

A's News Clips, Friday, August 6, 2010

Poole: A's owners need to stop city hunting and have team remain in Oakland

By Monte Poole, Oakland Tribune columnist

The A's once upon a time were going to move to Denver. Then it was Portland, Ore. How about Las Vegas? OK, perhaps they would consider Sacramento.

Then, three years ago, it was decided, once and for all, the lucky winner was Fremont. The A's were so certain of this that they made an official announcement, unveiling artists' renderings of Lew's and John's Ballpark Village, including Cisco Field.

So now, naturally, A's ownership is fixated on San Jose.

Yeah. That'll happen any year now.

Meanwhile, the team continues to reside in Oakland, at the Coliseum, its home of 43 years, through times good and bad -- with those fortunes almost always dictated by the degree of commitment and outreach by ownership.

"The place has stood the test of time since, what, the 1960s?" says Andy Dolich, an A's vice president from 1980-95 and most recently with the 49ers. "When you look at the economics and politics and consider how hard it is to build a new facility in California, Oakland makes the most sense. It's the geographical center of the East Bay.

"I really believe they'll be playing baseball at the Oakland Coliseum for years to come."

Yet the current owners, Lew Wolff and John Fisher, want out. They've been brazen about their restlessness, even expressing a measure of contempt for their situation and insensitivity toward the most loyal core of their clientele.

That would be the fans, who accounted for more than 2

million in attendance five consecutive seasons (2001-05), including the first under the Wolff-Fisher ownership.

Wolff, the managing partner and designated mouthpiece, has longed for a new fan base since joining the franchise about a decade ago in the fabricated role of chief in charge of finding a new ballpark. Fisher, whose role is almost entirely financial, is growing increasingly agitated about not being able to invest in downtown San Jose.

Such a move would make financial sense for both. Wolff is a developer with numerous properties in San Jose. As the money end of this partnership, Fisher surely visualizes growth possibilities. He's a very wealthy man seeking ways to get wealthier.

And we all know Wolff is an old pal of Major League Baseball commissioner Bud Selig.

"I'll admit, 16 to 18 months ago, the team seemed on its way out of Oakland," says Doug Boxer, vice chairman of the Oakland planning commission and co-founder of Let's Go Oakland, a group formed to keep the A's in the city. "We saw it as a 'check the box' process.

"But it has become apparent this is a real process. There has been correspondence with the commissioner. Oakland is providing relevant and real data showing the A's can make it work here."

Oakland Mayor Ron Dellums last month sent Selig a letter identifying three potential ballpark sites in Oakland and showing that, contrary to assertions made by Wolff, dozens of East Bay corporations and communities are willing to offer support. More than \$500,000 in deposits was collected from 35 corporations interested in luxury suites, sponsorship opportunities and naming rights.

"We also got more than 40,000 (fans) to sign up through Facebook -- and 30,000 of them were within 28 days," says Boxer, son of U.S. Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.).

So the city is going straight to the commish, bypassing Wolff and Fisher, in hopes of disproving their claims that Oakland can't support the A's. Already concerned with resolving the territorial-rights issue with the Giants, Selig can't casually dismiss this.

The challenges facing Wolff and Fisher are mounting and exceedingly complex, so much so that moving may be no more likely than deciding to sell.

Here is where we pause for robust cheers from die-hard fans in the East Bay, those always willing to detail the rich tradition of baseball in the Oakland area, from the youth leagues to semipro, from the Oaks to the A's. They know only the New York Yankees have hosted more World Series parades since 1968. These fans launch websites, craft petitions and carry signs to the Coliseum conveying a desire to keep the A's in Oakland.

Insofar as their wishes clash with those of Wolff and Fisher, these fans want nothing more than to see the A's go to folks willing to restore fan interest with baseball, rather than development, in mind.

That would mean committing to Oakland, which always has fought vigorously -- and successfully -- against even the most ardent pursuers of its baseball team.

