

A's News Clips, Monday September 13, 2010

Oakland A's vent anger at home plate umpire after 5-3 loss to Boston Red Sox

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Judged on its own, the A's nine-game homestand was a success considering they went 6-3.

But the A's collectively had steam coming out of their ears after a 5-3 defeat to the Boston Red Sox in front of 19,806 Sunday at the Oakland Coliseum.

A primary factor behind their frustration was the strike zone of home plate umpire Hunter Wendelstedt.

"Terrible," said first baseman Daric Barton, who earned a postgame ejection after arguing the called third strike he took to end the game.

In reality, it was a combination of events that made it a lousy afternoon for the home team.

Starting pitcher Dallas Braden (9-12) watched a 3-0 lead disappear after he couldn't close the lid on Boston's two-out rally in the sixth that led to four runs.

And the A's couldn't fully capitalize on the wildness of Red Sox starter Josh Beckett (5-4), who walked four consecutive batters in the third, the first time in his career he had done so.

It didn't help that the Texas Rangers finished off a three-game sweep of the New York Yankees, opening up an 8 1/2-game lead on the A's in the American League West.

Had the Yankees not blown a ninth-inning lead to Texas on Saturday -- and had the A's made Sunday's three-run lead hold - - Oakland would be looking at a 6 1/2-game deficit.

It's a different story now. If Texas goes 7-12 over its final 19 games, the A's would have to go 16-4 in their final 20 just to tie.

"Winning every series is what you want to do," A's manager Bob Geren said. "But it's a little disappointing today because of the (missed) opportunities "..."

The A's took a 1-0 lead when Beckett issued four straight walks in the third -- the final free pass to Jack Cust forcing in a run. Mark Ellis' two-run double in the fifth made it 3-0.

Braden came in 20-2 in 27 career starts when given three or more runs of support. But things unraveled with two outs in the sixth.

A double, an infield single and a walk loaded the bases. Then J.D. Drew sliced a two-run double down the left-field line to make it 3-2.

With runners on second and third, Geren called on Henry Rodriguez to relieve Braden, and Rodriguez surrendered a two-run single to pinch hitter Ryan Kalish that put Boston ahead 4-3.

In the eighth, a throwing error by reliever Jerry Blevins on Drew's infield single allowed another run to score.

Cliff Pennington, Coco Crisp and Barton all took called third strikes against Jonathan Papelbon in the ninth to end it.

Geren came out to separate Barton from Wendelstedt and then had words with Wendelstedt. But Barton's expletive-laden shouting in the clubhouse afterward suggested he thought A's hitters should have gotten more backing from their manager regarding the strike zone.

His yelling came within earshot of Geren's office as Geren addressed the media.

But the A's hurt themselves by going 2 for 10 with runners in scoring position.

"I understand you've gotta battle with two strikes," said Ellis, who was called out looking with the bases loaded and one out in the third. "(Wendelstedt) thought it was a strike, I thought it was a ball. We didn't lose the game because of the umpiring."

Said Braden: "I don't ever really complain about balls and strikes just because I think stuff like that kind of evens itself out throughout the season. But today was bad, period. We're held to a standard and (umpires) should be as well."

Oakland A's update: Team to sign veteran infielder Akinori Iwamura

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Infielder Iwamura to sign; he'll join team today

The A's were poised to sign free-agent infielder Akinori Iwamura on Sunday, assistant general manager David Forst confirmed.

Iwamura, 31, was released Friday by the Pittsburgh Pirates. Forst said Iwamura will join the team for the start of a six-game road trip today in Kansas City.

Iwamura is a .270 hitter through four major league seasons, the first three of which were spent with Tampa Bay. He was hitting just .182 through 54 games this season.

Iwamura has played primarily second and third in his big league career, and his signing likely was spurred by starting third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff's lower back spasms. Kouzmanoff has missed the past six games.

Steve Tolleson and Jeff Larish have platooned at third base in Kouzmanoff's absence.

The A's are giving a late-season look to players who have been discarded by other teams.

They recently signed outfielder Jeremy Hermida, released by Boston on Aug. 31. Hermida started in right field Sunday and is 2 for 15 in five games.

Left-hander Bobby Cramer will start today against the Royals, making his major league debut at age 30.

Since 1957, the only American-born pitcher older than Cramer to start in his debut was the Milwaukee Brewers' David Manning, who did so Aug. 2, 2003, at 30 years, 353 days. He was 33 days older than Cramer is.

The A's took a chartered flight to Kansas City immediately after Sunday's 5-3 loss to Boston. That's slicker accommodations than Cramer had in the minors.

"If I was in Triple-A, we'd go back to the hotel, have a 3:30 a.m. wake-up call, a 4 o'clock bus to the airport and a 6:30 flight out" the next morning, he said.

In attendance today will be Cramer's mother, Barbara; his girlfriend, Kaylynn Pefley; and best friend, Alex Meza.

