

## A's News Clips, Sunday, September 19, 2010

### Oakland A's done in again by Minnesota Twins rookie Danny Valencia in 4-2 loss

By Adam Czech, Oakland Tribune correspondent

If the A's could figure out Minnesota Twins rookie Danny Valencia, they would have already clinched this late-season series.

Instead, Valencia hit a three-run home run in the sixth inning to break a 1-all tie and send the A's to a 4-2 loss on a chilly Saturday afternoon at Target Field.

Valencia's homer was the Twins' only offense in the A's 3-1 win Friday night. On Saturday, Valencia made the difference by lining a 3-1 pitch from starter Dallas Braden over the left-center field wall.

"Ball just ran back over," Braden said. "That was kind of the tell for me around the fourth, fifth and sixth. I started laboring and started feeling fatigued. I never really finished the pitch and he took advantage."

A big reason for Braden's success this season has been his pinpoint control. But on Saturday, he walked four to match a season high set in his last start.

Two of the four walks were to leadoff hitters and both eventually scored.

"Four walks is ridiculous," said Braden, who allowed four runs and eight hits over six innings. "You don't deserve to be here making pitches like that. That's just a No. 1 no-no."

The A's came close to tying the game in the seventh, but were stymied by a lights-out Twins bullpen. After Akinori Iwamura's double scored Rajai Davis to make it 4-2, reliever Jesse Crain walked pinch hitter Jeff Larish.

Crain then got Cliff Pennington to ground out to end the inning, and the A's never had another base runner.

The A's also saw a potential rally fizzle with a baserunning mistake in the sixth. Coco Crisp led off with a single, then tried advancing to third after an errant pickoff attempt.

However, instead of picking up his third base coach, Crisp looked over his shoulder to find the ball in right field. That split second caused him to get thrown out by right fielder Jason Repko.

"That's a mistake an experienced guy like that doesn't make very often. He came in here and said just that," A's manager Bob Geren said. "I like the aggressiveness, but it was just a little bit of an error there."

Twins starter Kevin Slowey continued to baffle A's hitters. Slowey allowed two runs on five hits and struck out eight over 6<sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> innings. He improved to 4-0 with a 1.65 ERA in five career starts against the A's. He's struck out 46 in those five starts.

"He just doesn't leave a whole heck of a lot over the middle of the plate," Geren said. "Even when he missed, he just missed by a little bit."

After Landon Powell hit his second home run in the second inning, Slowey retired nine of the next 10 batters he faced.

Notes: Kevin Kouzmanoff, out since Sept. 6 with back spasms, took batting practice before the game. Geren said Kouzmanoff is improving, but is still day to day. "... Powell's home run was his first since May 28. "... Chris Carter was 0 for 2 with two strikeouts. Carter is hitless in his first 29 major league at-bats. "... Braden said he's already surpassed his high for innings pitched at any level and he's starting to feel it. "I'm 20 innings past my career max at any level," he said.

### Dave Newhouse: Al Pacino as Billy Martin? Roll the cameras

By Dave Newhouse, Oakland Tribune columnist

Another Oakland A's season is winding down with little theater, except for two highlight reels -- Dallas Braden's perfect game and "Moneyball" the movie.

But the cinematic "Moneyball" doesn't do much to validate "money ball," the concept, which falters alongside the Tampa Bay Rays, a more worthy baseball product with payroll constraints like Oakland's, yet with less Hollywood appeal.

Billy Beane's madman mathematics haven't yet turned Oakland into a regular contender like Tampa Bay, a World Series team two years ago and a postseason lock once again, despite the Rays' ranking 29th in Major League Baseball payrolls (out of 30 teams) at \$43 million, one spot below the A's \$47 million.

If Hollywood really knew baseball, it would realize that "Moneyball" is only the fourth best film possibility involving the Oakland A's.

No. 1 would be visionary/malcontent Charles O. Finley and his "Mustache Gang," winning three consecutive World Series with a payroll stingier than Lew Wolff's.

No. 2 would be "Billy Ball," with Billy Martin fighting, drinking, conniving and masterfully leading the A's into the split-season playoffs in 1981, just before he self-destructed in Oakland as he had every other place.

No. 3 would be the "Bash Brothers," featuring Dave Stewart's "death stare," Dennis Eckersley's flowing locks, Rickey Henderson's flamboyance, and Jose Canseco and Mark McGwire becoming bigger than life, if you catch my drift.

But, first, "Moneyball" needs recasting. Brad Pitt as Beane? They don't look anything alike. Wasn't Ben Affleck available? Philip Seymour Hoffman as Art Howe? Even worse. Hoffman can act, but he's a walking beach ball. Art Howe is tall, strong, erect, bald. Where's Bruce Willis?

So what's the story line on "Moneyball," the 20-game win streak? That was wonderful, historic, but it won't exactly grab your heart and mind like "The Natural," the greatest baseball movie ever.

