

A's News Clips, Saturday, July 3, 2010

Gio Gonzalez pitches Oakland A's to win

By Curtis Pashelka, Oakland Tribune

Ten days wasn't enough time for Dallas Braden's tender left elbow to show signs of improvement. Now the A's left-hander can only hope more rest can eradicate his nagging injury once and for all.

Before the start of Friday's 3-0 win by the A's over the Cleveland Indians at Progressive Field — a victory anchored by Gio Gonzalez's strong effort on the mound — Oakland manager Bob Geren said Braden would not make his scheduled start today. Clay Mortensen will be called up from Triple-A Sacramento to start today's game.

"I think he's going to get as much time as he needs to feel 100 percent," Geren said of Braden, who was hampered by tightness in the elbow throughout June. "I'm pretty confident. He's been checked out, and it seems like rest is going to do it, and he's going to get the rest."

Braden said he felt good after throwing off flat ground and doing a bullpen session Thursday in Baltimore, and Geren indicated he was moving forward with his plan to start Braden today. But Braden's elbow felt only slightly better Friday morning than it did earlier in the week when he missed Tuesday's scheduled start.

"I don't know how good (today) works," Braden said Friday before Geren spoke to reporters.

The A's have a day off Thursday and begin the All-Star break July 12. Geren said a chance exists that he could push Braden to the back of the starting rotation, meaning Braden wouldn't have to pitch again until the July 19-21 series against Boston.

As it stands, the A's likely will head into the All-Star break without three of the five starters they had on Opening Night. Justin Duchscherer (left hip surgery) and Brett Anderson (left elbow tendinitis) also are sidelined. Duchscherer might miss the rest of the season, but Anderson is progressing nicely and should return sometime this month.

Gonzalez, who made the rotation coming out of spring training, shut out the Indians for 6²/₃ innings to win for the first time in his past five starts. He also was the beneficiary of a sparkling 9-3 putout by right fielder Ryan Sweeney in the bottom of the sixth inning.

With two outs and the bases loaded, first base/outfield coach Todd Steverson indicated to Sweeney to look to throw to first base should Mike Redmond line to right field. Redmond did just that with a one-hopper right to Sweeney, who fired to first baseman Daric Barton for the rare out to end the threat.

"Usually, Daric would be going toward the middle of the diamond and I would be throwing home right there," Sweeney said. "It was a heads-up play. I didn't think of that."

The A's led 1-0 in the sixth inning when Mark Ellis, with the bases loaded, doubled to the wall in left-center field to score Kurt Suzuki and Sweeney. Craig Breslow and Andrew Bailey retired the final seven batters to preserve the shutout and give the A's their sixth win in seven games.

"When he commands both sides of the plate with the fastball, he's deadly because his curveball is so good," Ellis said of Gonzalez. "He's grown up every time he goes out there, keeping his composure."

Geren wouldn't say if Mortensen would get only one start. If Mortensen were to pitch twice, it's possible Trevor Cahill would not have to pitch July 11. If Cahill is selected to the American League All-Star team, and he pitches a week from Sunday, he cannot be on the AL's active roster. Geren indicated Cahill will pitch two more times before the break.

TODAY: A's (Clay Mortensen 0-0) at Indians (Jake Westbrook 5-4), 4:05 p.m. TV: CSNCA. Radio: 860-AM; 1640-AM

Athletics Update: Venezuelan sensation Renato Nunez, 16, signs

By Curtis Pashelka, Oakland Tribune

CLEVELAND — The A's again demonstrated an aggressive approach to acquiring young and heralded Latin American talent by agreeing to a \$2.2 million contract Friday with 16-year-old Renato Nunez — considered the top available batter in Venezuela — on the first day of the international free-agent signing period.

Nunez, who's 6-foot-2, 185 pounds, can hit for average and power, scouts believe. He caught the A's eye two years ago and had been looked at extensively by Latin American scouting coordinator Julio Franco and director of player personnel Billy Owens.

"What attracted us to him was watching how the ball just jumps off his bat," said Dan Kantrovitz, the A's coordinator of international operations/baseball operations, who was in the Dominican Republic on Friday to meet with Nunez. The A's have a facility for Latin American players in the Dominican.

"Then we followed him last year and he showed an ability to adjust to breaking balls and use the whole field."

The A's also agreed to terms with Venezuelan left-handed pitchers Anderson Mata, 17, and Jose Torres, 16. All three players will report to the A's complex in the Dominican after their contracts are approved by Major League Baseball. Nunez is eligible to begin to play in the Dominican Summer League next year.

The announcement on Nunez came two years after the A's signed Michael Ynoa, a 6-7 right-hander out of the Dominican, for a record \$4.25 million. Now 18, Ynoa made his professional debut late last month in Arizona.

The A's signed Boof Bonser, the Giants' No. 1 draft pick in 2000, to a minor league deal. He will start for Triple-A Sacramento today. They also claimed right-hander Jeff Lyman, a Danville native and Monte Vista High graduate, off waivers from Atlanta and optioned him to Double-A Midland.

Bonser missed last season with a torn labrum and was released by the Boston Red Sox earlier this week. Lyman, 23, started this season at Triple-A Gwinnett and was 0-0 with a 4.72 ERA in 21 appearances. He was transferred to Double-A Mississippi on Wednesday and waived after one appearance.

A's assistant general manager David Forst said Justin Duchscherer (left hip), widely believed to be done for the season, has been rehabbing aggressively and is eyeing a return late this year. Duchscherer had surgery in June.

A's manager Bob Geren said outfielder Conor Jackson will be out for a few days with right hamstring tightness. Jackson was on the disabled list April 19 to May 6 with a strained right hamstring.

