

Perseverance pays off for A's McCarthy

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

A's right-hander Brandon McCarthy has retooled his delivery and developed new pitches.

But in overcoming multiple shoulder injuries, his best career move was refusing to call it a career.

McCarthy, 27, has been the A's most pleasant surprise in 2011 with a 3.26 ERA and two complete games.

Last season, a third stress fracture in his throwing shoulder had him contemplating life without baseball. He eventually returned to full strength, showing a perseverance that doesn't surprise those who know him well.

"When a guy gets a shoulder injury, usually he's doomed," said Chicago White Sox scout John Kazanas, who signed McCarthy out of junior college in 2002. "It's a long, tedious process to overcome that. A lot of guys do quit, and that's not in Brandon's DNA."

McCarthy (1-3), who takes the ball Friday against the White Sox, does not bask in what he's accomplished so far this season.

"Hopefully on Nov. 1, it's something I can sit back and reflect on," he said.

His lanky 6-foot-7 frame was the first thing that caught Kazanas' eye when McCarthy was pitching for Lamar Community College in Colorado.

"He looked like a long piece of dental floss," Kazanas said.

The Sox drafted McCarthy in the 17th round in 2002, and he went 7-9 over 65 appearances (12 starts) for Chicago from 2005-06. He was traded to Texas before the 2007 season but pitched in just 45 big-league games over the next three years as his shoulder problems developed.

The Rangers declined to tender him a contract after he pitched at Triple-A last season, and the A's signed him to a one-year, \$1 million deal.

Thus far, he's been one of the majors' best bargains.

"As far as tools go, he's everything you look for," Texas pitching coach Mike Maddux said. "But it's tough to perform when you're not on the mound, and that was his dilemma with us."

Kazanas, who has kept in touch with McCarthy, believes the pitcher's lean physique contributes to his shoulder issues.

"Some people have the physical strength to take stress off the shoulder," Kazanas said. "If they don't have that strength and their mechanics are not sound, they're going to put more strain and stress on the joint and they're going to damage it."

After McCarthy suffered a third fracture of his scapula last season, he thought his career might be over.

"You wonder if you're ever going to pitch again and your mind starts going to a bad place," he said. "I'm there thinking, 'What kind of career am I going to have after baseball?' It was a pretty quick pity party, and I got back to work."

When he got healthy, McCarthy started throwing from a lower arm slot. He's not necessarily throwing more sidearm, but he's adjusted the tilt of his upper body, with his shoulder closer to the ground through his delivery. That reduces shoulder strain.

He also began rethinking his pitching strategy.

"Basically, I just really started watching Roy Halladay pitch," he said. "Let's just sink it, cut it, (throw the) curve ball, change-up. Let's keep hitters guessing, get ground balls."

When McCarthy arrived to spring training with the A's, pitching coach Ron Romanick continued cleaning up his mechanics.

"It was just trying to get his body to work correctly, kind of free it up and take out all the bad angles that were in there," Romanick said. "He's a real smart guy, and he studies the game."

He also has fun. McCarthy has emerged as one of the jokesters in the A's clubhouse, quick to needle teammates and showcasing a sharp wit via Twitter (B__McCarthy).

A's Kevin Kouzmanoff awaits next opportunity

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

Kevin Kouzmanoff played his best game in weeks Sunday in Kansas City, collecting two hits including a home run. He was involved in the defensive play of the game, making a perfect throw to an in-motion **Tyson Ross** for a putout at third base.

That's the last time Kouzmanoff appeared in a game. He wasn't in any of the three lineups in Texas, including Wednesday's, which was wiped out because of rain. Instead of riding a possible Kouzmanoff wave, manager **Bob Geren** went with **Andy LaRoche** at third.

"He deserves to play," Geren said of LaRoche. "But it's like anybody else. If they're performing, I'll do my best to get them in there."

Asked if he thought he'd get more time after Sunday's performance, Kouzmanoff said, "I'm not sure because we've been alternating back and forth. I've felt if I did do well, I'd be in there the next day. A couple of times, that didn't happen. I show up to the park every day ready to play, thinking I'm going to play. If I'm not in the lineup, there's nothing I can do about that. You just never know with baseball."