Cramer's father, Bob, won't be there. He's in Alaska visiting Cramer's brother, Chris, whose wife gave birth to a son Aug. 27.

"It's been a big couple weeks for our family," Cramer said.

Mark Ellis has a career-high 12-game hitting streak. He's hitting .444 (20 for 45) over that span. ... Coco Crisp has seven steals in the past four games. His 22 straight steals without being caught is the longest A's streak since Stan Javier set an Oakland record with 28 straight in 1995.

Leaving Oakland on a down note

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

To keep things interesting the next time they play at home, the A's will have to kick it into gear on the road this week and not squander the types of chances they had Sunday.

During a 5-3 loss to Boston, Oakland gave away the lead and whiffed on several scoring chances, falling another game behind Texas. But even though the A's, now 8 1/2 games back of the Rangers, couldn't pull off a sweep of the Red Sox, the 6-3 homestand was a good one.

The Rangers come to Oakland for four games beginning Sept. 23.

"We've played well at home all year, now we have to do it on the road," A's second baseman Mark Ellis said as the team prepared to depart for Kansas City and Minnesota. "If we can get to five games back when Texas comes in, we'll see. If we get it to five games, we'll be in good shape."

Oakland swept the Royals at Kansas City earlier this year, and the A's were swept at Minnesota last month.

On Sunday, the A's returned to .500 for the 28th time this season, upping an ongoing franchise record that topped the 1947 Philadelphia team's 23 stints at .500.

They held a 3-0 lead, thanks in part to Ellis' two-run double in the fifth. In the third, though, Oakland could score only once, leaving the bases loaded after four consecutive walks by Boston starter Josh Beckett. Ellis struck out looking on what manager Bob Geren called a "close pitch." Adding to the A's oh-so-close frustration, moments before striking out, Ellis hit a liner past first that landed just a foot or two foul.

Ellis said he and home-plate umpire Hunter Wendelstedt had a simple difference of opinion on that called strike three, but said, "That's not why we lose. We had our chances."

Ellis' teammates weren't happy with the zone, either. Daric Barton was ejected after striking out for the final out of the game, and though he wouldn't comment on that at-bat in particular, of the strike zone throughout the game, Barton said, "Terrible."

"I don't complain about balls and strikes because I think they even out, but today was bad, period," Oakland starter Dallas Braden said, adding of the umpires, "We're held to a standard. They should be, too."

Braden gave up four runs, all with two outs in the sixth. He also walked four batters, the first time in 22 starts he'd walked more than two.

Ellis extended his hitting streak to 12 games, a career high, and Coco Crisp stole two bases for a career-high 30 this season.

Oakland remained stuck on 89 homers, the fewest in the majors. Only once has Oakland finished a non-strike season with fewer than 100 homers.

The A's won the season series with Boston for the first time in four years.

Infielder Iwamura to sign with A's

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

The A's, who seem to add a new player out of nowhere every week, will announce today that they're signing infielder **Akinori Iwamura**, the starting second baseman for Tampa Bay's World Series team in 2008.

Iwamura was released Friday by Pittsburgh, which had designated him for assignment twice this season. The 31-year-old hit .182 in 54 games with the Pirates and .264 in 50 games with Triple-A Indianapolis. He would be the A's first-ever Japanese position player.

Assistant general manager **David Forst** said the acquisition is primarily for defensive reasons at third. The team is unsure when **Kevin Kouzmanoff** will return from back spasms, although he is improving.

Jeff Larish and **Steve Tolleson** have been sharing the spot without much distinction. Like Larish, Iwamura bats left, and Larish is 1 for his past 25.

Cramer's shot: If **Bobby Cramer** takes the mound today as scheduled, he will, at 30 years and 320 days, be the second-oldest U.S.-born starting pitcher to make his big-league debut since 1957. Only Milwaukee's **David Manning** (30 years and 353 days in 2003) was older.

Cramer is the fourth-oldest player in Oakland history to make his big-league debut. He said his mother, **Barbara**, will be on hand today, along with his girlfriend, **Kaylynn Pefly**, and his best friend, **Alex Meza**.

Cramer's performance will help determine the rotation the rest of the way. The team is off Thursday, so the spot can be skipped next time if need be in order to get the best potential matchups for the four-game Texas series next week.

Briefly: The A's top pick in June, outfielder **Michael Choice**, homered in his first two games after being promoted to Class-A Kane County for the playoffs. ... Top 2009 pick **Grant Green** went to Double-A Midland and homered in his Texas League debut.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Carter to return? With Triple-A Sacramento season's over after a 4-1 loss at Tacoma on Sunday, the A's are expected to call up Chris Carter if he is deemed healthy enough. Carter, who homered Sunday, missed two weeks with a sprained thumb.

