

A's News Clips, Thursday, September 24, 2010

A's, closer Brad Ziegler let one slip away in ninth against White Sox

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Ninth-inning leads have equated to slam-dunk victories for the A's this season.

Then again, there wasn't much that went by the book Wednesday afternoon at the Oakland Coliseum.

The A's were within one strike of pulling off a three-game sweep of the Chicago White Sox, only to watch Chicago score twice off Brad Ziegler and rally for a 4-3 victory that was tough for Oakland to swallow on several fronts.

The A's entered the game 68-0 when leading after eight innings, and they looked to be riding quite the bolt of momentum heading into a four-game home series with the first-place Texas Rangers that begins tonight.

Instead, they saw their three-game winning streak snapped and fell eight games back in the American League West, after the Rangers beat the Angels late Wednesday.

The A's can still put heat on Texas by winning all four against the Rangers, but both teams have just 11 games remaining.

"Especially going (against) Texas, it would have been nice to sweep the White Sox," A's starting pitcher Brett Anderson said. "It's tough, especially (losing) in the ninth inning with two outs. But we've got to put it behind us and come to play the next four days."

Such defeats can leave a lingering effect psychologically, but the more tangible concern for the A's is the tattered state of their bullpen.

They are without closer Andrew Bailey indefinitely because of a sore elbow. Setup man Michael Wuertz is day-to-day with a right thumb injury that's resurfaced, and left-hander Jerry Blevins hasn't thrown a ball in a week because of a sore left shoulder.

With temporary closer Craig Breslow unavailable Wednesday -- he had pitched in four of the previous five games -- manager Bob Geren was without a lefty reliever.

The A's had dodged trouble in recent days, but their lack of bullpen depth finally bit them.

They led 3-1 when Ziegler (3-5) relieved Boof Bonser with runners on the corners and one out in the eighth.

Ziegler faked a pickoff throw to third and caught Alexei Ramirez stranded between first and second. But in the ensuing rundown, Ziegler dropped the ball, and Juan Pierre broke from third and scored ahead of reliever's throw home.

"I caught it OK, and in the transfer to my bare hand, I somehow lost it," Ziegler said.

With a one-run lead and a runner on second in the ninth, Ziegler had two outs and a 3-2 count on pinch hitter Mark Kotsay. The former Athletic stroked a single into right field to tie it.

"The 3-1 pitch he was late on," Ziegler said. "We tried to go back in, thinking if he was late on the one away, maybe he won't be able to get to one in. And he got to it."

Pinch hitter Mark Teahen followed with a double to left-center that scored pinch runner Gordon Beckham from first base to put the White Sox ahead.

Kotsay and Teahen both hit left-handed, and lefties entered the game hitting .315 against the right-handed Ziegler.

In a fluky twist to start the day, both teams took the field wearing their black jersey tops. Starting pitchers generally make the call on which jerseys to wear, but the umpires gave the OK for both teams to dress alike.

The A's took a lead into the ninth despite mustering just five hits against Chicago starter Edwin Jackson, who went seven innings.

Oakland left fielder Chris Carter broke a scoreless game in the third with his first major league homer, a solo shot to left.

A's update: Craig Breslow ranked No. 1 on The Sporting News' smartest athlete list

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The Sporting News recently ranked the Top 20 Smartest Athletes, and A's reliever Craig Breslow landed in the top spot.

A 2009 Wall Street Journal story had dubbed Breslow the "smartest man in baseball," but this latest ranking is an even bigger feather in his academic cap.

The left-hander graduated from Yale in 2002, where he pulled a 3.5 grade-point average while majoring in molecular biophysics and biochemistry.

"At some point, somebody is going to figure out my secret," Breslow joked Wednesday. "You can only fool people for so long. While it lasts, I'll enjoy it."

Two other Bay Area athletes made The Sporting News list -- 49ers quarterback Alex Smith (No. 11) and Sharks defenseman Douglas Murray (No. 16).

Breslow has made an impact off the field with his Strike 3 Foundation, which raises money for pediatric cancer research. His work was recognized Wednesday when former A's pitcher Dave Stewart presented him with the Dave Stewart Community Service Award.

Breslow's intelligence makes him an easy target for teammates.

"It's probably just another (source) of ribbing and teasing," he said of The Sporting News' ranking. "But there's a lot of things people could be writing or saying about me, so as long as it's positive I'll take it."

Chris Carter's improvement continued in the A's 4-3 loss to the White Sox, as the left fielder connected for his first major league homer in the third inning. Edwin Jackson threw him a 3-2 changeup low and inside, and Carter drove it over the wall in left. "He showed a real quick bat on that pitch," A's manager Bob Geren said. "He's got very quick hands, and the ball jumps off his bat."

Outfielder Ryan Sweeney, lost to season-ending right knee surgery in August, had his left knee examined Tuesday, but no information was available. "... The A's agreed on a four-year extension for the Sacramento River Cats to continue as their Triple-A affiliate. Reportedly, they could be shifting their low Single-A affiliate to Burlington, Iowa, and their short-season Single-A affiliate to Burlington, Vt. "... Kevin Kouzmanoff wasn't in the lineup, and Geren said the third baseman might play every other day to rest his back. ... First baseman Daric Barton (left thigh contusion) didn't start but entered as a defensive replacement in the eighth.

Chin Music: Random thoughts and updates as A's go for sweep

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 9/22/2010 12:17PM

It's one of the more unusual A's lineups of the season today, with Daric Barton, Kevin Kouzmanoff and Mark Ellis all getting a day off. Barton left last night's game after bruising his left thigh while sliding into home. "Not playing today is best for his body," manager Bob Geren said. "Hopefully he can come back and play out the string." Kouzmanoff, who played last night for the first time in two weeks, still has some soreness in his back. Geren said he plans to play his third baseman every other day for now, an idea that Kouzmanoff said was probably for the best. He told me his back bothers him a bit as he gets up and down in his defensive position. Ellis is generally banged up and getting a regular day off, meaning Eric Sogard draws a start at second base.

It's that time of year when guys are feeling the wear and tear of a long season, and you figure Geren wants his front-line guys ready for this weekend's series with Texas, so I'm not surprised to see some players getting the day off.

The lineups:

A's — Davis CF, Pennington SS, Suzuki C, Cust DH, Gross RF, Iwamura 3B, Carter LF, Larish 1B, Sogard 2B; Anderson LHP.