Oakland is unbeaten against cities trying to lure the A's. As formidable as San Jose is, it remains the underdog. And the pooch shrinks a little more with each day that passes without MLB recommending a move to the South Bay.

Night Owl: Living and dying with the Raiders and A's

Angela Woodall, Oakland Tribune

Wednesday began with Raiders talk in a funeral home and ended with A's talk in a bar.

When I arrived at the funeral home late in the morning, Raiders fans had already begun mourning Jack Tatum with a tailgate memorial service. They cranked up the music and draped a No. 32 jersey on the door of their Ford van, painted silver and black, which was parked outside. Tatum, a longtime Raiders hero, died July 27 at age 61.

Instead of tears, there was music and beer.

I retreated and was trying to write the story assigned to me about Tatum when the news broke that Mayor Ron Dellums would not seek re-election. I filed the Tatum story, threw my laptop in the back seat and headed to City Hall.

But it was to remain a Raiders day for a few more hours.

Others in the newsroom already had the Dellums story.

Meanwhile, Raiders legend Otis Sistrunk had stopped to eat at a restaurant on Telegraph Avenue before heading to the Tatum memorial service. He flew in from his home in Seattle.

He and Tatum wore silver and black in the '70s, during the team's mad, glorious, outlaw days.

But I wouldn't have known all this if I hadn't stopped by the same restaurant, Phat Matt's, to talk to the owners, Matt and Charlotte Gonzalez. He is a former stone mason. She worked as an office manager. Now they converse in the language of barbecue.

"I can do three whole cows on it," Charlotte said about the large square smoker with levers and dials. But, she said, the restaurant is just an extension of a backyard barbecue.

"And if you take a nap, that's OK," Matt added. "It's the United Nations of barbecue."

But not the drenched-in-sauce kind. Matt says too much barbecue sauce would hide the flavor of the meat and the "rub" he created during the years the pair competed in cook-offs.

Customers can ask for extra sauce, which comes spicy or mild.

The couple pointed out the table where Sistrunk and two other men sat. But I didn't know who I was looking at. A Raiders fan I am, but my methods tend to leave certain details lacking. Like names and faces. I like to say that proper nouns and I have a terrible relationship. I didn't want to walk up and ask, "So. Which one of you is a former Raider football player?"

Instead, I asked, "What are you eating?"

The man who turned out to be Sistrunk was savoring smoked sausage.

"It was real hot. Tasty," he announced.

"She wants to know about your ribs," he told the man sitting next to him, Al Fisher, who was working on a plate of them.

"As you can see, I'm taking my time and savoring the flavor," said Fisher, a sports memorabilia distributor.

"Like bobbleheads?" I asked, picturing one of Catfish Hunter in the Tribune newsroom. No, he said. More like signed jerseys. I looked at the ones Gonzalez had framed and hung on the wall: Stabler, Gannon, Rice. I was too embarrassed to ask if anyone even makes football player bobbleheads.

Gonzalez began passing out bites of bittersweet chocolate-covered smoked meat as the trio headed past a 4-foot Raiders emblem toward the door. A Raider dream catcher swayed near the bar on the opposite side of the room.

Rolls of paper towels stand on each table. "That's a good idea," Fisher said. As he walked away, I looked twice at the block that Oakland A's pitcher Vida Blue might once have cruised down in his Cadillac -- a present from the former owner Charlie Finley.

On one end of the block sat the Nordic House, before it moved to San Pablo Avenue. Neldam's Danish Bakery on the opposite end is closed, although a collective of former employees announced plans to reopen as A Taste of Denmark.

I was thinking of writing a profile of the block when a man hobbled out of a bus. He was wearing an A's jersey -- No. 49, pitcher Brett Anderson's number.

So in the end, sports dominated the day.

ESPN's Howard Bryant, a former Tribune reporter, was at Books Inc. in Alameda reading from his thoughtful biography about Henry Aaron.

Hammerin' Hank may be best known for breaking Babe Ruth's home run record. Then the slugger was sucked into the controversy provoked when the Giants' Barry Bonds tried to surpass him.