Drumbeat: A's to add Akinori Iwamura tomorrow

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the Coliseum 9/12/2010 5:02PM

The Chronicle has learned that the A's will announce they've signed infielder Akinori Iwamura tomorrow, and assistant general manager David Forst just confirmed that. Forst told me that the team isn't sure when Kevin Kouzmanoff will be ready to play third, although his lower back continues to improve.

Iwamura, 31, had some good years with the Rays, but he spent this year with Pittsburgh, largely in the minors. In 54 games with the Pirates, he hit .182. At Triple-A Indianapolis, he hit .264 with three homers and 16 RBIs in 50 games.

This move doesn't necessarily bode well for Jeff Larish's future at third for the A's; he's actually looked better at first and in the outfield. He's also 1 for his past 25.

It sounds as if this move was made very much for defensive purposes.

A's sweep bid slips away against Sox

By Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- It was payback time at the Coliseum.

One day after the A's pulled off a late comeback to defeat the Red Sox, Boston returned the favor to claim a 5-3 victory on Sunday.

With the loss, the A's missed out on a chance to sweep the Red Sox while falling 8 1/2 games back of the Rangers, who completed a three-game sweep of the Yankees on Sunday. Texas' magic number to claim the American League West title is now 12. Oakland will host Texas for a four-game series next week.

"If we can get it down to five games when Texas comes to town, I think that would be the goal," A's second baseman Mark Ellis said. "Obviously, Texas had a good weekend, but we just have to keep winning series. This time of the year, one game can mean a lot."

From the onset of Sunday's tilt, it was clear Dallas Braden didn't have his best control. But the A's southpaw worked his way through five innings with little resistance before unraveling in the sixth. After getting two quick outs to start the frame, Braden served up a double to Adrian Beltre, setting the stage for a deluge.

Following Beltre's hit, Braden gave up an infield single to David Ortiz and walked Mike Lowell to load the bases. J.D. Drew then delivered a two-run double down the left-field line, knocking Braden out of the game.

"We weren't doing anything," Boston manager Terry Francona said. "Braden's changeup, even when we got in hitters' counts, he'd fall behind 2-0 and he'd change speeds and we got I don't know how many cue shots off the end, he just took the sting out. Fortunately, we strung together enough."

Right-hander Henry Rodriguez relieved Braden but promptly served up a two-run single to the first batter he faced, pinch-hitter Ryan Kalish. In a matter of minutes, the Red Sox turned a 3-0 deficit into a 4-3 lead.

"When you get two outs quickly like that, you'd like to think, 'All right, we got to get back to the dugout and get some more runs,'" Oakland catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "But good teams keep pecking away. They never give you any free outs."

Braden finished 5 2/3 innings, allowing four earned runs on six hits and four walks while striking out two. The four walks marked a season high for Braden, as he snapped a 20-start streak of issuing two walks or fewer.

"The story today was I provided a nice walk-a-thon for them," Braden said. "... Anytime you put guys on base like that, you can't expect to come out clean."

Funny thing, because Braden's counterpart, Red Sox righty Josh Beckett, did just that.

The A's were served a golden opportunity to break the game open in the second inning, when Beckett issued four consecutive one-out walks. But Oakland manufactured just one run in the frame, as Ellis struck out before Jeremy Hermida flied out to right to kill the threat.

Asked to assess the missed opportunity, Geren rolled his eyes and said, "They got a big strikeout on Ellis, which was a close pitch."

Plate umpire Henry Wendelstedt was a hot topic of discussion after the game, as Geren said he received plenty of complaints about the strike zone in the dugout.

Cliff Pennington threw up his arms in dismay after striking out in the bottom of the fourth, presumably because Wendelstedt said Pennington went around on two check swings without asking for help from other umpires. In fact, Daric Barton was ejected just moments after he struck out looking to end the game, before Geren also argued with Wendelstedt as he walked off the field.

"I don't ever really complain about balls and strikes, just because I think stuff like that evens itself out throughout the season," Braden said. "But today was bad. Period. We're held to a standard and [umpires] should be as well."

While some of his teammates may have seen it differently, Ellis took the high road when discussing the men in blue.

"It really doesn't matter, it's not why we lost," Ellis said. "The umpires aren't why we lost. We had a good chance to score some runs."

Though the A's couldn't capitalize on their second-inning chance, they still toted a 3-0 lead after five innings.

That's because Ellis delivered a two-run double to the right-field gap in the fifth, scoring Barton and Suzuki. Ellis had already extended his hit streak to a career-high 12 games with his second-inning single. He also turned in a heads-up play in the top of the fourth, when he nabbed Drew at first base after he rounded the bag on a single to right field.

"Anytime you have the lead, it's disappointing when you lose," Ellis said. "We feel really comfortable when we're going into the sixth with the lead, so it's frustrating to lose this one, no doubt. I feel like we could have gone for the kill there in the fifth and sixth. We had our chances."

