

## A's News Clips, Tuesday, June 8, 2010

### Barely 10,000 fans witness a familiar A's loss

By Curtis Pashelka\_Oakland Tribune

The A's on Monday night once again demonstrated they're capable of a late-inning rally against a quality opponent. Finishing is becoming an entirely different matter.

The A's scored one run in both the seventh and eighth innings but left nine runners on base in a 4-2 loss to the Los Angeles Angels before an announced crowd of 10,071 — the third smallest at the Oakland Coliseum this season.

The offense came with the A's trailing late, just as had been the case against the Minnesota Twins on Friday and Saturday. But Eric Patterson was stranded in scoring position after a run had scored in the seventh, and Ryan Sweeney suffered the same fate after driving in a run in the eighth.

"Any time you play against a team in your division, they're going to be crucial games," said utility man Jake Fox, who homered in the seventh inning for the A's first run. "These are tough ones to lose, but we have three games left. ... You can't focus on one game."

Angels starter Scott Kazmir lasted 6 1/3 innings and had five strikeouts as Los Angeles won its sixth straight to take over first place in the American League West.

The A's bench also seemed to think Kazmir was the beneficiary of a wider strike zone than their own starter, Ben Sheets.

With runners on first and third base and two outs in the bottom of the fifth inning, A's catcher Kurt Suzuki took an outside fastball that was ruled a strike by home plate umpire Eric Cooper. Suzuki later flied out to left field to end the threat.

In the top of the sixth, Sheets threw a pitch in a similar location to Kazmir's against Mike Napoli. Cooper called that one a ball, much to the chagrin of A's hitting coach Jim Skaalen, who was ejected; manager Bob Geren, who came out to argue the call; and the sporadically seated spectators, who jeered it.

"It was just a hitting coach protecting his hitters," Geren said of Skaalen. "He thought a few pitches didn't go our way, and arguing balls and strikes is a pretty much an automatic ejection, and he was a little frustrated."

Worst of all for the A's, Rajai Davis came down with tightness in his left hamstring in the fifth when he lined a two-out triple down the right field line. Davis grabbed the back of his leg as he approached third base and was replaced by Patterson in the seventh. Geren said Davis is day-to-day.

"I guess they just didn't want to take any chances," said Davis, who called the injury minor but added he may need a day or two of rest. "So we'll see what's going on and see how it feels (today)."

It was the second straight loss for Sheets, who, despite some solid performances, remains without a win since he lasted 6 1/3 innings on May 8 against Tampa Bay. He allowed a two-run homer to Bobby Abreu in the first inning but settled down to retire 13 of the next 14 batters.

But with two outs in the fifth, Sheets allowed three consecutive hits. Howie Kendrick's single to left-center was one of them, and it scored Erick Aybar to give the Angels a 4-0 lead.

It was a similar pattern to Sheets' last start on June 2 against Boston, which scored two runs in both the first and fifth en route to a 6-4 win at Fenway Park.

"I felt like I didn't make terrible pitches," Sheets said, "but in the end the results were bad (in the fifth) inning."

Sweeney had the A's other RBI with a double to left in the eighth that scored Kevin Kouzmanoff.

TODAY: Angels (Jered Weaver 5-2) at A's (Vin Mazzaro 1-0), 7:05 p.m. TV: CSNCA. Radio: 860-AM; 1640-AM  
INSIDE

## **A's update: Vin Mazzaro glad to get another chance as a starter**

By Curtis Pashelka\_Oakland Tribune

Mazzaro back in rotation and seeks to channel '09

Right-handed pitcher Vin Mazzaro was given a chance to start tonight's game against the Los Angeles Angels after left-hander Brett Anderson was diagnosed with tendinitis in his elbow.

Now Mazzaro must see if he can take advantage of the opportunity.

"It's definitely a shot to prove myself again and go out there and just dominate," Mazzaro said. "Do what I did last year — just go in there, pound the zone and get outs."

Mazzaro, who had a 4-9 record and a 5.32 ERA in 17 starts for the A's last season, has made three sporadic relief appearances since being recalled from Triple-A Sacramento on May 20.

He's worked just 101/3 innings.

But Mazzaro's changeup has become an effective pitch in his relief stints, because it has given hitters something else to consider besides his fastball and slider.

"It's tough not throwing for that long — you feel kind of rusty when you go out there," Mazzaro said. "You've just got to stay loose and get your work in, because you don't know when you're going to be up

"It was an experience, but I'm glad to be in a starting role again."

Mazzaro lasted just three-plus innings on May 4 against Texas in his only other start this season.

Eric Chavez (neck spasms) said he felt good after taking a few swings in the batting cage Monday at the Oakland Coliseum.

Chavez's schedule for the rest of the week was still being ironed out, so no clear-cut date has been established for when a potential rehab assignment might begin.

A's manager Bob Geren said it's possible Chavez could start playing minor league games when the team travels to Chicago next week.

"I'm just going to hit, and obviously it's one of those things where you do what you can do," said Chavez, who was placed on the 15-day disabled list on May 22.

"If you can do it, cool. If you can't do it, you can't do it."

Geren said outfielder Coco Crisp (strained right rib cage muscle) is supposed to play in a intrasquad game in Phoenix a week from now during extended spring training.

If things go well, he might begin a rehab assignment after that. ... Dr. Thomas Byrd performed pitcher Justin Duchscherer's left hip surgery Monday afternoon in Nashville, Tenn.

## **A's select outfielder Michael Choice in first round of MLB draft**

By Joe Stiglich\_Oakland Tribune

Outfielder Michael Choice wasn't drafted out of high school in 2007, but three standout seasons at the University of Texas-Arlington put him higher on the radar.

The A's were unsure if Choice would fall to them Monday in the first round of Major League Baseball's amateur draft. He did, and they grabbed him with the 10th overall pick, their only selection on the draft's first day.

Choice, the Southland Conference Player of the Year as a junior this season, was ranked by Baseball America as the No. 2 power-hitting prospect among college hitters. That potential caught the A's attention as they continue efforts to stock their farm system with more power bats.

"We're excited," A's scouting director Eric Kubota said. "We think he's a college bat that comes with upside and tremendous power potential. Over the past month to six weeks, we didn't think he was going to get (to No. 10). We were pleasantly surprised."

Choice hit .383 with 16 homers and 59 RBIs this season and batted .392 overall in 166 college games. A center fielder for UT-Arlington, some evaluators think he's best suited for a corner outfield spot.

"We think he's athletic enough that he can stay (in center)," Kubota said. "At the very worst, we think he can be a very good outfielder in left or right."

Choice, 20, when asked if he had a time frame, said he'd like to make it to the majors in two years.

"I definitely prefer to stay (in center), but if it doesn't work out that way, I'm happy to move wherever the organization wants me to," he said.

Choice, who bats and throws right-handed, said he's eager to get his pro career started, and figures to be quick to sign.

Last year's No. 10 pick, former Stanford pitcher Drew Storen, received a \$1.6 million signing bonus from the Washington Nationals. That was actually below MLB's recommended salary slot for the 10th pick. Choice reportedly won't make high bonus demands.

UT-Arlington, a Division I baseball program, is hardly high profile, but it's produced several major leaguers, including Red Sox pitcher John Lackey and Astros outfielder Hunter Pence. Mavericks coach Darin Thomas, who began coaching at the school in 2001, said Choice ranks ahead of the program's other standout alumni if the criteria are career numbers.

"It didn't matter if we were playing Texas A&M, Texas or TCU in our nonconference schedule," Thomas said. "He hit."

