

## A's News Clips, Thursday, September 30, 2010

### Los Angeles Angels ruin Bobby Cramer's homecoming, sweep Oakland A's

By Al Balderas, Correspondent, Oakland Tribune

Having already won his first two career decisions on the road, A's starter Bobby Cramer was hoping to land the trifecta in Anaheim, his hometown.

But that desire went askew, because the A's offense returned to form. The A's went 1 for 6 with runners in scoring position and lost their sixth straight, a 2-1 decision to the Los Angeles Angels on Wednesday at Angel Stadium.

Torii Hunter's two-out single in the 11th inning scored Jeff Mathis with the decisive run, and the Angels completed a three-game sweep that left Oakland in third place in the American League West. At 77-81, the A's also have lost their chance to finish the season above .500.

"It's just part of baseball," outfielder Rajai Davis said after notching the A's only RBI with a double in the fifth inning. "Every team has gone through it, even the Yankees. You just go out there and play hard. You do what you can out there and hope for the best."

That seemed to be the philosophy that Cramer took to the mound for his fourth career start. With about 200 friends and family members filling most of the seats behind the A's dugout, Cramer pitched a gem. He held the Angels to one run in 6<sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> innings.

"I've been looking forward to this day for a long time," Cramer said. "I could hear my mom clear as day on the mound. She has that voice that you can hear. I didn't know exactly where everyone was sitting, but every time I ran out on the field, they were letting me know where they were. "... I wish we could have won, but I kept it close and gave us a chance."

The Angels were given a freebie run in the third inning, taking a 1-0 lead without a hit. Mark Trumbo and Hank Conger walked to start the inning and moved up on a sacrifice by Peter Bourjos. Trumbo scored on Howie Kendrick's grounder to second base.

"It just seems that every second or third game, I'll hit a little 10-pitch skid where I just can't find it," Cramer said. "I was trying to throw the ball straight, and it kept cutting. That's kind of what happened to Conger and Trumbo."

The A's tied the score in the fifth but spent the rest of the game trying to hold off the Angels.

Boof Bonser worked out of trouble in the seventh inning, stranding runners at second and third.

Craig Breslow had his own control issues in the ninth inning, walking three consecutive batters with one out. But he got out of the inning by retiring an overly aggressive Alberto Callaspo on a pop fly and getting Bourjos to ground out.

In the 10th inning, A's manager Bob Geren use a two-outfielder, five-infielder alignment after the Angels loaded the bases with one out. Steven Tolleson was the fifth infielder.

Maicer Izturis then slapped a grounder up the middle that shortstop Cliff Pennington stopped. Pennington's throw home forced out Kendrick, and Erick Aybar flied out to left on a 3-2 pitch.

"I didn't have any prospects in the outfield that I felt comfortable with," Geren said. "I had told Tolleson to be ready, especially with Breslow pitching. He's more apt to give up a ground ball than a fly ball."

Brad Ziegler wasn't able to wriggle out of trouble in the 11th. A broken-bat single by Jeff Mathis and a hit by Kendrick off second baseman Mark Ellis' glove set things up for Hunter.

"He's a many-time All-Star for a reason," Ziegler said of Hunter. "He's not just a clutch hitter, he's a clutch player in general."

"Him and I have had some good battles the last few years, but he got the best of me, and you just tip your hat to him."

Notes: Chris Carter's single in the fifth inning snapped a 0-for-38 slump on the road and was his first career hit as a visiting player. "... The loss snapped a streak of 58 consecutive nine-inning games for the A's, their third-longest streak since moving to Oakland in 1968.

## **Angels sweep A's to pass them for 2nd in West**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

The Angels didn't outscore the A's by much in this three-game series, beating them by one run twice and two runs once. But they swept Oakland, and moved past the A's into second place.

On Wednesday at Angel Stadium, it took extra innings before Torii Hunter's two-out single off Brad Ziegler gave the Angels a 2-1 victory in the 11th. The A's couldn't put together much of a sustained rally at any point, failing to string together many hits.

