

A's News Clips, Monday, August 29, 2011

Brandon Allen making bid to own A's first base position

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

For someone drawing so much attention with his play, Brandon Allen's quiet nature deflects the spotlight when he's off the field.

Ask him a question, and you'll be leaning in just to hear the response.

"Half the time he talks I have to say, 'Speak up a little bit, I can't hear you,' " A's third baseman Scott Sizemore joked about his teammate.

But Allen, 25, is making a loud statement with his performance since taking over as the A's first baseman Aug. 13.

He's hitting .327 in 15 games since being recalled from Triple-A Sacramento and has cranked out 10 extra-base hits -- including three homers -- in 55 at-bats.

It's premature to draw conclusions, but if Allen can consistently approach his numbers of the past two weeks, the A's might have their answer at first base, a position that's been an offensive black hole since Nick Swisher was traded before the 2008 season.

From 2008-10, A's first basemen hit a combined .242 while averaging just 13 home runs and 67 RBIs per season -- hardly acceptable at a position traditionally counted on for offense.

At the very least, Allen appears to have moved ahead of Chris Carter in the pecking order of A's first base prospects, though it's possible Carter, 24, could wind up a designated hitter.

"I just go out there and play every day and hopefully help the team any way I can," Allen said. "The future will take care of itself."

The A's acquired him and reliever Jordan Norberto from Arizona in exchange for middle reliever Brad Ziegler on July 31. Allen's play has been an eye-opener considering his stock had fallen with the Diamondbacks as a top prospect.

Drafted by the White Sox out of Montgomery (Texas) High in 2004, Allen was dealt in July 2009 to Arizona for right-hander Tony Pena, and he made his major league debut in August 2009.

In two stints with the Diamondbacks, Allen hit .221 with five homers and 20 RBIs in 54 games. He struck out 60 times in 149 at-bats.

"I think at times he put some pressure on himself trying to prove that he (deserved) to be there," said Brett Butler, the former Giant who manages Arizona's Triple-A Reno squad.

However, Allen's attitude scored points.

"There's not a harder worker on the field and not a better man of character and integrity," Butler said.

At 6-foot-2 and 235 pounds, Allen's biggest asset is the power in his left-handed stroke. On Tuesday, he became just the second player to hit a ball into the third deck in right field at the new Yankee Stadium.

But A's manager Bob Melvin raves about Allen's athleticism and speed for his size.

Significantly, Allen also has displayed a better glove than Carter at first.

"I just like watching him hit," A's left fielder Josh Willingham said. "He's not up there trying to launch the ball. He's taking what pitchers are giving him and hitting the ball all over the field."

But Allen has 16 strikeouts in 55 at-bats with Oakland, and he struck out 124 times or more in three of his minor league seasons.

"To get to the big leagues is one thing. To stay there is a different animal," Butler said. "Do I think he has the ability to do that? Yes I do. Will he do that? To be determined."

After pep talk, Suzuki is starting to get hot

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

CLEVELAND -- - After an excruciatingly slow start to the season, **Kurt Suzuki** is starting to hit a bit more like his usual self.

Over his past 37 games, the A's catcher is hitting .277. And after doubling in Game 1 at Fenway Park on Saturday, he is 6 for his past 16.

For that recent uptick, Suzuki credited former A's teammate **Eric Chavez**, who gave Suzuki a pep talk when Oakland played at Yankee Stadium last week.

"Chavvy has seen me play ever since I first got called up," Suzuki said. "So he talked to me about the mental aspect of the game and making sure my approach and timing are good. But it was more about the mental part; believe in yourself, know yourself."

Suzuki is used to having an older player available in the clubhouse, but with Chavez leaving after last season and second baseman **Mark Ellis** getting traded this summer, Suzuki is now the A's player with the longest uninterrupted tenure.

"It's a learning process," Suzuki said. "Hopefully one day, I can be a player like Chavvy or Ellie, a guy who can help the younger players, but I'm still learning."

Doubleheader reminders: The A's scored 36 runs in the first four games on the trip, then two runs total in the two games Saturday.

