

A's News Clips, Friday, September 10 2010

Oakland A's weigh future without Mark Ellis

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Second baseman Mark Ellis enjoys the little things that have come with spending his entire big league career with the A's.

He has formed friendships with the Oakland Coliseum security guards and clubhouse staff. He often can be found lounging in equipment manager Steve Vucinich's office before a game.

Comfort comes with familiarity, and Ellis -- the longest-tenured Athletic on the active roster -- has a strong desire to stick with the team.

After the season, the A's must decide if the feeling is mutual.

Ellis' two-year, \$11 million contract expires after this season, and the A's can exercise his \$6 million option for 2011 or cut ties with a \$500,000 buyout.

What the A's do could be determined by some of the other high-priced decisions they need to make. The team is highly unlikely to pick up the \$12.5 million option on oft-injured third baseman Eric Chavez (their longest-tenured player, period). Center fielder Coco Crisp's strong second half gives Oakland incentive to exercise his \$5.75 million option.

But the decision on Ellis, 33, is not clear-cut. He tries not to dwell on the topic.

"They're going to do what they want to do," he said. "Obviously I like it here. This is where I want to be. I just do what I can to help the team win and that stuff will work itself out."

If work ethic and leadership qualities were the only considerations, this would be a no-brainer. Ellis has been one of the most respected players

in the clubhouse since breaking into the majors with the A's in 2002.

"He's always been a solid offensive player and been one of the best defensive second basemen in the league," A's assistant general manager David Forst said. "(But) Mark's value has been more than what he does on the field."

That said, Ellis hasn't stayed healthy in recent seasons. He missed the final month of 2008 after undergoing right shoulder surgery. He missed 55 games in 2009 with a calf injury and was sidelined for 28 games earlier this season with a strained left hamstring.

His offensive production also has tailed off since 2007, when he set career highs with 19 homers and 76 RBIs. Ellis is hitting .268 -- right around his career average -- and he has just three homers and 35 RBIs in 101 games, which means his streak of five straight double-digit homer seasons is likely to end.

"Numbers-wise, it hasn't been good," he said. "There's no doubt about that."

A major league scout who requested anonymity said he couldn't justify paying Ellis \$6 million based on his diminishing stats. But one move the A's might try is to buy out Ellis' option and see if he's willing to renegotiate a new contract at a lower salary.

Also to consider: Could the A's adequately replace Ellis?

Adam Rosales handled second base well when Ellis was out. But the A's value Rosales as a utility man, and he'll be coming off an ankle injury that ended his season in August.

Two highly regarded second base prospects haven't progressed as quickly as hoped. Adrian Cardenas, 22, has hammered Double-A pitching over the past two seasons but hit just .260 in two stints at Triple-A Sacramento over the same period. Jemile Weeks, 23, has been robbed of playing time with a left hip flexor problem since being taken by the A's in the first round of the 2008 draft.

Eric Sogard, a middle infielder enjoying a fine season at Triple-A Sacramento, could factor into the A's 2011 plans. Or they could look to the free-agent market, where Orlando Hudson and Cristian Guzman will be among the top names.

But A's catcher Kurt Suzuki is crossing his fingers that Ellis stays.

"We need him," Suzuki said. "He's consistent defensively and he's going to hit and provide leadership. I definitely want him back."

A's looking for home run hitters

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Oakland has one big need, and it's no secret. The A's are set with pitching, and they boast good defense and team speed.

They could contend next season, with ease ... if they add a big bat or two. Preferably two, with one threat who can protect the other.

"The game is changing. There aren't guys who can hit 50 homers, but you still have to have two guys in the lineup who are threats to hit the ball out of the ballpark," second baseman Mark Ellis said. "That would make everyone else better, too. But they're not easy to find."

Right now, Oakland's pitching staff is at the top of the league, but the A's cannot exceed the .500 mark because they are so power-short.

"It's an obvious area to address, and between now and the offseason, we'll have a number of conversations about how best to fill that need," A's general manager Billy Beane said.

A budget isn't in place for next year yet, but the team will have money - just with Ben Sheets and Eric Chavez alone, \$22 million comes off the A's books. (Chavez has a \$3 million buyout, but losing Justin Duchscherer and Gabe Gross covers that.) Designated hitter Jack Cust makes more than \$2.5 million, and his status is iffy. The team has options on Coco Crisp and Ellis, each worth about \$6 million.

The top slugger on the free-agent market will be Nationals first baseman Adam Dunn, who has averaged 41 homers the past six seasons. Dunn (34 homers this season) will come at a premium - he was looking for a four-year extension with Washington, and he's currently making \$10 million per year. If the A's are to have to shot, it's widely assumed they'll have to overpay to get Dunn to consider playing in a pitcher's park. He'll have no lack of suitors who might have more money and smaller stadiums.

"It would be great to have him," Cust said. "But I'm sure he's going to have some options. He's had a couple great years of production. He's hit 40 home runs before. I've never hit 40."

Other power hitters who will be free agents: Paul Konerko (33 homers); Hideki Matsui (18); Carlos Peña (26); David Ortiz (29), if his option isn't picked up; ditto Adam LaRoche (23).

Derrek Lee (17) will be a free agent, too, though his power numbers are down. Jayson Werth (20), like Carl Crawford (15), is expected to be pursued by teams like the Yankees and Red Sox.

Players who might be available via trade: Mark Reynolds (32), Matt Kemp (22) and Prince Fielder (30). The A's could potentially offer a package featuring Vin Mazzaro or a reliever or two to try to get a second bat. If they were to sign a big-bat first baseman or to decide prospect Chris Carter is ready to play first, they could dangle Daric Barton.