Royals, A's have differing goals in final weeks

By Andrew Pentis / MLB.com

The A's believe they are still in the playoff hunt. The Royals, just off opposing two clubs that are in an American League Central fight, aren't so sure about Oakland's chances.

"This series [against the White Sox] is about putting my best players on this field to win these games, in all fairness," said Kansas City manager Ned Yost, whose club lost five of six to the postseason-hopeful Twins and White Sox this past week. "We go back to evaluating [next week], depending upon where Oakland is. We're doing everything we can do to be fair to Minnesota and Chicago when we're out on the field."

"These games [against contenders] are played differently, where I'll put in my best players who I think give us the best chance to win a ballgame today. Then I'll play the game like it's the seventh game of the World Series. We hope to get to the point where we play like that every single day, where you've got a complement of 25 guys and are trying to win."

"The fans will say, 'Why don't you do [play your starters] every day.' When you're a championship-level team, you do. We're trying to get to that level. We do try to win every day, but there are certain situations in these [upcoming] games where I'll pinch-hit where I won't next week."

The A's sure won't mind that mindset. Despite losing 5-3 to Boston on Sunday, they took two of three from the Red Sox and, entering Monday, stood 8 1/2 games off the American League West pace.

So who will Oakland turn to for Monday's series opener? None other than substitute teacher-turned-Major League hurler Bobby Cramer, a 30-year-old who on Friday was promoted from Triple-A Sacramento and will make his MLB debut in place of recently demoted Vin Mazzaro.

"Him being with the club for a few days in Oakland, throwing a bullpen with our guys and our catchers, he's starting to feel a little more at ease being around the team for a few days," A's manager Bob Geren said. "He's also a little bit older and he's traveled all over the place to get here and he's been through a lot of stuff emotionally in his playing days. I think that this will be a fun step for him, I think he'll be fine as far as nerves."

Royals: Hochevar returns to rotation

Kansas City will counter Cramer with Luke Hochevar. The right-hander was back in action on Tuesday after nearly three months off with a strained elbow. He threw 53 pitches and gave up three Twins runs in three innings.

Athletics: Rehabbing in KC

Pitchers Joey Devine and Josh Outman will continue their rehab programs with the A's in Kansas City this week before catching a flight to Phoenix on Thursday and joining the instructional league. Both underwent Tommy John surgery last year and are expected to be ready by Spring Training.

Worth noting

The A's are 5-1 against the Royals this season. The clubs' series this week is their final head-to-head matchup in 2010.

A's sign veteran infielder Iwamura

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The A's have signed infielder Akinori Iwamura, and he will be in Kansas City on Monday for the club's series opener against the Royals, assistant general manager David Forst confirmed Sunday evening, while an official announcement isn't expected until Monday.

The 31-year-old Iwamura was released by the Pirates on Friday, and he'll likely give the A's a solid defensive option at third base in the absence of Kevin Kouzmanoff, whose lower back pain is steadily improving but not at a pace that gives the club a clear timetable for his return.

Iwamura -- who has been used both at second and third base during his four-year big league career -- spent just 54 games with the Pirates this year, hitting .182, before being optioned to Triple-A Indianapolis, where he put together a .264 mark with three home runs and 16 RBIs in 50 games.

He made his Major League debut with the Rays in 2007, a year during which he played in 123 games and batted .285 with seven homers. Iwamura appeared in 152 games the following year while carrying a .274 average, and he saw action in 69 games with Tampa Bay in '09 before being traded to Pittsburgh during that offseason.

Kouzmanoff, who took part in light stretching on Sunday morning, has missed six straight games after experiencing back spasms Sept. 5. Steve Tolleson was handed the majority of starts at third base this week, with Jeff Larish getting time at the hot corner as well.

Tolleson is 10-for-34 since being recalled by the A's on Aug. 13, while Larish has struggled at the plate recently, garnering just one hit in his last 25 at-bats.

Devine, Outman continue to rehab

By Jane Lee and Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Pitchers Joey Devine and Josh Outman will continue their rehab program with the A's in Kansas City this week before catching a flight to Phoenix on Thursday and joining the Instructional League.

Devine originally believed he'd be leaving teammates behind on Sunday, so he was pleasantly surprised to find out he'll be awarded a handful of days to work with the club.

The right-handed reliever threw 20 pitches in a simulated game on Saturday, and he's slated to do the same on Monday in Kansas City, where he'll be joined by Outman.

Outman tossed two sets of 20-pitch innings in a simulated setting on Sunday, the results of which he said went well. Both pitchers underwent Tommy John surgery last year and won't pitch for Oakland this season but are expected to be ready by Spring Training.

Cramer gives A's four lefty starters

OAKLAND -- When Bobby Cramer makes his long-awaited Major League debut in Kansas City on Monday, the A's rotation will feature four lefties, a rarity in today's game.

