

A's News Clips, Wednesday, September 29, 2010

Oakland A's fall, share second place with Los Angeles Angels

By Al Balderas, Correspondent, Oakland Tribune

The A's aren't exactly sprinting to the finish line of the 2010 season.

They went 1 for 8 with runners in scoring position and came out on the short end of a 4-2 decision against the Los Angeles Angels on Tuesday night at Angel Stadium.

Their fifth consecutive loss left them in a second-place tie in the American League West with the suddenly surging Angels at 77-80.

"You have to pitch pretty well to win with two runs," A's manager Bob Geren said. "We faced a pretty good pitcher (Dan Haren), and we got him out of the game fairly early, but we had to get another run or two somehow."

A's starter Dallas Braden (10-14) was charged with three earned runs in seven innings, but you couldn't put all of the blame on him.

Landon Powell was robbed of a two-run home run in the fourth inning when Angels rookie Peter Bourjos made a leaping catch at the center field wall.

Mark Ellis hit a leadoff double in the eighth but was stranded there. The A's had two runners on base in the ninth, but Daric Barton flied out to end the game.

"That kid in center field took that home run away," Geren said. "That was huge. Another six inches, and we have a different game."

The A's held a 2-1 lead in the sixth when the Angels were able to piece together three consecutive hits and a run-scoring ground out to take a 3-2 lead.

The Angels added an unearned run in the seventh moments after Bourjos had a home run overturned. Third base umpire C.B. Bucknor ruled it a homer, though he seemed to be the only one in the stadium who saw it that way. The umpires saw the replay before ruling it a foul ball.

"It was a baseball field foul," Braden said. "I wasn't too worried about it."

Braden was a little more concerned about the second-inning homer he gave up to Torii Hunter.

"The pitch to Torii was a homer," Braden said. "It was a slider. It didn't slide. It slid right over the fence."

If the A's don't get things turned around in their final five games, their chances of finishing second could slide right out the door.

A's catcher Kurt Suzuki was happy with the verdicts that were handed down in an Orange County courtroom Monday, finding Andrew Thomas Gallo guilty of three counts of second-degree murder. Gallo, 23, was also convicted of single counts of drunken driving, hit-and-run driving, and driving under the influence of alcohol and causing great bodily injury.

He faces 50 years to life in prison at his Dec. 10 sentencing.

The convictions were the result of an early-morning traffic collision on April 9, 2009, that took the lives of Angels rookie pitcher Nick Adenhardt, Henry Pearson and Courtney Stewart.

Jon Wilhite, who like Suzuki played baseball at Cal State Fullerton, survived the crash but was severely injured.

"I think it's great just for the fact that families get some closure, knowing that you can put it to rest," Suzuki said. "Having a verdict like this, it ain't going to make everything better, but for the families' sake, for each family, just to have this verdict, it kind of puts it to rest a little bit more. Justice has been served."

Suzuki and his wife, Renee, helped raise \$61,000 on Wilhite's behalf. The money went toward paying off his medical bills. Wilhite and some former Titans baseball players were guests of Suzuki at Tuesday night's game.

Though Suzuki and Wilhite were connected through the baseball program at the college, Suzuki got to know the families of the three victims.

"I met them after an Angels game last year when Jon threw out the first pitch," Suzuki said. "They're such great people. It's so sad."

Chris Carter and Cliff Pennington were credited stolen bases Tuesday, nearly 24 hours after they actually stole them. Carter and Pennington broke for third and second, respectively, in the second inning of Monday's game. Angels catcher Bobby Wilson was charged with a passed ball and the runners were not originally credited with the stolen bases.

Chin Music: Down on the Farm: End-of-the-season report

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 9/28/2010 9:16PM

With the A's minor league teams finished for the season, let's look at how some of Oakland's top prospects fared in 2010. I caught up with director of player development Keith Lieppman as he was watching an instructional league game in Phoenix. As usual, he dished some good insight on several players. The following are listed in no particular order, but those with an (*) by their name will be playing in the Arizona Fall League for the Phoenix Desert Dogs ...

***OF Michael Taylor:** Taylor steadied himself after a wobbly start with Triple-A Sacramento, but it's telling that the A's didn't think he was ready for a September call-up. The question remains when, or if, he'll hit for more pop. Taylor finished with a respectable .272 average but homered just six times in 464 at-bats. The A's have worked on his swing mechanics, hoping to unlock more power and help him drive inside pitches when opponents try jamming him. Will he be ready to push for a major league roster spot in spring training? "I think he's reached the level where he'll play in the Arizona Fall League, and there should be an opportunity to where he can be in position to contend for a job," Lieppman said.