In "Mustache Gang" the movie, a chrome-dome Robert De Niro is Finley, braying at American League president Joe Cronin (James Gandolfini), braying at Commissioner Bowie Kuhn (Robert Duvall), and braying at Charlie O. the mascot (Francis the talking mule).

Denzel Washington would be Reggie Jackson. Mark Ruffalo is "Captain" Sal Bando. Charlie Sheen, with a fake handlebar mustache, would play Rollie Fingers; Matt Damon is Catfish Hunter; George Clooney is Ray Fosse; and Clint Eastwood is coach Joe DiMaggio.

In "Billy Ball" the movie, the perfect Billy Martin would be Al Pacino. Dye his hair black, fix the lighting to hide his wrinkles, and Pacino is Martin: angry, soft, unpredictable, clever, unmanageable.

Jamie Foxx would play Rickey Henderson. Don Cheadle is Dwayne Murphy. Benjamin Bratt is Tony Armas.

Will Ferrell would be Steve McCatty -- both are goofy -- and Vin Diesel would be perfect as the militarylike Rick Langford. Will Smith must play the magnificent, misguided Mike Norris.

And Owen Wilson can be Mickey Klutts.

Moving ahead to "Bash Brothers," the movie, Eddie Murphy would be cast as the fun-loving Dave Henderson, drinking beer after a ballgame with his "Hendu's Bad Boys" fan club (Jim Carrey, Adam Sandler, Seth Rogan).

Michael Clarke Duncan is Dave Parker. Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson is Jose Canseco. Country singer-actor Toby Keith is Mark McGwire. Kevin Bacon is Dennis Eckersley. Cuba Gooding Jr. is Tony Phillips. Edward Norton is Walt Weiss, James Franco is Carney Lansford. And Brad Pitt -- this works -- is Bob Welch.

And only Samuel L. Jackson could do Dave Stewart's death look justice.

Tony La Russa? Has to be Matt Dillon. Kevin Costner would be the wise, thoughtful A's president, Roy Eisenhardt. And to play the finest owner of them all, Walter A. Haas Jr.? Why none other than Oakland's Tom Hanks -- hair thinned, wearing specs, sporting a Panama hat.

Now that's great casting. And did I mention Colin Farrell playing a newspaperman -- me? Clearly an oversight.

## **For A's Cahill, testing new pitches part of job**

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle, Saturday, September 18, 2010

Trevor Cahill's switch this year to a more conventional curve from his "double-knuckle" version was typical of his rapid development into one of baseball's best pitchers.

Messing around with grips and trying different things is the norm for him. He said that at one point last year, he threw a cutter for three games after trying one out while throwing on the side with Brett Anderson.

"It seemed like he had a new pitch every day," Anderson said. "Like, 'Oh, I'm going to do this now, and I'll be in contention for the Cy Young.' Pretty crazy."

Cahill also throws an improved slider, and he relies far less now on his changeup.

The sinker is what really allows Cahill to thrive, and in the past year, the right-hander has become more confident throwing it to both sides of the plate.

Though scouts and coaches knew that Cahill had a lot of natural movement on the ball, it was a minor-league catcher, David Castillo, who helped Cahill really understand how important the pitch was in 2007 at Class-A Kane County (Ill.).

Castillo, who had been sent specifically to work with some of the team's best prospects, said, "I remember catching him the first time and thinking that was a special pitch. He just needed to develop it. He also had a lot of catching up to do with the mental part ... but you could tell his mind works fast, and we were on the same page right away. He was always thinking ahead of the hitters."

Cahill wound up opening this season on the disabled list with a left shoulder strain, making his ascension since he was recalled to the majors on April 30 all the more impressive. Two and a half months later, he was on the American League All-Star team.

## **Young 'Pterodactyl' breaks out of shell**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Trevor Cahill is quirky. And among his oddities is the ability to briefly tinker with a pitch or two and become a potential Cy Young candidate. He's a fast study, perhaps not surprising for a straight-A student who'd planned to play baseball at Dartmouth.

"Nobody understood how good Trevor could be or how quickly," A's starter Dallas Braden said. "As scary as it is, I don't believe this is it. He can do better."

Cahill, 22, can adapt to things so easily that when he was a rookie in 2009 and his old spike curveball wasn't giving him the results he wanted, he switched to a traditional curveball.

"It was like a double-knuckle curve," Cahill said of his longtime breaking pitch, which he'd developed himself as a teen. "I never knew anyone else who threw it, but they said you shouldn't throw real curveballs that young, so I just kind of flicked it."

## **Fastball brings notice**

Cahill didn't pitch a lot until four years ago. He was mostly a shortstop at Vista High School, north of San Diego, and his junior year, the team had two college-bound starters, so when Cahill pitched, he usually closed games. That fall, though, he came in throwing 91 mph, and he reached 94 mph during the season.

