

## A's News Clips, Friday, April 8, 2011

### Oakland A's leave Toronto feeling good after 2-1 victory

By Joe Stiglich, Contra Costa Times

TORONTO -- It took a Coco Crisp strikeout for the A's to get on the scoreboard Thursday.

The game-winning hit came from a player expected to ride the bench much of the season.

Conventional it wasn't, but the A's 2-1 victory over the Toronto Blue Jays delivered a much-needed morale boost for everyone inside the Oakland clubhouse.

Trevor Cahill, coming off a lackluster opening-night start, limited the Jays to three hits over eight innings. The A's took the lead with two runs in the top of the eighth, then watched Brian Fuentes close it out for his first save as an Athletic.

Most important, the A's avoided being swept in the first series of this nine-game road trip, and they'll begin a three-game set Friday against the Minnesota Twins feeling a lot better about themselves.

"It was an all-around win," Cahill said. "We had timely hitting. We didn't score a ton of runs, but we got a bunt down. Everybody made plays. We definitely have a lot more confidence going into the next series based on today."

The A's needed Cahill (1-0) to be as dominant as he was, because Toronto lefty Ricky Romero was spinning a beauty himself. He held the A's off the scoreboard for the first seven innings, allowing just three hits.

But Andy LaRoche led off the eighth with a double and moved to third on Cliff Pennington's sacrifice bunt. In came right-hander Jason Frasor to replace Romero.

Frasor got Crisp swinging on a nasty breaking ball in the dirt, but the ball skipped past catcher J.P. Arencibia for a wild pitch. Crisp made it to first and LaRoche trotted in with the tying run.

Crisp stole second, and after Daric Barton struck out looking, Crisp swiped third. Then Conor Jackson, drawing a start in right field with David DeJesus getting the day off, singled sharply through the left side to put the A's up 2-1.

Jackson was relegated to a reserve role after the A's acquired outfielders DeJesus and Josh Willingham over the winter. But Jackson, a right-handed hitter, came up big in two starts against lefties in the series.

Jackson had two hits and an RBI in Tuesday's loss.

Along with his go-ahead single Wednesday, Jackson turned in a big defensive play in the sixth. Toronto had taken a 1-0 lead and had a runner on second when Jackson made a tumbling catch of Adam Lind's low liner to right to end the inning.

Jackson was more interested in praising Cahill than his own play.

"Trevor went out and shut them down," Jackson said. "That's a very talented guy. My game ball goes to him."

After walking four and lasting just 4 $\frac{2}{3}$  innings in the opener against Seattle, Cahill resembled his 2010 All-Star form Thursday. He struck out seven and walked no one.

He fed the Jays a steady diet of sinkers and changeups but also showed them his curve early in counts.

"He was outstanding," A's manager Bob Geren said. "I couldn't be happier with how (his curve) has progressed. It just adds something to his arsenal."

Cahill's pitch count stood at 105 after a 1-2-3 eighth inning, but Geren said he didn't hesitate to call on Fuentes.

The lefty was bothered by a blister on his throwing hand in recent days and allowed three runs Saturday in his only prior appearance.

Fuentes allowed Lind's two-out single but retired Aaron Hill on a fly out to end it.

## **A's update: Mark Ellis enters the game late to mark his 1,000th career game**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

TORONTO -- An inner ear infection was expected to keep A's second baseman Mark Ellis on the bench Thursday. But after the A's rallied to take the lead in the top of the eighth against the Toronto Blue Jays, Ellis entered as a defensive replacement for Andy LaRoche -- an unusual way for Ellis to appear in his 1,000th career game.

Ellis' left ear began bothering him before Wednesday's game, and he said he experienced dizziness during that game.

Before Thursday's game, he got checked out by a Blue Jays doctor, who prescribed antibiotics and cleared him to play.

Ellis said he had a feeling A's manager Bob Geren would seek him out if the need arose for a late-game defensive sub.

"I know Bob pretty well by now," Ellis said after the A's 2-1 victory. "I figured he was going to find a way to get me in there, especially in a close game."

Ellis became the 13th player in Oakland history to appear in 1,000 games with the team. He holds the Oakland record for games played at second base with 968.

Ellis was just happy his ear was feeling better after he had trouble sleeping Wednesday night.

"I feel like a 2-year-old telling people, 'I can't play, I have an earache,' " he said Thursday morning.

Geren said the A's had weighed whether it was safe to have Ellis fly on the team charter to Minnesota after the game, given how the altitude could bother his ear.

Ellis was game to give it a go, not that he had much choice. The drive from Toronto to Minneapolis takes an estimated 16 hours.

The [weather.com](#) forecast calls for much more mild temperatures in Minneapolis than were expected just a few days ago. A high of 63 degrees and a low of 46 is expected Friday, when the Twins host the A's in their home opener.

Sunday's high is expected to reach 70 degrees, though there's a 70 percent chance of thunderstorms, which could interrupt the A's-Twins series finale.

Toronto shortstop Yunel Escobar, who belted the game-winning, two-run homer off reliever Grant Balfour in the series opener Tuesday, missed Thursday's game with a mild concussion. He left Wednesday's game after banging his head against LaRoche's knee while sliding into third base.

## **Chin Music: Mark Ellis sits with inner ear problem; Andy LaRoche's tour of the A's infield continues**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 4/7/2011 8:56AM

It's getaway day for the A's in Toronto, and they want nothing more than to get away with a victory. Trevor Cahill takes the mound looking to help the A's avoid a three-game sweep. ...