***SS Grant Green:** The 2009 first-round pick made quite an impression with Single-A Stockton in his first full professional season. He hit .318 with 20 homers and 87 RBIs and finished second in the California League with 174 hits. But Green committed a whopping 37 errors, showing that he has work to do defensively. Lieppman said lots of those came early in the season and that Green, 23, made strides. "He still made some errors (later in the season), but he made them aggressively. I think the biggest thing he learned was how to mentally prepare himself to play defense on every pitch." He'll be ticketed for Double-A Midland next season.

***3B Stephen Parker:** Many observers feel Green will ultimately wind up at third base, but the A's may already have their future starter at that position in Parker, 23. A 2009 fifth-round pick out of BYU, Parker hit .296 with 21 homers and 98 RBI with Stockton, and he should join Green to form the left side of Midland's infield in 2011. Lieppman said Parker reminds him of Wally Joyner at the plate – "a classic left-handed swing and not a lot of excess movement." Like Green, Parker is a work in progress defensively. But considering the A's have no sure-fire prospect at third base behind Kevin Kouzmanoff, Parker's bat may blaze a path to the bigs.

***RHP Travis Banwart:** The Wichita State product hasn't produced a ton of hype, but he's steadily advanced through the farm system and impressed. After posting a 2.92 ERA in 14 starts with Midland this season, Banwart, 24, went 4-2 with a 4.81 in 15 appearances (11 starts) with Sacramento. Those aren't mind-blowing numbers, but Banwart was the River Cats' most consistent starter by season's end. He brings a fastball in the 92-94 mph range with an effective slider, and his invitation to the AFL shows the A's think highly of him.

2B Adrian Cardenas: He was the marquee name of the three players the A's received from Philadelphia in the 2008 Joe Blanton trade (lefty Josh Outman and outfielder Matt Spencer were the others). By now, Cardenas was expected to be knocking on the big league door. But he shuttled between Midland and Sacramento this season, hitting .345 in 51 games at Double-A but just .267 in 58 games at Triple-A. He did enjoy a strong finish with Sacramento. "It's (taken) a little longer than we hoped because he's been up and down a couple times," Lieppman said. Cardenas was pegged as a prime candidate to eventually replace Mark Ellis. But the A's now have players such as Adam Rosales, Eric Sogard and Steve Tolleson who are capable of playing second as well. Cardenas is still young – he turns 23 on Oct. 10 – but he'll need to turn heads in spring training to distinguish himself.

2B Jemile Weeks: Weeks was expected to battle with Cardenas to be the A's second baseman of the future. But the injury frustration continues for the 2008 first-round pick. He was unable to finish the playoffs with Midland due to problems with his left hip and hamstring. Weeks tore his left hip flexor while with low Single-A Kane County in 2008, and he's struggled to stay on the field since. The A's hoped to send him to winter ball, but instead he'll head home to Florida and rehab, with the hope of being full strength by spring training.

SS Josh Horton: Lieppman raves about this 2007 second-round pick. Horton hit .286 with three homers and 51 RBIs at Double-A this season, but he made his biggest improvement with the glove. He'll turn 25 around the time spring training begins – hardly young for someone who has yet to reach Triple-A. But Lieppman said he had lots of opposing scouts commenting on Horton's development in 2010. "His first year at Double-A (in 2009), he was tentative defensively," Lieppman said. "But his maturity kicked in. You looked at him and said he could be a big league player at that position."

C Max Stassi: Stassi, who didn't turn 19 until March, impressed the A's with his maturity in big league spring camp. But his first full pro season – spent with Kane County — was a rough one because of back, shoulder and hamstring injuries. The shoulder injury affected his throwing, but Lieppman said it's not thought to be a long-term problem. Stassi hit just .229 and struck out 141 times. On the bright side, he hit 13 homers and impressed with his handling of pitchers. If he logs less time in the trainer's room in 2011, his offensive numbers should improve.

LHP Ian Krol: Another high school pick from the 2009 draft, Krol, 19, enjoyed one of the best seasons of any A's pitching prospect. He went 10-4 with a 2.80 ERA, spending most of the season at Kane County but making four starts with Stockton. Most impressive, he racked up 111 strikeouts with just 28 walks in 138 1/3 innings. He combines a low-90s fastball with a good curve and changeup. Lieppman said Krol reminds him a bit of Mark Buehrle – a lefty who works at a brisk pace and seeks contact by challenging hitters.

