's going to try to start throwing when the soreness from the injection subsides. ... Reliever **Edwar Ramirez**, designated for assignment May 15, cleared waivers and was outrighted to Sacramento. ... **Chad Gaudin**, designated a day later, also cleared waivers. He was offered a minor-league assignment and declined, so he was released.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Bradenmania: Dallas Braden's perfect game was the punch line of Friday's Doonesbury comic strip. And before throwing out the first pitch Friday, his grandmother, Peggy Lindsey (also a lefty), jokingly asked reporters if they thought Braden would let her step on the mound.

Drumbeat: Crisp comes off the DL for the Giants series

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the Coliseum 5/21/2010 5:20PM

Coco Crisp was scheduled to play at Triple-A Sacramento tonight, but the A's cancelled that and he's in their lineup, instead, against the Giants, batting leadoff in his Oakland debut.

Both Crisp (fractured pinkie) and second baseman Mark Ellis (hamstring tendinitis) had hoped to avoid Sacramento, but Ellis will be there tonight.

"I didn't want to go to Sacramento, Elly didn't want to go either - ha ha!" Crisp said.

Because Ellis had an leg injury, the A's want to make sure he can play nine innings before he's activated; Crisp had been able to stay conditioned, doing his running and shagging flyballs, and he just had a finger injury. So nine innings weren't all that necessary. Plus, Crisp went 4-for-4 with a homer his first night with Class-A Sacramento and tripled his first at-bat the next night.

"I had a career .299 minor-league average, so that gave me something to shoot for," Crisp said with a grin. "So I was game-ready, and it worked. Now I'm a career .301 hitter and I can always say I'm a .300 hitter - as long as nobody asks where, I'll be fine."

Ellis should be back tomorrow or Sunday, and it's possible the team will drop down a reliever when he comes back. I had thought that might be the case today, though, but backup catcher Landon Powell was sent out.

He's unhappy about that - he's done everything the team has asked, he's played well, heck, he caught a perfect game - but he's not out of options and Jake Fox, who is now the backup catcher, is. So is utility player Eric Patterson, who is currently the backup middle infielder -and even though Adam Rosales becomes the backup middle infielder upon Ellis' return, Patterson might not be the choice to go.

I'm not sure that Patterson or Fox has shown enough to get a season-long pass just because of their option situations; at some point, they might be vulnerable. But so far, when they've been among the more obvious possibilities to go, either because of performance or because of redundancies with positions, Fox and Patterson have been safe.

Justin Duchscherer told me he did get an injection of Synvisc for his left hip problem; his hip is very sore today, and he's limping, but he said that's to be expected. He's trying to stave off left hip surgery until the offseason, but when he had the same problem with his right hip in 2004, he also had cortisone and then Synvisc and still had his season ended by surgery. He'll try everything he can first, though, he said.

Dallas Braden is feeling much better today after sleeping 14 hours yesterday. He was polishing off a big plate of food when I spoke to him, which is a great sign - especially considering there's a big ceremony for Braden's perfect game in about an hour.

A's PR man Bob Rose was just passing around today's Doonesbury: Braden's mentioned. He is now officially everywhere.

In other transaction news, Edwar Ramirez, designated for assignment last week, cleared waivers and was outrighted to Sacramento. Chad Gaudin, designated the next day, was released on Friday.

Here's the lineup: Crisp CF, Barton 1B, Sweeney RF, Suzuki C, Kouzmanoff 3B, Cust DH, Rosales 2B, Pennington SS, Davis LF, Cahill P

I specifically asked about Eric Chavez and if Cust might be DHing more now with Crisp back; Chavez doesn't DH against left-handers, so he wouldn't have been in tonight, anyway. Manager Bob Geren answered that Cust is swinging the bat well and

he wanted to keep him in tonight, and then he started to discuss how many options the team now has in the outfield and with left- and right-handed hitters.

Where that leaves Chavez, I'm not sure, but I'll hazard a guess he'll still be DHing pretty regularly against right-handers. We'll find out tomorrow when the A's face Matt Cain.

Crisp, Cahill lead A's past cross-bay rivals

Davis contributes three RBIs in victory over Giants

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Coco Crisp was supposed to be spending his Friday night in Sacramento, brushing shoulders with Mark Ellis as the pair underwent yet another rehab assignment.

He was supposed to be stealing the thunder of a handful of Minor League prospects en route to continually healing his fractured pinkie finger.

And, by night's end, he was supposed to be splitting the costs of the River Cats' postgame spread with Ellis.

Change of plans.

Crisp, instead, was activated from the disabled list and rubbed shoulders with his Oakland teammates following a 6-1 victory over the visiting Giants in the first round of Interleague action Friday.

And rather than stealing the thunder of some up-and-coming prospects, he simply stole some of starter Trevor Cahill's.

Batting leadoff while playing in center field, Crisp posted a 2-for-3 night and collected a pair of RBIs in his debut in green and gold as the A's easily took the Bay Bridge Series opener, improving them to 10-5 in their last 15 home games.

"Today I told them my timing was right," Crisp said. "I told them I didn't need too many more at-bats to be ready. It wasn't anything medical. My finger's fine. It's just been about getting my timing back. I'm grateful they activated me today."

It's safe to say Rajai Davis is, too. The A's outfielder got his partner in crime back and, as a result, was shifted to left field. With Ryan Sweeney manning right field, Oakland's outfield finally appeared just as Billy Beane and Co. imagined it would this offseason.

"Having those three guys out there," manager Bob Geren said, "it felt like the outfield shrunk tonight."

"It takes a little more pressure off of me," Davis said. "I feel comfortable out there when [Crisp] is out there. He'll get to everything over there, and I'll get to everything over here and then we got Sweeney. It's really nice to get an outfield like that."

As a slumping A's offense found out, it's also really nice to put some runs on the board. Coming off losing both ends of a two-game series in which they tallied just three combined runs against Detroit, Oakland on Friday doubled that total thanks to some perfectly placed bloop hits -- including two in the third that led to a pair of runs off San Francisco's Barry Zito.

Following a leadoff hit by Adam Rosales, Cliff Pennington moved him to third base on a softly hit fly ball near the right-field line that resulted in a double. Less than two minutes later, Davis found himself on second base with two RBIs in the bag thanks to a ball hit in nearly the same spot.

"How about that?" Davis said. "I thought, 'Oh, if it worked for him, it might as well work for me.'"

