

A's News Clips, Saturday, July 17, 2010

Coo-Coo call lifts Coco Crisp and A's to 5-1 win over Royals

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The strangest play in the A's 5-1 win over the Kansas City Royals on Friday night at Kauffman Stadium happened on the first at-bat.

If it was an omen of things to come for the A's in the second half, they'll gladly take it.

Leadoff man Coco Crisp yanked a ball down the right-field line that originally was ruled foul, then was switched to a double after an umpires' conference.

That got Oakland's offense rolling early against Royals ace Zack Greinke, paving the way for a victory that was void of any drama after the A's took control early.

"I don't know what was supposed to happen, no one did," Crisp said of his foul-turned-extra base hit. "I don't know if it's ever happened in the history of baseball."

Regardless — and chances are that such a reversal has happened on occasion — the win was an ideal way for the A's to resume play coming out of the All-Star break. They made the most of their seven hits, coming up clutch with men on base and making the Royals pay for two errors that led to three unearned runs off Greinke (5-9), the defending American League Cy Young Award winner.

A's starter Gio Gonzalez (8-6) allowed one run over seven innings. His best work came in the fourth, when he kept Kansas City off the board after loading the bases with no outs to preserve a four-run lead.

The Royals, playing in front of a sellout crowd of 37,312 on fireworks night, never mounted a serious threat after that.

Crisp's sharply hit ball down the right-field line in the opening inning was the key, however. First-base umpire Larry Vanover signaled foul, which prompted A's first-base coach Todd Steverson to argue right away.

A's manager Bob Geren then went out to plead his case, after which all four umpires convened.

The foul call was overturned to fair, and it was the umpires' judgment that Crisp would have gotten a double had the ball been ruled in play, so he was awarded second base.

"I could tell by the reaction of the first-base coach that it was fair," Geren said. "I ran out to see what happened. You could kind of see the ball mark on a piece of the line. They got together and did the right thing and changed it."

The call didn't sit well with the home crowd. Crisp, who played an injury-marred season with the Royals in 2009, eventually scored on Jack Cust's sacrifice fly, and the crowd erupted in boos as he crossed the plate.

"It's not my fault," Crisp said. "I didn't hit myself in."

The Royals scored their only run off Gonzalez to tie the game in the bottom of the first. The A's then went ahead for good in the second, when Kevin Kouzmanoff doubled and came around to score when Greinke threw wildly to first on Mark Ellis' tapper.

Kouzmanoff, who hit just .120 (6-for-50) over his final 13 games leading into the All-Star break, came through with a two-out, bases-loaded single up the middle in the third.

Ellis followed with another run-scoring single to make it 5-1.

That rally also was aided by an error, when Royals shortstop Yuniesky Betancourt had a catchable throw from Greinke bounce off his glove on a potential force-play at second.

Gonzalez, who walked five in a July 7 loss to the Yankees to finish his first half, scattered seven hits Friday and walked just one.

TODAY'S GAME

A's (Trevor Cahill 9-3) at Royals (Bruce Chen 5-3), 4:10 p.m., CSNCA

A's update: Dallas Braden may start Tuesday in Boston

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Braden OK after start, but key is how he feels today

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Write it in pencil, but left-hander Dallas Braden appears on target to come off the disabled list and start Tuesday against the Boston Red Sox.

Braden popped into the A's clubhouse shortly before Friday's 5-1 win over the Kansas City Royals, fresh off a flight from the Bay Area. He threw four-plus innings in a rehab start for Single-A Stockton on Thursday, his first game since joining the DL on July 3 with left elbow stiffness.

A's manager Bob Geren said Braden came out of that outing well, but Geren wanted to wait until Braden throws a side session today to declare him ready.

"After his side we'll know," Geren said.

Braden wasn't available for comment during the pregame media availability period.

The A's hope to have both Braden and fellow lefty Brett Anderson back in the rotation by the end of the month. Anderson, recovering from elbow inflammation, made his second rehab start Thursday with four innings in an Arizona Rookie League game.

He reported in a text message Friday that his elbow came out of it well. He'll make his next rehab start Tuesday, though Geren didn't know with which affiliate that will be.

Right-hander Trevor Cahill said he enjoyed his first All-Star game. He took home a bat and jersey signed by many of his American League teammates but said he wasn't awestruck.

He was ineligible to pitch in the game because he started Sunday for the A's.

Geren served on the AL coaching staff and said he enjoyed the family-oriented vibe surrounding the game. His son Brett, 18, got to rub elbows with big names in the clubhouse.

"I walked in, and he was eating with (Minnesota catcher) Joe Mauer and (Texas starter) Cliff Lee," Geren said. "It was pretty cool."

Right fielder Ryan Sweeney was held out after getting plasma and cortisone injections in his knees over the All-Star break. He requires periodic rest because of soreness in both knees dating back to last season. He's unlikely to play today even if he feels better, because Geren said he'll use a right-handed heavy lineup against Royals lefty Bruce Chen. "... Left fielder Conor Jackson (strained right hamstring) remains on a running program in Phoenix, with no word on when he'll be game-ready.

Dallas Braden, Brett Anderson making progress as A's begin second half

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 7/16/2010 4:40PM

When I arrived at Kauffman Stadium this afternoon, the sun was out and it looked like a typically hot, muggy Midwestern summer day ... Since then, dark clouds have moved in and we've actually gotten a bit of rain as first pitch approaches. There are storm warnings in the area, but let's hope the truly bad weather avoids us. Nobody needs to start the second half with a rain delay ...

—Dallas Braden popped into the A's clubhouse before batting practice, having tested his left elbow in a rehab game last night for Single-A Stockton. He headed straight for the trainer's room and didn't have time to chat, but we're supposed to get him after the game. Manager Bob Geren said Braden came out of his four-inning start fine, but the A's are waiting until after he throws a side session tomorrow to declare him ready to come off the DL and start Tuesday against the Red Sox.