Andy LaRoche remains a busy guy. He's starting at second base today with Mark Ellis experiencing an inner ear problem. LaRoche started at shortstop Tuesday, then played third base Wednesday night. It's sort of a continuation of what we saw in the spring, when LaRoche bounced around to all four infield spots. Interesting story from the spring: Many utility infielders will have different gloves for different spots -- a smaller one for turning double plays at second base or short, and maybe a bigger one for third base. LaRoche told me during camp he prefers sticking with one glove that he's comfortable with at all three of those positions -- advice he once received from Jeff Kent.

Ellis' inner ear problem is causing him some dizziness but it's not thought to be vertigo, he said. He felt it a bit during Wednesday's game (can you imagine backpedaling on a shallow fly to right field if you were dizzy?). Ellis said it was tough sleeping last night, but he gradually felt his ear popping, which relieved some pressure. "I'm not looking forward to the flight (to Minnesota)," he said. Manager Bob Geren said the team was weighing whether it was safe to have Ellis fly today, but driving to Minnesota is not a practical option -- too far. The upshot: Ellis won't play in his 1,000th career game until Friday at the earliest.

Conor Jackson draws a start in right field with David DeJesus getting the day off against Toronto left-hander Ricky Romero. Hideki Matsui is hitting sixth, and Geren said he'll likely drop DeJesus or Matsui to the No. 6 spot against lefties most games.

A's: Crisp CF, Barton 1B, Jackson RF, Willingham LF, Kouzmanoff 3B, Matsui DH, Suzuki C, LaRoche 2B, Pennington SS; Cahill RHP.

Jays: Davis CF, Nix 3B, Lind 1B, Hill 2B, Rivera RF, Encarnacion DH, Snider LF, Arencibia C, McDonald SS; Romero LHP.

## **A's hitters back Trevor Cahill, barely, in win over Blue Jays**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

To buck an uninspiring start to the season and also to back an excellent effort by right-hander Trevor Cahill, the A's needed to piece together a rally late in Thursday's game.

It wasn't a particularly impressive rally, really, but it was enough for a 2-1 victory over the Blue Jays, preventing a Toronto sweep: Oakland scored the tying run in the eighth on a wild-pitch strike three to Coco Crisp, then two steals by Crisp set up the game-winning liner to left by Conor Jackson.

Oakland avoided a 1-5 start, something the team hasn't done since 1987.

"It was good, it was big," Jackson said. "It wasn't a must-win, because it's game six, but Trevor had gone out and pitched such a great game."

Andy LaRoche opened the inning with a double to right center and he went to third on Cliff Pennington's sacrifice bunt. Then, with two strikes, Coco Crisp swung and missed at a Ricky Romero pitch that bounced in the dirt and got away from catcher J.P. Arencibia. Crisp sprinted to first while LaRoche sped in to score.

"Any way we can," LaRoche said of the unusual run. "That was a big win, we needed it. It's good to come back against their ace and get at least one win before we get out of here."

Jackson's hit came with two outs and two strikes, and against a right-hander, Jason Frasor. Jackson's starts this season have come against left-handers, such as Romero, but he's been an everyday player the past few years, when healthy.

"I feel like I've never considered myself a platoon guy," Jackson said. "But whatever my role is, I'm going to be prepared for anything."

Jackson was starting in right field, and he made one of the game's best defensive plays, with a backhand lunge to grab Adam Lind's liner just before it hit the turf. Jackson rolled and came up holding the ball aloft, ending the sixth inning.

Overall, Thursday's game looked much more like the projected A's: super pitching, strong defense and a plucky, if less than frightening, offense.

"That was an all-around win," Cahill said. "Great defense, timely hitting, and we did the little things, bunting, stealing bases. We're definitely a lot more confident going into the next series."

Cahill and Romero had a nifty pitchers' duel going, both unscored upon through the first five innings.

"I could tell from the get-go he was going to have a good game, and he did," Cahill said. "He was nasty. I'd sit down and then be right back out there."

In his first start of the season, on Opening Night vs. Seattle, Cahill had pitched well, but he had a lot of strikeouts (eight) and walks (four), and the Mariners fouled off a lot of pitches, so he only made it into the fifth inning.

On Thursday, Cahill worked more efficiently and made it through eight, making good use of his ever-improving curveball. Toronto had only one baserunner through the first five innings, but Arencibia led off the sixth with a double to left and he went to third on a wild pitch with one out. After Rajai Davis struck out, Jayson Nix provided the Blue Jays' two-out blow, a single to right that sent Arencibia trotting home.

## **A's Mark Ellis plays 1,000th game despite earache**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

**Mark Ellis** said he felt like a 2-year-old for missing a start with an earache, but because that earache came with dizziness, the second baseman was out of Thursday's lineup for safety reasons.

Ellis was back in the bottom of the eighth, however, after seeing one of the Blue Jays' doctors during the afternoon, and he singled in the ninth. It was a short afternoon for him, but it was still his 1,000th career game.

"Kind of anti-climactic," Ellis said with a grin. "At least I got a hit; that's good."

Ellis had discomfort in his left inner ear during the previous night's game; he said it felt full, and it hurt enough that he had trouble sleeping Wednesday night. He was diagnosed with an ear infection and given ear drops and antibiotics.

Before the game, there was concern that Ellis might not be able to fly to Minnesota, and the trip takes more than half a day by car.

"I'm very happy that I don't have to do that," Ellis said. "That would be a long drive."

With Ellis on the bench, **Andy LaRoche** got his third start in a row, going from shortstop Tuesday to third base, and then second.

Ellis is the 13th player in Oakland history to play in 1,000 games with the A's.