OF Jeremy Barfield: The Texas native racked up the assists with his powerful arm in right field. Sound familiar? His father, Jesse, struck fear into base runners with his right-field arm over a 12-year major league career. Jeremy, 22, hit .272 with 17 homers and 92 RBIs for Single-A Stockton. A 2008 eighth-round pick, Barfield was scheduled to participate in the fall instructional league but wound up having minor knee surgery earlier this month, scrapping those plans.

1B Sean Doolittle: Doolittle, 24, has missed most of the past two seasons with knee problems and recently underwent another surgery, but the A's are hopeful he could be ready by spring training.

Angels catch up to Oakland with 4-2 win

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

The Angels had a three-run home run recalled via a replay on Tuesday night. They still scored enough to pull even with the A's for the second spot in the AL West.

The Angels topped Oakland 4-2 even after Peter Bourjos' shot down the left-field line was ruled foul in the seventh upon review. Torii Hunter had drilled one fair to left in the second, and the Angels added two in the sixth off Dallas Braden on three consecutive singles and a groundout; an error by catcher Landon Powell led to an unearned run the next inning. The upshot: Oakland's fifth loss in a row and sixth in seven games.

"We're obviously losing ground," Braden said. "As hard as it is to play for (second place), we still have jobs to do. You don't want to give a team like that a chance to pass you up."

The A's got their 100th homer of the season, a solo shot by team home run leader Kevin Kouzmanoff, who has 15. Mark Ellis drove in the other run with a single, and he doubled to give him 12 multi-hit games this month. He's batting a league-leading .411 in September, good timing for a player whose team option will be discussed next week.

Braden, scheduled to start the season finale Sunday, allowed 10 hits and four runs, three earned, in seven innings.

Bourjos made his mark defensively: He made a diving play on a liner by Rajai Davis in the third and leaped at the wall for a drive by Landon Powell in the fourth.

"That kid in center taking a home run away, that was a big play. That would have put us up two more runs," A's manager Bob Geren said.

Today, in the series finale, Bobby Cramer starts in his hometown, in a ballpark where he has attended games his entire life - when Cramer was out of baseball in 2006, he had Angels season tickets. "This is the big leagues for me," he said. "It's pretty neat."

Cramer expects a big turnout; he's heard that a group of about 100 friends will be tailgating today, and he's got 30 tickets he's providing for his family and closest friends.

"I think half the city of Anaheim is going to be playing hooky tomorrow," he said with a grin.

Cramer's father, Bob, will be watching his son pitch in the majors for the first time.

"I'm going to try to win this one for my dad," Cramer said.

Available slugger? Oakland needs to add offense this winter. Could one potential target be in the opposite dugout this series?

Angels designated hitter Hideki Matsui will be a free agent, and the Los Angeles Times recently put the possibility of his return to the team at 3 to 5 percent. A's owner Lew Wolff told The Chronicle this week that he's not wild about one-year deals, but that said, Matsui isn't expected to be among the most high-priced free agents; it would probably take \$5 million or so to sign him.

Matsui told The Chronicle through an interpreter on Tuesday that he'd consider the A's if they called, "the same as I would for every team."

Matsui said he likes the Bay Area and he noted that it has a "decent-sized Asian community." He also said that the vast Coliseum wouldn't be any deterrent as far as he is concerned.

"You could say it's definitely a big ballpark. There's a huge amount of foul ground," Matsui said. "But I've always had a positive experience there. I've hit pretty well there."

Matsui, 36, has a lifetime .294 average in Oakland with four homers and 20 RBIs in 119 at-bats.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Stadium implications? Bob DuPuy stepped down as Major League Baseball's chief operating officer Tuesday, but according to A's owner Lew Wolff, who is also a friend of DuPuy's, DuPuy will continue to work with the panel looking at the team's stadium situation.

Drumbeat: Day off for Suzuki, bullpen in better shape

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Angel Stadium 9/28/2010 6:10PM

Kurt Suzuki is out of tonight's lineup; he was only going to catch two of the three games, so this is the one he's missing. I spoke to Suzuki at length this afternoon about his hitting slump, and he said he went back to his old set-up at the plate on the last homestand after tinkering unsuccessfully for a while. Since going back to his usual stance, he's 10-for-28.

Why'd he change in the first place? Well, maybe leading the team in homers most of the way is one reason - he was trying to tweak things in order to drive the ball better. Suzuki said he tried crouching, standing up taller, all sorts of things. Finally, he went back to his comfortable form and his nice, short stroke, and he had three hits the first game.