Kouzmanoff is hitting .209 with three homers and 11 RBIs to LaRoche's .250 (no homers, two RBIs), but neither has hit a lot lately. Kouzmanoff is 4-for-24 in his past nine games, LaRoche 2-for-23 in seven games. Kouzmanoff has six errors, LaRoche four (three at third).

Getting the call: **Trystan Magnuson**, Oakland's newest reliever, was informed he'd be promoted to the A's by Triple-A Sacramento manager **Darren Bush** - in a wacky way.

"Bushy tried to get me, saying I wasn't available to pitch," Magnuson said. "I was flustered because I was in the bullpen the whole time. I said what are you talking about? He said, 'That sort of stuff doesn't fly - here or in the big leagues ... tomorrow.' It was pretty funny."

A's leading off

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

Depth chart: With Dallas Braden set for Monday shoulder surgery, Tyson Ross seems a long-term solution in the rotation. Who's next in line in case one of the five starters can't go? Possibilities include lefties Bobby Cramer and Josh Outman and right-hander Guillermo Moscoso, all with Triple-A Sacramento.

Oakland's prospects honing their craft in Minors

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

A's director of player development Keith Lieppman is celebrating his 41st season with the organization and 20th in his current role, one which takes him all around the country as he keeps a close watch on all happenings within Oakland's farm system.

Having just taken in a Class A Burlington Bees game in the Midwest, Lieppman recently took time out of his constantly busy schedule -- which has him at one or two games on nearly every day of the year -- to chat with MLB.com about some of the club's top prospects.

MLB.com: How are Michael Taylor (wrist) and Chris Carter (thumb) coming along in their respective rehab programs?

Lieppman: Michael is the closest to coming back. He was just cleared by our hand specialist [Thursday], given the OK that he's 100 percent ready to go. Now we just have to get him enough at-bats down in Arizona to where he can rejoin the Triple-A club in Sacramento. The thinking is that it shouldn't be too long on him.

Chris is still with Sacramento, doing rehab in the thumb area, looking for mobility and just trying to get it to where it has some flexibility and doesn't hurt. It's a weird part in his thumb, but such an important part of swinging the bat and catching the ball. It's the same thumb he injured last year, and, unfortunately, it's taken longer than expected.

MLB.com: What kind of progress did you see from them in big league camp this year?

Lieppman: Michael had a good Spring Training, and Chris held his own. I thought they both did very well. The configuration of the club, with Josh Willingham and Coco Crisp and others, there just wasn't a place for them to get everyday at-bats. I think the feeling of the organization was that it would be best for them to continue to progress at Triple-A and then see how things go from there. I think they're doing great, actually, aside from the injuries, though.

MLB.com: Playing in the outfield has been a big adjustment for Carter. How much of that has slowed him in his journey to becoming a big league mainstay?

Lieppman: I think that had a little bit to do with his slow start through the season hitting-wise last year. When you're trying to focus on a position that you're uncomfortable with, it takes a lot of focus away from your at-bats. There came a point toward the end where we felt like, if this is going to be a distraction, there was some thought of letting him go back to first base to regain his confidence with the bat, because he certainly is a force when he feels good at the plate.

That may be the most important factor in his progression right now -- when he comes back, there may not be that quick push to put him in left field. We want him to regain confidence, so if that means putting him at first base and making it more of an experiment to play the outfield during winter ball, that would be the case. That power and his ability is going to show up.

You just never know when players are going to put it all together, mentally and physically. When they're talented, like both Carter and Taylor are, once they do, those are the kind of guys that are great players, everyday players in the big leagues. There's no perfect time, you can't predict when it all will happen, but they'll be fun to watch.

MLB.com: Who are some of the other key prospects dealing with health issues at the moment?

Lieppman: At one point, Andrew Carignan was kind of on the fast track for us, and he suffered a ribcage pull last year that took him down for awhile. He also had an elbow problem. He's working now, getting everything back together, in extended spring, and we're hoping he turns a corner here pretty soon.

