

**A's pitchers battling back from elbow injury**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

There were times after his elbow surgery when A's reliever Joey Devine doubted he would return to a big league mound.

Teammate Josh Outman felt his pain -- literally.

Both pitchers encountered hurdles on their long road back from elbow ligament reconstruction -- "Tommy John" surgery.

Now both are savoring their return to the A's staff, and they're as happy for each other as for themselves.

"We spent a lot of time together last year and we had our setbacks at the same time," Outman, 26, said. "If I was out for five weeks, he was out for five weeks. It just seemed like it went that way."

Elbow ligament reconstruction has become a common procedure in baseball since Dodgers left-hander Tommy John had his groundbreaking surgery performed by Dr. Frank Jobe in 1974.

It's said that 85 percent of pitchers return successfully from the surgery, in which a tendon is taken from the wrist or hamstring and woven into the elbow to act as a functioning ligament.

The typical recovery period is 12-18 months, but comeback stories vary.

New York Yankees right-hander A.J. Burnett returned slightly more than a calendar year following his operation in April 2003.

Devine had his surgery in April 2009. He was recalled from Triple-A Sacramento two weeks ago -- more than two full years after his procedure -- to bolster a relief corps that was missing closer Andrew Bailey.

An injury to the flexor tendon in Devine's elbow in spring training 2010 extended his rehab by several months.

"There's always that self-doubt, wondering if you're going to get back to your old abilities," said Devine, who has yet to allow a run in seven appearances. "The first eight, nine, 10 months of post-surgery, you keep focusing on the success stories of guys coming back. That's what kept me fighting that first year."

Outman, a left-handed starter recalled from Sacramento on May 23, had his surgery in June 2009.

Outman was progressing well last season -- throwing up to four innings in simulated games.

Then his elbow began hurting in June.

He was diagnosed with irritation in the ligament, and the A's sent him home to St. Louis for six weeks.

Devine was home in Atlanta at the time recovering from his flexor tendon issue. The two chatted on the phone often.

"I hated seeing him go through what I was going through," Devine, 27, said. "I know he probably felt the same way."

Although Outman entered this spring healthy, his mechanics were off. He began the season with Sacramento and posted a 4.78 ERA over eight starts, walking 27 in 37 2/3 innings.

He improved enough to earn a call-up when starter Brandon McCarthy went down. Outman held the Angels to one run over seven innings in his first start May 23, just five weeks shy of the two-year anniversary of his surgery.

"Early in the year, my command was bad. I was getting hit around," Outman said. "That's when I struggled most -- when I'd feel confident and still go out and get my butt handed to me."

His experience differed greatly from Burnett, who had Tommy John surgery on April 29, 2003 while with Florida and made his first start back in the majors June 3, 2004 -- a span of just 13 months.

"As soon as I picked up a ball, I felt like I never had (surgery)," Burnett said.

But having the operation convinced Burnett to care for his arm better. He does shoulder exercises twice between starts.

"I never did shoulder exercises (before). All I did was pitch and ice," Burnett said. "Your elbow goes because your shoulder is weak. It's all linked together."

And players can have setbacks even after a full recovery. Minnesota Twins reliever Joe Nathan was placed on the DL last week with elbow inflammation, an after-effect from his March 2010 operation.

Things are going smoothly right now for Devine and Outman.

"We've seen the ups and downs with both of them," A's general manager Billy Beane said. "It's a credit to their diligence and hard work. When they came back, they came back at a time when we badly needed them."

### **A's move to put Ryan Sweeney's hot bat in lineup**

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

**Ryan Sweeney** has gotten inconsistent playing time, which was expected following the offseason additions of outfielders **Josh Willingham** and **David DeJesus**. But Sweeney has managed to lead the team in hitting, by far.

He's batting .301 - comfortably ahead of runner-up **Coco Crisp**, who's at .272 - and was a reason designated hitter **Hideki Matsui** was on the bench the past two games. Sweeney played one in left and one in right and went 1-for-8.