That gained him all sorts of unexpected attention, including from A's general manager Billy Beane. Beane didn't see Cahill at his best; Cahill was recovering from a lengthy bout of strep throat, but area scout Craig Weissmann insisted that Cahill would be a worthwhile pick.

"He said, 'I've seen this kid at his best, and he's legit, trust me on that,' " Vista coach Rick Lepire said. "They trusted Craig, and Trevor just keeps getting better and better."

Cahill, like the A's other young starters, also is growing as a person. He and left-hander Gio Gonzalez are probably the best examples of maturation in the past year, but while Gonzalez has had to become more even-keel on the mound, Cahill always has been calm, even laid-back.

Braden likes to cite Cahill's first big-league start, when Cahill was standing next to him along the rail while the A's were at bat - discussing his Netflix queue. "I was like, 'How old are you, 50?' " Braden said. " 'Netflix queue? Are you kidding? You're 21, go to the video store!' "

While Cahill said little as a rookie, even to teammates, he's now letting his personality show more this year, part of coming into his own. "Most of it is getting to know guys, but I'm really shy, so it's hard to do," he said.

## **Unique personality**

He is offbeat, definitely not your standard jock. As is oft-noted, Cahill's warm-up music is Jefferson Airplane's "White Rabbit," a psychedelic staple of the late '60s, and when prompted to come up with his own nickname by veteran Russ Springer, Cahill blurted out, "Pterodactyl!" (It's mostly "Dactyl" now.)

"Trevor likes what he likes, and he's not swayed by what everyone else is doing," said Cahill's mother, JoAnne. "But he's also very focused. When he was little, he'd put the Legos together until it was done exactly the way he wanted."

Anderson describes his friend as being into "Star Wars" and "Alice in Wonderland," and Lepire remembers that on a high-school team trip to Europe, Cahill and a friend bought medieval-style swords.

"It was a Harry Potter kind of thing," Lepire said. "I was like, 'What are you doing?' "

A's pitcher Brett Anderson said the first time he met Cahill in the minors, Cahill said about four words all spring. Now Cahill is one of the gang. The starters average 23 years of age, and Anderson said, "We all feed off each other. Everyone has their own niche."

## **Relaxed attitude**

Several weeks ago, Cahill demonstrated just how relaxed he's become.

"In the New York clubhouse, Brett and I were joking around, singing 'Empire State of Mind,' even though we didn't know all the words," Braden said. "All of a sudden, Trevor takes over and starts belting it out, but he gets to a part he doesn't know, and he starts to mumble and taper off, and he goes as red as he could be. We started laughing, and he didn't talk to us for about 20 minutes because we thought it was so funny."

"He was really into it," Anderson said. "Then he realized he didn't know the words and he trailed off and hoped we wouldn't notice. The rest of the day we were going, 'Trevor, do the remix version of the song!' He was so embarrassed. I think he might really be left-handed, because he's got a lot of weird."

None of this comes as a surprise to his former catcher in Class-A.

"Even back at Kane County, he did his own thing," David Castillo said. "He's got a funny walk, and he's got a baby face, but his mind is on business. He looks so young, but he's a big-time competitor."

**Twins 4, A's 2:** Rookie's tie-breaking three-run homer beats Braden. **B5**

### **Trevor Cahill**

**Age:** 22 Ht., Wt.: 6-4, 220

**Hometown:** Oceanside (San Diego County)

**Drafted:** By the A's, second round, 2006

### **Career stats**

Yr	W-L	ERA	BB	SO	WHIP
'09	10-13	4.63	72	90	1.44
'10	16-7	2.84	59	102	1.08
Tot.	26-20	3.74	131	192	1.26

### **A's leading off**

San Francisco Chronicle

**Still hitless:** Rookie Chris Carter kept struggling, going 0-for-2 with a pair of strikeouts. He is 0-for-29 with 13 whiffs since making his major-league debut.

### **Braden foiled by walks, homer in A's loss**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com | 09/18/10 5:26 PM ET

MINNEAPOLIS -- Dallas Braden doesn't like walks. Fact.

He doesn't like losses. Fact.

He really doesn't like walks that lead to losses. Fact. Unfortunately, the A's southpaw was forced to face all three realities Saturday afternoon, when the Twins picked up a handful of damaging free passes en route to leaving Oakland on the losing end of a 4-2 contest at Target Field.

It marked just the 17th day loss for the A's, whose 33-17 mark under the sun is still the best in baseball. But they dropped to one game behind the .500 mark while evening their September record at 8-8.

Braden entered the contest with just 36 walked batters attached to his name, tying him with Carl Pavano for third fewest in the American League. But, for the second straight start, he added four to that list Saturday, two of which scored.

"Four walks -- that's ridiculous," Braden said. "You don't deserve to be here if you're making pitches like that. That's just the No. 1 no-no. Don't give up free base runners. They will score."