**Briefly: Rich Harden's** bullpen session with hitters standing in at the plate went well, said Harden, who threw 45 pitches. He'll throw live batting practice Monday and then probably a simulated inning later in the week before going on a rehab assignment. ... Closer **Andrew Bailey** will throw off the mound in Minneapolis or Chicago, according to manager **Bob Geren**. If all continues to go well, Bailey is probably a little bit more than two weeks away from a rehab assignment, putting his potential return near the end of April.

### **Leading off**

**Closing time:** Brian Fuentes earned his first save with the A's as a fill-in for Andrew Bailey. "I'd rather have a three-run lead," Fuentes said with a smile, "but to help the team get a win in a close game is always gratifying."

## **Drumbeat: Mark Ellis out of A's starting lineup with inner ear problem**

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Rogers Centre 4/7/2011 8:10AM

Mark Ellis is being held out of the lineup today because of an inner-ear problem that actually gave him trouble during last night's game because of the discomfort. He said he feels like a two-year-old, missing a game with an earache, but today, he had some dizziness, so sitting him down was an easy call - it's too dangerous to play a sport with 90 mph fastballs when dizzy.

The next issue will be the team's flight to Minneapolis this evening - there is a chance he won't be allowed to fly. Manager Bob Geren asked Toronto writers today how long the drive is, so the A's are considering that as an option.

"I hope not," said Ellis. "That doesn't sound fun."

It's a 10-hour drive, Toronto reporters estimate. MLB.com's Jane Lee just MapQuest'ed it and got an estimate of 16 hours.

Ellis was checked by the A's training staff and he doesn't believe there's a possibility of vertigo, but he'll be seen by the Blue Jays' doctor today.

Andy LaRoche therefore makes his third start in a row, all at different positions: shortstop, third base and now second.

Ellis had been scheduled to play in his 1,000th career game today. Now that might have to wait for later on this trip.

Rich Harden's throwing session with batters standing in went well this morning, he said; he will next throw live batting practice on Monday and a simulated game near the end of the week before heading on a rehab assignment.

Andrew Bailey will be throwing off the mound in Minneapolis or Chicago, Geren said, and he's hopeful that it's the former.

Here's the lineup: Crisp cf, Barton 1b, Jackson rf, Willingham lf, Kouzmanoff 3b, Matsui dh, Suzuki c, LaRoche 2b, Pennington ss

## **Sports fans enhance their zeal on social networks**

Benny Evangelista, Chronicle Staff Writer

Becky Dab liked the [San Francisco Giants](#) even though she lived 2,500 miles away. But it wasn't until she started following them on Twitter last year that she developed a passionate, goosebump-raising connection with the team.

In a recent college English paper, the 24-year-old Nashville resident captured why social media is revolutionizing the way sports fans interact with their favorite teams.

"If it had not been for Twitter, I would not have felt the same level of emotion while watching the game on TV or online," Dab wrote.

"It was this new connection and feeling of closeness with the team I had grown up following that caused my heart rate and blood pressure to spike while watching playoff games. ... And the same connection that made me cry (when the) Giants beat the Texas Rangers for the World Series title."

This year, the Bay Area's major professional and college sports teams are all using Twitter and Facebook to cultivate relationships with their fans. That's especially true with the new baseball season just under way for the Giants and Oakland [A's](#).

**Marketing boost**

But social networking is connecting fans with each other in a way not possible before. The teams can't control what the fans say, but receive a marketing boost from those conversations.

"It is absolutely 100 percent greasing the dialogue," said A's marketing manager Zachary Glare. "They are in a way our brand ambassadors."

"Social media only magnifies that conversation," said Bryan Srabian, the Giants social media director. "It's changed the way we communicate with our fans."

The best example may have come by serendipity rather than design as the sharp rise in social networking in the past two years coincided last fall with the Giants' historic playoff run.

Longtime radio host Marty Lurie, who has hosted baseball talk shows on both sides of the bay, believes social networking boosted interest in the Giants to a superheated level, beyond what might have been expected even in a championship year.

Facebook wall posts, shared photos and reposted links exposed even non-baseball fans to the excitement, while passionate fans created even greater connections by following the Twitter accounts of players and of reporters who cover the team.

"This Giants thing went from, 'Well, you know, they may win the division,' to lunacy within about 30 days," said Lurie, who has more than 4,000 Twitter followers. "There's a tremendous connection through Twitter and Facebook. People who don't know each other are communicating with each other."

### **Forging community**

Members of one private Facebook Group started by Giants fans didn't know each other either, but soon became a small community before, during and after games, even though they were in separate locations.

"I learned a lot about baseball generally, and about the Giants," said a post from Pamela Schuur of Walnut Creek in answer to a reporter's question. "And the energy and excitement quotients went way up. I felt like I was in a room full of people for every game."

Lurie said the ultimate catalyst might have been singer Ashkon Davaran's "Giants anthem" video, which was not officially connected with the team, but spread virally and has been viewed more than 2.2 million times on YouTube.

Srabian said he decided not to share the video on the team's official Facebook or Twitter feeds because "some things are best left organic."

Nevertheless, the video kept popping up on Facebook walls and Twitter tweets. "I was at a bar and people knew the words to that song," he said.

This season, Major League Baseball has added a "Social Media Clubhouse" section to team sites, listing official Twitter accounts, players who tweet and a direct sign-in through Facebook. The Giants have promoted on Facebook and Twitter only a deal that includes a \$15 discount on food or merchandise during Monday's game against Los Angeles. The A's, meanwhile, will use Twitter to transmit clues for a scavenger hunt for 130 bases hidden throughout the East Bay, a promotion for Rickey Henderson Bobblehead Day on April 30.

## **Ticket discounts**

Other sports teams have tested social media as well. In November, the first 200 San Francisco 49ers fans who checked into a game against the St. Louis Rams were offered a discounted \$49 ticket to a future game.

