

A's still looking to fill the seats

By Daniel Brown, San Jose Mercury News

Andrew Bailey tapped into an unusual energy source against the Giants recently. The A's closer plugged into the electricity from a rare sellout crowd at the [Q.co](#) Coliseum -- 36,067 buzzing fans -- as he blazed through a 1-2-3 ninth inning.

"It's definitely something I can feed off when I'm out there," Bailey said the next day. "Your heartbeat gets a little faster when you've got a big crowd like that."

Starting on Tuesday, however, the A's will be hard-pressed to duplicate the atmosphere. They host two unappetizing interleague opponents, the Florida Marlins and the Arizona Diamondbacks, before welcoming the Seattle Mariners for the third of six meetings this season.

That could make for a lonely nine-game homestand for a team already struggling at the gate. Even after three consecutive sellouts against the Giants, the A's rank 27th in the majors in home attendance. Their average crowd is 19,794, which trumps only Kansas City (19,645), Tampa Bay (18,484) and Florida (16,793).

Andy Dolich, an A's marketing executive from 1980-95 and part of the famed "Billy Ball" ad campaign, attended a recent game against the Yankees and looked around at the thousands of empty seats.

"Really, it just made me sad," he said. "There was a time -- and it's getting harder for people to remember -- when the Coliseum was the place to be. It was the Giants who were an afterthought. It was the Giants who were playing in a dump and waiting for high-profile opponents to come into town. It's completely flipped."

Jim Leahey, the A's vice president for marketing and sales, acknowledged Monday that the A's would have preferred to see their flashier interleague opponents, the New York Mets and Philadelphia Phillies, on the home schedule instead of on the road. But he said the upcoming schedule is counterbalanced by a string of popular promotions.

Most notably, the A's host fireworks night on Saturday -- it's a scheduling coup to be home on Fourth of July weekend. Leahey expects a crowd of around 30,000.

To a lesser extent, Thursday's root beer float day is also an annual drawing card. The A's expect about 20,000 fans.

The reasons behind the A's box office struggles are well-documented. The team wants a new venue, pronto, but the process is being held up as commissioner Bud Selig's blue ribbon panel studies the viability of a proposed move to San Jose. (Calling it a "complex situation," a league spokesman said Monday that there is still no timetable for the decision.)

In the meantime, owner Lew Wolff repeatedly has said that the Coliseum is not a viable business option and wants a new venue in the South Bay.

Dolich thinks such threats might be backfiring at the ticket window. "Ownership's message has been: 'This is a cesspool and we're getting the hell out of here.' That's the message that's been permeating for five years? Six years?"

Upon his hiring earlier this month, manager Bob Melvin resurrected the message he heard from management during his playing days at Candlestick Park. He told players to consider their humble home an advantage.

"In my position, you play the cards you're dealt, and that's playing in this ballpark right now," he said.

Dolich suggested A's ownership embrace the Coliseum, which was essentially what the Haas family did upon buying the team in 1980. At the time, the A's home park was nicknamed the Mausoleum for its ghostly crowds, including a smattering of 306,763 for the entirety of 1979.

But by 1990, the A's drew 2.9 million -- second best in the majors. It helped that the team got better, too. The current A's risk a fifth consecutive season without a winning record.

"The Haas family didn't threaten. They didn't complain. They built a heck of an A's team, brought in a great manager, bonded with the community -- and looked what happened. It's not like it can't be done," Dolich said. "No, you're not playing in AT&T Park or Camden Yards, but why not just do what is the most important thing in pro sports: doing what it takes to win?"

Mike Veeck, famous for his wacky promotions, including a role in the infamous "Disco Demolition Night" at Comiskey Park in Chicago in 1979, said the A's could boost crowds by making their building the least important part of the equation. He said improving customer service, inside and outside the ballpark, go a long way.

"To steal a line from the Doobie Brothers, it's about taking it to the streets," said Veeck, part-owner of five minor league baseball teams. "You make 500 speeches. You make every possible community group. You arrange for players to stick around and sign autographs after the game. ... You do things like that, nobody mentions the building."

Still, Veeck couldn't resist one off-the-wall promotion. (He once arranged for pregnant women to get in free on Labor Day.) Told that the Marlins were on the schedule, Veeck said: "Oh, that's an obvious one. In honor of Jack McKeon, let everybody 80 or older get in free."

Leahey, who handles the A's promotions, said the team has gained momentum with a more practical approach: bargain tickets. Seats are available for as low as \$2 every Wednesday as part of a promotion sponsored by BART. Fans can also get upper-deck seats for \$12 every game, a ticket that comes with a \$6 voucher for food or merchandise.

A's attendance is up 12 percent from last year.

"We're emphasizing value," he said. "We actually get a lot of feedback from people saying, 'I actually really liked coming to your park. It's about baseball here, and it doesn't hurt the pocketbook.'"