Instead of finishing the season strong, Oakland has dropped six in a row, and must win the final four games to finish at .500.

The bullpen in particular is hurt and/or tired: Craig Breslow somehow survived walking three men in a row in the ninth, his second inning of work, and Ziegler dodged a bases-loaded situation in the 10th with the help of a five-man infield and a fielder's choice at the plate. A broken-bat bloop single, an infield hit and Hunter's single got him in the 11th.

"There's no doubt the bullpen is in shambles right now," Ziegler said. "Three or four of our top guys are out for the year. All of us are capable of stepping up and getting outs, but in a game like today, Breslow was overextended and that was the most I'd pitched in a while. That's the way it is this time of year."

The bigger issue was the A's inability to score, denying rookie Bobby Cramer, 30, a win in front of numerous friends and family members in his hometown. He had a large and loud rooting section behind Oakland's dugout.

"I could hear my mom (Barbara) clear as day on the mound," Cramer said. "She has that voice. It was a pretty neat feeling."

Cramer was excellent, allowing three hits, two walks and one run in 6 2/3 innings.

"To do it in front of people who've known me from Little League to high school to pro ball, through the whole journey, is nice," said Cramer, whose father, Bob, watched him pitch in the big leagues for the first time. "My dad kind of got me into baseball, so that was a little salute to the old man for what he's done over the years."

Mark Ellis' torrid September continued, with the second baseman collecting his 13th multi-hit game. He's batting .414 this month. Next week, Ellis sits down with general manager Billy Beane to talk about the team's \$6 million option on him for next season. This late hot stretch has lifted Ellis' average to .289 and he remains among the best in the game at his position. It's hard to imagine that Oakland wouldn't pick it up, especially considering that he is a longtime favorite of Beane and manager Bob Geren.

Before Wednesday's game, Geren produced what sounded like a ringing endorsement for Ellis, saying, "Offseason plans are all to be discussed later, but obviously, I think he's great for the team and the organization."

**Briefly:** Chris Carter ended an Oakland-record hitless streak on the road at 0-for-38 when he singled to right center in the fifth, and he scored on a double by Rajai Davis. ... Wednesday was rookie hazing day. Among the standouts: Carter with a

Where's Waldo shirt and hat plus red skirt; Jerry Blevins as a very skinny Elvis; and bespectacled Eric Sogard as Harry Potter, with a wand and a skirt. Cramer called his banana costume "favorable" by comparison.

## **A'S LEADING OFF**

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

**In the running:** The team's 151 steals are tied for the ninth best single-season total in Oakland history, and the club's most since 151 in 1991. The A's lead the league in stolen-base percentage, at 80.2 percent, the second best mark since the A's arrived in Oakland in 1968.

## **Drumbeat: Battle for second place continues**

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Angel Stadium 9/29/2010 12:23PM

Can you feel the excitement? Two teams trying to finish above .500 and to avoid third place....magical

Or maybe not, but still, the A's would like to show they're taking strides, while the oft-division champion Angels would prefer not to slip too far with a team many thought would repeat in the West.

The A's recent slide isn't too encouraging - the club looks tired, especially the pitching, and the bullpen has been a particular area of disappointment, with relievers often unavailable or out altogether. Michael Wuertz isn't available today because of his thumb problem; at this point, it seems as if shutting him down entirely might make the most sense. He's tried everything to get ready and he's only able to go once every three or four days. Let the thing heal.

Mark Ellis just singled - he's been the one really consistent bright spot this month. He's batting over .400 in September, and that option went from looking iffy to looking like practically a bargain. How many No. 3 hitters cost \$6 million?

I asked manager Bob Geren about him; Geren will have input into the team's offseason decisions, of course, but it's not as if he can speak directly about any potential decision about the option, especially when Ellis and GM Billy Beane aren't meeting until next week. But Geren didn't hold back at all about his enthusiasm for Ellis, and if you want to read into that, I don't see why it wouldn't be pertinent. Beane clearly values Geren's opinions. And here's what Geren said:

"Obviously, I like Mark Ellis very much as a player and a person. I've had him since the first day he came to the organization. I saw him leapfrog Double-A to play for me (at Triple-A Sacramento) and he hasn't looked back. ... Offseason plans are all to be discussed later, but obviously, I think he's great for the team and the organization."