The speedy outfielder managed to steal third base and eventually scored on a sacrifice fly from Crisp, who ignited a club that saw hits from every member of its starting nine.

"Having Coco back helped a lot, just having that presence in the leadoff spot," Jack Cust said. "Not that other guys weren't doing a good job, but Coco brings a nice energy to the team. He's really good in the clubhouse, he's really good in the dugout, and obviously he's a great center fielder."

Crisp admitted he was somewhat surprised by his immediate success at the plate, especially against a guy who entered the affair having recorded the best start of his career with a 6-1 record and 2.15 ERA.

Apparently Crisp wasn't aware of Zito's history with the A's, though. The Giants lefty, who donned the green and gold for the first seven years of his big league career, remained winless against his former team after allowing six runs on nine hits and one walk while fanning three through 6 2/3 innings.

"It's hard to put a finger on it because the majority of guys usually haven't faced him," Geren said of Zito's constant battle with the A's. "We always seem to have a new bunch of young guys going against him, so there's no rhyme or reason. He's a great pitcher and has had a great year. We didn't exactly crush the ball against him. We just grinded out our at-bats. He threw the ball well."

Perhaps not as well as his counterpart, however. Cahill, making his fifth start of the season, quietly put together one of his most impressive performances of the season, giving up just one run and six hits to the Giants in 6 2/3 innings. The left-hander walked one and struck out four while inducing nine groundouts in the winning effort, which came in front of a crowd of more than 30,000.

"Warming up in the 'pen, I thought I saw some extra giddy-up on his fastball," catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "It was coming in pretty hot. He was obviously a little pumped up with all the festivities going on and all the fans. A lot of times when pitchers throw that well in the 'pen, it doesn't really translate to games. But he took it right into the game and kept his emotions in check. The biggest thing was he was getting ahead, and he was throwing strikes."

"I threw my sinker a lot," said Cahill, who uncharacteristically reached the mid-90s on a handful of pitches. "I was able to mix that in with the breaking ball and changeup and really just tried to keep the ball down. We're not too used to a big crowd like that, so I was definitely feeling the adrenaline."

"Any time you get a win, it builds confidence. And as long as you have that confidence, it makes it easier to win."

A's get reinforcements for clash with Cain

By Doug Miller / MLB.com

The A's are returning to health, but Matt Cain is usually pretty healthy against the A's.

Both storylines should provide plenty of intrigue Saturday when this season's first Interleague series between the San Francisco Bay rivals continues at the Oakland Coliseum.

For the A's, it's been a long time coming, but Coco Crisp has returned to the lineup after over a month on the disabled list with a fractured lefty pinky, and it's likely that second baseman Mark Ellis will return to the fold Saturday.

Crisp gives the A's seven outfield options, and manager Bob Geren says the veteran should provide a spark to the inconsistent hitting Oakland has seen so far in 2010.

"The offense has been real up and down, so just having somebody who can jump-start us is real nice," Geren said.

Ellis, meanwhile, played with Triple-A Sacramento on Friday night but should be ready to return Saturday after being out of action since April 20 because of hamstring tendinitis.

"We felt he needed to play at least nine innings once," Geren said. "He's still day to day, but hopefully he'll be back here soon. With a leg injury, it's important he gets a full game in."

The Giants, meanwhile, will be looking for a full game from Cain, who has been lights-out against the A's.

The right-hander is making his seventh career start against Oakland, and although he's only 2-4 against them, he has a 2.89 ERA and .173 batting average against and has yielded five earned runs in his last 24 innings vs. the A's.

Two of his eight career complete games have come against Oakland, including one last season.

Cain has often been plagued by a lack of offensive support, and it happened again in his last start, a loss to the Padres in which he gave up two earned runs on six hits in six innings.

"You make mistakes against these guys, they're going to take advantage of them," Cain said after that game. "That's what happened."

Giants: Huff on fire

First baseman Aubrey Huff went 2-for-4 on Friday night and leads the Giants with a .333 (23-for-69) average in the month of May. ... Bengie Molina is hitless in his last 13 at-bats. ... Third baseman Pablo Sandoval has hit safely in 14 of 15 career Interleague games and is batting .407 (22-for-54) in those games.

A's: One-run wonders

The A's are 7-2 in one-run games, the best record in the Majors this year. They went 15-23 in one-run games last year, which was second-worst in the American League. They're 3-2 in extra-inning games this year, which means they've already matched their extra-inning win total from last year. ... Saturday starter Gio Gonzalez comes off a victory over the Mariners in his last start in which he gave up three runs on four hits over seven innings while striking out four and walking four. Gonzalez allowed six runs (four earned) on 10 hits in 3 2/3 innings the only time in his career he's made a start against the Giants.

Worth noting

Prior to pitching 1 1/3 innings of scoreless ball in Friday night's 6-1 loss to the A's, the Giants' bullpen had been touched for 14 runs in 14 innings through the first four games of the road trip, including 11 runs in its previous six innings. ... The A's offense has been successful in 24 of 30 stolen-base attempts, the third-best percentage in the AL.

A's celebrate 'Dallas Braden Day'

Grandmother, Powell part of perfect-game ceremony

By Jane Lee and Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Grandma Peggy fondly remembers the days when she would take her grandson out for a game of catch.

"He always used to tell me I look like a flamingo," Peggy Lindsey said.

Several years have passed since then, but Lindsey was given another go at it when afforded the opportunity to throw out Friday's first pitch to grandson Dallas Braden, whom she raised alone after his mother, Jodie Atwood, passed away of cancer nine years ago.

Lindsey, a lefty like her grandson, was on hand Friday to celebrate "Dallas Braden Day," as was deemed by Oakland Mayor Ron Dellums, to commemorate Braden's historic perfect game May 9.

Before the A's took on the visiting Giants, Braden was not only presented with the home plate from the perfecto but with a ring that boasted 51 diamonds on the face -- for his number -- along with 27 diamonds around the edge in honor of the 27 successive outs he recorded. Lindsey, standing alongside in the arms of Braden, received a matching pendant.

"It's been fun sharing this with Dallas," Lindsey said. "We're very close, so I wouldn't expect it to happen any other way."

The past two weeks have been something of a whirlwind for the pair, who have already taken part in TV interviews with the likes of ESPN and CBS. Despite the suddenly busy schedule, though, Lindsey is still standing on cloud 10, as Braden noted.