All went well with Brett Anderson's rehab start last night in the Arizona Rookie League. He went four innings and gave up one run on seven hits. He threw 63 pitches, mixing in his slider, curve ball and changeup. Seems like a good sign that his elbow is coming along well enough to allow him to throw all his pitches. Figure he'll need at least two more starts before being activated.

The progress of those two pitchers is obviously crucial as the A's try to hang in the AL West picture. On that topic, check out the schedule the A's have coming out of the break: After this series in Kansas City, they host the Red Sox and White Sox for six games, then hit the road to play six against the Rangers and White Sox. I'd say this stretch will hold the key to the A's season.

—Ryan Sweeney is not in the lineup after getting plasma injections in both knees and a cortisone injection in his right knee over the All-Star break. Geren listed Sweeney as day-to-day, and considering Geren plans to start a righty-dominated lineup Saturday against Royals lefty Bruce Chen, Sweeney won't be playing tomorrow either. He didn't have much to say on how bad his knees have felt lately, but I guarantee you this guy's been playing through considerable pain all season. He hopes the shots alleviate some of that, but judging from conversations we've had in the past, it sounds like Sweeney is going to be dealing with knee issues his entire career. It's just not severe enough to keep him out for a prolonged period.

The lineups:

A's — Crisp CF, Barton 1B, Suzuki C, Cust DH, Kouzmanoff 3B, Ellis 2B, Gross RF, Davis LF, Pennington SS; Gonzalez LHP.

Royals — Podsednik LF, Kendall C, DeJesus RF, Butler 1B, Guillen DH, Callaspo 3B, Aviles 2B, Bloomquist CF, Betancourt SS; Greinke RHP.

Gonzalez, A's get past Greinke

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

, Mo. - Oakland's second half began with a nutty play, but a reversed foul-ball call worked in the A's favor in kick-starting a 5-1 victory at Kauffman Stadium. So if it's an omen of some sort, they'll take it.

Coco Crisp, the first batter of Friday's game, appeared to clip the first-base line with a bouncer that landed just in front of the outfield grass, but the ball was ruled foul. As A's manager Bob Geren came out to question the call, Crisp - who played for Kansas City last year - remained at the plate, chatting with Royals starter Zack Greinke and catcher Jason Kendall.

The umpires huddled, the call was reversed, and Crisp was summoned to first and then directed along to second, slowly turning left while in some confusion.

"I didn't know what was supposed to happen," Crisp said. "No one did. ... I don't know if it's ever happened in baseball."

The reversal was correct, according to Geren, who said the ball left an impression on the line.

Crisp was involved with another strange play in the ninth, when he tried to beat out an apparent double-play ball. He sprinted to first, then was pointed back to the plate - a balk had been called, putting Cliff Pennington at second. Given a second chance, Crisp grounded out to first. He also reached on an error in the third, and he scored on Kevin Kouzmanoff's two-run double.

"They said I had nine lives," Crisp said of his night of umpire-aided do-overs. "I actually got out like six times tonight. I kept running down the line like 'F!' and then I got another chance."

After the reversal on his double in the first, Crisp wound up scoring on Jack Cust's sacrifice fly, and the A's added four more in the first three innings.

Kansas City's defense helped - a throwing error by Greinke allowed Kouzmanoff to score in the second, and Yuniesky Betancourt's error led to two runs. Greinke, last year's Cy Young Award winner, allowed only two earned runs in six innings as a result.

Oakland starter Gio Gonzalez outpitched Greinke, allowing one run in seven innings.

After five walks his previous start, Gonzalez said he decided his goal for the second half of the season was to challenge every hitter, and he walked just one Friday. That came in the fourth, when the Royals loaded the bases with nobody out; Gonzalez slipped away by getting a shallow fly ball and a strikeout. Then Kouzmanoff made a fine play at third on a grounder by Betancourt, and Daric Barton applied a sweeping tag at first to end the inning.

Barton was shaking his hand after that play, and Geren said he was concerned when Barton then didn't swing the bat while leading off the next inning, but he hit a long fly ball his final at-bat, and Geren said he's fine.

Braden still in line for Tuesday return

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Oakland could soon get a starter off the disabled list: **Dallas Braden** is close to set to pitch Tuesday's game against Boston.

Braden will throw a side session today, and that will give the A's more of an idea, but manager **Bob Geren** said Tuesday looks good at this point.

Braden told Geren he had some fatigue after hitting the 70- to 75-pitch mark on Thursday at Class A Stockton, but Geren said that should improve Braden's next time out. Braden missed his final start of the first half because of elbow tendinitis.

Brett Anderson, out with elbow tendinitis, went four innings and allowed seven hits on Thursday, just as Braden did, but Anderson was in the Arizona rookie league. He threw 63 pitches, Geren said, and he'll make another rehab start on Tuesday. There's a good possibility he'd rejoin the A's after that, if all goes well, returning on or about July 25.

Sweeney's knees: **Ryan Sweeney** had a cortisone shot for his right knee Monday, and he also had platelet-rich injections for both knees. He was unavailable Friday and said his knees were sore from the treatment, so it might be another day or two before he is in the lineup; Geren said he'd planned to use primarily right-handed hitters against lefty **Bruce Chen** this evening, anyway.

Sweeney said he had an MRI exam on his chronically creaky knees and, asked if surgery might be a possibility again, said he is unsure; the main problem with his right knee is with the patella tendon.

Briefly: **Conor Jackson** (hamstring) isn't playing in rehab games in Arizona yet, nor has he been cleared for baseball activity, according to Geren. ... The Mariners signed right-hander **Jamey Wright**, recently released by the Oakland organization, to a major-league deal; the A's had an agreement with Wright that they would let him go if he had a major-league opportunity.

A's leading off

[Susan Slusser](#), San Francisco Chronicle

An unusual E for Ellis: Mark Ellis' errorless streak came to an end at 52 games when he couldn't handle a bouncer by Alberto Callaspo in the sixth inning. It was the first error by an A's second baseman this year.