That's a pretty ringing endorsement. Geren also praised Ellis' defense, his merits as a good teammate, and called him "steady." The A's don't have anything to match that in the minors right now, and there don't appear to be free-agent second basemen who'd come cheaper and provide more. At this point, I'd be surprised if he's not back.

Could the sides re-work the deal? Maybe if it adds another guaranteed year onto the contract, but not if there's a lot coming out of next year's total. I could see something like a two-year, \$10 million deal, but not much lower than that. And at that point, it probably just makes more sense for Oakland to do the one year at \$6 million.

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

## **New Niners make a big impression**

Al Saracevic, San Francisco Chronicle, 9/26/2010

Lost in the chaos and heartache of the Niners' locker room Monday night were two extremely large young men.

While reporters jockeyed for position to interview **Michael Crabtree** and **Alex Smith**, the team's top two draft picks this year, **Mike Iupati** and **Anthony Davis**, dressed in as much obscurity as two guys weighing nearly 700 pounds combined can muster.

It was a landmark night for the rookie offensive linemen, despite the tough loss. The Niners' quarterback had not been sacked and both youngsters helped blow open huge holes for **Frank Gore**, who ran for 112 yards against the Saints.

The team's vice president of player personnel, **Trent Baalke**, deserves credit here, acquiring two key building blocks in one draft. Whether Smith pans out as the quarterback of the future is in many ways less important than whether the Niners can build a championship front line.

Asked how things had gone in the trenches, Lupati showed an endearing sense of humor. "No comment," he said, mustering a tough scowl, before breaking up in laughter.

"Just kidding, man," the rookie said, as Davis made his way to the neighboring locker. "It was fun out there. We ran a lot of power, and had some success.

"But in this league, everyone's an athlete. We've gotta keep working hard."

The Monday night loss to the NFL champions left players, fans and coaches looking for moral victories. Smith had played well. The defense showed heart. Gore ran strong.

But the most important victory on the field was in the trenches. For the first time in years, the Niners have two linchpin offensive linemen.

Let's see how the big youngsters do in Kansas City today, facing a 2-0 Chiefs team that ranks ninth in the league in rushing defense.

If you see Gore running wild again, and if Smith remains upright, spend some time focused on No. 76 (Davis) and No. 77 (Lupati).

**The Torture Chamber:** The Giants keep telling fans to come out to the ballpark because it's "magic inside."

But it was the team's play-by-play man, **Duane Kuiper**, who coined the Giants' real slogan back in May: "Giants Baseball ... Torture."

Aside from the occasional outpouring of offense, when the team scores a week's worth of runs in one night, the Giants have a knack for grinding out low-scoring victories and losses.

Consider the following stat: The Giants have been shut out 16 times this year. The 2002 team that made it to the World Series had seven shutout losses the entire season.

The team's offensive woes add up to a heavy dose of Maalox for Giants manager **Bruce Bochy**, whose often disheveled appearance in postgame interviews tells fans all they need to know.

Bochy and Giants fans should embrace the nature of the 2010 squad. Enduring 1-0 and 2-1 squeakers against a dominant Giants pitching staff is much tougher on opponents. The slogan going into the final homestand: "Welcome to the Torture Chamber."

**East Bay torture:** Across the bay in Oakland, the A's are enduring a different type of torture: indifference.

General manager **Billy Beane** once again has built a superb pitching staff, ranked first in the American League in ERA (3.55 through Friday), fewest hits allowed, fewest runs allowed and team shutouts. With every likelihood of adding some bats in the free-agency market this offseason, the A's could be back in the playoffs as soon as next year.