I listened to all this in the company of my boyfriend and his buddy -- two men who love the Raiders and the A's as much as they would a firstborn son.

I was full of football legends and baseball stories by the time 9 p.m. rolled round. So it wasn't far from there to the Gold Coast Grill, a restaurant and lounge on Park Street where Joe DiMaggio would have fit right in.

Prospect Carter has more room to roam

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Chris Carter has played first base almost his entire time in the A's organization, and now Oakland is moving its top power-hitting prospect to left field at Triple-A Sacramento. Does this indicate a shift in thinking, or signal potential interest in free-agent first basemen?

No, said assistant general manager **David Forst**. It's just this simple: The A's know what Carter can do at first base, they know he can be a designated hitter, and they'd like to see what he can do in the outfield for two months.

"We moved Chris to the outfield because **Daric Barton** has really established himself at first base," Forst said. "We figured it wouldn't hurt. ... There's not a big, grand plan."

Forst said Carter's athleticism will help him make the adjustment, and it's now just a matter of learning the nuts and bolts of playing left field. "Everyone agrees he has the tools to learn the mechanics of the position," he said. "We're confident in his skills."

The A's other top prospect, **Michael Taylor**, also is an outfielder, and it's reasonable to expect both will come up at some point in September, perhaps after the River Cats are done with the playoffs. Carter has 25 homers and 80 RBIs, while Taylor is hitting .317 since the start of July.

It's also possible that another outfielder, **Travis Buck**, will return to Oakland soon. If the A's bring Buck back before he has served 20 days in the minors (minus any rehab time), he will have an option remaining next season. Buck, on the disabled list much of the season with an oblique strain and leg soreness, is 8-for-his-past-18.

Briefly: Top draft pick **Michael Choice**, an outfielder from UT-Arlington, will report to short-season Class A Vancouver today or Saturday, Forst said. Choice is 0-for-3 with a walk and a strikeout in two games with the A's rookie-league team in Arizona. ... Sacramento catcher **Josh Donaldson**, up briefly with Oakland earlier this season, was placed on the DL with a sprained right knee, incurred on a slide into second base Tuesday. Donaldson had an MRI exam Thursday and said in a text that he has a sprained medial collateral ligament. ... Class A Vancouver outfielder **Zachary Hurley** was suspended for 15 games after testing positive for a banned substance.

A'S LEADING OFF

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Texas time: The first-place Rangers come to the Coliseum tonight with a 5-4 advantage in the season series, outhitting the A's .281 to .237. The challenge for the Texas batters: The pitchers they'll be facing - Dallas Braden, Gio Gonzalez and Trevor Cahill - are all coming off complete games.

Chris Carter, A's left fielder in 2011?

Susan Slusser, SF Chronicle, 8/5/2010 11:58AM

Chris Carter ([stats](#)) got his 25th home run yesterday, compensation for his 121 strikeouts. On July 28, the Sacramento River Cats moved him from first base to left field and he's [been there ever since](#), except for one game as DH. This seems to either be an admission that he's not an adequate 1B or a recognition that Daric Barton has won the job for 2011, or both. There's a [full discussion](#) of the move on Athletics Nation.

Scout.com had [this review](#) of how the Oakland A's top ten prospects are faring. As usual, it's a mix of success, failure and frustrating injuries. Besides Carter, Josh Donaldson is viewed as the most likely September callup from among the top ten. It should be interesting to watch Carter stake his claim for the 2011 roster and Donaldson try to grab the backup catching position from Landon Powell.

A couple years back, I remember doing similar "prospect watch" posts about Carlos Gonzalez. The A's brought him up too early, didn't like what they saw, shipped him back to AAA and traded him to Colorado after the 2008 season. Seems like every night on the highlights we see how that turned out. Barton and Trevor Cahill were brought up a season too early, too, but the A's stuck with them. The lesson, I guess, is patience.