I also asked about his throwing success, or lack thereof. He's only thrown out two of the past 33 attempted base stealers, and his overall 13.7 percent success rate is the third lowest in the league. Suzuki can throw, of course. He's done well in the past. So is this him, or is it the young pitching staff having trouble holding runners?

A little of both. Suzuki blames himself for poor first-half numbers. "I knew it," he said. "I would have told you, 'I stink.' " And in the second half, it's probably more to do with not getting much time to throw.

That's fine with Suzuki. He said that the team wants the pitchers to concentrate on throwing strikes; if that means a higher degree of difficulty for him to throw out runners, so be it. He doesn't want a pitcher to go to a slide step if it affects his control. "I don't have an ego about guys running," Suzuki said. "Obviously, I want to throw them out, but if it costs a stolen base to keep the pitcher comfortable, that's my main concern. And they're improving - they're getting quicker, and I'm getting more time. We're not quite there, but it's close."

The A's biggest issue lately has been the bullpen, suddenly beset by injuries - Andrew Bailey is out for the season after minor elbow surgery, Michael Wuertz's availability is erratic because of a sore thumb, Jerry Blevins is out with a sore shoulder - and workload. Tonight, the team should have most everyone available, with Wuertz a possibility and everyone else except Blevins and Vin Mazzaro good to go.

Why hasn't the club just added more relievers? It's September, after all. Well, there were 10 men in the bullpen earlier this month, and even nine should be OK, but without Blevins and Wuertz it's seven. That's the usual number.

I've had two explanations for why no relievers were added lately with some dings and dents: One, most of the possibilities haven't thrown enough lately. Two, the 40-man roster might be an issue. A quick check shows that basically every possibility on the 40-man but one is hurt (Tyson Ross, Brad Kilby, Justin Souza, and so on). Clayton Mortensen is the one healthy arm really who might be available and he hasn't pitched in 16 days.

I've received a lot of feedback about Lew Wolff's comments yesterday suggesting the A's might not spend a lot of free agents this offseason. Wolff said he doesn't see the team making "a lot of moves," and he mentioned that one-year deals aren't something he'd like to see, necessarily.

Now, Wolff didn't say outright that the A's won't pursue a big-bat free agent. I asked every way possible, and he didn't ever say absolutely no. He just suggested that the approach will be cautious and that the \$22-plus million coming off the books doesn't mean it's freed up for more than one year. (There will be plenty of raises coming up, true, but not \$22-30 million worth.)

Here's something to keep in mind, though: There's no reason Wolff should commit to anything in the press. He kept it fairly vague, and that's typical for someone in his position. But it wouldn't make sense to guarantee spending big bucks ahead of time, in case something doesn't pan out. Telegraphing offseason spending plans might not do the team much good.

So while I understand fans' frustrations with the implication that the team won't roll that \$22 million or more into a bat or two, I'm not convinced that the A's won't try to shell out for a free agent or two. They need offense. They have money. Put the two together, and you have a contender. But the owner doesn't need to spell out the plans.

Also, I think the stadium situation plays into all of this. My impression is: no stadium, and the purse strings close a little tighter.

Here's the lineup: Davis cf, Barton 1b, Ellis 2b, Cust dh, Kouzmanoff 3b, Hermida rf, Carter lf, Powell c, Pennington ss

A's slip into second-place tie as skid continues

Oakland drops series with fifth consecutive loss

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

ANAHEIM -- It's a funny thing, this game of baseball.

Less than three weeks ago, the A's found themselves immersed in the playoff hunt, so sure they legitimately had a chance at surpassing Texas in the American League West standings.

Now, they're hanging on for dear life -- not for the grand prize, but simply for a second-place standing.

On Tuesday, it was no longer just theirs. A 4-2 loss to the Angels -- the A's fifth straight defeat -- officially gave Los Angeles a share of the runner-up position. And, no matter how silly a second-place fight may seem to outsiders, it's no joke to an A's team looking to finish higher than third for the first time since 2006, when they won the division.

"We're obviously losing ground," starter Dallas Braden said. "As hard as it is to play for [second place], we've still got jobs to do, and you don't ever want to give a team like that the kind of chance to gain ground or potentially pass you up. We come out tomorrow and put ourselves in a little better position."