One of the reasons the A's need a boost is that Cust has become more of a singles hitter than a wall-rattler. At the start of the season, the A's clearly weren't pinning many of their hopes on him - he was designated for assignment right before Opening Day.

Did such treatment shake his confidence and result in this year's power shortage? Cust doesn't believe so.

"I just haven't gotten hot yet with the homers," he said. "I can't explain it. I feel as good at the plate as I ever have, but I'm not getting good pitches to hit. They're not going to let you beat them."

With 10 homers after three seasons of 25 or more, his position is precarious again, but Cust isn't deterred. "We've got a good team here," he said. "I'd like to think I'm possibly a part of it. We definitely need some bats, but hopefully I can stay when some other bats come in."

The A's had hoped Carter would be in the lineup by now and driving balls out of the Coliseum, but his big-league experience consists of one week and 19 hitless at-bats. Outfielder Michael Taylor hasn't shown the team he's ready, either, and he's more of a 15-20 homer type.

The team has steadily added players who might provide a bit of power: Conor Jackson, Jeff Larish, Jeremy Hermida. But few doubt that the A's will pursue a premier hitter or two on the free-agent market this winter - they have to. Their 89 homers are tied with Seattle for fewest in the majors.

-- **Of note:** The A's are one of only three teams without a 20-homer guy. The others are the Royals (Jose Guillen, 16) and Indians (Shin-Soo Choo, 16).

Fewest HRs

A's89

Mariners89

Astros94

Royals96

Dodgers102

A's leaders

Kouzmanoff14

Suzuki12

Cust10

Barton8

Crisp8

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Powerful addition: Chris Carter (sprained thumb) has come off the disabled list at Triple-A Sacramento and could be in the lineup in the next day or two for the playoff series at Tacoma. Carter homered in all four playoff games against the Rainiers last year.

Drumbeat: Bobby Cramer likely to replace Mazzaro

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser 9/10/2010 11:00AM

I'm told that Bobby Cramer is the guy who will take the fifth starter spot next Monday or Tuesday at Kansas City next week; I'd speculated about Cramer when Vin Mazzaro was sent down earlier in the week because he's put up a 1.94 ERA at Triple-A Sacramento since being signed out of the Mexican League, and when I asked about him, I didn't get the impression I was wrong: "That's an interesting name," I was told. He's the Justin James of the River Cats' starters - an out-of-nowhere signing who's suddenly making it to the big leagues for the first time. Crazy stuff, great stories.

Cramer, 30, was once a prospect with Tampa Bay, then was in the A's organization, in independent ball, back with the A's organization and then Mexico. An unusual trajectory, to say the least. His addition will give the A's four left-handed starters, joining Brett Anderson, Gio Gonzalez and Dallas Braden.

It's quite likely the A's won't announce this until Cramer is actually activated to start. He'd been scheduled to go against Tacoma tonight for Sacramento in the PCL playoffs, but Mazzaro is starting this evening.

I'm not out at the ballpark tonight, but Ron Kroichick will be handling any breaking news if the team makes an announcement, and his work will be on SFGate.com tonight and in the Sporting Green tomorrow.

So...the A's have all this superb pitching and yet they still are combing the fringes for talent and then promoting deserving long-odds guys. Perhaps they could locate a bat or two in the Northern League or Mexico?

Red Sox, A's clinging to postseason dreams

By Jesse Sanchez / MLB.com

The gloves are off.

In what is sure to be a heavyweight throwdown, Boston's Clay Buchholz and Oakland's Trevor Cahill will take the mound Friday at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum.

And it's going to be a fight to the finish. Both clubs are hanging on to their postseason hopes. Both pitchers are candidates for the American League Cy Young Award.

Neither team will go down easy.

Ding, ding.

The White Sox made Buchholz work hard in his last start, but he avoided the knockout blow by allowing only two runs over five innings in the 95-pitch outing. The White Sox, led by John Danks, won the game, 3-1.

"They put together some good at-bats, fouled off some good pitches, [my] pitch count got up really quick," Buchholz said. "I got ahead in the count most cases. They battled off some good pitchers' pitches and found a way to get on base and score some runs."

Buchholz is 1-1 with a 1.47 ERA in his last three starts and 5-2 with a 1.93 ERA in his last 10 outings. He's struck out 41 and walked 19 batters during that span.

As for Cahill, he walked a career-high six batters on Saturday against the Angels but tossed six shutout innings to become Oakland's first 15-game winner since 2007. The right-hander has struggled to control his best pitch, the sinker, over his past two starts.

"The command wasn't there, but I got out of some jams -- that was the key," Cahill said after his last start. "My goal was to not walk anybody, and I think I set the new standard of walking everybody."

Cahill is still 6-2 with a 2.42 ERA in his last 10 outings.

Red Sox: Driving in runs

Adrian Beltre came into Wednesday's game against the Rays with 999 career RBIs. He finished the contest with 1,001. The veteran also leads the Red Sox with 95 RBIs this season. ... Victor Martinez is batting .396 with five home runs and 12 RBIs over his last 12 games. ... David Ortiz hit his 29th home run of the season Wednesday, one more than he hit last season.

Athletics: On the mend

The A's have used the disabled list 23 times this season, the second-most times in franchise history. They have used the disabled list 87 times since 2007, second only to Texas (97) in that category during that span. The team will set a club record for games missed on the disabled list this season. The current record is 1,259.

Worth noting

Boston's Darnell McDonald is the only Major Leaguer with at least nine home runs and nine sacrifice hits this season. He is the first Red Sox player to do it since 1993. ... Oakland's Kevin Kouzmanoff (lower back) is improving but there is still no timetable for his return. ... Right-hander Joey Devine threw 20 pitches in his second simulated game Wednesday. ... Adam Rosales (right ankle) will visit with A's team orthopedist Dr. John Frazier in Oakland on Monday and expects to be sent home for the remainder of the season.