Columnist Carl Steward darts from one topic to another

Carl Steward: BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

Darting here and there "...

| Now that we know all of the potential Warriors buyers, the suspense really begins as we wait to see who will overpay the most for Chris Cohan's Folly. Our early odds favor David Bonderman, the guy who paid \$7 million just to have the Rolling Stones play at his birthday.

| One wonders how much satisfaction there'll be for Bonderman if he lands the team. He'll be getting a beast of burden, a roster of far away eyes and zilch jumpin' jack flash.

| Sobering thought: Whatever the final selling price of the W's, it'll be at least \$300 million less than Tiger Woods' divorce settlement.

| By comparison, a \$6 million settlement to keep 70-year-old Don Nelson from returning to the bench next year seems quite reasonable. Heck, if a night with the Stones and John Mellencamp costs more "...

| Nellie has already quietly reneged on his plan to coach the Warriors summer league team, perhaps as a prelude to his exit stage left (Hawaii). The reported excuse that Stephen Curry won't be there in Las Vegas seems lame. What about poor Ekpe Udoh?

| Snazzy new logo for the Warriors, incidentally, but same old goofy Golden State moniker. Maybe the new ownership will do something about that travesty, but don't hold your Oaktown breath. Until LeBron James signs, we're totally swearing off ESPN. If you thought the network's obsession with Brett Favre was unbearable, the James Watch is nonstop insanity (or if you prefer, inanity). Can we just have some scores and highlights, please?

| We Could Have Told You Two Years Ago Dept.: The Los Angeles Clippers are frantically trying to unload Baron Davis' bloated contract to become a bigger player in the free-agent chase.

| Former Bishop O'Dowd High standout Brian Shaw, who also briefly played for the Warriors, got close on the Cleveland coaching job. Shaw is somebody the new W's ownership should take a long look at as a possible Nelson successor.

| As someone who got to know Manute Bol a little, I'm still in mourning for the big guy, who left this world far too soon. Gentle soul with a great sense of humor and one of the all-time most memorable Warriors.

| Hey, the Giants are scoring just fine "... for a World Cup team. They still might not be able to beat Argentina, though.

| The only thing flying out of AT&T Park this week as far as the Giants were concerned may have been the futures of Bruce Bochy and Brian Sabean with the club. The real question if the slide continues is whether Bochy lasts the season "... or the month.

| By the way, no truth to the rumor that AT&T Park will soon be renamed GIDP Park (OK, so you're not a stat geek and you don't get it: It stands for Grounded Into Double Play). For the record, the Giants have 84 GIDPs.

| Prediction: Only one Bay Area player from each team will get to the All-Star Game. For the Giants, Brian Wilson is the logical choice. For the A's, hmm "... Trevor Cahill? Andrew Bailey? Nah, our choice would be Kurt Suzuki, who's become as solid an all-around catcher as Oakland's ever had.

| Compared with FIFA overlord Sepp Blatter, Bud Selig looks like Steve Jobs when it comes to considering video replay technology. Blatter's preferred solution: even more clueless referees.

| Poor officiating aside, there is not much doubt the best teams made the World Cup's final eight. Netherlands over Brazil was dynamite, and Argentina vs. Germany this morning could be another classic. But why are these games quarterfinals?

| Venus Williams and Roger Federer: Based on their miserable Wimbledon performances, it looks as if their great careers are on the fast fade. Sadly, for both, it appears to be a case of lost incentive.

| One last Warriors question: If Stones freak Bonderman wheels the deal, will A Great Time Out become Let's Spend The Night Together?

Oakland A's claim pitcher Jeff Lyman of Danville off waivers from Atlanta Braves

Oakland Tribune wire services

The Oakland A's claimed right-handed pitcher Jeff Lyman off waivers from the Atlanta Braves and optioned him to Double-A Midland, the club announced today.

Lyman, who starred at Monte Vista High, began the season at Triple-A Gwinnett and was 0-0 with a 4.72 ERA in 21 relief appearances. He allowed a .250 opponents batting average, including .145 against left-handed hitters and .329 against right-handers.

The 23-year old right-handed pitcher was transferred to Double-A Mississippi on June 30 and made one appearance on Thursday, allowing a run on two hits in one inning.

Lyman was originally drafted by Atlanta in the second round of the 2005 First-Year Player Draft.

Gio Gonzalez, A's shut down Indians

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

With the bases loaded and two outs in the sixth, outfield coach Todd Steverson made a throwing motion toward right fielder Ryan Sweeney and first baseman Daric Barton.

Steverson "was saying, 'Throw it,' and I didn't know what he was talking about," Sweeney said after the A's 3-0 victory in Cleveland on Friday. "Then he told Barton, and Barton looked at me, and I was like, 'I'm throwing it to you.' "

Two pitches later, Indians catcher Mark Redmond hit a liner that dropped in front of Sweeney, and while everyone else was looking for Sweeney to launch a throw home, he instead winged it to Barton, throwing out Redmond and recording a rare 9-3 putout.

"Crazy play," Sweeney said. "Something you do in Little League."

That play preserved Gio Gonzalez's nice night. Gonzalez had gotten himself in trouble by allowing three consecutive two-out singles to load the bases, but he wound up unscored upon in his 6 2/3 innings of work, helping snap Cleveland's five-game winning streak.

Gonzalez was backing up home plate and expecting the throw there. "When I saw it go to first, and there was an out at first, I got pretty excited behind the dish," Gonzalez said. "Great play."

Gonzalez (7-5) has allowed only one earned run over his past three starts. "He's maturing with every start," said second baseman Mark Ellis, who had a two-run double. "He's turning into a man on the mound."

Craig Breslow went 1 1/3 innings and Andrew Bailey got his 16th save as Oakland recorded its AL-leading ninth shutout.

Today's scheduled starter, Dallas Braden, won't be pitching after all; it was decided that his left elbow tendinitis needs extended rest and Braden will be shut down until after the All-Star break.

Clayton Mortensen, who made six starts for Oakland last year, will be on the mound today instead of Braden. He has been particularly good lately, going 4-0 with a 2.00 ERA in June. The A's will make the roster move today. They did not indicate if Braden would be placed on the disabled list, but it would make sense if he's not going to be used for more than two weeks, anyway.

Oakland had two men back in the lineup and one still out. Coco Crisp was hitting leadoff after a night off to rest his legs, and he went 0-for-5. Barton, after showing he was OK during batting practice, was a late add and he had two hits despite bruised legs.

Left fielder Conor Jackson remained out with tightness in his right hamstring, and it's possible that if the injury doesn't respond soon, the A's will place him on the DL to take advantage of that built-in extra time with the All-Star break. He could be backdated and then come off the DL as soon as the break is over.

Third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff is 0 for his past 24, the longest hitless streak of his career.

An international trend

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

The A's have become annual newsmakers on international signing day, continuing the trend Friday by coming to terms with 16-year-old third baseman **Renato Nunez**.