Thomas also praised Choice's arm. Choice made two relief appearances this season and clocked a fastball in the 90-92 mph range.

The draft continues today and concludes Wednesday. The A's next three selections come at 60th, 92nd and 125th.

### **Chin Music: More on A's first-round pick Michael Choice, with comments**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 6/7/2010 6:42PM

Here's a little more on outfielder Michael Choice, drafted 10th overall by the A's today. He played center field for all three seasons at University of Texas-Arlington, but there's thought that Choice might be best suited as a corner outfielder. A's scouting director Eric Kubota said the A's will give Choice every chance to play center field, and if not, they think he can be a very good defender in right or left. He doesn't turn 21 until late November, so he was young for a college junior.

Choice just addressed reporters on a conference call, and he said he's eager to sign and get his pro career started. Last season's 10th overall pick, pitcher Drew Storen, signed for a \$1.6 million bonus, which was below MLB's recommended salary slot for that pick (worked out nicely for the Washington Nationals, who took him). Reportedly, Choice is not demanding above-slot money. So the A's should have this kid signed much sooner than last year's top pick, shortstop Grant Green, who didn't sign until deadline day in August.

I chatted with UT-Arlington head coach Darin Thomas earlier. Here's his thoughts on Choice:

"When you talk about tools, he has them. He hit from the first day he stepped on campus as a freshman. Then his power developed. It didn't matter if we were playing Texas A&M, Texas or TCU in our non-conference schedule, he hit."

Kubota said the A's like Choice's arm, and Thomas raved about his arm. Choice made two relief appearances this season and wanted to pitch more, but Thomas didn't want to jeopardize his health. He said Choice hit 90-92 mph on the gun. What outfield spot does Thomas think Choice is best suited for? "Maybe he's a corner guy, but I wouldn't rule out center field."

I'll have a full story in tomorrow's paper, and at [contracostatimes.com](http://contracostatimes.com). ... Remember, you can follow me on twitter at [twitter.com/joestiglich](http://twitter.com/joestiglich) ...

### **Chin Music: Chavez takes a few swings**

By Curtis Pashelka, Oakland Tribune, 6/7/2010

Not a ton of news to report before tonight's series opener against the Angels. Eric Chavez took some swings in the batting cage this afternoon and said he feels good. He just went as long as was comfortable. No need to push things at this point. His schedule for the rest of the week is still being ironed out by the A's training staff, but it's possible Chavez could start a rehab assignment when the team leaves for Chicago next week.

Manager Bob Geren said Coco Crisp is supposed to play in a intrasquad game in Arizona a week from now, and will possibly begin a rehab assignment after that.

Adam Rosales is playing shortstop tonight as Geren seeks ways to keep him in the lineup. Cliff Pennington will be back in the lineup tomorrow, Geren said. Jake Fox is playing left field, as Gabe Gross has the day off.

When reporters met with Geren, he wasn't sure if Andrew Bailey or Michael Wuertz were going to be available for tonight. But I'm guessing with two days off, Bailey should be ready to go. Justin Duchscherer had his left hip surgery this afternoon in Tennessee. No word yet on how it went.

The lineups

A's – Davis CF, Barton 1B, Suzuki C, Kouzmanoff 3B, Rosales SS, Sweeney RF, Ellis 2B, Cust DH, Fox LF, Sheets P.

Angels – Aybar SS, Kendrick 2B, Abreu RF, Hunter CF, Matsui DH, Napoli 1B, Rivera LF, Frandsen 3B, Wilson C, Kazmir P.

### **Chin Music: A's select UT-Arlington outfielder Michael Choice**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 6/7/2010 5:29PM

Quick draft update: The A's selected University of Texas-Arlington outfielder Michael Choice w/the 10th pick overall in the first round. Not a surprise selection by any means, though there was thought that Choice might be taken before the A's turn to pick. Choice, a 6-foot, 215-pounder who hits and throws right-handed, was ranked by Baseball America as the second-best college power hitting prospect behind catcher Bryce Harper, who went No. 1 overall to Washington.

Choice hit .383 with 16 homers and 59 RBIs as a junior this season, getting named the Southland Conference's Player of the Year. He walked a whopping 76 times, meaning opposing pitchers obviously pitched around him a ton.

We're about to talk to A's scouting director Eric Kubota. Hopefully I'll have a better scouting report for you in a bit ...

### **Short-handed Angels keep rolling, top A's**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Since losing one of their top players, Kendry Morales, to a likely season-ending broken leg near the end of May, the Angels have won eight of nine games.

The A's have their own numerous injuries to contend with, and they have weathered them fairly well so far, but they have lost five of seven, and they fell out of first place last week when Texas took over, and then the Angels passed them up, too. On Monday night at the Coliseum, the Angels kept streaking ahead with a 4-2 victory over the A's that vaulted them into first place in the AL West.

Meantime, Oakland lost another player when center fielder Rajai Davis left after the sixth with a hamstring strain. Davis described the injury as minor, but, considering that the team has a three-man bench, it's likely that if he's expected to miss more than a game or two the A's would make a move to add another position player, possibly dropping back to seven relievers.

The Angels have won six in a row, and they also have won their past six games at the Coliseum. The Angels now lead the Rangers by half a game, while the A's are a game and a half back. Angels starter Scott Kazmir extended his scoreless streak at Oakland to 19 innings before Jake Fox's solo homer in the seventh. Ryan Sweeney had three hits for Oakland, including two doubles, and he drove in a run.

In the fifth, Davis came into third holding his left hamstring after sprinting around for a triple on a drive to right, but he stayed in initially.

"I just tweaked it a little," he said. "Coming around second, I was trying to dig in a little more. I'd like to see how it is (today). It felt like a cramp, that's the best way to describe it."

The next inning, A's hitting coach Jim Skaalen was ejected for noting that Kazmir appeared to be getting outside strike calls more often than A's starter Ben Sheets, angering home-plate umpire Eric Cooper enough that he took some steps toward the dugout before being met by A's manager Bob Geren.

"Just a hitting coach protecting his players, but arguing balls and strikes is an automatic ejection," Geren said.

Despite pitching well most of the past month, Sheets hasn't recorded a victory in his past six starts. On Monday, Kevin Kouzmanoff's throwing error in the first put Howie Kendrick on with one out, and the next batter, Bobby Abreu, belted a fastball out to right. Abreu is now 7-for-23 against Sheets with two homers.

"He got me 2-0 and I totally mislocated," Sheets said. "It was supposed to be going down and away and went right down the middle."

The Angels then managed just one infield single in their next 14 at-bats until Bobby Wilson doubled to left with two outs in the fifth. Erick Aybar followed with a triple to right center, and Kendrick pushed him in with a single to make it 4-0.

Kouzmanoff made three errors last year with San Diego, but he has six in the A's 59 games this season. He recorded his 500th career hit, a leadoff single in the sixth.

### **Chavez, Crisp getting close to returning**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

**Eric Chavez** is eyeing a rehab assignment next week, and so is **Coco Crisp**, which means it's likely one or both will be back by the A's next homestand.

Chavez took early batting practice Monday at the Coliseum, and he said it went well. Nearly two weeks of rest and traction therapy have calmed down the discomfort from bulging disks in his neck, and he hopes to get into some minor-league games next week when Oakland goes on the road to Chicago and St. Louis.

Crisp, who is out with a ribcage strain, has played in only two games with Oakland this year. He missed the first month-plus with a fractured pinkie.

He is scheduled for an intrasquad game at extended spring training in Phoenix on Monday, and if that goes well, a rehab assignment would follow, which wouldn't put St. Louis out of the realm of possibility for his return.

