

A's News Clips, Friday, August 27, 2010

Oakland A's miss sweep in Cleveland, chance to gain on Texas Rangers

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Winning a series on the road generally gets chalked up as a success in the major leagues.

But the A's boarded their Texas-bound team charter on Thursday night knowing they had more within their grasp against the Cleveland Indians.

Vin Mazzaro served up a sixth-inning, two-run homer to the Indians' Matt LaPorta that was the difference-maker in the A's 3-2 defeat at Progressive Field.

That prevented an Oakland sweep, but more important, kept the A's from gaining a game on the first-place Texas Rangers as they begin a three-game series tonight at Rangers Ballpark.

The A's remain 8½ games behind the Rangers in the American League West. And though they could put heat on Texas by sweeping this weekend, every missed opportunity to gain ground gets magnified at this point in the season.

The A's have just 36 games left.

"We definitely were thinking sweep (against Cleveland)," catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "When you can win a series, it's always good. But when you lose a game like this, it hurts because we had a chance to win."

Cleveland, which had lost five straight, was bound to give its fans something to cheer about at some point. The Indians appeared to be swinging wet newspapers against A's pitchers on Tuesday and Wednesday, getting outscored 11-1 and combining for just 13 hits.

But they squeezed out just enough offense against Mazzaro (6-6), who didn't pitch poorly.

He gave up three runs on seven hits in 6⅓ innings, making it the 18th consecutive game in which the A's starter has lasted at least six innings and allowed three or fewer runs.

No major league team has put together such a streak since the 1997 Atlanta Braves did it in 21 consecutive games.

"When all was said and done, it was still a quality start," A's manager Bob Geren said. "We just didn't get enough runs today. We tried working our game, stealing some bases and do what we normally do. We just didn't capitalize on our opportunities."

The A's took the lead on Gabe Gross' bloop single to left that scored Mark Ellis in the second. But they left the bases loaded that inning without adding to their lead.

Cleveland made it 1-1 in the fifth but didn't score more thanks to some fine defensive work behind Mazzaro.

The A's went back ahead in the top of the sixth on a run-scoring double to the left-center gap by Kevin Kouzmanoff, who had four extra-base hits in the series.

But in the bottom of the sixth, Mazzaro caught too much of the plate with a two-seam fastball, and LaPorta made him pay.

"I just left a pitch over the plate, and he took a hack at it," Mazzaro said.

The A's, who went 2 for 13 with runners in scoring position, had a shot in the ninth against Indians closer Chris Perez.

Cliff Pennington singled with one out and stole second. But Coco Crisp took a called third strike, and Daric Barton went down swinging.

After taking two of three in Cleveland, the A's hit the meat of this 10-game trip with three in Texas and four against the New York Yankees.

They're 6-6 against the Rangers this season.

Texas native Brett Anderson takes the mound in the opener for the A's, followed by fellow lefties Dallas Braden and Gio Gonzalez over the weekend.

"Hopefully I can set the tone for it, and we'll go from there," Anderson said.

Oakland A's update: Jack Cust's all right in left in rare start

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

CLEVELAND -- Jack Cust was as surprised as anyone that he drew a start in left field Thursday against the Cleveland Indians.

Manager Bob Geren said he wanted to stack his lineup with left-handed hitters against right-hander Justin Masterson, so he started Cust in left rather than Rajai Davis and inserted the left-handed hitting Jeff Larish at designated hitter.

Cust, the normal DH, hadn't made an outfield appearance since June 20 at St. Louis, when he played two innings in right field. And he said he was a bit shocked when Geren approached him with the idea Wednesday.

He hadn't been putting in much defensive work lately because he'd been used primarily as DH.

"I haven't played much out there," Cust said before the game. "I can't say I'll be too comfortable. We'll see."

Cust's glove work can be an adventure at times. But he made the plays on all three fly balls that came his way in the A's 3-2 loss, including a sliding catch in shallow left to end the fifth when the Indians had runners on first and second with the score tied 1-1.

"Custy's good out there," said A's catcher Kurt Suzuki, before adding with a smile: "We've got Raj too. He's not too bad."

Cust led off the top of the sixth with a walk and then Davis entered the game to run for him.

Larish finished 1 for 4 as DH.

Outfielder Matt Watson was reinstated from the disabled list and outrighted to Triple-A Sacramento. That opened up a spot on the 40-man roster that the A's have yet to fill.

Watson had been out since Aug. 8 while recovering from a procedure to remove a kidney stone.

Word is circulating that the A's will abandon the black jerseys they use as alternate home uniforms and switch to gold jerseys for next season.

All indications are that the idea is a go.

It's typically the starting pitcher's call on whether to wear the white or black jerseys for home games. Gio Gonzalez, in particular, has been fond of choosing to wear black when he starts home games.

The A's recorded their final eight outs of Wednesday's game via strikeout, the most consecutive outs they've gotten by strikeout in their Oakland history.

Chin Music: Jack Cust gets start in left field; other pregame notes before A's-Indians finale

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 8/26/2010 3:48PM

Hey folks, sorry for no blog post yesterday. There was a problem with our blog site, but it's all cleared up now ...

Checking in before the A's-Indians series finale here at Progressive Field, where it's dog day. All fans were invited to bring their pooches to the park, and there's a spot in the right field bleacher area reserved for them. They just finished a dog parade around the field, and Dallas Braden and Daric Barton came out to the visitors' dugout to get a closer look. Perhaps some howling canines will add some life to this stadium tonight. It's been pretty quiet for the first two games of this series, with neither game drawing as much as 12,000. With no tarps covering the upper deck, this place feels more empty and cavernous than the Coliseum usually does ...

—Jack Cust draws a start in left field tonight, which may have made you spit out your beverage if you're drinking one as you read this. Cust has made 12 appearances in the outfield this season, but it's been quite some time, and I don't have to tell you it can be adventuresome when the big guy grabs a glove. Manager Bob Geren, who has always defended Cust as an outfielder, said he wanted to stack his lineup with lefty hitters against right-hander Justin Masterson. Jeff Larish gets a start at DH, and though he's been working in the outfield lately, Geren said he feels more comfortable with Cust out there right now.

Cust is a bit surprised himself that he's playing the outfield, though he said Geren gave him a heads-up Wednesday that it might happen. He hasn't been doing a lot of pregame defensive work because he's primarily been DH, and the A's haven't been lacking for outfielders. "I haven't played much out there, so I can't say I'll be too comfortable. We'll see," he said. "When I don't play the outfield for a couple weeks, my legs ... I feel them later in the game." That said, Cust is happy his name is in the lineup somewhere because he's feeling pretty good at the plate right now. He's 4-for-8 with a homer and three RBIs in this series. "I felt a little something in my last at-bat Tuesday (when he homered)," Cust said. "I felt something in my stance. I just moved my feet around, trying to get a base."