"My friends have all been making fun of me," she said, "saying I'm a celebrity and always seeing me on TV."

"It's been hectic, but really fun."

The A's rounded out the special pregame ceremony, which also honored Braden's perfecto batterymate, Landon Powell, by unveiling a logo on the left-field wall in memory of the game.

"This doesn't seem like it's real," Lindsey said. "It's crazy."

Ellis could return to A's on Saturday

OAKLAND -- It appears Mark Ellis' recovery is in the home stretch.

Oakland's second baseman could return as early as Saturday, when the A's continue their three-game set against the Giants.

Oakland manager Bob Geren said Ellis' status will be addressed day-to-day. Ellis, who is recovering from a strained left hamstring, will play with Triple-A Sacramento on Friday night and then update the big league club.

"Mark's close," Geren said. "He could be back really shortly or it might take a few more days. It kind of depends really on him."

Ellis has played in a pair of games with Class A Stockton this week, going 1-for-5 with an RBI and a walk, but is yet to play in a complete game. Ellis played seven innings both Tuesday and Wednesday.

"Mark feels real good at the plate," Geren said. "I just feel he needs to play at least nine innings and give it a true test every inning of the game."

Ellis joined his Oakland teammates in the clubhouse Thursday and said he felt physically fine, but that he needed to get some more at-bats in.

If Ellis is activated from the 15-day disabled list this weekend, the A's will likely have to cut loose a position player. As of Friday, the A's were carrying 12 pitchers. Oakland currently has six outfielders on its roster, including bench players Eric Patterson and Gabe Gross.

A's send Ramirez to Triple-A, release Gaudin

OAKLAND -- After being designated for assignment Saturday, right-handed reliever Edwar Ramirez has been outrighted to Triple-A Sacramento.

Ramirez cleared waivers after posting a 4.91 ERA in 11 innings of work over two stints with the big league club. He allowed nine hits and 10 walks while striking out 10 over that span.

Ramirez was designated for assignment to make room for outfielder Jack Cust, who is batting .316 (6-for-19) since being called up from Sacramento.

The A's also announced Friday they have released right-hander Chad Gaudin. Gaudin, who had been with the A's since Opening Day, was originally designated for assignment Sunday.

Gaudin had an 8.83 ERA in 12 appearances (17 1/3 innings pitched), which was the highest figure in the American League at the time of his designation. He was hit hard in his final two appearances, when he gave up a combined nine runs (eight earned) over 4 1/3 innings of work.

Since the departure of Ramirez and Gaudin, the A's have reshaped the bullpen by adding southpaw Cedrick Bowers and Triple-A starter Vin Mazzaro.

Crisp back in action at leadoff for A's

Outfielder activated from disabled list for opener vs. Giants

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Coco Crisp can officially say he's a career .300 hitter.

"As long as no one asks where," the outfielder said with a smile.

Crisp, who upped his career .299 Minor League average to .301 after two rehab stints with Class A Stockton this week, had plenty to smile about Friday.

The 30-year-old outfielder was activated from the disabled list and immediately placed in the starting lineup to make his A's debut. Crisp was slated to bat leadoff and play center field against the visiting Giants -- the same team against which he suffered the fractured pinkie finger that put him on the DL just two days before Opening Day.

"It's kind of ironic to be playing against them," said a self-described "excited" and "nervous" Crisp. "But it's not weird or anything. It just feels good to be back."

Crisp, signed as a free agent Dec. 23, lends the A's a solid leadoff hitter -- a slot the struggling Rajai Davis and Cliff Pennington have been occupying in his absence. In 12 games this spring batting leadoff, the veteran went 16-for-37 (.432) with two home runs and eight RBIs.

"Our offense has been up and down," manager Bob Geren said. "Just to have somebody in there who can jump-start things is nice. It also gives us more of an opportunity to give guys days off."

With Crisp back in action, left-field duties will primarily be shared between the likes of Davis and Jack Cust, who will each receive playing time based on a variety of factors, mainly pitching matchups.

The transaction, which forced Landon Powell to be optioned to Triple-A Sacramento, leaves the club with seven outfield possibilities -- among them Eric Patterson and Jake Fox, who are out of options.

"It's the same type of deal we had on Opening Day," Geren explained.

It was then that the 28-year-old Powell was optioned in a surprising series of moves that left him on the Triple-A roster. On Friday, he was less than thrilled with what's become an all-too-familiar scene.

"I have to look at it as a business move and keep my chin up and just move forward and hope that I'll be back," he said. "I feel very comfortable with where I'm at with that. I just have to keep my sights on the prize for the long term and keep putting on whatever color jersey it is that's in my locker and play my hardest."

Mind over batter? Nope

Paul Gutierrez, Sacramento Bee

OAKLAND – You could say the A's are still in Barry Zito's head.

His deep-thinking, too-smart-for-his-own-good, analytical dome.

Because, not to get all Madonna Louise Ciccone on you, but this used to be Barry Zito's playground.

Now, more than three years after last pitching at the Oakland Coliseum, it has become more of a house of horrors for him.

It's not that Zito was his 2007, 2008 and early 2009 ghastly self against his former team in the Bay Bridge interleague series opener Friday night. He just wasn't as sharp as he has been since last summer's wake-up call.

And that's all the A's needed to beat Zito 6-1 and remain the only team in the big leagues he has not defeated in a career that began on July 22, 2000.

"I didn't have a lot of the same thoughts like I did in '07 – 'It's weird being on this side,' stuff like that," Zito said after giving up six runs on nine hits, striking out three and walking one in 62/3 innings. He also hit a batter while throwing 102 pitches, 61 for strikes.

Zito came of age in the Coliseum. Spent seven free-spirited seasons finding himself in the A's clubhouse. Won a Cy Young Award in green and gold.

But so many faces in the third-base dugout were different from the last time he pitched for the A's, a Game 1 loss to Detroit in the 2006 American League Championship Series.

Only one player in the A's starting lineup was a former teammate of Zito's, and Rajai Davis and Zito played together with the Giants in parts of 2007 and 2008.

In fact, the only active A's player to have shared the Oakland clubhouse with Zito was Eric Chavez (Mark Ellis and Justin Duchschere are on the disabled list).

The novelty has worn off.