Braden, making his 29th start of the season, was coming off an eight-inning shutout performance against the Rangers and endured little damage in the early innings aside from a solo homer off the bat of Torii Hunter in the second

"It was a slider," Braden said. "Didn't slide. Slid right over the fence."

The A's tied it up in the fourth by way of their own homer, a long ball from Kevin Kouzmanoff -- his team-high 15th of the season -- off former Oakland hurler Dan Haren that barely eclipsed the left-field wall.

Oakland added on in the fifth inning thanks to an RBI single from Mark Ellis, but the Angels came right back in the sixth against Braden. The A's southpaw allowed three consecutive singles with one out, the last of which came from Mike Napoli and brought home a run to tie the game. Hideki Matsui followed with an RBI groundout to give the Angels a 3-2 lead.

That lead was extended one inning later in an eventful frame that almost put the game away. Jeff Mathis led off with a single and advanced all the way to third when Brandon Wood hit a sacrifice bunt that resulted in a throwing error from catcher Landon Powell to put runners on second and third.

Peter Bourjos, stepping in at the plate, proceeded to send a ball toward the left-field foul pole, at which point the third-base umpire C.B. Bucknor ruled the hit a home run before the call was reversed following a review, thus giving Braden a little more breathing room.

"The replay rule is very effective on plays like that," manager Bob Geren said. "It's a good rule."

Bourjos ultimately flied out to right field, but Howard Kendrick added an insurance run with a sacrifice fly by inning's end to make it 4-2. It marked the end of the road for Braden, who gave up four runs (three earned) on 10 hits while walking none and striking out three in seven innings of work en route to dropping to 10-14 on the season.

The lefty is now 1-5 in September and the first A's pitcher to lose five games in the month since Joe Kennedy did so in 2005. He's also up to 187 2/3 innings on the year, a number far surpassing his previous career-high total of 136 2/3 garnered in 2009.

"I'm in uncharted territory as far as innings and longevity as a starter," he said. "I'm pleased with where I'm at as far as health is concerned, being able to repeat this kind of delivery for so long. I was kind of curtailed as far as pitch counts were concerned early in my career, and I battled some nagging injuries in '08 and '09. This year has been a long one for me, but it's been nice to see what I can do."

Braden also noted it's a lengthy battle for the team, but he's sensed no amount of frustration around the clubhouse during the recent dip.

"There's a lot of positive vibes going around," he said. "We're excited to play, and I think every team in our position or around our position is excited to finish strong. Right now you dip into that workout in December at six in the morning and no one else is working hard. You were working hard that day, and you draw on those efforts to get you through the rest of the year."

The A's are hoping the rest of the year includes more runs. One night after stranding 16 on base, they left nine on board Tuesday, including two in the ninth and one on second with no outs in the eighth. At the same time, they were also robbed of a two-run homer in the fourth when Powell watched Bourjos leap and extend his glove over the center-field wall to make the catch.

"That kid in center taking that homer away, that was big," Geren said. "That ball goes over, and it's a different game."

"Right off the bat, I didn't know how well he hit it until a couple steps going back, I saw he hit it pretty good," Bourjos said. "At this point I just tried to get back to the wall, I found the wall and looked up and the ball was right there. I just kind of jumped up and caught it."

His efforts, in part, paved the way for Oakland's 80th loss of the season, marking the fourth consecutive year in which the A's have dropped 80-plus games. With five remaining, the A's aren't looking to add on any more.

"I feel like, as a team, we could be stronger," Braden admitted. "That's just the season taking its toll. It's a long one. As cliché as it is to say, it's a grind. I think, for the most part, we've tried to maintain our level of play. Obviously, we've had the injuries, and it's honestly tough to see the finish line and know you don't have a shot to be the first one through it, but you want to finish strong."

Braden is slated to get the ball for Oakland's season finale against the host Mariners on Sunday, when he expects to put aside the inevitable fatigue and simply bulldog his way through.

"The effort at this point is more mental than physical," he said. "I think you ask anyone around here, the mental wear and tear is much harder to overcome than the physical. At this point, it's just about talking yourself into it."

Pineiro, Cramer set to face off in matinee

By Jordan Schelling / MLB.com

When right-hander Joel Pineiro hit the disabled list with a strained left oblique in late July, he took with him a significant measure of the Angels' playoff hopes.

Without one of their more consistent starting pitchers over the following seven weeks, the Angels simply could not keep up with the Rangers in the American League West. It was a tough blow to the Angels, who had just acquired Dan Haren from the D-backs, and Pineiro, who was left to sit and watch as his team struggled, something new to the right-hander.