Ranked the top free-agent hitter in Venezuela by many scouts, Nunez received a \$2.2 million signing bonus, according to Baseball America.

"We're impressed with his tools, with his bat, his off-field demeanor, his family background," A's coordinator of international operations **Dan Kantrovitz** said. "He was regarded as one of the top bats available on the July 2 deadline, and he has an advanced approach you don't see in many 16-year-olds. He has an ability to adjust to off-speed pitches and the ball jumps off his bat."

The team also signed Venezuelan left-handers **Anderson Mata**, 17, and **José Torres**, 16. According to Kantrovitz, Mata throws a fastball, changeup and curveball, and he throws them all for strikes and can command both sides of the plate. Torres, who is listed at 6-foot-2, 155 pounds, has a fastball and curveball, and Kantrovitz said, "With the type of body he has, we're hoping as he matures that he adds some velocity. He's got a long, lean, lanky build with quite a bit of room to fill out."

Bonser signed: The A's signed free-agent right-hander **Boof Bonser**, the onetime Giants first-round draft pick, to a minor-league deal Friday and they will get him stretched out to start at Triple-A Sacramento, according to assistant general manager **David Forst**, in order to be an option as either a starter or reliever in Oakland whenever there is a need.

Bonser, 28, has missed most of the season with a groin injury, and he was designated for assignment by the Red Sox last month. Bonser never pitched in the majors for the Giants and he was traded along with **Joe Nathan** and **Francisco Liriano** to the Twins for **A.J. Pierzynski** after the 2003 season.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Local ties: The A's picked up right-hander Jeff Lyman off waivers from Atlanta and assigned him to Double-A Midland. Assistant general manager David Forst said the team saw a lot of the 23-year-old from Danville in its "own backyard" and believes he can become a big-leaguer.

Drumbeat: Braden won't start, Mortensen will; Barton now in the lineup

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Cleveland 7/2/2010 3:20PM

The A's have decided on the most sensible course of action and scratched Dallas Braden from tomorrow's start; he'll now get more than two weeks and potentially nearly three to rest his left elbow. Nicely done, no need to risk further issues for Braden for just one start.

Clayton Mortensen, having a very nice (10-2) season at Triple-A Sacramento will come up to start tomorrow. The A's have not made the move yet, but there's no reason not to put Braden on the DL since he won't be needed until after the break.

They could push him back all the way to July 20 if need be, and as I said the other day, if he's still not ready then, there's a far bigger problem, anyway.

Conor Jackson is a potential DL possibility, too. Manager Bob Geren said that Jackson will be out a few more days with his right hamstring tightness; I asked if the team might take advantage of the looming All-Star break to also shut Jackson down a little early and Geren said that they'll wait and see how this goes the next couple of days. Considering Jackson was already on Arizona's DL in April with a right hamstring strain, this is also one that would make sense, too, although Jackson would be looking at missing more like six games if he went on the DL than the one start Braden would miss. I think we've all seen enough of lingering elbow tendinitis and hamstring strains, though, given Brett Anderson and Mark Ellis' DL trips.

UPDATE: Barton is in the lineup; he's batting second and Ellis shuffles down to 7th in the order below.

Daric Barton currently is not in the lineup, but he'll be a gametime decision after batting practice (which just ended). His legs got banged up trying to break up a double play last night, but he said he felt much better today.

Here's lineup No. 1, write it in pencil because Rosales might come out and Barton might go in, and he'd obviously also be higher up in the order:

Crisp cf, Ellis 2b, Kouzmanoff 3b, Suzuki c, Sweeney rf, Cust dh, Rosales 1b, Gross lf, Pennington ss

The A's signed three Venezuelan players today, including highly regarded third baseman Renato Nunez, 16, who reportedly is getting a \$2.2 million signing bonus; also lefties Anderson Mata, 17, and Jose Torres, 16. It's anticipated there will be more international signings in the coming months.

Oakland also claimed minor-league right-hander Jeff Lyman, who is from Danville, from the Braves, and the A's signed onetime Giants pitcher Boof Bonser to a minor-league deal.

Gonzalez gets by with some help to beat Tribe

Sweeney's heads-up play prevents potential damage in sixth

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

CLEVELAND -- Gio Gonzalez didn't give up a hit in the first three innings on Friday.

In the sixth, he gave up three -- all in a row. Three then became four. Well, three *should've* become four.

Instead, what looked like a run-scoring single off the bat of Mike Redmond turned into the third out, when right fielder Ryan Sweeney collected the liner on one hop and threw to Daric Barton at first ahead of Redmond.

Inning over. Trouble averted.

As a result, the A's secured a 3-0 victory over the Indians at Progressive Field in the first of a three-game set, marking their sixth win in their last seven games.

And Gonzalez, despite the sixth-inning scare and four walks, exited with 6 2/3 shutout innings under his belt en route to picking up his seventh season victory and first since June 6. He's not so positive that would have been the case, though, had Sweeney and Barton not teamed up for their sixth-inning show.

"That's a great play, a heads-up play," Gonzalez said. "I was going behind home to back up the plate, and then you see the play at first is an out, I got pretty excited behind the dish. That's a credit to Sweeney. Hats off to him."

Sweeney was the first to admit, though, that it wasn't his idea. Rather, first-base coach Todd Steverson displayed a throwing motion from the end of the visitors' dugout toward Sweeney, who relayed the plan to Barton.

"That was a crazy play," the A's right fielder said. "It's something you do in Little League. We knew [Redmond] hits opposite field a lot, and sure enough he hits it right in front of me. I don't think anyone really saw it because everyone was looking at home."

"I hit it right to him," Redmond said. "What bothers me is that people will say, 'He didn't hustle.' I was running out of the box. I just hit it right to the guy. I knew I was in trouble. I knew something like that could happen. Unfortunately, it happened tonight, and it cost us a run."

One run, at least, said A's manager Bob Geren, who recognized the rarity of such an out.

"That was an excellent play," he said. "That's a product, really, of the preparation we do, as coaches and staff. It's a heads-up play. Steverson posted himself at the end of the dugout and predicted it. Where it was positioned, where it falls, that's really the only way it's possible. But it also takes a real good catch and release time. That's a huge play."

It's one that recharged Gonzalez, who came out for the seventh and got two quick outs before offering up a double to end his night, bringing on the seemingly untouchable Craig Breslow, whose opponents are now 3-for-44 over his last 15 games.