Right-hander **Justin Duchscherer** was scheduled for left hip surgery on Monday, but the A's did not have a report on the procedure after the game.

**Mazzaro set:** After three appearances in long relief, **Vin Mazzaro** makes a scheduled start tonight at the Coliseum, filling in for **Brett Anderson**, who is on the disabled list with left elbow tendinitis.

Getting a planned start is what Mazzaro, a second-year right-hander, is used to, as opposed to coming out of the bullpen, usually with little warning.

"It's nice, I'm more prepared," Mazzaro said. "It's nice to know when you're throwing. It's crazy going back and forth."

He's been working hard in side sessions, and Mazzaro said he's specifically trying to keep the ball low and using his changeup more. He did that against Boston last week and he said he had some good success with the changeup.

**Briefly:** Manager **Bob Geren** said that **Cliff Pennington** will be back at shortstop today; **Adam Rosales** got the start there Monday. ... Sidearmer **Brad Ziegler** occasionally came over the top during his bullpen session, which is unusual.

### **A's leading off**

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

**Speeding:** A's reliever Henry Rodriguez drew oohs from the crowd of 10,071 when he threw a fastball that registered 101 mph on the stadium radar gun in the eighth, something he also did against the Angels in September.

### **BASEBALL DRAFT**

#### **Outfielders first picks for Giants and A's**

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

The A's love center fielders. At one point last season, Ryan Sweeney was the man. When Rajai Davis was added to the mix, Sweeney moved to right. Then the A's signed Coco Crisp, and the plan was for Davis to play left - so long as Crisp could stay on the field.

Now there's someone else.

The A's used the 10th overall pick Monday to draft power-hitting Michael Choice, a center fielder from Texas-Arlington who eventually could move to a corner because his speed and arm are close to average. The A's plan to play him in center to begin his pro career.

The Giants, with the 24th pick, also selected a center fielder, Cal State-Fullerton's Gary Brown, who's a leadoff hitter and considered a well above average runner and defender. Management already is imagining Brown patrolling the open outfield space at China Basin.

For Choice, it's more about hitting than defending.

"If he could stay in center and hit for power, it would be great for us, a great value," A's scouting director Eric Kubota said. "He's a very strong man with tremendous strength in his wrists. We've had guys compare him to Ron Gant."

The A's favored Choice, 20, over other college hitters because he's both a power and on-base guy. He hit .383 with 16 homers and 59 RBIs and also led the nation with 76 walks, which helped account for his .568 on-base percentage. He reached base in each of his 60 games.

Choice's walks can partly be attributed to pitchers being overly careful with him and a subpar lineup surrounding him; Texas-Arlington finished 29-31.

"It was a little frustrating," Choice said. "There were certain situations I really wanted to contribute to the team. It made me be a little more patient than I'd like. I thought I handled it pretty well and was able to be patient and swing at good pitches at the same time."

Choice, 6-foot and 212 pounds, wasn't drafted out of high school but, as Kubota reminded, neither was Evan Longoria. One issue is the talent in the Southland Conference. Kubota said, "I think it's certainly not the ACC. We took that into consideration. We scouted him in the spring against teams in the Big 12."

Another issue is Choice's signability, but Choice said he wants to join the pros sooner rather than later.

"I don't think it'll take a long time at all," said Choice, who's represented by Jeff Frye. "I'm very eager to get on the field."

Last year's 10th pick - Stanford closer Drew Storen - received a \$1.6 million bonus from the Nationals, but Storen was eager to turn pro and signed on draft day, without much negotiation, for less than Major League Baseball's recommended guideline at No. 10.

Previous No. 10 picks signed for at least \$2 million, including the 10th pick in 2008. Catcher Jason Castro, another Stanford player, received \$2.07 million from Houston.

Brown, 21, was drafted by the A's out of high school but chose to go to Fullerton, where he's hitting .438 with six homers and 41 RBIs in 48 games. He had a .485 on-base percentage and stole 31 bases in 36 attempts but currently hasn't helped Fullerton in its College World Series pursuit because of a broken middle finger on his left hand.

John Barr, who's overseeing his third Giants draft, said Brown was selected with the team's ballpark in mind.

"The first thing that jumps out at you, he can really run well," Barr said, "which helps him offensively and defensively. When we evaluate players, we evaluate them with an idea of what our ballpark might be like and whether they can play the position we project them to play."

### **Giants, A's pay big for little pop**

Scott Ostler, San Francisco Chronicle

Aaron Rowand is not hitting up a storm. Giants manager Bruce Bochy said last week, "Row will come out of this. You stay with your guys, and he is one of our guys."

To concerned Giants fans, "our guys" might sound like code for "our guys who make \$12 million per" - in which case, it would be like college alums who get priority seating based on how much money they donate. Gold Level, Diamond Club, Platinum Circle ...

One would hope that is not the case with the Giants. While salary is always a consideration, there has to be a place for reason. Right, JaMarcus?

Bochy might have been simply giving his guy Row a word of support. But at some point the fans have a right to be heard, and now is about that time. Similar situation in Oakland, where Eric Chavez might be ready to play soon. Into designated hitter steps a rusty Chavez hitting .234; out goes a heating-up Jack Cust, .295?

By the way, Chavez and Rowand are two splendid gentlemen, truly well-liked and respected by teammates and the media. Tough, character guys. Gamers. But what if they didn't have huge contracts?

Instead of going negative, though, let's go positive: While the Giants may have overpaid for Rowand, who has not played up to his salary, let's salute Brian Sabean, Bochy and the Giants' talent finders for discovering Andres Torres and giving him a shot.

Torres and Rowand are both 32, but Rowand's chart is graphing downward, while Torres, who didn't play baseball as a kid, seems a true late-bloomer. Put Torres on the market at midseason and watch teams leap at him.

Think positive. Rather than say, "Boch, you can't play a guy hitting .225 with a .254 on-base percentage," say, "Boch, you're a good manager, we know you'll find a regular spot for a guy hitting .291 with a .378 on-base percentage who can fly."

Both Bay Area teams have a shot at the playoffs. But only if they play the fellows who are producing, regardless of Platinum Circle status.

### **Drumbeat: Chavez does some hitting, Crisp update**

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the Coliseum 6/7/2010 6:33PM

For those of you looking for the A's draft blog, Vlae posted that below; he and John Shea are all over today's goings-on, with Oakland using the 10th pick to take Texas-Arlington outfielder Michael Choice.

While that was all going on, I was watching Eric Chavez take early batting practice. He said everything went fine, and the week-plus of rest and traction therapy for the two bulging disks in his neck appears to have calmed things down. Chavez said that trainer Steve Sayles is coming up with a plan for Chavez's rehab assignment, but it still appears as if that will happen next week, when the A's head off to Chicago and St. Louis.

That could point to Chavez's return on Oakland's next homestand - although Chavez, after so many injuries over the years, won't hazard guesses about any timetables. He's just going to do all he can every day to get back on the field. I'm sure the debate will rage on about whether he should just retire, but why shouldn't he give it a try? The A's are paying him \$12 million no matter what. He's back to feeling good. It's not like the rest of the Oakland offense is setting scoring records. He's not taking away time from a great prospect. Let's see what he can do if and when he's really healthy.

Manager Bob Geren said that Coco Crisp (ribcage strain) will play in an intrasquad game at extending spring training in Phoenix a week from today. He'd probably head out on a rehab assignment after that if all goes well. Could he then head to St. Louis to join the A's? That sounds like a reasonable guess.