"I'll take advantage whenever I can get in there and take good at-bats," said Sweeney, who followed a .222 April with a .365 May.

It's unknown if Sweeney will play more regularly, but general manager **Billy Beane** mentioned that manager **Bob Geren** has been getting different people in the lineup. Sitting Matsui the past two games permitted four outfielders - Willingham, Crisp, DeJesus and Sweeney - to play simultaneously.

"We haven't exactly been scoring a lot of runs," Beane said. "Sweeney was sitting on the bench with a .300 average. We've got five guys (including Matsui), and you'd like to see them all play."

Sweeney had two hits to help the A's beat the Orioles last Friday, then sat out the next three games. He returned Tuesday and said, "The first at-bat, it felt like I hadn't picked up a bat for a couple of weeks. That's baseball. Some days you got it, some days you don't."

He stayed in the lineup Wednesday, having had strong career numbers against Yankees starter **A.J. Burnett**, but said he felt "terrible. I was chasing his pitch instead of hitting my pitch."

**Paternity leave:** The A's plan to announce today that reliever **Fautino De Los Santos** will be recalled from Triple-A Sacramento to replace **Grant Balfour**, who will go on paternity leave.

De Los Santos said he got the news at noon Thursday after the team had left for Boston. He took a commercial flight and still is awaiting his big-league debut.

**Leading off**

**Taking the week off:** Guillermo Moscoso, who replaced injured Tyson Ross in the rotation and has won both his starts, will be skipped in the rotation Saturday because of Thursday's off day. Trevor Cahill and Brett Anderson were moved up to start Saturday and Sunday with four days' rest.

## **Athletics won't limit themselves in Draft**

### **With first pick at No. 18, club will take best player available**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Oakland's farm system has consistently been deemed by many around Major League Baseball as one of the best, a deserving nod to its successful ways in the annual First-Year Player Draft.

The A's aren't too keen on choosing high in the pecking order, though, as it means they struggled at the big league level the previous summer. In that regard, their positioning at the No. 18 slot this year is a good thing -- the result of a second-place finish in the American League West.

That's eight spots behind where they stood last year, when they made the 10th overall selection -- marking the highest place in which they had been assigned in more than 10 years after being ranked in the bottom third of the Major League standings in 2009.

But whether dibs come 10th or 18th, A's scouting director Eric Kubota insists the organization goes about the annual event in the same manner, with no secret agenda attached -- unless that includes taking the best player available at the time.

Live coverage of the 2011 First-Year Player Draft begins with a one-hour preview show on Monday, at 3 p.m. PT on MLB.com and MLB Network, followed by the first round and supplemental compensation round. MLB.com will provide exclusive coverage of Day 2 and 3, featuring a live pick-by-pick stream, expert commentary and Draft Tracker, a live interactive application that includes a searchable database of every Draft-eligible player. You can also keep up to date at **Draft Central** and by following **@MLBDraft** on Twitter. And get into the Draft conversation by tagging your tweets with **#mlbdraft**.

Here's a glance at what the A's have in store as the Draft approaches:

### ***Athletics' Last Five No. 1 Picks***

Year	Player	Position	Current team
2010	Michael Choice	OF	Stockton (A, Athletics)
2009	Grant Green	IF	Midland (AA, Athletics)
2008	Jemile Weeks	IF	Sacramento (AAA, Athletics)
2007	James Simmons	RHP	Injured
2006	*Trevor Cahill	RHP	Oakland (MLB)

\* Second-round pick

### **In about 50 words**

Gone are the days of Stephen Strasburg and Bryce Harper -- at least this year. The identity of the No. 1 pick is again a mystery, as are the remaining choices. Kubota maintains that the hallmark of this year's Draft is depth. "I would probably say that's its strength, by far -- all-around, but probably moreso pitching," he said.

