

A's News Clips, Saturday, April 2, 2011

Sloppy Oakland A's drop seventh straight season opener, 6-2 to Seattle Mariners

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

A sellout crowd packed the Oakland Coliseum on Friday night, but the product it came out to see was hardly as advertised.

Starting pitcher Trevor Cahill couldn't make it out of the fifth inning, and the A's committed five errors in a 6-2 defeat to the Seattle Mariners in the season opener for both teams.

The A's are a team built on solid starting pitching, a dependable bullpen and sound defense -- or so the theory goes. All three areas betrayed them as they lost their seventh straight game on opening day, an ongoing franchise record.

It's the longest such streak in the major leagues since the Philadelphia Phillies lost eight straight from 1985-92.

"It was a poor night all the way around," manager Bob Geren said. "Too many walks, too many errors. You're not going to see that from this club very often."

Mariners ace Felix Hernandez, the reigning American League Cy Young Award winner, pitched a five-hitter and was dominant after allowing Josh Willingham's two-run home run with two outs in the first inning.

Oakland's sloppy play drew boos from the crowd of 36,067, and the A's can only hope they didn't lose more than a game.

Catcher Kurt Suzuki left with a sprained left ankle. Seattle's Miguel Olivo rolled over Suzuki's ankle on a play at the plate in the top of the seventh. Suzuki finished out the inning but was replaced by Landon Powell in the top of the eighth.

The A's announced it was a mild sprain, but Suzuki wouldn't speculate on whether he'd be in the lineup Saturday night.

"It's just a little sore," he said. "We'll see how it is when I wake up tomorrow."

Willingham, the A's new left fielder, turned on an inside fastball from Hernandez in the first and drilled it over the left field wall for a 2-0 lead. He became the 10th player in Oakland history to homer in his first at-bat with the team.

But Hernandez, who struck out five and walked none in 108 pitches, buckled down after that. Hernandez finished with the first complete game on opening day in franchise history and the 14th of his career.

"He was throwing the ball exactly where he wanted to," Willingham said. "He's got great stuff, but his location was most impressive."

Cahill, 23, was the A's youngest opening day starter since 1971, when Vida Blue took the ball at age 21. An 18-game winner in 2010, Cahill walked four and ran his pitch count to 105 by the time Geren pulled him in the fifth.

"I think I had a little more nerves than normal," Cahill said. "For me, that's not a good thing."

The Mariners trailed 2-1 but took the lead in the sixth. Craig Breslow relieved Jerry Blevins and allowed Ichiro Suzuki's RBI single. After Ichiro was thrown out trying to steal, Chone Figgins hit a solo homer to make it 3-2.

Breslow (0-1) allowed three hits and was charged with three runs (two earned) in two-thirds of an inning.

A's third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff had back-to-back fielding errors in the fourth.

Things got really ugly during Seattle's three-run seventh. First baseman Daric Barton dropped a routine throw from reliever Brad Ziegler on Olivo's high chopper, and Ziegler let a ball slip out of his hand on a pickoff throw to first, an error that allowed Justin Smoak to score the second run of the inning.

Oakland last committed five errors in a game on July 6, 2007, at home against Seattle.

A's notebook: Brett Anderson defies logic against left-handed hitters

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Brett Anderson's nasty slider would seem to make life miserable on left-handed hitters.

But there's a statistical oddity involving the A's pitcher: He's struggled more against lefty hitters than against right-handers, which goes against baseball logic for a left-handed pitcher.

Lefties hit .299 (32 for 107) against Anderson last season while he held righties to .243 (80 for 329). For his major league career, Anderson is allowing a .308 average to lefties and a .246 clip to right-handers.

That gives Anderson, who starts Saturday night against the Seattle Mariners, something to work on as he begins his third big league season. Not that he's sweating the imbalance too much.

"It's just always been like that, even in high school and the lower minor leagues," Anderson said. "My fastball-slider combination to righties has been pretty effective and to lefties, maybe they've sat on it or maybe I don't mix and match as much. It's not that I feel uncomfortable against lefties, they just seem to have more success against me."

Anderson worked during spring training to bust lefties inside. He also showed them a slow curveball that contrasts with his slider.

"I started trying to go inside more just to keep them from leaning out over the plate on fastballs away," he said. "I made some strides and we'll see what happens over the course of the season."

The Mariners started three left-handed hitters -- Ichiro Suzuki, Jack Cust and Ryan Langerhans -- against right-hander Trevor Cahill on Friday.

Three others were switch hitters -- Chone Figgins, Milton Bradley and Justin Smoak -- so Anderson will catch a break as they'll hit from the right side against him Saturday, assuming they play.

Rich Harden, on the 15-day disabled list with a strained right shoulder, has thrown twice from the mound and said he's felt good physically. His next session is likely to come Monday, which means a minor league rehab assignment may not be far off.

A's manager Bob Geren said he didn't know yet if Harden would be brought back as a reliever or stretched out to start.

Dave Stewart, four times a 20-game winner with the A's, threw out the first pitch Friday night.

A sign written in Japanese was hanging in the left field bleachers to greet new designated hitter Hideki Matsui. Translated, it read "Welcome to Oakland Matsui!"

Inman: Oakland A's will need to be Crisp-er

By Cam Inman, Bay Area News Group

Coco Crisp's white spikes crossed home plate barely 15 minutes into the A's season Friday night.

Run No. 1 was on the scoreboard, and so was No. 2 with Josh Willingham trotting in after his two-run homer to left field.

Fancy that, the A's didn't strand a runner in scoring position, and their 2-0 lead entertained a sellout home crowd of 36,067 fans -- in Oakland, not San Jose or Fremont.

Now that is how you start a season. Too bad it couldn't end on that high note. The Seattle Mariners rallied for a 6-2 victory and doused the A's opening-night optimism.

After an encouraging first inning, the A's offense clammed up, their defense racked up multiple errors, their touted bullpen got routed, and their mainstay catcher, Kurt Suzuki, injured his left ankle on a failed play at the plate.

That combination just won't do. Not again. Not after four seasons without a playoff berth.

But here is what will work this season: Crisp sparking a rally.

Once was not enough on this night, obviously. But if he scores, say, 90 more times this season, the A's are playoff bound.

You want optimism from an opening night? This is the best available, folks.

Kudos to Willingham, their new cleanup hitter, for going deep on the second pitch he saw in an A's uniform. But be sure to applaud Crisp, who led off by lining an opposite-field single over shortstop on a 3-1 fastball from Felix Hernandez, the reigning American League Cy Young winner.

After Crisp advanced to third on ground outs by Daric Barton and David DeJesus, this question loomed: Would the A's blow their scoring opportunity and remind everyone of last season's .241 batting average with runners in scoring position, the second-worst mark in the American League?

Nope, Willingham came through with a shot that cleared the out-of-town scoreboard on the left-field wall.

"When Coco got the ball rolling and got into scoring position, I focused on getting a good pitch to hit," Willingham said. "That was the only pitch I got all night."