Here's the lineup: : Davis CF, Barton 1B, Suzuki C, Kouzmanoff 3B, Rosales SS, Sweeney RF, Ellis 2B, Cust DH, Fox LF.

Geren said Cliff Pennington is back at shortstop tomorrow night. He wasn't sure if Andrew Bailey would be available to close but he thought that would be a good possibility.

Apparently, Geren is just getting hammered around the blogosphere for his decision to have Brad Ziegler intentionally walk Justin Morneau with one out and none on on Saturday.

### **Dumbeat: A's choose UT-Arlington outfielder Michael Choice**

Vlae Kershner, San Francisco Chronicle

**5:05 p.m. UPDATE::** The Oakland A's selected UT-Arlington center fielder Michael Choice with the 10th selection in the MLB draft. He has a ton of power to all fields and runs well. The main knock has been that his swing mechanics will lead to strikeouts. Here's a scouting report.

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**4:47 p.m. UPDATE:** The Indians, D-Backs and Mets, drafting 5-6-7, all took pitchers, including a couple who were forecast to go later. This could open it up for the A's to get a player who was not projected to be available.

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Today's MLB draft starts at 4 p.m. on MLB Network. Here's John Shea's preview.

Mock drafts, usually pointless in baseball because of the unpredictability, link the A's to third baseman Zack Cox (Arkansas), outfielders Bryce Brentz (Middle Tennessee State) and Michael Choice (Texas-Arlington) and pitchers Dylan Covey (Maranatha High, Pasadena), Stetson Allie (St. Edward High, Lakewood, Ohio) and Alex Wimmers (Ohio State).

I expect the A's to take a position player with the 10th pick-- that's their need, they've had much better luck developing pitchers from further down, and the injury risk is lower. The A's got way behind in hitter development in the mid-'00s and are only now making it up.

Specifically, I'm hoping for Zack Cox (scouting report). He changed his swing this year, which has meant more contact and less power. A line of .432/.524/.606 in a strong conference is a pretty strong hint there's a solid major leaguer there. He'll be expensive to sign, which may have scared the Astros off him at No. 9, but the A's haven't been cheapskates in their signings the last couple years. As always, other opinions welcome.

### **A's bats quiet in loss to Angels**

#### **Sweeney's three hits not enough in series opener**

By Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- In Ben Sheets' eyes, his start wasn't half-bad.

But on a night where the A's offense struggled to get any momentum, Oakland fell to the Angels, 4-2, Monday to drop its fifth contest in seven games.

Sheets surrendered a two-run homer in the first and three costly two-out hits in the fifth to doom the A's, who fell 1 1/2 games behind Los Angeles for first place in the American League West.

"I never felt in trouble," Sheets said. "I felt like I was in control of the game, which is good. When you feel like you can throw the ball where you want, that's good."

In his 13th outing of the year, Sheets turned in his eighth quality start, this time allowing four runs (three earned) on six hits while striking out five over six innings. He didn't issue a walk for the first time all year.

Sheets' counterpart, Los Angeles lefty Scott Kazmir, shackled the A's lineup, holding it scoreless until Jake Fox's solo shot in the seventh. By that point, the Angels led 4-1 and were in full control of the game.

"[Kazmir] did a great job of getting ahead of us tonight," Fox said. "When you're throwing strikes and throwing all your pitches for strikes, it's going to be a long night."

Kazmir said the key to his success Monday was his ability to effectively change speeds on his pitches. He took the mound in the bottom of the first with a 2-0 lead, thanks to a Bobby Abreu home run that landed just inside the right-field foul pole.

"To be able to set the tempo early and take command of the game so early -- that's huge for us," Kazmir said. "Especially as a pitcher -- me going out there -- I feel a little more comfortable just attacking the strike zone when you have a lead like that."

The A's had their chances against Kazmir, who didn't complete any 1-2-3 innings, but left nine men on base. Oakland also took exception to home plate umpire Eric Cooper's strike zone, as hitting coach Jim Skaalen was ejected in the sixth inning for arguing balls and strikes.

"If [Skaalen] felt like we were getting cheated on some of them, I guess that's the way it goes," Fox said. "I think it was nice to see Jim stick up for us because it's better him than one of the players."

After Sheets surrendered the Abreu home run, he settled down, retiring 13 of the next 14 batters he faced. Once he recorded the second out of the fifth inning, though, the Angels strung together a fatal rally.

Los Angeles catcher Bobby Wilson started it off by roping a double down the left-field line. He came around to score on Erick Aybar's triple, before Howard Kendrick singled in Aybar to give the Angels a commanding 4-0 lead.

The A's made it 4-2 when Ryan Sweeney doubled in Kevin Kouzmanoff in the eighth inning, but Kazmir's effectiveness was too much to overcome. Fox's home run ended Kazmir's 20-inning scoreless streak at the Oakland Coliseum, one that dated back to 2008 during his time with Tampa Bay.

"He kept the ball down really good at the bottom of the knees and [Cooper] was calling them strikes," A's manager Bob Geren said. "When you throw low-90s with a good changeup and a good slider and everything is at the bottom of the knees -- it's tough hitting."

After Sheets exited the game, the A's received three shutout innings from relievers Henry Rodriguez and Cedrick Bowers, who tossed a perfect ninth.

Rodriguez delivered his first two-inning performance of the year and the second of his career, this time shutting out the Angels in the seventh and eighth innings.

After issuing a walk to Kevin Frandsen to lead off the seventh, Rodriguez faced the minimum six batters. He capped off his outing by striking out Hideki Matsui with a fastball that touched 101 mph on the stadium radar gun.

"It was good to see that from him," Geren said. "When you throw that hard all you need to do is throw strikes, because when you got that velocity and get balls in the strike zone it's tough to hit."

Sweeney raised his average to a team-high .317 Monday, going 3-for-4 with an RBI and two doubles, both of which were hit to left field.

A's outfielder Rajai Davis left the game in the seventh after pulling his hamstring rounding second base on his fifth-inning triple. Davis said he is day-to-day.

### **First-place Angels feeling greedy**

By Jesse Sanchez / MLB.com

The reigning AL West champions are back on top.

How long the Angels will lead the division is to be determined but there is one certainty: this team is on a roll.

Following Monday's 4-2 victory against the A's, the Angels extended their winning streak to six games and moved into first place in the division, one-half game ahead of Texas, which lost 4-2 to Seattle.

Moreover, the Angels beat the A's for the sixth straight time in Oakland and for the ninth time in their past 10 games at the Coliseum. Overall, they've improved to 7-1 on their 14-game road trip and are 8-1 since losing first baseman Kendry Morales to a fractured leg.

As for Oakland, it fell to 1 1/2 games behind the Angels in the standings.

The Angels will look to Jered Weaver to keep the winning streak alive, and it's hard to blame them for feeling confident. As of his last start, Weaver had the best winning percentage for active American League pitchers with a minimum of 50 victories. He holds a .659 (56-29) winning percentage for his career.

Additionally, Weaver has allowed two earned runs or fewer in nine of his past 12 starts. He threw seven scoreless innings in his last start against the Royals and gave up four hits in the win.

The A's will counter with Vin Mazzaro, who will start for Brett Anderson after he landed back on the 15-day disabled list with a strained left forearm. In two career starts against the Angels, Mazzaro is 0-1 with a 7.88 ERA.