Carter, Taylor ready when the A's call

Pair of farmhands hoping to join big league squad soon

By Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- It was a sight that many fans in Oakland have long fancied to behold.

As Chris Carter loomed large in the batter's box with his slightly open stance, Michael Taylor stood in the on-deck circle, swinging at pitches unseen. Beneath a cloudless Sacramento sky, a balmy evening wrapped itself around perhaps one of their final games together as Triple-A teammates.

For weeks now, many have clamored to see Carter and Taylor get called up to the big leagues.

"We joke about it a lot -- being the last two prospects in baseball to still be in the Minors," Taylor said. "But it's one of those things that we both expect to be there someday."

Sure, there are obvious similarities between the two: their hulking builds and deft ability to hit a leather sphere with a wood cylinder, but make no mistake, Carter and Taylor are not one in the same.

Carter signed with the White Sox straight out of high school in 2005, while Taylor spent three years at Stanford before signing with the Phillies in 2007. Carter is a prototypical slugging first baseman, while Taylor is an athletic outfielder who will hit for a high average and drive in runs. Taylor is a diabetic.

But perhaps the biggest differences between the two are their dueling personalities. Taylor has an infectious smile and beaming personality to match, while Carter comes off as reserved and downright shy, if not to an unfamiliar face.

"[Carter] was like that when I first met him," said A's outfielder Rajai Davis, who got to know Carter during Spring Training in 2009. "But once you get to know him, he opens up a lot more, talks a lot more. That's just him, that's his personality. That's how he's been ever since I've known him."

Coming into 2010, expectations couldn't be higher for the pair of prospects. Carter dominated the Texas League for Double-A Midland for most of the year before getting a taste of Triple-A, finishing with a .329 average, 28 home runs and 115 RBIs.

Carter has been with the A's organization since the 2007 offseason, when he was traded from the White Sox to the D-backs for Carlos Quentin, before getting shipped to Oakland in the Dan Haren deal less than two weeks later.

Taylor also carved up Double-A competition before playing 30 Triple-A games in 2009, totaling a .320 average, 20 home runs and 84 RBIs. The A's then traded for Taylor in exchange for Brett Wallace, who was the centerpiece of the Matt Holliday trade.

Since Taylor's acquisition, Carter and Taylor have often been mentioned in the same breath. Given their stellar '09 seasons and Triple-A status, their callups have become a matter of when, not if.

"I don't know if it makes it any easier, but it's someone to talk to about it at least." Carter said. "You just try not to worry about him and being like a packaged deal. I'm just trying to focus on what I'm doing."

What Carter did in May and June was struggle to hit for average. After an April that saw him hit .269 with five home runs and 14 RBIs, Carter batted a combined .220 with 10 home runs and 40 RBIs in May and June.

But then July came around and so did Carter's swing. Over his past 32 games, Carter is batting .315 with 25 runs scored, 10 homers, 25 RBIs and 22 walks against 29 strikeouts.

Taylor, too, stumbled to start the season. After batting .247 in April then missing roughly two weeks of May with a calf injury, Taylor finally broke through in June, batting .278 in 27 games. Since July 1, Taylor has hit .317, scored 20 runs and driven in 25 more.

"The good thing I like is that when they were struggling they were down, but they weren't out," Sacramento hitting coach Brian McArn said. "They battled back and they're both going to end up with good seasons. That's a step in getting to the next level."

Entering play Thursday, Carter was batting .258 with 25 homers and 80 RBIs, while Taylor was hitting .272 with five homers and 63 RBIs.

For Carter, it was a matter of getting adjusted to Triple-A pitching. McArn said Carter has learned how pitchers approach him and he's become a more patient and effective hitter lately.

"It kind of makes you want to press more and try harder or something," Carter said of being so close to the big leagues. "But you can't let that get to you and you need to keep playing the same game."

For Taylor, it appeared he was struggling under the spotlight with a new organization, at least to some members of the front office.