Still, Oakland manager Bob Geren said he doesn't put much value in the makeup of his starting staff.

"Overall, I've never really been a huge left-right [guy], just the quality of the pitcher is more important," Geren said. "I've seen bullpens line up with all righties, but they're all good, so it doesn't matter. ... It just depends on the personnel rather than what side they throw from."

The 30-year-old Cramer, who spent two years away from baseball in 2005-06, started this season on loan to the Tigres de Quintana Roo in Cancun, Mexico, before making seven starts with Triple-A Sacramento. Admittedly, Cramer isn't a power pitcher, as he rather relies on location and adding and subtracting velocity.

Looking at his splits, though, Cramer has been effective at striking people out. Cramer struck out 123 batters in 128 innings in Mexico and 35 batters in 41 2/3 innings with Sacramento. Cramer said it was beneficial to pitch in the pressure-free environment of the Mexican League, as he was able to improve his changeup greatly.

"With [Sacramento], I was scratching and clawing trying to get innings and work my way up," Cramer said. "[In Mexico], there's nowhere else to go and they were happy to have me. I was able to just relax and pitch, it's a good league."

Cramer's spot in the rotation isn't guaranteed past Monday, as the A's will have an off-day on Thursday and could skip his place. But Cramer said he is just happy to have an opportunity for now.

"Even though I felt like I was earning it and I was deserving of [a callup], I wasn't on the 40-man [roster] and I'm a 30-year-old that never pitched in the big leagues," Cramer said. "I knew it was going to be a tough decision for Oakland to

make that decision, so in that sense, I was surprised. If I was 25, I might have expected it, but at my age, as much as I knew it could happen, I wasn't sure if it would."

Worth noting

Kevin Kouzmanoff (lower back) took part in light stretching for a third straight day on Sunday, but he has yet to begin any baseball activity. The A's third baseman could begin that as soon as Monday, manager Bob Geren said, but there is still no timetable for his return, although sometime during the club's six-game road trip is not out of the question. Steve Tolleson got his fourth start at third base in the last five days on Sunday. ... Geren said the club is still in discussion about how it will handle the rotation with Thursday's off-day nearing. Much of the decision will depend on newcomer Bobby Cramer's outing Monday and which pitchers, if any, they feel will need an extra day of rest. ... The A's, who entered Sunday's finale with a 5-3 record against Boston this year, have secured their first season series win over the Red Sox since going 7-3 in 2006. ... Oakland's 2009 first-round Draft pick, Grant Green, was promoted to Double-A Midland on Saturday, when he homered and compiled three RBIs in his Texas League debut, helping the Rockhounds advance to the Texas League Championship Series.

Major League: Geren, and more Geren

Jane Lee, mlb.com 9/11/2010 6:44PM

The club's decision to pick up **Bob Geren's** option for next season isn't as surprising as some might think. In fact, it was very much expected given **Billy Beane's** praise this year for the job Geren's done as manager of a youthful, injury-prone team. Beane believes it's important to offer the younger guys consistency in multiple forms, management included. He mentioned the development of Pennington, Suzuki and Barton, among others, have all come under the leadership of Geren. I know many have pointed blame on Geren at times when the team has struggled this year, and, while I don't agree with every single decision he's made, you have to figure there's only so much you can do with a team lacking any sort of power threat. Pitching, defense and speed can only take a team so far, and I don't even think Geren was expected to take this team into a second-place standing, where they happen to still be flirting with postseason thoughts.

Whether those playoff dreams become a reality is one thing, but right now I think the main focus should be staying above the .500 mark and claiming victory to as many series as possible. That will hopefully lead to Geren's first winning season as manager. And, if the club can add a bat or two this offseason to go along with a superb pitching staff, Geren and Co. are looking at an exciting team to watch in 2011.

That being said, I realize several thoughts have already been made about Geren, so feel free to comment away...

A's lose to Red Sox, 5-3

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Pinch-hitter Ryan Kalish hit a go-ahead two-run single in the sixth, J.D. Drew had a two-run double one batter earlier and the Boston Red Sox rallied for a 5-3 victory over the Oakland Athletics on Sunday.

Josh Beckett (5-4) settled down after a rocky start as Boston avoided its first sweep by the A's since May 23-25, 2008. The Red Sox have been swept in the series only three times in the last 18 years.

Dallas Braden (9-12), still trying to reach double digits in wins for the first time in his career, lost his third straight start. All the damage came in that tough sixth inning. The left-hander also struggled with location, walking four after issuing two or fewer walks in each of his previous 20 starts.

Oakland's Coco Crisp stole six bases in the series against his former team, including his career-high 29th and 30th on Sunday.

The Red Sox added an insurance run in the eighth on pitcher Jerry Blevins' wild throw past first trying to get Drew on a single. That allowed pinch-runner Josh Reddick to score.

Boston won for only the fifth time in its last 13 road games.