### **Angels: Angels on the mend**

Infielder Maicer Izturis, who was scratched from the lineup Sunday against Seattle because of soreness behind his right knee, was also given the day off Monday. He hopes to return to the lineup Tuesday. Angels manager Mike Scioscia said there's a chance catcher Jeff Mathis, who's on the disabled list with a fractured right wrist, could rejoin the team this weekend. Mathis is on a rehabilitation assignment with Triple-A Salt Lake.

### **A's notes: Chavez on comeback trail**

Eric Chavez, who is recovering from two bulging disks in his neck, is planning to meet with A's head athletic trainer Steve Sayles and the coaching staff Monday to create a plan for his recovery. He took batting practice Monday along with A's pitchers as they prepared for Interleague Play, but he is currently unable to throw.

### **Worth noting**

Scioscia returned to the team after missing the weekend's games against Seattle to attend his daughter, Taylor's, high school graduation. The team went 2-0 under bench coach Ron Roenicke in those two games and 7-0 when Roenicke fills in. ... A's hitting coach Jim Skaalen was ejected by home plate umpire Eric Cooper in the sixth inning of Monday's game against the Angels. ... Justin Duchscherer underwent surgery on his injured left hip Monday.

### **Quiet Choice relishes big league opportunity**

#### **College slugger selected with 10th overall pick by Oakland**

By Chris Cox / MLB.com

ARLINGTON -- Michael Choice sat in front of his television, stoic as always. His left hand dug deep inside his pocket. The right resting calmly on his leg.

With family, friends and teammates chatting with one another while the First-Year Player Draft went on, Choice sat quietly, his eyes fixated on the names popping up on his screen.

That never changed, even after he saw his own name pop up as the 10th overall pick in the Draft of the Oakland Athletics. With everyone yelling and screaming around him, Choice just sat in silence with a smile.

"I don't really usually show my emotions that much, so it was kind of hard to tell," Choice said. "But I was definitely nervous inside once it got down to it and Bud Selig started picking people."

It was tougher for his father, Charles Choice, who choked back his words as he spoke of his son's latest accomplishment.

"I'm just so ... so proud ... so happy," Choice said as he fought back tears. "I'm just really happy for him because every little kid wants to be a Major League Baseball player. He loves the game and plays it so hard.

"Oakland has a good player. They'll see that real soon."

It was the end to a stressful few days for Choice, who spent Sunday finding ways to pass the time as he waited to hear where he would play his professional baseball.

Choice said he went to the baseball fields at the University of Texas at Arlington during the day to pass the time along. That night, he went to the movies.

"It helped me sleep a little bit, because by the time I got home I was tired," Choice said. "I was able to go right to sleep.

"I went to see Splice. It was kind of weird," he said with a laugh.

No matter how weird it may have been, Choice's mother said she thought it helped calm her son's nerves as the hours drew closer to the Draft. "He had a nervous day yesterday," Charea Choice said. "He went to the movies last night to kind of relax. This morning he woke up himself. I was teasing him, 'You wait 'til the day before to get nervous?'"

If he was nervous, no one would have ever known it.

"I'm usually not the type to get too excited, but I am inside," Choice said. "But your heart just starts beating heavier and heavier, just waiting to hear your name called. So just to hear my name called was a relief."

But even throughout all the uncertainty that Choice faced as the first nine teams passed on him, he had a feeling that the Athletics would be his newest home even before they called his name.

"My first thought, I knew," Choice said. "I felt like I knew in my head that it was where I was going to go. It wasn't like the other picks where I wasn't sure."

And now the Athletics have a player who doesn't pride himself on either his power or speed, but rather his work ethic.

"They're going to get a hard worker, somebody that's going to be dedicated to their job," Choice said. "I'm going to push through as far as I can to get to the top. If I get that far, I'm going to work harder and try to be the best I can be at that level."

And now that it's all over, he'll be able to get more sleep than he did the day before.

"Tonight I'm going to sleep good," Choice said with a laugh. "I'll probably fall asleep at like eight."

### **Excellent Choice: A's draft college slugger**

### **UT Arlington outfielder crushed 16 homers this season**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Michael Choice was never much of a Major League prospect out of high school.

In fact, his name never came up in the Draft following his senior year at Timberview High in Arlington, Texas. And his name wasn't even taken very seriously by any college coaches.

Thus, Choice found himself just 20 minutes away from the home in which he grew up, playing at one of the select number of Division I schools offering him a chance. It was there, at the University of Texas at Arlington, the outfielder cultivated into a solid power hitter with defensive prowess.

Several big league teams, including the A's, took notice of the transformation. And on Monday, with the 10th overall pick in the First-Year Player Draft, Oakland acted on it by claiming Choice in the first round.

"I'm excited," Choice said soon after being selected. "This is definitely one of the happiest times I've ever had in my life. I'm eager to get out there to start playing."

The son of a former collegiate catcher, the 20-year-old Choice stands at an even 6-feet tall and weighs in near 215 pounds - numbers that A's scouting director Eric Kubota say disguise the fact "he's a very strong man" with "average Major League speed, on our scale."

"He's got tremendous strength in his wrists," Kubota said. "We're very excited. He's the guy we had targeted early in the year. He's got a college bat that comes with upside. Tremendous power potential."

### ***2010 top picks***

| <b>No.</b> | <b>Team</b> | <b>Player</b>        |
|------------|-------------|----------------------|
| 1          | WAS         | Bryce Harper, OF     |
| 2          | PIT         | Jameson Taillon, RHP |
| 3          | BAL         | Manny Machado, SS    |
| 4          | KC          | Christian Colon, SS  |
| 5          | CLE         | Drew Pomeranz, LHP   |
| 6          | ARI         | Barret Loux, RHP     |
| 7          | NYM         | Matt Harvey, RHP     |
| 8          | HOU         | Delino DeShields, 2B |
| 9          | SD          | Karsten Whitson, RHP |
| 10         | OAK         | Michael Choice, OF   |
| 11         | TOR         | Deck McGuire, RHP    |
| 12         | CIN         | Yasmani Grandal, C   |
| 13         | CWS         | Chris Sale, LHP      |

| No. | Team | Player                 |
|-----|------|------------------------|
| 14  | MIL  | Dylan Covey, RHP       |
| 15  | TEX  | Jake Skole, OF         |
| 16  | CHC  | Haden Simpson, RHP     |
| 17  | TB   | Josh Sale, OF          |
| 18  | LAA  | Kaleb Cowart, 3B       |
| 19  | HOU  | Mike Foltyniewicz, RHP |
| 20  | BOS  | Kolbrin Vitek, 2B      |
| 21  | MIN  | Alex Wimmers, RHP      |
| 22  | TEX  | Kellin Deglan, C       |
| 23  | FLA  | Christian Yelich, OF   |
| 24  | SF   | Gary Brown, OF         |
| 25  | STL  | Zack Cox, 3B           |
| 26  | COL  | Kyle Parker, OF        |
| 27  | PHI  | Jesse Biddle, LHP      |
| 28  | LAD  | Zach Lee, RHP          |
| 29  | LAA  | Cam Bedrosian, RHP     |
| 30  | LAA  | Chevy Clarke, OF       |
| 31  | TB   | Justin O'Conner, C     |
| 32  | NYN  | Cito Culver, SS        |
| 35  | ATL* | Matthew Lipka, SS      |
| 43  | SEA* | Taijuan Walker, RHP    |
| 44  | DET* | Nick Castellanos, 3B   |

\* Did not have a first-round pick

Choice, a junior All-American, owns the all-time home run record at Arlington, where he averaged a long ball every 17.8 at-bats. In 60 games for the Mavericks this year, he hit .383 to go along with a .568 on-base percentage and .704 slugging mark. He struck out just 54 times while managing 76 walks -- several of which Kubota admittedly said were a result of a rather weak lineup around him.