A's King gets another shot at Frick Award

Famous Bay Area broadcaster overdue for recognition

By Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- What would the Bay Area be without Bill King?

A figure so transcendent in the region's sports history has been shut out of Cooperstown thus far, but is up for the Ford C. Frick Award -- which recognizes excellence in sports broadcasting -- once again this year.

Truth be told, if he were alive, King probably wouldn't care much.

"He would be the first to tell you," said A's Spanish broadcaster Amaury Pi-Gonzalez, who worked alongside King for 25 years. "He was a very unassuming guy. If he was here, may he rest in peace, he would say, 'Ah, come on. What do you think about the Mariners?' He would try to change the conversation."

A's fans have the opportunity this month to demonstrate why King is generally regarded as the most popular broadcaster in Bay Area history by participating in online balloting.

Online voting for fan selections for the award will continue through Sept. 30 at the National Baseball Hall of Fame's Facebook site, www.facebook.com/baseballhall. The top three fan selections from votes tallied at the site during September will appear on the final 10-name ballot for the award. The 2011 Frick Award winner will be selected by a 20-member electorate, with the winner to be announced at baseball's Winter Meetings in Orlando in December.

Part scholar, part sailor, part bohemian, part fine arts aficionado, King was anything but ordinary. About the only time he got dressed up was to go to the ballet or the opera, which he did quite often. Otherwise, he'd rather be barefoot in a T-shirt and shorts.

"To be honest, I don't know what kind of shoes he wore or if he even owned socks," said long-time A's employee Debbie Gallas.

On special occasions, like in Spring Training, King even stripped down to a speedo to catch some rays with a game.

By land, King was renowned for his versatility in the broadcast booth. With his unkempt hair, trademark handlebar mustache and unique tone, King's vivid imagery was always matched by his unwavering objectivity.

By sea, King was free. With his beloved vessel Varuna, King sailed to Hawaii, across the Black Sea and discovered heaven on earth with waterfalls of the Princess Louisa Inlet in British Columbia.

He spent many of his years living on a house boat in the avant-garde San Francisco suburb of Sausalito. Because he wouldn't spend more than a few hundred dollars on a car, he became notorious for his cache of run-down vehicles, all of which he drove into the ground.

He taught himself Russian, was well-versed in world affairs, loved Monet and painted impressionist pieces himself. While he was also a wine connoisseur, tales of King's gastronomy deserve Hall of Fame recognition in themselves.

Raw onions for breakfast. Peanut butter and tortillas. Fine dining at America's top restaurants. King's tongue knew no bounds. Something made all the more impressive given his small, skinny stature.

"His eating habits are notorious," said A's clubhouse manager Steve Vucinich. "His body should have been given to medical science to study how he survived so long."

The essence of a renaissance man, King was at his best behind the microphone.

"Bill loved broadcasting," said long-time partner Ken Korach. "He told me that there was nothing in his life that could ever replace the feeling of being on the air, doing a game."

King got his first crack at broadcasting with the Armed Forces Network at the end of World War II, but was introduced to the Bay Area in 1958. Together with Lon Simmons and Russ Hodges, King formed the San Francisco Giants' first broadcast team. Talk about an All-Star cast.

King signed on to be the play-by-play man for the NBA's San Francisco Warriors in 1962, a position he would hold for 21 seasons. In 1966, the Warriors moved to the East Bay, where King would write his legend. He also started broadcasting for the Oakland Raiders in '66, staying with the organization until 1992.

Among the most memorable moments in King's career include the Warriors' 1974-75 season, when they won the NBA championship, and his infamous Holy Roller call with the Raiders in 1978. Not to mention the time he was whistled for a technical foul during a Warriors game after voicing his displeasure to a referee.

But it wasn't until 1981 when King would call games for the A's. Together with Simmons and manager Billy Martin, King gave a face to a franchise in desperate need of one.

When it came to his craft, there was none more dedicated than King.

"It kind of bothered him when he got older that he needed like six hours of sleep a night," Korach said. "In his earlier days he could get by with four hours of sleep. That way he could live more."

About the only time King would take it easy during the season was with the advent of Interleague Play. A baseball purist, King could be stubborn and hold firm to traditions. Whenever the A's would make their annual Interleague road trip, King and his signature "Holy Toledo!" phrase would stay put in the Bay Area.

"He thought it was a sideshow," Korach said.

During his 25 seasons with the green and gold, King saw Billy Ball, the Bash Brothers dynasty and Billy Beane's Moneyball.

Unfortunately, King's inimitable and vigorous life was cut short in 2005 due to complications from hip surgery. King called his final game on Oct. 2, 2005 in Seattle, an 8-3 A's victory, just 16 days before his death.

He wasn't about the money and he most certainly wasn't about the fame, King simply loved the game.

"I envision a shadowy image out there sitting next to the radio. I'm his eyes," King told Sports Illustrated in 1975. "If I can choose the right words to move and excite him, to tie his stomach in a knot, I've done my job and there is a beautiful satisfaction."

Stealing his new home

Buster Olney, espn.com

Chris Nelson has been in the big leagues for seven at-bats and only a couple of weeks' worth of games, but he has been in pro ball for seven seasons, after being drafted by the Colorado Rockies in the first round in 2004. So as he led off third base on Thursday afternoon, with the score tied 5-5 in the eighth inning, and he heard the verbal signal for a squeeze play from Colorado coach Rich Dauer, he knew to check the positioning of Scott Rolen, with a glance.