"Now," said A's manager Bob Geren, the club's bench coach in Zito's last season in the East Bay, "he's just another good left-handed pitcher. He's just another front-line pitcher we have to face.

"Some of us know him (personally), but a majority of these guys in here have never played with him."

Rather, they've just beaten up on him.

The previous three times Zito faced the A's since going to San Francisco for that landmark seven-year, \$126 million contract, he was pounded to the tune of a 9.22 ERA while going 0-3.

The first and only other time Zito faced the A's in Oakland? He was roughed up for seven earned runs on six hits and seven walks in four innings on May 18, 2007.

In that game, though, A's catcher Jason Kendall offered a detailed scouting report on how to beat the cerebral left-hander – take pitches, wait for him to throw that Bugs Bunny curveball for a strike, then attack his floating fastball.

Kendall is long gone from Oakland. As were Zito's early San Francisco-era struggles.

Entering Friday, Zito was 11-4 with a 2.55 ERA over his previous 22 starts, dating to last July 23.

In fact, Zito, at 6-1 with a 2.15 ERA this season, was off to his best start through eight games in his career. Better than in his 2002 Cy Young season.

Then came Friday's fruitless trip across the Bay Bridge, in which he received a mixed greeting from the fans.

"Today was a lot different than three years ago," Zito said. "It was just a game like any other."

If they're not in his head, the A's are in his face.

Oakland beats former ace Zito

Crisp drives in 2 runs in debut for A's in first game of Bay Bridge Series

By JANIE McCAULEY, ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Coco Crisp drove in two runs in his Oakland debut as the Athletics beat their former ace, Barry Zito, and the San Francisco Giants 6-1 on Friday night in the first game of the Bay Bridge Series this season.

Zito (6-2) was off to a career-best start this season for the Giants heading into just his second outing back at the Coliseum since the 2002 AL Cy Young Award winner with the A's was lured across the bay by a \$126 million, seven-year deal before the 2007 season.

Ryan Sweeney added an RBI single for the A's to help Trevor Cahill (2-2) win for the first time in three starts. Oakland kept Zito from a win against the only team in baseball he's yet to beat in his 11-year career.

San Francisco lost its third straight game a day after an 8-7 defeat at last-place Arizona in which ace Tim Lincecum struggled and manager Bruce Bochy was ejected late.

The Giants couldn't capitalize against Cahill despite having several chances with runners in scoring position. San Francisco lost to the A's for only the second time in the last nine meetings after going 5-1 in the rivalry in 2009.

Zito received a mixed welcome of boos and cheers from the crowd of 33,369 when he was introduced before the first pitch.

After the left-hander pitched 1-2-3 innings in the first and second, Oakland produced three straight hits to start the third.

Former Giants outfielder Rajai Davis got the A's on the board with a two-run double and Crisp followed with a sacrifice fly. Crisp, who began the season on the disabled list with a broken left pinkie that he injured April 2 in an exhibition game against the Giants, doubled in a run in the seventh to chase Zito.

Zito pitched more than six innings against the A's for the first time in the four outings against them — and this was at least better than his last one here.

On May 18, 2007, in his first return to Oakland, Zito was tagged for seven earned runs and six hits with seven walks in four innings of a 15-3 loss.

Zito allowed season highs of six runs and nine hits Friday. He walked just one batter after the Giants issued nine free passes against the Diamondbacks on Thursday and 29 over their previous four games.

Giants shortstop Juan Uribe left the game in the bottom of the third with a tight left hamstring. Fortunately for the Giants, regular shortstop Edgar Renteria is set to be activated from the disabled list Saturday.

Sandberg preparing for upcoming big events while taking time to enjoy the little ones

John Swartz, Marin IJ, 5/21/2010

GUNNAR SANDBERG doesn't have any memory of the nearly three weeks he lay in a Marin General Hospital bed, but he clearly remembers playing in the baseball game March 11 that led to his stay there and at a San Francisco rehabilitation center.

"I really didn't know anything about how bad the situation was," said Gunnar, speaking publicly about his injury for the first time since he awoke from an induced coma after a line drive fractured his skull and caused life-threatening brain injuries.

"My first memory was of the ambulance ride from Marin General to the hospital in the city. I didn't know too much about what had happened. My mom and my dad told me."

Sandberg has recovered enough to speak and act like a normal teen-ager while he continues outpatient therapy and awaits a surgery next week to replace the portion of his skull that was removed when the injury caused his brain to swell one day after the fracture. Describing the injury in detail makes Sandberg uncomfortable, but the 16-year-old Marin Catholic High baseball player doesn't mind opening up about his urge to once again play the sport he loves.

"I definitely want to play baseball again," Sandberg said. "I'm not really scared of what happened. It's in the past. I think we'll have to see how I'm doing, how I'm feeling (next spring), but I'm hoping to be able to play."

Sandberg is just beginning his path toward a total recovery, but the high school junior is pleased with his progress so far. Since leaving

the rehabilitation center, he rejoined his teammates in the Marin Catholic dugout for games and even tossed out the first pitch before a high school game at San Francisco's AT&T Park earlier this month. On Sunday, Sandberg throws out the ceremonial first pitch when the Oakland Athletics host the San Francisco Giants before a 1:05 p.m. start.

Both teams will honor Sandberg at a ceremony that begins at 12:30 p.m. The game features tickets specially designated to benefit the Gunnar Sandberg Fund, which was set up to help the family cover the costs of treatment.

After Tuesday's surgery to make his skull whole again, Sandberg likely won't need the helmet he's worn since he woke up from his coma.

"I've talked to the surgeon and he's said it's an easy surgery, so I'm not worried," Sandberg said. "I've thought about (the operation) a little bit, but I've always just tried to focus on the good things."

Good things like throwing out that first pitch.

"It's going to be pretty cool," Sandberg said. "It's going to be a big crowd. I'm pretty excited."

From laying unconscious in a hospital bed to throwing out the first pitch at a major-league game, Sandberg has made what his family members all agree is remarkable progress.

Looking back on those first weeks isn't easy for anyone in the family. It's perhaps even harder for the members of the Sandberg family who were wholly aware of every minute of the wait for Gunnar to wake up.

"That first month at Marin General, we were on pins and needles the entire time," said Bjorn Sandberg, Gunnar's father. "We didn't know what was going to happen next. It was a very scary situation for us. As parents, there's no handbook to teach you how to handle that situation."