Don't count on home runs to carry the A's to glory this season. It's vital Crisp gets on base and scores. He needs to be a catalyst the way Andres Torres was last season atop the Giants' championship lineup.

Yes, sorry for yet another comparison between the A's and those lads on the other side of the toll plaza. But if Crisp mimics Torres' breakout season, the A's will be in business.

"You saw what he could do when he played," A's manager Bob Geren said of Crisp before Friday night's game. "He was a huge part of our success when he was in there (last year). Part of the plan is to keep him rested enough to avoid injuries."

A broken left pinkie sidelined Crisp at the start and end of last season. He also spent time on the disabled list with a strained rib cage and played in just 75 games overall because of injuries.

The A's went 40-35 when he played, which isn't overwhelming success, but then again those A's went 81-81 overall. Crisp did have a career-high 32 steals and led the majors with a 91.4 stolen-base percentage.

Crisp failed to get on base in his three other plate appearances -- two fly outs to center and a line out to first base -- and the offense went stagnant, surely as a result.

"It's not necessarily all on me," Crisp said. "That's the beauty of a team sport. We rely on everyone in the lineup."

Not helping the A's cause was the debut of veteran slugger and crowd favorite Hideki Matsui, who grounded out to end innings in all three plate appearances, including a fourth-inning double play.

Matsui, Willingham and DeJesus came aboard this season to fill glaring holes in the middle of the A's order. Hernandez shut down that trio aside from Willingham's homer and a fourth-inning single by DeJesus.

The A's needed more from their offense after their first-inning fun run. Instead, they blanked out -- on the scoreboard, and perhaps with a loss of focus that led to their five errors.

But they've got 161 more games to play -- with or without sellout crowds at home, in Oakland.

A's opening night tailgate part dedicated to keeping team in Oakland

By Angela Woodall, Oakland Tribune

A's fans have toasted the team in the parking lot of the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum since anyone can remember. But this year was something different.

It was a rare Friday opening-night game, and fans turned out from Oakland, Livermore, Antioch, Burlingame, San Ramon, El Cerrito, Marysville and nearly every other city within driving distance to convince A's co-owner Lew Wolff that moving to San Jose would be a mistake.

The result was a giant tailgate party with a mission: Keep the A's in Oakland.

Sponsored by Let's Go Oakland, a group of business people and community leaders who are trying to keep the team from moving to San Jose, the event drew hundreds of fans to the Coliseum parking lot before the A's opening game against the Seattle Mariners.

Jane Ann Lamph, from Berkeley, grew up watching Rollie Fingers pitch for the team back in the heyday of the 1970s and balked at the idea the team would move to San Jose.

"We don't want them to go," she said, standing in the midday sun for a chance to win a "Stay" T-shirt by spinning a wheel and answering a trivia question.

"Who pitched the A's first perfect game?" asked Garth Kimball, a "Baseball Oakland" blogger and one of several organizers of Friday night's public tailgate party. He was overseeing the trivia contest.

(The answer: Catfish Hunter.)

Let's Go Oakland provided hot dogs and Oakland's Linden Street Brewery provided the beer. Oaklandish handed out the "Stay" T-shirts, as well as pendants, stickers and tattoos from the retailer's iconic bus covered in a satellite image of Oakland.

Another fan, Ramin Salem, drove from Mission Viejo in Orange County for the game.

He said he would travel to games in San Jose if the team moved there, "but I can't support it."

The A's are steeped in history, he said. The team was founded in Philadelphia in 1901 before moving to Kansas City in 1955, then Oakland in 1968.

"How many times does a team have to move?" he added in between shouts of "Let's Go Oakland" and surrounded by a sea of green and gold shirts.

Some bore the names and numbers of fans' favorite players -- Braden, 51; Anderson, 49; Sweeney, 21. Others were printed with the slogan "Lew Wolff hates Oakland."

A breeze began to cool the few still standing in the T-shirt trivia line when Mayor Jean Quan arrived about 6 p.m. to lend her support to the keep-the-A's-in-Oakland effort.

Let's Go Oakland co-founder Doug Boxer said the campaign has the support of unions, businesses and elected officials.

"Now it's up to the fans."

Chin Music: Trevor Cahill vs. King Felix on tap for A's opener

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 4/1/2011 5:45PM

Greetings with the first of many regular-season blogs coming to you from the Coliseum press box. ... I drove into the parking lot at about 3 p.m. today and was surprised by the number of people already tailgating. The A's are expecting a sellout tonight, so it should be a great atmosphere. Trevor Cahill vs. Felix Hernandez – you can't ask for a better pitching matchup ...

–There wasn't a whole lot that A's manager Bob Geren revealed during his pregame media session. As we were asking him questions, it hit me that there's really nothing more we can throw at him that we haven't asked repeatedly over the past six weeks. But that changes tonight as games start counting ...

Geren has talked plenty about the quality depth he sees with this year's team, and he plans to use it. He said he's talked individually with players about their roles, and that he plans to get his regulars some rest when possible to prevent them from wearing down. "Guys will be given time off even when they're not tired," Geren said. He mentioned center fielder Coco Crisp as one of those guys, and that makes sense to me. I see Crisp as a big key for this team, and if getting him occasional time off keeps him healthier, the A's should do that. Geren mentioned that Josh Willingham could get the occasional look at DH against a tough left-handed pitcher, with Hideki Matsui resting and right-handed hitting Conor Jackson drawing a start in left field.

The lineups:

A's: Crisp CF, Barton 1B, DeJesus RF, Willingham LF, Matsui DH, K. Suzuki C, Ellis 2B, Kouzmanoff 3B, Pennington SS; Cahill P.

Mariners: Ichiro RF, Figgins 3B, Bradley LF, Cust DH, Smoak 1B, Olivo C, Langerhans CF, Ryan SS, Wilson 2B; Hernandez RHP.

—Some A's career numbers to note vs. King Felix — David DeJesus has hit .364 against him (8 for 22) over his career with one homer; Kurt Suzuki sits at .353 (6 for 17); On the flip side, Kevin Kouzmanoff is hitting just .158 (3 for 19) with six strikeouts. ...

That's all for now ...

A's Josh Willingham powerful, but Felix is king

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

In his first at-bat with his new team, Josh Willingham did something the A's saw little of last season: He homered.

Willingham's two-run shot to left in the first inning was all the scoring the A's managed against reigning Cy Young winner Felix Hernandez, however, and the rest of the team couldn't do the things Oakland actually did do well last year. The defense was bad - five-errors bad - and the pitching was shaky in Friday's 6-2 loss to the Mariners.

"That's not the recipe we need to win," Oakland manager Bob Geren said. "That's not characteristic of our pitching staff or our defense."

A's starter Trevor Cahill said, "That's not our brand of baseball."

The A's have dropped seven openers in a row, an ongoing franchise record and the longest current streak in the majors, the most since the Phillies lost eight in a row from 1985 to 1992. Seattle, which got a complete game from Hernandez, has won five openers in a row.