Rise in number of centenarians has scientists looking at genes

By Suzanne Bohan , Contra Costa Times

Before delivering the ceremonial opening pitch on June 18 at the O.co Coliseum in honor of her 100th birthday, Frances Perenon limbered up at home by swinging her pitching arm in wide circles.

The exercise paid off when she delivered a solid underhand throw to start that evening's A's-Giants game. The crowd of more than 36,000 rose in a standing ovation for Perenon, an A's season ticket holder since 1970.

How far had she thrown it? someone asked. "I didn't measure it, but I know it went 84 miles an hour," she quipped.

Perenon can only guess at why she's fortunate enough to be sharp, healthy and mobile at 100. But the wife, mother, grandmother, former secretary, one-time hospital volunteer and official Oakland A's booster is grateful to be part of the action a century after her birth in Oakland.

"I thank God every morning," she said. "I'm a very lucky lady."

Centenarians were a rarity when Perenon was a child, but new U.S. census data shows she's entered an increasingly crowded field.

Some 72,000 people in the United States are 100 and older, almost double the 1990 figure of 37,000.

And their increase isn't expected to stop. On the low end, the Census Bureau estimates 265,000 centenarians will be alive in 2050, or maybe as many as 4.2 million, depending upon population growth and longevity trends. Public health measures such as better sanitation, housing and nutrition, as well as medical advances, are credited with the longevity boom.

In Alameda County, 275 people are 100 or older. Contra Costa County has 191 centenarians and Santa Clara County 240, according to the census.

The surge is galvanizing researchers to unravel why it is that some people arrive at the century line healthy and alert.

Perenon was always slender, ate well, exercised regularly and had a wide social network, all critical contributors to a long life. And she's still healthy; she moved only last year from her longtime Oakland home to a lively San Leandro assisted-living facility.

But other centenarians swear that their longevity "secret" -- an oft-asked question -- "is 'I drink Jim Beam every day,' " said Dr. Stephen Coles, who directs the Gerontology Research Group in Los Angeles and a private foundation researching "supercentenarians" -- those living to 110 and beyond. He's also a lecturer at UCLA. But others will declare they reached 100 because they never touched alcohol, he said. Others will say, "Well, I like my bacon extra crispy," Coles said.

"A lot of people make clever and witty remarks. That's because everyone asks them the same question," Coles said. "So they have a sort of standard answer that's humorous."

But the random explanations don't help scientists find unifying patterns.

Certain commonalities have emerged. Centenarians are typically thin, have a wide social network and long-lived parents, siblings and other relatives, pointing to a strong genetic component. They also handle stress well, and typically keep a positive outlook.

"You have to have a strong motivation to wake up in the morning and do the things that are important for you, that give meaning to your life," Coles said.

Perenon exemplifies all those traits. The slender woman grins while pointing to a box of birthday cards from well-wishers. With her were her 91-year-old sister, her daughter-in-law and granddaughter. Her brother is 90. Her goal now, she said, is "just seeing everybody being happy, and I want to be happy, too."

After the baseball game, she and her family went to an Alameda bar where she had a Rob Roy and didn't return to her apartment until 1:50 a.m., a few hours before her 6 a.m. rising time for church.

Reaching 100 takes a mix of good genes and a healthful lifestyle, but genetics takes the dominant role after reaching supercentenarian status, Coles said. And examining genes of the super-old may reveal why so many of the diseases on death certificates -- cancer, heart disease, stroke -- bypass them.

Coles directs the Supercentenarian Research Foundation, which studies those living near the limits of the human life span. The group has gathered blood samples from 15 supercentenarians, and hired a Mountain View lab to sequence genes extracted from the samples.

At the other end of the research might be drugs to prevent the tissue damage, organ failure or other common causes of diseases and death in the elderly, Coles said.

Other experts in the field, such as Dr. Thomas Perls of the New England Centenarian Study, have expressed skepticism about longevity drug development, given the complexity of the genetic puzzle.

Longevity expands the human family, Coles said, by giving subsequent generations a boost. It's called the "grandparenting effect," which in part relates to the practical advice from elders.

"That's one of the influences that help humans live longer than other mammals," Coles said.

Kaylea Perenon, 23, said her grandmother has had a profound role in shaping her outlook.

—%o'Don't judge people, just being happy, be proud of who you are,' " are lessons from her grandmother that the younger Perenon said are etched in her mind.

"Strength, perseverance -- you have to learn that somewhere," she said.

A's reshuffled infield trying to jell

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

As the 2011 season dawned, the A's had what they repeatedly called one of the best infields in baseball, particularly from a defensive standpoint.

Now, only shortstop Cliff Pennington is left as an everyday member of that unit, and the other three infielders are inexperienced either at their positions or in the majors - or both.

"Things didn't work the way we originally planned," A's assistant general manager David Forst said. "We sort of have to view these things as opportunities, and hope the players in those positions now look at it that way, too. But we didn't expect everything to go exactly as planned in December - you leave room for other possibilities."