Despite all that, the team doesn't draw. The A's are averaging 17,467 fans per game this season, last in baseball. This will be the fifth consecutive year that the team ranks in the bottom three in American League attendance.

Until **Law Wolff** and the ownership group can persuade Major League Baseball to let the A's move to San Jose, the song probably will remain the same.

And don't buy into the argument that the Giants own the rights to the South Bay. Baseball has an antitrust exemption, allowing it do pretty much whatever it wants when it comes to moving teams. It would be all but impossible for the Giants to block such a move via lawsuit as well.

Major League Baseball should write the Giants a check, stop torturing A's fans and let the team start fresh in the Bay Area's biggest city.

**Put me in, coach:** Niners legends were lining up on the sideline Monday, waiting to celebrate the retirement of **Jerry Rice's** jersey No. 80.

**Eddie DeBartolo Jr., George Seifert, Jesse Sapolu** and **Steve Mariucci** all were in attendance.

**Dwight Clark** stood to the side of the group, looking at the field where he made "The Catch," arguably the most famous moment in 49ers history.

I've always wondered what goes through a football player's mind when he revisits the field. Does he hear the old cheers? Does he remember his teammates?

Clark looked at the field and smiled. "It's funny," he said. "It just makes you want to knock the s- out of someone."

## **A's unable to back Cramer in walk-off loss**

### **Lefty goes a solid 6 2/3 frames, but Angels win in 11 innings**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

ANAHEIM -- Lefty Bobby Cramer stood by his locker Wednesday afternoon with mixed emotions swirling around following his first career start in front of his hometown Anaheim crowd. But a 2-1 loss to the Angels in 11 innings -- the A's sixth in a row -- cast a shadow over an otherwise particularly memorable day for the 30-year-old rookie.

"Growing up as a kid, I went to Angels games," Cramer said. "I'm from Anaheim. This, to me, was the big leagues. Pitching in all these other parks is great, but to come home and pitch in the stadium I came to since I was five is special, that's for sure."

Cramer did his part, tossing an impressive 6 2/3 innings, giving up just one run on three hits while walking two and striking out four. But lack of run support -- the club left nine on base -- and a walk-off hit from Torii Hunter off Brad Ziegler in the bottom of the 11th left the A's with the loss.

With the defeat, the A's fell into third-place in the American League West for the first time since Aug. 17. Four games against the Mariners remain on the schedule, equaling four chances to overtake the Angels again.

"Today we didn't get the big hit," Cliff Pennington said. "It's been different things every game. That's part of what makes a losing streak hard."

"The goal was to get second place when the Rangers won the division. There are four games left, so we're still within reach. We'll try and go do that in Seattle."

For Cramer, it marked his last start of the season in a whirlwind of a year that had him pitching in the Minors and the Mexican League before his callup. After completing just his fourth career start, he's not sure if he'll be given the opportunity to make a fifth one given Oakland's pitching depth, but he won't forget Wednesday's outing any time soon.

"I've been looking forward to this day for a long time," he said. "I wish we could have won, but I kept it close and gave us a chance, and to be able to do it in front of family and people who have known me from Little League to college to even Class A ball, they're people who have known me throughout my whole journey, so it was nice to be able to finish the season here."

"I don't know what's going to happen this offseason. I think I did everything I could do with every opportunity. I'd love to be back, but I understand how things work sometimes."

The Angels struck first in the third when Cramer allowed a leadoff walk to Mark Trumbo, who ultimately scored on an RBI groundout from Howard Kendrick to make it 1-0. He's not one for free passes, so Cramer was rightfully disappointed, especially on a day when runs were at a premium for both clubs.

"It's happened to me in a few of my starts, and not just here in the big leagues," he said. "It seems every two or three games I'll hit a 10-pitch skid where I just can't find it."

The A's tied it up two innings later against Los Angeles hurler Joel Pineiro thanks to a run-scoring double off the bat of Rajai Davis, whose efforts awarded a leadoff single from Chris Carter that snapped an Oakland-record 0-for-38 stretch on the road.