Because of the experience, the Sandbergs handle things a little differently these days.

There were hundreds of messages filling Lisa Sandberg's e-mail inbox a few nights ago. There was also an entire list of to-dos staring her in the face. She didn't get any of it done, something she's glad about.

"I had something like 600 e-mails to read the other day," said Lisa Sandberg, Gunnar's mother. "I looked over (at my family), and they were watching a game show and laughing and having a good old time. Bjorn must have seen something just then in my face, and he said, 'Why don't you come sit with us?'"

"I did, and we watched that show and just laughed and laughed. I wouldn't trade that moment for anything."

As the Sandberg family prepares for Gunnar to reach for more milestones, the community is still able to follow Gunnar's progress as chronicled on the family's Caring Bridge website. Being able to use that site, the family said, freed up a lot of time they could spend at Gunnar's bedside.

"Our phones were constantly going off, and Caring Bridge was a Godsend," said Kalli Sandberg, Gunnar's sister. "I think it's close to 90,000 visits, which is pretty substantial. If there's that many people caring, you don't have time to respond to every single person."

As the Sandbergs look to a future of Gunnar's return to school, a possible return to baseball and his eventual maturity into adulthood, the one at the center of everything said that he thinks his injury and subsequent rehabilitation have taught the family a valuable lesson.

"To know that life is so precious," Gunnar said. "It can be taken at any moment, and you've just got to do the things you love to do."

BACK ON THE MOUND

Marin Catholic pitcher Gunnar Sandberg will be honored before Sunday's game Giants-A's game at the Oakland Coliseum. Ceremonies begin at 12:30 p.m. before the game starts at 1:05.

Benefit tickets: The A's are donating \$5 from special tickets sold before Sunday's game. Cost is \$30 and must be purchased by going to oaklandathletics.com/gunnar or by calling 510-563-2318.

Injured high school pitcher set for first pitch

Sandberg recovering from line drive that nearly killed him

By Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

Over the phone, Gunnar Sandberg sounded just like an ordinary 16-year-old kid. If you know anything about his story, though, you know Sandberg is anything but.

On Sunday at 12:30 p.m. PT, when he gets to throw out the ceremonial first pitch during the A's-Giants series finale in Oakland, Sandberg will return to the place where it all started: the mound.

During a chilly Northern California night on March 11, tragedy struck. Sandberg, pitching in a practice game for Marin Catholic High School, was knocked to the ground by a line drive that hit him just above his right ear.

Sandberg was rushed to the hospital, still conscious, but with slurred speech. Over the next 24 hours, though, things got worse and Sandberg's head started to swell. A CT scan on the second day of his recovery revealed the swelling, prompting a surgery that removed part of his skull.

Sandberg nearly lost his life. After being in a prolonged coma, Sandberg has since made a scintillating recovery.

"I've learned a lot about how life can be taken at any moment -- even doing things you love to do," Sandberg said. "I'm just trying live life to its fullest and not trying to waste anything."

For nearly two months, Sandberg and his family essentially lived in hospitals. Together with his older sister, Kalli, and his parents, Bjorn and Lisa, Sandberg was able to recover in the company of those he holds closest.

"We were lucky to begin with that we're a real close family," Bjorn Sandberg said. "But any time you have adversity like this, it brings you even closer together."

The reaction from the nearby community was amazing. While Bjorn and Lisa put all their time and energy into helping Gunnar, the neighborhood put all its time toward Bjorn and Lisa.

So when Gunnar Sandberg made the move back home a couple of weeks ago, it signaled another huge step toward normalcy.

"It's unbelievable. Our family, our friends and the school community from Marin Catholic and our care community has just been incredibly supportive," Bjorn Sandberg said. "Now, it's pretty remarkable from where we were six or seven weeks ago when he was still in a coma. The doctors and the therapists are all pretty amazed at what's been going on."

Jump to the present and Gunnar Sandberg's getting back to his old routine. He's been living at home for the past two weeks, back to doing his homework and watching SportsCenter.

Sandberg now takes outpatient therapy five days a week, working to improve his speech, cognitive and physical skills. He's also working on doing things independently, like traveling around San Francisco.

In fact, he's already made his return to the mound. On May 6, Sandberg took to the rubber at AT&T Park in San Francisco to throw out the first pitch for his high school game. On Sunday, though, he's going big league.

The scouting report on Sandberg says he's got an average fastball with a mix of average offspeed stuff. He's also got a little surprise he uses to keep hitters off balance.

"I mix it up a little bit," Sandberg said. "I got a knuckleball. Might have to break that out at the game."

Catching Sandberg's first pitch will be Zac Byers, the player who hit the line drive. Sandberg said the two have got to know each other over Facebook.

"He's a real nice guy," Sandberg said. "He felt really sorry for what happened even though it was an accident. I'm looking forward to meeting him."

Aside from the first pitch, Sandberg will also get a tour of both the A's and Giants clubhouses and get to watch batting practice from the field. Sandberg said he'll be rooting for the Giants this weekend.

On Tuesday, he will undergo surgery to replace the missing part of his skull. Sandberg said he's understandably nervous for the procedure, but he's looking forward to life without a helmet, which he won't have to wear after the surgery.

"I've been playing baseball for 12 years ever since I was young," Sandberg said. "It's really my passion. I'm definitely looking forward to playing next year."

The A's are offering a special fundraising ticket offer for the game in Sandberg's honor. A donation of \$5 will be made to the Gunnar Sandberg Fund from each Field Level ticket (\$28) purchased through the A's web link for this game. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit oaklandathletics.com/Gunnar.

San Francisco Giants vs. Oakland A's: 2010 Bay Bridge Series Starts Perfectly

Andrew Brining, Bleacher Report, 5/22/2010

Friday marked the sixth time Bleacher Report and I have been welcomed into the press box at the Oakland Coliseum. My five previous trips were all stellar experiences, but this one felt different the minute I crossed the parking lot's threshold.

Generally when I arrive around 3:30 pm, the lot is dotted with one hand's worth of early birds. Today, the number was closer to triple digits.

Barbecues were in full smoke, games of catch featuring both footballs and baseballs were breaking out, and there was a general air of festivity hanging over the scene.

Once inside the stadium, the special atmosphere only got thicker.

More than a few t-shirts amongst the media members had been replaced by suits and ties, glitterati from the Bay Area press were out in full force, and there was even a cluster of representatives from a Chinese television station that were clearly there for the spectacle and nothing else.