All-Star Cahill didn't get a decision because his pitch count zoomed early, extended in part by back-to-back errors by third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff in the fourth inning. Reliever Brad Ziegler and first baseman Daric Barton made errors on consecutive plays in a three-run seventh, and shortstop Cliff Pennington made one in the eighth.

Even when the team didn't make an error, the defense was dangerous: Pennington's throw to the plate on a grounder by Brendan Ryan in the seventh was off line, plus catcher Kurt Suzuki was in an awkward position, and Mariners runner Miguel Olivo bounced off the back of Suzuki's left calf and ankle as he came in to score.

"He used me as a Slip N Slide," Suzuki said. "That was a terrible play by me."

Suzuki's left ankle began to swell when he was in the on-deck circle in the eighth, and Landon Powell took over. Suzuki is considered day-to-day with a mild sprain, but he said he's hoping to play this evening.

"He's a tough guy, one of the toughest," Cahill said. "He'll probably be in Bob's office, begging to be in there tomorrow."

Cahill, who won 18 games last year despite not making his first start for Oakland until the end of April, allowed four hits, four walks and one run, and he struck out eight. The walks and strikeouts contributed to his 105-pitch total, as did lots of foul balls.

"I didn't get them to swing at balls early in the count," Cahill said. "They did a good job of getting me out of the game."

Reliever Craig Breslow, who missed much of spring training with a hamstring strain, did not have his best night. In the sixth, he allowed an RBI single by Ichiro Suzuki and gave up a solo homer to Chone Figgins, and in the seventh, he walked Jack Cust and gave up a double to Smoak; both later scored in the inning.

"If he has to sharpen up, he's going to sharpen up," Geren said of Breslow. "But we're going to need him."

Brian Fuentes dons uniform of his childhood heroes

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Brian Fuentes was looking forward to his first Opening Night with his favorite childhood baseball team on Friday night.

"I'm sure I'll put on the uniform tonight and look in the mirror and be like, 'Wow, weird!' " Fuentes said before batting practice. "I felt the same way when I went to Anaheim, but this is the green and gold and Opening Night, here in Oakland."

In addition, Fuentes is back to his usual job, if only on a temporary basis. The free-agent acquisition will fill in at closer while **Andrew Bailey** is out with a forearm strain for two or three weeks.

"It's something I enjoy doing and something I'm comfortable doing," Fuentes said. "Hopefully I'll get a lot of opportunities."

Fuentes, who is from Merced, had family members at Friday night's game, and he expects quite a turnout from the town Sunday, when another pitcher from Merced, **Doug Fister**, starts for the Mariners.

"I'm sure there will be a couple of buses," Fuentes said.

All in the family: Catcher **Landon Powell** switched from jersey No. 35 to No. 11 because his wife, **Allyson**, has some illustrious 11s in her family. Her father, **Bo Davies**, wore No. 11 with the Saints, and her grandfather, NBA Hall of Famer **Bob Davies**, also wore the number.

"That will be a surprise for my wife," Powell said. "She doesn't know I switched, and she'll love it. Plus, it will be kind of cool for our kid (**Holden**). His dad, grandfather and great-grandfather all will have worn that number in pro sports."

The joke in the clubhouse was that Powell chose 11 because it's slimming. "Vertical stripes," Powell said, smiling.

Briefly: **Josh Willingham** is the 10th player in Oakland history to homer in his first at-bat with the team and the first since **Frank Thomas** in 2006. ... Designated hitter **Hideki Matsui**'s next hit will give him 2,500 for his career, between Japan and the United States. ... Bailey threw long toss at a distance of 120 feet. ... **Rich Harden** threw a bullpen session and will throw another Monday, then face hitters Thursday. Manager **Bob Geren** said the team will wait to decide if Harden is slated for starting or relief.

A's leading off

Numbers game: Third-base coach Mike Gallego switched to No. 3 after checking with previous owner Eric Chavez. "Eric said, 'It would be an honor,' and I said, 'No, it would be an honor for me,' " Gallego said. "Eric said, 'OK, just don't get hurt in it.' "

Jack Cust bears no grudges as he faces A's

Steve Kroner, Chronicle Staff Writer

Jack Cust, known for his selectivity at the plate, couldn't limit the number of his former A's teammates whom he considers friends.

When asked in the Seattle clubhouse before Opening Night at the Coliseum to name the one or two Oakland players with whom he remains close, Cust rattled off eight names (for the record, Kurt Suzuki, Mark Ellis, Ryan Sweeney, Daric Barton, Dallas Braden, Jerry Blevins, Craig Breslow and Andrew Bailey) before he said:

"I feel close to everyone. They were teammates, and you try to treat teammates like family, so they're all part of my family.

"We were together for a long time."

Cust, 32, signed with the Mariners in December after spending the past four seasons with the A's. As Seattle's designated hitter Friday night, he went 0-for-2 with three walks in the Mariners' 6-2 victory.

Friday was by no means a grudge match for Cust against his old teammates.

"It's not like we're enemies or anything like that," Cust said. "Just go out there, play the game, have fun and try to get a win."

The Coliseum fans treated Cust as the enemy. You could say he got a mixed reception when he came to the plate in the first inning, but boos dominated that mix.

"As the game went on," Cust said after the game, "I think the boos even got louder. That's just part of the game. I like that, though. It makes it more fun.

"They don't usually boo the bad players on the other team. So, I like getting booed like that. ... I know it might not be because I'm a good player. It may more because they don't like me.

"But, it is what it is. I'm here to beat these guys and beat their team. So we did."

Cust drove in a run, scored one and in Custian fashion, went to a 3-2 count in each of his final four plate appearances.

"That's what Jack does," said Seattle manager Eric Wedge, who - like Cust - made his Mariners debut Friday night. "He's a good hitter, he's a knowledgeable hitter, and he's going to make you work."

With Oakland, Cust hit .247 with 97 homers. He drew 377 walks and struck out 673 times. Those walk and strikeout numbers were tops in the American League in that four-year stretch.

Simply for comparison's sake, Hideki Matsui - the man the A's signed to replace Cust as their main designated hitter - went 0-for-3 against Felix Hernandez on Friday night.

Hernandez won the Cy Young Award last season. Cust knows facing the A's staff is no picnic, either.

"It'd be nice if I was coming home to beat up on some guys who weren't very good," Cust said, "but they're a good pitching staff."

Drumbeat: A's Opening Night lineup looks familiar

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the Coliseum 4/1/2011 3:29PM

Just a quick update before I run downstairs, and I'll update with any news from the pre-game availability.

Here's the Opening Night lineup, and it's the one Bob Geren used all spring when all the starters were in: Crisp CF, Barton 1B, DeJesus RF, Willingham LF, Matsui DH, Suzuki C, Ellis 2B, Kouzmanoff 3B, Pennington SS. Trevor Cahill is on the mound.