Gonzalez guides A's to third straight win

By Samuel Zuba / MLB.com

KANSAS CITY -- Before each of Athletics pitcher Gio Gonzalez's starts, he has a quick pep talk with fellow starter Dallas Braden.

As the two spoke before Friday's series opener in Kansas City -- a 5-1 victory over the Royals -- Gonzalez said Braden offered Gonzalez one piece of advice.

"We talked before the game, and [Braden] said, 'Don't worry about the strikeouts, go out there and pound the zone and let your defense do the talking.' What a coincidence -- he called it," Gonzalez said after the game. "Let the defense do the talking."

Gonzalez did just that as he threw seven innings, allowing only one run on seven hits, with one walk and three strikeouts. For his efforts, Gonzalez earned his eighth win of the season and propelled the Athletics to a three-game winning streak.

At no point in Gonzalez's day did his defense do the talking more than in the third inning, when the left-hander had the bases loaded with no outs. Gonzalez sat the next three batters down in order without allowing a single run to cross the plate.

"I was just trying to minimize damage as much as possible," Gonzalez said. "I wanted ground-ball outs. I was fortunate enough to get a shallow popup and a strikeout, and then a big play by [Kevin] Kouzmanoff and [Daric] Barton."

While Gonzalez did what he needed to do on the mound, his offense had his back for the first time in a long time.

In all six of Gonzalez's last starts, his offense has provided just three runs or fewer of support. However, that was not the case in this one as Oakland came out firing from the first inning.

Third baseman Kouzmanoff backed up his starting pitcher when he ripped a two-run single in the third inning that broke up a 1-1 tie, proving to be the difference in the game.

Kouzmanoff also doubled and scored a run in the second inning off Royals starter Zack Greinke, who was handed his ninth loss of the season. The two hits from Kouzmanoff left the reigning American League Cy Young Award winner quite frustrated.

"It was just bad pitching," Greinke said. "I tried to throw high fastballs and the first one was thigh-high and the second one was knee-high. So, I mean, it's just frustrating when you have an idea on how to pitch someone and you don't even come close to executing. And that's what happened."

On top of the A's win, Friday's game featured an overturned call by umpire crew chief Jeff Kellogg, which eventually provided the first run of the game for the A's.

As leadoff man Coco Crisp stepped up to the batters box in the first inning, he ripped what was originally ruled a foul ball down the right-field line. After umpires gathered to review the call, Crisp was awarded a double on the play.

Oakland manager Bob Geren said he knew it was a fair ball all along.

"I could tell by the reaction of the first baseman that it was fair, so I just ran out to see what happened," he said. "You could kind of see the ball mark on the line. [The umpires] did the right thing -- got together and talked about it, and they got the call right."

Geren said he was happy with the win, especially coming off the All-Star break when players tend to be a little rusty after not playing baseball for a few days.

"I think it's important when you get on the road right after three or four days off," Geren said of the win. "We practiced yesterday and guys looked pretty rusty at practice, but we had a nice workout, and today, they looked a lot better than yesterday, that's for sure."

It's a new start for the Athletics as they opened up the second half of the season with a win, and Gonzalez is happy with where things are going.

"It's a good start for Oakland," he said. "It shows that we're coming out swinging and we're flashing our leather a little bit. ... Just all around, it was a great day for the Athletics."

Braden, Anderson make rehab starts

By Samuel Zuba / MLB.com

KANSAS CITY -- A's starting pitchers Dallas Braden and Brett Anderson both made rehab starts Thursday and are making progress towards returning to the starting rotation.

Braden, who is rehabbing from an elbow injury, gave up three runs over four innings of work for Class A Stockton. He was pulled in the fifth inning after giving up back-to-back solo home runs.

"Dallas threw the ball well," Athletics manager Bob Geren said. "He got a little bit tired around 70, 75 pitches, but other than that, he felt good. It was his first time out in a while. He'll throw another side for us here [Saturday] and his stamina will go up for his next start and he'll be fine."

Anderson made his second rehab start Thursday as he works to come back from left elbow tendinitis. The left-hander gave up one run over four innings for the AZL Athletics.

"Brett still has a couple more-starts to go," Geren said. "He threw 63 pitches. ... He mixed all four of his pitches and felt pretty good."

Crisp meets with former teammates in KC

KANSAS CITY -- He may have only played in Kansas City for a year, but for Athletics center fielder Coco Crisp, it's good to get back and see some old faces.

"You form a bond with the guys from Spring Training, whether you're playing against them from the other side of the diamond," Crisp said. "Fortunately for me, I had a chance to play here last year and form that bond."

Crisp's season with the Royals was plagued by injuries, playing in only 49 games in 2009 before shoulder surgery ended his season.

Even still, Crisp built relationships with his teammates while in Kansas City. Crisp met up with Royals first baseman Billy Butler on Thursday night, and Crisp said he felt Butler deserved a spot on the All-Star team.

"[Butler] kind of got snuffed from the All-Star team," Crisp said. "I know as well as others that it's Kansas City, but some guys over here really deserved to make it."

Friendships aside, Crisp is ready to put the A's back on track as he hit leadoff in the first game back from the All-Star break.

"I'll say, 'Hi' to the guys once I get on the field, but then it's business," he said.

Bailey calls All-Star Game 'dream come true'

KANSAS CITY -- A's reliever Andrew Bailey is only 26 years old and the young right-hander already has two All-Star appearances under his belt.

Bailey, who was added to the All-Star team after A's starter Trevor Cahill started in last Sunday's game rendering him unavailable for the All-Star game, saw his first action this year in the Midsummer Classic.

Bailey got the call from the bullpen in the seventh inning with a runner on second and two outs. He walked the Dodgers' Rafael Furcal before striking out the Reds' Brandon Phillips to end the threat.

"Nerve-racking," Bailey said of the experience. "You try and sit back and tell yourself that it's just like any other game and there's nothing new -- same ball, same bat, but there's that extra little adrenaline and you know that millions of people are watching at home."