Michael Ynoa is also working really hard in Arizona and continues to make progress. He's in a throwing program and working himself up to a mound progression. Eventually, mid-summer, we're hoping he'll be ready to pitch in the Arizona Summer League. If everything goes well, he would progress up through the system from there.

MLB.com: How about Sean Doolittle? Is he on his way back to Sacramento's roster soon?

Lieppman: He was doing great. He was about a week away from being sent back out to Sacramento. Just two days ago, for some reason, he took a swing and he felt pain in his wrist. So he's having some diagnostic tests done on his wrist right now to figure out what's going on. It may be another situation where we have to wait and see how he responds. His knee had healed completely, and all of a sudden this showed up. I feel sorry for him. The frustration that he's experiencing, it's just been a lot of bad luck. I think we're all pulling for him -- that's the sentiment of all the organization, that this guy is working hard and been through numerable rehabs and yet still is not out there.

MLB.com: We're usually used to pairing Jemile Weeks with some kind of injury also, but he looks to be performing well. What have you thought of him so far?

Lieppman: He's been outstanding. I've really enjoyed watching him. He had a collision at home plate where he tweaked his hamstring, but other than that, we're seeing a complete player, with the speed and occasional power, excellent on defense, just really evolving. We never got to see him at 100 percent because of his injuries, so now we know what the scouts saw when he was a No. 1 pick. His production right now, it's everything you want out of a player. He's making his way and making a statement right now, and we're all noticing it.

MLB.com: How close do you see him being to Major League-ready?

Lieppman: He should be in the mix within the year. I'm not sure he's ready to be called up right now, but given the fact this is a kid who hasn't had many Minor League at-bats and hasn't really had a full season, you let him play and see what happens, hope injury isn't a factor. The way things are going right now, on a natural progression, he's a guy you start looking at toward the end of the season.

MLB.com: Along with Weeks, 2010 first-round Draft pick Michael Choice impressed many in camp this year. How is he doing?

Lieppman: I just saw him in San Bernardino. He's having to adjust quickly to the Cal League, having played a limited time last year. He's holding his own. He's a target. They know that this guy's good, and this is his first real trial. Mentally, he's handling it great. He's just working on some mechanical issues and learning how to be an everyday player. But he's doing great on defense, throwing well, and at the same time we're seeing the speed and the power. It's pretty exciting to see him but, like everyone else, he's going to scuffle a little bit, gain some confidence and get better as the season goes on.

What's great about Michael is that he understands the big picture of things that will enable him to be a great professional player. Results aren't part of that program right now. It's all about approach. You recognize that the foundation your building is something you want to hold up over time and against good pitching. They have to have an approach that will sustain itself against someone like King Felix.

MLB.com: Upon Trystan Magnuson's promotion on Wednesday, several questions were asked about Joey Devine's status and whether he's close to rejoining the A's bullpen. Is he back to complete form?

Lieppman: He's been outstanding. I think he's definitely in a position to go to the big leagues. I think everyone who has seen him has noticed that his command is better and his slider is back. I think you want to give him as much opportunity to repeat it, just to make sure it's all together for him. Each time out, he's gaining confidence. He looks real good, so I can't imagine he'll spend much time in the Minor Leagues. He's opening a lot of eyes, and he's certainly not going unnoticed.

MLB.com: Devine and Josh Outman were essentially on the same rehab schedule for most of last year and showed signs of their old selves in camp. How has Outman looked?

Lieppman: He's at the point in his rehab where he's really just getting the rust off of it all. He had a great outing Wednesday, and each one has progressively gotten better. It took him a little longer to get his command and his feel back, but the velocity is there, the breaking ball is good. Sometimes guys get off the radar for a bit, but in the back of our minds, we knew that he's there, and you're starting to see some of the finer points of his game come out.

The A's are desperate for offense, but not enough to bring in Bradley

Glenn Dickey, San Francisco Examiner

Fans have always been convinced they know exactly how to improve their teams, and they express their views in emails and blogs.

Right now, I'm being besieged by A's fans who bemoan their team's lack of hitting. One suggested they should pick up Milton Bradley, just released by the Seattle Mariners.