The A's are expecting a sellout, and the parking lot already was filling up at 3 p.m. when I was coming in. Lots of tailgaters, and the weather is perfect. Looks fun! I might wander out there at some point.

Post-availability update: Manager Bob Geren had some pre-Opening Night words for his team yesterday before their workout, and he emphasized to the players that the goals of spring training were accomplished: The starting pitching is ready to go, the bullpen started to round into shape at the end, and the position players are healthy and right about where they should be.

The A's didn't have a sparkling record this spring - they went 12-21-1, fifth worst in the majors, and they set an Oakland record for spring losses. That means nothing, really. A former major-league general manager told me this spring that his theory about spring training was that you don't want to finish with a tremendous record or a really dreadful record, because those can create false impressions one way or another, but anything else is OK. What you do want is for your young players to make progress (check that box off for the A's) and to get through with good health (more of a plus than usual for Oakland - Andrew Bailey is the most significant name on the DL and he should be back in two or three weeks).

Bailey threw long toss today. He's out to 120 feet, which means he's not too far away from throwing off the front of the mound; maybe next week sometime, going off the A's usual throwing program.

Rich Harden threw his second bullpen session, and he'll have another on Monday. It hasn't been decided yet if he and Bailey will accompany the A's on the road trip or if they'll stay behind for treatment and workouts here. Harden could be ready to face hitters as soon as Thursday, possibly in some sort of simulated-game action.

I spoke to Brian Fuentes, and he's excited about his first Opening Night with the team he followed as a kid. He's also back to closing, filling in while Bailey is out.

Number switch alert: Landon Powell is now No. 11, so Mike Gallego has taken No. 3. Equipment manager Steve Vucinich said he wasn't going to give Eric Chavez's former number to an active player this year, but the infield coach gets Vucinich approval.

A whiff of trouble at the Coliseum

Bruce Jenkins, San Francisco Chronicle, 4/2/2011

I hadn't intended to write a word about the Coliseum on Friday night when the A's opened their season. It's a dump, as club owner Lew Wolff can't wait to tell you, and everyone knows it. Why not concentrate on the game?

That was the plan, but the A's, in tandem with the ancient structure and its negligent proprietors, make it very easy to lose focus.

At 6:20 p.m., about 50 minutes before game time, we got our first words from the publicaddress system, all about how to evacuate the building. Seriously. For nearly five minutes — and this was someone other than the venerable Dick Callahan — we learned which fans have to walk up which aisle, and which gates to use for exiting.

In other words, the first thing we heard was how to get the hell out of there.

I was in the press box at the time, which was great, because this place really stinks at field level — and I mean that literally. Walking into the A's dugout before the game, hard by the air vent, you got the distinct sense you'd entered a Porta Potti.

I believe "sewage" is the word. The A's recoil from such identification, but that's the deal. Dating back to a complaint

lodged by the Angels last season, the prevailing theory around the Coliseum is that a number of sewage leaks have gone unattended. It's nothing you can pinpoint — not without a gas mask, a searchlight and a hardy sense of adventure — and the A's try to be as diplomatic as possible.

"We're 22 feet below sea level here," said David Rinetti, the club's vice president of stadium operations. "It could be a lot of things, including ground water. We've had so much rain, everything got totally saturated. It reached the point where we had trouble even getting the field ready for tonight. The guys worked miracles to do that."

He managed a thin smile.

"It's our place," said Rinetti.

"What can I tell you?"

In most stadiums, such issues would be a horrific embarrassment. The A's stance falls someplace between a shrug and a fist-pump. There's nothing they can do, because all maintenance is the Coliseum's responsibility, and in their quest for a better world, Wolff and his San Jose-minded associates actually like hearing that their ballpark stinks.

Merely reporting such things leaves a bitter taste. I'll forever think Vida Blue, Fred Biletnikoff, Reggie Jackson and Warren Wells when I hear mention of the Coliseum, to say nothing of Billy Martin, Rickey Henderson and Dave Stewart. Viewed in a certain light, this place has more soul than the old Stax music headquarters in Memphis. And make no mistake, it's still a treat when a lively, energetic crowd shows up — as it did Friday night.

With 36,067 on hand, and looking every bit that full, there were some positive signs. The A's need Coco Crisp to be a catalyst, and he singled sharply to left to lead off the first inning. They need some power out of Josh Willingham, and on the second pitch he saw in an Oakland uniform, he jolted a two-run homer to deep left-center.

The A's defensive skills had descended into sick comedy by the middle innings, but these people were so enthused about baseball's return, many of them gave Trevor Cahill a standing ovation when he left the game in the fifth. He couldn't have been thrilled — four hits, four walks, and departing just one out shy of qualifying for the win with a 2-1 lead — but there's an energy to Oakland baseball when the spirit is right. (A banner in the right-field bleachers read, simply, STAY.) It appears that the A's have a strong signal on their new radio station (FM 95.7), and it passed my personal test on a drive from Half Moon Bay through the hills on Highway 92 into San Mateo. But television coverage is another story.

Why aren't the A's televised tonight (6:05 p.m.)? Check out the decisions that went down at Comcast Sports Net Bay Area: With the Warriors on the main channel, the Sharks were given priority on the station that normally carries A's games (CSN California).

There's a Plus channel to handle overflow, but still, no A's.

The Earthquakes got the nod for their Major League Soccer game against Seattle.

According to a CSNBA spokesman, "With the Earthquakes on that night as well, we wanted to limit the number of times that we push the A's to the Plus channel. We felt it was a better choice to put a game in the total count that would air on our primary channel."

Frightening. Welcome to the bottom of the barrel, just slightly below sea level.

Facebook baseball fan stats: A's younger, single

Benny Evangelista, Chronicle Staff Writer

Oakland A's fans are younger, tend to be single and have more friends than other baseball fans, at least on Facebook.

And San Francisco Giants fans on the social network led the majors for being most liberal, the polar opposite of fans of their 2010 World Series foes, the Texas Rangers, who were the most conservative. But both teams found more friends during the playoffs.

Those are some of the findings that Facebook data scientists uncovered as they studied the habits of baseball fans within the popular social network.

"While the U.S. may be a country of 50 states, to fans of Major League Baseball, it's a country of thirty teams, each with its own sphere of influence," the Palo Alto firm's data team said in a report. "Who cares where the state line is when somewhere between New York and Boston, there's a baseball Mason-Dixon Line separating Red Sox fans and Yankees fans?"

Major League Baseball charts about every player statistic imaginable, esoteric things like the batting average of left-handed hitters against right-handed pitchers in day games in August. So the data scientists decided to look at the stats for fans by examining each team's Facebook pages and the status updates of fans.

The scientists came up with data such as the median distance of fans from their favorite team's stadium (A's fans were first at 218 miles) and average number of teams liked by each fan (the New York Yankees were first with about 1.5 teams per fan, the Washington Nationals last with more than five teams liked per fan.)