"I think coming to a different organization, he's had a chance to get comfortable," said A's director of player personnel Billy Owens. "With that, there's so much expectations of him coming over here with his talent level and I think, initially, he pressed. Now he's playing to his capabilities, using the field, just having a good time playing baseball."

McArn said Taylor was awfully hard on himself as he struggled through the first half of the season. But in fact it was McArn and his positive attitude who helped keep Taylor going.

"Sometimes it feels like you're climbing a mountain," Taylor said. "It's definitely been a battle for me this year, just trying to find what I want and he's been a big part of keeping me sane and keeping me positive. As long as you stay positive you have a chance to turn things around."

Taylor said people often judge players by their numbers and nothing else, but said he wants those to realize that players are people, too. They have lives outside of baseball and it isn't like any video game.

Taylor was 10 years old when he was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes.

"Oct. 28, 1996," Taylor said. "Three days before Halloween, can't forget that."

Taylor said he still gets affected by the illness, saying his vision gets blurred and at times he feels weak. But he doesn't use it as an excuse, saying all players deal with adversity on and off the field. Even though Taylor's season hasn't gone exactly to plan, he said he's happy to have found his groove at the plate again.

"My own expectations are higher than anyone could possibly put on me," Taylor said. "Fans and all the stuff that goes with that, that's great and I understand it's a part of the business. But to be honest with you, man-to-man, I could care less. I play this game because I feel like this is what I'm supposed to be doing."

When looking at Taylor's numbers, the striking difference has to be considered his drop off in home runs. After hitting 19 homers in '08 and 20 in '09, Taylor has just five this season. But McArn said he's more concerned with Taylor's ability as a hitter who can drive in runs, which he has been able to do consistently despite the dip in average.

As for being Major League ready, Taylor said he is.

"Why not?" Taylor said. "I've gained enough experience and I think these struggles have helped me a little bit, just mentally with what I'll probably have to face at the next level one day, whether it be this year, next year, two years from now or ever -- God willing. I don't see why not. If I get the call 15 minutes from now I'll be ready to compete."

And Carter?

"I think I am," Carter said. "Hopefully they think the same thing, too."

If recent history is any indication, Carter may be on his way up to the big leagues soon. After playing almost exclusively at first base to start the season, Carter has started seven of the past eight games in left field.

Given Daric Barton's solid all-around season at first base for Oakland, it seems logical to give Carter a crash course in the outfield before his callup. The way Carter legged out a double in Saturday's game at Sacramento assured he was not just a big lug, and that he can handle the athletic demands of a new position.

So will either player be called before Sept. 1, when rosters expand to 40 men?

"I think they're now getting comfortable handling expectation and realizing it's still just baseball, whether it's in Sacramento or Oakland," Owens said. "The pitcher is still 60 feet, six inches away, the bases are still 90 feet. ... It's exciting for both guys, I'm sure they've spent some restless nights wondering when their day is going to get here, but the best thing they can do is relax and just play the game."

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Six Minor League players suspended

MLB.com

The Office of the Commissioner of Baseball announced today that six Minor League players have received suspensions after each tested positive for a performance-enhancing substance in violation of the Minor League Drug Prevention and Treatment Program:

- Three Houston Astros Minor League players have received 50-game suspensions after testing positive for Methylhexanamine: shortstop Marcos Cabral and catcher Jonathon Fixler of Double-A Corpus Christi; and pitcher Daniel Meszaros of Triple-A Round Rock. The suspensions are effective immediately.
- New York Mets Minor League pitcher Zachary Dotson, who is currently on the roster of the club's Gulf Coast League team, has been suspended for 50 games after testing positive for Methylhexanamine. The suspension is effective immediately.
- Oakland Athletics Minor League outfielder Zachary Hurley, who is currently on the roster of the club's Single-A Vancouver team, has been suspended for 50 games after testing positive for Methylhexanamine. The suspension is effective immediately.
- Free agent pitcher Luis Mercedes has been suspended for 50 games after testing positive for metabolites of Stanozolol. The suspension is effective upon his signing with a Major League organization.