I don't think so. The A's had Bradley once, and he helped them in the 2006 postseason. But the team also had Frank Thomas, who could talk to Bradley, and Ken Macha, a manager he respected. They have neither of those components now.

Another suggested they had to get help immediately. When I asked him what they needed, he said, "A third baseman." Agreed, but they tried unsuccessfully for two years to get Adrian Beltre, who is in Texas now. There's nobody else on the market.

The 49ers have also been a hot topic before and after the draft. One reader suggested the 49ers blew it by not trading up to get cornerback Patrick Peterson. To do that, they would have had to convince the Arizona Cardinals, who got Peterson at No. 5, to trade out of that position and help a division rival. Not likely.

Another wondered why the 49ers didn't make the kind of trade the Cleveland Browns made with the Atlanta Falcons, giving up their No. 6 pick for multiple picks. The answer: because they didn't have the sixth pick. I'm sure the Falcons and Browns were in conversations before the draft, with the provision that, if Julio Jones were available, they'd make the trade. Teams don't put together anything that complicated on draft day.

I can't blame readers, though, when a writer in another Bay Area paper, who has covered the 49ers for perhaps 20 years, writes that the 49ers should have taken Jake Locker with their first-round pick. General manager Trent Baalke had discussed the four quarterbacks he expected to go early in a predraft meeting with the media.

Obviously, those evaluations came from Jim Harbaugh, and they weren't complimentary. So, this writer thinks he knows more about quarterbacks than Harbaugh. Oh, my.

It is usually baseball that generates the most interest for fans who want to improve their team, because trades are far more common than in football.

For years, it was Giants fans who wanted their team to trade for a bat. Of course, they always thought the Giants could make that trade with a bottom-of-the-rotation pitcher. The reality was that the only way to get a top-flight hitter was by trading somebody like Matt Cain. Giants general manager Brian Sabean wisely resisted that advice and built the team around pitching. They're still offensively challenged, but that pitching won a World Series for them last year.

Now, the A's are in a similar position. Their pitching staff has the best ERA in the majors, but they're barely above .500 because of their weak hitting. Perhaps they'll be able to pick up a good hitter on the cheap after the All-Star break when out-of-contention teams unload players. More likely, A's fans will just have to grit their teeth and hope for the best. They won't do it quietly, though.

Gutierrez: Braden staring at his own mortality

Paul Gutierrez, CSNCalifornia.com

A year and two days after his date with destiny, Dallas Braden set an appointment with a surgeon and the A's left-hander is suddenly staring at his own mortality.

The A's announced Wednesday morning that Braden, who authored the 19th Perfect Game in major league history on May 9, 2010, would undergo surgery this coming Monday to repair a torn capsule in his left shoulder. New York Mets medical director Dr. David Altcheck will perform the procedure in New York City.

A timetable for Braden's recovery will be determined after surgery.

Braden, 27, has been on the disabled list since April 18, retroactive to April 17, with what was initially diagnosed as shoulder stiffness with no structural damage by Dr. Lewis Yocum.

But after having to shut down a mere game of catch last week because of the pain, Braden sought second and third opinions, from noted orthopedic surgeon Dr. James Andrews in Pensacola, Fla., on Monday, and from Dr. Altcheck on Tuesday. The decision to undergo surgery was made shortly thereafter.

In his last start, on April 16 against Detroit, Braden threw five scoreless innings against the Tigers but left the game early with the shoulder stiffness. Afterwards, the normally affable southpaw was unusually glum. On the season, he is 1-1 with a 3.00 ERA, 15 strikeouts and five walks in three starts.

After making \$420,000 last season, Braden signed a one-year, \$3.35-million contract with the A's on Jan. 18, avoiding arbitration.

Since his memorable Mother's Day Perfect Game last season, Braden is 8-13 with a 3.51 ERA.

In his career, the Stockton product is 26-36 with a 4.16 ERA in 94 big league appearances, including 79 starts, with five complete games and two shutouts.

Braden's spot in the rotation has been ably filled by Tyson Ross, who has excelled in his last three starts. The young right-hander has allowed three earned runs in 19 1/3 innings over that stretch, lowering his ERA from 4.82 to 2.51. He is scheduled to start again Saturday, at home against the Chicago White Sox.