While teams like the Dodgers and Angels in Los Angeles "vie for popularity in Southern California, teams like the (Atlanta) Braves are dominant over most of the South," the report said. Both the Giants and A's have fan clusters outside of the Bay Area.

The scientists also dug into the demographics of fans.

"The Athletics and the (Toronto) Blue Jays are both younger and more single than we would expect for baseball fans," a report said. "These teams also stand out in another way: Their fan bases are predominantly male compared to the other teams."

The Giants were fourth on the younger-single side of the list, but on the other end fans of the St. Louis Cardinals, Cincinnati Reds and Detroit Tigers tended to be older and married.

And, the data team found, "The old cliché that males like sports more than females is true: Less than 50 percent of any team's fans are female, but the Blue Jays are the most extreme with a nearly 3-to-1 ratio."

Error-filled game spoils Opening Night

By Jane Lee / MLB.com | 4/2/2011 2:29 AM ET

OAKLAND -- Built on a seemingly bullet-proof defense and an overwhelmingly stacked pitching staff, the A's are plenty aware of their strengths, no doubt.

So when they walked out of the gates for Friday's season opener with such facets intact and exited having watched both unravel in a 6-2 loss to the Mariners in front of a sold-out crowd, there wasn't much to be said.

"I'll just say you won't see that very often," A's manager Bob Geren assured.

"That," as the skipper deemed, was a lot of bad, including five errors and a handful of shaky efforts on the mound, in Geren's fifth straight Opening Night loss at the helm, which was also the club's seventh straight season-opening defeat -- marking the longest such streak in A's history dating to 1901 and the longest active string in the Majors.

The lights weren't so dim in the beginning. In fact, the A's struck early against Seattle ace Felix Hernandez, who offered up a leadoff single to Coco Crisp and proceeded to garner two groundouts before watching Josh Willingham go deep on an inside sinker with a two-run shot to left field.

Willingham became the 10th player in Oakland history to homer in his first at-bat with the A's. Frank Thomas had been the last to do so on Opening Day in 2006.

"I just got my hands in and put the barrel on the ball," said Willingham, who was facing Hernandez for the first time in his career. "When Coco got the ball rolling and I got a good pitch to hit, it was exciting to have that lead against a guy like that."

Hernandez transformed into his normal self thereafter, though, keeping the A's offense at bay with eight shutout innings following the first, allowing just five hits total and striking out five while compiling the franchise's first Opening Day complete-game victory.

"I started throwing down in the zone with a good sinker and got a lot of ground balls," Hernandez said. "I just fell behind a couple times [in the first] and that's when I make mistakes."

The reigning American League Cy Young Award winner chalked his performance up to a good sinker, and his lack of mistakes just happened to coincide with one too many from the Oakland side.

Trevor Cahill, making his first career Opening Night start, breezed through the first two frames before loading the bases in the third and offering up a bases-loaded walk to Jack Cust, who went 0-for-2 with three walks in his first game against his former team.

It marked the third of four uncharacteristic walks on the night for the Oakland righty, who ultimately lasted just 4 2/3 innings -- mostly because of a long third (29 pitches) and an even longer fourth frame that included a career-high two fielding errors committed on consecutive plays by third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff.

Overall, Cahill surrendered just one run on four hits and also struck out eight Mariners, against whom he is winless in three career starts. Those numbers came on the heels of a strong 2010 campaign in which he averaged just 2.9 walks and 5.4 strikeouts per nine innings.

"I think I was a little more nervous than normal for me, which isn't a good thing," he said. "My strikeout-to-walk ratio was higher than normal. Usually I'm getting early swings and ground balls early, but they were fighting stuff off and I was falling behind. I just couldn't get deep in the game. I could tell in the bullpen that I was throwing harder than normal."

Geren, though, didn't sense that, instead applauding his starter's efforts and pointing to some of the night's miscues for his early exit.

"We make a few plays behind him, and he maybe gets into the sixth inning or even the seventh and possibly it's a different game," the skipper said.

Cahill was relieved by lefty Jerry Blevins, who finished the fifth frame before leaving bullpen mate Craig Breslow with a runner on second -- courtesy of a walk to Brendan Ryan and a bunt -- and one out in the sixth. Breslow proceeded to serve up Ichiro Suzuki's run-scoring single to make it 2-2 before Ichiro was caught stealing. But then Chone Figgins hit his first homer of the season, a blast to left field that gave the Mariners a 3-2 lead.

Seattle extended its lead to four in a messy seventh frame, which brought about errors from first baseman Daric Barton and pitcher Brad Ziegler, along with an injury to catcher Kurt Suzuki.

Cust's leadoff walk was followed by a double off the bat of Justin Smoak, and Miguel Olivo managed to bring Cust home and reach first when Barton dropped a ball fielded by Ziegler. The A's reliever then proceeded to throw a ball past Barton on a pickoff attempt, which brought Smoak home.

The dramatics not over, Ryan's fielder's choice had Olivo running toward the plate, where Suzuki caught the ball but, rather than tagging the runner, found his way to the ground after rolling on his left ankle. Following a lengthy trainer's visit, Suzuki finished the frame but was lifted in the bottom of the inning while experiencing soreness.

He's optimistic he'll return for Saturday's game, but it wasn't the type of scare the A's needed in an already discouraging contest. A Cliff Pennington fielding error in the eighth handed the club its fifth and final miscue of the night, and a failed attempt to score with no outs and runners on first and second in the bottom half of the inning essentially shut down a disappointing debut.

It was the first time the A's, whose 99 errors last season were the fifth fewest in the AL, had tallied five errors in a game since July 6, 2007, which also came against Seattle.

"It was a combination of everything tonight -- walks, errors, lack of run support," Geren said. "It was a team loss tonight, that's for sure."

"It was one of those games we're glad to get out of the way," Cahill added. "That's not our brand of baseball. We're pitching and defense, and I feel like we struggled in both aspects."

Suzuki exits with mild ankle sprain

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Kurt Suzuki left Friday's season-opening game in the bottom of the seventh inning with a mild left ankle sprain, but the A's catcher is hopeful he'll be back on Saturday against the Mariners.

Suzuki rolled his ankle while unsuccessfully attempting to tag out Seattle's Miguel Olivo at the plate in the top of the seventh. Olivo was running home on what was ruled a fielder's choice to shortstop Cliff Pennington, who tossed the ball home with "more time than I realized," Suzuki said.

"It was a slow grounder, so I thought it was going to be more of a bang-bang play. I was waiting for the blow and it wasn't happening, and then I just rolled it."

After a lengthy visit by one of the team's trainers, Suzuki finished the inning behind the plate but was pulled while standing in the on-deck circle in the bottom half of the frame and replaced by Landon Powell.

"It was just a little sore and it started to swell up a bit," he said. "I've never sprained my ankle before, so we'll see how it is when I wake up tomorrow."

Suzuki was one of the most durable catchers in the American League last season, tying for second with 121 starts despite missing 19 games while on the disabled list with an intercostal strain and three on the bereavement list.