### **The scoop**

As the Draft nears, Kubota and Co. are busy putting the finishing touches on what his team calls "The Board," a list of players they have deemed as potential early picks. Sometimes The Board isn't complete until Draft day, as a handful of players call for last looks. Once the Draft is under way, Kubota said, the A's take a rather simple approach.

"I would say we approach it the same from year to year," he said. "We rank the value of the players, and we're always going to take the best player available at the time when it's our turn."

### **First-round buzz**

In regard to early picks, Kubota says, "It's hard to say right now. There are a lot of uncertainties as we sit here less than a week out. I think probably the quality of the position players that are in the Draft are going to go higher, but there will be a lot of pitching in the first round."

It just so happens that it's been in identifying future Major League arms that the A's have traditionally had the most success.

### **Shopping list**

The A's are among several teams, Kubota says, that don't necessarily go into the Draft thinking about organizational needs, though he admitted that "pitching is always a big commodity." A's general manager Billy Beane has dealt away numerous established big leaguers in recent years, which has provided a haul of talent -- including Brett Anderson, among others -- that has the A's near the forefront of teams considered well-stocked for the future.

### **Trend watch**

It was not too long ago the A's were known for going heavy on college players, an approach that aided their need of getting draftees to help at the big league level as quickly as possible. However, "I think over the past four or five years we've been more concerned with just looking at the available players," Kubota said. "What seems like a trend is more of just how the Draft works out."

Thus, the A's aren't shying away from high school players, even though Kubota admits "you have to weigh in risk a little bit more with a high school player because they're farther away from where they need to be." In the end, he says, it all comes down to ability and potential talent, no matter from which level. But since 1997, the A's have drafted just one high school player in the first round -- Jeremy Bonderman (now with Detroit) in 2001.

### **Recent Draft History**

#### **Rising fast**

Outfielder Michael Choice, the A's first-round selection and 10th pick overall in the 2010 Draft, showcased a strong professional debut in the form of a .964 OPS with seven home runs and 26 RBIs in his first 30 games, 27 of which came at short-season Class A Vancouver. Just as impressive as his offensive ability are his blazing speed -- which only fully developed in his freshman year of college -- along with his worth ethic and first-class character.

After turning heads with a solid showing in big league camp, Choice was expected to put up big numbers for Class A Stockton this year. So far, he's hit for impressive power and has drawn a fair number of walks, but he's also tallied several strikeouts. As he continues to alter his approach at the plate, Choice is still gearing to land a big league roster spot within the next two years.

#### **Cinderella story**

Few people were surprised at Tyson Ross' ability to break camp with the A's last year, but the young righty -- currently making his way back to Oakland's rotation while rehabbing a left oblique strain -- still represents quite the fairy tale, considering the speed at which he made it to The Show.

Selected in the second round of the 2008 Draft out of the University of California, Ross began his first full professional season at Stockton in 2009 before earning a late-season promotion to Midland, where he combined for a 10-10 record and 4.09 ERA, along with 113 strikeouts, in 27 starts. Taking full advantage of an invitation to big league camp, Ross was the surprise story of the spring in 2010. He made the team and spent half of the season with Oakland, going 1-4 with a 5.49 ERA in 26 games, including two starts, before he was optioned to Triple-A and suffered a season-ending elbow injury in August. Before his most recent setback, Ross was 3-3 with a 2.75 ERA in nine games, six of them starts.

#### **In The Show**

Ross is the only player from the past three Draft classes to reach the Majors, but infielder Jemile Weeks -- barring any further injury -- is knocking on the door, having posted big numbers for Triple-A Sacramento this season.

### **Lights-out pitching highlights tight AL West**

### **Divisional race could be a four-team battle all summer long**

By T.R. Sullivan / MLB.com

Pitching is proving to be the great equalizer in baseball's smallest division.

As play came to an end on Wednesday, the four teams in the American League West were separated by a mere 3 1/2 games in the standings. No other division is so tightly packed, but no other division has such a high level of quality starting pitching as in the AL West. That's why these four teams are changing places in the standings almost on a nightly basis and may continue to do so through the summer.