Before Sept. 12, when Braden also walked four, the A's southpaw had walked two batters or fewer in 20 consecutive starts. On Saturday, he made it through four innings without a walk, scattering just four hits without allowing a run while carrying a 1-0 lead courtesy of Landon Powell's second homer of the season, a second-inning long ball off Minnesota's Kevin Slowey.

The fifth frame, however, brought about Braden's first walk that put J.J. Hardy on base. A double off the bat of Drew Butera moved Hardy to third, and Ben Revere's groundout to shortstop scored Minnesota's first run and also gave the Twins outfielder his first career RBI.

Braden survived the rest of the frame but found himself in trouble again in the sixth, which also began with a walk, this time to Joe Mauer. A Michael Cuddyer single put runners at first and third for Delmon Young, who flied out to center before Danny Valencia rocked Braden in a hitter-friendly count for a three-run homer -- his second in as many days -- to left field for a 4-1 Twins lead.

"He gave me a good pitch," said Valencia. "I had the same type of situation in the at-bat before, and knew maybe he was going to try to do something different this time. I was lucky he threw me a fastball in, and that's what I was looking for."

"With a 3-1 count, he had to throw a strike," Powell said. "We had him on the same count earlier in the game and got him with a changeup. We tried to go fastball in, and he just left it out a little."

"3-1 ball ran back over, I'm trying to stick it in there," Braden said. "That was kind of the tale later in the game for me, in the fourth, fifth, sixth -- just having to make pitches, starting to labor. I could just feel the fatigue. I didn't really finish the pitch, and he took advantage."

A shaken Braden proceeded to load the bases with one out as a result of two walks and an infield hit, but he forced Revere to pop out to shortstop and struck out Orlando Hudson to keep the damage to a minimum with action in the A's bullpen.

"That's big, just as far as momentum is concerned," Braden said of his chance to finish the inning. "Obviously momentum is on their side at that point, but by shutting it down and kind of stopping the bleeding, if you will, you can give your team a chance to fight back."

The A's added a run with two outs in the seventh on an RBI double from newcomer Akinori Iwamura, but they failed to get a hit the rest of the way as they dropped the middle contest of the three-game set less than 24 hours after posting a 3-1 win over the Twins.

Meanwhile, the sixth inning marked Braden's last, as he tossed 112 pitches while giving up four runs on eight hits and four walks while striking out two. The A's southpaw dropped to 9-13 on the season and is winless in each of his last four starts, in which he's allowed a combined 15 earned runs in 21 2/3 innings.

Braden will be the last hurler to offer any excuses, but he's not afraid to admit a dragging sense of fatigue as the season nears an end. He pitched fewer than 75 innings in each of his first two big league seasons and compiled 136 2/3 in 2009. This year, he's up to 172 2/3 and is expected to make three more starts.

"I'm 20 innings past my career max at any level, so this is uncharted territory for me as far as what my body feels like and how to maintain it and bounce back," he said. "You learn a lot during this time as well, so it's definitely something to benefit from, going through these ups and downs at this point in the season."

A's pitching coach Curt Young understands the notion and realizes building innings is a necessary facet of each pitcher's game, but he noted after Saturday's loss that he's not too worried about Braden.

"He's really been pitching his game and not giving in at any time," Young said. "Just a couple times it's been where he's trying to make pitches and just missing."

Valencia's homer may have magnified that thought, especially on a day Slowey wasn't giving the A's much to work with again. The Twins rightly, who pitched seven no-hit innings against Oakland last month, compiled eight strikeouts in 6 2/3 innings for Minnesota, which has put together a 6-2 record against the A's this year.

"It was a similar performance," A's manager Bob Geren said. "He keeps the ball down and throws well on the corners. He really didn't leave a whole heck of a lot over the plate. He has real good command, has a delivery that's short and compact. He's a strike thrower."

Powell believes the same of his battery mate, no matter Saturday's results.

"Dallas isn't a guy that walks a lot of people," the A's catcher said. "He was just missing, but he was battling for us. When you're down by just a couple runs like that, you have a chance to compete. He did that for us, and we weren't able to close in."

### **Twins' pace conjures memories of A's past**

By Bailey Stephens / MLB.com

While the Twins are surging their way into the postseason, the Athletics are getting a look at players who figure to factor into their plans next season.

Oakland is giving those younger players some valuable experience late in the season, and they've responded to the opportunity. On Sunday, the young A's will battle the Twins for the final time this season with a series victory on the line.

The Twins, who are 43-17 since the All-Star break, offer stiff competition. Minnesota is only the second team in the last 15 years to win at that pace after the break, joining Oakland's 2001 squad (58-17).

The A's may not be up to the speed of that 2001 team, but they have turned in a strong second-half record at 30-27. That's largely due to a pitching staff that could be just as successful in 2011, and after his first Major League victory last week, Bobby Cramer showed he might be able to be a part of that rotation. In his first big league start, the left-handed journeyman allowed one earned run in 5 1/3 innings to Kansas City.