—The A's recorded their final eight outs via strikeout Wednesday night (two by Trevor Cahill, three each by Craig Breslow and Henry Rodriguez). That's the first time in Oakland history that A's pitchers have gotten eight straight outs by way of the strikeout. "It's one of those records you don't realize is happening until somebody tells you after the game," Geren said. "Obviously I was happy with Henry. Breslow, after getting hit in the forearm (last week), had good hop on his fastball."

Tonight's lineups ...

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

Indians — Brantley CF, Cabrera SS, Choo RF, Hafner DH, Nix 3B, Crowe LF, LaPorta 1B, Valbuena 2B, Marson C; Masterson RHP.

How the A's ballpark plans stack up

San Jose Mercury News 8/27/2010

In the continued quest to find the right home for his baseball team, A's owner Lew Wolff is being wooed most aggressively by Oakland, his old standby, and San Jose, his new flame.

The first offers the comfort of home, which it's been for the past 42 years. Anxious over its fading allure, Oakland is racing to revive Major League Baseball's interest with three downtown waterfront ballpark plans.

Yet it's San Jose's downtown proposal that Wolff has dubbed his best option, with the city contributing the land and Wolff building the stadium. After 17 months of study by an MLB committee, Wolff and others wonder if Oakland's 11th-hour pitch is truly credible.

"Oakland's effort is entirely smoke and mirrors," said Michael Mulcahy, co-founder of the grassroots group Baseball San Jose. "There is no political will and no corporate community to mount a serious effort."

Oakland disagrees, though the city has not yet committed any money to a stadium deal. Still, boosters have recruited 35 companies that have pledged a total of \$500,000 in future sponsorships, naming rights and luxury suites.

The opinion that matters most belongs to baseball Commissioner Bud Selig, a fraternity brother of Wolff's who is awaiting the committee's final report. That report will help baseball's 30 team owners decide whether the team can move to the South Bay, which is officially the territory of the San Francisco Giants.

With committee members currently tallying up each city's pros and cons, here's our own effort to assess the situation.

San Jose officials tout their plan to woo A's, but hurdles remain

By Tracy Seipel, San Jose Mercury News

When San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed talks about the selling points of his city's efforts to woo the Oakland A's, he gets right to the point: "We have the best site, we're ahead of the others and this is the place that makes the most sense."

There's an economic analysis that touts the \$130 million annual impact of a proposed 32,000-seat ballpark near Diridon Station. There's San Jose's place atop the list of highest median household incomes among major U.S. metro areas. There's

the South Bay's strong corporate base: 14 Fortune 500 companies are located in Silicon Valley, compared with five listed in the A's current territory.

On top of all that, Reed notes, the city has acquired just more than half of the 14 acres needed for a downtown ballpark, an environmental review of the site is done, and the City Council is officially on board with the project.

Perhaps most significant, the A's will pay to build and run the \$461 million ballpark with help from investors and sponsors, team owner Lew Wolff said. San Jose-based Cisco Systems has asked for naming rights to the field, though a company spokesman won't speculate on how much the firm might pay.

Still, such pluses aside, potentially significant hurdles loom.

Even after spending \$24.4 million, the city's redevelopment agency has much work ahead to complete the site. Negotiations with the two holdout land owners -- including AT&T, which says its land is not for sale -- come as the agency's budget has been squeezed drastically after local property assessments plunged.

While that means the land should be less expensive, the cash-strapped agency will likely be forced to sell more of its own assets to complete any deal. Reed and redevelopment chief Harry Mavrogenes said they're willing to sell pieces of the agency's approximately \$150 million real estate portfolio, including the Fairmont Hotel garage or annex retail, if necessary.

Critics of the project, including a grass-roots group backed by the San Francisco Giants, cite problems with the stadium's environmental report. In analyzing the traffic impact on nearby freeways and intersections, the city mainly focused on the hour between 5 and 6 p.m. But the dissenters contend that's insufficient since games will most likely start at 7 p.m. And even those traffic studies done by the city between 6 and 7 p.m. were incomplete, they say.

If a city-sponsored ballpark measure goes to the ballot, such issues could ultimately spark lawsuits by opponents, who also include residents concerned about the ballpark's impacts on their neighborhoods. Any litigation could slow down the project, which requires approval from city voters before the A's can use public funds for a baseball stadium.

City officials say the traffic studies can always be redone. And Reed, an environmental attorney familiar with such reports, doesn't believe the concerns will jeopardize the project.

"The fact that there will be traffic -- what a surprise," he said dryly. "We hope there will be traffic. We are looking forward to the day when something is going on at HP Pavilion and baseball and lots of things are happening."

But the biggest obstacle to San Jose's proposal is that it pulls the city into a battle over Major League Baseball's boundaries.

If Wolff stays in Oakland, he draws no ire from the cross-bay Giants, who were granted baseball's territorial rights to Santa Clara County in 1990. Those rights can be rescinded only by a vote of three-quarters of baseball's 30 team owners.

Nor would the Giants object to the latest effort by Fremont, part of the A's current territory. Having failed in its first two overtures to Wolff, the city has submitted its third and perhaps best offer to a panel considering the territorial-rights issue for the league. It envisions using more than 100 acres on part of the former NUMMI auto factory property.

However, there's no plan yet as to whether the city or team would buy the NUMMI parcel, which is being eyed by private developers. "We didn't even call it a proposal. It was just really a conceptual approach to developing a stadium," said Fred Diaz, Fremont's city manager.

The baseball panel, appointed 17 months ago by Commissioner Bud Selig to study the A's options, has yet to reach a conclusion, and it's unknown when the group will issue its recommendation.

That hasn't stopped San Jose.

"I can only guess what is important to MLB," said Mayor Reed. "Based on what Lew has told me, he spent millions of dollars in Fremont and he struck out. It's over. He spent years and lots of money in Oakland, and they struck out. It's over. San Jose is the best place for the A's."

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ECONOMIC IMPACT OF PROPOSED BALLPARK

An economic analysis done last year predicts a 32,000-seat stadium near San Jose's Diridon Station would lead to \$130 million in annual spending throughout the local economy and \$2.9 billion over a 30-year-period. The A's -- not taxpayers --

would be responsible for financing and building the stadium, estimated to cost \$461 million. If voters approve, the city would lease the land to the team.