RoughRiders Take Series With A Come From Behind Win

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

The RockHounds will return home still in first place in a tight Texas League South Division race, but the road was a bit rough.

Frisco didn't completely "return the favor" after being swept at Citibank Ballpark last week, but the RoughRiders took 2-of-3 from the RockHounds with a 7-3 come-from-behind win Thursday night in the Metroplex.

The 'Hounds built an early 3-0 lead, but Jonathan Greene cracked his second home run in as many nights to cut the lead to 3-2. From there, the RoughRiders used a combination of key hits, walks, wild pitches and one costly error to take the lead in the third (4-3) and score three insurance runs in the fifth.

The 'Hounds went 2-5 on their one-week road swing, returning home with a one-game lead in the South. The road trip began with three, consecutive, one-run losses at Corpus Christi. The 'Hounds will now host the Hooks in a four-game series beginning Friday, also the start of a 10-games-in-11-nights homestand.

The pennant race & the wild card: The 'Hounds now lead Frisco by one game in the South, with San Antonio four games out and Corpus Christi seven games back. In the wild card race (which takes effect if Frisco wins the second half), San Antonio is back to within four game of the RockHounds with Corpus Christi six games out.

The road leads to Citibank Balpark: The RockHounds open a 10-game, 11-night home stand Friday at Citibank Balpark.

The 10-gamer will cover two weekends, plus a "Thirsty Thursday" ... and will see the RockHounds host Corpus Christi for four games, followed by visits by the top two clubs in the North Division, the Northwest Arkansas Naturals and the Tulsa Drillers. Scary stat: When the home stand concludes, there will be just 20 games remaining in the 2010 Texas League regular season.

Oakland A's MLN: Hot 'Hounds

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Aug 4, 2010

We have lots of news and notes from around the Oakland A's minor league system, including on a trio of hot hitters in Midland, the first pro struggle for Tyler Vail, the debut of Michael Choice, a 2010 draft update and more...

Trio On Hot Streaks For Midland

For the past two seasons, **Josh Horton** has been plagued by slow finishes in July and August. The A's 2007 second-round pick is looking to buck that trend in 2010. Horton hit .282 with three homeruns in July and he has four hits in 13 at-bats thus far in August.

Horton slugged .331 and .357 for Stockton and Midland in 2008 and 2009, respectively, but he has a .424 slugging percentage in 84 games for the Ports and Rockhounds this year. He has already matched his career-high in homeruns with

five. Horton's slugging percentage for his time with Midland is .377.

Since returning from the disabled list for a sprained left hip flexor, **Jemile Weeks** has been an igniter at the top of the Midland Rockhounds' line-up. In 11 games, Weeks has posted a .421 OBP. He has walked nine times and has collected 15 hits in 47 official at-bats. Weeks has scored eight runs and has driven-in three.

In 37 games for Midland this season, Weeks is batting .309 with an 842 OPS.

Corey Brown has also been helping to carry the Rockhounds' offense. Brown has collected four hits over his last seven at-bats and he had a four-RBI game on Monday. He also hit his eighth homerun of the season for the 'Hounds on Monday. He has driven-in eight runs over his last eight games. Brown has a 924 OPS and a .325 average in 66 games for Midland this season. He has a .412 OBP and has scored 45 runs.

Brown has been particularly impressive on the base-paths. Including his stint with Triple-A Sacramento early in the season, Brown is a perfect 17-17 in stolen base chances this year.

Vail Has First Poor Outing

Oakland A's 2010 fifth-round pick **Tyler Vail** had made professional baseball look easy until Tuesday night. The 18-year-old right-hander from Pennsylvania had allowed only one run over his first 13.2 innings with the Arizona League A's, giving up only seven hits and six walks. Vail was touched for four runs on seven hits in three innings against the AZL Padres on Tuesday night, raising his ERA to 2.70.