Cramer, whose debut earned one more chance to show he can be effective at the Major League level, knows nothing more than his start on Sunday is promised, but he left an impression on manager Bob Geren.

"He looked very comfortable," Geren said. "He threw strikes and I was very happy about him going that deep into the game and keeping a lead."

The Twins' Sunday starter carries a bit more experience under his belt, but he is still growing. Francisco Liriano has had some brilliant moments this season, but the Twins need him to take the next step and fill the ace role in big games this postseason.

The left-hander pitched well enough to win in his last start against the White Sox -- perhaps one of his biggest starts to date -- by allowing three runs in six innings. Afterward, though, he admitted to getting a little too amped. The experience of pitching through it is one that the Twins can only hope will make him stronger heading into the playoffs.

The big games couldn't be coming at a better time for Liriano, who has gone 7-0 with a 2.42 ERA in his last 10 starts. The young southpaw could be looking at the first 15-game-winning season of his career, a feat that will be within his reach on Sunday.

### **Athletics: Carter getting opportunities at plate**

The As are sticking with Chris Carter despite his career-opening hitless streak, which reached 30 at-bats on Saturday. But Geren says Carter will continue to see playing time, as he's turning in much stronger at-bats than his first stint with the A's. He started on Saturday and Geren said he'll see action again on Sunday. "I'm putting him in there because I think he's had some good swings," Geren said. "He's having good at-bats. I don't feel like he's struggling. He struggled last time he was here, swinging at pitches out of the zone. But he's swinging at good pitches, so I don't want to say he's struggling when he's not."

### **Twins: Bullpen providing anchor late in games**

The Twins' bullpen continued its good work on Saturday with 2 1/3 scoreless innings, extending a stretch in which the relief corps has allowed just one earned run in its last 22 1/3 innings. Minnesota has now gotten scoreless outings during six of the bullpen's last seven appearances. ... Jesse Crain, who has been part of the 'pen's recent dominance, hasn't allowed a run in 38 of his last 41 appearances, compiling a 0.70 ERA dating back to June 13.

### **Worth noting**

The Twins' Jason Kubel, whose left wrist kept him out of Saturday's lineup again, could possibly return on Sunday. ... Danny Valencia continued his hot hitting on Saturday and is 9-for-20 over his last six games. ... Oakland now trails Minnesota 6-2 in the season series with one to go. This is the first time the A's have lost the season series to the Twins since 2001.

## **Geren pleased with Kouzmanoff's progress**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

MINNEAPOLIS -- A rather early start at Target Field forced A's hitters to take their practice swings inside the cages on Saturday morning, as is custom on most day games.

But one green and gold member stood outside, at the plate, taking pitches from manager Bob Geren.

Sounds like special treatment, but it was all in an effort to aid the rehab process of Kevin Kouzmanoff, who has been nursing his lower back for nearly two weeks. The A's third baseman took light batting practice for a second straight day Saturday, the results of which Geren said went well.

"It was better than yesterday," the A's skipper said. "He's still day-to-day, but he felt better today, and it seems he's getting better every day."

Kouzmanoff initially experienced lower back spasms Sept. 5, when he left the club's home game against the Angels in the fifth inning. He's missed 11 games since that time, but has been able to avoid the disabled list thanks to an expanded roster.

A's display confidence in rookie Carter

MINNEAPOLIS -- Chris Carter's career-opening hitless streak keeps expanding, but manager Bob Geren has no problem continually throwing out the club's top prospect on the field every day despite any woes at the plate.

On Saturday, Carter received his third start -- second in left field -- since being recalled from Triple-A Sacramento on Tuesday, and Geren said he'll again see action in Sunday's series finale against the Twins. Thus, he'll have plenty opportunity to put an end to an 0-for-27 string and instead showcase the bat that racked up 31 homers and 94 RBIs in 125 Minor League games this year.



"I'm putting him in there because I think he's had some good swings," Geren said. "He's having good at-bats. I don't feel like he's struggling. He struggled last time he was here, swinging at pitches out of the zone. But he's swinging at good pitches, so I don't want to say he's struggling when he's not."

Carter's 0-for-27 mark, which he carried into Saturday's contest, represents the longest hitless streak to start a career by a non-pitcher since Vic Harris went 0-for-36 for Texas in 1972. In his first stint with the A's, Carter compiled nine strikeouts in 19 hitless at-bats. This time around, he's racked up two strikeouts in eight at-bats.

"He'll get his hit," Geren said. "He's a very confident, young man. I'm not too worried about him."

Worth noting

Landon Powell received his 27th start of the season behind the plate and ninth with starter Dallas Braden on the mound Saturday afternoon. The duo entered the contest 4-4 with four complete games -- including two shutouts -- and a 2.29 ERA. Braden is 5-8 with a 4.26 ERA in his other 18 starts. ... Craig Breslow has a career-high 64 strikeouts, which is tied for the third-best total by a left-handed reliever in Oakland history.