"He's so good," Geren said of the reliever, "so that was an easy decision right there."

Breslow recorded four outs, three of them strikeouts, before handing the ball to closer Andrew Bailey, who in turn pitched a perfect ninth inning for his 16th save of the season in his 100th career game.

The Tribe was 1-for-6 with runners in scoring position, while the A's went 1-for-9 but also took advantage of a wild Mitch Talbot in a pair of frames. The Indians starter loaded the bases in the first and proceeded to walk in a run. Then, in the sixth, the A's crowded the bases again and Mark Ellis brought in two with a double.

"I really didn't feel good tonight except for that at-bat," Ellis said. "I got ahead of the count, and it was a good feeling to get that hit for us and give Gio some extra support since he was pitching so well."

Gonzalez acknowledged his second baseman's offensive efforts, but by night's end, the lone effort that truly mattered was the one that will forever be recorded as an unusual 9-3 play.

"I've never seen that before," Ellis said. "We had a good scouting report on Redmond, and the pitch before it, I saw Trick [Steverson] signaling to Sweeney and Barton. And he hit it exactly to him. I didn't even really see it because I was looking at home plate.

"They had a lot of momentum right there. That definitely made a difference in the game. ... Any play like that is going to help a pitcher out."

Hafner leads improved Indians against A's

By Didier Morais / MLB.com

As uncertainty surrounds Athletics emergency starter Clayton Mortensen on Saturday, the only constant for the club is to carefully pitch against Travis Hafner.

Since returning to American League competition, the Indians designated hitter has been in the zone, batting .367 (11-for-30) with three doubles, three homers and seven RBIs in his last nine games to regain his power stroke.

"I'm trying to be shorter to the ball," he said. "That lets you see the ball longer and get the barrel of the bat on the ball more consistently."

As a result of Hafner's hot hitting and solid contributions from other players, the Indians had won five straight before Friday's 3-0 loss to the A's in the series opener. But Cleveland manager Manny Acta has downplayed the magnitude of the team's improvement.

"I don't think the guys are thinking about it," Acta said. "It's a long season. Things change so quickly in baseball. You can enjoy it, but it's not like we're breaking a record."

In order to keep Hafner and Cleveland's offense at bay, Mortensen will need to showcase flashes of Dallas Braden in his first start of the season.

Braden was originally scheduled to take the mound for the A's, but the perfect game pitcher is battling stiffness in his pitching elbow. Oakland manager Bob Geren scratched his southpaw from a start on Tuesday, hoping to give him time to heal from the injury.

After a few bullpen sessions and days of evaluating, the skipper ultimately decided to take the cautious approach with his blossoming pitcher and will likely place him on the disabled list.

In 98 innings for Triple-A Sacramento this year, though, Mortensen compiled 77 strikeouts and walked 31 batters. The 25-year-old boasts a 10-2 record and a 3.58 ERA this season and Geren is looking for Mortensen to continue that success in the Majors.

"We'd like to see a performance similar to what he's been doing," the skipper said. "He's been throwing strikes and throwing his sinker for strikes. That's his key pitch, so that's what you want to see."

Jake Westbrook gets the start for Cleveland. Westbrook allowed four runs on eight hits against Oakland in a loss on April 23.

Indians: Nix impresses Acta

Cleveland acquired Jayson Nix a few weeks ago and Acta has been impressed with the infielder's mental approach at the plate.

"He always gives you a good at-bat," the skipper said. "We've always liked him. We monitored him in Spring Training. He's fundamentally sound and taking advantage of his opportunity."

Athletics: Lyman claimed from Atlanta

Oakland snatched Jeff Lyman off waivers from the Braves on Friday. The 23-year-old pitcher, who was originally drafted by Atlanta in the second round of the 2005 First-Year Player Draft, started off the year at Triple-A Gwinnett, making 21 relief appearances while owning a 0-0 record and a 4.72 ERA.

The A's optioned Lyman to Double-A Midland.

The club also made some moves in the Minors, locking up three Venezuelan free agents -- Renato Nuñez, Anderson Mata and Jose Torres -- to contracts. All three players will report to the A's complex in the Dominican Republic after their contracts are approved by Major League Baseball and they pass physicals.

Worth noting

Cleveland has homered in 19 of its last 24 games. ... The club has turned 98 double plays, which is the most in the Majors. ... Oakland left-hander Gio Gonzalez blanked the Indians for 6 2/3 innings in Friday's 3-0 win. It was an AL-leading ninth shutout for Oakland this season.

Braden scratched, likely headed to DL

Mortensen will be promoted from Triple-A to deal vs. Indians

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

CLEVELAND -- Left-hander Dallas Braden will have to wait until after the All-Star break to notch the win he's been looking for since tossing a perfect game on May 9.

A's manager Bob Geren said on Friday that Braden will miss his scheduled start on Saturday, due to elbow tightness that kept him from taking the mound in Baltimore on Tuesday.

In his stead, right-hander Clayton Mortensen will be promoted from Triple-A Sacramento to start against the host Indians.

Braden, battling a dose of elbow tendinitis, came out of a 25-plus pitch bullpen session on Thursday feeling well, but Geren said the club wants to give him "as much time as he needs to get himself feeling better." Thus, to make room for Mortensen on the roster, Braden is likely to be placed on the disabled list on Saturday.

Oakland can afford to skip Braden's next turn in the rotation on July 8, when the club has a scheduled off-day. Then, with the All-Star break awaiting just four days later, the southpaw can potentially rest until July 20 and jump into the back end of the rotation.

"We'll look at the rotation," Geren said. "We'll consider who needs the most time out."

Mortensen was one of two Sacramento players -- the other Josh Donaldson -- recently named to the Pacific Coast League All-Star team. The 25-year-old righty, owner of a 10-2 record and 3.58 ERA this season, was held out of his scheduled start for the River Cats on Thursday in the event Braden was unable to go.

In 98 innings pitched for Sacramento this year, Mortensen has compiled 77 strikeouts, good for third in the PCL. Meanwhile, he's walked just 31. He made seven appearances -- six of them starts -- for the A's last year, struggling with a 2-4 record and 7.63 ERA.

However, the improvements he's made since then, as noted by Geren, show in more than just his current numbers.