"He's by far the best player on his team -- gets pitched around a lot, doesn't see a lot of pitches to hit," Kubota said. "He's still selective enough to not swing at pitches in the zone."

Choice's large dose of power nicely complements his impressive abilities in center field, where he hopes to remain as his professional career begins.

"If he can stay in center and have the power, that would be great for us. We certainly think he's athletic enough to possibly stay there," Kubota said. "We're certainly going to give him every opportunity. At the very worst, we think he's going to be a very good defensive outfielder at the corner, whether it's in left or right. We have reports that say [his arm] is anywhere from average to plus. There are a lot of guys in our room that would say it's a plus."

Kubota and Co. initially witnessed Choice's talent while the youngster was playing with Team USA last summer, when the A's decided to add him to a list of players to watch during spring. Area scout Armann Brown, according to Kubota, played the most significant role in acquainting the organization with Choice's skills.

"We had heard in the last month that there were a lot of teams in the top nine who were considering him," said Kubota, who is in his ninth season as scouting director. "Most of the mock drafts leading up to today really had him going before we picked him. I would say he was one of the guys we targeted early in the year and one of the guys we hoped to choose out of that group."

There was much uncertainty following the Nationals' No. 1 pick of highly touted prospect Bryce Harper, and Kubota admitted the club was still in discussions when the Draft began, including talk about an anonymous high school player "under strong consideration."

However, with the selection of Choice, the A's continued a widely known organizational trend of grabbing college players in the first round -- an approach that has aided its need of getting draftees to help at the big league level as quickly as possible.

That same notion has Choice very much excited about his future in the Majors, where he hopes to be two years from now, if not sooner. Thus, he believes signing a deal with the help of adviser and former big leaguer Jeff Frye will take place sooner rather than later, and well before the Aug. 16 signing deal.

"I don't think it will take a long time at all," Choice said of hammering out a contract. "The main goal in my mind is to get there as soon as possible."

"We feel good about getting it done and getting him out there," Kubota said. "Our hope is to get him out playing as soon as possible."

Choice, who grew up idolizing the Yankees' Derek Jeter and familiarizing himself with the American League West at Rangers games, is widely considered the class of this year's college outfield crop. Such recognition, he said, is a tribute to the way in which he expanded both his own knowledge of the game, as well as his skills, out of high school.

"I've definitely matured physically and mentally," Choice said. "I've gained a lot of strength as a player and feel like I've grown as a baseball player. I feel like that helped me a lot vs. being a player drafted right out of high school."

Kubota mentioned it's not uncommon for a player of such caliber as Choice to go undrafted out of high school. Plenty of Major Leaguers, including Tampa Bay's Evan Longoria, went unnoticed before college.

"There are some guys," Kubota said, "that just mature physically and develop in college. He's one of those guys."

The A's 10th selection marked their highest pick since 1999, when the club chose lefty Barry Zito with the ninth pick. Choice's place in the Draft was met with questions regarding his ability to compete outside of Arlington's Southland Conference.

"It's certainly not the SEC," Kubota said, "and we certainly took that into account. But we did see him play against a national team last summer and scouted him against teams in the Big 12, so while his conference isn't necessarily the strongest as far as competition goes, we did see him in a lot of situations where he played good competition."

"It's the power and power potential that intrigues us."

### **Angels series should say a lot about Oakland's chances**

Paul Gutierrez, Sacramento Bee, 6/8/2010

OAKLAND – It would be funny if it wasn't so sad.

The A's are a major league club that fashions itself a legit contender, and, more than a third of the way through the season, why not? One that entered Monday a mere one game out of first place in a down American League West, despite being a small-market club with just-as-thrifty payroll sensibilities. One of the best stories in baseball.

Yet one whose Triple-A affiliate in the River Cats plays before crowds closer to capacity (57.9 percent) at intimate Raley Field than the parent club draws to the vast Coliseum (51.9 percent).

That a mere 10,071 (that was the announced crowd; it looked a lot smaller) bothered to show for the start of a critical four-game series against the rival Angels from down south spoke volumes about how disenfranchised the Athletics' fiercely loyal but shrinking fan base feels.

Too bad the A's seemed to stay home themselves in the lifeless 4-2 defeat.

Because with homemade signs flapping in the breeze above right field that read "Don't Take Our A's Away" and "Keep Our A's In Oakland," fans are weary of owner Lew Wolff's annual threats of relocation to A) Fremont, B) San Jose, C) parts unknown.

Or maybe they were just distracted by sports world goings-on, what with the seeming canonization of "Saint" John Wooden, despite his hear-no-evil, see-no-evil, speak-no-evil approach to booster Sam Gilbert's tawdry bankrolling of his program back in the day.

Or by the baseball draft.

Or even by the potential seismic shift in the college sports landscape with the Pacific 10 Conference tarnishing its legacy with so much shameless flirting with the Big 12 and expanding to a 16-Pac.

Huge sports stories all.

But the biggest on this day for A's fans was going down in the shadow of Mount Davis.

"The A.L. West is still up for grabs," A's catcher Kurt Suzuki told me before the game. "The fact that (the Angels have) dominated the division the past few years, it definitely puts a little more (juice) in it. You want to be the guys to dethrone them.

"It's kind of early to be talking about this because it is still June. But then, you wonder if at the end of the year you'll look back at some of these early games and go, 'You know, if we could have just won a few more of those ... ' "

Facing the class of the division – the Angels have won five of the past six division crowns and been in the playoffs six of the last eight seasons – is the perfect litmus test.

"There's some extra incentive," A's manager Bob Geren said. "They are the champs."

Thing is, the third-place A's have now dropped five of seven and the smoke-and-mirrors-along-with-some-duct-tape-to-keep-the-ship-afloat approach 14 games into this 20-games-in-20-days stretch is waning.

Especially with speedy center fielder Rajai Davis the latest to pull up lame, as he did on his breathtaking fifth-inning triple. The A's have already used the disabled list 15 times this season.

The Angels, meanwhile, have done what good teams do – beat up on the dregs – in winning eight of nine against the Royals and Mariners before rolling into the East Bay. They finally look like, well, the Angels.

So are the A's for real or, to use one of Angels center fielder Torii Hunter's more unfortunate choice of words of late, imposters? This series will tell the tale. Whether the answer is funny, or sad.

### **A's lose to Angels, 4-2**

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Bobby Abreu hit a two-run homer, Scott Kazmir won for the third time in four starts and the Angels beat the Athletics 4-2 on Monday night for their season-best sixth straight victory.

Erick Aybar added an RBI triple as the Angels improved to 8-1 since Kendry Morales broke his leg jumping on home plate in a celebration following his game-ending grand slam against Seattle on May 29.

Abreu's first-inning drive gave Los Angeles a quick lead and the Angels only built on it from there. Manager Mike Scioscia returned following a one-game absence for his daughter's high school graduation.

Howie Kendrick singled in a run as the Angels won their sixth straight in Oakland. They have outscored the A's 30-14 in those games.

Kazmir (5-5) gave up a solo home run to Jake Fox with one out in the seventh, ending the pitcher's scoreless streak in Oakland at 17½ innings spanning his last three outings. The left-hander pounded the strike zone to work ahead in the count much of the game. He improved to 9-3 lifetime against the A's.

Kazmir gave up four other hits in 6½ innings, struck out five and walked two. Brian Fuentes earned his eighth save in 11 opportunities with a 1-2-3 ninth, including consecutive called third strikes to end it.

