

**Josh Willingham forcing Oakland A's to make difficult decision**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's face a crucial decision in whether to re-sign left fielder Josh Willingham, a potential free agent who could be one of the more enticing outfielders available this winter.

Willingham, 32, leads the A's in homers (22) and RBIs (73). Though he's hitting just .249, he fills a void as the type of right-handed power hitter the team is perpetually searching for.

Acquired from the Washington Nationals in December for reliever Henry Rodriguez and outfielder Corey Brown, Willingham says he would like to return to Oakland.

His agent, Matt Sosnick, says Willingham seeks a two- to three-year contract and that the ball is in the A's court.

"I think his inclination would be to stay here, if it's something that could get done by the end of the season," Sosnick said. "If not, he's going to go out and really explore his options."

Therein lies the rub.

The A's have six potential free agents -- Willingham and fellow outfielders Coco Crisp and David DeJesus; designated hitter Hideki Matsui; first baseman/outfielder Conor Jackson and starting pitcher Rich Harden.

Team officials have said they won't decide whether to re-sign anybody until after the season.

And though teams get a five-day window after the World Series to negotiate exclusively with their own free agents, the A's will have more difficulty signing Willingham if that window passes and other teams get a crack at him.

"The most informed decision we can make is after the season," A's assistant general manager David Forst said. "We certainly understand (the risk in waiting). He's going to be a sought-after player this offseason."

This winter's free agent class is not deep in power-hitting outfielders, which benefits Willingham.

Among potential free agent outfielders, as listed by mlbtraderumors.com, only the Cardinals' Lance Berkman entered Monday with more homers (28) than Willingham.

But the Giants' Carlos Beltran and the Twins' Michael Cuddyer are among other outfielders who will command interest. Both sport higher career batting averages than Willingham and are better defenders.

Sosnick said he believes Willingham -- who makes \$6 million this season -- is worth a contract that exceeds the two-year, \$13.5 million deal that the Royals recently gave outfielder Jeff Francoeur.

Francoeur, 27, is hitting .275 with 15 homers and 67 RBIs, but he also possesses one of the game's best throwing arms.

Given the A's lack of power in recent years, it's fair to ask: Can they afford not to bring Willingham back?

They entered Monday with the third-fewest home runs in the American League (81), and Willingham's 22 homers are the most by an A's right-handed batter since Frank Thomas swatted 39 in 2006.

Willingham, who lives in his native Alabama during the offseason, says he's adapted well to the Bay Area and playing for the A's.

"I'm comfortable here," he said. "I've developed good relationships."

He's also adjusted to the pitcher-friendly O.co Coliseum. Willingham is just four homers shy of the career-high 26 he hit with Florida in 2006. He has more homers at the Coliseum (12) this season than on the road (10).

But one major league scout pointed to Willingham's defense and his 113 strikeouts -- sixth-most in the A.L. entering Monday -- as warning signs.

"He was more mobile (in the past) than he's been this year," said the scout, who requested anonymity. "He was a better defensive player."

However, the same scout believes the A's best bet would be to re-sign Willingham.

"There's nobody at Triple-A that can do what Willingham is doing right now."

A strained left Achilles that he suffered in mid-June sidelined Willingham for 17 games, and injuries have limited him to fewer than 120 games twice in the past three seasons.

### **Brandon Allen making powerful impact with A's**

Rusty Simmons, Chronicle Staff Writer

**OAKLAND** -- Brandon Allen is from Montgomery - a blip on a Texas map, 55 miles north of Houston and a shorter distance from the middle of nowhere.

The population is 621, up from 489 in the past 10 years, according to the U.S. census.

"My hometown is Montgomery, but it doesn't have a hospital, so I was born in Conroe," Allen said. "But Montgomery is growing. We have a Walmart now."

The 4.6-square-mile, East Texas city is on the verge of having more to brag about than the discount department store. Since arriving in Oakland on Aug. 13, Allen has jump-started the A's offense and reinvigorated fans' hopes for the future.

The 6-foot-2, 235-pound first baseman is hitting .379 with two doubles and two triples in nine games. And he offers the promise of power to a clout-starved franchise that is among the major's bottom six in homers for the fourth consecutive season.