Source: San Jose Redevelopment Agency

Tribe hands A's a doggone loss, 3-2

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

After dominating the Indians in the first two games of the series, and in much of the season series, the A's had a sweep in mind Thursday night, a nice warm-up before heading to Texas to face the division-leading Rangers.

Despite more good pitching and a lot of nice glove work, Oakland couldn't polish off the third and final game in Cleveland: The Indians beat the A's 3-2 on the strength of Matt LaPorta's two-run homer off Vin Mazzaro in the sixth inning.

"We definitely were thinking sweep, but whenever you can win a series, it's good," Oakland catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "When you don't win a game like this, it kind of hurts, but we're definitely looking forward to Texas."

When the teams match up beginning this evening, it will be the second-to-last time Oakland sees the division leaders this season. The A's are 8 1/2 games behind the Rangers.

"It's a big series," said Brett Anderson, who is starting tonight. "We've had a good start to the road trip and hopefully we can roll right into Texas."

Mazzaro extended the hot streak by the A's starters. In each of the past 18 games, they have allowed no more than three earned runs while working at least six innings, matching the longest such roll in franchise history. The 1927 Philadelphia A's also had an 18-game streak.

Over the past 24 games, the starters' ERA is 2.02, though their record is 10-10.

Mazzaro's only real mistake was the two-seam fastball to LaPorta that was supposed to be away but came back over the plate. "It wasn't a bad pitch," Suzuki said. "He just put the barrel on it and he's so big and strong it went out."

Mazzaro got little in the way of run support, with the A's scoring limited to an RBI single by Gabe Gross in the second and a run-scoring double by Kevin Kouzmanoff in the sixth, as Indians starter Justin Masterson kept Oakland off balance with a sinker that had a lot of movement.

A's manager Bob Geren packed his lineup with left-handed hitters, knowing lefties hit Masterson at a .309 clip, compared to right-handers' .268. That's how Jack Cust wound up playing defense for the first time since the middle of June. Asked before the game about his comfort level in the outfield, the A's designated hitter responded, "Not very comfortable."

Cust wound up making one of the A's better plays, with a sliding catch on Shin-Soo Choo's sinking liner to end the fifth.

"I was kind of joking but kind of serious before the game when I said Cust would get a Web Gem," Suzuki said.

Jeff Larish was at DH; he was an outfielder at Arizona State but hasn't played there in the pros except during spring training. Geren noted that Larish has been working out in the outfield.

The A's three lefty starters will go at Texas. The Rangers have a .268 average and a .728 OPS against lefties, .277 and .775 against right-handers.

Eric Chavez, A's brass to talk about his future

[Susan Slusser](#), Chronicle Staff Writer

Eric Chavez said via text Thursday that he'll be in Oakland a week from today when the team returns. Chavez, who has missed much of the past few seasons with injuries (most recently bulging disks in his neck), said he expects there will be meetings that day to go over what's next for him.

Chavez told The Chronicle earlier this month that for the first time, he has begun to consider retirement, and he said that he only would want to return in September if it doesn't disrupt the team.

The A's have an extra spot on the 40-man roster if they want to take Chavez off the 60-day disabled list and add him for the final month of the season: Outfielder **Matt Watson** was outrighted to Triple-A Sacramento on Thursday after first coming off the DL. Watson was out for 2 1/2 weeks after a procedure to remove a kidney stone.

That 40-man spot also could go to a third catcher when the rosters expand in September; the A's probably would have recalled **Josh Donaldson**, who is the only catcher on the 40-man besides **Kurt Suzuki** and **Landon Powell**, but Donaldson is out with a knee sprain. Oakland also could add Sacramento's hottest hitter, former Angels third baseman **Dallas McPherson**, to the 40-man as a potential September call-up.

Briefly: Justin Duchscherer, who had left hip surgery nearly two months ago, said via text that his rehab is going very well but that he's not sure when he'll be cleared to begin throwing off the mound. He is not expected to rejoin the A's this season. ... **Brett Anderson** deleted his Twitter account Wednesday after the team asked him to remove a tame but somewhat cheesy photo he'd posted the night before of himself and two female friends at a Cleveland nightspot. He had no comment other than to say that the matter had been handled internally.

A's leading off

[Susan Slusser](#), San Francisco Chronicle

Big time: Ballboy Kevin Fennell was on ESPN with the girl he got a date with by giving her foul balls, then went to New York for "Inside Edition." "Trevor Cahill might win the Cy Young Award, and Kevin will have had more national airtime," Brett Anderson said.

Drumbeat: Cust is in the outfield, first time since mid-June

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Cleveland 8/26/2010 2:29PM

Manager Bob Geren wanted to stack the lineup with left-handed hitters, so Jack Cust is playing in the outfield for the first time in more than two months. He hasn't been shagging many balls in the outfield, and when I asked him if he feels comfortable out there after so much time strictly DHing, Cust said, "Not very comfortable."

Jeff Larish is DHing; he played in the outfield at Arizona State and he said he also played there during the spring with Detroit. He hasn't played a game in the outfield in the regular-season, and he never played there in the minors, so Geren went with Cust's greater experience. Could be interesting. Kurt Suzuki promised a "Custy Web Gem," but Cust said, "lower expectations!"

Here's the lineup with Vin Mazzaro on the mound: Crisp cf, Barton 1b, Suzuki c, Cust lf, Ellis 2b, Larish dh, Kouzmanoff 3b, Gross rf, Pennington ss

It sounds as if Matt Watson has been outrighted to Sacramento after coming off the DL; it hasn't been announced yet, but I believe it's happened already. That would free up a 40-man roster spot in case the A's want to A) put in a waiver claim (and I haven't heard anything to that effect, but knock yourselves out speculating), or B) add someone to the 40-man, like hot-hitting third baseman Dallas McPherson or a healthy third catcher. Josh Donaldson is the only catcher on the 40-man besides the two big-leaguers and he's out with a knee sprain. Or perhaps they're readying the spot in case Eric Chavez does come off the 60-day DL next month.

Mazzaro pitches well, but A's drop a close one

By John Barone / MLB.com

CLEVELAND -- Vin Mazzaro pitched well enough to extend a franchise record Thursday night. Just not well enough to earn a victory for the Athletics.

Mazzaro scattered seven hits over 6 1/3 innings of three-run ball, but the two-run home run he served up to Matt LaPorta in the sixth sent the A's to a 3-2 loss against the Indians at Progressive Field.