The Reds third baseman was playing back, and with that in mind, Nelson had an opportunity to be more aggressive, to try to make something happen. And since being promoted from Triple-A into a pennant race, Nelson has intended to take advantage of every chance he gets.

Buster's new book

Buster Olney is the author of the forthcoming book "How Lucky You Can Be" about basketball coach Don Meyer, whose life changed dramatically -- and who made life changes -- after a horrific accident on Sept. 5, 2008. Meyer was the subject of an "E:60" piece in April 2009 and was honored at last year's ESPYS. "How Lucky You Can Be" is due for release in early November.

"You can't imagine what this means to me," he said on Thursday.

Nelson looked out at the mound, where Reds right-hander Nick Masset stood. Melvin Mora was at first base, there was one out, and the slow-footed Miguel Olivo was at the plate -- a candidate for a double play. He hit into 10 last year, and he's hit into four this year.

Maybe that's why Masset seemed preoccupied with Mora at first base. Nelson looked out to the mound, and almost always in this kind of situation, there will be eye contact between a runner at third and the pitcher. But Masset never looked up at Nelson; he seemed to be staring at the ground, Nelson thought. More freedom for Nelson to be aggressive.

When Masset started his pitching motion, Nelson was already leaning toward home, ready to race home at the front end of the squeeze play, and as Masset lifted his left foot, Nelson sprinted with his head locked on home plate.

He had no idea that Masset had actually spun toward second base, in an attempt to sniff out a possible stolen-base attempt by Mora. By the time Masset heard his teammates shouting about Nelson and the pitcher turned toward home plate, it was too late; it wasn't until after Nelson touched home with the go-ahead run, he said, that he ascertained what had happened on the play.

When he got back to the Rockies' jubilant dugout, some teammates asked him how he had stolen home so deftly. Nelson really didn't know, because he had never stolen home in any game, at any level. "Never," he said happily over the phone a few minutes later.

By the end of the night, San Francisco had beaten the Padres with a bunch of homers, and the Rockies had drawn to within 3½ games of the Padres and 2½ games of the Giants in the NL West. Keep in mind that Colorado -- a dominant home team this year, with a 47-22 record -- has 13 of its remaining 22 games at Coors Field.

That's seven straight wins and counting for the Rockies, as Troy Renck writes. It will be Jeff Francis who gets the ball in Aaron Cook's spot in the rotation. The big question about Francis is whether he can stay healthy.

From his Man Cave, Hal McCoy tried to alert Nick Masset to the fact that Nelson was running.

There's a double standard at work for the Rockies' award candidates, writes Dave Krieger.

The Padres keep losing when they face teams other than the Dodgers, writes Bill Center. The Padres need to play some mind games, writes Tim Sullivan.

Heath Bell has a lot of respect for Giants closer Brian Wilson. Pablo Sandoval's mother was evacuated after the explosion in San Bruno.

Silicon Valley's plea

Some prominent CEOs from Silicon Valley want a baseball team, and they sent this letter to commissioner Bud Selig as part of their effort to get one (please excuse the edges of the letter, which is a copy of the exact version sent):

Selig has been dealing with pressure from the Giants to not give in to the Athletics' desire to move to San Jose, so it will be interesting to see how he views this pledge from business leaders to support both teams.

NL East

Derrek Lee hit his first homer with the Braves, but Jair Jurrjens has struggled recently and he got pounded by the Cardinals. The Braves missed a chance to do something, writes Mark Bradley.

It's that time of year: Placido Polanco is playing -- and intends to continue to play -- with a broken left elbow.

It has been mind over matter for Cole Hamels this season, writes David Murphy.

Brad Lidge will have a crucial side session.

AL East

Andy Pettitte came through his minor league rehab start well, allowing two hits in four innings, but he is likely to take the ball again in the minors -- which makes sense for a couple of reasons. First, he needs to build his pitch count -- he threw 51 last night -- and No. 2, if Pettitte pitches in the majors next week, he would have to start against the Rays. And with Tampa Bay and the Yankees seemingly destined to make the playoffs and perhaps on their way to facing each other in the American League Championship Series, there's really no reason for the Yankees to give Tampa Bay another late look at Pettitte.

The left-hander has been as consistent in his rehab as in his career, writes Harvey Araton. The Yankees are opening what might be a playoff preview, writes Pete Caldera.

For the Rays, the AL East title is still the big carrot. Carl Crawford is having perhaps his best season.



NL Central

Adam Wainwright and the Cardinals dug themselves out of an early hole. That allowed St. Louis to pick up a game in the standings on the Reds, who were swept in Colorado.

From ESPN Stats and Information, how Wainwright bounced back:

(A) Control: He threw 60 percent of pitches in the strike zone, third-highest rate of the season and up from 51 percent over his four-game losing streak. He issued zero walks for the first time in five starts (nine during previous four).

(B) He reeled it in: He threw 51 of 96 pitches (53 percent) on the inner part of the plate or inside, and only 31 (32 percent) away. In his prior four starts (all losses), those percentages were reversed (51 percent away, 26 percent in).

(C) He threw first-pitch strikes to 21 of 29 batters (72.4 percent), his best in 14 starts and well up from the 56.7 percent over his losing streak. He retired 19 of the final 21 batters, and got the other two on double plays, meaning he faced the minimum from innings 2 through 8. The longest of those innings was 14 pitches, and two were in single digits.

(D) He threw 16 changeups, tied for most in a game this season. The Braves went 0-for-5 when putting it in play.