"The small sample has been pretty good," manager Bob Melvin said. "It's not just the at-bats. It's the at-bats against left-handers, the defense and the baserunning. He's a good athlete, and you don't see that often in a first baseman.

"There are going to be days when you're not swinging the bat well, but he can bring his glove out there and make everybody in the infield that much better."

Allen has seen plenty of days filled with poor swings since he was selected by the White Sox in the fifth round of the 2004 draft. In his first three seasons of professional baseball - all at the Class A level or lower - Allen struck out in 31.4 percent of his at-bats.

At Class A Kannapolis (N.C.) in 2006, Allen struck out 126 times in 395 at-bats. The next season, he trimmed it to 124 strikeouts in 516 at-bats.

"I learned to be more patient," said Allen, who was acquired with Jordan Norberto for Brad Ziegler in a trade-deadline deal with Arizona. "I started looking for pitches in the zone, and I got willing to take strikes out of the zone.

"It just kind of clicked."

Kind of like his opportunity in Oakland.

If a deadline deal with Boston (right-hander Rich Harden for first base prospect Lars Anderson) had been completed, the A's probably wouldn't have traded for Allen. The A's still have some decisions to make about the pecking order of their first base prospects (Allen and his former White Sox roommate Chris Carter, who hit 31 home runs last season at Triple-A Sacramento).

By 2008, Allen was ranked as the sixth-best prospect in the farm system of the White Sox. In 2009, he made his major-league debut with Arizona, hit four homers in 32 games and got some major-league hazing.

As the story goes, left-handed pitcher Doug Davis made Allen dress in an orange jumpsuit with a prisoner number on the back. The plan was to drop off Allen a couple blocks from the Houston hotel and see what high jinks ensued.

"It was raining that particular day, so I just got off the bus and walked into the hotel and up to my room," Allen said. "It wasn't that bad."

But the hunky-dory story didn't continue in Arizona. In spotty playing time this season, Allen hit .172 with the Diamondbacks and was passed in the decision makers' minds by prospect Paul Goldschmidt.

Still, talent recognizes talent.

"As soon as we got him (in Oakland), I got calls from Chris Young and Justin Upton," said Melvin, the Diamondbacks' former manager. "They said, 'You're going to love this guy.' "

The praise has to come from others, because Allen isn't boastful. If the taciturn giant isn't watching or playing baseball on Sundays, he can often be found quietly watching or playing golf.

Don't worry. He plays golf right-handed - so as not to screw with his left-handed baseball stroke.

"He's very quiet and respectful," Melvin said. "Once he gets more comfortable, we'll see the real guy come out, but I don't think you'll ever see him run his mouth a whole lot."

But they'll be talking about him in Montgomery.

### **Recker getting call**

Anthony Recker has never known if he's in the A's plans. After all, he isn't on the 40-man roster and he'll be 28 next week.

But today, Recker will be called up to the big leagues for the first time.

Recker had been holding out hope the A's might bring him up when Triple-A Sacramento's season ends next month.

"That's when I thought I might have a shot," he said. "To come up in August - it's really cool. Unexpected."

Recker is from Catasauqua, Pa., and he expects numerous friends and family to head to New York for the series that opens tonight.

The A's will need to make a corresponding move to get Recker on the 40-man roster. Oakland officially announced that backup catcher Landon Powell had been sent to Sacramento on Monday, as previously reported by The Chronicle.

### **Willinghams working to bring help to hometown**

#### **A's outfielder and wife assisting tornado-stricken Alabama**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Committed to giving back to the community where they return every offseason, A's outfielder Josh Willingham and his wife, Ginger, have made a dedicated effort to aide those surrounding their home in Florence, Ala.

At the moment, the couple, who created the Josh Willingham Foundation, is providing disaster relief for the victims of April's devastating tornados across northwest Alabama.

Less than a week after the onset of the storms, Ginger was heavily involved in hands-on work and helped people whose homes were destroyed by the disaster. Meanwhile, Josh was back in the Bay Area doing his part, organizing plans to help financially.

Along with thousands of dollars in donations from the A's, the Willinghams have been collecting donations through the foundation's website, with 100 percent of funds going toward those with immediate needs and to help with long-term recovery and rebuilding efforts.