"The starting pitching in our division is the best in the league," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "Right now, everyone's bunched up. I've always said we have the most competitive division, top to bottom."

When the calendar turned to June, the West had the top three pitching staffs by ERA in the AL. The Athletics had a 2.99 ERA, followed by the Mariners at 3.39 and the Angels at 3.44. The Rangers were sixth at 3.71.

At the same time, six of the top eight pitchers in ERA going into June were from the AL West, with at least one from each team.

Pitching is what keeps the Mariners and Athletics afloat. Seattle entered June having scored the second-fewest runs in the league while Oakland had scored the third fewest. The Halos, dealing with injuries to some of their biggest offensive weapons, had scored the fifth-fewest runs.

So if everybody has such great pitching, the question is: What will separate one team from the rest of the pack as the summer progresses?

"The one thing we learned last year is you've got to have a total team effort, from top to bottom," Rangers infielder Michael Young said. "You've got to pitch well early and late in the game, play good defense and score runs. If we do that, we'll be fine, but we've just got to focus on getting better as a team."

"I don't see one team pulling away," Angels pitcher Dan Haren said. "The pitching is just so good in the division, that'll be hard to do. Texas has a great lineup and obviously enough pitching, but every team in the division has excellent starting pitching. That should keep everyone in the race and prevent anyone from running away."

The Rangers are the defending champions, and they should have the best offense in the division. They were fourth in the league in runs scored going into June, and they had Josh Hamilton and Nelson Cruz back off the disabled list. The Angels wish they could say the same about some of their big bats.

Texas was also last in the league in defense, but what really rankles manager Ron Washington is his team's inability to close out games. At the end of May, the Rangers were tied with the Angels for most blown saves and with the Twins for most relief losses. They had lost two games when leading after eight innings and five more when the game was tied after eight complete.

"We have to close games out," Washington said. "When it comes time to close games out and get those last four, five, six outs, we need to do it. If we can take care of that, we'll be fine."

Every team has issues. The Angels had concerns about their bullpen until Jordan Walden seized the closer's role. Now they need to put their offense back together, and they could get Vernon Wells (strained groin muscle) and Howie Kendrick (strained right hamstring) off the disabled list sometime next week. They know for sure that Kendry Morales is done for the season, but rookie first baseman Mark Trumbo hit .272 with six home runs, 15 RBIs and a .511 slugging percentage in May.

"A lot of teams are fighting the injury things just like we are, and no one is feeling sorry for us, so we just have to go out there and battle and as a staff keep our team in the game until we find a way to win," Angels starter Jered Weaver said. "The bullpen has found its legs with Jordan Walden doing a great job as the closer, and once we get our team back at full strength, we think we're the best team in the division."

The Athletics don't have offensive reinforcements coming off the disabled list. They are pretty much stuck with what they have, and what they didn't have after two months was an offensive player with at least 100 at-bats and a batting average over .270.

Oakland's rotation took hits when Dallas Braden, Tyson Ross and Brandon McCarthy went on the disabled list with injuries. But Guillermo Moscoso won his first two starts up from Triple-A and Josh Outman, after two miserable years recovering from Tommy John elbow reconstruction surgery, was 2-0 with a 2.08 ERA in his first two outings.

The Athletics hope they can hold up the back of a rotation that's formidable up front with Gio Gonzalez, Brett Anderson and Trevor Cahill. The return of Andrew Bailey, who missed two months with a strained right forearm, can only help a pretty good bullpen.

"We're fortunate, given some recent struggles, that it's stayed as close as it has," Athletics manager Bob Geren said. "But I really don't think anyone expected anything else. Any team in this division is capable of being a first-place team, and it's just a matter of playing well at the right time."