Cal football rooters who checked in before a Nov. 27 game at Memorial Stadium had the chance to become one of 20 fans to form an on-field human tunnel used to introduce the players. And the San Jose Sharks are using "promoted tweets," Twitter's advertising program that highlights messages from paying sponsors.

Basketball's Golden State Warriors were one of the first 22 businesses to try Facebook Deals, which lets members of the social network check in and receive discounts or other offers. Between 750 to 1,100 fans have checked in for nearly all of the Warriors home games this season at the 19,000-seat Oracle Arena.

## **Meeting up**

Their rewards have included meeting guard Monta Ellis or former star Rick Barry in person, an experience they would post immediately on Facebook or Twitter, said Kyle Spencer, the Warriors executive director for marketing.

"It gives you real world advocacy," Spencer said. "It's not a commercial telling you to go to a Warriors game. It's your friends telling you to go to a Warriors game."

But Srabian, Glare and Spencer know there's a line between having a social media conversation with the fans, giving them behind-the-curtain glimpses of their favorites, and spamming them with more advertising.

"Everyone's trying to figure out how much is too much, what the right level of engagement is," Glare said. "We don't have this stuff figured out. We're doing these kinds of test cases and seeing how they go."

## **Fans & followers**

### **-- San Francisco Giants**

Facebook fans: 885,234

Twitter followers: 107,937

### **-- Oakland Raiders**

Facebook: 756,209

Twitter: 53,199

### **-- San Francisco 49ers**

Facebook: 576,154

Twitter: 48,977

## -- Oakland Athletics

Facebook: 250,428

Twitter: 14,999

## -- San Jose Sharks

Facebook: 198,157

Twitter: 27,478

## -- Golden State Warriors

Facebook: 195,056

Twitter: 24,104

## **Cahill shines as A's rally to top Jays**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com | 4/7/2011

TORONTO -- Conor Jackson's diminishing role, the result of a long bout with Valley Fever and a handful of injuries, has been well-documented over the past two seasons.

Now healthy, he's finding comfort in his backup outfield duties with the A's, who like starting him against lefties.

Jackson, though, has never considered himself to be much of a matchup guy. So when the Blue Jays replaced proven southpaw Ricky Romero with right-hander Jason Frasor in the eighth inning of Thursday's series finale in Toronto, Jackson didn't wince as he came to the plate with Coco Crisp on second and two outs in a 1-1 game.

Instead, he watched Crisp steal third -- his second stolen base of the inning -- and proceeded to bring him home with a line-drive single to left field as the A's permanently gained the lead in a 2-1 victory over the Blue Jays, thus avoiding a sweep and their first 1-5 start since 1987.

"I'm going to be prepared for every opportunity I get," said Jackson, who received a start in right field while David DeJesus got the day off. "Coming off the bench, you have to prepare for every situation that might come about, and that's my main motivation."

Motivation is just what the A's needed as they move forward on their nine-game road swing with stops in Minnesota and Chicago. And it was Jackson, along with another surprise offensive contributor, who joined forces with starter Trevor Cahill to make it happen.

Cahill engaged in a pitchers' duel with Toronto's Ricky Romero for five-plus scoreless frames and gave up just one run in eight solid innings. The young righty, who walked four in his first outing, didn't grant a single free pass the entire way. He also struck out seven and now has 15 strikeouts through a combined 12 2/3 innings this year, after averaging just 5.4 strikeouts per nine innings in 2010.



Much of Cahill's current success can be attributed to the strides he's made with a curveball that was essentially nonexistent two years ago. On Thursday, the 23-year-old hurler said he used the pitch quite often, mostly early in counts and, sometimes, later in counts if behind a hitter.

"He started developing that pitch at the end of last year and took it into Spring Training and kept working on it," manager Bob Geren said. "I couldn't be happier with how that pitch has progressed. It just adds something to his arsenal to help him."

The A's skipper called Cahill's performance "outstanding," though the righty made sure to hand praise over to Romero.

"I could tell from the get-go that he was going to have a good game, and he did," Cahill said. "His stuff was nasty. I felt like I would sit down and then get right back out there."

The Blue Jays' starter shut out Oakland for seven innings but was tagged with a run in the eighth. Romero surrendered a leadoff double to Andy LaRoche and watched him advance to third on a sacrifice bunt from Cliff Pennington. He was then relieved by Frasor, who allowed Crisp to reach first on a dropped strike three that scored LaRoche and knotted the game at 1.

Filling in for Mark Ellis at second base, LaRoche is now 4-for-9 this season as he continues to give Geren a reason, much like Jackson, to plug him into the lineup.

"He had a great spring, and it's carrying right over into the season," Geren said. "It's nice to have that versatility."

Jackson, meanwhile, came to the plate after a Daric Barton strikeout and put aside numbers that tell him he's better against lefties than righties. He owns a career .294 average and .857 OPS against left-handers, compared to a .269 mark and .745 OPS when facing righties.

"He's a good player," Geren said. "Obviously, he's dominated against lefties, but he's had a pretty good career against right-handers, too. We have more depth than we've ever had in the outfield. That's one of our strengths, and we're trying to use them all."

Jackson also made a nice play in the outfield on an Adam Lind fly ball to close out the sixth. It came one day after DeJesus experienced trouble with the lights in Toronto's Rogers Centre dome, also in right field.

"This is not an easy place to play the outfield," Jackson said. "I tip my hat to the corner outfielders here that play for the Blue Jays because it's hard to get a good jump on the bat. It's off the bat and you lose it for a split second, and then you have to make an adjustment once it comes out of the light."