When you're pulling dudes to a baseball game who have to ask what a perfect game is, you know you're a big deal.

To remove any doubt that the day was unique, Oakland manager Bob Geren was downright jovial in his session with the media. Heretofore, I'd only seen a no-nonsense version face the barrage of questions.

This time, however, he was hamming it up with Kate Longworth of CSN Bay Area and kidding around with other reporters in the pool.

Sure, the pregame ceremony celebrating Dallas Braden's perfect game had something to do with the warm-fuzzies.

The southpaw was already popular with Oakland Athletic fans, but he vaulted into "adored" status following the stout defense of his pitching mound from the onrushing hordes (yes, a juiced up Alex Rodriguez counts as a horde). Consequently, the perfecto he twirled on Mother's Day launched him into even more cherished territory.

Possibly divine.

So more than a few of the faithful were there to see the home team honor Stockton's favorite son. Furthermore, baseball history typically puts a smile on the organization that authors it.

Nevertheless, this was more about the main event—the first game of the 2010 Bay Bridge Series between the A's and their cross-Bay rivals, the San Francisco Giants.

For many baseball aficionados in the City and Oakland, this is as good as it gets on a diamond.

Major League Baseball's Northern Californian constituents have met 74 times since Interleague play began and rarely fail to deliver a tense, exciting game. To that end, familiarity has only nurtured contempt bred by the 1989 Bay Bridge World Series—at least as far as the fans are concerned.

The green and gold leads the regular season confrontations with a 39-35 record as it does the postseason meetings (13-5). All is not gloom and doom for the Orange and Black, though, as it has taken seven of the last eight contests, so it's a nip/tuck type affair.

The current iteration promises to bring more of the same.

Both franchises come into the series deploying a similar formula to win—superlative pitching, solid defense (better than that in Oaktown's case), and timely hitting. If matchups make a metaphoric fight, this three-gamer should be a bloody knuckle war of attrition because both sides have had success with the approach.

Granted, some of the attrition has already started as the pair comes in scuffling.

San Francisco has fallen all the way to third place in the National League West, courtesy of a recent jag that's seen the fellas lose eight of their last 13 games and three of four. As has been the case all year, los Gigantes had a devil of a time navigating local waters—dropping six of those eight to NL West foes in the San Diego Padres and Arizona Diamondbacks.

Meanwhile, the smell emanating from the Elephants' dugout is no sweeter.

The Athletics have eaten L's in seven of their last nine trips to the yard, including two straight after a couple of victories over the Seattle Mariners broke a five-game slide. Coincidentally, all five were against American League West opponents.

In other words, it was the classic "something's got to give" scenario.

Give it did as the Athletics touched up a resurgent Barry Zito.

The Junior Circuit reps used some very well-placed, bloop doubles to conjure up a trio of runs in the bottom of the third inning and didn't look back from there. The Gents' lefty pitched well before tiring in the seventh, but the knocks came in bunches and the result was a six-spot on the scoreboard before he hit the showers.

Ex-Giant Rajai Davis, who tipped his hand early with a loud batting practice, was the main culprit. The speedster landed the most crippling of the bloopers in the third, stole third base, and notched a sacrifice fly to plate the third of his three RBI from the No. 9 hole.

On the mound, a suffocating blend of Trevor Cahill, Brad Ziegler, and Craig Breslow kept the San Francisco lumber in check—an increasingly easy task at the moment. In fairness, the visiting offense *did* manage to bang out eight hits.

Alas, the Oakland hurlers were able to sprinkle the damage harmlessly throughout the nine frames (only John Bowker tallied a run for SF) and secure a much-needed W.

In so doing, the home team tied a neat bow on an ideal evening for the organization.

And it ruined one for the San Francisco Giants.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Unearned runs cost Sacramento against Memphis

By Robbie Enos / Sacramento River Cats

The woes of the River Cats continued Friday night as their home record fell to 5-13 after a 9-2 loss to the Memphis Redbirds before 11,053 at Raley Field.

Sacramento (17-25) was doomed by a dreadful eighth inning when Memphis scored eight of their nine runs on five hits, one error, and three walks. Two of the walks occurred with the bases loaded.

Infielder Eric Sogard has played all but one game for the River Cats and feels the team just needs to stay determined to get out of last place.

"We just gotta stay at it," Sogard said. "We got games every day and we'll come out here every day. We just gotta get going with the bat and in the field. We just gotta keep coming at it."

Utility man Corey Wimberly, who has also seen a lot of action with a team-leading 159 at-bats coming into the game, gave his thoughts on the Cats performance thus far as well.

"I think we gotta play sound baseball," Wimberly said. "Everybody has to step up and do their own part. We need to come together as a team."

River Cats Manager Tony DeFrancesco felt his team was in need of a win.

"We still have to be able to play well at home. We haven't been doing that," DeFrancesco said before the game. "Our weekend crowds that come up to see us are true fans. We gotta play well for them."

Starting pitchers Kyle Middleton of the River Cats and Evan MacLane of the Redbirds silenced the bats from both dugouts early. The first 16 batters of the game were all outs until Anthony Recker took MacLane deep in the third, smacking a 2-0 line drive that crawled over the left field fence.

In that same inning catcher Josh Donaldson hit a line drive right back at MacLane that bounced off the pitcher's arm. MacLane threw Donaldson out at first for the final out, but he was taken out of the game and replaced by right hander Rich Hill in the fourth.

The Cats offense took advantage of the early bullpen and tacked on another run against Hill. First baseman Chris Carter was hit by a pitch to lead off the inning and then took second on a wild pitch. Steve Tolleson smoked a ball down the third base line that was too hot to handle for third baseman Ruben Gotay.

With runners on first and third and one down, Eric Sogard walked to load the bases. Recker came through again, stroking a sacrifice fly to left to score Carter from third.

DeFrancesco and Middleton had a plan heading into the start.

"Last night the Memphis team swung the bats real well," DeFrancesco said before the game, referencing the River Cats 13-3 loss on Thursday night. "(Kyle Middleton is) going to have to change speeds and get that breaking ball over for strikes. The biggest thing is that he's gotta get ahead in the count. He's got to be ahead and pitch effectively."