MINOR LEAGUE REPORT

Famous Tutor Revives Mitchell's Athletics Career

By Casey Tefertiller, Baseball America

OAKLAND—After a big start to his professional career, outfielder Jermaine Mitchell wound up stranded in Stockton, Calif.

For two long, ugly years, Mitchell struggled through the high Class A California League, batting .245/.344/.351 in 1,025 trips to the plate stretching across 2008 and '09. "I hit the ball, I just wasn't getting hits," Mitchell said.

"The hardest thing for me was trying to stay positive," Mitchell said. "Failure was a new thing because I'd never failed before, and I had to learn to deal with it. I think I grew up a lot."

Mitchell's fortunes changed last season when he began talking with roving instructor Rickey Henderson.

"We just started talking," Mitchell said. "He realized that I'm a fiery kind of guy. He said to relax and let it go. As long as you realize you gave it your all, that's all you can do. Just have fun playing the game . . . (because) this game is built on failure."

Armed with a new attitude, Mitchell batted .309/.413/.523 with 10 homers in 78 games for Stockton last season before a promotion to Double-A Midland. The 26-year-old returned to the RockHounds this season, where he began on a .333/.467/.615 tear through 96 at-bats.

"He's a totally changed person," farm director Keith Lieppman said. "He's showed major league power. Before he was an opposite-field hitter, maybe hit the ball in the gap. Mostly he was just trying to survive. Now he's standing up there, looking for pitches to drive out of the park.

"He's played much better defense (in) center field every day. He's always had great athleticism—his speed is amazing when he's up and running."

An Athletics fifth-round pick in 2006, Mitchell grew up in Daingerfield, Texas, before attending North Carolina-Greensboro. Though he initially balked at the idea of batting leadoff, Mitchell learned to embrace the role after talking with Henderson.

"I'm getting comfortable with it," he said. "I feel like whenever I get on base, I can change the game."

A's ACORNS

- First baseman/left fielder Chris Carter jammed his left thumb—injuring the same digit that forced him out of action last year—and will miss four to six weeks. The slugger got off to a 9-for-52 (.173) start with Triple-A Sacramento.
- The A's promoted Shane Peterson to Sacramento to help fill in for the loss of Carter. Oakland turned Brett Wallace into Michael Taylor and Clayton Mortensen into Ethan Hollingsworth, making the 23-year-old Peterson the last player standing from the Matt Holliday trade with the Cardinals.

River Cats improve to 6-0 on Thursdays

By Kyle Tucker / Sacramento River Cats

If only every day was Thursday.

Behind another dominating pitching performance by starter Guillermo Moscoso, Sacramento downed Memphis 7-3 to improve to 6-0 on Thursdays this season.

Sacramento took the field looking to stay hot in May and add to their four-game lead in the PCL South. Moscoso looked to pick up where he left off, tossing 6.0 innings of one-hit ball in his last start.

The River Cats got things started early, jumping on Memphis starter Raul Valdez in the second inning. Matt Carson led off the inning with a sharp single to center. Adrian Cardenas then grounded a single into right field, moving Carson to third and leaving runners at the corners with one out. Shane Peterson stayed red-hot, hitting his second triple in as many days, scoring Carson and Cardenas for a 2-0 lead.

The River Cats continue to have success in the second inning of games. They have scored 39 runs versus just 16 runs scored by their opponents in the second frame this season.

Peterson has been a run-producing machine this series, driving in two more runs in the fourth inning by lining a single to center giving the Cats a 4-0 lead. Peterson has 10 RBIs in his last three games.

Sacramento added a pair of runs in the next inning. Wes Timmons laced a stand-up double to center in the fifth inning with one out. The next batter, Steve Tolleson, smoked a 0-1 Valdez offering into the left field seats giving Sacramento a 6-0 lead.

Cardenas added some pop of his own, hitting a towering home run to right field, an estimated 433 feet said River Cats broadcaster Johnny Doksow. Cardenas continued to lead the way offensively for Sacramento, going 4-for-4. Cardenas is crushing left-handed pitching this season, hitting .432 (19-44) off southpaws.

