

Oakland A's reliever Michael Wuertz's struggles are puzzlement

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Observe Michael Wuertz in the A's clubhouse, and there's little that suggests how rough this season has been on him.

The soft-spoken reliever generally keeps to himself at his locker, much as he did last season when he was mowing down American League hitters with regularity.

He isn't fooling the opposition nearly as much in 2010, and without much prodding, Wuertz opens up about his frustration.

"I've never struggled like this before," he said before Wednesday's A's loss against the Cincinnati Reds. "It's been hard mentally, but it's one of those things you've got to forget about."

It's easy to point to the A's hitting woes for why they have lost ground rapidly in the American League West. Long-term injuries to starting pitchers Brett Anderson and Justin Duchscherer haven't helped.

But the A's normally trusty bullpen also has shown vulnerability, posting a 2-6 record with a 4.97 ERA in June. Wuertz's struggles stand out if only because he was so dominant last year, his first season with Oakland.

As the setup man for closer Andrew Bailey, Wuertz led AL relievers with 102 strikeouts. He averaged 11.67 strikeouts per nine innings, the second-highest rate by a reliever in Oakland history, and held opponents to a .188 batting average.

This season has told a different story.

After missing the first month with right shoulder tendinitis, Wuertz has posted a 7.11 ERA in 17 games heading into tonight's series opener against

the Pittsburgh Pirates. Right-handed hitters are batting .297 (11 for 37) against him, and lefties .400 (6 for 15).

What gives?

Wuertz — who was given a two-year, \$5.25 million contract in the offseason — said he feels 100 percent physically.

He's tried tinkering with the mechanics on his slider, which hasn't been the devastating put-away pitch it was in 2009.

But Wuertz, 31, points to the inconsistent workload he's received as the main reason he hasn't been sharp.

After notching the save in a 5-4 win over Minnesota on June 6, Wuertz made just three appearances over the next 13 games.

At times, manager Bob Geren has been quick with the hook if Wuertz has shown signs of struggling.

"I understand Bob is trying to use me in situations, in games that we're winning, (and that) I haven't been performing," Wuertz said. "It's been tough on him and it's tough on me. But the only way to get through it is to keep pitching."

The two chatted recently, and Geren said he's going to look for opportunities to give Wuertz a full inning — regardless of the score — to find his rhythm. On Wednesday, Wuertz delivered a scoreless ninth in a 3-0 loss to the Reds.

"He was the best eighth-inning guy in baseball last year," Geren said. "It's my job to get him into situations to find his groove and get back in that job."

Geren has tried various relievers to protect leads in the eighth, depending on matchups.

But Wuertz's stuff and experience make him best suited to handling the eighth and getting a lead to Bailey. That would also help define roles for the other relievers.

"This year hasn't been what he's wanted," Bailey said of Wuertz. "(But) I still consider him the leader of our bullpen."

Note: The A's came to terms with four more draft picks, including University of Nebraska left-hander Ryan Hughes, a 16th-rounder who attended Foothill High.

### **No changing of the guard this July**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

A poor June has pointed to July changes in Oakland each of the past several seasons.

This year, though, might be different. The A's don't have a hitter like Matt Holliday or a pitcher like Rich Harden, or even a Joe Blanton to deal. Ben Sheets, the obvious candidate to move because of his \$10 million contract and his free-agent status, isn't stirring up interest, and outfielder Coco Crisp barely has been on the field.

General manager Billy Beane isn't looking to make sweeping changes, anyway, he said after his team's 3-0 loss to the Reds on Wednesday. Beane's club has lost 10 of 12 and has dropped from first to third, 11 games out, in less than a month, but Beane is relatively unperturbed. He looks at all the A's injuries - a difficulty four years running - and he figures that they've finally caught up with the team.

"We've been playing shorthanded all year, and you could argue that our best starter (Brett Anderson) is still out. We've been behind the injury curve all along," Beane said.

And though the results don't show it, Oakland hasn't been awful, Beane argued.

"We haven't played poorly," he said. "We just haven't played well enough to win. We've played some very close games. We've basically lost one- and two-run games the last week, unfortunately.

"You have to keep it in perspective. There have been some good things, like the way young starters like Gio Gonzalez and Trevor Cahill are pitching, and we have some fatal flaws, like the lack of power."

It's the injuries, 15 trips to the disabled list in all this year and 79 since the start of 2007, that continue to prevent manager Bob Geren from fielding a truly representative team. As a result, Beane will ascribe no blame to Geren this year, just as in the previous three.

Recently, Geren has drawn criticism from a tactical standpoint - intentionally walking Justin Morneau with the bases empty, which backfired; failing to double switch with Andrew Bailey last week in Chicago, with the pitcher's spot leading off the ninth - but Beane said that Geren provided reasons for his decisions, and he's satisfied with them. In addition, he said he believes that Geren has the team playing hard and has a will to win, which is what he wants to see.

As for trading any players, Beane said it's too early to consider, but there is one certainty:

"The one thing we're going to do is to hang onto our young players," he said. "That's one of the reasons we acquired Conor Jackson, not just for right now, but he's a younger player and his age (28) makes him very attractive."