White Sox — Pierre LF, Ramirez SS, Rios CF, Konerko 1B, Ramirez DH, Quentin RF, Flowers C, Morel 3B, Lillibridge 2B; Jackson RHP.

–Looking for some inside keys to how the A's might fare against the Rangers? Keep an eye on the bullpen, folks. Not only is closer Andrew Bailey out indefinitely, but Geren revealed that left-hander Jerry Blevins is battling a sore shoulder and hasn't thrown the past couple days. He's unavailable, and Craig Breslow — who's thrown four of the past five days — won't be used today, Geren said. That means the A's are without a lefty in the bullpen.

Breslow should be available for tomorrow's series opener against Texas, but Bailey's absence could definitely be felt over that crucial four-game series. You have to like the way Breslow's handled ninth-inning duties with Bailey out. But it's too bad Geren had to call on him last night (or at least felt like he had to) when Henry Rodriguez found mild trouble in the ninth. Breslow has been carrying quite a load.

–What's it like to be Gabe Gross right now? He goes 24 games without a start, and today he finds himself batting fifth and playing right field. As a beat writer, I'm always eager to walk in the clubhouse to start the day and see who's in the lineup. I get the feeling the players themselves are just as curious as me.

Speaking of Gross, check out the unique facial hair he's sporting right now. He's got a full beard going, but he's shaved a bare patch around his chin. It's, uh, interesting ... Gross, who replaced Chris Carter in left field last night in the seventh inning, said he planned to shave his beard. But ... "I hit one off the wall last night, so what are you gonna do?" He said Steve Tolleson gave his new look the thumbs-up. Gross' wife, Kelly, has yet to see it.

That's all for now ...

White Sox score twice in 9th to beat A's

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

With division-leading Texas arriving at the Coliseum tonight for the start of a four-game series, the A's wanted to make the standings as tight as possible.

Instead, Oakland missed a big opportunity, letting a late lead trickle away in messy fashion and falling 4-3 to the White Sox, who scored twice in the ninth with two outs. It was the A's first loss of the season when leading after eight innings. They were 68-0.

"We've got to come back and we've got four big games in a row," reliever Brad Ziegler said. "We've got to pretend this one didn't happen."

Pinch hitters Mark Kotsay and Mark Teahen, both left-handed hitters, delivered RBIs in the inning off Ziegler, Kotsay with a single and Teahen with a double. The A's did not have a left-handed reliever available with Jerry Blevins nursing a sore shoulder - and with Craig Breslow having worked four out of the previous five games, including with a five-run lead the night before.

"Both Kotsay and Teahen are better suited for a lefty, without a doubt," A's manager Bob Geren said.

The A's put two on with two outs in the bottom of the ninth, but pinch-hitter Steve Tolleson struck out against Chris Sale.

The White Sox also scored a run in the eighth, abetted by a flubbed rundown by Ziegler. Ziegler, who'd made a third-to-first move that isolated Alexei Ramirez off first base, took a relay from Mark Ellis but dropped the ball before throwing to the plate, allowing Juan Pierre to steal home.

"I caught it OK, but I was trying to transfer to my bare hand and just lost it," Ziegler said. "I knew if (Pierre) was charging home, I would have to turn and throw, I just made a bad transfer. I was just trying to do it too quick."

With a nice outside slide, Pierre got his hand in just ahead of the tag from Kurt Suzuki. Ziegler said he felt as if he'd let the team down, especially after a good start by Brett Anderson and some early offense, which began with Chris Carter's first big-league homer, a leadoff shot in the third.

Anderson went 6 2/3 innings, allowing six hits, one walk and one run. Anderson said he didn't have his best stuff and he described the outing as "smoke and mirrors."

Daric Barton did not start Wednesday after coming out of the previous night's game with a bruised left leg, but he did come in to play first base in the eighth inning, and he recorded one of the A's two-out hits in the ninth, along with Ellis, who also did not start.

Barton is expected back in the lineup tonight and Geren believes he'll play the rest of the season.

Jerry Blevins latest to be injured Jerry Blevins latest to be injured

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Even with the finish line in sight, the A's are still dropping left and right.

In this case, specifically left. Lefthander **Jerry Blevins** is out with a left shoulder strain, but he's hoping it won't keep him out the final week and a half. "It's just day by day, playing it by ear," said the reliever, who never has had a shoulder strain before. "If it feels good, I'll go out there."

Blevins hasn't pitched in more than a week, since the team was in Kansas City, one reason **Craig Breslow**, the lone remaining lefty in the bullpen, had worked four of the previous five days. Breslow's excessive workload is also because closer **Andrew Bailey** is out with elbow soreness. **Michael Wuertz** was unavailable with tendinitis.

Breslow honored: Dave Stewart presented Breslow with the team's service award, which is named for Stewart. Breslow's Strike 3 Foundation has raised nearly \$150,000 this year for pediatric cancer research and patient support.

"I feel privileged to be recognized, but that's not the driving force behind it," said Breslow, whose sister, **Lesley**, survived childhood cancer.

Breslow was also named the smartest athlete in sports by the Sporting News, which will feature him on its cover this week.

Briefly: Geren said he'll probably alternate **Kevin Kouzmanoff** and **Aki Iwamura** at third. ... Both teams wore black tops Wednesday, which is not supposed to be allowed. Chicago decided to go ahead and wear black, anyway, though they have alternate grays. The umpires approved it, confusing as it was for fans. ... The A's extended their agreement with Triple-A Sacramento through 2014.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Winter plans: A's infielder Jeff Larish and reliever Henry Rodriguez will play winter ball in Venezuela this offseason, and Chris Carter is considering Venezuela after going to Mexico last year. Boof Bonser is thinking about winter ball, but he's not sure where.

Drumbeat: Add Blevins to the injured; Barton out today

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the Coliseum 9/22/2010 11:59AM

Reliever Jerry Blevins is among the A's wounded now; he's out with a left shoulder strain, an injury he's never had before, but he was relieved the MRI showed nothing more serious. He said he's on the mend and he's really going day to day, seeing how he feels, so it's very possible this isn't a season-ending thing. It does leave the A's with just one left-hander, Craig Breslow, in the bullpen, one of the reasons he seems to be in every single game. Blevins wasn't available in Minnesota or the first two games here vs. the White Sox.

Daric Barton will get today off for leg tightness, the result of a slide into home last night that left him bruised. Manager Bob Geren noted that Barton had played in all but three games, so a day off was needed, and he believes that Barton will play out the string from here. Mark Ellis also is getting a day off, a little banged up like most everyone else, so Eric Sogard is at second.