The Mariners are like the Athletics. They are not expected to find external reinforcements for their struggling offense anytime soon, although they could promote top infield prospect Dustin Ackley from Triple-A Tacoma at some point soon. Otherwise they will have to find a way to do it with pitching. They don't have a player hitting over .280, and only two players -- Justin Smoak and Adam Kennedy -- have a slugging percentage over .400.

That gives Doug Fister, Jason Vargas, Erik Bedard and Felix Hernandez the honor of being four of the top 15 pitchers in the league as far as lowest run support. Only rookie sensation Michael Pineda has been given more than four runs per nine innings to work with this season.

But Seattle still won 12 of 15 to close out May, even though the club averaged just 3.7 runs per game during that streak, while batting .241 with a .349 slugging percentage.

"I kind of see this team and Oakland, for that matter, as being like San Francisco last year," Mariners veteran reliever Jamey Wright said. "They didn't have a powerhouse lineup by any means, but they pitched and played good defense, and all of a sudden when they needed to, they were the ones outslugging people when it mattered."

"It seems like every team has their strengths and no one has really clicked on all cylinders yet. Oakland and our team have pitching, and I'd say the same for Anaheim with Haren and Weaver. That's a great one-two punch right there. And Texas has the sticks. So I guess it's just a matter of who puts it all together for the most games the rest of the way."

### **Red Sox, A's regroup after busy stretches**

By Joey Nowak / MLB.com | 6/1/2011 7:05 PM ET

Both the Red Sox and the Athletics have battled through a strenuous three-week stretch. They'll be well-rested when they meet up Friday in Boston for a weekend series after a rare day off.

Boston's stretch of 20 games in 20 days included a day-night doubleheader in Detroit that didn't allow the Red Sox to return home until 5 a.m. the following morning for a game that night.

"We're fine. We played that day-night in Detroit and got home at 5," second baseman Dustin Pedroia said. "So guys have kind of been dragging and picking each other up. I'm not trying to make excuses, but we need a day off to get some rest and come back out and play good ball."

Oakland, which put together an 8-12 record through its 20 games in 20 days, is kicking off an 11-game road trip. The A's were on a roll, winning five of six, before the Yankees came to town and swept them.

It won't get any easier this weekend against the Red Sox.

"They are a disciplined team with some power, so you want to limit any free passes, stay aggressive, stay in the strike zone," Oakland manager Bob Geren said. "I think the two teams, Boston and New York, are very similar offensively as far as their philosophy and their talent level."

The Red Sox went 13-7 through their 20-game stretch.

Clay Buchholz, who will start Friday for the Red Sox, could use the extra day of rest as much as anyone. The right-hander has been fighting through discomfort in his lower back and also endured a blister on the bottom of his right big toe his last time out.

He tossed six innings against the Tigers on Sunday, allowing three runs while walking one and striking out three. It was the sixth straight game he's allowed three runs or less.

"I thought he actually pitched real well," said manager Terry Francona. "Good changeup, he pitched ahead in the count, especially earlier in the game. I think later he was getting a little tight, and that blister was bothering him a little bit."

### **Athletics: Outman working out kinks**

Josh Outman will be tasked with keeping the Red Sox in check Friday, in just his third start since returning from Tommy John surgery.

He struggled a bit with control in his last outing, walking five, but worked out of jams and pitched well to earn his first victory of the year.

The southpaw is 1-0 with a 2.08 ERA and has struck out four in 13 innings. He has never faced the Red Sox.

### **Red Sox: Drew gets a breather**

- Outfielder J.D. Drew sat out Wednesday's game, and will likely do the same Friday with a lefty on the mound for Oakland. Drew closed out May with a .188 average, and Francona said Drew has yet to find his comfort zone.

"I think we keep waiting for that," Francona said. "J.D. has kind of a track record of grabbing on to that one month and really almost put us on his back, and certainly you always wait for that. And he hasn't gotten to that point yet."

- Reliever Rich Hill left the seventh inning of Wednesday's game clutching his left elbow. He underwent an MRI and the injury was ruled a left forearm strain.