Beane said the next step is for the team's young bats to start to arrive, but that is not expected to be soon. The A's aren't going to bring up any top prospects when they're hitting under .240, as are first baseman Chris Carter and outfielder Michael Taylor are at Triple-A Sacramento.

**Briefly:** Reliever Joey Devine said via text that he received a platelet-rich plasma injection at Dr. James Andrews' office in Birmingham, Ala., his second such injection in less than three months. Devine, who had elbow-ligament-replacement surgery last year, said he hasn't been able to throw above 80 percent effort level without discomfort. ... Justin Duchscherer will be on crutches for two more weeks after left hip surgery. He said he started physical therapy the day after his June 7 surgery, which was far more extensive than expected: Dr. Thomas Byrd repaired the torn labrum, shaved down a significant bone growth at the top of the femur and removed a bone spur in the hip socket. Byrd told Duchscherer his lower back trouble last year and this spring probably was related to the tremendous amount of hip damage.

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

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

**Not so rosy:** Infielder Adam Rosales is hitless in his past 17 at-bats, dropping his average to .257. Rosales, a sparkplug for the A's the first two months, is hitting .189 in June. He has 12 strikeouts in 37 at-bats this month.

### **Skaalen brings positive experience to A's**

#### **Hitting coach knows struggles of hitting first-hand**

By Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

It's been nearly 35 years, but A's hitting coach Jim Skaalen can still remember.

Taking swings in the cage after his first professional season in 1976, when he batted .278 with 10 home runs for Baltimore's rookie ball team, Skaalen's baseball dreams were about to come to an end.

"I had a Major League coach come down and watch one round of batting practice," Skaalen said. "He came up to me and said, 'Son, that's a long swing you got. You're going to have to do something about that.'

"Instantly, I could feel the confidence kind of get sucked up. It was my own fault for basically not saying, 'The heck with you, I'll show you,' and that's what I needed to do. Instead, it created doubt, because that was all he said. He didn't give me anything to try and fix it. It was the single worst thing I had heard as a player."

After hitting .239 in '77 and .214 in '78, Skaalen was done with baseball. As a player, anyways. Skaalen saw himself as a lifetime Minor Leaguer, something he didn't want, so he called it quits.

The decision didn't sit well with his father, Morris, a former Minor League pitcher himself who ended his career due to World War II. After playing from 1938-41, Morris Skaalen flew bombers in the war before crashing his plane. Skaalen paralyzed his fingers in the crash and could no longer throw the ball, so when Jim showed promise as a ballplayer, Morris dreamed big, too.

"He influenced me greatly," Jim Skaalen said. "He had such passion for the game and he was living vicariously through me to want me to succeed in an area where he didn't get an opportunity to. When I made that decision to retire, I know it crushed him."

By 1981, Skaalen -- or "Ski" as he's called -- had returned to baseball, this time as a coach. Taking from his own playing experiences, especially the fateful batting-practice chat, Skaalen's coaching approach was a positive one. Of all the coaches he played for growing up, the negative ones stuck out.

"I don't think it's a good way to instruct," Skaalen said. "With our players, we still talk about the things that they are doing wrong -- we probably watch more video than we should -- but as I said, adjustments at this level are small."

In a sport where failing seven times out of 10 is considered success, good vibes are often necessary to keep pushing through. From discussions with players and A's manager Bob Geren, it's evident Skaalen's optimistic views are noted.

Take Ben Sheets, for example. The affable pitcher he is, Sheets told Geren before Wednesday's game he was available to pinch-hit.

"What are you hitting, .333?," Geren joked. Sheets *is* hitting .333 (1-for-3) this season. Geren's comment prompted an A's media relations person to say, "I bet Ski takes all the credit for that one."

"I give him credit for the .076, too," Sheets said before flexing both of his biceps.

For reference, Sheets was recently named the worst hitter of the decade by Baseball America after batting .076 from 2001-08 with Milwaukee. It was there where Sheets and current A's outfielder Gabe Gross first met Skaalen.

After serving in various Minor League coaching roles -- from manager to hitting instructor -- and in the San Diego Padres front office, Skaalen got his first big league coaching gig in 2007 as hitting coach for the Brewers. That season, led by Prince Fielder (50) and rookie Ryan Braun (34), Milwaukee topped the Majors with 231 home runs.

"Getting back with him again I think has kept me positive," Gross said. "You think that you got 14 things wrong with your swing, he tries to get you back to realizing it might just be one small thing that's causing everything else."

"To me, a hitting coach probably needs to be more of a psychiatrist than a mechanical guy. I think he's great with that. Baseball's such a frustrating game -- it is a game of failure. To have a guy as a hitting coach that is so steady and also so positive has a calming effect on guys."

According to Geren, Skaalen is a grinder with a great rapport with all his players.

"On the airplane, I don't think I've ever seen him watch a movie or play cards," Geren said.

After batting .248 through their initial 38 games, the A's have hit .277 over their past 36. Unfortunately for them, it hasn't translated into wins, as they are 18-20 and 16-20 in the respective stretches.