Kevin Kouzmanoff is out again after playing last night, but Geren indicated he'll pretty much alternate Kouzmanoff and Aki Iwamura vs lefties and righties since the A's see left, right, left, right the rest of the week.

Here's the lineup: Davis CF, Pennington SS, Suzuki C, Cust DH, Gross RF, Iwamura 3B, Carter LF, Larish 1B, Sogard 2B

The A's re-upped with Triple-A Sacramento through 2014, no real surprise; though the loss of low-A affiliate Kane County and short-season Vancouver hurt a bit, no one thought that Sacramento was in doubt. In fact this announcement had been expected some time ago.

I was asked a lot of questions yesterday about affiliation moves yesterday because of Kane County and Vancouver, including why teams change affiliates. Often it's the affiliates that do the moving - Vancouver, for instance, wanted to link up with Canada's one big-league team, the Blue Jays, which makes total sense. Kane County apparently liked the idea of being affiliated with a big-league club closer to Illinois, and Kansas City came calling. It sounds as if Kane County likes the Royals' prospects a lot, too, but why the heck wouldn't they like Oakland's? The A's have done well by Kane County, always sending all of their top-flight young players through there. That's often the biggest selling point for affiliates - obviously, they want to win and make the playoffs, helping attendance figures and all of that. In which case, again, Kane County should be pretty happy with the A's over the years.

The A's loved Kane County's facilities, and going to Burlington, Iowa, is apparently not an upgrade in that area, but Burlington was the only remaining low-A ball option.

Oakland's other new affiliate will also be a Burlington - Vermont, of the New York-Penn League. A nice spot, but too far from Oakland, really. Vancouver was much better in terms of geography for the front office and development people.

Several people asked what happens with the rosters. The A's move their players to new affiliates (many of them, of course, get promoted - Vancouver's players, in fact, probably would have moved on to Kane County, but now they'll go to the Burlington Bees). Kane Country stocks its team with Royals players, etc.

It's a strange system, and some big-league teams have bought affiliates to prevent these kinds of shuffles. It's a pain up and moving operations and getting used to a new facility and team employees.

Ziegler's shaky ninth sends A's to defeat

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The A's are young. They're motivated, energetic and gritty.

But they're also banged up.

The latter tale prevailed over the former Wednesday.

Lefty Brett Anderson and phenom slugger Chris Carter teamed up early for a bright beginning, but a thin relief corps relying on Brad Ziegler's submarine ways made for a rather dim end.

And so, a longtime lead diffused into nothing more than a 4-3 A's loss to the White Sox, one that represented the club's first this season when leading after eight innings.

Ziegler, who had not allowed a run in each of his last 12 appearances, endured a shaky ninth inning following an equally shaky eighth frame, one that witnessed an odd sequence of events with Alexei Ramirez on first base and Juan Pierre on third.

With one out and a 3-1 lead, Ziegler faked a throw to third before tossing the ball to first, where Daric Barton began a rundown that had Ramirez caught between the bags with Pierre stalling at third. Ziegler, though, got involved and attempted to tag the runner but instead dropped the ball, at which point he was forced to throw home with Pierre on the run. But the White Sox outfielder slid under Kurt Suzuki's tag to narrow Oakland's lead to one.

"I think I caught it OK, and then with the transfer to my bare hand I somehow lost it," Ziegler said. "I picked it up, saw he was running and threw home. I knew as soon as I tagged [the runner], I was going to have to throw anyway, so I was trying to get it into my hand as quick as possible and made a bad transfer."

The right-handed reliever was able to induce an inning-ending double play, but his return in the ninth inning brought about an even more disastrous scene, one that ultimately ended Chicago's string of eight consecutive losses.

Ziegler struck out Paul Konerko to begin the ninth, but he walked Carlos Quentin to set up Chicago's rally before garnering out No. 2 on an A.J. Pierzynski groundout. Just one out away from handing Anderson his seventh win of the season, Ziegler forced pinch-hitter and former A's player Mark Kotsay into a 3-2 count but lost the battle when Kotsay laced a game-tying RBI single to right field.

"Obviously, I'm not trying to pitch around him by any means, because that puts the winning run on base," Ziegler said. "Early in the at-bat, I froze him on a fastball in -- he took it for a strike. Later, the 3-1 pitch, he was late on. We tried to go back in, thinking if he was late on the one away, he wouldn't be able to get to the one in, and it was a good pitch. I got it on the corner, and he just fought it into right field."

With the game now tied and no noise from the bullpen, Ziegler set up to face another lefty, Mark Teahen. The A's righty had no better luck, as he surrendered a go-ahead RBI double to Teahen.

"I felt like it was a pretty good pitch down and away," Ziegler said. "It was a 2-0 count, and he was just looking for something to drive there. Just two good pieces of hitting, when a lefty takes you the other way."

"It's frustrating. Brett deserved a better outcome. Our team fought hard all day. They got us runs when they could, because [Edwin] Jackson was incredible today. I feel bad. I feel like I let them down."

Manager Bob Geren had few options, though. Ziegler's ninth-inning appearance, even after Kotsay's game-changing hit, continued as a result of several A's hurlers -- including the only two lefties -- being unavailable out of the bullpen.

Southpaw Craig Breslow, who pitched in each of the club's last three games, was not available due to his recent workload. Fellow lefty Jerry Blevins, meanwhile, has been shut down from throwing for the time being because of a strained shoulder. So while Geren admitted both Kotsay and Teahen would have been "better suited right there for a lefty," he knows his bullpen situation is not ideal.

Furthermore, the A's skipper has been managing without his top two right-handed relievers, as closer Andrew Bailey is dealing with a sore elbow to be examined by Dr. James Andrews on Thursday and Michael Wuertz was deemed unavailable after the game because of a nagging sore right thumb. Geren listed Wuertz as day to day, and neither are ruled out for the rest of the season.

But for the time being, the A's have been left to play with what they have, and they'll have to continue those efforts on Thursday against a Texas team looking to close in on the American League West, which the Rangers led by 7 1/2 games following Oakland's loss.

"We're a little beat up," Ziegler said. "The guys that are here are still capable of putting together a really good ballteam. We have to keep it together and do what we can. I don't think anybody at this time of the year is 100 percent, so you just have to fight through and do what you can."