"I messed up my groin once before, but it was only for like two weeks, three weeks," Pineiro said. "Nothing that affected the team this bad. It's not like missing one or two starts -- a month and a half.

"We needed somebody to go out there to switch things around. But the guys are trying, got to give credit to Texas."

Since coming off the disabled list on Sept. 18, Pineiro has picked up right where he left off. Nine of his past 10 outings are quality starts, and he's thrown six innings or more in 13 consecutive starts.

Pineiro has a 1.67 ERA over his past nine outings at Angel Stadium, giving up one run or less in six of the nine.

Unfortunately, the Angels have not taken advantage of Pineiro's impressive performances since his return. In Pineiro's two starts since coming off the DL, the Angels are 0-2 despite Pineiro posting a 1.93 ERA and allowing just three runs on 10 hits over 14 innings of work.

"Obviously you want to go out on a good note and finish strong and whatever happens happens," said Pineiro, who is 1-0 with a 1.68 ERA and a shutout in two starts against Oakland this season.

Pineiro and the Angels will face off against A's left-hander Bobby Cramer, who has turned a few heads in three September starts, two of which came against division leaders.

Cramer is 2-1 with a 3.71 ERA, allowing seven runs on 17 hits over 17 innings pitched. The biggest problem for Cramer has been the long ball, as he's allowed five home runs in three starts against the Royals, Twins and Rangers.

After starting his Major League career with consecutive wins, Cramer took his first loss in his most recent start, as the A's lost, 10-3, to the Rangers. A pair of homers early sparked what had been a struggling Rangers offense.

"You fall behind and throw a fastball here, they're going to get it," Cramer said. "That's what they're doing. I'm not helping my cause. I need to pitch better behind the count. I think I'm underestimating what these guys can do up here. I need to do a better job of making quality pitches and knowing your hitter.

"I haven't done that. It's a problem I'm going to have to try to correct."

A's: Duchscherer rejoins team in Anaheim

Last time Justin Duchscherer was in Anaheim, he was set to make his first start after spending two weeks on the disabled list. Instead, Duchscherer went back on the DL, for an extended stay after experiencing hip pain during warmups.

Duchscherer underwent season-ending hip surgery on June 7, and had not been with the A's since. On Monday, the A's right-hander was back with his club in Anaheim, suiting up for the first time since he was supposed to start there in mid-May.

"I missed this," Duchscherer said, looking around the clubhouse, before Oakland's contest against the Angels. "It feels like years, it really does."

Angels: Shields leaning toward retirement

Only one Angels player, reliever Scot Shields, remains from the 2002 world championship team. By next April, the number may fall to zero, as Shields is considering retirement after the 2010 season.

"I'm probably leaning that way," Shields said. "If the right situation comes up, I'll look at it. But if not, I'm happy to go home and spend time with my family. I've missed a lot throughout the years. It might be time just to go home."

Shields, 35, is a free agent at the end of the season after completing the final season of a three-year, \$14.6 million deal.

Injuries have derailed Shields in the past two seasons. Shields and Angels manager Mike Scioscia both feel that when healthy, the right-hander can still contribute. But with his current injuries, Shields would need to put in a lot of rehab work in the offseason, with no guarantees of a spot on a Major League roster afterward.

"I imagine if I do decide to come back that the Angels are definitely going to be one of the teams I talk to," Shields said. "If I do decide to play again, I understand that they may want to look in a different direction. I haven't really had the greatest last two years here."

Worth noting

Erick Aybar and Maicer Izturis, both of whom returned from injuries on Monday, are expected back in the lineup on Wednesday after getting Tuesday night off. ... Bobby Abreu played in his 150th game of the season on Tuesday night, the 13th consecutive time he's reached the mark, which matches Willie Mays for the most in Major League history. ... The A's have a 34-20 record during the day compared to 43-60 at night. Their day record is second best in the Majors behind Colorado (34-19) and the night record is fourth worst in the AL. ... Oakland has a 3.06 ERA during the day, the lowest in the Majors, and a 3.94 ERA at night.

Major League: State of the Bullpen

Jane Leem, mlb.com, 9/28/2010, 6:36PM

Last night's wacky (and long) series of events included an interesting use of Justin James and Ross Wolf in the later innings, hinting at a very thin bullpen. Geren confirmed that thinking after the game, when he said Michael Wuertz, Henry Rodriguez, Boof Bonser and Vin Mazzaro were all unavailable. Wuertz was battling that sore right thumb again, but Geren -- when speaking about the state of the bullpen this afternoon -- said he was going to test it out today to determine his availability tonight. Wuertz (who has not allowed a run in nine career outings against the Angels) would lend the A's a stable righty, and the team also has Rodriguez and Bonser available again. Craig Breslow never came in yesterday, so he's also in the mix. Nevertheless, this team should be in much better shape in the bullpen -- an especially important facet of the A's game right now considering the way they seem to always duke it out with the Angels.