Both clubs remained quiet in the final inning, as Oakland walked away having left seven on base in the game. The team compiled eight strikeouts and went 1-for-8 with runners in scoring position, but there were plenty of positives in the second win of the season, including Ellis' presence in the bottom of the eighth.

The A's second baseman, who didn't start because of a left ear infection, entered the game for defensive purposes and also compiled a hit in his long at-bat in the ninth. It marked career game No. 1,000 for Ellis, who called the milestone "anticlimactic" following the day's events.

The honorable feat paired with a win, though, and the A's couldn't ask for much more following four losses in their first five games.

"That looks like our team," Geren said. "Every game, our starting pitching has done a great job and now our defense is coming around. It was a typical game. We're going to have a lot of close games and, if we pitch like that and field like that, we're going to win those."

"I think today was an all-around win," Cahill said. "We had great defense and we didn't put up a ton of runs, but we did enough. There's definitely a lot more confidence going into the next series."

## **Pavano, Anderson square off in Twins' home opener**

By Cash Kruth / MLB.com | 4/7/2011

After spending their first six games of the season on the road, the Twins arrive in Minnesota for their home opener at Target Field on Friday against the A's.

And, for the second straight season, it will be right-hander Carl Pavano on the mound when the Twins play their first home game in Minnesota.

"It's awesome," Pavano said. "It's the second year I get to throw the first pitch so there's definitely a positive there."

Pavano (0-1, 15.75 ERA) will start the opener of the three-game series against Oakland lefty Brett Anderson (0-0, 1.50) when the Twins begin their home season at Target Field. Last year the new ballpark yielded 118 home runs, one of the lowest totals in the Majors. With season No. 2 at Target Field beginning, Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said his players need to focus on what they can and can't control -- which includes the number of homers hit.

"All we heard about was how the ball doesn't carry," Gardenhire said at the close of Spring Training. "I think you know and I know that it doesn't carry. So we got away from that as best as we could. We talked about forgetting about it and just playing and hitting the ball hard and seeing where it goes. And that was a huge adjustment for us."

After one full season at Target Field, Gardenhire hopes his squad continues to take that approach. He also hopes Target Field plays similarly to last season.

"I honestly hope it plays about the same because we won [53] games, and I kind of like winning [53] games at home," Gardenhire said. "That's not a bad theory either."

### **A's: Ellis' travel plans in question**

An inner ear problem kept Mark Ellis out of Thursday's game in Toronto, and prior to the game it was yet to be determined how the A's second baseman would get to Minnesota. Before Oakland's win, the team was concerned what effect Ellis' ear problem would have on his ability to make Thursday night's charter flight to Minnesota. Manager Bob Geren didn't rule out the possibility of Ellis being driven to Minnesota, which would nearly be a 16-hour journey. "That doesn't sound like a lot of fun," Ellis said.

- Rich Harden had a successful bullpen session Thursday as the right-hander continues to rehab a sore lat muscle. "I feel good," said Harden, who is scheduled to throw live batting practice on Monday. "I'm ready to go." Before he's allowed to

step on a big league mound again, though, the A's right-hander will have to take part in a simulated game before being sent on a Minor League rehab assignment.

### **Twins: Gardenhire's friend earns Purple Heart**

Logan Hastings, an Army member stationed in Iraq and an online acquaintance of Gardenhire, e-mailed the Twins' skipper Thursday to inform him that he'll be receiving the prestigious military honor. Gardenhire and Hastings began exchanging messages about a year ago when Hastings guessed the Twins manager's e-mail address and eventually sent him a greeting and a brief and basic description of himself -- "Big Twins fan in Iraq." "That's all it took," Gardenhire said on Thursday. "I fired off an e-mail to him right away." Hastings' family members -- mother and daughter included -- were the guests of the Twins at Target Field on Mother's Day last year.

- One change to Target Field this season is the removal of the trees from the batter's eye area. The move should help batters who, last season, were bothered by the shadows. "It's depth perception," Gardenhire said.

### **Worth noting**

Tsuyoshi Nishioka broke his leg after being knocked to the ground by a hard slide from Nick Swisher in Thursday's game against the Yankees. ... Justin Morneau went 1-for-1 Thursday, recording his 999th career hit in a Twins uniform. He will be only the 13th player in Minnesota history to knock out 1,000. ... After a 1-2-3 first inning on Thursday, the Twins are hitless with two walks in 23 plate appearances, and also scoreless in the first inning in their first six games. ... Geren said Andrew Bailey (forearm) is close to getting on the mound again and is expected to do so before the end of the club's nine-game road trip, which concludes on Wednesday.

### **Harden has successful bullpen session**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

TORONTO -- Rehabbing hurler Rich Harden, nursing a sore lat muscle, had a successful bullpen session with hitters standing in on Thursday morning and is now geared to throw live batting practice on Monday.

"I feel good," Harden said. "I'm ready to go."

Before he's allowed to step on a big league mound again, though, the A's right-hander will have to take part in a simulated game before being sent on a Minor League rehab assignment.

Manager Bob Geren would like to see Harden throw in at least two games -- a one-inning stint and a two-inning outing -- before deciding whether a starting or relief role is best for Harden.

### **Ellis gets into game despite ear troubles**

TORONTO -- Mark Ellis nearly missed the chance to check off career game No. 1,000 because of a left ear infection on Thursday, but the A's second baseman was feeling well enough by the eighth inning of an eventual 2-1 Oakland victory to enter for defensive purposes and reach the milestone.

Ellis, who said that his ear pain first surfaced before Wednesday night's game, saw a doctor in Toronto on Thursday afternoon and was cleared to play after being given antibiotics. He called his 1,000th game "anticlimactic" after the day's events, but was at least happy to tally a hit in his only at-bat -- a ninth-inning single to left-center.