With Daric Barton's demotion last week, Conor Jackson is now the primary first baseman, but he's really an outfielder who happens to play first reasonably well. Mark Ellis, who made two starts at first in the past four games, had not played there until last week.

Second baseman Jemile Weeks has been in the majors for less than three weeks, and though he has provided the A's with some real spark since his promotion, pushing Ellis into a utility role in the process, he is still learning the game.

After the A's sent everyday third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff down to Triple-A Sacramento, along with backup third baseman Andy LaRoche, Scott Sizemore wound up there. Sizemore is a second baseman who has some time at third.

This all makes infield coach Mike Gallego a busy man.

"Let's just say I've been more mentally exhausted after each ballgame than I ever have been in the past," Gallego said last weekend. "That's not to say that the new infielders haven't done well, because they have; I'm very satisfied with them. But I am trying to give them as much help as possible."

The primary issue that Gallego tries to address is positioning. Weeks is still learning the league, the hitters and the tendencies of A's pitching staff, and the men at the corners are less familiar at positioning themselves than they would be at their normal positions.

Weeks quickly is figuring out things, Gallego said.

"He's going to be a superb second baseman in the big leagues, and he's already making adjustments on his own," Gallego said. "When we were in New York, after a couple of at-bats, Jemile started playing (Mets rookie) Lucas Duda an extra step over to pull, because he recognized he was swinging it differently than what the spray chart showed. That's impressive."

Pennington is now the anchor of the infield, rather than Ellis. But, Pennington said, "Ellis is still here, so it doesn't feel that different."

Communication is important when it comes to the middle infielders, and Pennington said that he and Weeks are still getting used to each other. There have been no major crossed signals, but, Pennington said, "It's just a matter of playing together more. You can't say we'll figure it out in two weeks. Weeks is playing great, but it takes some time."

Ellis learned second base under former A's infield coach Ron Washington, now the Rangers' manager. Washington was a stickler for fundamentals who disliked flashy plays, so when Weeks made a glove flip to second to start a game-ending double play Saturday, some eyebrows were raised. Weeks said he works on that move a lot, and the only times it hasn't worked were when the play was going to be too close to make either way.

"As long as the shortstop knows it's coming, it's not a problem," Weeks said.

Manager Bob Melvin said he would prefer a player toss the ball with his bare hand, but he knows the play can be instinctual, so he wants Weeks to be confident and not think too much in the field. "You pick your battles," Melvin said with a smile.

Change is the name of the game for the A's these days, with Melvin taking the job just two days after Weeks arrived. Melvin didn't see the old Opening Night infield together, but he likes the way the current version is meshing. On Sunday in Philadelphia, he canceled pregame infield practice as a reward for how well the defense has been playing.

Barton is expected to rejoin the A's at some point. Kouzmanoff was taken off the 40-man roster, and he's unlikely to regain his job except in the event of an injury. Ellis is a possibility to be traded before the deadline.

Around the horn

The new A's infielders might face some fielding challenges, but they've been up to the challenge of exceeding their predecessors on offense.

Player	G	R	RBI	BA
Opening Night infield				
1B Barton	67	27	21	.212
2B Ellis	62	21	16	.217
3B Kouzmanoff	46	13	17	.221
SS Pennington	77	22	21	.243
Sunday infield				
1B Jackson	58	15	20	.265
2B Weeks	18	12	6	.309
3B Sizemore	16	7	7	.327
SS Pennington	see above			

A'S LEADING OFF

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Magic number: Gio Gonzalez, who will start tonight against Florida, has received run support of two runs or fewer in nine of 14 starts this year. Gonzalez is 24-1 in 33 career starts with run support of three runs or more.

Inbox: Will Carter see more playing time?

Beat reporter Jane Lee answers questions from fans

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

Now that Chris Carter has been called up, is he going to get a shot to play? He's had only one at-bat in three games. He should be starting at first base and batting seventh until he gets in a groove. As their supposed top prospect, it's time to show some faith and confidence in the kid.

-- Mike W., Alameda, Calif.

Well, when Carter was given a shot to play at first base on Thursday, he dropped the first ball he attempted to field. It was a catchable popup, and the potential out was ultimately turned into an RBI single just seconds later. That was manager Bob Melvin's first and only look so far at Carter, with whom he hasn't had much time to familiarize himself, or much of the farm system for that matter. And while that sample size is extremely small, it's likely left an impression on Melvin, who is also content with rotating Conor Jackson and Mark Ellis at first.

Still, Carter deserves a string of playing time before he's sent down when Josh Willingham (Achilles) returns, especially given the fact the A's are collectively struggling at the plate and Carter was tallying homers as a hobby upon his promotion. But Melvin made it pretty clear this weekend that Carter's stay is likely a fill-in thing on the bench, with maybe a possible few starts at designated hitter coming this week at home.