## **Major League: Postgame tidbits**

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 9/19/2010

A handful of quick notes from Target Field:

- **Coco Crisp** was tagged out trying to go from first to third in the sixth inning, when he made his way to second on a throwing error by **Kevin Slowey** before pausing to look back to find the ball and continuing on to third, where he was tagged. Pausing rather than just focusing on third base coach **Mike Gallego**, Geren said, led to the out.
- The Twins are now 6-2 against the A's and 24-11 against the AL West this year.
- A's starting pitchers have recorded a decision in each of their last 25 games, which is the fourth longest streak in Oakland history. It marks the longest since Aug. 21-Sept. 29, 1979, when A's starters had a record 36 straight games with a decision.
- **Aki Iwamura's** seventh-inning double was his first extra-base hit since June 15, when he was with the Pirates.
- **Chris Carter** extended his career-opening hitless streak to 29 at-bats. It is the longest hitless streak to start a career by a non-pitcher since Texas' **Vic Harris** went 0-for-36 in 1972. Carter has compiled 13 times in those at-bats.
- Carter's attempt at **Drew Butera's** ball to left field that resulted in a double in the fifth had Geren saying his outfielder would likely make that play 8 out of 10 times. "It just didn't stay in his glove," Geren said. "He catches that more times than not."
- **Henry Rodriguez** has not allowed a run in 15 of his last 16 appearances. He has 17 strikeouts over that span.
- **Brad Ziegler** made his first appearance since Monday, tallying two strikeouts in the eighth inning. He has appeared in just 12 of the club's 44 games since July 31.
- **Daric Barton** is 1-for-16 on the road trip and didn't reach base for just the second time in his last 32 games Saturday. He still has a Major League-leading 102 walks for the season.
- **Gabe Gross** has endured a stretch of 21 games without a start. On Saturday, for a second straight day, he entered the game late but did not get an at-bat.

• **Landon Powell** joked before Saturday's game that he was going to need to hit doubles with **Rajai Davis** batting behind him. He not only got a double, but a homer too. It marked his first home run since May 28 at Detroit.

## A's take beating from Twins

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS - Danny Valencia is hardly looking like a rookie for the Minnesota Twins.

Valencia delivered another key hit, launching a tiebreaking three-run homer in the sixth inning that sent Kevin Slowey and the American League Central-leading Twins over the Oakland A's 4-2 Saturday.

The Twins cut their magic number for clinching the division to six. Minnesota began the day with a nine-game lead over second-place Chicago.

"You see all these situations coming up in the minor leagues," Valencia said. "Obviously everything is magnified up here, but it's still the same game and you've just got to go with it."

Valencia, Michael Cuddyer and Jason Repko each had two hits for the Twins.

Slowey (13-6) set a career high for wins, giving up two runs and five hits in 6 2-3 innings. Matt Capps earned his 40th save and 13th in 15 chances since coming to Minnesota.

Landon Powell homered and doubled for Oakland. Rookie Chris Carter kept struggling, going 0 for 2 with two strikeouts - he is 0 for 29 with 13 whiffs since making his major league debut this season.

Carter also came up short on a line drive hit down the left-field line that led to the Twins' first run in the fifth.

"It's a ball that I think he'd catch more often than he wouldn't," A's manager Bob Geren said. "If he had to do it again, I think he'd catch that eight or nine out of 10 times. He just didn't catch that one."

A stark contrast to Carter, Valencia has been right in the middle of the Twins' ascension during his rookie year. Since arriving at the start of June, Valencia has hit .340 with 33 RBIs and taken control of third base, a rotating spot for Minnesota the past several seasons.

"I've been more impressed with his defense than any other part of his game because he's worked really hard at catching the ball," Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said. "And he knows how much that means to us. I thought he had a heck of a spring for us in the short time he was there. And he's probably going above what we thought he would do his first year up here. He's really playing well."

Dallas Braden (9-13) went six innings for Oakland, allowing four runs on eight hits and four walks.

Valencia connected for the second straight game, his fourth home run this season breaking a 1-1 tie in the sixth.

The Twins have seen Valencia deliver in the clutch as he's hit .431 with runners in scoring position. He's done damage at Target Field, hitting .456, the best home batting average in the majors.

"You want to come out, being a first-year guy, and you want to perform," Valencia said. "Luckily, I've caught a bunch of breaks since I've been here. Things couldn't have gone much better for me than they are right now."

Slowey, meanwhile, is trying to put himself in position for a potential starting spot in the playoffs.

Since a trip to the disabled list with a right triceps strain at the end of August, Slowey is 2-0 and has allowed four earned runs over 15 2-3 innings in his last three starts.

Slowey gave up just one hit - Powell's solo home run in the second - through the first four innings.

"I think part of it is just time," Slowey said. "Time and repetition coming back from the DL and starting to trust your stuff a little bit more."

Braden, who had allowed just five earned runs over his last five road starts, cruised before the Twins scored in the fifth to tie it.