The team was initially concerned about what effect Ellis' ear was going to have on his ability to make Thursday night's charter flight to Minnesota, where the A's are set to begin a three-game series on Friday afternoon.

On Thursday morning, manager Bob Geren didn't rule out the possibility of Ellis being driven to Minnesota, which is nearly a 16-hour journey.

"That doesn't sound like a lot of fun," Ellis said.

The Oakland veteran, who said he felt "like a two-year-old missing a game because of an earache," noted a feeling of fullness in his ear, as well as dizziness, which is why the team didn't want him playing at first.

"When the blood gets pumping," he said, "you can lose your equilibrium."

Ellis is now 5-for-20 to start the season. He represents the 13th player in Oakland history to reach the honorable 1,000-game mark.

### **Worth noting**

Geren said Andrew Bailey (forearm) is close to getting on the mound again and is expected to do so before the end of the club's nine-game road trip, which concludes on Wednesday. ... Hideki Matsui slid down to the sixth spot for Thursday's contest, and Geren explained that he's inclined to place Matsui or David DeJesus in that hole when the team faces a left-hander. DeJesus received the day off Thursday, while Conor Jackson got a start in right field.

## **Cahill earns first win of season as A's beat Blue Jays**

By ASSOCIATED PRESS

TORONTO — Trevor Cahill pitched eight strong innings for his first win of the season, Conor Jackson singled home the go-ahead run and the Oakland Athletics beat the Toronto Blue Jays 2-1 on Thursday afternoon.

Brian Fuentes closed it out in the ninth for his first save as the Athletics avoided a three-game sweep. Fuentes gave up a two-out single to Adam Lind before Aaron Hill flied out.

Oakland trailed 1-0 going into the eighth when Andy LaRoche led off with a double and advanced to third on Cliff Pennington's sacrifice. Jason Frasor (1-1) replaced starter Ricky Romero and fanned Coco Crisp, but strike three was a wild pitch that bounced away from J.P. Arencibia, allowing LaRoche to score and Crisp to move safely to first.

Crisp stole second and third before scoring on Jackson's single.

Shawn Camp replaced Frasor after Josh Willingham was hit by a pitch. Camp got Kevin Kouzmanoff to ground into a fielder's choice to end the inning.

## **Bee On Baseball: A's fans, is it time to panic?**

Brian Clark, Modesto Bee, 4/8/2011

The San Francisco Giants raise their World Series flag today. Don't know if they've checked with the Marlins, Diamondbacks or any other expansion teams that happened to beat them to the punch, but if they need some guidance, they can check with their friends across the bay.

So, flag ceremony today? Ring ceremony on Saturday? How long are they going to string this out?

All right. I'm done. Until they're officially eliminated from the playoffs in mid-September, I guess I'll have to live with "defending World Series Champions San Francisco Giants" and the endless gushing on KNBR for a few more months.

Of course, for A's fans, a World Series title is a distant memory. And from what we've seen early on, it could be at least another year.

The Toronto series was brutal. Anemic hitting. Bad pitching from the bully. Fielding that leaves the team dead last in defense with Kevin Kouzmanoff and Daric Barton tied with a few other for most errors in the majors.

Up next, games against quality teams in Minnesota and the Chicago.

I guess at this point, I'm not really panicking about the season as much as I'm worried about how boring this team's becoming.

When I look at Bob Geren I see nothing but a deer in the headlights. No emotion. No fire. No oomph. Mr. Auto Pilot.

Unfortunately, it's carrying over to the field. There's just a certain flatness that resonates, especially when the team has runners in scoring position.

It feels as if Geren never plays a hunch, sticking to the same game plan, the same strategy no matter what the situation.

I mentioned in the Seattle series my frustration at Geren's unwillingness to sacrifice runners over late in the game. Another thing that burned me a little in that body blow of a game Tuesday was changing pitchers between the ninth and 10th innings.

A's and Jays tied heading into the bottom of the ninth. Jerry Blevins comes in, throws 11 pitches, eight for strikes, and mows down the Blue Jays. A's score a run in the top of the 10th to go ahead 6-5.

Now, Geren wouldn't be the first manager to automatically send in a closer to win the game. But with the team's only real closer in the disabled list, and no real distance between the rest of the relievers, why not stick with the hot hand? Why go to Grant Balfour when Blevins was in full control? He retired the side in 11 pitches? I'm sure he had more than enough left, and he looked so good in the ninth.

Yet, Geren inserts Balfour, who in the time it took me to go into Walgreen's to pick something up, blows the game.

I don't mean to be Mr. Negative here, but like the Giants, the A's great pitching staff is opening a window for the organization to go deep into the playoffs should they get there.

Void of a big bopper in his prime ("Paging Carlos Gonzalez! Paging Carlos Gonzalez! Green courtesy phone, please!), everything has to be tight to win low-scoring, one-run games. Sound fielding. Smart baserunning. Station-to-station baseball. Good, creative decisions from a manager who understands there's no room for error.

I'm not sure on the latter.

Am I panicking here? What are your thoughts of Geren? Can the A's win with him?

**EXTRA BASES:** I wonder if the Blue Jays have thought about tarping their upper deck? It's never good to see that many empty seats. ... Not sure on who's pushing buttons at Modesto's 970-AM, but can you at least wait until Ray Fosse stops talking before abruptly going to a commercial? It's happening way too many times. ... Wonderful catch by Conor Jackson on Thursday in the sixth inning that prevented a run from scoring. Making even it more remarkable is that was his first career start in right field. Mostly a first baseman since hitting the bigs in 2005, he's seen outfield time in 157 games, 156 of them in left until Thursday. His go-ahead RBI single in the eighth wasn't that bad either. ... For as much as baseball brings out the nostalgia in all of us, there's no professional sports league as progressive with its use of the Internet and smart phones than MLB. I have the MLB 2011 app on my iPhone, and it's great. Intuitive, easy, accessible. It's even offering live look-ins this year. The MLB Web site offers so much, too, especially in the way of video. Check it out if you haven't.