The Red Sox still have three games in Seattle starting Monday to conclude their second-to-last trip of the year.

Jonathan Papelbon worked a perfect ninth with three called strikeouts for his 36th save in 43 chances, pitching for the first time in seven days. He threw 48 pitches in his career-high seventh blown save and loss to the White Sox on Sept. 5.

Daric Barton was ejected after the final out by home plate umpire Hunter Wendelstedt for arguing the called third strike.

Crisp got his 29th steal in the third for a new career high, topping his 28 for the Red Sox in 2007. He stole No. 30 in the sixth — and on a day Hall of Fame speedster and Crisp mentor Rickey Henderson gave a pushup demonstration in the clubhouse pregame to show he still has it at 51.

This marked the first time the Red Sox gave up six steals to an A's player since Henderson had six from July 2-4, 1984.

Mark Ellis hit a two-run double in the fifth to put the A's up 3-0. Ellis extended his hitting streak to a career-high 12 games with an infield single in the second.

Cliff Pennington hit a two-out triple in the bottom of the sixth after the Red Sox took the lead, but Oakland couldn't capitalize.

Beckett ran into trouble in the third, when he walked four straight batters and issued Jack Cust's free pass to force in the first run of the game. After Kurt Suzuki drew a walk for Beckett's third consecutive base on balls, he received a mound visit from pitching coach John Farrell. Then catcher Victor Martinez came out to chat during Cust's plate appearance.

Yet Beckett got out of the inning without further damage, retiring Ellis on a called third strike and Jeremy Hermida on a liner. It was the first time he walked so many in one inning since issuing five walks in the top of the first on Sept. 23, 2004, while with Florida against Philadelphia — but those didn't all come in order. He walked four in a row for the first time in his career.

Beckett allowed three runs on five hits in six innings, struck out seven and walked five to win for the first time in three starts. He had lost two of his last three decisions but was coming off a season-best nine-strikeout performance in a no-decision against the White Sox his last time out.

The right-hander has allowed three or fewer earned runs in each of his last seven outings against Oakland, four of those at the Coliseum.

NOTES: Marco Scutaro again started at 2B for the Red Sox.

Manager Terry Francona doesn't plan to use him every day at SS for the rest of the season because of his troublesome right shoulder.

"Days when we have him scheduled to play we will always check with him in the morning to make sure there's not a setback," Francona said. ... The A's won the season series (5-4) for the first time since going 7-3 in 2006, Oakland's last playoff season. ... A's LHP Josh Outman, recovering from Tommy John reconstructive elbow surgery, threw two sets of 20 pitches in a two-inning simulated game and felt fine. Both Outman and Joey Devine, also coming back from Tommy John, will travel with the team to Kansas City then return to Arizona on the A's off day Thursday.

Former Algebra Teacher, Utility Worker Bobby Cramer to Debut for A's

Jeff Fletcher, Fanhouse, aol.com 9/13/2010

OAKLAND -- Bobby Cramer has been preparing for this moment his whole life.

Well, except for the time that he was collecting paychecks inspecting pipelines, making sure that no one caused a disaster by sticking a shovel in the wrong place.

Or the time that he was teaching algebra to troubled high school kids.

To say Cramer has followed a winding path to the major leagues would be an understatement, but here he is. The 30-year-old left-hander was promoted to the big leagues for the first time on Friday, and he's scheduled to make his big-league debut by starting for the A's on Monday at Kansas City.

It will be the culmination of a season that Cramer spent mostly pitching in the Mexican League.

"You feel so far out of it," Cramer said. "It's different if you are in Double-A and doing well, you know the reports are sent to the higher powers every day and if you get on a roll, it's being noticed, but down there I didn't know. I didn't know what was being noticed. You just pitch for your pride. That's what kept me going."

Cramer's baseball resume includes two blank years, when he worked odd jobs and played Sunday recreational ball. Even after getting back into pro ball, he spent a year pitching in the independent Golden League, winters pitching all over the Caribbean, and, finally, this season in the Mexican League.

"It's been a long time coming," he said. "You always hope it will happen, but sometimes it doesn't. I know people in situations like I've been in. You just feel blessed that they made this decision."

Cramer earned a shot to fill the A's rotation void by posting a 1.94 ERA in seven starts at Triple-A Sacramento after returning from Mexico.

"It's always a pleasure to see someone work that hard and get a chance," A's manager Bob Geren said, "but we're in the business of winning games, and we feel he's our best option to throw and win us a game."

The A's had Cramer in minor-league camp this spring. Geren saw him, but he didn't leave much of an impression other than the tag "crafty lefty," which Cramer also used to identify himself.

Cramer played college baseball at Long Beach State, but he went undrafted. The Rays signed him as a free agent, and he spent two years in the Tampa Bay system before he was released in the spring of 2005.

That's when his odyssey really began.