Despite the A's best efforts to help him defensively, both in the outfield and at first base, it's becoming increasingly clear that they're coming to terms with Carter not playing the field but as the DH of the future. For now, though, that role belongs to Hideki Matsui, so Carter's shot at consistent playing time may not even come until next year.

Does Mark Ellis want to be traded, or does he think he has a chance to regain his starting role at second base with the A's?

-- Greg K., Santa Rosa, Calif.

Ellis is still very much eyeing a return to second base. Whether that's with the A's or another team has yet to be determined, but I think he'd welcome the chance to regain everyday playing time almost anywhere at this point. Any competitor would likely want the same. At the same time, Ellis can't imagine leaving the organization he's essentially grown up with, and his numbers aren't going to foster many teams willing to pick up a lot of the \$6 million he's making this year.

This is his 10th season with the A's, and no current player within the organization is beloved and respected as much as he is. He's thus far taken his new utility role in stride and really just wants to contribute in whatever way possible. After Saturday's game in Philadelphia, Ellis noted how much fun he had playing first base. It marked just his second start there, but the difference in his comfortability level was profound.

Is Scott Sizemore the A's long-term solution at third base?

-- Keith T., Bakersfield, Calif.

I believe the long-term solution you're speaking of is at Double-A Midland, where prospect Stephen Parker is currently stationed. But until the A's 2009 fifth-round Draft pick is ready for the big league stage, it appears Sizemore is here to stay, especially given his recent production. In a short amount of time, he's done for the A's what neither Kevin Kouzmanoff nor Andy LaRoche could really do -- be consistent at the plate and with the glove. The latter is still a work in progress, but Melvin is intent on running Sizemore out there on a daily basis.

Who will be the A's All-Star this year?

-- Marcus H., San Jose, Calif.

Considering no A's player ranks even close to the top in any offensive categories, it's safe to say the club will be represented by a pitcher at this year's Midsummer Classic. It's something of an open field right now, but it's likely that steady setup man Grant Balfour or hurler Gio Gonzalez are the most proven candidates at this point in time. But if Balfour's right oblique discomfort remains an issue, that could easily cost him the trip to Arizona, though he wouldn't necessarily have to even participate in the game. Trevor Cahill is seemingly another option, but it's hard to tell how much of his rough seven-game stretch that resulted in an 0-5 record and 5.67 ERA will be considered.

Do you think the A's will trade Josh Willingham?

-- Chris D., Alameda, Calif.

If the A's fall out of contention in the next month, it's very likely Willingham is a player they would look to deal considering he's a free agent at the end of the season. It remains to be seen, though, whether they'll even have that opportunity, as his nagging Achilles injury is surely raising question marks for interested teams. If Willingham is out longer than planned, the injury could easily scare off other clubs or force the A's to take on a reduced offer.

A's, Gio return home to face struggling Marlins

(AP) -- In a little more than a week, the struggling Florida Marlins have endured a managerial change, a home series that took place on the opposite side of the country and one of the strangest losses in franchise history.

That might make a matchup in Oakland against resurgent left-hander Gio Gonzalez seem less daunting than it appears to be.

Continuing a road trip that began much earlier than expected, Florida faces Gonzalez on Tuesday night looking to prevent the Athletics from matching their longest home win streak from each of the past two seasons.

After Edwin Rodriguez resigned on June 19 amid a franchise record-tying 11-game skid, the Marlins welcomed back Jack McKeon, who led the team to its second World Series title in 2003. The 80-year-old McKeon's second stint with the team, however, hasn't gotten off to a strong start with four losses in six games.

Being forced to play a home series in Seattle likely didn't help.

Florida (34-44) was sent to Safeco Field this past weekend because Sun Life Stadium was preparing for Wednesday's rescheduled U2 concert. The Marlins dropped two of three games to the Mariners and Sunday's 2-1 loss - their 22nd in 25 games this month - was likely their most bizarre yet.

Steve Cishek's third pitch on an attempted intentional walk in the 10th inning sailed over catcher John Buck's head, allowing the go-ahead run to score from third.

"There can't be too many other ways (to lose), right?" Buck said. "Well, we've got that one crossed off the list. Hopefully that will be it."

If Gonzalez (6-5, 2.59 ERA) can maintain his current form, Florida might lose by a more traditional method.

Following three consecutive losses, the left-hander is 1-0 with a 2.08 ERA over his last two outings and has registered 18 strikeouts to three walks.

He fanned eight and walked one in a 3-2, 13-inning loss to the New York Mets on Wednesday, allowing one run and four hits over seven innings. Gonzalez, among the league leaders in ERA, received less than three runs of support for the fifth time in six starts.

"I battled all the way, just trying to keep the team in the game," Gonzalez told the team's website after retiring 15 of the final 17 batters he faced.

The left-hander, who has never faced Florida, has a 1.01 ERA in his last four interleague starts but hasn't received a decision in any of them.

The A's (35-44) have lost four of five since a season-high six-game win streak.