AL Central

Matt Fox, who made the emergency start for the Twins last weekend, was claimed on waivers by Boston -- but you can bet Fox is already engrained into Minnesota Twins lore for his one strong outing, and is an answer to a newborn trivia question.

The Twins' lead is at a staggering six games after the White Sox loss on Thursday, but Minnesota has stuff remaining on its to-do list, as Joe Christensen writes.

The White Sox lost to Detroit on Thursday and feel that they got punched in the nose, writes Joe Cowley. Mark Teahen is being kept away from third base. And Bobby Jenks has the dreaded forearm tightness.

Moves, deals and decisions

1. With Tony La Russa nearing the end of his one-year contract with the Cardinals, there are folks with other teams reading the tea leaves. And some are assuming that all of the recent machinations -- the handling of Colby Rasmus, the report that the center fielder may or may not have asked for a trade, La Russa's effusive praise of his *former* general manager -- mean that the future Hall of Famer could be more open to leaving St. Louis at year's end.
2. La Russa and his boss agree that the trade of Ryan Ludwick was designed to improve the pitching.
3. Phil Coke might join the Tigers' rotation next season.
4. The Indians are inviting 50 players to their instructional league.
5. The Astros made changes in their farm system, writes David Barron.
6. Voters will have to make a choice between CC Sabathia and Felix Hernandez for the AL Cy Young Award, writes Geoff Baker.
7. Mark Ellis' future with the Athletics is unclear, writes Joe Stiglich.
8. The sad exit of Scott Kazmir has worked out well for the Rays, writes John Romano.
9. The D-Backs' GM search is intensifying, writes Nick Piecoro. Arizona is making it clear that the next GM is going to make a relatively low salary, and the assumption among rival executives is that this will probably help the chances of interim GM Jerry DiPoto of keeping the job. It's hard to imagine an experienced GM like Kevin Towers would take this job for less than \$1 million when he could have other opportunities in the next year for a lot more. Arizona's best GM and managerial bets are already in place, writes Bob Young.
10. Mike Quade might have other opportunities if he isn't kept on as the Cubs' next manager, writes Gordon Wittenmyer.
11. Paul Konerko deserves a new deal, writes David Haugh.

Thursday's games

1. Rick Porcello was The Man for the Tigers against the White Sox, as Perry Farrell writes.
2. Chris Johnson had a big hit for the Astros.
3. Colby Lewis shut down the Jays. The Texas pitching staff is racking up a ton of strikeouts. The Rangers will need more from C.J. Wilson, writes Evan Grant.
4. The Dodgers -- another game, another loss, as Jim Peltz writes.
5. Jose Bautista hit home run No. 44 in a Toronto defeat. Shawn Hill made it back on the mound for the Jays.

Dings and dents

Joel Pineiro is likely to be activated today, as Mike DiGiovanna writes within this notebook.

The Patience Index

Wait Your Turn Overdrive

These hitters saw the most pitches per plate appearance on Thursday.

Hitter	Pitches	PA	Pitches/PA
Jason Giambi, COL	27	4	6.75
Austin Jackson, DET	29	5	5.80
Chris Johnson, HOU	22	4	5.50
Eric Young, COL	22	4	5.50
Humberto Quintero, HOU	16	3	5.33
Trent Oeltjen, LAD	16	3	5.33
Chris Iannetta, COL	16	3	5.33
All of MLB, Thursday	1678	435	3.86

Other stuff

- Larry Stone has some thoughts about the [Howard Lincoln e-mail](#).
 - The feds obtained [documents related to Roger Clemens](#) from the Yankees and the [Toronto Blue Jays](#), writes Michael O'Keefe.
 - [Miguel Cabrera](#) is absolutely [the Most Valuable Player](#) of the American League, writes Michael Rosenberg.
 - Since being berated by [Luke Scott](#), [Felix Pie](#) has been a [hit with teammates](#), writes Jeff Zrebiec.
 - A pitcher has taken an [unusual route](#) to the Brewers, writes Tom Haudricourt.
 - [Jarrod Saltalamacchia](#) is cherishing the chance [to prove himself](#), writes Daniel Barbarisi.
 - A scout [stuck by Domonic Brown](#), writes Matt Gelb.
 - The pitching in the Pirates' organization [is better](#), but more progress is needed, as Dejan Kovacevic writes.
 - The Athletics are looking for some [home run hitters](#), writes Susan Slusser.
 - [Austin Jackson](#) has been [amazing](#), says Al Kaline.
 - [Darnell McDonald](#) has earned an [offseason vacation](#), writes Peter Abraham.
 - Some [Mets volunteered](#). It's time for the no-show Mets [to just go](#), writes Mike Lupica.
- The soldiers at Walter Reed [deserved better](#), writes David Lennon.
- Josh Fields' time in Double-A helped [put the fun back](#) into baseball for him, writes Bob Dutton.
 - Adam Kilgore wonders if [Ian Desmond](#) is a [Rookie of the Year candidate](#).
 - It doesn't look like there will be carryover from the [Nationals-Marlins brawl](#) into this weekend's series.
 - The basketball series "White Shadow" had a [big impact in Turkey](#).
 - The modern definition of bitterness is the man or woman who not only suffers the defeat of his or/her favorite team, but also the repeated fantasy failures of the kicker on the *other* team. So in other words, I was the modern definition of bitterness during the Vikings' loss Thursday night.
 - Very happy birthday wishes to my sister Amelia, who knows as well or better than anyone: Today will be better than yesterday.

Is It Next Year Yet?

He has the AL's best starters, and cash to spend this winter. Will Billy Beane finally build another contender in 2011??