"I'm 20 innings past my career max at any level," Braden said. "This is uncharted territory as far as what my body feels like and how to maintain and bounce back. But that's something you learn and benefit from, going through these ups and downs at this point of the season."

## **Pitcher's Path to Major League Debut at 30 Was No Pipeline**

By TYLER KEPNER, New York Times, 9/19/2010

The Kansas City Royals used two pitchers against the Oakland Athletics on Monday. The starter was Luke Hochevar, and the reliever was Bryan Bullington. They each began their professional careers as the No. 1 overall pick in the draft.

The A's started Bobby Cramer, 30, a former substitute math teacher and utility worker making his major league debut. Naturally, Cramer tossed five and a third strong innings for a well-earned victory. What a game.

"I've been talking to a lot of people I hadn't talked to in years," Cramer said by phone the other day. The friends who lost track of him had missed quite an odyssey.

Undrafted out of high school, the left-handed Cramer pitched in junior college, then earned a scholarship to Long Beach State. He broke into the rotation as a senior, only to shred an elbow ligament when he returned to a game after a long rain delay.

The Seattle Mariners drafted him, anyway, in the 38th round but lost interest when he needed reconstructive elbow surgery. A Tampa Bay scout, Craig Weissmann, signed Cramer after he recovered. He pitched well for a while in the Rays' chain, but doctors then found bone chips in his elbow.

"I got released on April 1, 2005 — on April Fool's Day, and it wasn't very funny," Cramer said. "It was hard for me. That was the first time I'd ever really been cut from a team. Considering how long I'd been playing baseball, it felt like I'd been dumped by a girlfriend. I struggled with it. I cried when they released me. I thought that was it — and it kind of was for a time."

For four months, Cramer said, he could not even watch baseball on television. The Rays were terrible then, and if he could not stick with their Class A team, he figured, what chance did he have?

Cramer had earned extra money in the off-seasons by coaching and teaching, but with nobody paying him to play, he took a job inspecting pipelines for Shell Oil. His only connection to baseball was a Sunday recreation league, on a team called the Southern California Riptide, knocking around local fields with other dreamers.

"I was pitching off mounds with foot-deep holes," Cramer said. "But it was something I loved to do. It was just fun being out there with the guys, playing ball."

Cramer was living in Irvine, Calif., with friends who had season tickets to the Angels' games in Anaheim. He felt oddly out of place in the crowd.

"I didn't feel like a fan," Cramer said. "I felt like a player sitting up in the stands. I never made the transition. I'd have that feeling: 'You should be out there; that should be you.' You don't say it because you'd sound like a lunatic, like that guy who just can't give it up. But it ate at me inside."

Even so, Cramer resisted an offer from Weissmann, who had since joined the Oakland organization, to go back to the minors. He feared that the A's were simply stockpiling pitchers to release, as Tampa Bay had done, and he liked the security of his job with Shell.

But just after Cramer lost the job in a labor dispute, Weissmann called with another offer. Cramer joined Oakland's Class A team in Stockton, Calif., in 2007 and pitched well but was released again the next spring. After a season with the Orange County Flyers in the independent Golden League, he came back to the A's, reaching Class AAA Sacramento last season.

The final twist came this spring, when the Athletics lent him to the Quintana Roo Tigers of the Mexican League for the contract rights to two pitchers. Cramer went 13-3 with a 2.95 earned run average, then 2-2 with a 1.94 E.R.A. in seven starts at Sacramento before — at last — his debut.

"Things never seemed to click at the right time," Cramer said, reflecting on his journey. "It's not only about being good at what you do; a lot of it is timing and luck."

At last, for Cramer, timing and luck are on his side.

#### Giambi Still a Hitter

The Rockies' Jason Giambi runs the Hitman Baseball Academy in Henderson, Nev., named for a nickname of Don Mattingly's, a former Yankees icon who will replace Joe Torre as the Los Angeles Dodgers' manager next season. Giambi rooted for Mattingly while growing up in California, and later became close with him when Mattingly coached him on the Yankees.

In Colorado, Giambi salutes Mattingly in another way: by wearing his number, 23. Giambi wore 7 in youth leagues to honor his father's favorite player, Mickey Mantle. Then, with Oakland and the Yankees, he wore numbers with digits that equaled 7: 16 for the A's and 25 for the Yankees.

When he joined the Rockies last summer, closer Huston Street had 16 and the hitting coach Don Baylor had 25.

"They said 23 was available, and I said, 'I'll take it for the Hit Man,' " Giambi said.

He has mentored some of the younger Rockies hitters. Asked if he could see himself becoming a hitting coach like Mattingly, Giambi said: "That's a lot of work, man. It's easy to do it from over here. They love it, but I'm not ready for that part of it yet."

Giambi, who has always loved the rock-star element of big-league life, is not quite ready to retire. He turns 40 on Jan. 8 (also the birthday of Elvis Presley and David Bowie) and plans to play as long as someone lets him.