"I think Rich is OK though, from what I heard," said Daniel Bard, who came on to pitch when Hill left. "He said it was just scar tissue that kind of popped. If that's the case, hopefully he's OK."

### **Worth noting**

- Oakland shortstop Cliff Pennington had a nine-game hitting streak (a career high and A's season high) snapped Wednesday with an 0-for-3 afternoon.

- Pedroia struggled in May, hitting .227, but Francona said the second baseman is starting to put good swings on the ball.

"I think he's taken some real good ones," Francona said. "He rifled that ball up the middle, he hit the ball to right field, in Detroit he hit the ball I thought it was a home run. The guy made the shoestring catch, I actually think he's had some real good swings."

- After going 28 straight games allowing four runs or fewer, the Oakland rotation has allowed 14 earned runs in the last two games.

### **Enormous disparity between A's pitching and hitting**

#### ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Oakland Athletics had the AL's best pitching last season. They also had one of the league's worst offenses. So both areas figured to even out this year, if only because there was almost no other way to go.

Instead, the A's have defied common logic again.

In what was supposed to be a season with improved offense, the gap between pitching and hitting has never seemed wider. Oakland heads into a three-game series at Boston beginning today tied for the best ERA in the majors, an impressive feat for a banged-up pitching staff — outdone only by its anemic run support.

"If the offense can start rolling with the pitching that we have, we'll definitely be on the top of the division at the end of the year," two-time All-Star closer Andrew Bailey said.

Maybe.

If only it were that easy.

The strikeouts and hitless innings pile up about as quickly in Oakland for the pitchers as the hitters, an unbalanced production almost unrivaled in the majors. In its own way, each has been equally surprising this season.

Three of the five starters in the rotation are injured. Lefty Dallas Braden won't be back at all this year after surgery to repair a torn capsule in his shoulder, Bailey just returned from a strained right forearm and Rich Harden hasn't gotten off the disabled list with a strained muscle under his right shoulder.

All the injuries have done little to slow A's pitchers.

Oakland is tied with Atlanta with a majors-best 3.01 ERA despite playing in the hitter-heavy American League. The bullpen is finally at full strength and fill-in starters Josh Outman and Guillermo Moscoso are undefeated in four combined starts.

"We feel like we've weathered the storm a little bit as far as the injuries," reliever Brad Ziegler said. "But we know there are more storms coming, hopefully not with injuries, but other challenges to overcome."

Easily the biggest hurdle to clear is the lack of offense.

Oakland ranks 25th in batting average, 26th in runs scored and 29th in home runs, underwhelming even the typically tepid crowds at the Coliseum. The pitching-to-hitting disparity wasn't supposed to happen this year, at least not to this extreme.

The A's signed sluggers Hideki Matsui, Josh Willingham and David DeJesus in the offseason to give the middle of the lineup some pop. But it has been a quiet offensive output from new and old faces alike.

"With the pitching that we have, we're a tough team to beat when the offense is there," manager Bob Geren said.

But the offense just hasn't been there.

Matsui (.222) and DeJesus (.254) have been perhaps the most disappointing. Willingham (.240) has always hit for power and not average, and his 10 home runs might be the lone bright spot among the newcomers.

Daric Barton (.206) is the only regular starting first baseman in the majors without a home run, Kurt Suzuki (.242) has been inconsistent and Mark Ellis (.214) is off to an usually slow start.

With the pitchers producing with baseball's best, the lack of offense has weighed heavily on hitters.

"We haven't helped them as much as we should have so far this year, but hopefully we can start coming around and putting some consistent games together," Willingham said.

Hitting struggles are not exactly a new concept in Oakland.

General manager Billy Beane has built the A's on pitching for years, although hitting was never so scarce in the most recent playoff runs.

Oakland hasn't played into October since being swept by Detroit in the 2006 AL championship series, and even those teams found a way to manufacture runs when it counted.