## **MINOR LEAGUE NEWS**

### **Weeks leads Cats to Opening Night win**

By Kyle Tucker / Sacramento River Cats

Baseball season is officially here, Sacramento.

On a brisk night, 10,387 fans filed into Raley Field, bundled up in jackets and blankets to watch the Cats start their 2011 campaign with a 6-2 victory over the Tacoma Rainiers.

Not quite the feel of a summer night, but a beautiful night for baseball nonetheless. Sacramento didn't wait long to get the fans into the game. Jemile Weeks hit a three-run triple in second inning and scored on a throwing error by shortstop Sean Kazmar for a 4-0 lead.

Josh Outman allowed back-to-back walks leading off the top of the third inning, followed by an Eric Sogard error that loaded the bases with no outs. With a strikeout, force out and groundout, Outman pitched out of the jam allowing only one run.

Matt Carson led off the third with a home run that just cleared the left-field wall. Adrian Cardenas followed with a base hit and was driven in on a two-out double by Jai Miller.

Sacramento's pitching staff got the season started on the right note. Outman had a strong outing, allowing one earned run on two hits through 4.0 innings of work. Vinnie Chulk (1-0) was lights out in relief, striking out four in 2.0 hitless innings. Willie Eyre then pitched scoreless seventh and eighth frames and Fernando Cabrera closed the door for the River Cats in the ninth.

Highly touted Tacoma prospect Dustin Ackley reached base twice on walks. The Rainiers had trouble getting anything started, scattering three hits and leaving seven runners stranded.

The River Cats continued their success on Opening Day, improving to 8-4 all time with help from some new faces. Weeks, playing his first Triple-A game, stepped right into a leadoff role previously occupied by fan favorites Eric Patterson (2009) and Corey Wimberly (2010).

"That's a big part of my game, using my legs, a lot like Corey did," said Weeks, who went 2-for5 with two runs. "I like to be aggressive -- swing at good pitches and hit the ball hard."

The Cats' offense followed suit, putting up six runs on 13 hits. All but one starter reached base, giving the pitching staff plenty of run support.

Sacramento baseball fans have plenty to look forward to this season as the River Cats try to claim their 10th division title in 12 seasons since moving to the River City.

### **RockHounds' Ladendorf back where career began — in West Texas**

Shawn Shroyer, Midland Reporter-Telegram

When Tyler Ladendorf made a campus visit to Howard College, he had an inkling that West Texas would become a special part of his life.

A native of Parke Ridge, Ill., a suburb of Chicago, Big Spring was a far cry from the midwest. However, even after the Minnesota Twins drafted Ladendorf out of Howard College in 2008, he would return to West Texas to see Hawks coach Britt Smith and his former coaches. Three years after his career at Howard College ended, Ladendorf is back in the Permian Basin as a member of the Midland RockHounds.

"From the day I went on my visit, (West Texas became a special place) because of the family atmosphere and welcoming atmosphere," Ladendorf said. "Obviously, I didn't know I'd be so involved with Midland, but it brings so much familiarity, throughout the season I'll keep getting more and more comfortable."

"Everything from places I like to eat to so many friends -- everybody at the college, the coaches, the staff and the counselors have been so supportive. So many people have been supportive and are excited to see me play."

In reality, West Texas could have been merely a blip on Ladendorf's baseball radar. But a combination of chance and abilities have landed him back where his road to professional baseball began.

Ladendorf was drafted after his senior year of high school and after his freshman and sophomore years at Howard College by the Yankees, Giants and Twins, respectively. None of the three organizations have teams in the Texas League.

Ladendorf ultimately signed with the Twins instead of continuing his college career at the University of Oklahoma. No matter which he chose, he was unlikely to return to West Texas as a player. Then a 2009 trade deadline deal sent Ladendorf from the Twins organization to the Athletics. A few days later, Smith pointed out to Ladendorf he was a promotion to Double-A away from returning to the region where he made a name for himself.

But regardless of where Ladendorf's career has taken him since leaving Howard College, he always has returned.

"After every fall league and before spring training, I go down there and just talk to some of the guys," Ladendorf said. "Ever since they won the national championship (in 2009), we're just building a family atmosphere. So many guys are going back and being involved with the program. To see where it's at now is unbelievable, and it's fun to be a part of that family."

However, this return to West Texas is all business for Ladendorf. After two disappointing seasons for someone who was a second round pick, Ladendorf found his stride last season, his first earning regular playing time.

With more at-bats than he'd accrued his first two professional seasons combined, Ladendorf came into his own with 31 doubles, four triples, five home runs, 41 RBI and 20 stolen bases. RockHounds manager Steve Scarsone, who managed Ladendorf last season, said the key for the infielder is to find consistency in his play, something he began to develop last year.

"He's definitely making huge strides," Scarsone said. "This should be very much a come-out season for him. Tyler's a guy who's very exciting. He brings a lot to the game. He's going to be a nice commodity for the A's as he moves up through the ranks."

Ladendorf also benefited from a short stint in Triple-A, getting to witness how players at that level go about their day-to-day duties and learn from their experience.

He spent most of his 2010 campaign in Stockton, though, where he found a way to get his name on the lineup card almost every day. Scarsone tested Ladendorf's versatility, playing him at second base, third base, shortstop, center field and right field for at least one game. However, he spent 97 of his 126 games played for the Ports at second base, a position he has taken to after playing shortstop his entire amateur career.