For Bailey, his time in Anaheim fulfilled a lifelong dream.

"It's a dream come true," Bailey said. "It's what you dream of when you're a little kid, playing in those types of games and having those experiences."

Geren happy to share ASG with son

KANSAS CITY -- While most of the Athletics got a few days off for the All-Star break, manager Bob Geren was busy at work.

Geren was selected to help coach the All-Star Game for the American League and the best part of his All-Star experience had nothing to do with baseball.

"The best part was getting to share it with my son," Geren said. "I enjoyed it. It would've been a great experience by myself, just to be around that environment, but to be able to share it with family and friends was great."

A's open second half with 5-1 win over Royals

By DOUG TUCKER, ASSOCIATED PRESS

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Gio Gonzalez outdueled Zack Greinke and the A's caught a big break in the first inning en route to a 5-1 victory over the Kansas City Royals on Friday night, disappointing a rare Kauffman Stadium sellout crowd.

Kevin Kouzmanoff had a two-run single for the Athletics while Gonzalez (8-6) allowed seven hits and one walk in seven innings.

Relievers Craig Breslow and Michael Wuertz each pitched a shutout inning.

Leading off the game, Oakland's Coco Crisp was awarded a double after first base umpire Larry Vanover first ruled a foul ball on Crisp's liner down the right field line. On replays, it did appear to come down an inch or so fair. A's manager Bob Geren came out to argue, the umpires huddled, and the call was reversed.

Jack Cust drove in Crisp with a sacrifice fly.

Greinke (5-9), who missed his previous start with stiffness in his right shoulder, was charged with five runs — two earned — four hits and four walks in six innings. He lost to the A's for the first time in five career decisions.

With the help of shortstop Yuniesky Betancourt's fielding error, the A's scored three unearned runs in the third to take a 5-1 lead.

After Cliff Pennington walked and was safe when Betancourt dropped Greinke's throw to second on Crisp's grounder, Greinke loaded the bases when he bounced a pitch in the dirt for ball four to Kurt Suzuki. With two outs, Kouzmanoff rifled a two-run single up the middle and Mark Ellis followed with an RBI single.

Kouzmanoff was cut down at third, ending the inning.

Scott Podsednik doubled leading off the Royals first and tied it 1-1 on Jason Kendall's RBI single.

The Royals loaded the bases with no outs in the fourth with two singles and a walk. But Gonzalez got Mike Aviles to fly out to shallow center, fanned Willie Bloomquist and coaxed a grounder to third from Betancourt.

Crisp was involved in two other unusual plays. He reached safely on a fielder's choice when Betancourt made his fielding error. Then with a runner on first in the ninth, he grounded to second base man Aviles, who made the toss to Betancourt to start what might have been a double play.

But umpires called a balk on Joakim Soria, making the runner safe at second and sending Crisp back to the plate, where he grounded out.

The attendance was 37,312, the Royals' fifth sellout this year.

Ratto: If Threatened with Violence, Bet the A's

Ray Ratto, CSNBayArea.com 7/16/2010

The essential shortcoming of conventional wisdom is the fact that it is an oxymoron. If it's conventional thinking, the chance that it is also wise is minimal.

Thus, the conventional wisdom that the Giants are better off than the A's as the second half of the baseball season begins falls into that category. Not necessarily because you'd rather have the A's roster than the Giants', but because you'd rather have the A's opponents than the Giants'.

As day dawned on the second half, the Giants had better pitching, better hitting and better health than the A's, which would thus explain their better record. As a simple matter of numbers if nothing else, you'd rather have Bruce Bochy's hand than Bob Geren's.

Yet, here we are making the case that Oakland might be the stealthier upset pick down the stretch than San Francisco based on one thing above all others.

We don't get the Texas Rangers or Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim, and we do get the Colorado Rockies.

Neither the A's nor Giants are particularly well positioned to be a wild card entrant -- the A's because either the Yankees, Red Sox and Rays will take that spot in the American League, and the Giants because either the Braves, Mets or Phillies will do so in the National. Thus, their only ticket to the postseason will be punched as a division winner, or not at all.

And here is where the A's look better.

The Rangers have been proactive in the market, already scooping up pitcher Cliff Lee from Seattle as a pure three-month rental to bolster a rotation that already has C.J. Wilson, Tommy Hunter and Colby Lewis. But the idea of the Rangers as a pitchers' team is hard to get one's head around, and the notorious Texas heat has this way about it.

In short, while you'd rather be the Rangers than the A's, you have a better chance that the Rangers would come back to the pack than not.

And the Angels? Window closed.

Does this make the A's sudden favorites? No. They don't hit, they don't hit homers at all, and their chief baseballing export is injuries. They need winning streaks to get to .500, and that's a bad way to go about one's business. If you want to bet a horse in this field, bet Texas and feel good about it.

But the Giants? The Giants are facing the one thing nobody ever truly thought they'd have to face this year -- a crowded field of divisional rivals.

The Diamondbacks are so dead that dead doesn't begin to cover their situation. But the Dodgers are hanging around despite being the cover story in the current issue of Dysfunctional Operation Quarterly, the Padres look to have stolen the title of "Best Rotation In The Game" from the Giants, and the Rockies are getting shortstop Troy Tulowitzki back in time for their typical second-half sprint.

If you thought the Giants would be six games over .500 and plus-61 in run differential at the break, you'd have taken it with a grimace. It would have meant 87 wins (which is not progress) and 720 runs, a significant though not overwhelming advancement.

In short, they are performing like the Cardinals, and in most years you'd take that and be happy. But they don't have to beat the Cardinals, so that isn't as helpful a notion as Giant fans would like.

Their much-grouched-about inability to win within the NL West is a direct measure of how much better the Padres are (the Giants are 1-8 against San Diego), and if San Diego isn't going anywhere, then neither are the Giants.

Boiled down to its essence then, we think the Padres can last longer than the Rangers, and that the Rockies can last longer than either of them. That takes the Giants out of the picture.