However, they have won a season-best five in a row at home, limiting the opposition to 10 runs. Their longest home winning streaks of the past five years both lasted six games, once each in 2009 and 2010.

Trying to prevent Oakland from equaling that feat is veteran right-hander Javier Vazquez (4-7, 6.37), who earned his first win in six starts last Tuesday.

That 5-2 victory over the Los Angeles Angels was also McKeon's first in the majors since 2005 and ended the team's 11-game slide. Vazquez tossed 5 1-3 scoreless innings despite allowing a season-high 10 hits.

He's 4-0 with a 2.16 ERA in his last four games against the A's and earned three of those wins last season while with the New York Yankees.

Leading Off: A's loud uniforms key in winning streak

Anthony Sorci, Sacramento Bee

It wasn't new manager Bob Melvin or ex-River Cats Jemile Weeks or Josh Outman.

The real catalyst for the recent six-game winning streak for the A's – yellow jersey tops.

In 1972, the A's debuted their then-California gold pullover green uniforms to go along with their "kelly green" and "wedding gown white" tops. Frugal, eccentric but sometimes brilliant owner Charlie Finley provided the official descriptions for the uniforms.

Other outlandish ideas for which Finley advocated – night World Series games, the designated hitter, white cleats – now are commonplace. Others – orange baseballs, designated pinch runners – were too extreme.

It didn't hurt in the early '70s that future Hall of Famers Reggie Jackson, Jim "Catfish" Hunter and Rollie Fingers wore those garish yellow uniforms.

This year's tops are even a louder shade of yellow, but the players have embraced them and wouldn't take them off until the winning streak – which included a sweep of the Giants – ended Wednesday in a loss to the Mets.

Baseball is probably the most superstitious sport. Players hang on to a favorite bat or comfortable glove as long as they can.

Look for the loud garb to return often if the A's start making noise in the wide-open American League West.

What to do

Baseball, Reno at River Cats, 7:05 p.m., Raley Field: With the Giants and A's off, it's a great day to catch some live baseball.

Today's poll

How do you feel about the A's yellow uniforms?

- If it helps them win, I'm good with it.
- The uniform color doesn't matter.
- I love them so much I want one in my wardrobe.
- It's a fashion faux pas.

Vote above or leave your comments in the comment field; Or, go to www.sacbee.com/sports

Weekend results

What best describes your take on Jimmer Fredette joining the Kings?

- He's going to be a star in the NBA: 23%
- He'll help sell some tickets, but not sure how good he will be: 23%
- Let's wait to see him play before we decide: 26%
- He's going to be a bust: 28%

Total votes: 618

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Improved Slider Keys Magnuson's Breakout For A's

By Casey Tefertiller, Baseball America

OAKLAND—After righthander Trystan Magnuson finished his fourth year at Louisville in 2006, his older brother Sam had a few words for his younger sibling.

"He told me, 'Dude, you don't throw like a major leaguer,' " Trystan recalled. As a catcher for Louisville, Sam had an ideal vantage point.

Undrafted in 2006, Magnuson returned to the Cardinals in '07 as a fifth-year senior, but not as the same type of pitcher. He began to incorporate his lower body in his delivery and his velocity spiked. He began touching the mid-90s where before he topped out in the high 80s.

The 6-foot-7 Magnuson, whose family moved from Winnipeg to Louisville when he was 12, shot up draft boards in 2007, ultimately landing with the Blue Jays as a supplemental first-round pick. The Athletics pried him loose last November in the trade that sent Rajai Davisto Toronto.

Oakland called on Magnuson, 26, in mid-June to fill a hole in the bullpen. He made two appearances, allowing six runs in three innings, before returning to Triple-A Sacramento

"It was really exciting," Magnuson said. "Even though the crowd was small, they were cheering me on. I really enjoyed it."

He said he immediately connected with Sacramento pitching coach Scott Emerson and pitching coordinator Gil Patterson.

"He used to throw only a two-seamer," Patterson said, "but now he throws more four-seamers. That increases his velocity. He pitches at 94 and touches 95. He had a cutter, but he and (Emerson) turned it into a slider."

That pitch has made a big difference for Magnuson, who has posted a 2.32 ERA with four saves in five chances as he moved into the closer role with the River Cats. Righthanded batters had gone 8-for-62 (.129) with 18 strikeouts.

"I needed a swing-and-miss pitch," Magnuson said. "We started working on a slider and it really took off. It's become a really good offspeed pitch with some depth . . . and that was everything."

Magnuson walked on to the Louisville baseball team and red-shirted his first year, a move that afforded him an extra year to earn his degree in mechanical engineering.

A's ACORNS

- The A's promoted high Class A Stockton righthander A.J. Griffin to Sacramento for an emergency start. The 23-year-old struck out eight in six innings while allowing three runs.
- First baseman Chris Carter returned to Sacramento in mid-June after missing April and May with a thumb injury. In his first 20 games, he went 15-for-73 (.205) with five homers and 17 walks.