Anderson, for one, did just that in his start. The A's lefty allowed one run on six hits while walking two and striking out one in 6 2/3 innings of work. He remained 6-6 on the year with a no-decision and is 3-1 with a 1.61 ERA in the month of September.

"Fantastic," Geren said. "He's one of the best young pitchers in the game. That's a pretty good lineup over there, and he pitched extremely well."

Both teams remained hitless until the third inning, when Carter led off the bottom half with a long shot into the left field bleachers off Jackson for his first Major League homer. The young phenom, who began his career mired in a 0-for-33 slump, is now 4-for-8 over his last three games.

"It felt pretty much the same as getting my first hit," said Carter, who was given the home run ball. "It was exciting. Everyone waits for that, getting that out of the way."

"Everyone was fired up," Anderson said. "Especially off a good pitcher who was throwing well today, it kind of boosted us momentum-wise. We were able to eke out some more and, unfortunately, we weren't able to finish it off."

No one in the A's clubhouse was blinded by the ramifications of Wednesday's loss.

"Going into the Texas series, it would have been nice to get the sweep and then see what happens [Wednesday night] with them and the Angels," Anderson said. "Next thing you know, we could have been right back in it. It's tough, especially in the ninth, having two outs. But we have to put it behind us and be ready to play the next four days."

Blevins, Wuertz both day to day for A's

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- An injured Jerry Blevins gives the A's just one lefty in a rather thin bullpen, where Craig Breslow will likely represent the only southpaw available for the Rangers series beginning Thursday.

Breslow was not available for Wednesday's contest having pitched in each of the club's last three games, but he'll be expected to carry closer duties for the four-game set with Texas with both Blevins and Michael Wuertz being unavailable.

Blevins is feeling better, according to manager Bob Geren, but has yet to resume throwing because of a strained left shoulder. Wuertz, meanwhile, is battling a nagging sore right thumb and, thus, has been deemed day to day. The A's other top reliever, Brad Ziegler, endured 1 2/3 innings of work (24 pitches) while taking a 4-3 loss Wednesday.

Breslow, who recorded just one save in four seasons prior to this year, has a career-high three saves this season as a result of the injury to Andrew Bailey, who is slated to have his sore right elbow examined by Dr. James Andrews in Florida on Thursday.

Despite Bailey's glaring absence in what could be a pivotal series for the A's, Geren knows he must handle the left-handed Breslow carefully, so rather than simply selecting relievers based on left-handed and right-handed situations, he'll "use different criteria," including low-strike and low-walk history.

Breslow is currently tied for second among American League relievers with 71 appearances and is also tied for fourth in innings pitched with 69 1/3, which marks just one-third of an inning less than his 2009 total. Along the way, he's compiled a career-high 67 strikeouts, which ties him with Bob Owchinko (1982) for the second-best total by a left-handed reliever in Oakland history.

A's give Barton day off to rest thigh bruise

OAKLAND -- Daric Barton received a much-needed day off Wednesday after suffering a left thigh bruise the night before, thus handing Jeff Larish a start at first base.

Barton, who has appeared in a team-high 146 games, including 145 starts, was in a collision at the plate with White Sox catcher A.J. Pierzynski in the third inning of Tuesday's game. He stayed in the game for another inning but was lifted after the fifth frame.

"He needs a day," manager Bob Geren said. "He banged his knee into the catcher. There's some tightness in his knee, so to not play would be best for his body."

The A's skipper expects Barton to be ready for Thursday's four-game series opener against the visiting Rangers, who stood seven games ahead of Oakland in the American League West entering Wednesday's action.

The A's first baseman is batting .226 in 19 games this month, but he still leads the AL in walks (103) and ranks sixth in on-base percentage (.395).

For Larish, it marked his third start at first base for the A's this year. After a short week-long stint with the club in early August, Larish returned Aug. 20 and is 8-for-46 (.174) with two home runs and eight RBIs in 16 games since then. He entered Wednesday's contest mired in a 0-for-14 stretch.

A's hold Kouzmanoff out of lineup

OAKLAND -- Kevin Kouzmanoff's long-awaited return Tuesday lasted just one day, as the A's third baseman sat out Wednesday's series finale against the White Sox.

Manager Bob Geren insisted Kouzmanoff's lower back -- which kept him out of the lineup for more than two weeks -- was "fine." The A's skipper simply wants to keep him healthy while also using Akinori Iwamura at third base.

Iwamura got the start at the hot corner on Wednesday against Chicago righty Edwin Jackson, his eighth appearance there since being signed by the A's on Sept. 13. He's 4-for-14 (.286) over his last four games entering Wednesday after going hitless in 10 at-bats.

A's extend contract with Triple-A Sacramento

OAKLAND -- The A's on Wednesday announced they have extended their player development contract with Triple-A Sacramento through the 2014 season.

"We are delighted to continue one of the most successful Major League Triple-A relationships in all of baseball," A's general manager Billy Beane said in a statement. "We consider Sacramento to be the premier franchise in Minor League baseball, providing us with an ideal situation in regards to a first-class playing facility, a supportive fan base and close proximity to the Bay Area.

Sacramento, which has had a Minor League affiliation with the A's since 2000, won its ninth Pacific Coast League Division title in the past 11 seasons this year. Their success followed a rather ugly start that had the River Cats 12 1/2 games back of first place in June.

Since 2000, the club has won four PCL Championships and has posted the league's best record (892-691). All the while, they've also led Minor League Baseball in attendance during nine of the past 11 years.

Worth noting

Eric Sogard received his first Major League start Wednesday, getting the nod at second base while Mark Ellis received a day off. ... Gabe Gross, who underwent a stretch of 24 straight games without a start, was handed one in right field Wednesday. Gross had been sporting a full beard, but he showed up Wednesday with a small bare patch on his chin less than 24 hours after entering the game in the seventh and tallying a double. He said he had planned to shave it all off Tuesday night, but "I hit one off the wall last night, so what are you gonna do?" ... The A's entered Wednesday's contest with a 56-30 mark against the White Sox since the start of the 2001 season, which is the best record by any American League team against Chicago over that span.

Texas heads to Oakland with title in reach

By Bailey Stephens / MLB.com

For the Athletics, who have trailed the Rangers by a significant margin much of the second half but refused to go away, Thursday's series opener against Texas represents one last chance to gain serious ground. For the American League West leaders, it is a chance to deliver the knockout blow to the second-place A's.

The clubs begin a four-game series on Thursday, which could feature the Rangers clinching the division -- two wins in four games will do the trick -- or the Athletics injecting some drama into the final week of the season.