Reliever Jerry Blevins saw his first action with the River Cats this season after being recalled from Oakland. Blevins struggled in his first appearance out of the bullpen, giving up back-to-back doubles in the seventh inning. He surrendered three earned runs on four hits in just one inning of work.

Moscoso improved to 3-2 and lowered his ERA to 3.13 by throwing 6.0 shutout innings, giving up two hits while striking out eight. Moscoso is now second in the PCL with 40 strikeouts in 37.1 innings pitched. He retired 13 of the last 14 Redbirds he faced, allowing only a walk after giving up a double to former River Cat Freddie Bynum in the second inning.

The River Cats wrap up the series Friday night at 5:05 from AutoZone Park. Sacramento will send left-hander Bobby Cramer (0-0, 5.23) to the mound against right-hander Lance Lynn (2-3, 4.66). With a victory Friday, Sacramento will win its fourth consecutive series.

RockHounds unable to pull off comeback against Missions

Oscar LeRoy, Midland Reporter-Telegram

The San Antonio Missions have had a stranglehold on the Texas League South Division for most of the season and that includes their dominance over division rival Midland.

That dominance continued on Thursday as the Missions took advantage of a struggling Anthony Capra early and then held on for a 7-6 victory over the RockHounds in front of 4,532 fans at Citibank Ballpark.

Midland fell behind 7-1 in the fourth inning but rallied back against the San Antonio bullpen. However, after cutting the Missions' lead to one run in the eighth inning, San Antonio closer Brad Brach pitched the last 1 2/3 innings for his 10th save of the season.

With the victory, the Missions (23-10) improved to 8-1 against the RockHounds on the season and now have a seven-game lead over Midland (15-18), which fell to third place and a half-game back of Frisco (16-17). The RoughRiders defeated Corpus Christi 10-7 on Thursday night.

The RockHounds got off to a good start as Jermaine Mitchell hit a leadoff triple to right-center field and then scored on a Stephen Parker single for a 1-0 lead after the first inning.

San Antonio, which came in with a Texas League-best .301 batting average, got its offense going in the second inning when Beamer Weems hit a two-run double to left field to give the Missions a 2-1 lead.

When the Missions weren't hitting the ball, they were taking advantage of Capra's lack of control on the mound. The left-hander walked Jaff Decker to leadoff the third inning, then hit Kyle Blanks with a pitch. That set up James Darnell, who smacked a two-run triple to right-center. Darnell (2 for 5) then scored on a two-out single by Sawyer Carroll to give the Missions a 5-1 lead.

Capra's troubles continued in the fourth as he gave up two runs on three hits sandwiched around a walk and a wild pitch as San Antonio took a commanding 7-1 lead

Capra (0-2) left after 3 2/3 innings, gave up seven earned runs on seven hits, struck out six, walked three and hit two batters.

Like the RockHounds, the Missions had to go to their bullpen early as starter Jorge Reyes was on a strict pitch count and had to depart after four innings and after giving up one run on three hits.

The RockHounds began to rally against the Missions' bullpen and Matt Buschmann (5-1), a former starter, as they cut the lead to 5-3 in the fifth with a two-run home run to right field by Michael Spina.

Then in the seventh, the 'Hounds crawled to within 7-5 in the seventh against Craig Italiano as Grant Green singled and later scored on a wild pitch. And then Spina drove in his third run of the game with an RBI single to score Parker.

With Brach in the game with one out in the eighth, the RockHounds started another rally when Mitchell and Green singled. With Mitchell at third base and Green at first, the RockHounds attempted a double steal but Green got caught in a rundown between first and second. While the rundown was going on, Mitchell raced home to cut it to 7-6. Stephen Parker followed with a single, but Spina struck out for the third time in the game to essentially end the RockHounds' last hope of the night.