"Why not?" Giambi said. "I'll keep doing it. I'm having a great time."

#### Playoff-Ready Rotation

After a recent victory in Philadelphia, the Phillies left-hander Cole Hamels talked about the importance of having three top starters in the postseason. With Roy Halladay, Roy Oswalt and Hamels, the Phillies seem set up well. But Hamels also referred to the Phillies' fourth starter, Joe Blanton.

"It makes it uncomfortable for the opposing team to come in and not look at anybody and go, Yeah, we can probably get a couple of runs off this guy," Hamels said. "Because when the postseason comes, it's about three guys that go, and we definitely do have those good three guys — and we have an unbelievably good fourth guy."

It seemed that Hamels was exaggerating about Blanton, simply playing the role of good teammate. But a closer look shows that Blanton, if not quite unbelievably good, is certainly adequate to start a Game 4 in October, as he has done five times the last two years for the Phillies.

Blanton is no star, and he struggled after missing April with a strained left side muscle. But he has nine quality starts in his last 12 outings, and in 10 starts since his last loss, on July 21, he is 4-0 with a 3.41 earned run average.

"Sometimes, I may not be the best at it," Blanton said, "but I'll always give you everything I've got and go as far as I can."

## **MINOR LEAGUE NEWS**

### **Naturals top 'Hounds for TL crown**

Shawn Shroyer, Midland Reporter-Telegram

For the first time in franchise history, the Midland RockHounds had the opportunity to win a Texas League Championship at home. Instead, they felt the same heartbreak they dealt to the Northwest Arkansas Naturals last season.

The Naturals put an end to the series and clinched the Texas League Championship with a 2-0 defeat of the RockHounds on Saturday at Citibank Ballpark. A year ago it was the RockHounds who celebrated a title on the Naturals' home field. While the RockHounds felt the dejection of losing back-to-back games at home to lose the best-of-five series in four games, there were feelings of elation on the opposite side.

The Naturals were celebrating their first title since moving to Springdale, Ark., in 2008 and the franchise's first Texas League Championship since 1999. The victory capped off the Naturals' team Triple Crown after taking both the first and second half North Division titles, posting the best record in the league, and bringing home the championship trophy.

"This is what we've been playing for all year. Even though we won the first half and the second half, it wouldn't have meant anything if we didn't win this," Naturals center fielder Derrick Robinson said. "There's just a lot of dedicated guys who have come a long way this year. Nobody here would give up the dream."

With a championship in the balance, the Naturals and RockHounds couldn't have packed more drama into nine innings if they tried.

The game remained scoreless until the fifth inning and the teams were separated by one run from then until the eighth. The Naturals' run that crossed the plate in the eighth sparked the ejection of RockHounds manager Darren Bush, who was handcuffed early in the game by another ejection when catcher Petey Paramore was thrown out.

In the top of the fifth, Anthony Seratelli led the inning off with a triple that rattled around the right field corner. He came home to score the game's first run when catcher Ryan Eigsti, who was only in the lineup because regular catcher Manny Pina was injured the night before, grounded out to shortstop.

Seratelli went 3 for 4 in the game and finished the series 5 for 9 with two home runs, a triple, four RBI and three runs. This from a player who had just three home runs and a .334 slugging percentage in the regular season.

"In the North championship, it was our 3-4-5 guys who came through, but this series it was our 6-7-8-9 guys who did the damage," Naturals manager Brian Poldberg said. "It's amazing how it changed like that, but that's a credit to their pitching staff taking our bats away."

Seratelli's run was all the support starting pitcher Will Smith (1-0) would need.

Smith, who pitched for the Arkansas Travelers for most of the regular season but didn't join the Naturals until the playoffs, was superb. He held the RockHounds scoreless over 6 2/3 innings, allowing seven hits and two walks and striking out six. His defense helped him escape a couple tight spots with two double plays.

The RockHounds had runners reach third base in the second, third and seventh innings, but each time they were denied. The third inning was their closest call as Jermaine Mitchell was gunned down at the plate trying to score from first with two outs on a bloop single from Shane Peterson.

Earlier in the third inning, RockHounds catcher Petey Paramore was ejected for questioning home plate umpire Dan Oliver after striking out. That forced backup catcher Gabriel Ortiz into the lineup and cut the number of bench players available for Bush in half.

Bush never had a chance to make any late-inning changes, though, after he was ejected in the top of the eighth.

With Johnny Giavotella on second, Eric Hosmer singled through the left side and Giavotella came around to score. However, Giavotella was called out for interfering with Hosmer's hit. Poldberg asked for a second opinion and the call was reversed, forcing Bush to argue the decision. He was ultimately tossed by first base umpire Brett Robson.

It was the climax of a series that was more intense than anyone involved could have anticipated.

"I've never been so on my toes in my whole life," Robinson said. "It's a great feeling."