Ben Reiter, Sports Illustrated 9/12/2010

The usually even-keeled Trevor Cahill was a bit worked up after his Aug. 30 start at Yankee Stadium. Yes, the A's righthander, a onetime Dartmouth recruit with an endearingly wry sense of humor ("He's got a little Steven Wright to him," says G.M. Billy Beane, referring to the skulleted master of the one-liner), had been rocked for eight runs in four innings. But it was the Yankees' caterers, not their hitters, that had him so animated. "They had filet, chicken, a guy making pasta," Cahill said three days later, still marveling about the spread in the visitors' clubhouse. "I think if our team played here, everyone would be pretty fat."

These have been lean years for the A's, who have won 75, 75 and 76 games since their last postseason appearance, in 2006. At week's end they were on pace to win 80 this season, a modest improvement, but there's reason for Oakland to look ahead eagerly to 2011. Through Sunday the A's starters led the league with a 3.45 ERA, which would be the lowest full-season mark for any AL rotation since 1989. Even better: The group is young and should return intact next year. Cahill, a fringe Cy Young candidate at 15--6 with a 2.72 ERA, is only 22, and other than Dallas Braden, 27, none of the current starters—lefthanders Brett Anderson and Gio Gonzalez and righty Vin Mazzaro—is older than 24. Next season the group will likely earn less than \$4 million combined; no one will be eligible for free agency until at least 2014. "*Young* is synonymous with *low cost*," says Beane. "It's a more politically correct term."

With his starters locked up and some \$28 million coming off the payroll due to the expiring contracts of veterans such as Eric Chavez, Mark Ellis and Ben Sheets, Beane will have something this winter he rarely has: money to spend. (Oakland's \$51.7 million payroll this season ranked 27th.) That's good, because the offense—11th in the AL in runs—needs an upgrade. The signing of a free-agent slugger like Adam Dunn, Paul Konerko or Jayson Werth could change that. "I'd expect [the A's will] be in the mix for a few of them this winter," says one rival G.M.

Beane won't commit to chasing free agents: "I'm not quite sure yet there's just one player that provides the panacea for this club," he says. Besides, his farm system boasts a quartet of top hitting prospects—Triple A outfielders Chris Carter and Michael Taylor, 2009 first-round pick Grant Green (a shortstop) and '10 first-rounder Michael Choice (outfield)—who could provide a power boost as early as next spring.

This A's team is a reverse image of the teams Beane built in the late '90s. Back then he had a foundation of young hitters—Chavez, Jason Giambi and Miguel Tejada—which he augmented with pitching prospects Tim Hudson, Mark Mulder and Barry Zito. Those teams became perennial contenders. Now Beane has a foundation of young pitchers, a stockpile of hitting prospects and could add a veteran or two in free agency. In the coming years Cahill could have many more chances to sample Yankee Stadium's delicacies—in October.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Sacramento loses late, faces elimination

By Robbie Enos / Sacramento River Cats

Dustin Ackley of the Tacoma Rainiers turned around the River Cats' season in a quick swing of a bat. Now, because of him, the Cats need a great comeback to keep their season alive.

Tacoma stuck a dagger into the River Cats' gut with an Ackley grand slam in the top of the sixth inning. Ackley battled to a full count and then pulled a fastball over the plate down the right-field line. The liner bounced off the foul pole, barely fair, and gave Tacoma a 5-1 lead. They held on to win 8-5.

"I was just trying to put a good swing on something," Ackley said after the game. "It seemed like I didn't get that pitch and he got ahead of me, but I ended up working it to 3-2 and he gave me the changeup. That was the pitch he threw me in the previous at-bat, and I just put a good swing on it."

The grand slam was the product of hard working, disciplined at-bats by the Rainiers. With runners on second and third, catcher Eliezer Alfonzo worked River Cats starter Travis Banwart for eight pitches before popping out. Then shortstop Jeffrey Dominguez worked another eight pitch at-bat, this time ending in a walk. That loaded the bases for the Ackley granny and set the table for a Rainiers victory.

"Banwart pitched a hell of a game," River Cats manager Tony DeFrancesco. "He had his good stuff with him, but unfortunately it didn't work out."

DeFrancesco did not feel that the ball was fair, and came out to contest the call, but his argument did not hold up.

"I didn't see it go off the foul pole," DeFrancesco said. "It was not so obvious to me, so that's why I went down there to argue it. It was a big play."

Down 5-1 in the seventh, the Cats didn't give up so quickly, coming back with four runs in the seventh. Michael Taylor singled to right field before Wimberly and Sogard hit back-to-back base knocks to center field, giving the Cats their second run of the night.

The River Cats tied the game thanks to a Tommy Everidge three-run homer. After Tacoma starter Blake Beavan was taken out with two outs, reliever Levale Speigner served up a gopher ball on his very first pitch to Everidge.

Tacoma struck their final blow off a Jeffrey Dominguez triple with one out in the eighth that scored pinch-runner Mike Wilson from first. Brad Nelson led off the inning by hitting into an Adrian Cardenas error at second before Dominguez swatted a liner to center field that went past the diving Corey Brown of the River Cats.

Tacoma scored another run off an Ackley single to right-center. That hit also escaped the grasp of a River Cat defender, as Ackley hit a high hopper at Cardenas who leaped in the air in an attempt to get the ball, but came down empty handed. A sacrifice fly off the bat of Mike Carp tallied another run and gave Tacoma an 8-5 lead.

Wimberly had an outstanding game, going 4-for-5 with a triple and two runs. Second baseman Eric Sogard and Everidge both had two hit days and a run.

"I just swung at good pitches today," Wimberly said. "I battled every at-bat. We played hard. This is what it comes down to though. You just have to keep going out there and play hard, try to win three over there."