"We'd like to see a performance similar to what he's been doing," the skipper said. "He's been throwing strikes and throwing his sinker for strikes. That's his key pitch, so that's what you want to see."

A's bring Bonser, Lyman on board

CLEVELAND -- The A's on Friday signed free agent right-hander Boof Bonser to a Minor League deal and also claimed right-hander Jeff Lyman off waivers from Atlanta.

Bonser, just days removed from his release by the Red Sox, will immediately report to Triple-A Sacramento, where Oakland assistant general manager David Forst said the club hopes to stretch him into a starter.

The 28-year-old has spent the majority of the season on the disabled list. He allowed four runs in just two appearances with Boston this year.

Lyman, meanwhile, was optioned to Double-A Midland and will shed his reliever role and transform into a starter, which is how the A's envisioned him upon first seeing him in 2005, when he was drafted by the Braves in the second round out of Monte Vista High School in Danville, Calif. -- located less than 30 minutes from Oakland.

"He's a guy we liked a lot out of the Draft," Forst said on Friday. "We saw him in our backyard when he was in high school. He has a good arm and is still really young, despite how much time he's spent in the Minors."

The 23-year-old Lyman began the season at Triple-A Gwinnett and was 0-0 with a 4.72 ERA in 21 relief appearances before being transferred to Double-A Mississippi on June 30. He made just one appearance there, allowing one run on two hits in one inning on Thursday.

"We'd like to develop him as a starter," said Forst, who noted that starting pitching is an area which the entire organization would like to improve as a whole. "We think he can be stretched out as a starter and help us out that way."

Oakland signs three Venezuelans

CLEVELAND -- A trio of Venezuelan players were officially welcomed into the A's fold on Friday, as Oakland agreed to terms with three international free agents.

Renato Nuñez, a 16-year-old right-handed hitting third baseman, along with 17-year-old lefty Anderson Mata and 16-year-old southpaw Jose Torres, will report to Oakland's complex in the Dominican Republic following physicals and approval of their contracts.

According to A's coordinator of international operations Dan Kantrovitz, Nuñez not only represents a player the club has eyed for a couple of years but also one of the "top bats" in all of Latin America.

"As we got to know him on and off the field," Kantrovitz said, "we realized what a good head he has on his shoulders. He's smart. And we think very highly of his bat profile. He was No. 1 on a few of our scouts' prep list."

Torres and Mata, meanwhile, are pitchers the A's are attracted to for different reasons. Torres, said Kantrovitz, owns a curveball "you don't see from many kids his age." Then there's Mata, who he sees as something of a "sleeper."

"He has three pitches he can throw for strikes. His current arsenal -- fastball, curveball, changeup -- is already very developed. He's someone we've been very impressed with because of his pitchability, as opposed to just his arm strength projection, which is already pretty good."

Worth noting

Daric Barton, who left Thursday's game with injuries to both legs, was inserted into Friday's starting lineup, where Adam Rosales was initially penciled in at first base, at the last minute. ... Conor Jackson was held out of the lineup for the second straight day due to right hamstring soreness. Manager Bob Geren said the outfielder is still day-to-day, but "it's going to be a few days." Jackson spent some time on the disabled list in April with Arizona as a result of a right hamstring strain. ... The A's on Friday agreed to terms with their 39th-round Draft selection, Clemson catcher John Nester.

A's sign three Venezuelan free agents

Club also inks 2010 39th-round pick catcher Nestor

By Tom Singer / MLB.com

On the first day of the international signing period, the A's on Friday came to terms with a trio of teenage Venezuelan prospects.

Oakland announced agreements with left-handed pitchers Anderson Mata and Jose Torres, as well as with third baseman Renato Nunez. After physicals and approval of their contracts by Major League Baseball, the three will report to the A's Dominican Republic complex.

Nuñez, 6-foot-1 and 185 pounds at 16, hails from Valencia. His signing bonus was reported as \$2.2 million by Baseball America.

Mata, 5-foot-11 and 165 pounds, is a 17-year-old from Margarita. Torres, 16 and from Caracas, is a lean 6-foot-2 and 155 pounds.

In addition, Oakland announced an agreement with catcher John Nester, its 39th-round pick in the 2010 First-Year Player Draft, out of Clemson University.

Sweeney's sweet play preserves lead

Gonzalez pitches 5-hit ball to help push Oakland past Cleveland

ASSOCIATED PRESS

CLEVELAND — Ryan Sweeney thwarted the Cleveland Indians' best chance to score — by throwing out Mike Redmond at first base after he hit what appeared to be a single to right field.

The rare play helped preserve the Oakland Athletics' 3-0 victory over Cleveland on Friday night.

"That was a crazy play," Sweeney said. "That is something you do in Little League. That is the first time I have done it (in the majors). We know Redmond hits to the opposite field a lot."

With two outs and the bases loaded in the sixth inning, Redmond hit a line drive to right field that dropped in. Sweeney, the right fielder, was playing shallow. He charged the ball and quickly made the throw to first baseman Daric Barton, wiping out the run and ending the inning. The play was scored a groundout to the right fielder.

Sweeney and A's manager Bob Geren credited Oakland first-base coach Todd Steverson for positioning Sweeney in shallow right field.

"Where he was positioned and that type of line drive is really the only way that play can happen in this level of play," Geren said.

The 38-year-old Redmond said opposing teams have been playing him that way most of his career and he was almost thrown out at first while playing for Minnesota in a game at Oakland a few years ago.

"I hit it right to him," Redmond said. "I knew I was in trouble. The only thing that bothers me is the fact there are probably people out there who think I didn't hustle," Redmond said. "I was running hard out of the box. I'm slow."

Indians manager Manny Acta said: "You don't see that very often in the game, but unfortunately you saw it today. There's nothing he can do."

Sweeney's play and the strong pitching by Gio Gonzalez helped Oakland win for the sixth time in seven games. Gonzalez (7-5) pitched five-hit ball for 6½ innings and Mark Ellis drove in two runs with a bases-loaded double in the sixth.

Gonzalez won for the first time since June 6. He walked four and struck out five. The left-hander has beaten Cleveland twice this season, holding the Indians scoreless for 13½ innings. He's 3-0 in four starts against Cleveland since 2009.