The continued response to their efforts, Josh said, has been tremendous.

"Absolutely unbelievable," he said. "We're helping people who essentially lost everything."

Willingham's now two-year-old foundation has also provided the means for helping underprivileged children. Its future endeavors have not yet been determined, but Josh and Ginger are willing to offer the benefits of the charity to wherever help is needed.

"This is our way of giving back to the community," he said. "Not everyone has the chance to do what we're doing, so it's nice to be able to take advantage of our situation and help as many people as possible along the way."

#### **A's Matsui enjoys hot streak after his miserable first half**

Eric Gilmore, Sacramento Bee

OAKLAND – The hot streak began innocently enough for Hideki Matsui. He went 1 for 4 on July 15 against the Los Angeles Angels in the A's first game after the All-Star break, raising his average from .209 to .210.

Matsui had a hit in each of his next two games in that series at home, then opened a two-game set at Detroit on July 19 with two hits. The next night, he went 3 for 4 and made history. He slammed the 500th home run of his pro career, which spans 10 seasons in the Japanese pro leagues and nine in the major leagues.

Four days later at Yankee Stadium, he capped a three-game set by going 5 for 5 against his former team.

The hitting machine known as "Godzilla" was officially back. Since the All-Star break, Matsui has hit .384 and raised his batting average 52 points to .263.

Although he has cooled a bit recently, he put on a post-break batting show that his A's teammates and manager Bob Melvin won't soon forget.

It was a blast from his past in New York, where he had more than 100 RBIs four times, hit higher than .300 twice and was named the World Series MVP in 2009 after hitting .615 with three home runs and eight RBIs.

"It's something I've never seen before, someone just locked in for a month," A's outfielder David DeJesus said. "I'm so happy for him. The start was tough for him, but he's a great hitter, and we rely on him for a lot of offense. He's been coming through for us."

Melvin said the only time he's seen a hitter as hot as Matsui was in 2004 when he managed Seattle Mariners outfielder Ichiro Suzuki, who had a major league record 262 hits while batting .372.

"Those are probably the two most impressive that I've been around," Melvin said. "It's fun to watch every day, and the players get a kick out of it, too. He took an '0-for' the other day and we were all shocked."

Matsui, through his long-time interpreter, Roger Kahlon, said he "can't really pinpoint" one main reason for his turnaround.

"I haven't really changed my approach," Matsui said. "I think it's just the daily adjustments that you continually do that I think are starting to come alive in game situations."

There also was the managerial adjustment that the A's made, firing Bob Geren and hiring Melvin on June 9. Although Matsui didn't bust out of his slump immediately after Melvin arrived, he said the new manager has played a significant role in his hot streak.

After his slow start, Matsui didn't know from day to day whether Geren would put him in the lineup. He was often benched against left-handed pitchers, despite his track record of hitting well against left-handers.

When Melvin arrived, he made it clear that Matsui would remain in the lineup as a middle-of-the-order hitter unless he needed a day off to rest. He also began using Matsui occasionally in the outfield, giving him a change from his job as designated hitter and a chance to play defense, which has often helped him be more relaxed at the plate.

"I feel like he's helped me in many ways," Matsui said of Melvin. "Just the fact that playing every day really means that the support is there and the expectations are there.

"I've always played with those types of expectations, so in that sense I feel like I'm my usual self. To have the opportunity to play the outfield I think helps in many ways as well."

About 15 members of the Japanese media cover Matsui's games with the A's at home and on the road. According to Bob Rose, the A's director of public relations, about 50 Japanese media members had credentials for A's spring training games.

Pitcher Gio Gonzalez, who has a locker next to Matsui's in the A's clubhouse, said he's been impressed by how accommodating Matsui is to media members from Japan and the United States and how easygoing he is for such an international sports star.

"When he came over here, you expected, 'Wow, watch out, get out of his way,' all that stuff, but he's just unbelievable," Gonzalez said. "As a person, as a player, as a locker mate, too, he's unbelievable. Nothing bothers him. He's super-polite. Just one class act."

Matsui, 37, has been in the spotlight since he was a legendary high school star in Japan, said Kahlon, who was born and raised in that country and is in his ninth year as Matsui's interpreter.