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'HOUND BITES: The RockHounds' bullpen was once again outstanding as Paul Smyth, Justin Souza and Trey Barham combined to pitch 5 1/3 scoreless innings. Smyth was especially strong as he struck out two and walked one in 2 1/3 innings. Baseball Hall-of-Famer Rickey Henderson is expected to be back in town working as a special assignment instructor (base running and hitting) for the Oakland A's organization.

TODAY'S PROBABLES: The RockHounds host the Missions in the second game of a four-game series at 7 p.m. today as Midland is expected to send RHP Shawn Haviland (0-3, 8.10 ERA) to the mound against San Antonio RHP Aaron Breit (1-1 6.65).

LeVier Lifts Ports to Victory

Stockton Ports

The Ports were back to their winning ways Thursday evening, topping the Nuts 6-5 on the power of Mitch LeVier's bat. The Left fielder went 2-for-4 with a double, home run, a run scored and four RBIs, accounting for five of the Ports six runs of the evening.

The Modesto Nuts jumped out to an early lead knocking in two runs in the first. Mike Zuanich, who is batting .452 against the Ports already this season, made the Ports pay early, hitting his second home run of the series. Zuanich wasted no time, hitting the first pitch he saw over the Jackson Rancheria Back Porch to put the Nuts up 2-0 early.

The Ports answered right back with a home run of their own in the first. Dusty Coleman, hot in his own right, hit a single to get things started for the Ports. Michael Choice advanced him to second and reached on an error. Mitch LeVier then hit his fourth home run of the season, a three-run blast to almost the exact same spot as Zuanich the inning before, to put the Ports up 3-2 in the first.

The Nuts would tie it up in the third when Josh Rutledge drove in Delta Cleary Jr. Cleary and Rutledge both singled, which may not have been enough to drive in Cleary had he not stolen second with Rutledge batting.

Conner Crumbliss, who has been hot in May with a .346 average, got the third inning started with a splendid bunt single that trickled down the third base line. Coleman advanced Crumbliss with his second single of the night up the middle of the diamond. LeVier, who was the star for the Ports Thursday night, then drove in the speedy Crumbliss with a double to right field. Max Stassi made his mark on the evening in the third inning as well, hitting a two-RBI single up the middle.

Things would remain close with the Nuts tacking on a run in both the fifth and the sixth to make it a one-run game. Things would stay quiet through the seventh and eighth. The Nuts would try to rally in the ninth, even going so far as to bring in pinch hitter Scott Robinson, who managed to hit a single and steal second to give the Nuts a sliver of hope. This hope was short lived as the next batter, Cleary, flew out to end the game.

The Ports look to close out the series Friday as right handed pitcher Murphy Smith takes the mound for Stockton.

Chiefs Win 3-2

By Jon Versteeg, burlingtonbees.com

PEORIA, IL - The Peoria Chiefs (19-15) scored six runs on nine hits to beat the Burlington Bees (24-9) 6-2 at O'Brien Field on Thursday night. The Bees finish their season-long nine game road trip with a 7-2 record.

Peoria opened the scoring with a single run in the first inning off of Bees' RHP Tyler Vail (0-1). 2B Pierre LePage (2-4) singled and went to third base on a single by CF Rubi Silva (2-5). 3B Greg Rohan (1-4) lifted a sacrifice fly to right field to score LePage and make it 1-0.

SS Elliot Soto (1-4) hit an RBI single in the third inning to drive home Silva and make it 2-0.

In the fourth inning the Chiefs sent eight men to the plate. LePage hit a two-run double to make it 4-0. With two runners in scoring position, Rohan hit a two-run single to round out the scoring at 6-0.

In the eighth inning RF Royce Consigli (2-4) hit a one-out single and scored on a two-run home run over the left field wall by SS Yordy Cabrera (2-3) to make it 6-2.

The Bees return home to start a three-game series with the Cedar Rapids Kernels on Friday night at 6:30. It's another "Big Fun Friday" with 3.25 Budweiser, Bud Light and Bush Light 12-ounce specials at the game. LHP Max Russell (3-2, 3.08) gets the start for Cedar Rapids against LHP Jacob Brown (4-0, 1.24) for Burlington. Pre-game coverage begins at 6:10 p.m. on Newsradio 1490 KBUR and online at gobees.com.