The A's showed in a three-game sweep of Baltimore last weekend how dangerous they can be when the offense erupts, scoring 16 runs in a lopsided series. Oakland followed that up by showing how quickly its bats can go cold, getting swept by the Yankees and outscored 19-5 in the three-game series.

"We didn't score runs," Oakland's Conor Jackson said after the series finale. "It's a recipe for losses."

## **MINOR LEAGUE NEWS**

### **Peterson's 3-run homer lifts Sacramento**

By Mike Morris / Sacramento River Cats

River Cats left-hander Lenny DiNardo could have used a cold beverage after a rough first inning on Miller Lite Thirsty Thursday at Raley Field.

Despite the slow start, DiNardo rebounded with a spectacular 4.0 innings to help the River Cats cruise to an 8-5 victory over Salt Lake.



DiNardo struggled in his previous two appearances, allowing six earned runs in each game while holding a 54.00 ERA. However, after Thursday's first inning in which he allowed five runs, he was as cool as the \$2 Miller Lites fans were sipping on in the stands.

In his first start, DiNardo made it through 1.1 innings, walking three batters and allowing eight runs (six earned). The left-hander started things on a similar note Thursday, but saw four more innings on the mound. In those four innings, DiNardo allowed just two hits while striking out two.

The River Cats scored two runs in the first and third innings before Scott Sizemore tied the game in the seventh on a play that knocked the catcher Kevin Richardson out of the game.

Salt Lake manager Keith Johnson was unable to watch the comeback from the bench as he was tossed in the middle of the game after arguing a call with the home plate umpire.

A bunt by Adrian Cardenas turned into the tying run for the River Cats in the seventh inning. Salt Lake reliever Bobby Cassevah threw the ball over the head of first baseman Efran Navarro. After the throw, Cardenas tried to go to second, putting himself in a pickle. Sizemore took advantage of the situation scoring the tying run after jarring the ball loose from Richardson's grasp at the plate.

The River Cats didn't stop there as Shane Peterson sent a three-run go-ahead home run to the Salt Lake bullpen in the eighth inning, bringing in Matt Carson and Eric Sogard.

"With the situation I was in I just wanted to get my barrel on the ball," said Peterson, who admitted he hasn't been hitting up to his standards recently. "I wanted to make sure I put together a good at bat and at least give myself a chance to get a hit. Hopefully, I can take the last few at-bats and run with it tomorrow and get back to where I was a few weeks ago."

Five River Cats had two hits Thursday, while two of them (Sizemore and Jai Miller) combined for five of Sacramento's eight RBIs. Sizemore, who scored four runs Monday, scored three runs Thursday. Miller, who has five home runs during his current seven-game hitting streak, had three RBIs and two runs.

Pitching coach Scott Emerson chose to leave DiNardo in despite the rough first inning, and it turned out to be a good decision.

"You want your starters to go as deep as you can," Emerson said. "With nine innings of baseball, one inning isn't going to hurt you but over the next four (innings) he went out there, battled and kept the ball at the bottom of the strike zone."

The River Cats are 8-1 on Miller Lite Thirsty Thursday's and close the series Friday night at 7:05 p.m. Sacramento moves to 35-20 on the year and is currently three games ahead of second-place Las Vegas.

Friday's pitching matchup includes two pitchers who have spent time in the majors. Left-hander Bobby Cramer (0-0, 4.34) of Sacramento faces off against fellow left-hander Scott Kazmir (0-2, 36.00).

### **RockHounds top Tulsa in extra innings**

Staff Reports, Midland Reporter-Telegram

TULSA -- For a second straight night, the Midland RockHounds and Tulsa Drillers needed extra innings to decide their game. After Tulsa prevailed in 10 innings on Wednesday, it was the RockHounds outlasting the Drillers on Thursday, winning 6-4 in 12 innings at ONEOK Field.

With two outs in the top of the 12th, Midland third baseman Stephen Parker drew a walk. Michael Spina made Tulsa reliever Daniel Turpen pay for that mistake, taking Turpen deep to center field for what turned out to be a game-winning home run.