"He's a tough guy, one of the toughest there is," hurler Trevor Cahill said, "so he's probably going to be in [Bob Geren's] office trying to get back in there tomorrow."

Matsui's milestone hit must wait

OAKLAND -- A's slugger Hideki Matsui, making his ninth consecutive Opening Day start as a Major Leaguer on Friday, entered the contest one hit shy of a combined 2,500 between his time in Japan and the United States.

"I was hoping it'd be more than 2,500 tonight," A's manager Bob Geren said before Friday's game against Seattle. "Maybe 2,501 and 2,502 also."

Matsui ultimately went hitless in his A's debut, going 0-for-3 against Seattle ace Felix Hernandez. In his previous eight season openers, he was 12-for-32 (.375) with four home runs and 13 RBIs.

The 2011 campaign marks Matsui's 19th professional season, which includes 10 in his homeland. He's not only one hit away from 2,500 but he also needs just seven home runs for 500 and eight runs for 1,500.

Matsui struggled at the plate this spring, hitting just .169 with one home run and two RBIs in 22 games, but he's a .271 career hitter in April with 20 long balls and 98 RBIs.

Crisp enjoys gag, and entering season healthy

OAKLAND -- The always-entertaining Coco Crisp appeared to be in midseason form on Friday, both on and off the field for an Opening Night that also doubled as April Fools' Day.

A few hours before leading off the A's season opener against Seattle with a single, Crisp sat by his locker, reaching for his right ankle with a disappointed look on his face, hesitant to talk about entering the 2011 campaign healthy.

"Actually," Crisp began, "I just came from the coach's office, told them my ankle's bothering me a bit. I fouled a ball off it yesterday, and it's a little sore."

The outfielder's poker face lasted nearly a minute before Crisp broke into a smile, offering a reminder of the calendar date.

"I'm all good," Crisp assured.

That's exactly what the A's want to hear from their center fielder, whose 2010 season was interrupted by injury three times. When healthy, though, Crisp proved to be the club's catalyst, posting a .279 average with eight home runs, 38 RBIs and a career-high 32 stolen bases in just 75 games.

"You saw what he could do when he played," manager Bob Geren said. "He played less than 80 games but he was a huge part of our success when he was in there. Part of that overall plan we have this year is to keep him rested up and help him avoid injuries."

Crisp, entering his 10th Major League season and his second with the A's, hit .379 with three homers and 11 RBIs in 20 spring contests. He battled hamstring soreness in the final two weeks but managed to enter Friday's contest injury-free -- something he couldn't say last year when he missed almost the entire first two months with a fractured finger.

"It feels really good to come in here healthy and start things out the right way," he said. "For me, it felt like such a long spring because I was feeling so good and just wanted to get the ball rolling."

Crisp isn't one to set season goals but rather keeps a realistic perspective when he comes to the field each day.

"Stay healthy, that's what I'm all about," he said. "It's hard to put numbers on anything because you don't want to set the bar high in case things don't go accordingly. The easiest thing to do is to go out, play hard and know you did so the best way possible. You do that, and the rest will take care of itself."

Geren calls this his deepest A's club

OAKLAND -- Before the first pitch of Friday's season opener against Seattle was even thrown, A's manager Bob Geren -- entering his fifth year at the helm -- was asked if his 2011 squad is the best he's seen in his time in Oakland.

"I think it's our deepest roster for sure," he said. "Our best? With depth, sure."

That depth, built in a busy offseason, has the A's garnering much attention on the national scene. And while Geren is well aware of the hype surrounding his new-look team and deems it "a good thing," he's more concerned about keeping a realistic eye on in-house goals.

"We think we have a good chance to compete and win this division," Geren said. "Myself, the players, the coaching staff, the front office staff, we all feel the same way. If they stay healthy and play good baseball, they'll compete for the division. Those are the keys."

Oakland escaped Spring Training without much damage, aside from injuries to hurlers Andrew Bailey and Rich Harden. The club used the disabled list 23 times last season, and Geren is hoping to ward off that trend this year by taking a slightly different approach when filling out his daily lineup card.

"I told them we have a deep team, and we're going to use everybody," he said. "Guys will be given days off even when they're not really tired, for a couple reasons -- to avoid them getting tired, to avoid injuries the best we can, and to keep everyone else sharp."

"The big message is that it's going to take everyone to win. Everyone is going to contribute. Everyone is going to get their chance to play."

Rehabbing Bailey throws from 120 feet

OAKLAND -- A's righty Andrew Bailey, nursing a strained forearm, celebrated the club's season opener on Friday by moving ahead with his rehab work and throwing to a distance of 120 feet.

It wasn't the way Bailey initially envisioned Opening Night, but the A's closer is optimistic about his progress, even though a time frame hasn't been set for his return. He was placed on the 15-day disabled list on Wednesday -- retroactive to March 22 -- after appearing in just two spring games.

"I'm feeling really good," Bailey said. "We're just taking it day to day so that we take care of it now and it won't be an issue later in the season."

The two-time All-Star will continue lengthening his throwing distance before getting back on the mound and taking part in what his teammates have already left behind.

"I never really had a Spring Training," he said, "so I know I'll need a couple appearances somewhere to get ready. I don't know where that will be yet, but right now we just want to get it healthy."

In the meantime, manager Bob Geren will rely on Brian Fuentes for closer duties. The veteran hurler, who has the most saves by a left-handed reliever (183) since 2005, did not allow a run in eight of his 10 spring outings.

Worth noting

Andy LaRoche entered Friday's game in the top of the ninth inning at shortstop, marking his first career plate appearance while playing that position. ... Mark Ellis (1-for-3) has hit safely in 14 consecutive games dating back to last season, which is a new career high. ... Rich Harden (lat muscle) threw his second bullpen session on Friday. Geren said all went well but there is still no timeline for the right-hander to see game action. The club also hasn't made a decision on whether Harden, once healthy, will return to the rotation or slide into the bullpen. "We're not even close to making that decision," Geren said. "We're just worried about getting him healthy." ... The average age of the A's Opening Night roster was 28.96, which is nearly two years older than last year's (27.16). Cahill is the youngest at 23, while Matsui is the oldest at 36.

Cohn: Time for A's to show they matter

By [LOWELL COHN](#), THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

OAKLAND -- The Oakland A's lost their 2011 home season opener 6-2. It's how they lost that's troubling.

The A's led 2-0 early but made five errors, gave up two unearned runs — lavished them on the Mariners — and played defense like a bunch of Little Leaguers. Third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff made errors on successive plays. It's like, by some weird fluke, the A's forgot to practice defense in spring.

"I'll just say you won't see this very often," A's manager Bob Geren said. "They can really catch the ball."

This was a disastrous way to begin the season considering the A's, usually attendance-starved, attracted 36,067 living, breathing, paying fans, 1,000 of them standing room — a sellout. The fans craved a good performance but the A's were like a Broadway play that bombed the first night in front of a full house.