Middleton's approach worked flawlessly through 4.2 innings of work. Middleton retired the first 14 batters of the game, striking out half of them, getting four outs on the ground and getting three outs through the air. His control was superb as well, allowing zero walks.

But things fell apart for Middleton in the fifth with two outs, when catcher Bryan Anderson broke up the perfect game with a base hit to right. Gotay smacked a liner to left to put Anderson in scoring position.

In an odd looking play, short stop Michael Affronti fielded a Mark Shorey ground ball up the middle. Affronti headed to second to get the forceout, but at the last second changed his mind and threw to first. His throw went wide left of Carter and allowed Anderson to score.

This set up a huge rally for the Red Birds. Kevin Howard ended Middleton's walkless performance, and then a bases loaded battle with Jim Rapoport ended in a full count RBI base on balls. The consecutive walks sent Middleton out of the game and brought in reliever Jonathan Hunton.

Hunton didn't impress the Memphis any better, as the Red Birds combined another full count RBI walk from Tyler Greene, a Daniel Descalso single, Allen Craig double, and Mark Hamilton single to score six more runs and make the score 8-2 heading into the bottom of the fifth.

Sacramento blew an opportunity to respond in the fifth after Corey Wimberly led off the inning with a walk and Mark Ellis, playing on rehab assignment, bashed a single to center. In another unusual play, Hill threw a pitch past the catcher Anderson all the way to the backstop. Wimberly dashed home from third, but the ball bounced off the bottom of the backstop and rolled back to the pitcher Hill, who tagged Wimberly out. The play was scored as a one-unassisted, and Memphis got out of the inning without any further damage.

Hunton's night ended in the sixth when the Red Birds tacked on another run in the sixth, created by Gotay after he singled, advanced to third on a Howard single, and then scored on a pass ball. Sam Demel took over on the mound and ended the inning with a strikeout and ground out.

The rest of the game was taken over by the bull pens. Josh Kinney of the Red Birds retired the side in the sixth and finished a scoreless seventh. Sam Demel continued in the seventh and sat down all three batters faced.

Southpaw Brad Kilby stood on the bump in the eighth for Sacramento and retired all three batters on ten pitches, eight of them strikes. Henry Rodriguez followed suit and pitched a scoreless ninth with one strikeout.

Pitching coach Rick Rodriguez gave his thoughts on the game afterwards.

"We just need to come out (Saturday) and just keep coming at them," said Rodriguez. "Unfortunately we did have that one bad inning and that's all it took. Hunton normally has been very very good (13.0 consecutive scoreless innings spanning six appearances) but tonight wasn't his night and he'll be back in there again. So we just have to regroup, come back tomorrow, stay positive, keep working, and keep going after them."

Sacramento will take on Memphis again at home on Saturday night at 7:05 p.m.

'Hounds Break Out Against Frisco

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

The sport of hockey has a wonderful tradition known as the "three stars of the game." The three players judged to have had the most outstanding performances in that night's contest are introduced and skate back on to the ice for a quick salute. It was 90-degrees at game time, and still 83 just two hours, 10 minutes later, when the RockHounds completed a 9-1 win over the division-leading Frisco RoughRiders. Tough "skating" weather, but perfect for baseball. And, had this been a hockey game, the three stars would have been easily selected:

Josh Horton went 3-for-4, including two triples. The 'Hounds shortstop scored three runs and drove in another.

Carlos Hernandez returned to the starting rotation, and pitched the first five innings. Five perfect innings. The lefty faced and retired 15 batters, was really threatened only twice on two hard outs, and struck out five. Carlos had missed a start due to an ankle injury, and had made one appearance in relief, so his pitch count limited him to those five, outstanding innings, enough to earn him the win (3-0, 1.96).

Archie Gilbert went 2-for-3, and both of his hits left the ballpark. Archie's 3-run home run in the last of the first inning was huge, coming just one pitch after Frisco starter Martin Perez struck Jeff Baisley out on a laser of a fastball at the knees. The whiff was the second out of the inning, and the 'Hounds have struggled to get that "one big swing of the bat" over the last week or two. This time, on Perez' first pitch, Gilbert delivered a towering fly over the left center field wall. After adding a walk and a stolen base in the third inning, Archie capped the 'Hounds scoring with a line shot over the left field wall in the seventh.

Gilbert took over the team lead in home runs (7) and RBI (28) with the big night at the plate.

J.C. Holt also provided a key hit. The RockHounds led, 4-0, in the fourth, with runners at second and third. Perez got a strike out and promptly went 0-2 on Holt, whom he had struck out in the first and second innings. J.C., who joined the club two days ago as a free agent, fouled off five, 2-strike pitches and ran the count full. On the 11th pitch of the at bat, he delivered a 2-run single up the middle. The lead was 6-0 and that was largely the ballgame.

The first seven runs came against Perez, the Texas Rangers' # 3 prospect. The outstanding lefty, just 19, saw his ERA jump more than a half-point (from 3.34 to 4.91). Ben Hornbeck came out of the bullpen to relieve Hernandez, pitching the last four innings to earn the save in his first relief appearance of the season.

The RockHounds close the current home stand with a "Thirsty Thursday" match-up against Frisco before traveling to Corpus Christi for a 4-game series with the Hooks.

Rawhide Whip Ports, 12-3, in Series Opener

STOCKTON, Calif. - The Stockton Ports (18-25) couldn't keep up with the Visalia Rawhide (22-21) at the plate, dropping the series opener, 12-3, on Friday night at Banner Island Ballpark. Visalia collected 17 hits in the contest, including 10 off Ports starter Murphy Smith. The Ports posted 10 hits, but left eight runners stranded in the game.

Stockton centerfielder Todd Johnson went 3x4 in the game with a pair of doubles, and second baseman Tyler Ladendorf also finished 3x4 with a double and two RBI. Smith allowed five runs on 10 hits in 4.1 innings, picking up his third loss on the year. He has allowed 25 hits in his last 10.0 innings. Lance Sewell tossed 1.2 scoreless, hitless frames. Jose Pina allowed five runs on five hits in 2.0 innings, and Brett Hunter allowed a pair of runs on two hits in an inning of work as well. Rawhide starter Andrew Wolcott won his second game of the year.

Visalia jumped to a 2-0 lead in the second inning. Left fielder Marc Krauss singled to lead off the inning. He was caught stealing while right fielder Kyle Greene was at-bat. Greene walked and Josh Ford followed him on base with a single. Greene scored the first run on an RBI single by catcher Rossmel Perez. Ford came around to score later on a sacrifice fly by centerfielder Alfredo Marte.