Until A's first-round pick **Michael Choice** made his professional debut as a DH for the AZL A's on Tuesday night, Vail was the A's highest pick from this year's draft to be playing in minor league games. Choice went 0-2 with a strike-out in his pro debut. He is expected to join short-season Vancouver by the end of this week.

Draft Update

With Choice now in the fold, the A's have signed 29 of their 50 picks in the 2010 draft. Five of those unsigned picks are among the team's top-15 selections, with second-round pick **Yordy Cabrera**, third-round pick **Aaron Shipman**, fourth-round pick **Chad Lewis** and 15th-round pick **Scott Woodward** still unsigned.

The A's are still hopeful of signing Cabrera, Shipman and Lewis, but A's Director of Scouting Eric Kubota termed the chances of signing Woodward as "not likely." Woodward, a centerfielder from Coastal Carolina, was participating in the Cape Cod League, but he broke his foot in late July. Before the injury, he was having a great season in the Cape and was named to the league's All-Star team.

Other News And Notes

* The A's claimed former top Detroit Tigers prospect **Jeff Larish** off of waivers on Tuesday and optioned him to Sacramento. Larish has hit 15 homeruns for Triple-A Toledo this season and was 2-for-10 with the Tigers in three big league games. He hit .216 with four homers in 32 games for Detroit last season and has hit at least 15 homeruns in all of his five full professional seasons.

* To make room for Larish on the A's 40-man roster, Oakland designated **Adam Heether** for assignment. Heether was batting .232 in 48 games for the River Cats. He could still rejoin the team if he clears waivers. **Jared Price** was sent from Sacramento to Midland.

* Stockton's **Michael Spina** hit his 21st homerun of the season on Tuesday night. He is currently second in the organization behind **Chris Carter** in homeruns. He leads the organization in RBIs with 80.

* **Omar Duran** of the AZL A's is rebounding well after an injury cut short his 2009 season. He tossed three scoreless innings on Tuesday night in relief of Vail and has a 2.30 ERA in 27.1 innings. He has struck-out 35 and has held opposing batters to a .233 average.

* Power has been hard to come by in Kane County this season. The Cougars have managed only 49 longballs in 3,552 at-bats. **Max Stassi** leads the team with 12. **Leonardo Gil** has nine and **Rashun Dixon** has seven. No other Cougars hitter has more than four. The Stockton Ports, led by Spina's 21 and **Stephen Parker's** 15, have 104 homeruns in 3,712 at-bats.

* **Corey Wimberly** now holds the Sacramento River Cats' single-season stolen base record with 44. He broke Eric Patterson's record of 43. Wimberly is one of four A's farmhands with 20 or more stolen bases this season, with **Tyreace House** (29), **Conner Crumbliss** (21) and **Archie Gilbert** (21) being the other three.

* Four of the A's six minor league affiliates boast team ERAs under 4.00 right now with Vancouver leading the way at 3.41. The AZL A's have a 3.85 mark, Kane County is at 3.93, Midland is at 3.99, Sacramento has a 4.13 mark and Stockton has a 4.88 team ERA.

Stockton Swept In 6-3 Loss To Giants

SAN JOSE, Calif. - Heading into their three-game series with the Stockton Ports, the San Jose Giants had just four home wins in the second half. The Giants nearly matched that total over the past three games, completing a three-game sweep of the Ports on Thursday by handing Stockton a 6-3 loss.

For the first time in the series, it was the Giants scoring first. Juan Perez led off the bottom of the first with a double and later scored on a wild pitch thrown by Ports starter Ben Hornbeck to give the Giants a 1-0 lead.

San Jose stretched their lead in the second by scoring what would be for Hornbeck an unearned run. After a leadoff single from Drew Biery, James Simmons hit a ball to third baseman Brandon Pinkney. Pinkney's throw to second for a fielder's choice force out was low and second baseman Tyler Ladendorf was unable to handle it, an error that kept two on with nobody out. Two batters later, Hornbeck walked Matt Klimas to load the bases. After a strikeout of Perez, Ehire Adrianza drew a bases-loaded walk to make it a 2-0 game.