For the next two years, Cramer was out of professional baseball. He worked in Southern California for Shell Oil in pipeline maintenance.

Our job was to check out this Web site and see if people were digging around the pipeline and go out and watch and make sure they didn't hit our line," Cramer said. "It was kind of an entry-level, monkey-type job, but it was a good job. Twenty-eight bucks an hour. Full benefits. Then they voted out our union and a week later I got let go."

Cramer also worked as a substitute teacher at continuation high schools, which are for at-risk students or those who need extra help academically.

"They had a tough time getting teachers there, because of the students," Cramer. "I'm driven by money. Math was my worst subject in high school. I basically had to take the book home with me and stay one section ahead of the kids and sound like I knew what I was talking about."

During those years, Cramer's baseball was limited to a Sunday rec league. Although it was dotted with former college players and those who had been in the low minors, it wasn't exactly the fast track to the big leagues.

He had Angels season tickets, so he sat in the ballpark countless days, dreaming of someday reviving his career.

In May 2007, the A's were desperate for warm bodies to fill out their minor-league rosters because other pitchers had gotten hurt or been ineffective, so they signed Cramer. Although he went 9-2 with a 2.77 ERA combined between Single-A and Double-A, the A's released him the following spring.

Cramer then spent the 2008 season pitching for the Orange County Flyers, in the independent Golden League. Again, he was playing in a league full of players who had been released, all of them looking to salvage their careers.

He spent the whole season waiting for a call that never came, but the A's did sign him again prior to the 2009 season, and he again put up solid numbers (a 3.87 ERA) pitching at three levels of the A's system. This spring, the A's loaned Cramer to Quintana Roo of the Mexican League.

Cramer spent the season pitching in antiquated ballparks where air conditioning in the clubhouse was a rare luxury. The competition wasn't as bad as the facilities.

"I'd compare the pitching to Double-A, the hitting to Triple-A and the defense to Single-A," Cramer said. "It's a good league, though. It got me better."

Cramer was 13-3 with a 2.95 ERA in Mexico, and the A's brought him back to Triple-A Sacramento in August. He kept pitching well, and it's now earned him a trip to the big leagues.

"It's a good story on a personal level," Geren said, "but on a baseball level, he's been their best pitcher and that's what we need."

A's Spark Win in Seventh

Malaika Bobino, Oakland Post, 9/12/2010

Oakland, CA – The seventh inning was the turning point for the A's. Three runs led to Oakland capitalizing off every mistake and opportunity to stay in the race for the post season.

Red Sox pitcher John Lackey started off strong but made a couple of mistakes that allowed the A's to get back into the game and seal their victory over Boston 4-3.

"I made a couple of mistakes in the seventh," Lackey said. "A couple of bad pitches in one inning, in our situation you can't make too many mistakes." "Honestly, I can pitch the exact same next year and have a totally different result." "It is what it is right now, giving up a couple of runs and it turns out like that."

Erasing a 2-0 lead, the A's took over with Daric Barton leading things off in the seventh frame with a double followed by Jack Cust's single RBI. Mark Ellis tied the game with a single RBI and that's when the crowd of 22,932 stood to their feet. Next at bat was Rajai Davis who hit a triple to center giving Oakland a 3-2 lead.

"I made some minor adjustments with my hands," said Davis. "I was losing the ball while at bat, he beat me a couple of times especially on 2-0 pitch but when the fast ball came I was ready."

The A's added an insurance run in the eighth frame from Cust that followed with a double steal from both Coco Crisp and Barton. Crisp surpassed his career-high and recorded his twenty-eighth steal. The defense did it's work for the remainder of the game as the Red Sox tried to rally a come back in the ninth.

Oakland's closer Andrew Bailey almost put himself in a jam when he gave up an double to Victor Martinez that followed with an RBI double from Adrian Beltre. Boston was now within one and manager Terry Francona called on his ace David Ortiz to hit for Mike Lowell. With Ortiz at bat the crowd again rose to their feet with anticipation, fortunately for Bailey he calmed down to regain his command as he struck him out with an outside fastball to end the inning.

"I love that kind of battle," Bailey said. "Obviously, you don't want to throw that many pitches, he's a professional hitter and I wanted to go after him." "Kurt Suzuki (catcher) and I thought we should go right after him and it worked out in our favor tonight."

It's a brand new day for the A's who have played well during the month of September and stay hopeful they'll play in the post season. Improving to a 6-2 on a nine-game homestand, Oakland still remains 7 1/2 games behind Texas, they defeated the New York Yankees 7-6 Saturday night.

The biggest victory of the night came when the ball club announced they will bring back A's skipper Bob Geren for another season. Geren will return to Oakland's dugout for his fifth season after exercising club option for 2011.

"It was good news to have my option extended," Geren said. "We have a solid pitching staff and the opportunity to manage an elite team is an honor."