The Ports responded by cutting the lead in half in the bottom of the inning. With two out, Johnson doubled to right field. He scored on a double by Ladendorf.

The back and forth between the two clubs continued in the third inning. An RBI double by Krauss gave Visalia a 3-1 lead in the top of the third, while an RBI single by Ports designated hitter Mike Spina made it 3-2.

Visalia then went on to score seven unanswered runs between the fourth through eighth innings. Josh Ford made it 4-2 in the fourth with a solo home run to left field off Smith. Ryan Wheeler collected his 20th RBI on the year in the fifth on a double to score Brent Greer.

Paul Goldschmidt then slammed a three-run home run off Pina into the visitor's bullpen in left field in the seventh inning to make it 8-1 in favor of the Rawhide. In the eighth, Marte doubled to score Perez, and a sacrifice fly by Greer scored Victor Estevez to stretch it to 10-2.

In the ninth inning with Hunter pitching, Visalia plated their final two runs of the night. Krauss walked to lead off the inning and moved to third on Greene's double. Perez hit a sacrifice fly to right fielder Jeremy Barfield, which allowed Kraus to score the eleventh Visalia run. Estevez followed that with an RBI single to bring home Greene. Hunter bore down and struck out the last two batters to get out of the jam.

The Ports got a little offense cooking in the bottom of the ninth. Barfield led off with a single to right field, and he moved to third on Johnson's second double. Ladendorf then stepped up to the plate and singled to score Barfield. Shane Keough then lined out to Goldschmidt for the first out of the game, and Johnson was put out at the plate as he tried to score on the play. Grant Green struck out swinging to end the game.

The Ports and Rawhide will square off for Game 2 of the series at 7:05 p.m. on Saturday night at Banner Island Ballpark. RHP Kenny Smalley (2-3, 5.74) will take the hill for Stockton, while LHP Taylor Sinclair (2-2, 3.78) will start for Visalia.

Cougars' Hitting Woes Continue in Iowa

CLINTON, Iowa - With a 4-1 loss Friday night in the start of a four-game series against the Clinton LumberKings at Alliant Energy Field, the Kane County Cougars dropped to two games under .500. They are 1-4 so far on their eight-game road trip and have scored just eight runs on 24 hits in that five-game span.

Leonardo Gil gave the Cougars reason for optimism in the fourth inning when he belted a solo homer for a 1-0 lead, but the Cougars never scored again. Starter Jonathan Joseph gave up a two-run shot in the bottom half, and the L'Kings never looked back. Joseph (0-2) gave up two runs on three hits over four innings in the loss. Clinton added a controversial run in the fifth against A.J. Huttenlocker and one more in the eighth versus Max Peterson on a wild pitch from Josh Lansford.

The homer by Gil was the first by a Cougar since he hit one last Friday against Quad Cities, and the team entered play in Clinton with a collective .215 average in the last 10 games.

The Cougars (20-22) and L'Kings (21-20) continue the set Saturday night at 6:30 CT. Dan Straily (4-1, 4.19) will face Jon Hesketh (2-3, 6.82). The game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and online at www.kccougars.com, with pregame coverage starting at 6:15 p.m.

Oakland A's Prospect Q&A: Justin Marks, SP

David Malamut, OaklandClubhouse.com

May 21, 2010

Things haven't gone according to script for Justin Marks, the Oakland A's second overall pick in the 2009 draft. Marks made only one appearance in 2009 before landing on the disabled list and he wound-up having surgery. This season, Marks has struggled on the mound, posting a 7.15 ERA with 21 walks and seven homers allowed in 39 innings. Marks discussed his efforts to turn the corner inside...

David Malamut: How has your season been?

Justin Marks: Definitely not what I expected. I haven't had the outings that I wanted to have so far, but on the other end I think that I'm learning a lot. It's not a huge leap from college ball to Low-A, but it's a learning experience, learning the hitters and learning to adjust to the game in a different sense. When you spend three years at a college and do things their way, which was great, I had a great time at Louisville, but it's a different time now.

It's a learning experience and I'm enjoying every minute of it. I know I'm not putting up the numbers that I should be, but I'm happy with what I'm getting out of it, and I think that, in turn, this season will turn at a certain point. I've had one good

outing really, and the other ones things just didn't go my way. I let it get to me instead of just pushing through it, and trying to overcome that. I think that I've learned a lot, so I hope that the game will start to become more positive on the numbers side.

DM: What are your goals?

JM: I really don't have any goals as in I want to pitch this amount of innings, my ERA needs to be this. Goals are just I want to be comfortable out there. I want to look back at the season and say I learned something. I feel like this is a great year for learning and picking up the game of professional baseball.

DM: What do you throw?

JM: Fastball, curveball, cutter, changeup.

DM: What do you ultimately want those pitches to do?

JM: I want the fastball to run in on lefties. I want to have good arm-side action.

DM: How was draft day?

JM: It was good, exciting. It was definitely an experience I won't forget. It was definitely nerve-racking waiting around for the call or just seeing where I was going to go.

DM: What did you learn from playing at Louisville?

JM: Kind of what I'm trying to find right now, the mental side of the game. There I felt like I was really well composed. I felt like I dealt with adversity very well, and that is something that I'm trying to find right now. They advanced my skills just from three years of being in a college program, working out every day, training. They have great pitching coaches, and it's fun to be around a winning organization like that.

DM: Besides baseball what do you like to do?

JM: Hunt, fish. I'm a big outdoors guy.

DM: Top 5 artists in your iPod?

JM: I listen to something new everyday it seems like. Kings of Leon, the Features, the Black Keys. I listen to a lot of country to but no one in particular. I like the Abbott Brothers.

DM: Always a pitcher?

JM: In high school I played first base.

DM: What's your mentality on the mound?

JM: Go at them. Have good composure.

DM: If you were not playing baseball what would you be doing?

JM: No clue.

DM: Who was your biggest influence?

JM: Parents. The way they brought me up, things they bestowed on me.

DM: How was your off-season?

JM: Good, too long, definitely way too long with the [groin] surgery being out. I didn't get back on the field for about seven months. It was good at first. I had a little break, but then after a month and a half I was ready to get back at it. I had to wait around for another five and a half months.