Dribblers: The A's enter tonight's contest trailing the season series 8-9. ... Mark Ellis hit the 191st double of his career yesterday, tying Miguel Tejada for 10th place in Oakland history. He's batting an American League-leading .407 in September. ... The A's have been between two games over .500 and three games under .500 every day since the All-Star Break.

Hunter sparks Angels' 4-2 win over Athletics

Braden nearing dubious distinction for pitchers in years throwing no-hitters

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ANAHEIM — Torii Hunter opened the scoring with a home run and his center field replacement, rookie Peter Bourjos, robbed Landon Powell of a homer to lead the Los Angeles Angels to a 4-2 victory over the Oakland Athletics on Tuesday night.

Dan Haren (4-4) allowed two runs and six hits over six innings, struck out five and walked one. The right-hander threw 96 pitches and was lifted after the Angels took a 3-2 lead on Mike Napoli's RBI single and Hideki Matsui's run-scoring groundout in the sixth.

Bourjos also lost a homer — to a replay reversal after third base umpire CB Bucknor incorrectly ruled that his towering drive toward the left field pole on a 2-2 pitch from Dallas Braden was a fair ball. Instead of a three-run homer, Bourjos returned to the plate and flied out before Howie Kendrick's sacrifice fly gave the Angels a 4-2 lead.

Kevin Jepsen and Jordan Walden each pitched a scoreless inning of one-hit relief and Fernando Rodney got his 14th save in 20 chances after giving up a two-out single to Cliff Pennington and a walk to Rajai Davis.

Braden (10-14) gave up four runs — three earned — and 10 hits over seven innings and struck out three without walking a batter. The left-hander is 1-6 with a 5.36 in his previous seven starts against the Angels, including a 4-0 loss on May 14 in which he threw a complete game and lost to the pitcher the Angels traded away to get Haren — Joe Saunders.

If Braden doesn't get the win in Oakland's season finale at Seattle on Sunday, he will make some dubious history. None of the other 16 pitchers who have thrown a perfect game since 1900 have finished with fewer than 11 victories in the season they did it — including Roy Halladay, who is 21-10 this season after getting his perfect game on May 29. Kenny Rogers finished the 1994 campaign 11-8 after no-hitting the Angels, and Don Larsen was 11-5 in 1956 before pitching the only no-hitter in a World Series.

Hunter drove Braden's first pitch of the second inning into the lower seats in the left field corner for his 22nd home run, matching his total from last season. Kevin Kouzmanoff also hit a first-pitch homer into the same area two innings later for his 15th of the season, tying the score.

Three batters later, Powell sent Haren's 3-2 pitch to center field and Bourjos timed his leap perfectly at the fence before pulling it back. On Aug. 23 at Angel Stadium, Bourjos did the same thing to Tampa Bay's B.J. Upton — four innings after robbing Sean Rodriguez of a homer and having the ball bounce off his glove and back in play for a double.

Mark Ellis gave Oakland a 2-1 lead with a two-out RBI single in the fifth.

NOTES: Angels LF Bobby Abreu played in his 150th game of the season, the 13th consecutive year he has reached that figure. ... Haren, who has a 2.86 ERA in 13 starts since joining the Angels in a trade from Arizona on July 25, is one-third of an inning shy of his career-high total of 229-1/3 in 2009, and will get the ball for the season finale on Sunday at Texas. ... Hunter is batting a team-high .285 with five games remaining. The last time the Angels finished a season without one of their regulars batting .300 or better was 2001. ... Angels relievers have given up 32 home runs, the fewest by any bullpen in the AL and three more than San Francisco's pen. ... Kouzmanoff's homer was Oakland's 100th. The only season the A's failed to reach triple digits since moving from Kansas City to Oakland was 1968, their first season in the Bay Area. ... Braden and Haren, who were teammates in 2007, each picked off a runner at first base.

Urban: A's-Angels Gripping Despite Standings

[Mychael Urban](#), CSNBayArea.com

For much of the previous decade, the American League West was all about the [A's](#) and the [Angels](#). One or the other -- frequently both -- owned the division, and when the two teams got together it was a virtual lock that compelling baseball would follow.