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Sacramento's season ends with Game 5 defeat

By Robbie Enos / Sacramento River Cats

Through the good and bad, from Portland to New Orleans, through tough times and splendid, from home runs to strikeouts, and from last place to first, the Sacramento River Cats enjoyed a great 2010 season.

However, on Sunday night in Seattle, the Tacoma Rainiers beat Sacramento 4-1 to win the first-round playoff series and end Sacramento's season. After losing the first two games of the series at Raley Field, Sacramento had won games 3 and 4 at home to force the deciding Game 5.

Down three runs in the top of the ninth inning, Sacramento faced closer Josh Lueke. Corey Wimberly led off the inning with a walk before Eric Sogard battled to a 2-2 count, but was sat down on strikes. The River Cats continued to fight, as Tommy

Everidge boarded on a fielding error and Josh Donaldson battled in a nine pitch at-bat. Donaldson would fly out to left field, ending the game.

The Rainers got some needed insurance in the eighth inning, scoring two runs to make it a 4-1 game. Reliever Lenny DiNardo hit Dustin Ackley, and then threw a wild pitch that allowed Ackley to advance to second. Matt Mangini then smashed a two-run shot to right-center field.

Tacoma put pressure on the seventh inning, taking a 2-1 lead. Justin Smoak led off the inning with a soft line drive to right field. Pinch-hitter Mike Wilson did not execute a solid sacrifice bunt, getting Smoak thrown out at second.

That's when things got strange for Sacramento.

Jose Yopez hit a grounder to Sogard at shortstop, who tossed to Wimberly at second base. Wimberly then threw to Everidge to complete what would have been the inning-ending double play. Only, the runner at second base was safe. Everidge, not realizing there were only two outs, tossed the ball into the stands, and Wilson was awarded home plate for the go-ahead run.

In the sixth inning, Tacoma tied the score at one a piece. Dustin Ackley and Greg Halman hit back-to-back singles with one out putting runners on first and second. Mangini drove the second pitch of the following at-bat into left field for a single, scoring Ackley.

Sacramento scored the first run when Chris Carter blasted a solo shot to left-center field in the top of the fifth. Tacoma starter Ryan Feierabend put Carter in a 1-1 count before serving up a pitch middle-in that Carter was able to turn on.

Starter Clayton Mortensen battled with Feierabend through a scoreless first three innings. The pitchers combined for just three base runners and two strikeouts as both teams waited on the big hit.

The 2010 River Cats season has left the organization and fans with many great memories. Wimberly dazzled fans with his consecutive games on-base streak and record-breaking stolen bases. Carter's mountainous power earned him a spot on the all-PCL team. Tony DeFrancesco's on-field debates with umpires sparked fan cheering. Mortensen and Josh Donaldson made the PCL All-Star team and led the way the whole season. Numerous Cats were called up to the bigs, including Steve Tolleson, Carter, Matt Watson, Matt Carson, Donaldson and Mortensen. They all showed their true heart when they sparked a 12.5-game comeback in winning the PCL South Division.

A year of so many memories goes into the River Cats history forever. The many footsteps that took place in the batter's box, ran the bases, and charged onto the field will have to wait till next season, when another spring awaits.

Cougars Drop Game 2, Head to Game 3 **Kane County needs Game 3 win for 2nd straight series**

CLINTON, Iowa – The Kane County Cougars entered play Sunday night just one win away from their fifth trip to the Midwest League Championship Series, and they finished play still one win away. The Clinton LumberKings beat the Cougars, 6-2, at Alliant Energy Field in Game 2 of the Western Division Championship Series to even the best-of-three set and force a decisive Game 3 Monday night in Clinton.

Michael Choice, who joined the Cougars on Saturday and homered in his first at-bat, led off the second inning with a long homer to left for a 1-0 Cougars advantage. It turned out to be the only time all night the Cougars were on top. The LumberKings scored single unearned runs against Kenny Smalley over the next two innings and added one more in the fourth for a 3-1 score. Smalley (0-1) gave up the three runs -- one earned -- on seven hits over 3 1/3 innings in the loss, and Bo Schultz yielded three more in the fifth for a 6-1 deficit. Ryan Doolittle and Aaron Larsen combined for three scoreless innings to give the Cougars a chance.

The Cougars managed one run in the sixth with two outs. Choice singled and took second on a wild pitch, and Rashun Dixon doubled him home for a 6-2 score that became the final. Nick Czyz (1-0) got the win for the LumberKings. The Cougars' offense mustered four hits and went 1-for-11 with runners in scoring position.

The series-deciding Game 3 is Monday night at 6:30 CT. Murphy Smith (0-1, 1.50) is scheduled to oppose Tom Wilhelmson

(0-0, 1.59). The game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and online at kccougars.com with pre-game coverage starting at 6:15 p.m. The winning team would host Games 1 and 2 of the LCS on Wednesday and Thursday, respectively.