Mind you, it doesn't put the A's in the picture, because the A's are still so aggressively incomplete in so many ways. They have to figure out a way not to get hurt any more (yeah, like they're any good at that), and they have to get a home run more often than once every game and a half, and they have to be lucky.

But if they do their part, the Rangers can be had.

The Giants need the faces of their franchise, [Tim Lincecum](#) and [Pablo Sandoval](#), to be more like their doppelgangers of a year ago, while finding better bullpen balance and getting [Jonathan Sanchez](#) to be the same pitcher consistently. And they have to get lucky, too.

But if they do their part, the Rockies probably can't.

That's why it is better, in a parallel universe where the [A's](#) stop being the A's, to be the A's than the [Giants](#) in the second half. The Giants are still performing better, and none but an idiot would claim otherwise, but the Giants aren't playing the A's. They're playing in a nasty division that looks like it's going to stay that way, and that is the biggest reason of all.

Urban: Weekend in Bay Ball

Mychael Urban, Csnbayarea.com 7/16/2010

Yesterday we went pretty Giants-centric because the A's were off. Today we give Oakland the love it deserves with a few looks back and a spin forward, but the Giants opened the second half Thursday, so it'll be a fair and balanced bunch of laps between the shores of McCovey Cove and Jack London Square ...

... It's difficult to determine what the key to the second half for the A's might be, but whatever happens between now and the July 31 non-waiver trade deadline is a good place to start. If Billy Beane doesn't deal his logical chips, i.e., [Ben Sheets](#) and [Coco Crisp](#), it changes everything.

... If Beane does deal, i.e., sell, it's an obvious white flag. Again. But that certainly won't mean the A's don't have a shot at going .500 for the year, and that should be the goal. The [Rangers](#) and [Angels](#) are vastly superior teams unless every injured Athletic gets healthy, and you have to walk before you can run. Winning 81 games represents a brisk jog, for sure.

... Anyone still worried about [Tim Lincecum](#)? Didn't think so.

... OK, I'm confused. Did CSNBAYArea.com hire [some new guy](#)? They should promote him or something. Seriously.

... [Kevin Kouzmanoff](#) is a tough read. Oakland's third baseman was brought in to provide power and defensive stability at third base, and while he hasn't been bad by any stretch, he hasn't been exactly as advertised.

... Nice to see [Pablo Sandoval](#) come up with a big hit, but the flex and third-person primal scream at second base was a bit much after tagging a 78-mph lollipop at the letters.

... Don't think Michael Taylor isn't hoping Crisp gets dealt. [Rajai Davis](#) would never say it, but he's likely thinking the same thing.

... Josh Thole almost killed Lincecum with a line drive back up the box last night, which begs the question: Josh Thole???

... I don't mean to be a gas-soaked rag, but [Brett Anderson](#) should be shut down for the year. The latest setback is innocuous; blisters are typical for pitchers who haven't thrown for a while. But something about a 22-year old who's been on the disabled list twice with elbow issues fairly screams danger.

... R.A. Dickey is one of three knuckleballers in the big leagues, and that's about enough. At least he pitches a little, though. You actually see a fastball with meaning here and there.

... Prediction: [Kurt Suzuki](#), if healthy, hits 13 homers in the second half.

... The Mets are an absolute mystery, but they can pitch their butts off. Taking three of four against them to start the second half would be a massive boost for the Giants, who need a head of steam heading into a roadie against the NL West foes Dodgers and Diamondbacks that absolutely has to be successful.

... Biggest surprise of the first half for the A's: [Daric Barton](#), hands down. This was a make-or-break year for him, and he's made it already. Biggest disappointment: [Michael Wuertz](#) in a similar landslide. One of the best setup men in the game last year, he appears to be feeling the effects of being used in what seemed like every single game in 2009.

... Hi, I'm [Buster Posey](#), and this is my manhood.

... And finally, it's time for our "Why?" of the day: Dontrelle Willis. The answer: Why not? He's only 28, he's a heck of an athlete, and being back home -- he grew up in Alameda -- might be exactly what he needs to get back on track. It could be a pipe dream, but it's a no-risk move, and you never know what the comforts of home might mean to someone who's been to baseball hell.

That's all for which we have time, gang. Peace, s'mores soft granola bars and "Brick House" by the Commodores to all.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Cats' seven game road win streak comes to end

By Robbie Enos / Sacramento River Cats

After the Sacramento River Cats won the first game of their four-game series against the Salt Lake Bees, they fell 5-3 in the second game Friday night. Salt Lake nearly doubled the River Cats hit total 10 to seven, led by their top of the lineup hitters Peter Bourjos and Luis Figueroa.

Figueroa drove in two runs on two hits, including a home run in the fifth inning. Bourjos went 2-for-4 with a triple, run scored, and RBI.

Sacramento also got good production from their top two hitters. Eric Sogard had two hits and a run scored, while Steve Tolleson scored the other Sacramento run with two hits and a walk.

Salt Lake got a great outing out of starter Trevor Bell, who threw 6.0 innings. Bell allowed one earned run and on five hits and no walks to go with five strikeouts. His outing brought his season ERA down to 3.00 in six starts.

The River Cats smelled a comeback in the ninth against reliever Rafael Rodriguez. Tolleson led the inning off with a walk before Michael Taylor singled with a line drive to center field. Taylor and Tolleson advanced one base on a Dallas McPherson ground ball, setting up a Chris Carter RBI single. But Rodriguez managed to record the final two outs to end the game.

River Cats starter Tyson Ross gave up a run early in the first after Bourjos singled with a ground ball into center field. Bourjos stole second, his 24th of the season, and then advanced to third on a groundball hit by Figueroa. Michael Ryan finished up the rally with a ground ball to first baseman Carter, allowing Bourjos to score.

The first inning turned out to just be a teaser, as the Salt Lake offense conjured up an even bigger rally in the second. With one out, Terry Evans hit a double into right field. Nick Gournault singled to left field to put runners on the corners. Drew Meyer hit a ground rule double into right-center to score Evans.