Now it's a new decade, and 2010 is the Year of the [Rangers](#) in the AL West -- a testament to the vision of team president Nolan Ryan and the salt-of-the-earth approach of manager Ron Washington. But when it comes to the A's and the Angels locking horns, nothing has changed.

Granted, Oakland's Justin James walking some guy named Hank Conger with the bases loaded, as happened in Anaheim on Monday night, is a far cry from Tim Hudson staring down Tim Salmon in September 2002.

Yet the final score of 6-5 was reminiscent of great battles past, and despite what the current standings suggest, both teams have every reason to play with the same passion and intensity that's marked the rivalry for years.

Priority No. 1 for the A's, who have dropped their past four games, is getting to .500 or better.

They haven't been there since 2006, the most recent year of glory in Oakland and the year before current skipper Bob Geren took over. They're two games under entering Tuesday's game, which pits Dallas Braden vs. Dan Haren, who was a big part of that 2006 A's team that reached the AL Championship Series.

Oakland needs to go 4-2 from here on out to give Geren his first break-even-or-better season, so expect him to manage as though each contest is Game 7 of the World Series.

Also at stake, for both teams, is second place in the division. As of Tuesday morning, the A's were a game up on the Angels in the bridesmaid race

What's the big deal there? Money. That's right. There's cash at stake here. The second-place team in each division gets a little extra glue, and don't think that's not a motivator.

So don't write this series off as a couple of also-rans playing out the string. They're playing for more than it appears, and they'll be playing as hard as ever.

Apple & The Oakland A's: They're Both Playing Moneyball

Chip Conley, Huffington Post, 9/28/2010

As we round the bases for the last two weeks of Major League Baseball, it's worth noting that big league managers may know more about 21st century leadership than Fortune 500 CEO's, with the possible exception of Steve Jobs. Remember Michael Lewis' bestseller *Moneyball* about how Oakland A's General Manager Billy Beane remade the game of baseball by looking at new metrics as a means of determining which players had the greatest impact on his team's success?

Like Steve Jobs' Apple in the battle against Microsoft, The A's had high odds against them with a team payroll that was just one-third of what a bigger market team like the New York Yankees could pay their players. So, Billy Beane reevaluated the conventional wisdom that stolen bases, runs batted in, and batting average were the most important statistics to consider when selecting players for a team. Doing rigorous statistical analysis -- and using a certain amount of gut wisdom -- Beane was able to show that little-considered stats like on-base percentage or slugging percentage were bigger indicators of offensive success than some of the historical numbers that most teams used. The Oakland A's soon leveraged their intellectual competitive advantage by selecting bargain players who helped them in a series of improbable playoff runs. Sadly for the A's, the rest of the league caught up and teams like the Boston Red Sox parlayed these "Sabermetrics" -- what Beane called these unique numbers -- into the World Series. The A's were back where they started, a perennial also-ran.

Most business leaders are using 20th century metrics to create 21st century success. We were taught to "manage what we can measure" and, generally, what's most easily measurable are the more tangible aspects of life. In business, this translates to metrics like profitability and cash flow -- clearly important, but outputs in actuality, not the inputs that create success in the modern company. Today's most valuable business assets often don't appear on a balance sheet, an accounting relic that is 500 years old. In our knowledge economy, it's not the tangible factories or equipment that creates sustainable success, it's the intangibles like innovation, employee engagement, brand reputation, and customer evangelism that drive market performance. Stock analysts suggest that 80% of Apple's value doesn't appear on its balance sheet. The balance sheet is the output, just like the baseball standings are the results of how you've invested in your inputs.

We're living in a new era. And yet, we're using the old metrics. Nearly two-thirds of the world's GDP now comes from the intangible service industry -- as opposed to tangible industries like manufacturing or agriculture -- where competitive advantage isn't about who's the biggest, but who's the smartest. Savvy business leaders are learning how to measure those intangible assets like loyalty and reputation -- there are even social media benchmarks for your company now -- so that they can modernize what they're managing. What are the inputs or "Sabermetrics" in your business that you've been ignoring?

Fortunately, Hollywood is a step ahead of most business leaders, as they realize that Moneyball defines our 21st century world of underdogs looking for a leg up. You'll see Brad Pitt playing Billy Beane next year when Sony Pictures brings this epic story of "what counts" to theaters around the world. Let's hope a few business execs sneak off on their lunch hour to learn this leadership lesson on the big screen.