"I was just trying to keep my team in the game," Gonzalez said. "They had won, what five or six games in a row. You have to give respect to a team like that. They have a good hitting team and it is just one of those breaks."

"Gonzalez was the story," Acta said. "He was very tough on us."

Andrew Bailey pitched the ninth for his 16th save in 19 opportunities. Mitch Talbot (8-7) allowed three runs — two earned — and five hits in 5½ innings.

The A's scored in the first when Cust walked with the bases loaded and took a 1-0 lead into the sixth before Ellis delivered.

LHP Dallas Braden was scratched from tonight's start because of a sore elbow. RHP Clayton Mortensen will be called up from Triple-A Sacramento to make the start.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Sacramento wins in 11th, moves 5.0 back

By Robbie Enos / Sacramento River Cats

Game by game, play by play, pitch by pitch, the River Cats are slowly chipping away at the lead of the rival Fresno Grizzlies. With a 4-3 win in the 11th inning Friday night, Sacramento now trails first-place Fresno by 5.0 games in the Pacific Coast League South Division after being 12.5 games back on June 15.

The game was settled when Josh Donaldson hit a dribbler up the middle with runners on first and third. Dallas McPherson came home as Fresno attempted the inning-ending double play. Shortstop Ryan Rholinger picked up the ball, forced Matt Carson out at second and fired to first. First baseman Brett Pill tried to pick it, but could not handle the low throw. Donaldson was safe at first and McPherson had the winning run before a sellout crowd of 14,014 at Raley Field.

"It was by far the worst walk off I have ever had," Donaldson said. "I was still trying to get a ball to the outfield, but I rolled one over to the shortstop. It was relieving because we didn't have to keep playing and we got the win. Any time you get a win it's good."

The inning started with a Chris Carter walk off of reliever Osiris Matos. McPherson hit a ground ball to second baseman Emmanuel Burris, who flipped to Rholinger. Rholinger was taken out by Carter, and McPherson beat out the throw to keep the out at one.

"That was all Carter," McPherson said. "He took the guy out at second. He didn't hesitate."

Carson singled to right-center, putting runners on first and third before Donaldson's big RBI.

In the eighth inning, reliever Brad Kilby brought out the Rally Pants with Sacramento trailing 3-2. Kilby's good luck charm sparked another River Cats rally, starting with a Steve Tolleson lead-off triple off reliever Tony Pena.

The hit was attributed to a Grizzly defensive mishap, where Tolleson's drive into left-center caused center fielder Eugenio Velez and left fielder John Bowker to collide. The ball bounced off both players' gloves, falling on the ground and bouncing off the wall. Matt Watson poked a clutch hit through the left side off new pitcher Gino Espinelli to score Tolleson from third.

Reliever Ross Wolf came in for the River Cats in what turned out to be a wild ninth inning. Matt Downs led off the inning by getting aboard on a McPherson error at third. Jesus Guzman singled to right field, and Michael Taylor's throw to third allowed him to advance to second. Downs was safe at third.

What happened next was an incredible defensive stand by the Cats, with runners on second and third and no out. Tolleson made the play of the night at shortstop, snagging a Tyler Graham ground ball and firing home to nail Downs, who represented the go-ahead run.

Jackson Williams then hit a squibbler to first baseman Carter, advancing the runners but giving Fresno their second out. Wolf got out of the jam by striking out Emmanuel Burris, leaving Fresno empty handed.

Relievers dominated the 10th, with Espinelli and Edwar Ramirez of Sacramento retiring the side. River Cats manager Tony DeFrancesco argued balls and strikes during a Watson at-bat, getting him ejected from the game. DeFrancesco was tossed by home plate umpire Darren Budahn, and let third base umpire Jeff Latter have it on his way back to the clubhouse.

Play didn't get any less intense.

With Ramirez still in, Downs doubled down the left-field line with one out. After Guzman struck out, Donaldson attempted to throw out Downs at second. His throw went into center field, and Downs advanced to third. Graham hit a sharp ground ball down the third-base line, but McPherson, unaffected by his earlier error, made a slick stop and threw Graham out to end the threat.

"I just reacted," McPherson said. "I'm pretty confident in my defense. I'll make errors, but I won't let one get to me."

Oakland A's roving instructor and Hall of Famer Rickey Henderson gave his thoughts after the game.

"It's just good to be out here with the kids," said Henderson, who also coached first base. "I just want to give them the knowledge that I know after playing the game. Just trying to give them lessons and make them become what they want to be as a baseball player."

Starting on the bump for Fresno was right-hander Joe Martinez, who entered with a 5-2 record and a 3.38 ERA.

"He's got tough sinkers and cutters," first baseman Chris Carter said before the game. "If we can stretch him up in the zone, I think we'll be fine." Corey Wimberly jumped on Martinez to lead off the game with a walk. Wimberly then stole second, his 30th steal of the season. Matt Watson won a 3-2 battle with Martinez and blasted a home run over the right-field fence to give Sacramento the early lead.

The Grizzlies answered in the second against River Cats starter John Halama with a Matt Downs home run. Downs' jack was a low line drive that flew like a laser beam through the air and landed in the Jackson Rancheria Home Run Terrace in left field.

Sacramento's defense tightened in the third, making two great defensive plays. McPherson made a leaping catch on a Burris line drive over his head. After Eugenio Velez reached base on a single, catcher Donaldson nailed him at second on an attempted steal.

The web gems kept coming in the fourth, when a great double play turned by Carter ended the inning. He snagged a John Bowker line drive on a dive, and then doubled off Rohlinger at first for the force out.

"I just take every game the same way," Carter said. "I believe if I just stay focused I can have a good game."

Fresno tied the game in the fifth with the eight and nine spot hitters Graham and Williams. Graham hit a two-out blooper into the right-field corner for a double. He then got an excellent jump on Halama and swiped third. A clutch, seven-pitch at-bat by Williams ended in a single, bringing Graham in for the run.

The Grizzlies almost broke the tie in the sixth, when Rohlinger and Brett Pill hit back-to-back singles. Bowker beat out a double-play ball to put runners on first and third. DeFrancesco decided to remove pitcher Halama and bring in reliever Jon Hunton. Hunton forced a line-out from Downs to end the inning.

Halama finished the night with 5.2 innings pitched, eight hits, two earned runs, two walks and two strikeouts. Alex Hinshaw relieved Martinez in the sixth, ending a solid pitching battle in the middle of a tied game. Martinez finished with three hits, two earned runs, and seven strikeouts.