It didn't help that starter Trevor Cahill, the A's best pitcher, lasted only 4» innings because he used up his allotment of pitches — in this case a whopping 105 — way too early. And that made the game a bullpen game, and the A's bullpen got murdered — Jerry Blevins, Craig Breslow, Brad Ziegler, Bobby Cramer, Mich-ael Wuertz.

But something way more important than the game was going on Friday night. The A's have not mattered around here for a long time. Sorry, there's no polite way to say that. In Geren's four seasons as Oakland manager, the A's haven't had a winning season, although they broke even last year.

In the meantime, the Giants completely remade themselves and won the World Series, and they always get great attendance in their palace of a ballyard. All of that makes you think "Poor A's." That's what they want you to think. Well, the heck with that. The A's have to make a change, show they are a factor instead of a mere complainer.

And make no mistake, the A's are world-class complainers — they have a crummy ballpark and the Giants are meanies who won't let them move to San Jose, and they're just such victims and life is so unfair. They have adopted this line and they've bored us to death.

Now they have to become a baseball team again, one that attracts fans and wins, and wins with excitement. Please don't think I'm being unfair or raising the bar too high. At a certain point a big-league team must stop boring us and must become, well, a big-league team. At a certain point the A's have to turn their potential — a vague term — into actual production.

In the offseason, the A's bravely tried to make themselves a team by adding hitting to their impressive young pitching. They added three hitters, David DeJesus, Hideki Matsui and Josh Willingham, all better than anyone they had in 2010.

Willingham crashed a two-run home run over the left-field scoreboard in the bottom of the first. It might have been his way of serving notice — that he will be a force. Then again it may not.

One game certainly doesn't mean anything in a long season, although the A's lost their seventh opener in a row, and although their effort was poor.

They need to show they are a serious player in the American League West. And more important — let's be honest about this — they need to show they belong in the Bay Area sports conversation along with the rival Giants. That's what this season is about, and that's why it means so much. And that's why the A's have to play better.

Gutierrez: A's wilt under Opening Day expectations

[Paul Gutierrez](#), CSNCalifornia.com

OAKLAND - Bob Geren settled into his usual spot on the [A's](#) bench on a blazing April afternoon for his customary pre-game skull session with the media.

A larger-than-usual throng surrounded him. Reporters stared at Geren. Geren stared back, twitching nervously, making small talk to no one in particular. The ensuing silence grew uncomfortable.

Welcome to the first Opening Day where there are actual, factual real live expectations placed on Geren and the A's to start a season.

"No big opening statement," Geren said with a wink. "I have a headache, actually."

Imagine how his noggin felt some six hours later, after the A's flipped and flopped before finally face-planting to the tune of a 6-2 defeat to Seattle in front of a disillusioned sell-out crowd of 36,067 at the Coliseum.

Embarrassing? That might be too strong, though the A's did commit an unconscionable five errors. Included in the mess - the first two-error game of third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff's career.

The rebuilt middle of the lineup? Newbies David DeJesus, Josh Willingham and Hideki Matsui went a combined two for 10, with Matsui grounding out to end three innings. Though Willingham took reigning American League Cy Young King Felix Hernandez deep in the first inning for a two-run shot, becoming the 10th player in Oakland history to homer in his first at-bat as a member of the A's, the first since Frank Thomas in 2006.

The bullpen, a supposed strength? It imploded...with aplomb, surrendering five runs and looking as shaky as it has in recent memory.

Even the pillar of the team, catcher Kurt Suzuki had to leave the game after an awkward collision with Miguel Olivo in the seventh inning left him with what was termed a "mild" left ankle sprain.

"It's fine," Suzuki insisted after the game. "Just a little sore. We'll see when I wake up tomorrow."

If the A's lose him for any substantial amount of time, it would hurt more than on the field and in his handling of the A's young staff. But that's for another day.

Instead, it all added up to a ruination of a supposed coronation for Oakland starter Trevor Cahill.

The 23-year-old with an 18-win season in his back pocket did himself no favors, either, running up a pitch count of 105 while not being able to get out of the fifth inning.

And yet, with all the hoopla surrounding opening day, Cahill was supposed to be the last guy affected by the sideshow. His biggest weakness - a relative inexperience of the big moment - was supposed to be his greatest strength. Ignorance, was truly going to be bliss.

"His personality, he's so mild-mannered he's the perfect guy for opening day," said A's second baseman Mark Ellis, who's been through nine of these things in the bigs.

"You see he has more confidence, just in the way he walks around."

The vibe was different, too, before the game. A confident atmosphere not really felt around these parts since the end of the 2006 season, when the A's played in the American League Championship Series. Ellis and the re-signed Rich Harden, who is on the disabled list, are the only remaining A's players from that season.

"So much has changed with so much turnover," Ellis added. "We've added some key people so it's the start of something special."

Like being a trendy pick to win the AL West after four seasons of yawn-inducing baseball. Five of the A's nine regulars - Ellis, Matsui, Willingham, DeJesus and Coco Crisp - are in contract years. So yes, there is also a sense of urgency permeating the A's clubhouse.

"Expectations are great," Ellis said. "This is as excited as I've been in a long time, entering a season."

So I asked Geren if those expectations placed on him and his team this year were daunting...or exciting.

"I don't see how that's a bad thing," he said. "There's no negatives there. People in the outside world have expectations of us. That's a good thing.

"The expectations from the inside are probably the same from the outside. We expect to compete for the division."

The giveaway to fans on opening night was a schedule magnet. With their sloppy play, the A's also doled out a few migraines.

Sloppy play, quiet bats spoil opener Mariners pitcher flashes Cy Young form

Janie McCauley, Associated Press

OAKLAND – Felix Hernández found his Cy Young form in a hurry, pitching a five-hitter for his 14th career complete game and the majors' first this year, and the Seattle Mariners beat the American League West rival A's 6-2 Friday night.

Chone Figgins hit a go-ahead solo home run in the sixth inning off loser Craig Breslow (0-1), and Ichiro Suzuki singled twice, drove in a run and stole two bases as the Mariners won their opener under first-year manager Eric Wedge to end a five-game losing streak in Oakland. Seattle spoiled the A's opener played before a sellout crowd of 36,067 that included 1,000 standing-room only tickets. Suzuki moved within one hit of tying Edgar Martinez's franchise hits record of 2,247.

Hernández (1-0) dazzled after allowing Josh Willingham's two-run, two-out homer in the first. King Felix faced the minimum in each of the next six innings, allowing only a leadoff single to David DeJesus in the fourth before Landon Powell's hit to begin the eighth.

Hernández, who won the 2010 A.L. Cy Young Award despite only 13 victories, struck out five and didn't walk a batter in a 108-pitch gem. The right-hander is now 3-0 with a 1.71 ERA in his four career Opening Day outings.