"I don't know if the conditions got to us, but that's no excuse," manager **Bob Melvin** said after the two rain-soaked games. "We really couldn't get anything going all day ... or night."

-- Catcher **Anthony Recker** wasn't sure his first major-league hit would wind up counting during Game 2.

There was a one-hour rain delay hit before the game was an official five innings, and if the game had been called, the hit would have been erased.

"A couple of guys in the dugout when the delay started said, 'Congratulations on your first hit ... maybe,' " Recker said with a smile once the game was in the books.

-- Oakland played four nine-inning games Thursday through Saturday, and the total playing time was 14 hours, 19 minutes, or 3 hours, 35 minutes per game. The three days included four rain delays totaling 5 hours, 29 minutes.

-- The A's were shut out 3-0 in the second game Saturday, the third time the A's have been shut out in the past 10 games, and the 14th this season. That's the most by an Oakland team since 1991.

-- The A's bus arrived at Fenway Park at 9:15 a.m. Saturday, and left Fenway Park at 11:45 p.m. The players got to the hotel in Cleveland at 3 a.m. Sunday.

A'S LEADING OFF

Move coming: The A's have six starters after recalling Graham Godfrey, so the team is likely to send out Godfrey and call up a reliever - possibly a pitcher not on the 40-man roster.

A's look to put hitting shoes back on vs. Tribe

By Chris Vannini / MLB.com

Saturday was a long day for the Athletics.

After enduring a doubleheader against the Red Sox with multiple rain delays at Fenway Park, the A's spent Sunday on an off-day en route to Cleveland. The rain doused the recently hot Oakland offense, but the A's are hoping to resume swinging the bat well when they take on the Indians for a four-game series, beginning Monday.

The A's have scored 39 runs over the past six games.

"We've been playing good offensively, and we've just been trying to put everything together," said rookie second baseman Jemile Weeks. "It's good for the confidence, and it helps you as an individual, feeling like you need to go out there and prove something to help out the team."

In the Indians, the A's will face a team that has been reeling in the past week-plus -- having lost seven of its past 10 -- but is still hoping to challenge for a division crown. While Oakland is far behind the leaders in the American League West, the club can spoil the hopes of opponents with its bats.

"The offense has come alive and stayed consistent to this point," A's manager Bob Melvin said, "and it certainly makes things easier on everybody when they're scoring some runs."

Indians: Huff on the hill

Left-hander David Huff takes the mound for the Indians on Monday, looking to rebound from his shortest start of the season. In that outing, Huff lasted only 2 1/3 innings against Detroit, allowing five runs on four hits and four walks. Before that hiccup, Huff had been solid, allowing only one earned run in three starts (17 2/3 innings). The 27-year-old faced Oakland twice in his rookie year of 2009, going 1-1 with a 3.75 ERA.

- Cleveland's bullpen has a 1.68 ERA in its past 18 games.

Athletics: Pitching woes

- After leading the American League in ERA before the All-Star break, Oakland's pitching staff hasn't been able to find the same success.

Entering Saturday, the A's ERA since the break was 5.03, which was third-worst in the AL and Majors.

- Monday's starter, Brandon McCarthy, is 6-1 in his past eight starts, posting a 4.01 ERA in that span.

- Oakland has hit 28 home runs in August and 10 through the first six games of the road trip. The last time the club had 28 homers in a month was August 2009.

Worth noting

- The A's went 1-2 against the Indians in a May series.
- Saturday's doubleheader was the fifth in the Oakland history of the Athletics.

Irene will be felt for weeks in MLB

Jon Morosi, foxsports.com

Burke Badenhop, the well-read **Marlins** reliever, has developed an affinity for the FX sitcom "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia." With his team having played one game in the past four days, he's had plenty of time to catch up on episodes.

In fact, Badenhop spent part of his Sunday watching a DVD of the show while at his team's hotel . . . in Philadelphia.

No, the Marlins didn't have a game.

But yes, he saw the sun.