Of course, the Athletics have known for weeks that their shot is a very long one at this point. Still, manager Bob Geren hasn't stopped pushing his team.

"We have a young team, we're pretty banged up and, yet, we still have a chance," Geren said. "There's a good feeling in the clubhouse. Guys are trying to win every game. They're playing extremely well, extremely hard."

While the A's hope to pile on, the Rangers will be trying to put a strong finish to what has been a rough road trip.

"It's important we go up there and play well," manager Ron Washington said. "They are the guys chasing us so we want to have a good showing. It's not going to make or break us and I don't envision us going to Oakland and getting swept. It's the last time to play them and they certainly play us tough."

Texas will throw its ace at the Athletics, with Cliff Lee set to start Game 1 on Thursday. The left-hander has endured his share of struggles since joining the Rangers, but in his last two starts has looked like vintage Lee. In wins over the Yankees and Mariners, Lee threw a combined 16 innings, tallying 13 strikeouts and allowing just two earned runs. Against his former team last time out, Lee proved he was totally healthy after overcoming a back injury earlier this season. Lee's resurgence is least surprising to his teammates, who seemed to expect a rebound now that he is healthy.

"Typical," second baseman Ian Kinsler said. "It's what he does. He had a couple games of a rough stretch, but nobody lost confidence in him and he didn't lose confidence in himself. That's the type of game he throws. That's what he expects."

Athletics: Braden goes for 10th victory

Dallas Braden will continue his quest to record double-digit wins for the first time in his career on Thursday. Since winning his ninth game, Braden has lost four in a row, compiling a 6.23 ERA during that span. The problem could be the 12 walks he's also issued over that span. It could be fatigue at this point in the season as Braden is nearly 30 innings over his previous career high, but the lefty is more inclined to point to the four free passes he handed out in his last start. "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 baserunners. They will score."

Rangers: Vlad wielding a hot bat:

It's no surprise at this point in the season that Vladimir Guerrero has been one of the offensive cornerstones for the Rangers. He'll likely be looking forward to hitting against the left-handed Braden, as he's hitting .350 against southpaws, compared to .289 against right-handers this season.

Worth noting

Athletics prospect Chris Carter hit his first Major League home run on Wednesday afternoon. ... With another steal on Wednesday by Cliff Pennington, the A's now have 144 on the season, most for the club since the 1991 team registered 151. ... The Rangers are 7-8 against Oakland this year and 2-4 in Oakland. Overall, the Rangers have lost 12 of their last 18 games at the Coliseum.

Major Lee-ague: Geren without top four relievers today

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 9/22/2010 5:46PM

The A's won the series with the White Sox, but I think today's loss just goes to show that not even a series win is that significant when you can't close in on games you should have won. I've already heard from many people who are ragging on Bob Geren for letting submariner Brad Ziegler face two lefties there in the ninth. The A's were without a left-handed reliever today, so Geren had no options there. So you get Michael Wuertz warming up then, right? Not if Wuertz is unavailable, which Geren informed us after today's game. He's battling that sore right thumb that kept him out of some recent games again, and there's really no timetable for his return. Same for Jerry Blevins, who isn't even throwing because of a shoulder strain. Craig Breslow wasn't available because of his recent workload (maybe he shouldn't have been used Tuesday?), so Geren -- also without an ailing Andrew Bailey -- was without his top four relievers today. Still, I think in today's situation, you maybe pull Ziegler after he walks Quentin and let Henry Rodriguez or even Vin Mazzaro have a go at Mark Kotsay. Your thoughts?

Nevertheless, it was a tough loss and the A's are going to need their starters to go very deep over the next four games against Texas. Otherwise, they're going to be hurting in the later innings and lose any chance at whatever shot they still have at catching the Rangers. If, by weekend's end, the division has been decided or is close to being decided, it's probably best to simply shut down Bailey, Blevins and Wuertz -- and be cautious with Breslow -- for the remainder of the year to allow them the opportunity to get 100 percent better.

White Sox drop A's to end 8-game losing streak

Chicago avoids being swept with 4-3 victory over Oakland

By JANIE McCAULEY, ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — A day after being eliminated from the division race, the Chicago White Sox rallied to end their longest losing streak of the season.

"We don't give up, man," manager Ozzie Guillen said. "I'm proud of the way they play, pleased with the way they play."

Mark Teahen hit a go-ahead double with two outs in the ninth inning right after pinch-hitter Mark Kotsay's tying single, lifting the White Sox over the Oakland Athletics 4-3 Wednesday and stopping their eight-game skid.

On Tuesday night, Chicago's loss clinched the AL Central for Minnesota.

"You feel funny, you feel jealous, you feel you should be there," Guillen said. "I'm disappointed. We should be disappointed."

The White Sox got to Oakland's short-handed bullpen, scoring twice against Brad Ziegler (3-5). The right-hander hadn't given up a run in his previous 12 appearances.

Juan Pierre stole his majors-leading 60th base, swiping home in the eighth to get Chicago within 3-2. He moved into 30th place on the all-time steals list with 519 and into second on Chicago's career single-season list.

Matt Thornton (4-4) pitched 1-2/3 innings for the win. Chris Sale recorded the final out for his third save in as many tries, striking out pinch-hitter Steve Tolleson to end it with runners on first and second.

"It's a tough loss. I don't think we've experienced that this year," manager Bob Geren said. "We've held the lead and now, nothing."

Oakland's Chris Carter hit his first career home run.

White Sox slugger Manny Ramirez was a late scratch after he told Guillen during batting practice he didn't feel well. Dayan Viciedo, who replaced Ramirez in the lineup, hit an RBI single in the seventh.

"A little flu," Ramirez said afterward.

The White Sox won for only the third time in their past 15 games. Chicago snapped its longest September skid since dropping nine straight games in 1976.

"I think we played good as a group," Guillen said. "The only difference from today and the past is we got clutch hitting."

Guillen said after the game he would like to know where he stands with the White Sox beyond 2010. The skipper is signed through the next two seasons — and he wants to stay put in Chicago.

Oakland was an out away from its first sweep of the White Sox since Aug. 14-16, 2007. The White Sox avoided being swept in a third straight series for the first time since Aug. 19-28, 1991, by Detroit, Cleveland and Kansas City.

On a day when four of Oakland's top relievers weren't available, Brett Anderson went 6 2-3 innings. He allowed one run on six hits, struck out one and walked one.