Still, shortstop Cliff Pennington said Skaalen helped him break out of the extended hitting funk he was in earlier this season. After being mired in a 3-for-46 (.065) slump from May 22-June 9, Pennington has excelled, batting .447 (17-for-38) in 12 games since. Pennington said he likes Skaalen's half-mental, half-physical approach with players.

"You got to be able to do both," Pennington said. "He definitely keeps everything positive for us. You got to be able to help a guy when a guy has got a little funk going with something mechanical and he can do that, too. It makes it great for us because we have confidence he's going to fix us and get us back right."

## MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

### Oakland A's MLN: First Half Stars

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Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Jun 24, 2010

With the first half of the 2010 minor league schedule in the books, we take a moment to acknowledge the Oakland A's minor league prospects who put up impressive numbers during the first half of the season.

*All stats good through Tuesday, June 22*

### **Sacramento River Cats**

**Steven Tolleson:** Tolleson has been consistently solid for Sacramento offensively, posting an OPS of 835 or higher in every month. A leg injury shut him down for three weeks, but he picked up where he left off upon his return and is batting .400 for the month of June. Tolleson has been especially dangerous versus left-handed pitching with a .500 average and a 1436 OPS. His overall slash line is .321/.418/.485.

**Eric Sogard:** After a horrific April (.234 BA/ 550 OPS), Sogard has been arguably the River Cats' best hitter. He hit .343 in May and is batting .329 in June. Sogard has walked more times than he has struck-out (36:28 BB:K) and he leads the team in hits with 79. He has also added versatility, playing all over the infield. Sogard's overall slash line is .306/.391/.376.

**Clayton Mortensen:** Mortensen has put together a 9-2 record and a 3.66 ERA in 91 innings for the River Cats this season. The right-hander has not allowed more than three runs or pitched fewer than 6.2 innings over his last six starts. Mortensen has been a groundball machine and he currently ranks fourth in the PCL in groundout-to-flyout ratio (GO/AO) with a 2.22

mark. He has been particularly tough at home with a 2.79 ERA in eight starts.

**Matt Carson:** Like Tolleson, Carson has been a steady performer for Sacramento, and his presence in the River Cats' line-up has been missed when he has been hurt (he missed time with an oblique injury) or with Oakland. Carson is third on the team in homers with seven and second in stolen bases with nine. He has also played an outstanding defensive centerfield. His overall slash line is .279/.345/.506.

**Henry Rodriguez:** Rodriguez is currently sidelined with a hamstring injury, but the right-hander has been lights-out when healthy. In 18.1 innings, he has allowed only 10 hits. He has struck-out 27, walked nine and has a 1.96 ERA. Rodriguez leads the team with nine saves.

**Josh Donaldson:** Donaldson is still working on his defense (he leads all PCL catchers in errors with seven), but he has carried a big stick for Sacramento all season. He is second on the team in homeruns (9) and RBIs (49) despite spending more than two weeks in the big leagues. His overall slash line is .269/.351/.497.

**Chris Carter:** The average is down (.238), but the power numbers have been there all season for Carter, who is tied for second in the PCL in homers (15) and is in second by himself in the league in RBIs (53). At times this season, thanks to injuries and promotions, Carter has been the lone power source in the middle of the Sacramento line-up. Like Tolleson, Carter has killed left-handed pitching (1072 OPS). Carter's overall slash line is .238/.343/.488.

**Kyle Middleton:** Middleton has really turned it on in June, as the right-hander has not allowed a run in 17 innings. Overall, he carries a 2.69 ERA in 63.2 innings (eight relief appearances and seven starts). At night he has been nearly unhittable with a 1.74 ERA in 51.2 innings.

**Sam Demel:** Demel was so good during the first half of the season that the A's were able to trade him straight up for an established major league hitter (Conor Jackson). In 28.2 innings with the River Cats, Demel posted a 1.26 ERA and he struck-out 28 batters while holding PCL hitters to a .212 average. Demel was promoted to the big leagues immediately after the trade and he has continued to shine for Arizona, tossing two scoreless innings in his first two big league appearances.

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## Midland Rockhounds

**Travis Banwart:** Banwart was promoted to Triple-A earlier this week after posting a 2.92 ERA in 14 starts for the Rockhounds. He allowed only 71 hits and struck-out 59 in 83.1 innings. Banwart has failed to get through five innings only once this season.

**Ryan Edell:** Edell has been with the team only for a month, but he has made a huge impact out of the Rockhounds' starting rotation. In seven starts, he has a 1.42 ERA and a 24:5 K:BB ratio in 38 innings for the Rockhounds. Contrast those numbers to his time with Double-A Akron in the Cleveland organization earlier this year when he had a 6.85 ERA, although his K:BB ratio was still outstanding at 18:4.

**Jeff Baisley:** After spending the past two seasons in Triple-A or the big leagues, Baisley is too good for Double-A and he is showing it with a .357/.421/.516 overall slash line. While Baisley waits for the A's to promote him a level or trade him to another organization, the infielder is racking up the two-base hits. Despite missing the first month of the season while recovering from injury, Baisley is currently tied for third in the Texas League in doubles with 17.