"He really handles it with grace," Kahlon said. "He knows that it's part of your responsibility."

Matsui said the reporters who follow him play "a very important role" because they "ultimately bring the message" to his fans.

"I take it positively because the fact that there's this many media means there's that many fans that still are supporting me and wanting to know what's going on," Matsui said. "So in that sense it's quite an honor to have that kind of attention."

Matsui signed a one-year contract with the A's, and as he heated up at the plate, speculation grew that he'd be sent to a contender at the non-waiver trade deadline. That didn't happen, but he reportedly cleared waivers recently, making him eligible to be dealt if the A's get an offer they like.

Matsui said he didn't spend any time thinking about a possible trade as the deadline approached.

"My mind was really focused on whatever I needed to do for this team," Matsui said. "I wasn't really placing my thoughts on anything else. Once I signed with this team, this was where I was committed to."

Melvin has said he'd like to have Matsui back next season if he's still the manager.

"He's been on fire for us," Gonzalez said. "Every time we need an extra hit or run, he's there to lean on."

### **Brad's Pitch**

#### **Why an A-list actor was willing to go to bat for *Moneyball* - an adventure story about sabermetrics.**

By Mark Harris, New York Magazine, 8/21/2011-

Movies and baseball marry well for a reason. They both start with a pitch, they both involve contentious teams and intense efforts that lead to more strikeouts than home runs, and they're both overseen by people who believe that if you work the numbers hard enough, you can always find a way to win.

One more thing they share: The closer we get to fall, the more we root for long shots. And *Moneyball*, which opens September 23, is one such underdog. Michael Lewis's 2003 book focused on Billy Beane, the general manager of the then-impooverished Oakland A's, who used a kind of quantitative analysis known as sabermetrics to create a winning team and, more miraculously, to combat the huge payroll inequities between baseball's richest and poorest organizations. Beane's quixotic attempts to reform a hidebound system and turn a ragtag starting lineup of last-chancers into champions forms *Moneyball's* heart. But consider that the above summary hinges on words like *sabermetrics* and *payroll inequities*, and you begin to understand why even with the dogged support of Brad Pitt *Moneyball* took nearly a decade, three directors, three writers, an almost complete recasting, and a public collapse before it got made. There were some hard days, says Pitt. By which he means years.

It didn't start out that way. *Moneyball* was a quick sell to Hollywood when it was first published, back when every studio still wanted to be in the indie-style movie business. Producer Rachael Horovitz, who snatched up the rights in 2003, had had enough experience in studio trenches to feel instant kinship with a book subtitled *The Art of Winning an Unfair Game*. I thoroughly related to the themes of starting over, reinvention, trusting in yourself to think and act differently, she recalls. And in Beane she saw a fantastic movie character a burned-out baseball prodigy who'd flamed out early and unimpressively and who was now, in middle age, determined to make a mark on the game he loved.

But there were problems, beginning at the source. Lewis's book is less a narrative than a riveting Gladwellian case study in which a single outlier occasions a series of meditations on the risk-averse institution of baseball. This is not something that screams adaptation, Pitt says, citing the difficulty of making a movie whose front window is dressed with economics and science and math. You can't simply hack away all the nuances to reboot the story as an inspirational sports weepie the way, for instance, the adapters of Lewis's *The Blind Side* did; *Moneyball's* nuances are its narrative.

Sports movies work when they transcend the sport they're about and become metaphoric, says Michael De Luca, who joined Horovitz as producer early on, soon after leaving his position as president of production at DreamWorks. For him as for nearly everyone involved at that stage Beane's David-and-Goliath story already functioned as a metaphor, for his own life in Hollywood. The notion that occasionally you get revolutionary thinkers who speak truth to conventional wisdom well, as a former production head subject to other people's green-light decisions, that's a fantasy I had continued to indulge! De Luca exclaims. I also loved the idea that your price isn't always your value. Billy Beane gave a lot of players other teams had discarded an opportunity to prove their real worth. Those themes really made me feel there was a movie in this.

Pitt came aboard in late 2007 to play Beane and quickly became obsessed as well. I saw it as a story about justice, he says. How is a team with a \$40 million payroll going to compete with a team with a \$140 million payroll and another \$100 million in reserves? Any talent they grow is going to get poached by the rich teams. That became really interesting to me.