"Considering the stuff I had the results were pretty good," Anderson said. "It was a smoke-and-mirrors outing where I was trying to get outs anywhere I could."

Ziegler hasn't converted a save in four chances this year. The A's had no lefties to pitch in relief.

Since Carter began 0 for 32 in his initial 11 big league games, he is 4 for 8 in his past three games. He homered leading off the third, then Jack Cust added an RBI single in the sixth.

NOTES: Oakland's Jeff Larish snapped a career-worst 0-for-16 stretch with a double in the seventh. It was just his second hit in 30 at-bats over his past 12 games. ... Pierre's career-best year for steals was 65 in 2003 for Florida. ... Geren plans to

play 3B Kevin Kouzmanoff every other day because he recently missed nearly two weeks with back spasms. ... The A's renewed their player development agreement with Triple-A Sacramento through the 2014 season. ... Chicago went 2-4 at the Coliseum this year and 4-5 overall against the A's in 2010. ... A's closer Andrew Bailey, the 2009 AL Rookie of the Year, is set to see Dr. James Andrews on Thursday for another opinion on his troublesome elbow. ... Eric Sogard made his first start at 2B for the A's.

Geren mismanages bullpen as Oakland blows late lead to lose to Chicago, 4-3

Sam McPherson, examiner.com

The Oakland Athletics have spent months wasting opportunities to catch the Texas Rangers for the American League West division lead, but Wednesday's blown chance may have been the most painful of all.

Since the Rangers haven't done anything special since June, they've been cruising and sitting on their lead in the division while the A's and Los Angeles Angels have fumbled around .500 for the last two-plus months.

But with Texas losing three in a row earlier this week and Oakland winning three in a row, suddenly the A's were looking at a surprising opportunity: win another game Wednesday and then host the Rangers for four games at home with an outside shot at cutting the division lead to two games with one week to play.

And of course, it was that kind of pressure that got to A's manager Bob Geren and the bullpen, leading to a complete collapse in the final three innings that cost Oakland a win and a chance to make their season matter.

With the 4-3 loss to the Chicago White Sox on Wednesday -- coupled with the Rangers' extra-innings win over Los Angeles - the A's once again are eight games out of first place. And with only 11 games to play, even sweeping Texas over the next four games won't help Oakland do much damage.

And the blown opportunity really started on Tuesday night, when Geren inexplicably used his replacement closer, Craig Breslow, for the fourth time in five games -- basically making him unavailable on Wednesday. Since the A's had a five-run lead on Tuesday night, using Breslow in a non-save situation was not only illogical but extremely costly for the next game.

Nursing a one-run lead on Wednesday in the ninth inning -- and with normal closer Andrew Bailey ruled out for the year with elbow issues and lefty specialist Jerry Blevins also unavailable due to injury -- Geren didn't have very many options for saving the game, and yet he committed a cardinal sin for bullpen management: asking a reliever to get a save across two different innings.

Brad Ziegler had entered the game with one out in the eighth inning to put out a fire, but Geren marched him back out in the ninth. Yes, the A's righty had only thrown a few pitches as he stamped out a White Sox rally in the eighth inning, but it's the stress and mentality for closing that require the singular focus on the one inning.

Like it or not, that's what modern-day closing is in the major leagues: a one-inning proposition.

Asking a reliever who isn't used to closing to get more than three outs for a save is just asking for disaster.

And that's what Geren got out of Ziegler in the ninth: two runs for the White Sox, a blown save for Ziegler, and a loss for the team that was very costly.

White Sox Rally Back For The Win

Malaika Bobino, Oakland Post

Oakland, CA – There's the saying "so close but yet so far" would be best to describe the A's stunning loss to the Chicago White Sox. In what seemed to be a sure thing changed in the ninth inning.

Mark Teahen hit a double on a fly ball to left field and Gordon Beckman scored giving the Sox the 4-3 victory. Their rally began in the eighth inning when Juan Pierre stole home while Alex Rios was at bat. Then top of the ninth Mark Kotsay hit the game tying RBI single to right field.

"We had a chance in the ninth but we couldn't get that hit," said Rajai Davis. We'll have to put this one behind us and be ready for tomorrow series."

In baseball that's what you do, but it behind you and move on. But for Chicago it's a celebration they ended their eight game losing streak. After losing game two of the series to Oakland, Minnesota clinched the division eliminating the White Sox from the pennant race.

"I forgot how to shake the players hand after the game," manager Ozzie Guillen joked. "I think we played good as a group, we got big hits and pitched well late in the game."

The A's got off to a great start when Chris Carter hit his first Major League home run in the third inning. Carter ended his slump the night before when he singled to lead off the bottom of the seventh. He snapped a career-opening 0-33 streak that lasted since his debut on August 9th.

"It feels good to help the team in anyway," Carter said. "At first I was anxious but now I'm settling in and becoming more comfortable." After receiving the home run ball he explained "that it felt the same as getting his first hit."

Oakland's skipper Bob Geren had to manage his bullpen without two of his best right-hand relievers Andrew Bailey who has a sore elbow and Michael Wuertz is out due to a sore right thumb. Geren also is missing his leadoff hitter Coco Crisp who recently sprained his pinkie finger.

"I think I caught it OK, and then with the transfer to my bare hand I some how lost it," closer Brad Zeigler said. "I picked it up, saw he was running, threw home for the out but made a bad transfer."

Zielger struck out his first batter Paul Konerko to begin the ninth frame but walked Carlos Quentin. With one out away from their first sweep of the White Sox since August 14-16 2007 he forced pinch hitter Kotsay into a 3-2 count to seal Chicago's victory.

Now 7 1/2 games back from Texas who lead the American League West, the A's look ahead to their next four game series which begins Thursday night against the Rangers.

A Voice of Béisbol Is Benched

By JOEL MILLMAN , Wall Street Journal, 9/23/2010OAKLAND—

This season has been a roller coaster for broadcaster Amaury Pi-Gonzalez, the Havana-born Spanish voice of the Oakland Athletics.

The 65-year-old savored the thrill of the announcement that he would be inducted into the Bay Area Radio Hall of Fame in September. In July, he also experienced the despair of being driven from local airwaves after two AM radio stations abruptly pulled the plug on airing A's games in Spanish.

"In four decades in this business, nothing like this had ever happened to me," says Mr. Pi-Gonzalez, who boasts over 3,500 baseball games called in Spanish—plus hundreds more NBA Golden State Warriors basketball games, and one NFL preseason football game—for sports fans up and down the West Coast.