**Alexander Valdez:** Valdez's production has cooled some since his red-hot April performance, but the infielder is still among the team leaders in most offensive categories. He carries an overall slash line of .284/.347/.463. The switch-hitting Valdez has been particularly good as a left-handed hitter, posting a .302 average and an 866 OPS.

**Beau Vaughan:** Like Banwart, Vaughan has been promoted to Triple-A, but he was a stalwart in the Rockhounds' bullpen before the promotion. He saved a team-high six games and posted a 1.95 ERA. His K:BB ratio was a stellar 29:6.

**Archie Gilbert:** Not much has been written about Gilbert during his three seasons in the A's system, but he has been an important part of all three of his squads. Gilbert has a .270/.351/.433 slash line and a team-best 13 stolen bases. He also is second on the team with 27 walks.

**Josh Horton:** Horton began the year at extended spring training due to off-season elbow surgery, but he has been an important cog for Midland since early May. He hit .287 in May and is batting .290 in June for an overall average of .288. Despite being a left-handed hitter, Horton has hit well against lefties this season, batting .308 with an 804 OPS. He also played eight games with High-A Stockton and his overall slash line for the season is .317/.363/.452.

**Jared Lansford:** Until Vaughan's promotion, Lansford was sharing closing duties with him. Now Lansford has the role to himself. He leads the team with nine saves and his ERA is a solid 2.73 in 26.1 innings. His groundout-to-flyout ratio is an outstanding 2.93 and it is helping him overcome his 16 walks. Lansford has induced seven double-plays in 22 appearances.

**Corey Brown:** As poorly as Brown played for Sacramento, he has been equally good for Midland. In 109 at-bats with Sacramento, Brown hit .156/.207/.275. In 108 at-bats with the Rockhounds, Brown is batting .352/.423/.565. He has five stolen bases and five homeruns and he has driven-in 20 in 28 games for Midland.

**Mickey Storey:** Like Brown, Storey didn't fare well after a promotion to Triple-A, but he has been a steady force for the Rockhounds. In 28.1 innings, Storey has allowed only 19 hits and seven walks and he has struck-out 25. He also has three saves. With Sacramento, Storey's ERA was 5.54 in 13 innings, although he did strike-out 14 against five walks.

**Jemile Weeks:** A tear in Weeks' left hip flexor robbed the Rockhounds of their best player in early May. At the time of the injury (which was very similar to the injury he sustained with Kane County in 2008), Weeks had a .304/.368/.490 slash line, making him a dangerous top-of-the-order threat. His rehab from the injury has been a long one. According to A's Director of Player Development Keith Lieppman, Weeks has just started baseball activities and will continue them as much as the hip will tolerate.

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## Stockton Ports

**Stephen Parker:** The Ports' lone All-Star, Parker is ninth in the California League in OPS (918), third in doubles (22) and tied for second in walks (45). Parker punctuated his stellar first half with a game-winning RBI in the Cal League-Carolina League All-Star game. The left-handed hitter has scalded right-handed pitching, hitting .313 with a 963 OPS.

**Paul Smyth:** Smyth has been nearly unhittable since turning pro last season. The right-hander leads all A's minor leaguers with 10 saves and he has a 1.54 ERA in 41 innings. He has struck-out 42, walked only nine and has allowed only 25 hits.

**Grant Green:** It was a quiet start for Green this season, who posted a 724 OPS in April. However, he has improved every month, posting a 786 OPS in May and a 1099 OPS in June. He finished the first half with a .320/.371/.466 slash line and was named to the MLB Futures Game. The A's top pick in 2009 tortured left-handed pitchers to the tune of a .434 average and a 1108 OPS.

**Michael Spina:** Spina's average isn't where he'd like it to be (.254 BA), but his power numbers are second only to Chris Carter's in the A's system. Spina leads the Ports with 12 homers and 55 RBIs. Those stats put him tied for sixth and in fourth place in the Cal League, respectively.

**Shawn Haviland:** Haviland's ERA has leaked above 4.00 recently, but his ERA isn't a reflection of how well he has pitched this season. Haviland has struck-out 81 and walked only 16 in 77.1 innings for Stockton. He has pitched so well for Stockton that when Sacramento needed a starter, the A's sent Haviland up to make a start.

**Ryan Ortiz:** Sharing the catching duties with Petey Paramore throughout much of the first half, Ortiz has appeared only 36 games, but his bat has made its presence known when he has been in the game. In 118 at-bats, Ortiz hit .305 with five homers, 25 RBIs and a 931 OPS. He has walked 19 times and has scored 21 runs.

**Trey Barham:** Barham has teamed with Smyth to give the Ports a steady presence in the back-end of their bullpen. The left-hander has a 2.02 ERA in 35.2 innings. Barham has held opposing batters to a .225 average and has induced nearly two groundouts for every flyout.

**Jeremy Barfield:** Barfield has yet to reach his potential as a hitter, although his seven homeruns and 44 RBIs are solid, but he has done some damage with his throwing arm from right. He has tossed out 13 runners from the outfield this season, the most of any outfielder in the A's system.