Sogard gave his thoughts on what he felt Sacramento needed to do to win the game.

"I hear he throws a lot of strikes," said Sogard before the game, speaking of Tacoma starter Blake Beavan. "He's going to come out early and throw a lot of fastballs, so we're going to want to make sure we come out and get after him. The biggest key is to not let up the whole game. Yesterday we got up by seven runs and couldn't hold it, so today hopefully we can get a big lead and hold it."

The River Cats could not accomplish either of those goals throughout the game, scoring just two runs against Beavan in 6.2 innings. Beavan was aggressive as the Cats thought, throwing 70 percent (58 of 84) of his pitches for strikes. Sacramento never held a lead in the game.

"Beavan's key to success on the mound was throwing strikes," Tacoma manager Juan Castro said after the game. "He just needed to get ahead and keep the ball down."

The Rainers displayed an array of offensive talents in the first inning, getting things started with an Ackley infield single, Greg Halman four-pitch walk, and a Mike Carp scorching line drive to right field to load the bases. Tug Hulett hit a sacrifice fly to left-center to bring in Ackley. No more runs would score, but Banwart walked another batter and labored through 27 pitches.

Sacramento battled back with their own offensive talents against Beavan, starting with a Wimberly triple to lead off the third. Wimberly stroked the first pitch he saw down the right-field line, hustling all the way to the third. Sogard hit a high blooper into right field, falling between right fielder David Winfree and first baseman Justin Soak for an RBI single.

Everidge got things rolling with another bloop single to right, landing in almost the same exact spot as Sogard's. With runners on the corners and one out, Sacramento hit a huge speed bump thanks to the Tacoma defense. Matt Watson hit a fly ball to center field that looked like it would score Sogard on a sacrifice, but the center fielder Halman fired a one-hopper to home plate, nailing Sogard at the plate for the 8-2 double play.

Banwart came into his own after the one-run first, retiring 12 of the next 15 batters. He struck out eight batters in that span and kept the Rainers scoreless through five. After Ackley's grand slam, Banwart was taken out of the game after throwing 116 pitches.

The River Cats will now need three consecutive games against the Rainers in Tacoma to advanced to the PCL Championship Series. The Cats were outscored 18-13 in the first two games. "These were two good games," DeFrancesco said. "The thing

we need to improve on is our pitching. It's a good hitting club over there. Sometimes when you score eight or five runs it's good enough, but we need to have better pitching."

Meanwhile, Tacoma will try to keep their momentum going and finish the series up at home.

"I think just playing defense will be the key for us," Ackley said. "They put the ball in play real well and they have a bunch of good hitters. If we play defense and our hitters keep hitting the way they've been hitting, I think we have a good shot."

Wimberly feels the team needs to hold on to and maintain a lead, something they didn't do in either game.

"I believe the key to winning over there is going to be getting ahead and staying ahead," Wimberly said. "Once we do that, we're on a roll."

Riders Even Series Behind Perez and Beltre

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

The Frisco RoughRiders needed a win Thursday to avoid going down, 2-0, in the Texas League South Division Championship Series. They got the win, and did it with emphasis.

Martin Perez was dominant. The 19-year-old top five prospect for the Texas Rangers allowed just one run on two hits, walking one and striking out seven over 6.0 innings of work.

By the time Shane Peterson got the 'Hounds first hit ... a 2-out triple in the 4th ... the RoughRiders led, 5-0, and were well on the way to squaring the series.

Engel Beltre and Jonathan Greene each drove in three runs, each with a 2-run home run and an RBI single.

The series now becomes a best 2-of-3, with the South Division pennant ... and a trip to the Texas League Championship Series ... on the line this weekend at Citibank Ballpark.

The playoffs now move to Citibank Ballpark!

Game 3 - Thirsty Friday with Half-price soda and draft beer ...

Game 4 Saturday night playoff baseball with post-game fireworks ...

Game 5 If there is a decisive fifth game, the RockHounds will host it Sunday at 6!

Nuts Sweep Ports in Mini-Series

Stockton Ports end season on Thursday

STOCKTON, Calif. – The Modesto Nuts (2-0) swept the Stockton Ports (0-2) in the California League Mini-Series with a 6-2 win on Thursday at Banner Island Ballpark. The Nuts advanced to the North Division Series to take on the San Jose Giants, while the Ports saw their season come to a close.

The Ports outhit the Nuts in Thursday's game, but the Ports left 10 runners stranded and went 4x13 with runners in scoring position. Grant Green finished the contest 3x5 with a double, while Todd Johnson, Stephen Parker, Jeremy Barfield and Tyler Ladendorf finished the game with two hits apiece.

Starter Justin Murray collected the loss, allowing six runs (two earned) on nine hits in 4.2 innings. Scott Deal, A.J. Huttenlocker, Mike Hart and Andrew Carignan all appeared in relief for Stockton and held the Nuts scoreless. Modesto starter Juan Nicasio collected the win, striking out eight and allowing one run on six hits in 6.0 innings.

The Nuts pulled ahead to a 4-0 lead in the second inning, on four consecutive RBI singles. Right fielder Jimmy Cesario was hit by a pitch to start the inning. He moved to second as Ryan Peisel walked. Catcher Dustin Garneau hit into a fielder's choice which put out Cesario at third. Murray then struck out left fielder David Christensen. With two on and two out, shortstop Erik Wetzel hit an RBI single toward shortstop to score Peisel. Garneau scored the second Nuts run on a single to left field by Tim Wheeler. Designated hitter Michael Zuanich singled to left field to bring home Wetzel and make it a 3-0

game. Ben Paulsen collected his second hit of the game to score Wheeler. Joe Sanders hit into a fielder's choice to end the inning.