The 23-year-old righty walked two and struck out five in his 97-pitch outing, which ran Oakland's consecutive quality start streak to 18 games.

"Vin threw the ball OK," A's manager Bob Geren said. "When it's all said and done, it was still a quality start. We just didn't get enough runs today. Three runs allowed at that point of the game is usually a good start.

"Obviously, the pitch to LaPorta wasn't where he wanted it."

Mazzaro wanted the first-pitch two-seam fastball to run away from the right-handed LaPorta. It did no such thing.

"I just left a pitch over the plate," Mazzaro said. "It ran back and he took a good hack at it."

That hack spoiled Oakland's bid for a three-game sweep heading into its weekend series with first-place Texas, which begins on Friday night in Arlington.

Geren was more disappointed in Thursday's loss than the unexecuted sweep.

"When we came into today, we weren't thinking about the last two games," said Geren, whose club trails the Rangers by 8 1/2 games in the AL West standings. "We wanted to win today. We weren't looking at two out of three or three out of three. We would've liked to have gotten this game.

"Anytime you get two out of three, it's good -- but we weren't looking at it any which way going into the game. We just wanted to take this one and go. We just didn't get enough offense to win it today."

Indians starter Justin Masterson was the primary reason for the struggles of Geren's offense. The lanky 25-year-old righty yielded two runs on five hits across six innings of work, firing first-pitch strikes to 19 of the 26 batters he faced.

"With that team," Masterson said of the A's, "you want to get that first pitch in for a strike and get them swinging a little more."

The A's took plenty of swings against Masterson that produced undesired results.

"He had really big movement on his fastball," Geren said. "We had trouble barreling it up. We tried to work our game and steal some bases. We did what we normally do. We just didn't capitalize on any of our opportunities."

Oakland did seize a 1-0 lead in the second. With one down, Masterson unleashed an 0-2 sinker that plunked Mark Ellis. Three batters later, Gabe Gross plated Ellis with a two-out single to left field.

Cleveland used a two-out rally of its own to even the score in the fifth. With two down, Lou Marson worked a walk, stole second base, took third on a Mazzaro wild pitch and scored via Michael Brantley's single to right.

The A's answered right back with a run in the sixth, making Masterson pay for the leadoff walk he issued to Jack Cust. Rajai Davis pinch-ran for Cust at first, swiped second, took third via Ellis' groundout to shortstop and scored on Kevin Kouzmanoff's double to left-center.

But Oakland's bats sputtered after scoring a combined 11 runs in its previous two games. The A's finished 2-for-13 with runners in scoring position and stranded nine.

Their 2-1 lead proved short-lived. LaPorta followed Trevor Crowe's two-out single to left in the sixth with a towering blast over the left-field wall that awarded Cleveland a 3-2 edge.

LaPorta's homer aside, Mazzaro had few criticisms of his performance -- which dropped him to 0-4 with a 3.89 ERA in six starts since July 29.

"Other than that, I thought it went pretty well," Mazzaro said. "They came out swinging. I just wanted to pound the zone and get some easy quick outs. I did that pretty well. I got through the first few innings, but it was a battle.

"I came up a little short. It happens."

The A's worked a pair of walks off Joe Smith in the eighth to put runners on first and second with one out, but Chris Perez fanned Jeff Larish and coaxed Kouzmanoff into a check-swing ground ball to first.

For all of its missed opportunities, Oakland still found itself one swing away from a reversal of fortune in the ninth.

Cliff Pennington's one-out single to right brought the tying run aboard for Coco Crisp. After Pennington stole second, Perez struck out Crisp on a 2-2 fastball and Daric Barton on a 2-2 slider to end the contest.

Minutes removed from Thursday's loss, Geren opted to look toward the future.

"We'll get on the flight and go get 'em tomorrow," Geren said. "We have to be ready."

Still, the sting of a missed opportunity wasn't easily forgotten.

"It's a little disappointing," Mazzaro said. "We took two out of three. That's not bad. It would have been nice to get the sweep, but we'll go get 'em in Texas."

Rodriguez continues to impress

By John Barone / MLB.com

CLEVELAND -- Henry Rodriguez knows how to light up a radar gun. Recently, he's been lighting up the faces of his manager and teammates.

Rodriguez struck out all three batters he faced to close out the Athletics' 6-1 victory against the Indians on Wednesday night at Progressive Field. But it was the manner in which the flame-throwing righty disposed of Jayson Nix, Trevor Crowe and Matt LaPorta that had A's skipper Bob Geren raving about the rookie reliever.

"He just keeps getting better and better every time out," Geren said of the 23-year-old Rodriguez, who has fired 7 2/3 scoreless innings of three-hit ball with an 11:1 strikeout-to-walk ratio this month. "His confidence is growing and his command is improving. The potential is so high for him. He has such a high ceiling with that stuff.

"We still have to let him keep growing, but he's really taken some big leaps lately."

He certainly pitched well Wednesday, topping out at 101 mph and registering triple digits on eight of his nine fastballs.

"It's been really fun watching him get better every time he goes out there," said starter Trevor Cahill, who earned his 14th victory of the season on Wednesday. "He just paints some of those pitches at 100-plus [mph] and his curveball is looking a lot better. The steps he's made are just amazing."

In 17 1/3 innings of Major League work this year, Rodriguez is 1-0 with a 3.12 ERA, two holds and a 20:8 strikeout-to-walk ratio.

"For him, the biggest thing is confidence," Cahill said. "He's having fun out there and working hard every day. I think he's got his mechanics down to a point where he can repeat his delivery, not overthrow and still throw 100 [mph]. That's pretty impressive."

Geren loads lineup with lefties

CLEVELAND -- How much more effective is Indians starter Justin Masterson against right-handed batters than lefties?

Athletics manager Bob Geren answered that question loud and clear on Thursday, when he started regular designated hitter Jack Cust in left field opposite the lanky Tribe righty.

The left-handed-hitting Cust entered Thursday night's series finale at Progressive Field having made 58 of his 69 starts as the A's DH this season.

Did Cust's lack of consistent outfield playing time concern Geren?

"He'll be fine," Geren said.

Cust is batting .283 (54-for-191) with nine home runs and 32 RBIs against right-handed pitching in 2010. Through Wednesday, lefties sported a .309 average across 317 at-bats opposite Masterson this year -- as opposed to the .268 mark righties registered in 269 at-bats against him.

Geren's Thursday starting lineup included a combined six left-handed and switch-hitters.

"We're just trying to get as many lefties in there as possible," Geren said.