**Justin Murray:** Murray has moved on to Midland, but he made his mark with Stockton. In 13 appearances (12 starts), he went 6-3 with a 3.69 ERA. He walked too many batters (32), but he was able to overcome that with 54 strike-outs and a strong groundball rate.

**Jermaine Mitchell:** Mitchell has been in Stockton seemingly forever, although he did spend more than a month of this season in Midland. He might be frustrated to be stuck in High-A, but his numbers with Stockton are finally starting to reflect his talent. In 123 at-bats with the Ports, Mitchell is batting .309/.410/.496.

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## **Kane County Cougars**

**Ian Krol:** The A's couldn't have hoped for a better first half for their 2009 seventh round pick. The 19-year-old Krol dominated the Midwest League, posting a 1.68 ERA and a 52:13 K:BB ratio in 67.2 innings. He will be limited to roughly 100 innings this season, so he is likely to be shut down in August, but he still has time to continue to build on his strong first half.

**Rashun Dixon:** After a horrific season with Vancouver in 2009, Dixon has rebounded nicely with the Cougars. His 784 OPS is the highest on the Cougars' roster and he was in the midst of a torrid month of June before the All-Star break hit (972 OPS in 16 games). His five homers are third on the team. His overall slash line is .261/.362/.420.

**Kent Walton:** Walton lost nearly a month when he was hit in the hand with a pitch, but he has been productive when healthy. The outfielder has a .281/.342/.416 slash line and he is fourth on the team in RBIs despite missing all of that time.

**Connor Hoehn:** Hoehn has been a strike-out machine this season, whiffing 62 batters in 46 innings. He has also allowed only 28 hits. The only area in which Hoehn has struggled is with walks. He has issued 22 free passes.

**Max Stassi:** The season has had numerous ups-and-downs for the 19-year-old Stassi, but he has shown impressive power with a team-leading nine homeruns, a total that has him tied for fifth in the Midwest League. Stassi has also shown improvement defensively after a rough start to the season behind the plate. His 755 OPS is third on the Cougars behind Dixon and Walton and his overall slash line is .247/.319/.436.

**Jose Guzman:** The Cougars' closer has eight saves and a 34:9 K:BB ratio in 28.1 innings. Guzman has also allowed only one homerun this season. After spending much of the last three seasons with short-season Vancouver, Guzman could be in-line for a promotion to High-A Stockton during the second half of the season.

**Bo Schultz:** The undrafted free agent from Northwestern has been a dominating reliever for the Cougars. He has induced three times as many groundouts than flyouts and he is holding Midwest League batters to a .209 average. His ERA is 2.66 in 40.1 innings and he has yet to allow a homerun.

**Conner Crumbliss:** Crumbliss has yet to show the power that he displayed last season, when he compiled a .404 SLG, but he is still getting on-base at an impressive clip. Thanks to 61 walks, Crumbliss has a .400 OBP. That walk total is best in the Midwest League and is second in all of minor league baseball. He also leads the Cougars with 44 runs scored. Crumbliss' overall slash line is .245/.400/.318.

## **Sacramento shut out by Las Vegas**

By Abbie Ellis / Sacramento River Cats

Stellar Las Vegas pitching combined to shutout Sacramento, 8-0, for the River Cats' second loss in a row against the 51s on the road.

Las Vegas pitcher Marc Rzepczynski showed no mercy against the River Cats. The left-hander pitched an outstanding 7.2 innings with three hits, no runs, and nine strikeouts. Reliever Jesse Carlson came in for the save.

Rzepczynski's pitching limited a River Cats team loaded with power hitters to just three hits on the night.

First batter of the night was Eric Sogard, who looked like he was getting the game going on a positive note with a line drive single. In the third inning Sogard reached base on a walk, and a Matt Carson double put Sogard on third, which is the closest the Cats came to a score.

It was a five-inning wait before another River Cat touched a base. Steven Tolleson doubled on a fly ball to center field, but a pop fly ended the inning quick.

Sacramento's defense was able to rally back in the second half of the game, but the 8-0 lead the 51s acquired through the fifth was too much.

A Mike McCoy home run for the 51s started what would become 11 batters in the third inning. Edwin Encarnacion, Brian Dopirak, and Adam Calderone all singled to score and give the 51s a 5-0 lead over the Cats to close the third.

An Aaron Mathews two-run homer in the fifth inning sealed the deal for the 51s.

With the loss, Sacramento drops to 0-2 in this series against Las Vegas. The River Cats have two more shots at redemption Thursday and Friday, before returning home.

### **RockHounds fall once more to Frisco**

By Shawn Shroyer, Midland Reporter Telegram

Citibank Ballpark didn't exactly endear itself to the Midland RockHounds during their brief four-game homestand.

In the bottom of the seventh, with the RockHounds down three runs to the Frisco RoughRiders, Josh Horton hit a pop up down the third base line. The ball sailed toward the front row of the bleachers, forcing RoughRiders third baseman Renny Osuna to lunge into the crowd. Rather than shield Osuna from the ball, though, the fans allowed him to make the catch.

The play didn't cost the RockHounds the game, but it didn't help in a 7-2 loss as the RoughRiders won their third straight game of the four-game series.