The Angels are in a stretch with 14 road games in as many days, their longest trip since a 14-gamer during their World Series season of 2002. They've been impressive so far.

"When Kendry got hurt, everybody stepped up," Torii Hunter said.

Ben Sheets (2-5), the A's \$10 million right-hander, lost his second straight start as the A's lost for the fifth time in seven games and dropped the opener of this key four-game series between division rivals. A dismal announced crowd of 10,071 turned out for this one.

Sheets is winless in his last six outings since beating Tampa Bay on May 8. Sheets struck out five and didn't walk a batter in six innings, allowing four runs — three earned — and six hits.

Ryan Sweeney doubled twice, singled and drove in a run for Oakland, which would like to get back on track during this tough stretch with 20 games in 20 days. They were coming off four straight one-run games, including a series loss to Minnesota in which they salvaged Sunday's series finale to avoid a sweep.

Eric Patterson replaced Rajai Davis in center field for Oakland in the top of the seventh after Davis' left hamstring tightened up following a fifth-inning triple.

## NOTES

Injured Oakland DH Eric Chavez (neck spasms) took batting practice on the field for the first time since going on the DL May 21.

A's RHP Justin Duchscherer underwent season-ending surgery on his troublesome left hip.

A's hitting coach Jim Skaalen was ejected in the sixth inning by home-plate umpire Eric Cooper for arguing balls and strikes. It was Skaalen's second ejection with Oakland. He also got tossed May 25, 2009, against Seattle.

### **A's lose first game against Angels**

Malaika Bobino, Oakland Post, 6/8/2010

Oakland, CA – Division rivals are always games that matter more. The start of a four game series will determine who gets the bragging rights and sit atop the division. Tonight, the victory went to the Anaheim Angels who defeated the Oakland A's 4-2.

The Angels have won their sixth straight game and moved to first place in the American League West. They match a season high winning five straight games and recorded a season best three games over .500. Despite their recent surge, players remain focused and don't feel coming into this series will be easy.

"We've been playing really well but have a very long road trip ahead of us," said Torii Hunter. "We're not coming into this series thinking this will be an easy task." "They're much better than they were last year, they play hard and get on base." "We just got to go out there and do what we do!"

The A's just coming off a win the day before fell to the third spot in the AL West standings. This is a different team from last season, last year they spent only one game above .500 and now have been 46 games above. Oakland is getting better everyday while learning from their mistakes.

If Ben Sheets could take back any pitch, it would probably be in the first frame when Bobby Abreu hit a two-run homer. Sheets gave up four runs (three earned), allowed six hits, struck out five and gave no walks for the first time this year.

"I never felt in trouble," said Sheets. "I didn't make a couple of pitches when I needed to but I thought I did well." "I felt like I was in control of the game which is good."

The A's got their first run bottom of the seventh inning when Jake Fox hit a solo home run. Bottom of the eight, where the A's seem to really get going, Ryan Sweeney doubled and brought in their final run of the game. Sweeney raised his average to a team-high .317 going 3-for-4 with an RBI and two doubles.

"He (Kazmir) did a great job of getting ahead of us tonight," Fox said. "When your throwing strikes and throwing all your pitches for strikes, it's going to be a long night."

Lefty Scott Kazmir shook up the A's lineup, holding them scoreless until bottom of the seventh. He went 6 2/3 innings, allowing five hits, one run, striking out five and walking two. Kazmir has thrown 14 consecutive scoreless games against Oakland and extended that streak to 20 before allowing one run.

"I think it means a lot," Kazmir said. "From where we started at and now the roll that we're on feels good." "It feels good to be back in first place, we want to stay there and build on it."

The good thing about a four game series is there three more games to be played. Oakland has the opportunity to turn things around tomorrow. They've proved they can rally late but closing the game has been their biggest challenge.

"Anytime you play a team in your division is huge," manager Bob Geren said. "There's been close games where it's decided by one or two runs." "It was a good effort today but they got on board early."

A's outfielder Rajai Davis left the game in the seventh inning after pulling his hamstring rounding second base. This is a huge loss for Oakland as Davis is one of their best base stealer's. He will be listed day-to-day in hopes to return to the lineup before the series ends.



"I'm feeling fine right now but will know more in the morning," said Davis. "I think I'll just need a little time to rest."

## **LITTLE BIG LEAGUERS**

### **BRADEN MAKES TWO STOCKTON YOUTHS HIS GUESTS OF HONOR**

By Jason Anderson, Stockton Record

Two Stockton boys who encountered tragedy at a tender age emerged from the Oakland Athletics clubhouse with smiles on their faces, ice cream on their upper lips and shiny new bats over their shoulders.

Tears rolled down Lisa Liddon's cheeks a little later when her sons, 11-year-old Reagan and 9-year-old Alec, there as special guests of A's pitcher Dallas Braden, walked to the mound at the Oakland Coliseum to throw ceremonial first pitches.

Liddon has helped her sons cope with heartache and sadness since their father died of anemia in 2006, and she said she was overcome with emotion Sunday as the whole, heartwarming scene unfolded before her eyes.

"It's been very hard on the boys, but a day like this ...," Liddon said. "I think it gives them hope."

The boys were guests of honor on Little League Day at the Coliseum. Braden purchased tickets for 275 Hoover Tyler Little Leaguers. All participated in a parade around the warning track before the A's played the Minnesota Twins, but only Reagan and Alec got the grand tour.

"It was awesome," Alec said with a toothy grin and his father's wraparound Oakley sunglasses covering the top of his face. "Very, very, very awesome."

Braden, a Stockton resident who played for Hoover Tyler and attended Stagg High, is again sponsoring two Little Leaguers growing up as he did in a single-parent home.

Last year, he sponsored Camron and Mitchell Alexander, each of whom was invited back Sunday. This year, league officials selected the Liddons.

Lisa Liddon and her mother, Cynthia Stapley, are raising Reagan, Alec and their cousin, Eric, in a 1,400-square-foot home. Life was easier when her husband, Mark, was here, actively participating in classroom and after-school activities, and providing a second income.

Now, Liddon boards a commuter bus at 6:05 a.m. each day, returns after nine-hour shifts as a sales manager at a hotel in Sacramento and rushes out to practices and games. Stapley shuttles everyone around in their only working vehicle.

"It's been pretty hard, but I think my mom is doing a really, really good job," Reagan said.

Braden understands their struggles. He grew up with his mother and grandmother, and lost his mother to cancer during his senior year at Stagg.

"I want them to know that any time they feel like their glass is half-empty instead of half-full, there's a lot to fill that glass up with, and it doesn't mean that life from there on out is going to be half-empty," Braden said.

"There's a lot of hope from a lot of people, especially when you have a mother, a grandmother and a cousin, all in that tight network, all under one roof. They might not understand what kind of a network and support group they have now, but they will someday."

Braden said it was a joy to see the boys' faces when they entered the A's clubhouse shortly after noon.

"It gave me goosebumps," Braden said. "I guarantee I've gotten more out of it the last couple years than any kid has."

The kids might disagree.

"(Reagan and Alec) are in for a dream of a lifetime," Tami Ratto, Camron and Mitchell Alexander's mother, said while the boys were in the clubhouse. "It was a life-changing experience for us, as I'm sure it will be for them."

Reagan and Alec joined their teams in Section 204 when the pregame ceremony was over, each with a few new stories to tell. Their grandmother sat nearby, bursting into tears when asked about the big league treatment her grandsons received.

"It's the most awesome thing I've ever seen in my life," she said.

They've cried a lot in recent years, but these were tears of joy brought on by Braden's generosity.