So went one of the many ironies of a weekend that saw Hurricane Irene turn the Major League Baseball schedule into a tempest of a different sort.

Typically, the big leagues play a full slate every Saturday and Sunday. Not this weekend. Irene's gales brought on scheduling machinations in four series — Marlins-Phillies, **Yankees**-Orioles, Braves-Mets, and A's-Red Sox — and the effects will be felt for weeks to come.

For one thing, the Yankees are irritated, and not only because New York is waterlogged. Several members of the organization — including manager Joe Girardi and union representative **Curtis Granderson** — publicly questioned the Orioles' decision to schedule a makeup game on Sept. 8. The Yankees would have preferred that the Orioles squeeze in a doubleheader on Friday, before the storm hit. (The **Red Sox** took a similar step in their series with Oakland over the weekend.)

Orioles manager Buck Showalter didn't appreciate the criticism, telling the Baltimore Sun that the Yankees' remarks were "a little disrespectful" to former Baltimore pitcher and executive Mike Flanagan, who died in a suicide last week.

My take: The Orioles deserve a break here. The organization was (a) grieving and (b) planning a tribute to Flanagan for Friday's game while Irene approached. They were the home team. They have tickets to sell, (fewer) fans to please and a business to run. The Yankees' September schedule, while admittedly bereft of off days, isn't of paramount concern to the **Baltimore Orioles**. Nor should it be.

The Orioles sought and received the approval of MLB and the players' union for the Sept. 8 makeup date. They have even announced a start time (1:05 p.m.). So, it's going to happen, and now the Yankees need to deal with it. I have a suspicion that they are going to be OK. They are a veritable lock to reach the postseason. They will have an expanded roster at their disposal beginning this Thursday. And we are told that their farm system is teeming with top-end talent, no? So let them play.

If anything, the Yankees' objection underscores how sensitive teams are when it comes to their schedules. This is particularly true of contenders. Girardi, whose desire to control variables is nearly (but not quite) Showalterian, has most certainly sketched out his pitching rotation from here until late October. He must also map out the DH days for **Derek Jeter**, A-Rod and friends. An extra game wedged into September spills coffee all over the drafting board.

Remember: Girardi has a degree in industrial engineering from Northwestern. He values his decimal points. He knows that one game could be the difference between winning the American League East and entering the postseason as the wild card. (But I would advise him not to worry too much. If the Red Sox wish to win the division and face Justin Verlander in the first round, let them.)

Oddly enough, other teams might actually benefit from the respite that rode in with Irene's wrath. Take the **Atlanta Braves**, for example. Like the Yankees, they are running second in their division yet are all but assured of at least winning the wild card.

And they could actually use this second All-Star break.

The Braves have three relievers — **Jonny Venters**, **Craig Kimbrel** and Eric O'Flaherty — who have each made at least 63 appearances this year. That is the most of any contender in the big leagues. **Brian McCann**, **Chipper Jones**, **Jason Heyward**, **Martin Prado** and others have battled injuries this year.

So, this wasn't a bad time to have three consecutive days off. The Braves were rained out Saturday and Sunday in New York and will resume play Tuesday at home against Washington.

Similarly, the **Phillies** could be a fresher team in October because their veteran position players have taken the field just once since Wednesday.

"With the nicks you get during the season, it's nice to have three days to let guys heal up," Braves reliever **George Sherrill** said. "But it's like how you hate to see somebody get hurt when you're the guy who gets called up. It's the same thing with this situation. People are losing homes and power and lives. It puts what we do in perspective."

We must also give proper credit to the traveling secretaries of the affected teams. They are baseball's answer to the state emergency management director.

Consider what A's director of team travel Mickey Morabito endured at Fenway Park: With the hurricane arriving in New England on Sunday, the Red Sox wanted to conclude the series with a day-night doubleheader on Saturday. But that, too, was interrupted by rain — so often, in fact, that the Red Sox informed Morabito of the possibility that the A's would need to stay in Boston and play Sunday, after all.