On the bright side for the RockHounds, they're back on the road today, where they have an 18-18 record compared to their 17-19 home mark. The story for the third straight night was a dominating pitching performance by a RoughRiders pitcher — this time Tanner Roark — as the RockHounds went from averaging seven runs over a seven-game span to a total of six runs the last three games.

"We ran into (Martin) Perez the other night and, even though he's 19, he can throw," said RockHounds infielder Adrian Cardenas, who had two of the team's nine hits and its only extra base hit on Thursday. "He was on (Wednesday) and they've got a few future big leaguers. Roark pitched a hell of a game. What can you do?"

Roark (8-3) went seven innings, allowing just two runs, one earned, on seven hits and he struck out three. He forced the RockHounds to put the ball in play by not walking a single batter and his defense backed him up with just one error.

"He made big pitches when he needed to," RockHounds manager Darren Bush said. "He got ground balls when he was behind in the count. Our plan was just to get on his mistakes — get something up. When we did, we just missed."

Roark faced the minimum in four innings, helped by double plays to end the second and third innings. The only inning he faced more than four batters was the fourth, in which right fielder Joey Butler sailed a throw to third base into the stands to let in an unearned run.

The RoughRiders didn't hit the ball especially hard with 13 of their 15 hits going for singles. Several of those base hits found a hole in the infield or a safe place to land in the outfield.

Their ability to string together singles made for a frustrating fourth inning. The RoughRiders scored three runs that inning with five consecutive two-out singles.

"They strung them together and found some holes," Bush said. "That's baseball. It happens."

Adding insult to injury was a throwing error by RockHounds starting pitcher Ryan Edell (3-2) that he didn't exactly deserve.

During a mound visit from pitching coach Scott Emerson, Edell was instructed to throw over to first base with Marcus Lemon on second and Renny Osuna on first. The only problem was first baseman Jeff Baisley didn't cover the base and Lemon came in to score while Osuna wound up on third.



While the RockHounds leave their unfriendly home confines today, for the fourth straight game they'll face one of the better starting pitchers in the Texas League. In their 7:05 p.m. meeting with San Antonio today, they'll see right-hander Simon Castro, who is 4-2 with a 2.87 ERA.

"He's a good pitcher. He has good action," Bush said. "We need to make him get the ball up, but he's good at getting pitches down and attacking the zone, so we have to stay on the ball."

## NOTEBOOK

**HOME RUN DERBY LINEUP ANNOUNCED:** The cast for the 2010 Texas League Home Run Derby, presented by State Farm Insurance, was unveiled on Thursday. The eight-player list included Midland RockHound Alex Valdez and Texas League home run leader Mike Moustakas of Northwest Arkansas.

The other six competitors will be Springfield's Steven Hill and Aaron Luna, Frisco's Joey Butler, San Antonio's Matt Clark, Corpus Christi's Koby Clemens, and Northwest Arkansas' Clint Robinson. The Derby will begin at 5:55 p.m. Wednesday at Citibank Ballpark, prior to the All-Star Game. Former Major League pitcher Roger Clemens, father of Koby, will throw to hitters for a portion of the Derby.

"We're grateful to Roger for wanting to be part of this event," RockHounds general manager Monty Hoppel said in a release. "It was really Roger's idea and we think it will make the Home Run Derby a very special and unique part of the All-Star Game. It will be something that will become part of our franchise's history, and of Texas League history."

The format for the Derby will allow each batter six outs in the first round. Any swing that doesn't result in a home run is considered an out. The top two hitters in the first round advance to the finals. In the event of a tie in the first round, the batter with the most home runs hit the first half of the season will advance. Each hitter will then have nine outs in the finals and, should a tie arise in the finals, an extra three-out round will be implemented. If the two are still tied after the extra round, the player that hit the most home runs in the first round will be crowned champion.

Moustakas lead all Texas Leaguers with 18 home runs going into Thursday. Clemens was second with 16, Clark was fourth in the league with 12 and Luna was fifth with 11. Robinson had 10 entering Thursday, Hill had nine, Valdez had eight and Butler had six.

Each Derby participant will represent a youngster from a select local organization and the organizations will receive ballpark recognition and a block of tickets to a future RockHounds home game.

**WRIGHT PLEASED WITH RETURN:** RockHounds starting pitcher Matt Wright said his goal on Wednesday was to throw strikes against the Frisco RoughRiders. He can put a checkmark beside that objective.

Wright pounded 32 of 34 pitches for strikes in four shutout innings and only an innings restriction kept him from heading back out for the fifth. The innings limit was a result of him making his first start since straining his hamstring pitching for the KIA Tigers of the Korean Baseball Organization.

"(Wednesday) night I just wanted to get back out on the mound," Wright said. "I hadn't been in a game or faced a hitter in probably two and half months, so I just wanted to get back out there and get going and try to get my stuff back and see where I was at."

The stuff was certainly there for the Waco native. He allowed just one hit, didn't issue a walk and struck out three.

And after spending the early part of this season, Wright has a new perspective of the game. Korea isn't usually a stop players make on their way to the Major Leagues, but when the KIA Tigers purchased Wright's contract while he was in camp with the Oakland Athletics, he gave it a shot.