The previous pitcher to throw a complete game on Opening Day was Ben Sheets for the Milwaukee Brewers in 2007 against the Los Angeles Dodgers, according to STATS LLC.

Willingham wasted little time showing why the A's acquired him from Washington this winter to be their new cleanup hitter and upgrade an offense that managed only 109 homers and 663 runs last season, the team's second-fewest in the last 28 non-shortened seasons.

Willingham sent the second pitch he saw from Hernández over the out-of-town scoreboard in left – the first opening day homer allowed by Hernández in his four career assignments. Willingham became the 10th player in Oakland history to hit a home run in his first at-bat with the A's. Frank Thomas last did it on April 3, 2006.

Former A's player Jack Cust scored an insurance run to start the Mariners' three-run seventh, when Oakland committed two of its five errors. A's catcher Kurt Suzuki gave everybody a scare when he went down writhing in pain after being clobbered by a scoring Miguel Olivo, but Suzuki stayed in the game to finish the inning before taking a seat with a mild left ankle sprain. Backup Powell replaced him to start the eighth.

Coincidentally, Oakland last committed five errors in a game on July 6, 2007, at home against Seattle. The A's also had four errors during their season-opening 5-3 loss to the Mariners here on April 5 a year ago.

Trevor Cahill hung tough in his first career opening day start but labored and saw his pitch count climb in a hurry. The right-hander, an 18-game winner in his second full major league season last year, allowed one run on four hits in 4 2/3 innings, struck out eight and walked four.

Cahill escaped a bases-loaded jam in the fourth after consecutive errors by third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff, who had his first career two-error game. Cahill left with runners on first and second with two out in the fifth – at 105 pitches.

New Oakland designated hitter Hideki Matsui went 0 for 3 and grounded into a double play in his A's debut and his ninth straight Opening Day start.

Mark Ellis, who matched his career best with a 13-game hitting streak to end last season, hit an eighth-inning single.

Hundreds of tailgaters took to the parking lot early on a spectacular spring day in the Bay Area, when first-pitch temperature was 64 degrees.

Note: The uniforms worn by Matsui and Suzuki will be auctioned off Sunday to aid earthquake and tsunami relief efforts in the players' native Japan.

A's fan? A fan's guide to opening day 2011 for the Oakland A's

By [Doug Brockwell](#), [Yahoo! Contributor Network](#) 4/1/2011

There's a sociological genius at work in the [Oakland Athletics](#) marketing department. The current slogan for the franchise, "green collar baseball," speaks volumes about the culture of the bay area, and why I have become such a devoted fan of the Oakland A's.

Thank goodness baseball is back and opening day for the Athletics is just around the corner.

Across the Bay Bridge, you'll find a better stadium (AT&T Park), a team with a higher payroll, fancier concessions, and fancier fans. You'll find doctors, lawyers, and San Francisco techie types taking in an afternoon game, reveling in the *see and be seen* crowd. On the San Francisco side, baseball is very much en vogue. If you search hard enough, you might even find a fan in the crowd who can tell you what a change-up is or explain the infield fly rule.

Trot back over to the Oakland side, and you'll see where that marketing slogan is coming from. The Oakland Coliseum is clearly a Soviet spin on the baseball stadium, a concrete gulag if there ever was one. The concession options are minimal, the team operates on a shoestring payroll, and the fans are decidedly less cosmopolitan.

All these shortcomings are what bring me to love the authentic experience of Oakland Athletics baseball, and loathe the corporate, plasticized feel of the Giants. There's an old Taoist saying that it's "better to be alive in the mud than dead in the palace." Count me as one who's happiest to feel alive in the mud of the Oakland A's.

So if you're looking to experience opening day baseball in northern California and you're not one of those fancy Giants fans, here's a quick guide of the opening series for the Oakland Athletics:

When is opening day and how long is the series?

The [Oakland Athletics begin their season at home](#), with the first game on April 1, Friday night, at 7:05 p.m., against the [Seattle Mariners](#). The opening series runs for three games, with a 6:05 p.m. evening game on Saturday night and a 1:05 p.m. getaway matinee on Sunday afternoon. The opening series against Seattle will be the only home games for the Athletics until mid-April, when they return home for a short six-game homestand against the Tigers and Red Sox.

Where can I get tickets and how much will they cost?

Don't expect to get gouged for tickets in the way that you would going to see a certain other bay area baseball team that shall remain nameless. Plaza Reserved section seating can be had for just \$9 a ticket. You can find club level tickets in prime foul ball territory behind home plate and along the first and third base line for roughly \$35 at the Oakland Coliseum.

Tickets can be found at www.oaklandathletics.com, or check stubhub.com for bargains on ticket resales.

What about parking and transportation?

You'll [pay an extra \\$17 for parking in one of the Coliseum controlled parking lots](#), though you may be able to find a cheaper private lot near the coliseum. The less stressful option is to take one of the public transit systems directly to the stadium. BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit), the local light rail system, has a Coliseum stop that will drop you off three minutes from the stadium.

The Capitol Corridor Amtrak line also has a stop within walking distance of the Oakland Coliseum.

Are there giveaways during the opening series?

Yes! At each game of the opening series, a different promotional giveaway will be featured. Magnetic schedules will be given to the first 32,000 fans on opening night, a pet calendar to the first 10,000 fans on Saturday, and [Hideki Matsui](#) t-shirts to the first 10,000 fans on Sunday.

Carl Finley's daughter recalls 1970s A's

[Laura Anthony](#), KGO, 4/1/2011

DUBLIN, Calif. (KGO) -- Opening Day has special meaning for one Bay Area woman who literally grew up with the Oakland A's in their championship days.

It happens every spring, when the A's Opening Day comes along. Dublin's Nancy Finley gets nostalgic about the old days.

"Everything is new again and you have that chance to make it to the championships," said Finley.

Finley is the daughter of Carl Finley, who was a minority owner of the A's and the cousin of Charlie O. Finley.

"He became the common enemy. Dad was the one everyone loved," said Finley.

Finley was just 12-years-old when she moved with the A's from Kansas City to Oakland. She was a young girl, growing up with a big-league team.

"My cousins and I used to jump round on top of the dugout before a game started. It was just fun," said Finley.

With players like Reggie Jackson, Vida Blue, Rollie Fingers, Sal Bando and Catfish Hunter, the A's were perennial champions. Still, Charlie Finley was not always well-liked. For one thing, he didn't spend lavishly on players.

"We started Rickey Henderson out at \$33,000 a year. That was 1977, but still," said Finley, the former A's pitcher.

"We were a misfit group of guys that just went out and played baseball real hard," said Blue.

Blue remembers Charlie Finley's prickly personality as a motivator.

"I was trying to prove to him every day, I think we all were, that we were worthy of the money that we were making, but he dangled in front of us, he kept us hungry," said Blue.

And for a time, it worked. In the 70s, the A's won five straight divisional titles and three consecutive World Series. Finley has the memories and the rings to show for it.

"This one has the three-leaf clover on the side," said Finley.