For Pitt, *Moneyball* also evoked films about process, particularly the seventies movies he loved. I thought of *The Conversation*: How do you tap a phone? Or *Thief*, with Jimmy Caan: How do you crack a safe? Pitt says. And I saw in it a guy who had an obsessive quality like Popeye Doyle, from *The French Connection*. I don't really like big character-arc epiphanies. What I most loved about those seventies films is that the characters were the same at the end as at the

beginning. It was the world around them that had shifted. In Beane, he says, I saw a man going up against a system, questioning the reasoning: Just because we've been doing it this way for 150 years, why shouldn't we change it?

The involvement of an A-list star instantly made *Moneyball* a film that could actually get produced, and led, inevitably, to some personnel changes. Neophyte screenwriter Stan Chervin was replaced by veteran A-lister Steven Zaillian, whose experience adapting nonfiction included *Schindler's List* and *A Civil Action*. And *Devil Wears Prada* director David Frankel departed in 2008, making room for Steven Soderbergh, who had worked with Pitt three times before.

But this wasn't going to be *Ocean's Fourteen*: Soderbergh was just coming off the massive eccentric historical docudrama *Che* and was eager to continue playing with the gray area between drama and factual authenticity. Where Pitt saw a story about justice, Soderbergh saw one about Justice specifically, outfielder David Justice, who, along with former major-leaguer Scott Hatteberg, was enlisted to play himself. Art Howe, the longtime A's manager and occasional Beane antagonist, was wooed as well. Other big names, including Lenny Dykstra and Darryl Strawberry, were drafted for interview segments intended to contextualize the dramatic action device one insider calls Steven's *Reds* thing, meaning the Warren Beatty movie, not the Cincinnati baseball team. Soderbergh also cast the lanky, sharp-minded alt-comedian Demetri Martin as *Moneyball's* second lead, the semi-fictionalized Peter Brand, a nerdy, tightly wound young number-cruncher and baseball savant who serves as Beane's more freewheeling adviser.

*Moneyball* appeared to be on the fast track to production. But instead, in what Pitt calls definitely a dark week in June 2009, it derailed. It's likely to take a few years of cooling temperatures before the full backstory is revealed, but what went public was bad enough: Just days before production, Sony chairman Amy Pascal slammed on the brakes. Reportedly, Sony was upset that the film had veered in an alarmingly documentary-ish direction, although how surprised anyone involved could have been remains unclear, since the planned use of real-life players was already public knowledge and several documentary segments had been filmed. Sony, in a paroxysm of postcrash panic, may also have balked at the \$57 million budget, low by blockbuster standards but high for a prestige fall movie (ultimately, the film cost about that much anyway). In any case, when the dust cleared, Soderbergh was out, an experience so disheartening that his recent threats to retire become a little more understandable. And the film itself retained a pulse only because of Pitt's support. I just couldn't let it go, he says.

At that point, De Luca, who had been caught flat-footed by the bad news while honeymooning, threw the bat-signal up for Scott Rudin and Aaron Sorkin, with whom he'd just worked on the yet-unreleased *Social Network*. Sorkin added humor to the script by punching up the dialogue, and also enriched Beane's relationship with his ex-wife and especially with his young daughter, an arc that plays out straight through the completed film. But the film was still missing a director. On the recommendation of his friend Catherine Keener, Pitt met with Bennett Miller, who had won an Oscar nomination for 2005's *Capote* but hadn't made a movie since. I saw *Moneyball* as the story of one guy, in his mid-forties, who is beginning to question decisions he made when he was younger, says Miller, 44. There's a line in the book about Billy wondering if there was another life he was supposed to be living. To me it's a classic search-for-wisdom story about a character who's dislocated from his life, trying to find his way. It's not a baseball movie or a business movie or a movie about stats. It's a wisdom story with an unlikely setting.