Gournault scored on a ground ball to short off the bat of Bourjos. To finish it off, Figueroa smacked a double to score Meyer. At the end of it all, Salt Lake was up 4-0 before the third.

Tolleson got Sacramento on the board in the fourth, starting with a leadoff double. He advanced to third on a Taylor line drive, and then scored on a McPherson single.

Travis Banwart replaced Ross in the fourth, ending Ross's outing with four earned runs allowed on five hits and one walk. He recorded five strikeouts. This was Ross's second start since getting called down from the Oakland Athletics.

Figueroa took Tolleson's run right back with a solo shot in the fifth. The drive went deep to right field and was Figueroa's third of the season.

Sacramento continued to fight in the sixth. Sogard dropped down a drag bunt in front of third baseman Nate Sutton to lead the inning off with a single. Starter pitcher Trevor Bell attempted to pick Sogard off, but an errant throw allowed Sogard to advance to second.

Tolleson struck again, pounding a liner into left for a single. Taylor grounded into a 4-3 double play, ending a rally threat but scoring Sogard from third.

The Cats are now 51-42 on the season, the Bees 44-48. The two will square off again on Saturday at 6:05 p.m.

Missions blast RockHounds

By Oscar LeRoy, Midland Reporter Telegram

The San Antonio Missions had been struggling to score runs over the last two weeks. In fact, they had scored two or fewer runs in seven of the previous eight games, including a 3-2, 10-inning defeat to the Midland RockHounds on Thursday night.

However, on Friday, Blake Tekotte and the rest of the Missions took out some of their offensive frustrations with a 17-4 victory over the RockHounds at Citibank Ballpark.

Tekotte led the onslaught as he was a double short of a cycle by going 3 for 4 with a home run, triple, four runs scored and five RBI. That's a pretty good night for a hitter who came in hitting .211. The Missions also finished with 16 hits for a team that came into the game last in the Texas League with a .237 team batting average.

"We've been having a tough time getting everything going and finally we're starting to swing the bats well with runners in scoring position. I think that was the key today," said Tekotte, the designated hitter. "I think it will (get us jump-started). We're too good to be scoring just two runs a game like we have been lately. I hope this starts us on a little roll."

This was such a fun night for the Missions that Tekotte could only crack a smile when thinking that he was a double shy of hitting for the cycle.

"When I got a triple and home run I thought, 'OK we've got something going there,'" he said. "But I had some good at-bats today."

The RockHounds got off to a great start when they jumped on San Antonio starter Jeremy Hefner (8-4) — the best starting pitcher in the Texas League in terms of earned run average (2.44) — with two runs in the first inning. Archie Gilbert led off with a double and then later scored on a single by Val Majewski. Two batters later Alex Valdez then made it 2-0 when he singled home Majewski.

After a decent first inning for Midland starter Jeff Lyman, it self-destructed in the second inning when the Missions scored five runs. Three walks and a wild pitch didn't help matters for Lyman, but the backbreaker came from Tekotte, who hit a three-run triple to right field.

"That was huge," said Tekotte about his triple. "That kind of jump-started us a little bit. We can score 17 runs, we just need something like that to get us going."

Lyman, who was on a strict pitch count anyway, was done after 1 2/3 innings and after giving up four runs on just one hit and four walks and a wild pitch. That forced the RockHounds to go to their bullpen earlier than they wanted to and ended up using six relievers, including two position players in J.C. Holt and Gabe Ortiz.

"(The pitchers) are battling," Midland manager Darren Bush said. "We just made a few mistakes and they took advantage of them. It was just a tough night."

After an unearned run in the third, the Missions added four more in the fifth behind a pair of two-run homers. Andrew Parrino hit a two-run shot to left and then Tekotte went yard with his two-run blast to right field for a 10-2 lead.

The RockHounds had 16 hits as well but struggled to get the clutch hits to make this a closer game. They left the bases loaded in the both the fourth and sixth innings and left 16 stranded for the game.

"We swung the bats well," Bush said. "We get three more hits and it's a completely different ballgame. But tomorrow's another day. You would have liked to get those hits but you don't always get them."

ROCKHOUNDS NOTEBOOK

ROCKHOUND MOVES: The RockHounds made a few moves prior to Friday night's game. RHP Jared Lansford has been promoted to Triple-A Sacramento. The RockHounds' closer was 4-1 with 12 saves in 12 opportunities and a 2.43 ERA. ...RHP Justin Friend has been activated off the disabled list to take Lansford's place in the bullpen. ...Also C Yusuf Carter is off the disabled list but was sent down to Single-A Stockton on July 10. ...2B Jemile Weeks, out since late April with a hamstring injury, is playing in live action with the short season Arizona League A's.

'HOUND BITES: Missions SS Drew Callender is likely out for the season after suffering a broken left knee cap in Thursday night's game against the RockHounds. Callender injured himself while going after for a foul ball beyond left field during the bottom of the fourth inning. Callender slid and then crashed into the wall in the left field stands. ... RockHounds 2B Alex Valdez made a great play in the fifth inning to rob Andrew Parrino of a base hit. Parrino hit the ball deep in the hole between first and second base when Valdez made a diving stop in the grass area, propped to his feet and then made the throw to first for the out. ...The win for the Missions brought them within two games back of the RockHounds for the wild card. The wild card only comes into play at the end of the year if Frisco, the South Division first-half champion, wins the second half crown. Midland is 45-45 on the season, while San Antonio is 43-47. ...The RockHounds' bullpen was so stretched on Friday that reserve infielder J.C. Holt and backup catcher Gabe Ortiz came in to pitch in the ninth inning. Holt came into the game with 1-0 record and a 0.00 ERA after getting the win in relief of a 15-inning, 11-10 victory over San Antonio on June 27. Holt had to leave the game with an injury, which brought in Ortiz for his first relief appearance of the season. Midland manager Darren Bush said after the game that Holt should be OK. ...Midland is now 9-13 against the Missions this season but 2-8 against San Antonio at Citibank Ballpark.