Cramer, meanwhile, cruised along before being pulled with two outs in the seventh and walking off the mound to a loud standing ovation from several friends and family members stationed behind the A's dugout -- a boisterous mom and proud dad included.

"I could hear my mom as clear as day on the mound," Cramer said, smiling. "She has that voice that you can hear."

"When I came off, I tipped my cap to my dad. He's been in Alaska, so this was the first chance he had to see me throw in person. My dad's the one who turned me on to baseball as a little kid, so it was a salute to the old man for all the support he's given me over the years."

Boof Bonser was brought in for Cramer and, following a bout of trouble by way of a walk and wild pitch, proceeded to leave the seventh unscathed. Craig Breslow pitched a scoreless eighth and ninth frame, the latter which found him deserting a bases-loaded situation, before Ziegler was brought in for two final eventful frames.

In the 10th, Ziegler allowed a leadoff base hit to Kendrick and suddenly had runners on first and second with no outs following a fielding error by Kevin Kouzmanoff. Andrew Romine laid down a sacrifice bunt to move the runners over a bag, at which point Ziegler intentionally walked Hideki Matsui to load the bases.

Manager Bob Geren utilized a five-man infield with Maicer Izturis at the plate by bringing Steve Tolleson into the game and removing Jeremy Hermida from right field, a decision that proved fruitful when Izturis grounded into a fielder's choice to Pennington, who got Kendrick at home. Tolleson, then, moved to left field while Gabe Gross shifted to right, and garnered the final out of the frame when Erick Aybar flied out to left.

But after the A's left Jeff Larish on second following a leadoff double to start the 11th, trouble mounted in the bottom half of the frame. A bloop hit from Jeff Mathis and an infield single from Kendrick put runners on second and third with two outs for Hunter, who lined a ball to center field for the winning run.

"It's frustrating when you make good pitches and it doesn't work out," Ziegler said. "I'm a guy who pitches to contact. I rely on putting the ball in play and hoping it's at somebody. Even when it's at somebody, sometimes it doesn't work out -- whether they hit it too hard or not hard enough."

"He's a many-time All-Star for a reason. He's not just a great hitter, he's a clutch player in general. He and I have had some good battles the last few years, but he got the best of me today and you just have to tip your cap to him."

The A's, at least, found postgame humor in the form of rookie hazing day, which had several youngsters wearing interesting costumes as a nod to a baseball tradition. Cramer, for one, didn't mind his banana look.

"Even though I'm almost 31, I'm still a rookie," he said. "I think I got a favorable costume. It's a small price to pay to be here."

## **Mariners, A's eye good start in year-end series**

By Bailey Stephens / MLB.com

As the Athletics and Mariners kick off the final series of the year on Thursday in Seattle, both clubs are trying to get the most out of the final days.

The Athletics are in the midst of trying to end a skid which has seen them drop a season-high six in a row and seven of eight -- definitely not the way that manager Bob Geren envisioned his young club finishing, especially since a formidable rotation sets them up nicely in 2011. Also, after getting swept by the Angels, the A's find themselves in third place for the first time since Aug. 17. The final series of the season will be a sprint against the Halos to try and finish the season in the No. 2 spot.

On the other side of the field, the Mariners are trying to get healthy in time for the offseason. At the same time, there are still important games to be won, and Seattle could capitalize on Oakland's recent slide to pick up some victories in front of the home fans.

The Mariners are toying with the idea of getting DH Russell Branyan back in the mix for the final series if he's ready. Branyan has been out since Sept. 17 with stiffness in his back.

"[He] saw the doctor [Tuesday]," Mariners interim manager Daren Brown reported. "He was feeling good and we'll give him another couple of days. Re-evaluate tomorrow. We'll sit down and see what's going on and go from there. With his history, we want to make sure we're doing what we need to be doing."

While the Mariners want to remain cautious because of Branyan's back history, there's some value to Branyan returning to the lineup for a couple of games to end the season, if there's no danger to his back.