Allen's blast helps topple Sacramento

By Zeke Fine / Sacramento River Cats

The River Cats were unable to avenge Sunday's loss, dropping their second consecutive game to the Reno Aces by a score of 9-2.

The River Cats (50-29) scored first when Matt Carson singled to left to drive in Eric Sogard. This was the River Cats' only lead of the night. Reno came back in the second to tie the score on a single to left by Cole Gillespie.

The Aces added to their lead in the fourth inning when third baseman Sean Burroughs hit a double to right center. He scored on a single later in the inning by Mark Hallberg, making the score 3-1.

Sacramento made a comeback bid in the bottom of the fifth, when Kevin Kouzmanoff drove in Eric Sogard on a two-out single to left. This was the last run the River Cats would drive in.

Reno was far from finished scoring, torching the River Cats for five runs in the top of the sixth. The inning was highlighted by first baseman Brandon Allen's two-run home run to right field, his 14th of the season.

River Cats starter Doug Mathis (0-5, 4.13) was tabbed with the loss, throwing 5.1 innings and allowing six runs (all earned) on eight hits and four walks while striking out four.

The Aces scored again in the top of the eighth inning on a home run from catcher Konrad Schmidt, a Petaluma native, who blasted his fifth dinger of the season.

Mathis was relieved by Justin Souza, who threw 2.0 innings and allowed three earned runs on four hits while striking out one. He was later relieved by Vinnie Chulk, who threw two-thirds of an inning, walking two and striking out another two. Fernando Cabrera came in for a perfect ninth inning, striking out one batter.

Also contributing on the offensive end for the River Cats was catcher Anthony Recker, who went 2-for-4 with a pair of singles. He currently leads all Pacific Coast League catchers in on-base-percentage (.404) and slugging percentage (.550).

"The main thing for me has been by approach this year," Recker said, "swinging at pitches that I can hit and making sure that I'm mentally ready at the plate."

The win was picked up by Tom Layne (7-3, 6.25). He started the game for the Aces and threw 6.0 innings while allowing two earned runs on five hits and four walks.

Though it does not show up in the box score, the River Cats displayed some incredible defense. Center fielder Matt Carson made three great catches on the run that took him to the outfield wall, and also earned an assist when throwing out a runner between second and third base. Adrian Cardenas also turned in a spectacular catch of his own, crashing into the left field wall to secure a catch.

The River Cats and Aces will complete the series Tuesday night at Raley Field at 7:05 p.m., when Yadel Marti (5-1, 4.29) of the River Cats will take on Zach Kroenke (4-0, 6.35).

Daley Carries Hounds To Another Win

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

Former St. Louis cardinal farmhands Gary Daley and Shane Peterson were front-and-center Monday night as the RockHounds made it two-in-a-row over the Texas League's best team, defeating San Antonio, 2-1.

Daley recorded his fifth consecutive quality start, going 6.1 innings, allowing one (unearned) run on three hits with five walks (one intentional) and five strikeouts. San Antonio's only run came, ironically, on a strikeout and a passed ball. With the bases loaded and one out in the third, Daley whiffed Jaff Decker and James Darnell on a combined six pitches, but the last of them got by catcher Petey Paramore. The passed ball allowed a run to score.

"Pete" went 3-for-4 with three stolen bases and another great catch in center field. In the eighth, with the score tied at 1-1, he legged out a hustle double to right ... stole third with one out ... and scored on Adam Heether's sacrifice fly.

The 'Hounds gained a split of the series by handing the Missions just their seventh and eighth home losses in 40 games.

BATS - Heether lost a 13-game hit streak, but also had the game-winning RBI.

Jermaine Mitchell returned to the line-up and busted out of an 8-48 slump, going 3-for-5 ... boosting his average back to .342.

Paramore "avenged" the passed ball with the game-tying RBI single in the seventh.

ARMS - Trey Barham was the winning pitcher in relief of Daley, retiring left-handers Blake Tekotte (a 3-pitch strikeout) and Jaff Decker (line-out) to escape a 2-on, 1-out jam in the seventh.

ROAD 'HOUNDS - This must be a misprint on the team itinerary. It says next stop ... Midland! Monday was the final game of the club's 12-game road trip (5-7, 3-3 in the second half). The club now, along with the rest of the league, takes a two-day break for the Texas league All-Star Game (Wednesday in San Antonio). The All-Star game and break come six games into the second half. Last Wednesday, all eight Texas League clubs went back to 0-0 for the start of the 70-game second half. Arkansas (36-31) and San Antonio, with the league's top record (49-21), were the first half pennant-winners.

CONGRATS, WAGS! - Pitcher Neil Wagner has been promoted to (Triple-A) Sacramento. The right-hander, acquired last season via trade from Cleveland, was 1-3, 3.38 with the 'Hounds, and had been sensational of late, touching 99 mph on the radar gun. In 10 appearances in June, "Wags" was 1-1 with a 0.87 ERA with four walks and 16 K's.