The Ports scored their first run in the fourth inning to make it a 4-1 ballgame. With one out, shortstop Green singled. He moved to third on a double off the mini monster wall in left field by Parker. Mike Spina grounded out to Nicasio for the second out of the inning. Barfield then stepped up to the plate and singled to left field, which allowed Green to score. Both runners were left stranded as Ladendorf grounded out.

The Nuts answered right back in the top of the fifth to pad their lead. With two out, Cesario singled to short to get things rolling. Murray then gave up a two-run shot to Peisel. It was Peisel's first home run of the playoffs. The Ports then called on Deal, who got Garneau to ground out to end the inning.

The Ports had their scoring chances in the seventh, but left runners on the corners. Stockton scored its second and final run in the eighth inning. Green slammed a double off the Food 4 Less sign in left field. Parker came up to bat and singled. Green scored and Parker moved to second on a passed ball by Garneau while Spina was batting. But the Nuts retired Spina and Barfield to end the inning.

Things got interesting in the bottom of the ninth, as the Ports brought the tying run to the plate. With one out, catcher Dusty Napoleon (who replaced Yusuf Carter in the top of the seventh) singled. Left fielder Kent Walton then struck out for the fourth time of the night. Johnson stepped up to the plate and singled to left field. Designated hitter Brandon Pinckney then came up to bat and singled to the pitcher. With the bases loaded, Green came to bat. He worked a full count before lining out to Peisel at third base, who made a great grab to keep the ball from going down the line and allowing runs to score. The catch sealed the Modesto victory.

The Ports end the season with a 74-66 overall record in the regular season. They finished the season in second place in the North Division, after ending the first half in fourth place. The Ports went 0-2 in the playoffs and are now 111-99 in the California League playoffs.

Cougars Save Season, Force Game 3 **Kane County wins in must-win contest**

DAVENPORT, Iowa – The Kane County Cougars faced a must-win situation Thursday night at Modern Woodmen Park, and their five-run second inning proved to be enough as they hung on to beat the Quad Cities River Bandits, 5-4, in Game 2 of the best-of-three quarterfinal playoff series. Jonathan Joseph pitched five solid innings for the win, and the Cougars used two-run homers by Rashun Dixon and Conner Crumbliss to fuel the offense.

The Cougars had not scored a run in 22 consecutive innings when Dixon blasted a two-run shot off Michael Blazek (0-1) in the second. Mike Gilmartin followed with an RBI double, and Crumbliss smashed a two-run shot of his own later in the frame to make it 5-0. The Cougars never scored again and had only four hits the rest of the way, but their early production held up.

Joseph (1-0) gave up his only run in the second and fanned seven over five frames. He yielded two hits and walked three. Ryan Doolittle gave up two runs in the sixth, Josh Lansford tossed two perfect innings, and Jose Guzman, Max Peterson and Bo Schultz each recorded a strikeout in the ninth to end it. Guzman had ceded one run to make it 5-4, and Schultz fanned Ross Smith with the tying run at first for the save.

The series-deciding game is Friday night at 7 CT, again in Quad Cities. Chris Mederos (7-5, 3.01) will face Daniel Bibona (4-0, 1.91). The game will be broadcast on www.kccougars.com with pre-game coverage starting at 6:45 p.m.

Grant Green Reworks Swing From The Inside-Out

By Casey Tefertiller, Baseball America 9/3/2010

OAKLAND—Almost immediately after shortstop **Grant Green** signed with the Athletics as the 13th overall pick in 2009, he faced a hurdle so daunting that most players would be intimidated.

Green had been a good, and occasionally great, college hitter at Southern California. But after signing for \$2.75 million, the A's wanted him to change just about everything in his swing.

"It was difficult," Green said. "I changed my swing from the college metal-bat swing, staying inside the ball and going opposite field, to a pro swing, pulling the ball. It was a complete 180 from what I had been doing."

So Green, 22, worked diligently with hitting coaches **Greg Sparks** and **Tim Garland** to make the adjustment.

"I've always, ever since I could remember, had a little trouble pulling the ball," Green said. "I've been told I had a **Derek Jeter** swing, where I stay inside the ball. So I had to learn how to pull when I can, to look for the ball inside so I can do some damage with it rather than hit it up the middle.

"I'd say I've made a little progress with that."

That's a big understatement. Green emerged as a dominant hitter in the high Class A California League, batting .315/.359/.512 through 502 at-bats for Stockton, racking up 17 home runs, 36 doubles, six triples and 77 RBIs.

"He really has an exceptional feel for the offensive game," farm director **Keith Lieppman** said. "He puts together solid, consistent at-bats."

Despite a .920 fielding percentage and a Cal League leading 34 errors, Green had made improvements to his defensive play at shortstop, Lieppman said. He credits Green with an improved ability to read the ball off the bat, though he had not yet proven he has sufficient arm strength for the left side of the infield.

"My goal has always been to play as a shortstop at the big league level," Green said. "(A's starter **Cliff Pennington** is) doing very well. The final goal is just to get there.

"I would love to play as a shortstop, but if it means making the majors, I would suck up my pride and make the switch (to second base)."

A's ACORNS

- Triple-A Sacramento slugger **Chris Carter** will spend the winter playing in the Mexican Pacific League, where the plan calls for the natural first baseman him to focus on the finer points of playing left field. He went 0-for-19 with nine strikeouts during his first callup to Oakland.
- Sacramento righthander **Tyson Ross**, who began the year in the Oakland bullpen, suffered a strained ulnar collateral ligament in his elbow that knocked him out for the season. He landed in the Sacramento rotation in July, just long enough to make six starts.