It's the 10th home run of the season for Spina, who leads the RockHounds in that category. He ended up 1 for 4 with three RBI, bringing in shortstop Grant Green with a sacrifice fly in the third inning. It's the third sac fly Spina has hit in the past two games.

The final game of a three-game series between Midland and Tulsa is set for 7:05 p.m. today at ONEOK Field.

## **Ports Bats Come Alive To Earn Win**

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The Ports bats came alive Thursday night as the Ports snapped a four-game losing streak, beating the Bakersfield Blaze 7-3. Ports designated hitter Ryan Ortiz had a strong night, going 3-for-3 with three RBIs and two runs scored to power the Ports past the Blaze.

The Ports got on the board first, putting three runs on the board in the second inning. Ortiz started the inning with a walk, which was promptly followed by a Michael Gilmartin single. Ryan Lipkin walked to load the bases for Conner Crumbliss. Crumbliss singled to Blaze starter Lance Janke to score Ortiz and keep the bases loaded for Myrio Richard. Richard was hit by a pitch, which brought Gilmartin home and took Richard out of the game. The Ports would get their final run of the inning on a Jason Christian sac fly before Michael Choice flew out to end the inning.

The Ports tacked on two more runs in the third. Similar to the second, Anthony Aliotti walked to start the inning. Aliotti advanced to second as Mitch LeVier reached on a fielding error and was driven in on an Ortiz single. LeVier crossed home plate on a Lipkin single before Crumbless flew out to end the inning.

The Blaze struck back in the fourth inning with two runs of their own. With Josh Fellhauer on base, Henry Rodriguez blasted a 1-0 pitch to right field. The Blaze tacked on a third run an inning later with a Chris Richburg solo shot to left field. The Blaze would be unable to add any further runs in the game as Ports pitching remained dominant.

The Ports added two more runs in the game to bring the final score to 7-3. The first run came in the bottom of the fifth. Ortiz stepped up to the plate with two outs already recorded in the inning and drilled the first pitch he saw over the mini monster wall in left field. The Ports added another insurance run in the seventh, grinding out a run on an Aliotti walk, passed ball and Ortiz single.

The Ports look to continue their winning ways tomorrow as righty Murphy Smith takes the field for the Ports at 7:05 p.m.

## **Loons Win 4-3 in Ninth Inning Thriller**

By Jon Versteeg

MIDLAND, MI-The Great Lakes Loons (29-25) scored two runs in the ninth inning on a triple by DH Bobby Coyle (1-4) for a 4-3 win over the Burlington Bees (37-18) before 3,456 fans at Dow Diamond on Thursday night.

The Bees jumped on top in the third inning with an unearned run. SS Wade Kirkland (2-4) singled and went to second base on a throwing error. CF Tyreace House (1-3) hit a sacrifice bunt to move Kirkland to third base. He scored on a groundout by C John Nester (1-4) for a 1-0 lead.

The Loons scored an unearned run in the third inning against Burlington RHP Tyler Vail. 3B Christian Lara (1-3) singled and went to second base on an error. A wild pitch by Vail moved Lara to third base and a sacrifice fly by 2B Bryant Hernandez (0-1) scored Lara to tie the score at 1-1.

Burlington pushed across two runs in the fourth inning to take a 3-1 lead. 2B Nino Leyja (1-4) doubled and moved to third base on a single by 3B Tony Thompson (1-3). A wild pitch by Great Lakes starter Bret Montgomery scored Leyja. Thompson scored on an RBI single by Kirkland.

Vail pitched five and two-thirds innings and allowed one unearned run on one hit. He walked just one and struck out six.

The Bees head to Lansing to take on the Lansing Lugnuts, the Midwest League affiliate of the Blue Jays on Friday night at 6:05 p.m. RHP Jose Macias (1-0, 0.62) gets the start for the Burlington Bees against the LHP Sean Nolin (1-1, 2.61) for the Lugnuts