But to make that kind of movie, Miller felt, the script still needed work. (In the end, it was credited to Zaillian and Sorkin, with story credit to Chervin.) Mostly, it was a matter of remembering the thing I wanted to protect and always asking myself how every element served it, he says, noting that the work continued throughout prep, as we were shooting, and even as we were cutting. Miller, a methodical, low-key director who tends to channel his nervous energies into attention to detail, was wary about satisfying so many big interests there was Major League Baseball, which had demanded certain script alterations in exchange for its cooperation, a big star, and a studio, and so many drafts, and a book that's chock-full of interesting nuggets but has no real narrative. How does it become a movie? he asked. It sort of had to die and be reborn as something new.

That meant jettisoning the interview footage as well as the notion of real-life baseball figures playing themselves. Instead, Miller cast *Parks and Recreation's* Chris Pratt as Hatteberg, an injured catcher whom Beane reincarnated as a first-baseman, and got his *Capote* star Philip Seymour Hoffman to play Howe. But his most surprising choice was for Peter Brand. Demetri

Martin was a casualty of Soderbergh's departure (fittingly, you can see him in Soderbergh's *Contagion* next month). His replacement: Jonah Hill, the explosively funny, trash-talking star of *Superbad*, and absolutely nobody's idea of a buttoned-up brainiac whose expressive range seems to be governed by a giant, invisible mute button.

But Miller knew Hill socially and felt he could thrive in the role. Jonah is brilliant in a way that might not be evident from the roles he's played before, Miller says. He has a near-encyclopedic knowledge of movies. And I also knew he was interested in breaking out of whatever box he was in. For his part, Hill felt he'd found a project and a director that might allow him to grow up a little. A lot of times you're funny as a way of not having to say anything real about yourself. Bennett knew that there are whole days when I'm not funny at all, he says, laughing. And this character has sweet moments, but no jokes or wisecracks.

Jonah's a revelation in this thing he's a study in reserve, says Pitt, who saw Hill's potential in his earlier films. I think the most interesting work that's been going on in the last couple of years is what the comedy guys have been doing. Guys like Jonah and Russell Brand and [Seth] Rogen and a few others they picked up on an irreverence that started with Adam Sandler and continued with Will Ferrell, but they've been grounding it in a kind of pathos and humanity. I find it really strong work.

Hill had tested his ability to play a less overtly comic role in the indie *Cyrus*, and he loved this part because, like everybody else involved, it reminded him of Hollywood. It wasn't the baseball or the numbers I connected to, he says. It was the obsessiveness. Bennett said that the way we talk about actors and roles and movies with each other is the way my character should be able to talk to Brad's about baseball. It's what we do all the time about movies we analytically shit-talk everybody's strengths and weaknesses! Everybody I know does that. So that was my in.

For the movie, as for Beane, the triumph may be that an innovative idea got a fair chance to play out at all. I think a documentary about the making of *Moneyball* would in some ways have been the perfect complement to the movie itself, says Miller wryly. It's not a good-versus-evil story. And when you get into the shoes of everybody who exercised some kind of will over the creative process, it's hard not to sympathize. But yes, I did have some moments of living scenes that felt like they were right from the movie.

I don't mind the struggle as long as the work amounts to something in the end, says Pitt, who ended up with a producer credit as well. It was really Bennett who finally cracked it. His anxiety not to do anything conventional ultimately formed what this would be. At the same time, everyone involved in *Moneyball*, at every stage, was very passionate. But what most everyone gleaned from the book was very different. I look at the movie now, and I feel everyone's fingerprints are on it. It's been well, listen. It's been an interesting process.

## **MINOR LEAGUE NEWS**

### **Cats' magic number 1, can clinch Tuesday**

By Zeke Fine / Sacramento River Cats

Sacramento can clinch its 10th division title in 12 seasons Tuesday night after topping host Tucson 11-9 on Monday night. Both teams scored one run in the first inning, with the River Cats cashing in on an RBI double by Kevin Kouzmanoff that drove in Adrian Cardenas. Kouzmanoff went 3-for-4 with two doubles, two RBIs, two runs scored and one walk in the game.

The River Cats regained the lead in the top of the fourth inning when Chris Carter blasted his 13th home run of the season over the left-field fence, making the score 2-1. He hit his 14th later in the game and was 2-for-5 on the night with two home runs, four RBIs and two runs.