The game continued to be dictated by the long ball. In the seventh, Jesus Guzman of Fresno took Hunton deep, sending a big fly to deep center field. The homer was Guzman's 10th of the season.

The River Cats play Fresno again Saturday at 6:35 p.m. Another win will put the River Cats within 4.0 games of Fresno with eight games left before the All-Star game.

"Right now they (The River Cats) seem like they are playing a lot better," said Henderson, who also visited Sacramento in April. "They've built up their confidence a lot since the first time I was here. They're taking a better approach in what they want to do out there now."

Cardenas' HR sends 'Hounds over Travs

Shawn Shroyer, Midland Reporter-Telegram

Friday's hourly forecast gave every indication the Midland RockHounds and Arkansas Travelers had a long night ahead of them if they intended to play their game as scheduled.

Instead, through six innings, rather than rain the only threat to the two teams spending the night at Citibank Ballpark was extra innings. But RockHounds second baseman Adrian Cardenas quelled that possibility with a leadoff home run in the seventh to put his club on top for good.

His teammates tacked on an insurance run in a 6-4 victory to ensure the teams didn't spend any more time at the ballpark than necessary with a doubleheader scheduled today.

"Like I said before the All-Star break, we can hit," Cardenas said. "So, even though they tied it up, at no point did we think we weren't going to score another run."

The Travelers, though, made it interesting after falling in a three-run hole.

Their comeback attempt began innocent enough with a single run in the fourth thanks to a leadoff Roberto Lopez double and an RBI ground out off RockHounds starter Ryan Edell, who faced just four batters in the inning. The next inning, Edell retired two of the first three batters he faced. However, the Travelers then strung together four straight singles on their way to taking a 4-3 lead.

The Travelers (3-4) threatened to extend their lead in the sixth, but they were denied thanks to a heads-up play by Cardenas.

With runners on first and second and two outs, both runners were moving when Jeremy Moore singled up the middle. Cardenas stopped the ball deep in the hole, though, and threw home as Anel De Los Santos rounded third for home. Cardenas' throw beat De Los Santos easily and it ended the threat.

"They were running with two outs and (Cardenas) showed good instincts to know to throw home and get the out there," RockHounds manager Darren Bush said.

The RockHounds (3-4) then slowly took control of the game with single runs in the sixth, seventh and eighth.

Shane Peterson singled in the sixth to drive in Matt Sulentic, who was 3 for 4 in the game. Cardenas' home run to right led off the seventh. And Jeff Baisley, who was 3 for 5, drove in Peterson in the eighth for good measure.

"(Cardenas) swung the bat well and he drove that ball tonight," Bush said. "We had 16 hits, so we were all swinging the bat well. We hit the ball hard and took advantage of their mistakes and those were good pitchers on the other side."

The home run was Cardenas' only home run of the game, but it came at a crucial time as the Travelers brought in Robert Fish (2-4) to replace starter Will Smith. The second pitch Fish threw, a fastball, wound up on top of the hill in right field.

"I was coming off a horrible at bat my last at bat where I just gave it away, swinging at bad pitches," Cardenas said. "So, I knew I was taking the first pitch. I wanted to take my time, make sure I was calm and felt good. I was sitting on a pitch and made good contact."

Jeremy Haynes entered in relief in the eighth for the Travelers, but couldn't keep the RockHounds off the board.

"We just hit good pitches," said Baisley of his club's success against Arkansas' bullpen. "We didn't swing at bad pitches, so they were getting behind in counts and that allowed us to wait for good pitches."

Having played Friday's game without delays, forcing unexpected pitching changes, both teams enter today's doubleheader, which begins at 5 p.m. at Citibank Ballpark, in good shape. Matt Wright will start the first of two seven-inning games today for the RockHounds and Derrick Gordon will start the second.

Bush can only hope he gets a similar effort from his bullpen after Mickey Storey (2-2) and Justin James combined to throw 3 2/3 innings of one-hit ball.

"They did a good job. They threw the ball well and shut them down," Bush said. "Mickey coming in and getting that big out (to end the sixth inning) and being clean the rest of the way was big."

NOTEBOOK

ROCKHOUNDS BITES: Believe it or not, Friday's game started virtually on time, just two minutes behind schedule and was played to completion without delay. While scattered showers popped up during the first three innings, the threatening weather held off the rest of the night and a decent crowd of 2,960 fans took it in. ... In their first game back from the All-Star Game, RockHounds All-Star representatives Archie Gilbert, Jeff Baisley, Corey Brown and Josh Horton had an overall successful Friday night. Gilbert had the night off while Baisley, Brown and Horton were all in the starting lineup. Baisley went 3 for 5, Brown was 2 for 4 and Horton was 1 for 3 and all three drove in a run.

Brewer Buries Ports In 5-2 Loss

VISALIA, Calif. - After posting a sub-two ERA in the Midwest League, Visalia Rawhide right-hander Charles Brewer (1-1) official arrived in the Cal-League on Friday night. After a sub-par Visalia debut on Sunday, Brewer showed why he earned a mid-season promotion. Brewer had stretches of 13-in-a-row and eight-in-a-row retired and allowed just two hits over his first eight innings before leaving the game in the ninth as he helped his team to a 5-2 win over the Stockton Ports.

For the second straight night, the Rawhide got the scoring started in the last of the first. Dan Kaczrowski started the inning with a single to left, and then scored two batters later on a single to right from Ryan Wheeler to put Visalia up 1-0.

Stockton, after hitting into an inning-ending double-play in the first, tied the score in the second on a leadoff solo home run from Mike Spina, his 14th of the season. After Spina's home run, Brewer retired the next 13 batters he faced to take him into the sixth inning.

Ports starter Shawn Haviland (6-5) would fall victim to his own error in the bottom of the third. After getting two quick outs to start the inning, Wheeler came up and hit a bouncing ball down the first base line that was gloved nicely by Spina. Haviland ran over to cover the bag but dropped the throw from Spina. Originally ruled a hit, it would be changed to an error on Haviland and it would prove costly. Haviland would walk Paul Goldschmidt, then give up a three-run homer to Marc Krauss-his second in as many nights-to put the Rawhide up for good at 4-1.