"Honestly, if my boys were to do something like this ...," Liddon said, pausing, sobbing and pausing again. "I know Dallas' mom would be extremely proud of him."

## **MINOR LEAGUE NEWS**

### **Fresno takes one-run game from Sacramento**

By Abbie Ellis / Sacramento River Cats

A three-run Josh Donaldson homer wasn't enough as the Fresno Grizzlies topped the Sacramento Grizzlies 6-5 to win the first three games of the four-game series in Fresno. The Cats have now lost four in a row, all by two runs or less.

Monday night's game was a scoreless until the fourth inning when Fresno's hitters went on a wild run that loaded bases and led to a grand slam. Tyler Graham scored on a Joe Borchard single. Then with one out remaining Steve Holm hit a grand slam that gave Fresno a 5-0 lead to cap the inning.

Fresno pitcher Madison Bumgarner breezed through five innings and limited the Cats to two runs. The tables turned in the sixth inning when the Cats scored five runs against Bumgarner. A three-run homer from Donaldson that scored Corey Wimberly and Matt Carson put the Cats right back in the running at a 5-3 ball game. Adam Heether later hit a line-drive double to score Chris Carter and Matt Watson to tie the game, 5-5.

A crucial throwing error from Wimberly, who was playing second base, should have been the final out of the sixth inning. Instead, Ben Copeland reached and Brett Pill scored on the play for a 6-5 lead.

Bumgarner's frustration continued to mount in the seventh inning until he reached a breaking point and was ejected after a Matt Carson double.

Sacramento did their best to conjure up some magic in the ninth inning, but came up short. The Cats substituted Affronti with pinch-hitter Landon Powell, who quickly singled. Pinch-runner Eric Sogard replaced Powell on base. Sogard made it to second on a sacrifice bunt from Wimberly, and then to third on a wild pitch to Donaldson. With a runner on third and two outs, Donaldson was called out on strikes to end the game.

This was only the fourth game with Sacramento for Adam Heether, who was claimed off waivers from the Nashville Sounds. Heether had a hot night, batting 3-for-4, including a game-tying double.

In a Graham vs. Graham match-up it was Sacramento's Graham Godfrey that came out on top. Fresno right fielder Tyler Graham was a perfect 7-for-7 at bat in the last two games. Godfrey struck out Graham in the first inning for his first out this entire series.

Sacramento looks to be on the other end of these tight games with Fresno, and avoid a sweep Tuesday at 7:05.

### **RockHounds hold off Naturals rally**

Midland Reporter-Telegram

SPRINGDALE, Ark. -- Three Midland RockHounds pitchers combined to allow Northwest Arkansas to cross home plate a mere one time as the RockHounds avoided a sweep with a 2-1 victory over the Naturals in the final contest of a three-game series.

The RockHounds needed the stellar performance on the mound as their bats were cold for eight of the nine innings played. However, things started with a promising outlook at the plate.

Both of Midland's runs came in the first inning as doubles by Alex Valdez and Jeff Baisley combined with a Northwest Arkansas fielding error allowed the RockHounds to get on the scoreboard.

Valdez hit a one-out double to right field and came around to score after Naturals first baseman Clint Robinson committed a fielding error, allowing Corey Brown to reach base. Brown crossed when Baisley followed him up with a double to right.

From there, Travis Banwart pitched six shutout innings, allowing just two hits and five walks, while striking out three batters. Jason Ray threw two shutout innings, giving up two hits and a walk with two strikeouts.

The Naturals were able to get to closer Jared Lansford in the ninth and put their only run on the board in the frame as Paulo Orlando scored on an Anthony Seratelli single. However, with the bases loaded, Lansford was able to strike out top prospect Mike Moustakas and force Clint Robinson to line out to right, ending the Naturals rally a run short.

Midland is off today, but returns to action at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday with a game against the Corpus Christi Hooks at Citibank Ballpark.

### **Ladendorf Leads Ports to 9-8 Victory**

**STOCKTON, Calif.** - The Ports (25-33) won their tenth home game of the year and their 25th game of the season in exciting fashion—a walk-off victory against the Bakersfield Blaze (25-31). Stockton's come-from-behind win was powered by second baseman Tyler Ladendorf, whose RBI single with one out in the ninth inning sealed the 9-8 walk-off victory.

All Ports starters collected a hit in the game, and Ladendorf finished 4x4 with two RBI. Ryan Ortiz collected three RBI in the contest, including a two-run home run. Grant Green and Stephen Parker also homered in the game for Stockton. Starter Paul Oseguera had a rough outing, allowing six runs on nine hits in 3.2 innings. Scott Deal and Andrew Carignan carried the middle relief for Stockton, and Fautino De Los Santos pitched a scoreless ninth for the victory.

After getting out of a bases-loaded jam in the first inning, the Ports pulled ahead to a 3-0 victory in the bottom of the first. Centerfielder Jermaine Mitchell walked to start the inning. Green then drilled his third home run of the year to left field to put Stockton up 2-0. Parker followed with a powerful solo shot that cleared the batter's eye in deep centerfield. The Ports collected two more hits in the inning, but didn't add another run.

The Blaze made it 3-1 in the top of the second as Mike Bianucci notched a solo shot to left field for his fifth homer of the season.

But the Ports' lead was short-lived, as the Blaze pounded out five runs in the top of the fourth to make it 6-3. The Blaze collected five straight singles to open the inning, and totaled three runs from those hits. First baseman Johnny Whittleman then hit into a fielder's choice for the first out. Catcher Jose Felix next popped out to Ladendorf. But then Oseguera hit

Tommy Mendonca to load the bases. The Ports then called on Deal to pitch. Deal gave up an RBI single to left fielder Erik Morrison, and gave up an RBI walk to Bianucci. Andres James grounded out to end the inning.

The Ports didn't score again until the seventh inning, when they pulled within a run. Ladendorf singled to lead off the inning and Ortiz notched his fifth homer of the year to make it 6-5.

Bakersfield padded their lead in the eight, as Whittleman slammed a two-run shot over right field to make it 8-5.

But Stockton wasn't finished yet. They put together a three-run rally, all with two outs to tie the game in the eighth inning. The Ports collected five consecutive singles from the bottom half of the order to score three runs. The Ports left the bases loaded at the end of the inning.

De Los Santos entered the game in the top of the ninth and struck out the first two batters he faced. He then gave up a single to David Paisano, before getting Davis Stoneburner to hit into a fielder's choice to keep Bakersfield at eight runs.

The Ports kept the offense coming in the bottom of the ninth. Parker walked, and right fielder Jeremy Barfield then hit a single and moved to second on an error by Stoneburner. Blaze pitcher Mark Hamburger then intentionally walked Todd Johnson to load the bases with no out. Bakersfield then got creative with its defense. Right fielder Mike Bianucci was pulled from the game and replaced with Jared Boldin. The Ports then moved Paisano from center field to play left, and moved left fielder Morrison to play a fifth infield position. Ports first baseman Mike Spina stepped up to the plate and struck out. Ladendorf walked up to the plate, and battled against Hamburger. He hit the ball to be just fair inside the right field line, and Parker came home to score the winning run. The Ports celebrated the walk-off victory with Ladendorf around second base.

It was their third walk-off win the season, their last coming against San Jose on May 28.

The Ports will take on the Blaze on Tuesday at 7:05 PM PST at Banner Island Ballpark. LHP Ben Hornbeck (0-1, 3.14) will take the mound for Stockton while RHP Wilfredo Boscan (2-7, 5.46) will start for Bakersfield.