Filling the roster spot is right-hander Brett Hunter. Oakland's 8th round draft choice in 2008 out of Pepperdine, Brett opened the season in extended Spring Training to work on mechanics. The work has paid off, as he pitched 2.0 scoreless innings for Sacramento and posted a 1.35 in 12 games with (Advanced-A) Stockton. He made his debut with the RockHounds Sunday night, pitching two-thirds of an inning ... and turned 27 on Monday.

ROCKY TOWN - The RockHounds open a 6-game home stand Thursday, hosting the Arkansas Travelers and Springfield Cardinals, June 30 through July 5. The 6-gamer opens with a Thirsty Thursday (featuring Breakin' B-Boy McCoy) and also includes Cap Night (Friday, July 1) and three fireworks shows celebrating Independence Day weekend. Check out all the details at www.midlandrockhounds.org.

Ports Get Lucky 13 Win

Stockton Ports

The Stockton Ports get their lucky thirteenth straight win tonight in the first game of a four-game series at home against the Bakersfield Blaze. It was constant competition between both teams tonight, but the Ports would come out ahead with a final score of 8-6.

Bakersfield wasted no time getting the ball rolling. Lead-off hitter and left fielder A.J. Means took his first pitch from Ports starter Jacob Brown to left field for a base hit. Means advanced to second on a wild pitch to shortstop Didi Gregorious, then scored when Gregorious hit a shot past the diving second baseman Conner Crumbliss and into right field for a base hit.

Gregorious would be caught stealing with second baseman Brodie Greene at the plate, but Greene would respond by knocking one out of the park for the Blaze's second run.

The Ports would start the home half of the first with back-to-back walks for left-fielder Myrio Richard and third baseman Michael Gilmartin. Nothing would come of it, however, as Blaze starter Josh Ravin struck out center fielder Michael Choice before getting catcher Ryan Ortiz hit into a double play.

Brown retired the next three batters he faced, bringing the Ports up for a far more productive bottom of the second. Right fielder Rashun Dixon drove a solo home run to deep left-center field to put the Ports first run on the board.

Stockton continued to hold Bakersfield to their two runs through the third and the fourth. First baseman Alex Buchholz began the top of the fourth with a single to center field, but would be caught in a run down and eventually tagged out by first baseman Anthony Aliotti.

Aliotti would begin the bottom of the fourth by drawing a walk, followed by two singles by Dixon and designated hitter Mitch LeVier. This brought shortstop Dusty Coleman to the plate. Coleman reached on a hard ground ball through the legs of Blaze third baseman Frank Pfister, which allowed Aliotti and Dixon to score, giving the Ports a 3-2 lead.

In the top of the sixth, the lead would go back to the Blaze. Means led off with a double to center field, and was brought in on Greene's second home run of the night. Buchholz followed up with a double to center field. Buchholz tried to score on a base hit to left by designated hitter Chris Richburg, but was gunned down at the plate by Richard.

In the bottom half, both Dixon and Coleman would draw walks. With one out, Crumbliss hit a fly ball to left-center that fell in for a base hit, allowing Dixon to score. Richard came to the plate and hit a similar ball that fell in, scoring Coleman. A walk for Gilmartin would load the bases for Choice, who brought in another run on a sacrifice fly, giving the Ports a 6-4 inning.

But neither team was going down without a fight. In the top of the seventh, facing new Ports pitcher Mike Benacka, catcher Kevin Coddington began the inning with a solo home run to left field. With two outs, Means was hit by a pitch. He would steal second, then take third on a throwing error, putting him in position to score on a passed ball, tying the game up 6-6.

Drew Bowman came in to pitch in place of Ravin in the bottom half, retiring three Stockton batters in a row, bringing the Blaze up in the eighth. With one out, Buchholz popped out into foul territory, Aliotti making a great sliding catch. Richburg and center fielder Ryan LaMarre both singled, the second of which was hit off the foot of Benacka. Jose Guzman then came in to pitch for the Ports and drew the ground ball from Coddington that would end the inning.

The Ports got their final lead in the bottom of the eighth, beginning with a walk for Coleman. With one out, Richard singled to center field, advancing to second on the throw that followed Coleman to third. Coleman would score on a sacrifice fly by Gilmartin, and Richard went to third. Choice would walk before Doug Salinas came in to replace Bowman on the mound for Bakersfield. Ortiz hit a single off of him, which brought in Richard and moved Choice to second. Aliotti came to bat and hit a grounder to shortstop, which hit Choice as he was running to third, which would be the final out of the inning.

Guzman finished out the top of the ninth by striking out both right fielder Stephen Hunt and pinch hitter Josh Fellhauer. Means would ground out to third for the final out, keeping the Ports' winning streak going. Guzman would get the win tonight, Bowman the loss.