Worth noting

Oakland on Thursday reinstated outfielder Matt Watson from the 15-day disabled list and outrighted him to Triple-A Sacramento. He had not played since Aug. 7 because of kidney stones. ... Athletics pitching prospect Michael Ynoa underwent successful Tommy John surgery on Tuesday. The 18-year-old right-hander posted a 5.00 ERA across three winless starts for the A's rookie-level Arizona League affiliate this season. ... Oakland pitchers recorded eight consecutive outs via strikeout to conclude Wednesday's 6-1 win against Cleveland at Progressive Field. Said A's manager Bob Geren: "It's one of those things that you don't realize it's happening until somebody tells you after the game." ... Third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff's 2-for-4 effort on Wednesday followed a 4-for-42 slump. ... The A's pitching staff entered Thursday's action having yielded five or fewer runs in 23 straight games, the longest streak by an American League team since the 1980 Royals (25). ... Twelve of Oakland's past 16 contests through Wednesday had been decided by two or fewer runs.

Former A's farmhand Desme enters seminary

By Tom Singer / MLB.com

The Oakland A's are mounting a surprising challenge in the American League West, but it's all on the wings of their remarkable pitching staff. For 19 straight games, Oakland starters have pitched at least six innings and given up fewer than four runs -- yet half the time it hasn't been stingy enough for a vapid offense.

No Oakland batsman has hit more than 12 home runs or driven in more than 61 runs or is batting higher than .278.

You have to figure that the A's could well use a strapping slugger who clocked 31 home runs in the Minor Leagues last year, who was the only 30-30 Minor Leaguer -- and who would be on his way to Oakland in a few days when September brings expanded rosters.

But the young man who produced those numbers will not be called up to the A's, because Grant Desme is answering a call from higher-up.

Desme, you might remember, is the former A's nugget who announced in late January that he was leaving baseball to become a Catholic priest.

His spiritual odyssey toward that goal begins in earnest today, when he is due to enter St. Michael's Abbey in Silverado, Calif., in the southern tip of Orange County.

Aug. 27, Desme noted cheerily months ago, is "the feast day of St. Monica." So the 24-year-old starts his fast of earthly delights to obey a calling he received long before finally deciding to make the break.

St. Michael's is an autonomous abbey of the Norbertine Order, a discipline demanding prayer and contemplation, as well as obedience and labor.

That is the disciplined life, eventually leading through opened doors to help others, which Desme chose mere weeks after reaching the pinnacle of his three-year professional career, by being named Most Valuable Player of the highly competitive Arizona Fall League.

According to its website, St. Michael's for 50 years has welcomed men who believe they were called to the priesthood. For most, it has remained a target much of their academic lives. A few are professionals who opt for a path away from the pleasure and glamor of their own lives.

That is Desme, who for a year tried to repress the urge to take the spiritual road.

As he said while frankly discussing his choice during his final media conference in January, "Last year before the season started, I really had a strong feeling of a calling and a real strong desire to follow it. I just fought it."

Subsequently, Desme acknowledged the frustration of "doing well in baseball."

"I really had to get down to the bottom of things -- what was good in my life, what I wanted to do with my life. And I felt that while baseball is a good thing and I love playing, I thought it was selfish of me to be doing that when I really felt that God was calling me more."

In the eight months since Desme made his decision and announcement, much has changed. Not the mind of a young man who once gave his all on the diamond and now gives himself to all.

Mazzaro yields key homer in A's 3-2 loss

ASSOCIATED PRESS

CLEVELAND — Matt LaPorta hit a go-ahead two-run homer to help Justin Masterson (5-12) win for only the second time in 10 starts as the Indians broke a five-game losing streak with a 3-2 win over the Oakland Athletics on Thursday night.

"It was a well-pitched ballgame and you need those to snap out of losing streaks," Indians manager Manny Acta said. "These guys are young and test your patience, but I am happy both kids contributed tonight."

While the dog days of summer have been unkind to the Indians, they got a small attendance boost on "Puppypalooza Night," a promotion in which fans bought tickets for their dogs.

The Indians avoided a three-game sweep.

"It makes it a little more fun to come to the park tomorrow and hopefully put a (winning) streak together," Masterson said.

LaPorta hit the first pitch thrown to him from Vin Mazzaro (6-6) with two outs in the sixth inning to put Cleveland ahead 3-2.

Trevor Crowe lined a two-out single to left. Then LaPorta, 0 for 5 in his career against the right-hander, broke a 4 for 44 (.091) slump with his eighth homer.

A few woofs of approval along with a genuine bark or two were heard from the crowd of 11,826. That included 269 canines, according to an Indians spokesman.

"Let's have one for the players," closer Chris Perez said.

"Why not? That would be fun bringing in our dogs and walking around."

Perez, the Indians' fourth pitcher, struck out four over 1½ innings for his 16th save in 20 chances.

"Was that a save or what?" Acta exclaimed. "That was a legit save, a throw back. Perez was lights out. His command was tremendous."

Masterson threw 19 of 26 first-pitch strikes while allowing five hits and two runs over six innings for his first win in four starts since Aug. 4. He improved to 1-3 in five starts against AL West opponents, including an 11-0 defeat to Oakland on April 25 in which he gave up seven runs in four innings.

"He had real big movement on his fastball," Oakland manager Bob Geren said of Masterson. "We had trouble barreling it up. We hit balls on the ground."

Gabe Gross' two-out bloop single to left put the Athletics ahead 1-0 in the second inning.

Michael Brantley tied it with an RBI single in the fifth, when the Athletics also played fine defense.

Shortstop Cliff Pennington went into the hole to backhand LaPorta's sharp grounder, then bounced a throw across the diamond that was scooped up by first baseman Daric Barton for the out.

Luis Valbuena followed with a sinking liner that center fielder Coco Crisp caught at his shoetops. With Brantley on second after a single by Asdrubal Cabrera, left fielder Jack Cust, normally a designated hitter, made a diving grab of Shin-Soo Choo's bid for a bloop RBI single.

Kevin Kouzmanoff put Oakland ahead 2-1 with a two-out RBI double in the sixth. He has 15 RBIs in 11 career games against his former team, batting .368, 14 for 38.

Mazzaro gave up three runs and seven hits over 6½ innings to fall to 0-4 in six starts since July 29.

"He threw the ball OK," Geren said. "Obviously, the pitch to LaPorta wasn't where he wanted it. It was still a quality start. We just didn't get enough runs today."