His season says a lot about the shifting Spanish-language radio landscape. Although some 1.5 million Spanish-speakers reside in the Bay Area, baseball has become a tougher sell on the airwaves because many local Latinos hail from Mexico, Guatemala or El Salvador—places where soccer reigns. And while the children of immigrants do sometimes become baseball fans, they usually are sufficiently assimilated to enjoy the game in English, meaning Spanish baseball's demographics typically skew older.

In addition, the leading Latino radio networks increasingly cater to younger audiences, relying on syndicated news, talk shows and music rotations that are mass-produced in Miami or Los Angeles and cost next to nothing for local affiliates to program.

By contrast, Spanish baseball requires a heavy up-front cash commitment to hire announcers and technical staff. It also eats up plenty of air time—an average of four hours per game for six or more months. So over the years, the Oakland A's and the San Francisco Giants have struggled to find and keep stations willing to carry their games.

"The economics of Spanish radio favors music," says Ken Pries, the Oakland A's vice president for broadcasting. "Building a network of Spanish radio outlets for baseball has always been a challenge."

All of this has added a new twist to Mr. Pi-Gonzalez's 32-year career in radio. The Fremont resident, who emigrated to the U.S. from Cuba in 1961, began calling A's games in the 1970s.

He soon found that developing an audience wasn't easy in an ethnic market where AM station formats keep changing. In the 1990s, A's broadca

sts were carried by KNTA, a San Jose AM station. But when KNTA switched to an all-Vietnamese format in 1995, the A's had to suspend Spanish programming. Similarly, while calling games for the Giants a few years later, Mr. Pi-Gonzalez could be heard on KLOK. That station switched to a Hindi-Punjabi format.

From 2003 to 2006, Mr. Pi-Gonzalez was a radio nomad, jetting up to Seattle to call 81 Seattle Mariners' home games, while also calling 50 games each season for the Giants. In 2007, he did the full 162-game season for the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim, traveling with the club and living out of a rented apartment near Angels Stadium.

This year, the A's partnered with the Spanish Béisbol Network. The Philadelphia-based operation markets Spanish baseball broadcasts as packages to national advertisers, then hires local talent to call games in each city. Participating teams generally buy air time on low-power AM stations, and cover the cost by selling their own ads to local sponsors.

The Spanish Béisbol Network was on the hook for about \$500 an hour to two gospel stations in Vallejo say people familiar with the matter.

Spanish Béisbol Network and the A's say neither partner sold enough ads to cover the cost of air time, nor the roughly \$90,000 a season salaries of Mr. Pi-Gonzalez and co-announcer, Manolo Hernández-Douen.

To compensate sponsors like [Comcast Corp.](#) and [Comerica Inc.](#), which agreed at the season's start to buy a full year's worth of ads on Spanish broadcasts, the A's offered more commercial slots on its English-language broadcasts. Meanwhile, both announcers agreed to salary cuts of between \$12,000 and \$20,000 to finish the season.

But the concessions ultimately weren't enough. In July, Mr. Pi-Gonzales learned he was losing his radio slots. That relegated him to Internet radio, where his calls of "jonrones" (home runs) and "ponches" (strikeouts) now stream from a free website, [losatleticos.com](#).

While the Web arrangement technically violates Major League Baseball's licensing rules, the A's petitioned the league commissioner's office to allow Mr. Pi-Gonzalez to finish the 2010 season at his microphone. For an undisclosed fee, the MLB sanctioned the deal, which expires at the end of the season.

On Saturday, the Bay Area Radio Hall of Fame will induct this year's honorees—including Mr. Pi-Gonzalez, who expects to broadcast the A's meeting with Texas earlier that day. His season ends Sunday, when the A's play their last home game.

Sporting News names top 20 smartest athletes

September 22 - In sports, brawn is important, but *Sporting News* has released its list of the top 20 smartest athletes, who with their impressive accomplishments both on and off the field, blow up the idea that brains and sports don't mix.

Oakland A's pitcher, **Craig Breslow**, tops the list. His on-field accomplishments including a 2.93 ERA over five seasons and an AL leader in games played complement his equally-impressive off-field resume, which includes a 3.5 GPA in molecular biophysics and biochemistry from Yale University, a 1420 SAT score, 34 MCAT score (the average score for medical school applicants is 28) and acceptance to NYU's medical school. He speaks both English and Spanish, runs the Strike 3 Foundation, a nonprofit that raises awareness and support for pediatric cancer research and, if he wasn't a professional athlete, would be in medical school.

Tennessee Titans safety, **Myron Rolle**, who graduated from Florida State in exercise science (premed) in 2 1/2 years, received a master's degree in medical anthropology from Oxford and counts philanthropic medicine and social equality among his off-field interests, comes in at number two. Number three, **Ross Ohlendorf**, starting pitcher for the Pirates worked as a volunteer intern in the U.S. Department of Agriculture last offseason after graduating from Princeton with a 3.8 GPA in operations research and financial engineering. Anaheim Ducks forward and one of the NHL's top enforcers, **George Parros**, also a Princeton grad with a degree in economics, is number four. Harvard economics graduate and Buffalo Bills quarterback **Ryan Fitzpatrick**, who scored a 1580 on the SAT, rounds out the top five.

Sporting News Top 20 Smartest Athletes:

1. Craig Breslow, RP, Oakland A's
2. Myron Rolle, S, Tennessee Titans
3. Ross Ohlendorf, SP, Pittsburgh Pirates
4. George Parros, F, Anaheim Ducks
5. Ryan Fitzpatrick, QB, Buffalo Bills
6. Matt Birk, C, Baltimore Ravens
7. Shane Battier, F, Houston Rockets
8. Chris Young, SP, San Diego Padres
9. Brad Ausmus, C, Los Angeles Dodgers
10. Grant Hill, G, Phoenix Suns
11. Alex Smith, QB, San Francisco 49ers
12. Jody Gerut, OF, San Diego Padres
13. Craig Counsell, IF, Milwaukee Brewers
14. Peyton Manning, QB, Indianapolis Colts
15. Pau Gasol, F, Los Angeles Lakers
16. Douglas Murray, D, San Jose Sharks
17. Sean Bedford, C, Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets
18. Sam Acho, DE, Texas Longhorns
19. Matt Bonner, F, San Antonio Spurs
20. Greg McElroy, QB, Alabama Crimson Tide

Twelve Thoughts: Towers in Arizona, Car-Go and A's, Kirk Gibson's Future

Tom Krasovic , Fanhouse aol.com

The Padres were a sports car needing mostly a tuneup years ago when they hired as their general manager Kevin Towers, who now takes over a bad Diamondbacks team.