The hits kept falling for Sacramento in the fifth inning, as they scored four runs in the top of the inning. With men on first and second and two outs, Kevin Kouzmanoff drove in his second run of the game on a line-drive single to center field. Carter followed with a three-run shot to left, giving the River Cats a 6-1 lead.



The Padres struck back in the fifth inning, narrowing the lead to two by scoring three runs in the inning and knocking River Cats starter Josh Outman out of the game. Outman (8-3, 3.91) picked up the win for the River Cats. He threw 5.0 innings and allowed four runs (all earned) on six hits and one walk while striking out seven.

Michael Benacka relieved Outman in the sixth, and gave up one run in his first inning of work, narrowing the River Cat lead to one and making the score 6-5. He threw a scoreless seventh inning, giving Benacka a line of 2.0 innings with one unearned run on two hits and one walk.

Sacramento blew the game open in seventh and eighth, scoring five runs between the two innings. Adrian Cardenas drove in Joel Galarraga on a sacrifice fly, and Jermaine Mitchell scored on a balk by Tucson reliever Greg Burke. Cardenas went 2-for-4 at the plate with a double, an RBI, and two runs scored for Sacramento.

Michael Taylor drove in the final run of the seventh inning on a single between the third baseman and shortstop to score Kevin Kouzmanoff. In the eighth inning, Jermaine Mitchell hit a two-run shot to right field, his third home run of the season, bringing the score to 11-5.

Tucson scored two runs off of Sacramento reliever Vinnie Chulk in the eighth inning, closing the gap to 11-7. Chulk pitched 1.0 inning, allowing two earned runs on three hits.

Jerry Blevins came in to shut the door in the ninth inning for the River Cats, but ran into some trouble. Blevins gave up two earned runs on two hits and one walk while striking out one to give the River Cats an 11-9 victory.

The win, along with the 6-4 loss of Las Vegas to Fresno, brings the team's magic number to 1 (one River Cats victory or Las Vegas loss will clinch the River Cats a Pacific South Division championship). Sacramento will look to clinch the playoff birth Tuesday night in Tucson at 7 p.m.

### **Errors and Mother Nature Cost Hounds**

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

Mother Nature threw a monkey wrench into the RockHounds' travel (see "Rocky Town," below), as rain delayed the start of the final game of the series in Springdale, Arkansas by nearly two hours (1-hour, 47-minutes).

The RockHounds then did a little wrench-tossing of their own, committing four errors in a 7-6 loss to Northwest Arkansas.

Adam Heether hit a 2-run home run in the second, and the 'Hounds led, 2-0.

Over the next two innings, however, Northwest Arkansas would score six runs ... just two of them earned ... with four RockHounds errors aiding the Naturals' cause.

A Wil Myers double in the fourth extended the margin to 7-2, but the 'Hounds rallied back. Grant Green ripped a 2-in, bases-loaded double in the fifth, and Michael Spina followed with a 2-run single later in the inning, drawing the 'Hounds to within 7-6. The 'Hounds had a couple of threats in the sixth and seventh, but could not get the equalizer.

Blaine Hardy went the last three innings for another "old school" save, and the Naturals took the series, 2-games-to-1.

- Congratulations to Anthony Recker! The former RockHounds catcher has been promoted to the Major Leagues, and will serve as Oakland's back-up catcher, behind fellow RockHounds alum Kurt Suzuki.

- In the South Division: San Antonio and Frisco were winners, with the Missions winning their 50th home game of the year at Nelson Wolff Stadium in the Alamo City. The Missions continue their drive toward a sweep of the first and second half titles in the South, leading both the RockHounds and Frisco by eight games, with just 14 games remaining in the season. If the Missions complete the sweep, Frisco would advance to the playoffs as the wild card entry.

**ROCKY TOWN** - The 'Hounds will have a challenging "road back to Rocky Town," with Monday's series finale' at Springdale, Arkansas pushed back two hours by a rain delay. After an all-night bus ride, the 'Hounds will arrive back in West Texas early Tuesday afternoon, then host the Corpus Christi Hooks a few hours later ... you gotta love minor league baseball!

Tuesday's game is the opener of the 2011 season's final home stand. Check the web site for special events (Thirsty Thursday, fireworks, team photos and more) and we look forward to seeing you at Rocky Town! Check out all the details at [www.midlandrockhounds.org](http://www.midlandrockhounds.org).