Mazzaro's outing gave Oakland 18 consecutive games with starters going at least six innings and allowing three earned runs or fewer, the longest streak by the franchise since the 1927 Philadelphia Athletics had 18 in a row.

NOTE

Oakland has not swept a three-game set in Cleveland since September 1989, but did take four straight Aug. 19-22, 2002.

Oakland catcher Kurt Suzuki went 0 for 4 and is hitless in his last 22 at-bats, one short of his career worst set May 7-14, 2008.

Cahill making a charge for Cy Young votes as Oakland beats Cleveland

Sam McPherson, examiner.com 8/26/2010

Go back to Opening Day 2010, and think about the Oakland Athletics starting rotation.

If someone had predicted that in late August, an A's starter would be 14-5 with a 2.43 ERA, no one would have picked Trevor Cahill to be that starter.

To begin with, Cahill wasn't on the Opening Day roster; the Oakland rotation featured Ben Sheets, Dallas Braden, Justin Duchscherer, Brett Anderson and Gio Gonzalez.

Of those five starters, maybe "experts" would have picked Duchscherer or Anderson to have those above numbers almost five months later. After all, Duchscherer was a two-time All-Star, and Anderson was the young star on the rise after his very solid rookie year in 2009 as a 21-year old.

Throw in the fact that Cahill's rookie year was not nearly as good as Anderson's, and Trevor would have been a distant afterthought in the discussion.

Lo and behold, with Oakland's 6-1 win over Cleveland on Wednesday night, it is Cahill who stands atop the A's rotation with those stellar numbers noted above.

And although he's a longshot for a variety of reasons, it's time to consider Cahill's season in terms of Cy Young voting.

Yes, the season is not over, and the A's 22-year old right-hander has several starts left in the season. Sure, he missed the first month of the season, because he didn't make the Oakland rotation out of spring training. We know he plays for a mediocre team that's pretty much been out of contention for the playoffs since before the All-Star break.

But surely, his season won't be ignored. He already made the All-Star team, which was a great accomplishment. So how does he stack up in terms of Cy Young consideration?

Cahill has the second-lowest ERA in the league (2.43); in addition, he's second in WHIP (1.00), sixth in wins (14), and first in opponents' batting average (.201).

What hurts Cahill is that he isn't a strikeout pitcher; he's 43rd in the American League in strikeouts (88). While he's much higher in terms of walks allowed (12th, with 46), he isn't that "sexy" pitcher who makes batters miss.

Instead, all Cahill does is win and give his team its best chance to win each time through the rotation.

Surely, some Cy Young voters will reward Cahill for that simple accomplishment.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Fresno tops Sacramento with late rally

By Annie Becker / Sacramento River Cats

Fresno took the lead with a two-run seventh inning en route to a 3-2 victory over Sacramento on Thursday night at Raley Field. With the loss, the River Cats fall 2.0 games behind the Grizzlies in the Pacific Coast League South Division standings with 11 games remaining.

Anthony Recker put the River Cats on the board with a solo home run over the center field wall in the third inning. The River Cats took a 2-1 lead in the fifth when Corey Wimberly scored Michael Taylor on an RBI fielder's choice.

Sacramento starter Bobby Cramer held the Grizzlies to one run before being relieved by Ross Wolf in the seventh. Cramer, who is coming off PCL Pitcher of the Week honors, allowed seven hits and struck out eight.

Wolf (0-1) struggled on the mound, giving up a solo home run to Joe Borchard. But the Grizzly streak didn't stop there.

Tyler Graham reached base on an infield ground ball to shortstop. Steve Holm then singled on a soft line drive to center field, advancing Graham to third with no outs. Emmanuel Burriss grounded into a force out, scoring Graham and giving Fresno a 3-2 lead.

But the Cats couldn't scratch back and remained scoreless for the remainder of the game.

'Hounds fail to cash in opportunities in loss

Shawn Shroyer, Midland Reporter-Telegram

Offense seemed to come easy for the Midland RockHounds the first two games of their series with the Corpus Christi Hooks. They had their chances again on Thursday, but couldn't cash in.

The RockHounds were 1 for 9 with men in scoring position and their two most promising innings for production turned into their most disappointing in a 4-3 loss to the Corpus Christi Hooks at Citibank Ballpark. Meanwhile a former RockHound started a rally that led to the Hooks' winning runs.

Former RockHound Michael Affronti started a ninth inning rally to help the Hooks to the victory as Corpus Christi scored two runs in the final frame.

"We didn't capitalize a few times and it cost us in the end," RockHounds manager Darren Bush said. "But credit their pitchers for making big pitches when they had to."

Affronti, a third baseman for the Hooks who spent last season with the RockHounds, came up to the plate in the ninth with a chance to break a 2-2 tie. Facing RockHounds reliever Daniel Sattler, Affronti got ahead in the count, 3-0. After taking the next pitch for a strike, he squared up the next pitch to left field for a base hit.

"I was just trying to be patient and find a way to get on base," Affronti said. "He threw two balls, so I was able to cheat and look for the fastball and have me a good pitch to hit."

Wladimir Sutil followed with a walk and Sattler (1-2) was removed in favor of Mickey Storey. Storey struck out the next batter, but then had to face the top of the Hooks order, in particular David Cook. After taking a first pitch strike, Cook launched a double to right-center to bring home both Affronti and Sutil to take a 4-2 lead.

A couple clutch at bats such as Affronti's or Cook's might have changed the outlook of the game for the RockHounds.

In the third inning, the RockHounds loaded the bases with no outs. However, they came away with just one run on a sacrifice fly to center from Shane Peterson, which was still just the first out recorded in the inning.

It was one of the few times Hooks starting pitcher Polin Trinidad faltered, but he got some help from center fielder Jon Gaston, who made another nice catch after Peterson's sac fly.

"He kept the ball down," Bush said of Trinidad. "He made us keep the ball on the ground and didn't let us drive anything. Gaston made a big catch with the bases loaded. If it falls, the bases are still loaded with a run across and no outs and who knows what happens from there."

Down 4-2 in the ninth, the RockHounds tried to put together one last rally.

Matt Sulentic led the inning off with a single and moved up two bases on a pair of wild pitches from Jared Wells. Petey Paramore followed with a walk. Sulentic eventually scored on an Archie Gilbert sacrifice fly to center, but Paramore never advanced past first as Wells picked up the save.

Sulentic and Paramore, who batted eighth and ninth, each had two hits, accounting for more than half of the RockHounds seven hits in the game.

"That's going to happen," Bush said. "Those guys (at the top of the order) have delivered a lot this year. Sometimes it just doesn't happen and tonight it just didn't happen."