TODAY'S PROBABLES: The RockHounds will likely send LHP Carlos Hernandez (8-1, 3.89 ERA) to the mound against San Antonio's LHP Nathan Culp (1-5, 4.45). First pitch is scheduled for 7 p.m.

Ports Sweep Rawhide on Parker's Home Run

Stockton bullpen perfect in 7-5 victory

STOCKTON, Calif. – The Stockton Ports (43-49) struggled mightily against the Visalia Rawhide (48-44) in the first half, posting just a 4-15 record against them. But the Ports found great success against the Rawhide in the second half, and completed a sweep of the Rawhide on Friday night with a 7-5 win at Banner Island Ballpark.

The last time the Ports swept an opponent was on June 7-10, when they took four games from Bakersfield at home. This was their second sweep of the season, and their fifth win in their last six games.

Stephen Parker sealed the win and the sweep with a three-run shot in the seventh inning off Ryan Robowski. Brett Tomko had a solid start, allowing five runs on seven hits (including two home runs) in 5.0 innings with three strikeouts. Lance Sewell picked up his sixth win, tossing 3.0 hitless and scoreless frames. Sewell hasn't allowed an earned run in his last 16.1 innings, and has allowed just four hits in that span. Paul Smyth collected his 15th save on the year as well. Robowski took the loss for Visalia.

Visalia took a 4-0 lead in the first inning. Dan Kaczrowski and Alfredo Marte singled off Tomko to start the game. Left fielder Marc Krauss hit an RBI single to put the Rawhide ahead, 1-0. First baseman Paul Goldschmidt then stepped up to the plate and launched a three-run home run over the Jackson Rancheria Back Porch in right field on a 2-2 pitch to make it 4-0.

Tomko then retired the next eight batters he faced, before giving up another single to Goldschmidt. He shutout the Rawhide until the fifth inning, when Krauss hit his 17th home run of the year over the Food 4 Less sign in left-center field.

Meanwhile, the Ports chipped away at the Visalia lead. Designated hitter David Thomas hit a triple in his first at-bat in the second inning. Catcher Ryan Ortiz brought him home with an RBI single to left field to make it 4-1.

The Ports plated two more runs in the fourth to come within a run of Visalia. Second baseman Tyler Ladendorf doubled to left-center field to start the inning. He moved to third as left fielder Todd Johnson singled. Thomas hit an RBI single to score Ladendorf. Ortiz hit a sacrifice fly to Alberto Diaz in right field to allow Johnson to score the third Stockton run.

The Ports entered the bottom of the seventh inning down 5-3. Ortiz walked to lead off the inning, and advanced to third on a double to left by Jermaine Mitchell. Ortiz scored on an RBI single by Grant Green. Parker then stepped up to the plate and took a 2-1 pitch yard to center field for a three-run shot. It was his twelfth homer of the year and his second three-run home run on the year.

Sewell and Smyth combined to toss two perfect innings in the eighth and ninth to preserve the 7-5 victory and complete the sweep.

The Ports will take on the Rancho Cucamonga Quakes for the first time this season in a three-game series starting Saturday. LHP Fabian Williamson (0-0, 7.45) will take the mound for Stockton, while LHP Manny Flores (3-5, 4.58) will start for Rancho Cucamonga. The game on Saturday will begin at 7:05 PM PST. Fans can follow the game live on KWSX 1280 AM.

Cougars Sweep Silver Hawks

Kane County keeps cruising, pitchers run scoreless streak to 19

GENEVA, III. – The Kane County Cougars' terrific month of July continued Friday night, as they pounded the South Bend Silver Hawks, 8-0, in front of 10,045 at Elfstrom Stadium. The Cougars swept the three-game series, improved to 5-1 so far on their nine-game homestand, moved to 11-4 in July and posted their fourth sweep of the season and first since early May.

Kenny Smalley, Chris Mederos and Josh Lansford combined on the four-hit shutout, running the Cougars' consecutive scoreless innings streak to 19. Smalley pitched 4 1/3 innings in his return to the Cougars, where he spent the '09 season and won nine games. Meanwhile Mederos (3-2) also returned to the Cougars, as he took the mound for them for the first time since May 2 following a shoulder injury. He tossed 3 2/3 innings of one-hit ball with four strikeouts, and Lansford handled the ninth to wrap it up.

The Cougars' offense posted 10 hits. They put up four runs and batted around in the second against Andrew Wolcott (0-2). Rashun Dixon, Jason Christian, Tyreece House and Myrio Richard each drove in a run. Then Conner Crumbliss and Richahit consecutive two-out RBI singles in the fourth to make it 6-0, and Christian launched a two-run homer in the fifth for the 8-0 final.

The Cougars (13-8, 45-45) continue their homestand Saturday night at 6 CT when they open a three-game series against the West Michigan Whitecaps (7-14, 33-57). Dan Straily (6-6, 4.63) is scheduled to face Trevor Feeney (7-9, 3.49). 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 Draft Q&A: Jose Macias

John Anderson, OaklandClubhouse.com

Jul 16, 2010

One of the most intriguing picks in the Oakland A's 2010 draft class is RHP Jose Macias. The 18th round pick spent his first two years in college as a shortstop, but switched to the mound this season and posted an 0.87 ERA with 118 strike-outs and only 22 walks in 92.2 innings. John Anderson caught-up with the Bronx, New York, native, who is currently with the A's Arizona Rookie League team.

Jose Macias is still learning how to pitch, so one can only imagine the sort of numbers he will put up once he has all of his pitches and some experience under his belt.

The native of the Bronx made the transition from position player to pitcher look easy this season for Franklin Pierce College. A shortstop his first two years of school, Macias took the mound by storm, going 9-1 with an 0.87 ERA in 14 appearances (12 starts). He tossed a no-hitter in his second start and held opposing batters to a .161 average. He also struck-out 118 while walking only 22 and he gave up only one homerun.