The Ports go for their 14th straight win tomorrow as Ports righty Dan Straily takes the mound at a special 11:05 a.m. start.

Cougars Win Series Opener

By Jon Versteeg, Burlington Bees

BURLINGTON, IA-The Kane County Cougars (4-0) scored four runs on nine hits to beat the Burlington Bees (1-3) by a score of 4-1 before 997 fans at Community Field on Monday night.

Kane County scored two runs in an unusual way in the second inning. 3B Cheslor Cuthbert (1-3) hit a single off of the glove of RHP Blake Hassebrock (4-3) that died in the infield for a single. DH Brett Eibner (0-4) flew out and Cuthbert advanced to second base on a wild pitch. 1B Jake Kuebler (1-4) singled up the third base line on a ball that just rolled fair to the right of the third base foul line. RF Geulin Beltre (2-3) walked to load the bases.

C Travis Jones (1-4) reached base on a throwing error by Hassebrock, as Cuthbert scored from third base. CF Angel Franco (3-5) singled on a ball off the glove of Hassebrock for a 2-0 Kane County lead.

Burlington scored a run in the fourth inning to cut the lead in half at 2-1. 3B Tony Thompson (1-4) reached base on an error and went to second base on a single by 1B Josh Whitaker (2-4). RF Douglas Landaeta (1-4) reached base on a fielder's choice and Whitaker was retired at second base. SS Yordy Cabrera (1-4) ripped an RBI double to right field to score Thompson.

LF Brian Fletcher (1-4) hit a solo home run over the right field wall in the fifth inning to give the Cougars a 3-1 lead.

The Cougars got an insurance run in the ninth inning when Franco singled home Jones from third base for a 4-1 lead.

The Bees and Cougars continue their series Tuesday night at 6:30 p.m. It's "KRAFT Singles Two for Tuesday" with a two for one ticket offer when you present your KRAFT Singles package wrapper. It's also "Hawkeye Two for Tuesday" with two for one general admission tickets when you present the Hawkeye Newspaper Ad to the Community Field Box Office. RHP Greg Billo (4-1, 1.63) gets the start for Kane County against RHP Tyler Vail (1-3, 5.05) for Burlington. Pre-game coverage begins at 6:10 p.m. on Newsradio 1490 KBUR and online at www.gobees.com.

Vermont Loses 4-2 At Lowell On Monday

By Paul Stanfield / Vermont Lake Monsters

LOWELL, MA --- Will Middlebrooks and Tavis Shaw hit back-to-back home runs in a three-run sixth inning as the Lowell Spinners jumped out to a 4-0 lead before holding on for a 4-2 New York-Penn League victory over the Vermont Lake Monsters Monday night at LeLecheur Park.

The Spinners scored all four of their runs after Vermont reliever Kurt Wunderlich had retired the first two batters of the inning. Wunderlich, who had allowed four runs after their were two outs and no one on in a start on June 21st vs. Lowell, came on in relief of starter Brent Powers to begin the bottom of the fifth inning and quickly retired the first two Spinners.

But then Wunderlich allowed a single to Jayson Hernandez and an RBI double to Drew Turocy to give Lowell a 1-0 lead. Then in the sixth Wunderlich (0-2) again retired the first two batters before issuing a four-pitch walk to Garin Cecchini.

Middlebrooks, who also homered in Sunday's 4-1 Lowell win over the Lake Monsters, followed the walk with a towering two-run homer to leftfield and Shaw smashed a Wunderlich offering over the rightfield fence for a 4-0 Spinners lead.

Vermont finally got on the board in the seventh as Jacob Tanis led off with an infield single, moved to second on one of Sam Roberts' three walks and advanced to third on a Dan Petitti sacrifice bunt. After Sean Jamieson struckout swinging for the second out, Jeff Bercume lined a single to left scoring Tanis.

A hit batter and single to left put Vermont runners on first and third with no outs in the eighth, but the Lake Monsters were only able to cut the lead to 4-2 on a Chad Lewis sacrifice fly scoring Tripp. The Bercume RBI single in the seventh was the Lake Monsters only hit with a runner in scoring position all night as Vermont went 1-for-13 with RISP.

Lowell starter Jason Garcia (1-0), who allowed just one unearned on three hits over four innings in a no-decision at Vermont on June 21st, tossed five scoreless innings and allowed just two hits for his first win. Powers, making his first start for the Lake Monsters after two relief outings, gave up just one hit with one walk and one strikeout in four scoreless innings.

Tanis had two of Vermont's five hits, the third straight game that the Lake Monsters have been held to five hits or less and going 14-for-93 (.150) with seven runs scored in the three games.

Vermont (5-4) will try to salvage one game of the three-game series at Lowell on Tuesday night with Seth Frankoff scheduled to start for the Lake Monsters, who then head to Connecticut for a three-game series against the Tigers before returning home for a quick two-game homestand Saturday and Sunday.