"It's fun and I just take pride in it," said Ladendorf of playing all over the field. "I just try to do anything that the coaches ask with the understanding that as long as you're out there every day getting your at bats, it's fun for me to show what I can do."

Ladendorf is eager to show what he can do at the Double-A level and, nothing against Midland, has his sights on moving on.

In an interview after he signed with the Twins, Ladendorf said his goal was to reach Double-A within three seasons. Entering his third full season, he's where he set out to be. He's in a place that's become his second home. But now his sights are set on Triple-A Sacramento. He knows he always can come back to West Texas in the offseason.

"Just getting better," Ladendorf said. "Every year I feel like my numbers have improved and I've improved defensively and in all aspects of the game. As long as you're doing that, it's never going to be a satisfying feeling, but it's a day-to-day process to understand how to get where you ultimately want to be."

## **Stockton Suffers 8-0 Opening Night Loss**

04/07/2011 10:30 PM ET

**MODESTO, Calif.** - Fortunately, there are 139 more games to come for the Stockton Ports. In the season's first contest, Stockton saw an early opportunity fall by the wayside and never got their offense rolling as the Modesto Nuts cruised to an 8-0 win at on Opening Night at John Thurman Field. The win for Modesto was their 6th straight on Opening Night, dating back to 2006.

The Ports looked to get off to a quick start in the top of the first. Nuts starter Chad Bettis (1-0) yielded back-to-back walks to Connor Crumbliss and Dusty Coleman, then fell behind third-place hitter Michael Choice. Bettis, however, would show resiliency, coming back to strike out choice and setting down the next six hitters in a row.

Ports starter Fabian Williamson (0-1) tossed the first two innings scoreless but allowed the game's first run in the third. Scott Robinson started the third inning with a single to left and took second as the ball was bobbled by Kent Walton. Robinson would subsequently steal third, and then come home on a wild pitch to give Modesto a 1-0 lead.

The Nuts bats began heating up in the fourth. After two quick outs, Michael Zuanich homered to left to increase Modesto's lead to 2-0. Kent Matthes followed with a double to left, and then back-to-back RBI singles from Orlando Sandoval and Scott Robinson to make it 4-0 Nuts.

Williamson allowed a single and a walk to the first two batters of the fifth before departing. Justin Murray came on in relief and allowed a single to Josh Rutledge. Rashaun Dixon bobbled the ball in right field allowing Angelys Nina to score and advancing Delta Cleary, Jr. to third. Cleary would score on a wild pitch and Murray would allow an additional run in the inning to give Modesto a 7-0 advantage after five frames.

Williamson would suffer the loss, going four-plus innings and allowing six runs on eight hits while walking one and striking out four. Murray allowed just the one run in 2.2 innings of relief.

Bettis would earn the win for Modesto, going five scoreless innings and allowing just one hit while striking out five.

Alan DeRatt, Chad Rose and Coty Woods would combine to toss the final four scoreless innings for the Nuts with each pitcher allowing one hit.

Scott Deal pitched the final 1.1 innings for Stockton and didn't allow a hit while striking out two.

In a quiet night offensively for Stockton, Crumbliss reached base three of the four times he came up. Crumbliss walked twice and singled. Choice (two walks) and Juan Nunez (single and a walk) also reached base twice on the night for the Ports.

The Ports and Nuts will play Game 2 of their season-opening series at John Thurman Field on Friday night. Dan Straily (0-0, 0.00 ERA) will make his Cal-League debut for Stockton, opposed by Nuts right-hander Nick Schnaitmann (0-0, 0.00). First pitch is set for 7:05 p.m. PDT.

## **Bees and LumberKings Suspended**

04/07/2011 9:28 PM ET

By Jon Versteeg

Clinton, IA- The Burlington Bees and Clinton LumberKings played to a 4-4 tie through three innings before rain forced the game to be suspended. The game will be made up as part of a doubleheader on Friday at 6:00. The two teams will play the completion of the regularly scheduled game and proceed with a seven-inning nightcap.

The Bees scored three runs on three hits in the first inning against Clinton RHP Forrest Snow. CF Tyreace House walked and scored on a double by 2B Nino Leyja. A wild pitch moved Leyja to third base. LF Douglas Landaeta doubled Leyja home for a 2-0 Burlington advantage.

After 3B Tony Thompson struck out, 1B A.J. Kirby-Jones singled Landaeta to third base. DH Jose Rivero lined out to right field to score Landaeta and make it 3-0.

The LumberKings scored two runs in the second inning against Burlington RHP Seth Frankoff. 1B Tim Morris singled and scored on an RBI triple by RF Julio Morban. SS Marcus Littlewood followed with a bloop single to plate Morban and get Clinton within one run at 3-2.



Burlington scored an unearned run in the third inning. Kirby-Jones worked a two-out walk and went to third base on a single by Rivero. SS Yordy Cabrera hit a groundball to third baseman Ramon Morla, who threw wide of second base. Kirby-Jones scored from third base to make it 4-2 Burlington.

Clinton scored two runs in the third inning. 3B Ramon Morla and LF Mickey Wiswall worked back-to-back walks to start off the inning. Morla stole second base and went to third base on a throwing error.

DH Stefan Romero hit a sacrifice fly to score Morla and C Steven Baron singled home Wiswall to make it 4-4.

The rain delay started just after the third inning and lasted 44 minutes before the game was suspended shortly after 8:30.

The Bees continue their four-game series in Clinton on Friday night. Starting pitchers have yet to be announced for tomorrow's doubleheader.