Macias accomplished all of that while being only a two-pitch pitcher (fastball and slider). Now with the A's, Macias is working on a third-pitch (change-up) and continuing his education on the mound.

John Anderson spoke to Macias shortly after he arrived in Arizona and then again this week after his professional debut, a scoreless inning of relief for the AZL A's.

John Anderson: How are things in Arizona?

Jose Macias: They're good. It's hot out here.

JA: Well it's hot back East especially in your old area.

JM: Yeah but it's 115 degrees out here today.

JA: Well that's quite a change from pitching in the early Spring in New Hampshire and New England.

JM: Yeah it is.

JA: Well as I'm on the East Coast I know the baseball program at Franklin Pierce and am intrigued by your story. One year of pitching experience and straight to pro ball. Give me a bit of your background.

JM: I'm from Bronx, New York, and I did pitch in high school but I was a shortstop all my life and pitched a bit my sophomore and senior year of high school. I then went to Monroe(NY) College and played there for one year as a starting shortstop. I hit about .380 and then somehow I got into the NECBL and I went up and played in Keene, N.H. for the Keene Swampbats.

This was in 2007 after my freshman year and I played shortstop for that team and I met a kid that was a pitcher at Franklin Pierce and he asked me what school I was at and whether I wanted to go to Franklin Pierce to be a shortstop. I said I didn't know because I was already at a college. I gave him my number and then Coach King [Franklin Pierce coach] came to a game. He liked how I played and started talking to me and told me about the school and program so I liked what he said and that's how I ended up at Franklin Pierce.

JA: Now Coach King only saw you play shortstop and that is the position he wanted you to play at Franklin Pierce, correct? In the back of your mind were you thinking about pitching or just playing short?

JM: Well at Monroe I was just a shortstop and I thought I could make it as a shortstop.

JA: So your freshman year at Monroe you played short and your sophomore year at Franklin Pierce you started at short but did pitch one inning. How did you get on the mound for an inning?

JM: Well I had gone to a scout day between freshman and sophomore year and I hit 92 MPH on the radar gun so I called Coach King and told him and he asked if I liked to pitch and wanted pitch.

I said I didn't care. He asked if I wanted to be a closer and I thought I could be the shortstop and closer, but I ended up pitching just the one inning.

JA: So the summer after your sophomore year, did you go back and play at Keene in the NECBL?

JM: Yeah I did. I told the Coach at Keene I wanted to pitch a little more because I knew I had the arm and had a better chance of being drafted as a pitcher. So I told him I wanted a few innings.

I pitched about 10 or 11 innings that summer and struck out a lot of guys and gave up like one earned run. So Coach King called me in that fall and asked what I wanted to do for next year and I told him I think I want to be a starting pitcher.

JA: That's great. I spoke with Coach King and he said they knew you had a strong arm and once that got you on the mound they were impressed by how comfortable you were on the mound and how quickly you adapted to it.

JM: It wasn't a hard transition for me because I knew I had the fastball and that I just had to develop one more pitch. I learned the slider and got it down within one month and the slider became my plus pitch. After that, I knew I could throw strikes.

I knew I had the control and I always had the confidence that when I stepped on the mound I could throw strikes and get outs. That's all I try to do.

JA: So your fastball is about 91-92 and the slider has been the pitch that caught most scouts' attention. What third pitch do the A's have you working on?

JM: I've been working on a change-up.

JA: If you can command that third pitch is the organization talking about that moving you from a reliever to a starter?

JM: Yeah. Right now they have me throwing bullpens and haven't really talked to me about whether I'm going to be a reliever or a starter.

JA: Going back to this season, when did the scouts start talking to you about your pro potential?

JM: Right before my first game the Marlins sent me a letter saying that they were interested in me and that I was a candidate to be taken in the draft by them. I heard nothing for two weeks and then I pitched my first game and got a couple letters and after I pitched the no-hitter in my second game scouts started coming around and coming to my bullpen sessions and started watching me and going to my games.

JA: Did the A's show much interest?

JM: A scout was at my no-hitter and [A's scout] Marc Sauer called me once and then they called me two or three days before the draft. I was pretty sure that one of the other teams would draft me but the A's sort of came from out of nowhere.

JA: It is pretty amazing how quickly it all came together for you. Were you aware of the Franklin Pierce program and how well-respected Coach King is by scouts and the number of players they've had drafted in recent years?

JM: I knew nothing about the program. I made some calls to friends and they all said great things about Franklin Pierce and Coach King and the program. Everyone said Coach King was "The Man." That he respects everyone and he works hard and gets a lot of guys drafted and he is one of the best coaches.

JA: Yeah he has a great reputation and has done a great job. So where were you when you were drafted?

JM: I was in New York with my parents.

JA: They must have been thrilled.

JM: Yeah. We had a good idea I'd get drafted that day so we were just waiting for my name. My father was watching on the computer...nervous. I got the call and I told my parents and they started jumping around.

JA: So you signed quickly.

JM: Yeah four or five days.

JA: And you went straight to Arizona.

JM: Yes and I'm just working on my pitches. This is my first year pitching so they want to get my arm strong and also watch my innings.

JA: How has the instruction and treatment been?

JM: It's great. Here they take great care of your arm. They don't want to rush you. They want you to take your time until you are ready. It's a good program.

JA: Yankees or Mets fan growing up?

JM: Mets fan.

Note: This part of the conversation came after Macias' debut on July 10th. He threw a scoreless inning and didn't allow a base-runner.

JA: Jose, saw you debuted last night. How did it feel to be on the mound in a real game?

JM: Felt great and comfortable. I was clocked in the low-90s and my slider was good.

JA: How about the changeup?

JM: I threw it a couple times and it went well and it felt good.

JA: What is the organization's plan for you this year?

JM: I'll probably stay in Arizona. They want me to throw 25 innings and then go on to Instructional League.

JA: Well it's great that you got into a game and good luck for the rest of the year.

JM: Thanks.