"I know he would like to [return to the lineup] if he's able," Brown said. "I can relate to back issues. The minute you think it feels good, go out and swing a golf club and the next day you are sore again. The good thing was it has felt better the last couple of days. The doctor thought everything was OK. Give him a couple of days. See what he says tomorrow and go from there."

### **Athletics: Gonzalez aims to finish strong**

One of the pieces to that 2011 pitching puzzle, Gio Gonzalez, will make his final start of the season Thursday. Gonzalez has held the Mariners to a 3.93 ERA this season and could pick up his 15th win of the campaign. Fourteen is already a career high for the 25-year-old lefty.

It's been quite the season for the young southpaw, who barely made the rotation out of Spring Training, but has proved to be one of the most consistent pitchers in the rotation. After struggling earlier in the month, Gonzalez has allowed just three earned runs over his past two starts. His previous start was against the Rangers, the night Texas clinched the AL West.

### **Mariners: Fister looking for consistency**

Doug Fister will get the ball in the final start of his roller coaster rookie season. The right-hander has shown flashes of becoming a key cog in the Mariners' rotation, but at other times has seemingly shown the need for more time to develop. His past three starts are a good example -- sandwiching a stellar seven-inning shutout against the Rangers between two mediocre losses to the Red Sox and Rays -- both of which he allowed four runs or more. In his previous start, though, Fister gave up four runs early, but made an in-game adjustment to start using his breaking pitches earlier in the count. "For the way the game started, I thought Fister put it together," Brown said. "He made some adjustments and did a nice job."

### **Worth noting**

The Mariners have swiped five bags in their past five games after not attempting a steal in their five previous games. ... Seattle finished with a 26-55 record on the road this season. ... Oakland might be a good team for Fister to finish against this season as he's 4-1 with a 1.80 ERA in six career starts against the Athletics. ... The A's left 34 runners on base over their three-game sweep at the hands of the Angels.

## **Hunter's RBI in 11th leads Angels to sweep of A's**

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ANAHEIM — Torii Hunter's two-out single drove home Jeff Mathis in the 11th inning, and the Los Angeles Angels wrapped up their home schedule with a 2-1 victory over the Oakland Athletics on Wednesday.

Los Angeles failed to score with the bases loaded and one out in both the ninth and 10th innings, but Mathis and Howie Kendrick singled in the 11th against Brad Ziegler (3-7). Hunter then lined a hit to center, ending a disappointing season at Angel Stadium with a fireworks celebration for the dethroned AL West champions.

Kendrick had three hits for the Angels, who will miss the postseason for the first time since 2006 and just the third time since their only World Series title in 2002. Their three-year reign atop the division officially ended last weekend when the Texas Rangers clinched the title in Oakland.

Rajai Davis had a run-scoring double for the A's, who have lost six straight while falling behind Los Angeles into third place in the AL West.

Bobby Cassevah (1-2) pitched two scoreless innings of relief to earn his first major league victory in his 14th appearance for Los Angeles.

The Angels swept a series for the eighth time this season while preventing Oakland from winning the California clubs' season series for the first time since 2003.

Anaheim native Bobby Cramer pitched three-hit ball into the seventh inning for the A's in the 30-year-old rookie's fourth major league start. He was cheered enthusiastically by his hometown fans in his first appearance at Angel Stadium, where the erstwhile substitute math teacher attended games while he was out of baseball four years ago.

Joel Pineiro allowed five hits over seven strong innings in the final start of his first season with the Angels. He won 10 games for Los Angeles despite missing nearly two months with a strained muscle in his side, returning for three consecutive solid starts in late September.

Mark Trumbo scored Los Angeles' first run on Kendrick's groundout in the third inning.

Oakland evened it in the fifth when Chris Carter scored on Davis' double.

Cramer spent nearly five months of this season in the Mexican League before returning to the A's organization with Triple-A Sacramento last month. He won his first two major league starts earlier this month, and he battled Los Angeles' lineup throughout a sweltering afternoon in Orange County.