### **Bees Bounce Back For 5-3 Win**

By Jon Versteeg, Burlington Bees

BURLINGTON, IA -The Burlington Bees (23-33) took advantage of eight walks to score five runs on just four hits and earn a 5-3 win over the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers (23-33) before 991 fans at Community Field on Monday night.

Burlington pushed three runs across home plate in the second inning. DH A.J. Kirby-Jones (1-3) led off the inning with a single and was forced out at second base when SS Yordy Cabrera (0-4) reached on a fielder's choice. C John Nester (0-2) walked to push Cabrera to second base. LF Royce Consigli (1-3) singled to score Cabrera.

3B Wade Kirkland (0-1) reached on an error by Wisconsin LF Chad Stang. CF Tyreece House (1-1) followed with an RBI Single to score Kirkland for a 3-0 lead.

Wisconsin scored a single run in the third inning to make it 3-1.

The Bees scored two runs in the fourth inning to make it 5-1. Consigli and Kirkland worked back-to-back walks. House was hit by a pitch to load the bases. RF Jose Crisotomo (0-4) reached on a fielder's choice and House was forced out at second base. Consigli scored from third base.

The Bees executed a double steal with Crisotomo stealing second base and Kirkland scoring from third base for a 5-1 lead.

The Bees and Timber Rattlers finish their series on Tuesday night at 6:30 p.m. It's "Hawkeye Two-For-Tuesday." Fans will receive two for one general admission tickets when they present the Hawkeye Newspaper ad to the box office upon purchase of tickets. It's also another KRAFT Singles Tuesday Night Ticket Offer. When you present your KRAFT Singles Wrapper, you can get a two-for-one ticket offer! Exclusions apply! RHP Jimmy Nelson (6-8, 4.54) gets the start for Wisconsin against RHP Nate Long (7-6, 3.22) for Burlington. Pre-game coverage starts at 6:10 p.m. on AM 1490 KBUR and online at gobees.com.

### **Lake Monsters Fall 4-2 On Monday**

By Paul Stanfield / Vermont Lake Monsters

BURLINGTON, VT --- Jonathan Kosco went 3-for-4 with an RBI single and RBI double to lead the Hudson Valley Renegades to a 4-2 New York-Penn League victory over the Vermont Lake Monsters on Monday night at historic Centennial Field.

The Renegades took a 1-0 lead in the second inning on a Kosco's RBI infield single to third base scoring Alejandro Segovia. Vermont was able to tie the game at one in the bottom of the third on a Nick Rickles' bases loaded forceout at second base that scored Michael Fabiaschi, who had led off the inning with a single.

With two outs and no one on in the fourth, Hudson Valley put together three straight hits off Vermont starter J.C. Menna to score two runs. Leonardo Reginatto got the rally started with a single, stole second and scored on a Cesar Guillen RBI single before Kosco's RBI double plated Guillen for a 3-1 lead.

Vermont loaded the bases with one out in the bottom of the fifth, but reliever Ryan Carpenter struckout Rickles and Chad Oberacker to end the threat. Carpenter (2-1) then struckout the side in the sixth to earn his second win of the season.

The Renegades added an insurance run in the seventh as Kosco singled, stole second and scored on a two-out fielding error by second baseman Chih-Fang Pan. Vermont got the run back in the bottom of the eighth on a Dusty Robinson solo home run, his fourth homer of the season for the Lake Monsters.

Robinson and Aaron Shipman both had two hits for Vermont, while Sean Jamieson went 3-for-5 with a double. Rickles and Pan both went hitless, snapping their hitting streaks of 14 and 13 games respectively. Menna (2-7) allowed three runs on five hits with three walks and three strikeouts over four innings for the loss.

Despite the loss, Vermont (32-29) remains 1 1/2 games in front of the Connecticut Tigers for first-place in the Stedler Division. The Lake Monsters head out on a five roadtrip with three games at Hudson Valley before a two-game series at Connecticut. Vermont returns to Centennial Field on Sunday to face the Tigers in the completion of a suspended game from June and then the regularly-scheduled game.