NOTEBOOK

ROCKHOUNDS BITES: After receiving a scare in his previous start, Graham Godfrey looked like his old self his last time out. On Aug. 16, he left his start after facing just four batters after being hit in the forearm with a line drive. But on Sunday, he held Northwest Arkansas scoreless in five innings of work on six hits and a walk while striking out three. Godfrey was the RockHounds' Pitcher of the Year in 2009, but he struggled at Triple-A Sacramento most of this season with a 4-7 record and 5.59 ERA in 106 1/3 innings with 87 walks to 53 walks. ... Despite the low score in Thursday's game, RockHounds starting pitcher Anthony Capra and Hooks counterpart Polin Trinidad were hardly efficient with their pitch counts. In particular, the two combined for 68 pitches in the third inning alone. That inning was a major reason why Capra lasted only five innings, but Trinidad recovered and made it into the seventh.

TODAY'S PROBABLE PITCHERS: Corpus Christi Hooks (23-36) -- Erick Abreu (RHP, 2-4, 3.41); Midland RockHounds (30-29) -- Graham Godfrey (RHP, 0-0, 3.68)

Ports Walk All Over Nuts in 5-1 Win

Stockton wins series against Modesto

STOCKTON, Calif. – The Stockton Ports (67-62) won their fifth series of the month, by defeating the Modesto Nuts (66-63) by a final of 5-1. The Ports walked 10 times in the contest, and collected six hits en route to the victory on Thursday night at Banner Island Ballpark.

Ian Krol, in his Banner Island Ballpark debut, struck out six and allowed just one run, a home run, in 4.2 innings. Justin Marks picked up the win, striking out four in 2.1 scoreless frames. Scott Deal picked up his first save on the year, fanning two and allowing just one hit in 2.0 frames to close out the game. Tyler Ladendorf led the team with three hits, all infield singles, and Dusty Napoleon walked three times. Jeremy Barfield hit his 14th home run on Thursday as well.

Krol retired the side in order in the first and second before allowing the lone Modesto run in the top of the third. Third baseman Joe Sanders slammed a solo home run to left field, his third on the year. Krol ran into a little bit of trouble, following that home run. Catcher Johnny Bowden was hit by a pitch, and then Krol walked left fielder David Christensen. Erik Wetzel then grounded out for the first out of inning. Tim Wheeler next struck out, but then the Nuts loaded the bases as Thomas Field walked. But Krol got first baseman Ben Paulsen to strike out swinging to get out of the game.

The Ports tied the game in the bottom of the fourth inning. With two out, Ladendorf singled to start the offense. He took second as designated hitter Todd Johnson singled to center field to keep things rolling. Ladendorf ran toward third, and center fielder Wheeler tried to throw him out at third base. The throw went wild, and Ladendorf scored on the error, and Johnson took second. Left fielder Kent Walton and Napoleon then walked back-to-back to load the bases. But all three runners were stranded as Jermaine Mitchell struck out swinging.

The Ports took a 3-1 lead in the bottom of the fifth off Modesto righty Alan DeRatt. With two out, first baseman Mike Spina was hit by a pitch. He was hit twice in the game, becoming the second Ports player this season to be hit twice in a single game. Barfield then stepped up to the plate, and slammed a two-run shot over the left field wall to give Stockton the lead. Ladendorf next singled, but was then picked off first to end the inning.

The Ports collected their fourth run in the seventh inning. With one out, Isaiah Froneberger issued back-to-back walks to Stephen Parker and Mike Spina. The Nuts then called on Rhett Ballard to face Barfield. He grounded out, but then Ballard walked Ladendorf to load the bases. He then walked Johnson to bring home Parker. Walton grounded out to end the inning.

The walks kept on coming in the eighth inning. With one out, Mitchell walked. He then moved to second as Green was hit by Ballard. The Ports successful executed a double steal while Parker was batting. Parker walked to load the bases. Ballard then hit Spina with a pitch, to score Mitchell and make it a 5-1 game. The Nuts then brought in Stephen Dodson to relieve Ballard. Barfield grounded into a double play to end the eighth inning.

Ports relievers Marks and Deal were crisp in relief, combining to retire 11 consecutive Nuts batters at one point in the game.

The Ports will welcome the San Jose Giants to town for a four-game series starting Friday night at 7:05 PM. LHP Fabian Williamson (4-1, 4.47) will take the hill for Stockton, while RHP Jorge Bucardo (2-1, 3.81).

Cougars Drop Game 2 in Beloit

Kane County rallies in 6th for tie but never leads in defeat

BELOIT, Wisc. – For the second night in a row, the Kane County Cougars put together a late rally in Beloit. Thursday night, however, the Cougars were unable to grab a lead, and they fell, 4-3, against the Snappers at Pohlman Field. Max Peterson gave up a solo homer in the bottom of the eighth to Aaron Hicks, and that became the difference in the game. The Cougars' lead over Beloit for the Wild Card spot is back to one game with 11 remaining.

The Cougars trailed, 3-0, after five innings before they broke through against Tom Stuifbergen. Jason Christian roped a two-run triple to bring home Anthony Aliotti and Rashun Dixon and cut the deficit to, 3-2. Then Christian scored on a wild pitch to make it 3-3. That score remained until the eighth when Hicks pulled a line-drive homer to left off Peterson (4-4) to account for the 4-3 final. It was the first Beloit hit since the third inning and the first Snappers run since the second.

Starter Jose Macias gave up one in the first and two in the third before departing after three innings. He yielded six hits, walked one and fanned three in the no-decision, and Bo Schultz logged three hitless, scoreless frames in his stead before

Peterson took over in the seventh with a 1-2-3 inning. Andrey Lobanov (1-2) got the win for Beloit, and Miguel Munoz posted his first save.

The Cougars (31-27, 63-64) and Snappers (29-27, 66-59) wrap up the three-game series Friday night at 7 CT. Murphy Smith (7-2, 3.90) is scheduled to oppose Edgar Ibarra (6-10, 4.67). The game will be broadcast on www.kccougars.com with pre-game coverage starting at 6:45 p.m.

Oakland A's Prospect Q&A: Stephen Parker, 3B

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Aug 26, 2010

Since Eric Chavez started to be limited by injuries, there has been a search within the Oakland A's organization for his longterm heir at the hotcorner. The race for that spot is still wide-open, but one candidate is starting to make a name for himself: Stephen Parker. Parker has had a standout season for the Stockton Ports and is quickly positioning himself as one of the A's top prospects.