When Towers replaced Randy Smith in late 1995, the rookie GM inherited the future all-time saves leader in Trevor Hoffman and a future Hall of Famer in Tony Gwynn, who would bat an NL-best .353 and .372 in the next two years. Other holdovers were a future unanimous MVP, Ken Caminiti, and a Gold Glove center fielder whose power was emerging, Steve Finley, both affordably signed to multi-year deals; and frontline starting pitchers Andy Ashby and Joey Hamilton cheaply controlled; and a future All-Star catcher in Brad Ausmus.

Prospect Derrek Lee enabled Towers to smartly trade for ace Kevin Brown two offseasons later. What's more, because Padres ownership lusted for voter approval for a new ballpark, the payroll was doubled from 1995-98.

Towers was the right guy, but it was also the right time and place.

- The contract between Towers and the Diamondbacks calls to mind swimmers sticking their toes in a chilly pool.

GMs often get 3-5 years in guaranteed salary, but this pact has only two guaranteed years, followed by four option years. Both sides deemed it wise to limit risk. Diamondbacks owner Ken Kendrick, burned several times by hasty and overly optimistic moves, still must pay large sums to former rookie GM Josh Byrnes and former rookie manager A.J. Hinch, who were given guarantees of eight and four years, respectively, and fired in July.

Towers agreed to a lower salary than what he got recently from the Padres but gained flexibility in years, plus escalators based on performance.

Expect Towers to make significant trades this offseason.

Trading is what he does best. Count on Towers to stir up offers for shortstop Stephen Drew, whose rising salary could make him too expensive for the Diamondbacks. Known by his San Diego staffers as "Willie Waiver Wire," Towers also will put in \$20,000 claims. Maybe he'll find another Scott Linebrink.

- Identify the best Dodgers prospect, then expect to hear, "Who?"

Jerry Sands started out in low Single-A this year with only 413 career at-bats, but the 25th-round draftee should now be considered the Dodgers' best prospect. Scouts say Sands' mature hitting approach and all-fields power will give him a fighting chance in the major leagues. A corner outfielder who'll turn 23 next week, Sands may be in Chavez Ravine next summer.

- Baseball benefited when the Oakland A's heard woofs from a top prospect. Part of why the A's traded outfield prospect Carlos Gonzalez to the Rockies was, they thought he was a dog (baseball-speak for uncoachable and bored). Gonzalez and his agent Scott Boras aren't complaining with how it turned out, and here at West Coast Bias, I'm pretty tickled with it too.

Dealt to the Rockies for another Boras client, Matt Holliday, Gonzalez thrived in Colorado's great hitting environment after working with hitting coach Don Baylor and is now one of baseball's more entertaining players. Off the field, he gets high marks for maturity, affability and team ethic, which isn't surprising to Diamondbacks personnel who knew him early in his career.

Holliday's big offensive years with the Rockies were a springboard to a \$120 million deal with the Cardinals, and it wouldn't surprise me if the so-called dog days with Oakland ultimately help to make Gonzalez a very rich man when he hits free agency. Woof.

- The Rockies would flourish as an NBA club.

They have three stars, which in the NBA translates into playoffs and titles, yet Colorado's quest for a franchise-first division title still could come up empty. Mega-years from ace Ubaldo Jimenez, shortstop Troy Tulowitzki and Gonzalez haven't fully overcome the roster's prevailing mediocrity.

The Rockies would flourish as an NBA club. They have three stars, which in the NBA translates into playoffs and titles, yet Colorado's quest for a franchise-first division title still could come up empty. • West Coast Bias isn't ruling out a VJ Day later this season in SoCal.

For all the talk about how Southern California's only NFL team and its best receiver, Vincent Jackson, are destined to stay at odds contractually, both club and player still have incentive to strike a deal for the season's final six games and beyond. The Chargers have no other receiver as able as Jackson, who by playing the final six games can pull in a lot of money and also increase his value for free agency. It's boring when rich people squabble over money. Strike a deal, gentlemen.

- No longer does his home ballpark give Towers an advantage when he shops for pitchers.

Towers is an astute judge of pitching talent, but San Diego's forgiving ballpark helps to turn nibbling pitchers into attackers. It's also a recruiting tool. Towers, acknowledging the challenge of building a pitching staff in the desert, said he's pleased that Arizona will store baseballs in a humidior next year. So is every National League pitcher.

- The Diamondbacks will shop for arm strength and athleticism.

"With pitchers, you need strength and strikeout ability, maybe not as much pitch to contact, because of the way the park plays," Towers told FanHouse. "Position players, you have to be real athletic, not only in the outfield but in the infield, because of the way the ballpark plays."

- Trevor Hoffman's slow start to the 2010 season likely had deeper roots than iffy form.

Heard this: Hoffman's shoulder was "barking" early in the season. Back then, the worst stretch of his Hall of Fame career sent Hoffman into mid-May with a 13.15 ERA and five blown saves in 10 attempts. The Brewers reliever responded with a 3.16 ERA in his last 33 games. If this is Hoffman's final season, at least it ended fairly well.

- USC's sneaky football coach should sound out a former Trojans football coach about Student Body right and left.

If you gave John Robinson running backs as talented as USC's current top trio, he would've used them to beat down opposing defenses. In the entertaining Pacific 10, which is loaded with snazzy offenses, USC can prevail by going Old School and revving up its power game like Robinson used to do, and like Stanford's Jim Harbaugh did with Toby Gerhart a year ago. A beefier attack would assist USC's so-so defense and accentuate the play-action passing of strong-armed sophomore Matt

Barkley.

- Kirk Gibson could remain as Diamondbacks manager.

"He's done some good things," said Towers, who met with the interim manager for nearly two hours on Wednesday.

But if Gibson doesn't pan out, Dodgers Triple-A manager Tim Lincecum likely is on Towers' short list, as Lincecum greatly impressed the GM four years ago in an interview for the job that went to Bud Black. A name for the future is Padres first-base coach Rick Renteria, once described by Towers as a potential major league manager. Towers has targeted Padres scout Bill Bryk, who is a former development man, and assistant GM Fred Uhlman Jr. for his staff.