The Giants tacked on a run in the fourth when Simmons hit the first pitch of the inning out to left, making it a 3-0 San Jose lead.

Despite being given four walks over the first four innings, the Ports offense had trouble gaining any traction against Giants starter Jorge Bucardo. Stockton stranded five baserunners over the first four innings.

In the fifth, however, Bucardo broke down and walked the first three batters of the inning. With the bases loaded and nobody out, Stephen Parker hit a ball off the center field fence. Jermaine Mitchell, the runner who started at second, had trouble getting a read on the play and slowed at third. It wasn't until Grant Green arrived on the third base bag that Mitchell started to go to the plate. Mitchell would be thrown out on a relay and Parker's double resulted in only one run scoring.

The Ports would catch a break, however, two batters later. With the bases loaded and one out, Ladendorf hit a ball toward the middle of the infield that got through Giants second baseman Charlie Culberson, an error that resulted in two runs scoring and a tie ballgame.

Bucardo would go 4.1 innings, allowing three runs (two earned) on three hits while walking a career-high seven and striking out two.

Hornbeck would go 5.1 innings for Stockton and also receive a no-decision, allowing three runs (two earned) on six hits while walking four and striking out eight.

With the score knotted at three, the Giants would break through in a big way in the seventh. With Scott Hodsdon (2-2) on the hill, the Giants loaded the bases with one out. Hodsdon induced a fielder's choice force out at home off the bat of Culberson for the second out. With two down, however, Biery stepped to the plate and delivered his first bases-loaded hit of the season, a three-run double to left-center to give San Jose a 6-3 advantage.

Hodsdon would take the loss, allowing three runs on three hits in 2.2 innings of work.

San Jose's bullpen held strong down the stretch. Scott Nestor (3-3) pitched 2.2 scoreless innings of relief and picked up the win in the game. Brian Anderson (SV, 1) tossed the final two scoreless innings and picked up his first save since September 2, 2007 when he was pitching for the Double-A Connecticut Defenders.

After being swept, the Ports return home to welcome the High Desert Mavericks for a three-game series. Left-hander Justin Marks (0-1, 11.25 ERA) will toe the slab for Stockton in his second Cal-League start. He'll be opposed by Mavericks right-hander Ken Kasperek (7-3, 3.17 ERA). First pitch is set for 7:05 p.m. PDT at Banner Island Ballpark.

Smith Gets Cougars Back on Track

Kane County now 4-2 with 1 left on homestand

GENEVA, III. – With a 10-hit attack on offense and six shutout innings from Murphy Smith, the Kane County Cougars cruised past the Cedar Rapids Kernels, 6-2, on Thursday night in front of 9,455 at Elfstrom Stadium. The Cougars never trailed and now can take three of four from the Kernels with a win Friday and go 5-2 on their seven-game homestand.

Conner Crumbliss hit a two-out solo homer in the third off Ariel Pena (5-4) to make it 1-0, and the Cougars scored three times in the fourth with two-out hitting. Max Stassi drove in Anthony Aliotti, and Mitch LeVier poked a two-run double to make it 4-0. The Cougars' final two runs came in the sixth and were unearned from a Kernels error.

Smith (6-0) faced the minimum in five of his six innings and gave up three hits, walked none and fanned three in the win. It was his seventh quality start in 11 tries, and the Cougars are 11-0 in games he starts. Connor Hoehn gave up single runs in the seventh and eighth for the 6-2 final, with Jose Guzman facing three batters in the ninth to end it.

The Cougars (23-16, 55-53) and Kernels (21-17, 64-42) conclude the four-game set Friday night at 7 CT. Jonathan Joseph (1-3, 4.63) is scheduled to face Max Russell (0-1, 9.00). The game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and online at www.kccougars.com with pre-game coverage starting at 6:45 p.m.