He didn't have the success he hoped he'd have, but he came away with a new outlook on what players go through when they play overseas.

"The baseball was good," Wright said. "Now I sense for what the Dominicans feel like when they come over here. It was really good baseball, but I was only there for a month and a half, so I was only getting my feet wet. By the time I got accustomed, I was leaving."

**ROCKHOUNDS BITES:** Another day, another Texas League All-Star Game roster change. Northwest Arkansas pitcher Edgar Osuna was injured Wednesday night and will be unable to appear in the game, so teammate Brandon Sisk will take his place on the North roster. ... RockHounds infielder Adrian Cardenas got an error taken off his record after a scoring change from Wednesday's game. In the fourth inning Wednesday, Frisco catcher Taylor Teagarden hit a low line drive to Cardenas at second base that skidded under his glove. Originally ruled an error, Teagarden was given a hit.

**TODAY'S PROBABLE PITCHERS:** San Antonio Missions (36-36) — Simon Castro (RHP, 4-2, 2.87); Midland RockHounds (35-37) — Justin Murray (RHP, 0-0, 11.25)

### **Ports Outlast JetHawks In Wild 10-Inning Affair**

**LANCASTER, Calif.** - If Thursday night's contest between the Stockton Ports and Lancaster JetHawks was a precursor to the season's second half, fans of both teams are in for a wild ride. Stockton took a 7-0 lead in the top of the first inning, only to see it evaporate by the end of the third. Ultimately it was the Ports who would prevail in 10 innings despite the JetHawks tying the game with two outs in the ninth.

Stockton hit the ground running-literally-in the top of the first. Jermaine Mitchell drew a walk to start the game and promptly stole second, coaxing an errant throw into center field from catcher Federico Hernandez that allowed Mitchell to take third. Grant Green brought Mitchell home with an RBI single to left to put the Ports in front 1-0. Stephen Parker followed and reached on an error and two batters later with one out, Jeremy Barfield singled to right to load the bases. Tyler Ladendorf came up next and delivered a bases-clearing triple down the right field line to make it a 4-0 Ports lead. Ryan Ortiz walked and two batters later with two down, Michael Richard was hit by a pitch to reload the bases. Mitchell came up again and drew a bases-loaded walk, signaling the end of the night for JetHawks starter Kyle Greenwalt.

Leandro Cespedes came on in relief and was greeted with a two-run single off the bat of Green to make it a 7-0 ballgame. All seven runs that came home in the first were charged to Greenwalt, who received a no-decision after a disastrous two-thirds of an inning of work. Cespedes would go 4.1 innings and allow two runs on five hits while striking out four.

Lancaster set the tone for their resilient play in the bottom of the first. Jay Austin singled to start the inning and Albert Cartwright followed with a double. Brandon Barnes came up with two on and nobody out and hit a three-run homer to right to cut Stockton's lead to 7-3. Lee Cruz followed the home run with a double to right and two batters later, scored on a David Flores double to left to make it a 7-4 game.

Ports starter Ben Hornbeck would struggle to settle in throughout his outing. Hornbeck gave up a two-out solo blast to Cartwright in the second which cut the Ports lead to 7-5.

It was the Ports defense that dropped the ball in the third. Cruz reached to start the inning on an error made by Parker. After Cruz was caught stealing, Freddy Parejo reached on an error made by Ladendorf. Two batters later with two aboard, Hernandez singled to center to score Parejo. Two batters later with two down, Ebert Rosario reached on an infield single that scored Flores who'd reached after being hit by a pitch to tie the game at seven apiece.

Hornbeck would receive a no-decision after going four innings, allowing seven runs (five earned) on nine hits while striking out four.

Stockton reclaimed the lead in the fifth. Ladendorf started the inning with a double and scored two batters later when Shane Keough singled to right to make it 8-7. Keough would go to second on the throw home, take third on a wild pitch and score on an ensuing sac-fly from Richard to give the Ports a 9-7 advantage.

Lancaster started their second comeback of the night in the sixth when Austin led the inning off with a solo home run off Ports reliever Scott Deal to make it 9-8. It was the only run allowed by Deal in three innings of work.

In the last of the eighth, Brandon Wikoff greeted Ports reliever Trey Barham with a single to right. After stealing second and going to third on a passed ball, Wikoff was the tying run at third base with nobody out. Barham, however, would record back-to-back strikeouts of Andy Simunic and Austin, then get Cartwright to ground to second to end the inning.

Lancaster would make a final push and tie the game in the ninth down to their final out. Barnes doubled off Paul Smyth (3-2) to start the inning and would end up at third base with two down. Smyth, with two down and Barnes at third, faced Flores who hit a single off the third base bag to score Barnes and tie the game at nine.

In the tenth, it was Green who almost singlehandedly produced the game's winning run. With one out, Green doubled to center as the ball fell just in front of a sliding Austin. Realizing the JetHawks were taking their time in retrieving the baseball, Green aggressively headed for third, drawing a throw that nearly wound up in the Ports dugout. Green was credited with a triple and scored when Parker followed with a sac-fly to left to make it 10-9.