Visalia added another run in the fifth. With two on and one out, Haviland struck out Goldschmidt and was then lifted in favor of Lance Sewell. Sewell would be greeted by a Krauss single to right-center, scoring Kaczrowski to make it 5-1.

Haviland would take the loss, going 4.2 innings and allowing five runs (two earned) on five hits while walking three and striking out four.

Sewell and Brett Hunter would combine for 3.1 scoreless innings in relief to finish the ballgame.

Brewer, meanwhile, had his 13-in-a-row broken up when he hit Ramon Soto with one out in the sixth. He then walked Jermaine Mitchell to put two aboard for the first time. Grant Green came up and lined a ball toward right field, but it was snared on a leaping grab by the first baseman Goldschmidt, who threw to second to double off Soto and end the inning. That double-play started a stretch of eight in a row retired, taking Brewer into the ninth.

Brewer recorded the first out in the ninth, then yielded a ground-rule double to Mitchell-Stockton's first hit since Spina's second-inning home run. Green followed with an opposite-field double to right to score Mitchell and knock Brewer from the game.

Bryan Woodall (SV, 8), who'd allowed only one earned run in 25 appearances on the season, came on for the save. Woodall allowed a single to Stephen Parker to start his outing, putting runners at the corners and bringing Spina to the plate as the possible tying run. Spina, however, would hit into a game-ending 6-4-3 double-play.

Brewer would earn the win in his longest outing of the season, going 8.1 innings and allowing two runs on three hits while striking out eight (Brewer struck out the side in the third and the eighth). Woodall earned his eighth save of the season.

The Ports and Rawhide will play the rubber match of their series on Saturday night at Recreation Park, where the Ports will try and win their first series of the year against the Rawhide. Mike Madsen (1-3, 3.44 ERA) will head to the hill for Stockton, opposed by Rawhide right-hander Billy Spottiswood (4-2, 2.72 ERA). First pitch is set for 7 p.m. PDT.

Krol, Cougars Even Set with Peoria

Lefty's 6th win and quality start get Kane County on track

GENEVA, III. – Naperville native Ian Krol pitched six excellent innings Friday night to lead the Kane County Cougars to a 3-1 victory over the Peoria Chiefs at Elfstrom Stadium. Anthony Aliotti went 3-for-4 with an RBI, and Mike Gilmartin drilled a solo homer to lead the offense, and the Cougars evened the three-game series against their intrastate rivals. The two teams play Saturday at Elfstrom Stadium and then meet again next Wednesday night at Wrigley Field in Chicago.

Krol (6-2) gave up one unearned run in the outing, and it came in the first inning after an errant pickoff throw and an RBI single by Greg Rohan. The southpaw then settled in to retire nine straight at one point and post his sixth quality start. He fanned five batters, four of which went down looking, and also walked none. He has walked just two batters in his last 41 2/3 innings.

The Cougars took a permanent lead with a two-run rally in the third against Rob Whitenack (6-6). Conner Crumbliss scored Tyreace House with an RBI fielder's choice, and Aliotti roped a double to make it 2-1. Then Gilmartin belted a two-out solo shot in the seventh off Manolin DeLeon to complete the scoring. Jose Guzman worked two scoreless innings out of the bullpen, and Jose Pina handled the ninth for his first save of the season.

The Cougars (3-5, 35-42) and Chiefs (3-5, 41-36) conclude the three-game series Saturday night at 6 CT. Murphy Smith (3-0, 5.20) is scheduled to face Jeff Antigua (3-5, 4.65). The game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and online at www.kccougars.com with pre-game coverage starting at 5:45 p.m.

Oakland A's Prospect Q&A: Tyreace House, OF

David Malamut, OaklandClubhouse.com

Jul 2, 2010

Throughout the 2010 season, Tyreace House has been one of the most consistent threats to get on-base in the Kane County Cougars' line-up. The outfielder's on-base percentage is nearly .400 and he leads the team with 19 stolen bases. David Malamut spoke with the speedy outfielder.

David Malamut: How has the season gone so far?

Tyreace House: Gone pretty good. I've seen the ball really good so far. The team is doing good.

DM: What's your mentality at the plate?

TH: See the ball, hit the ball. I like to work to right field.

DM: What are you working on defensively?

TH: Trying to field the ball better, catch the ball better.

DM: Offensively?

TH: We changed my stance. I was open. Now I'm closed. That's really working real good right now.

DM: Are you a natural centerfielder?

TH: I could say that, but I really like left and right as well.

DM: You played a game at second base as a pro.

TH: I played infield when I was in high school and a little outfield, and when I was in junior college I played the outfield. A man went down so they asked me to play second base. I played short in high school.

DM: What did you learn from playing ball in high school?

TH: Really nothing, because baseball was my second sport. It was the little thing to just go out there and play and just try it out. Football, I love football. Football was my first sport. I thought I was going to go to college and play football. It didn't work out.

DM: What did you learn at College of the Canyons?

TH: Baseball-wise I learned a lot. Coach Carter was a good coach, by far the best coach. He really just taught me how to play baseball. He has taught me about pitchers and just everything.

DM: You were drafted three times.

TH: That was kind of weird how I was drafted three times. I was drafted twice by the Atlanta Braves out of high school. Since I got drafted twice I figured I should go my second year in junior college and try it again, so I did and got drafted by Oakland in the 6th round.

DM: How bout being drafted by Oakland?

TH: I like it. It was really good. It is close to home. I think it is like three-and-a-half hours away.

DM: How was playing in Arizona?

TH: Hot. You lose a lot of weight. Arizona is good.

DM: How was Vancouver?

TH: It was fun. The fans were great.

DM: Travel?

TH: It was alright. It was kind of long. We had one to Boise. I think it was 13 hours.

DM: Midwest League?

TH: It is different for me. The rain, the weather. I'm trying to get used to rain now. April is kind of brutal.

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

TH: Going to school. My major would be business.

DM: Besides baseball what do you like to do?

TH: I like to fish. I love fishing, anywhere I go I just want to fish.

DM: Your biggest influence growing up?

TH: My dad. He did track, he did football. He gave up most of that because of us.

DM: Your baseball hero growing up?

TH: Ken Griffey Jr.

DM: Top 5 artists in your iPod.

TH: Little Wayne, Drake, Gucci, Bousie.