A's manager Bob Geren finally pulled Cramer after Erick Aybar's two-out single on Cramer's 118th pitch. When his fans above the Oakland dugout gave him a standing ovation, Cramer responded to his hometown crowd with a sweeping wave of his hat.

Reliever Boof Bonser narrowly escaped the jam, stranding two runners in scoring position. Los Angeles stranded eight runners in the final four innings before winning it.

**Notes:** The Angels won't renew the contract of Eddie Bane, their director of scouting for the past seven seasons. ... Carter's fifth-inning single snapped an 0-for-38 slump on the road. ... Los Angeles must win three of four in its season-ending series at Texas to avoid its first losing season since 2003.

## **Rookie's dream comes home**

By MARCIA C. SMITH, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER 9/29/2010

ANAHEIM – The rookie left-handed Oakland pitcher left the field, 62/3 innings into Wednesday afternoon's game against the Angels, the contest still undecided, much like Bobby Cramer's future in baseball.

Cramer, the journeyman farmhand who had made just his fourth career major league start at the age of 30 years, 336 days, tipped his green A's ballcap to his father, Bob Sr., who was seated behind the dugout in the shaded Section 224, Row J.

Bob Sr. brought his first of two sons to the game here to see their hometown team at Angel Stadium 25 years ago. He introduced his namesake to the game, signed him up for Loara Little League and caught his mid-70s, spine-bending curveballs until wearing bifocals doing that became too dangerous.

"That was my salute to the old man for the support he has given me over the years," said Cramer (2-1, 3.04 ERA), the starter who got a no decision in the 2-1, 11-inning A's defeat, having given up three hits, two walks and one earned run with four strikeouts. "For me, I don't know what's next."



"About two years ago," said his mother, Barbara, wearing a ballcap from her son's Triple-A Sacramento River Cats team and rusted-back 1987 circular photo pin from his Mariners T-ball season, "I was starting to think that it wasn't going to happen for him."

"Go get 'em Bobby," she yelled as he jogged toward the mound in the bottom of the third inning, her high-pitched cheer slicing through the lull of the crowd of 39,199 mostly Angels fans.

"I could hear my mom as clear as day on the mound," said Cramer, smiling. He always remembered how she kept telling him, "Keep walking through that (baseball) door until God slams it shut."

There were so many doorknobs to turn after his 2001 injury-shortened season with the 49ers and 2002 Tommy John surgery: the Tampa Bay Rays' Class-A farms of the Hudson Valley (N.Y.) Renegades, the Bakersfield Blaze and the Charlestown (S.C.) RiverDogs; the Oakland affiliates of the Class-A Stockton Ports twice, Double-A Midland (Texas) RockHounds twice, Sacramento twice; the independent Golden Baseball League's Orange County Flyers, two teams in the Mexican League and trip through Dominican Republic ball.

Yes, that was a long sentence, which is fitting because Cramer had essentially been serving one long sentence since he signed as an undrafted free agent in 2003 with Tampa Bay until the Sept. 9 evening when River Cats manager Tony DeFrancesco called a team meeting and announced, "Bobby Cramer, you're going to the big leagues."

Sitting cramped with the no-frills Flyers on a school bus bound for another forgettable ballpark? Struggling, hurting, needing a third surgery on the left arm that was throwing everywhere for a career going nowhere? Feeling far away and forgotten in Cancun?

"I've been looking forward to this day for a long time," said Cramer, who stood on the top step of the dugout after the game and signed baseballs for every fan who threw one his way.

His debut came Sept. 13, when Cramer, 30 years, 320 days old, pitching at Kansas City, got his first career strikeout (Josh Field) and gave up his first home run (Mike Aviles), allowing an earned run and striking out four in 51/3 innings. He won his second game, going 52/3 innings at Minnesota, striking out two, giving up home runs to Michael Cuddyer and Jim Thome and getting an assist after catching a line drive by reigning AL MVP Joe Mauer with his right thigh.

At least Bobby Cramer, finally, was able to make The Show at home.