Smyth, who blew the save in the ninth, would work around a leadoff walk he yielded to Wickoff and strand the possible tying run at third to end the ballgame. Smyth would get credit for the win, while Lancaster's David Berner (1-4) took the loss after being charged with the go-ahead run that scored in the 10th.

The Ports and JetHawks will continue their series on Friday night at Clear Channel Stadium. In a battle of left-handers, Paul Oseguera (1-2, 4.84 ERA) will take the mound for Stockton, opposed by David Duncan (0-1, 3.38 ERA) for Lancaster. First pitch is set for 7 p.m. PDT.

## **Oakland A's Prospect Q&A: Michael Spina, IF**

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Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Jun 24, 2010

STOCKTON – Some players shy away from the “run producer” label, but Michael Spina is someone who embraces it. The Cincinnati alum has been a force in the middle of the Stockton Ports’ line-up all season long, having already collected 12 homers and 55 RBIs at the All-Star break. We spoke to the Oakland A’s corner infield prospect over the weekend...

In the 2010 MLB draft, the Oakland A’s made a conscious effort to select more players who profiled as power hitters in the professional ranks. More hitters like their 2009 11th round selection, corner infielder [Michael Spina](#).

Spina came to the A’s after breaking [Kevin Youkilis’](#) school homerun record for the University of [Cincinnati](#), and Spina has carried his homerun and run-producing tendencies into the professional ranks. After signing with the A’s, Spina spent most of his first stint in pro ball with the Low-A Kane County Cougars. In 184 at-bats, Spina hit seven homeruns for Kane County, an impressive total in the pitcher-friendly Midwest League.

The Florida native has already surpassed that total in 2010. In 256 at-bats, Spina has hit 12 homeruns and has driven-in 55 runs. Both totals lead the Stockton Ports and put him among the top six in the California League.

Spina has put up those numbers while learning a new position. The longtime third baseman was moved to first base this season. It has been an uneven experience for Spina thus far, as he has 12 errors, but he has shown improvement, committing only two errors thus far in June after making eight during the month of May.

We spoke to Spina just before the All-Star break about his first full professional season and more...

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*OaklandClubhouse: Has your first full season been what you expected?*

**Michael Spina:** Yeah. Earlier I was struggling. I have been working on a couple of different swings. Swings that will help me get to the big leagues. Our hitting coordinator Sparky [Greg Sparks] and our hitting coach Timmy [Tim Garland] have been working a lot with me this first half. I feel like it is coming along great. I still have a lot of RBIs and homeruns. I just need to get my average up and be more consistent in getting base hits right now.

*OC: You've been at first base a lot this year after playing third base last season. Is that a big adjustment for you?*

**MS:** It's a huge adjustment. I had never played first until coming to the Ports this year. I didn't even play first in spring training. When I first got here, we had [Stephen] Parker at third so I had to move to first to get a lot of playing time and get my at-bats in. It's been an adjustment. First base isn't easy, I'll tell you that much. You are in the action every play. Picks. Flyballs come down differently on than they do on the left side of the infield, so it's a huge difference.

*OC: Have you seen any time at third?*

**MS:** It's been mostly first. That's where the guys in our organization want me and so I have been trying to play there and get better at it.

*OC: Have you noticed a big difference between the Midwest League and the California League?*

**MS:** There's a huge difference [in leagues]. The ball flies a little bit better [in the Cal League], but there is a lot better pitching here, too. Last year we faced a lot of young guys who didn't know where the ball was going or who threw a lot of balls, but out here there are guys who can pitch. And they are throwing hard. It's definitely a bigger challenge and I'm enjoying it. I love it.

*OC: You are already in double-digits for homeruns. Would you describe yourself as a homerun hitter, or as a different kind of hitter?*

**MS:** No, that's my game. I am a power hitter, definitely. That's why they have me at the corner spots. I'm a guy who needs to drive the ball and hit homeruns and hit doubles and get runners in. The big thing is getting RBIs, which I have been doing a lot, and hopefully I can keep doing it.

*OC: What was your off-season preparation like now that you were out of school?*

**MS:** I actually went back to school. I finished my degree at Cincinnati. And I didn't go to Instructs last year. I finished school and then I went home to Florida and started conditioning and working out and getting ready for spring training. I actually went to spring training a month early and was there and got used to the weather and stuff in Arizona. I got to hang out with the big leaguers there and got to learn a little bit more and it helped me a lot.

*OC: Was there anyone in particular who helped you?*

**MS:** Yeah, I hung out a lot with Jake Fox. I know that we [the A's] don't have him anymore, but he is a great guy. Great guy to be around and he taught me a lot about what we need to do to grind everyday out on the field. In the minor league system, it is a long year.

*OC: He's also a right-handed power hitter. Did you take away anything from his swing, or was it more that he gave you advice about playing professional baseball?*

**MS:** More advice than anything. Our swings are a little bit different. I like to elevate the ball a little bit more than he does. He likes to hit line drives in the gaps. But being around all of those guys was great. They have great guys up there in Oakland and hopefully someday I'll be able to get up there with them.