Stephen Parker's initial foray into professional baseball was somewhat disappointing. The Oakland A's 2009 fifth-round pick out of BYU was assigned to the Low-A Kane County Cougars soon after signing with the A's, but he struggled at the plate for much of his stint in the Midwest League, batting only .243 with five homers and a .674 OPS in 70 games.

Parker began to turn it around immediately after the 2009 regular season ended, however. He was a star pupil at the A's fall Instructional League and had A's coaches raving about his swing. Parker followed Instructs with a strong showing in spring training, and he earned a jump to High-A Stockton on Opening Day despite his struggles in Kane County the previous season.

After a slow first two weeks of the season, Parker has proven that the A's confidence in him was not ill-placed. Parker has been arguably the Ports most consistent hitter this season, never posting an OPS lower than .825 in any month. Overall, Parker is batting .293 with 19 homers, 87 RBIs and an .894 OPS in 127 games. He ranks third in the Cal League in walks (75), seventh in OPS, ninth in homeruns, fifth in RBIs, fourth in doubles and eighth in on-base percentage (.388). He was named to the California League's midseason All-Star team and has helped lead the Ports to a three-game lead in the second half division title standings (the Ports are also tied for the wild card spot).

Parker spoke with OaklandClubhouse.com on Tuesday about his first full season, the Ports' recent 14-game winning streak and more...

OaklandClubhouse: You guys just recently completed a 14-game winning streak. Is that the longest winning streak you've ever been a part of?

Stephen Parker: I believe so. I can't think of a team that I have been on that has won 14 straight games. It was two straight weeks of just winning. It was pretty cool.

OC: Has it changed the outlook in the clubhouse now that you guys went from being on the outskirts of the playoff chase to being right in the middle of it?

SP: Yeah, definitely. We gained a bunch of confidence. Our pitchers pitched really well during that two-week span and I think they gained a lot of confidence. Our clubhouse atmosphere was great. Everyone was relaxed and playing the way that we know that we are capable of playing. It was really great to have that winning streak going into potentially making the playoffs and I think it is good to have that confidence going late into the season.

OC: The current roster has been together for much of the season. Do you think that is helping the team at this point in the season that you have been playing together this long?

SP: Yeah it definitely has helped. We've basically had the same line-up all season. We've had a few pitchers come and go, but basically the same team. It's been good to be together for this whole six months to really learn how everybody operates and how everybody plays. We've really started to play as a team and it's been really good.

OC: You're obviously in the middle of a very strong season. Looking at your stat-sheet, you have stayed pretty consistent from month-to-month. Do you feel like you've had a swing that you liked from the beginning of the season or it is something that has improved as the year has gone on?

SP: Early on I started off a little slow. I had to make a couple of minor adjustments. But once I got comfortable with the league and the surroundings and just playing baseball again, I felt like it was back to the same game I had played my whole life. I've felt really consistent the whole year. I don't feel like I have dipped into any deep slumps or had any really high moments. I've just been consistent the whole year. That's how I've played my whole life.

OC: You are currently third in the California League in walks. Is that something that has always been a big part of your game, even dating back to college?

SP: Yeah, I've always been a selective hitter. I tend to walk a lot because I choose the pitches that I want to hit. If I don't like a pitch, I don't swing at it. A lot of times if it is a ball, I feel like I have a pretty good strike-zone judgment, so that turns into a lot of walks.

OC: Have you learned a lot between your stint with Kane County last year and now?

SP: Back in Kane, I think it was just a matter of getting used to a different style of baseball. It is different from college. Going to a wood bat and playing everyday, it was definitely a transition. Going into my first spring training and Instructs helped out a lot to kind of settle in and get comfortable with professional baseball. Once I did that, I think I kind of calmed down and just focused on playing well and it has been great so far.

OC: Do you have fall or winter league plans?

SP: I'm not sure yet. I'm assuming I'll go play somewhere, but I'm not 100 percent sure where yet. [Note: A's Director of Player Development Keith Lieppman has indicated that Parker is a candidate to play in the prestigious Arizona Fall League.]

OC: How about defensively? You played a lot of first base at Kane County, but I know that you are a natural third baseman. How do you feel like your defense at third has progressed this season?

SP: I feel real confident and comfortable at third base, even though I have made a few errors here and there. I have been working hard everyday to be more accurate with my throws. I feel like if I can improve on my throws and the accuracy of my throws, the errors will come down as time goes on. But I feel like I am making strides at third everyday.

OC: You, Grant Green and Michael Spina have formed a pretty formidable middle of that Stockton line-up. With you being the left-handed hitter between the three, does it help you to have a hitter like Green hitting in front of you and a hitter like Spina hitting behind you?

SP: It definitely does. Having a solid hitter in front of me helps and having Spina behind me, who is a big power bat, definitely helps. The other teams have to pitch me a certain way because if they put me on base, they have to deal with Spina. It definitely helps out. Every person in the line-up helps out another person in the line-up. It's good to have a solid line-up one through nine.

OC: Your numbers with runners on-base (.320/.417/.594) and runners in scoring position (.346/.457/.638) are really strong. Does your approach change at all when you know you have a runner you can drive-in?

SP: Not really. I try to have the same approach from at-bat to at-bat. I feel like sometimes if I try to change my approach I get into trouble and do something I shouldn't be doing. I kind of think up the middle and make solid contact each time.

OC: The season has only a few weeks left. Are there goals that you set for yourself that you have already accomplished or goals you are still looking to meet by the end of the season?

SP: I don't really like to set goals numbers-wise. I just always like to have good at-bats. I could be stronger with two-strikes. And definitely I always want to improve defensively. The major team goal right now is to make the playoffs, so I think we are really focused on that right now.

OC: Is moving up a level during the season important to you or is that something that you don't really worry about?

SP: It's always in the back of your mind. You always want to be moving up, but it's nothing that I can control. It's a decision that the organization has, so I really can't worry about it. I just have to worry about playing well and if I play well and do the things I'm supposed to be doing, the team will move me up when they feel that I am ready.

OC: One of the guys who was recently added to the team is your college teammate Kent Walton. Has it been fun to have someone on the team you played with in the past?

SP: Yeah definitely. It's been great having Kent here. Being an extra outfielder, he's been a good bat in the line-up and a

good bat off the bench. It's been good having a familiar face around. It's been fun.

OC: Have you been able to have your family come out from Utah to see you play?

SP: Yes. My parents and my little sister came out for the Rancho series a couple of weeks ago. It was really good to see them.