So, Morabito rebooked a block of rooms at the team's Boston hotel. But he had to keep his reservation for Cleveland — which had been adjusted for an arrival on Saturday, not Sunday. And then he waited.

Fortunately, the Red Sox and A's finished 18 innings in just under 11 hours, enabling the A's to arrive in Cleveland on Saturday night.

Actually, at 3 a.m. Sunday.

"You have all these nightmares and logistical challenges," said Morabito, for whom the 1989 World Series earthquake presented the ultimate headache/heartache ordeal. "But as you're solving them, there's a sense of satisfaction."

Morabito, in his 32nd season with the A's, was able to enjoy a well-deserved day off in Cleveland on Sunday. But the work continued in Philadelphia, where Badenhop's Marlins were marooned. They arrived there last Wednesday — one day early, because of Irene's initial threat to *Florida* — but played only one game. As it turned out, the weather might have allowed the Phillies and Marlins to play Sunday. There was only one problem with that: The Phillies were already in Cincinnati, having flown there Saturday as Irene drew near.

As recently as mid-afternoon Sunday, the Marlins had yet to be cleared for their bus trip to New York, where they are set to begin a doubleheader on Monday afternoon. Finally, Marlins traveling secretary Manny Colon received the OK and marshaled the players. They set out for the big and soggy city, but not before settling their hotel bills. As Irene soaked stadiums up and down the East Coast, the Marlins watched enough just-released films to qualify as voters for the Academy Awards.

"I'm all caught up in the movie department," Badenhop said.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Sacramento takes five-game series from Fresno

By Veronika Tafoya / Sacramento River Cats

A home run in the first inning by Jermaine Mitchell followed by a five-run second inning provided the River Cats all the offense needed in a 6-4 win Sunday against the Fresno Grizzlies.

Mitchell's homer was knocked out on the very first at-bat of the game, and pushed his hitting streak to 14 games.

"I've definitely taken a pounding from (the Grizzlies) in the past, so I'm always glad to get something in my first at-bat," said Mitchell, who attributes his hitting streak to being patient at the plate. "I always try to see the ball well, but I've been trying to stop chasing pitcher's pitches and focus on getting the ones that I want."

The momentum from the homer kept rolling into second inning, with five River Cats picking up an RBI, three of which came before the first out. Chris Carter's two-run double gave the Cats a 6-0 lead that lasted for the next three innings.

Starting pitcher Travis Banwart dominated the Grizzlies, allowing only two base runners with one hit and a walk through five innings. Banwart gave up a two-run homer to Edgar Gonzalez in the sixth inning, but would end his outing by taking the win.

Fresno snatched another two runs from reliever Mike Benacka, who took over in the seventh inning. The runs were scored on back-to-back solo home runs blasted by Max Ramirez and Tyler Latorre. It was the eighth time this season the Grizzlies knocked out back-to-back homers, and cut Fresno's deficit to only two runs.

Neither the River Cats nor the Grizzlies would score again in the game, leaving Sacramento to take the series with three consecutive wins.

The Pacific South Division champion River Cats return to Raley Field to start a four-game series against Las Vegas on Monday. Left-hander Carlos Hernandez (7-7, 5.63) will take the mound against right hander Kyle Drabek (4-3, 6.51) at 7:05 p.m.

RoughRiders pounce on RockHounds early for win

Jordan Mason, Midland Reporter-Telegram

Ben Snyder stymied the RockHounds' bats early while Renny Osuna and Davis Stoneburner gave him all the run support he needed in the Frisco RoughRiders' 8-4 win against the Midland RockHounds on Sunday.

Frisco jumped out to an 8-1 lead that the RockHounds closed with a three-run inning in the eighth but ultimately were unable to rally in the ninth.

"We seemed to continue to fight throughout the whole game," RockHounds manager Steve Scarsone said. "It's unfortunate that we fell behind early."

Snyder never let the RockHounds get into a rhythm, allowing just one run on six hits over seven innings, while Osuna and Stoneburner drove in seven RBIs to bury Midland by the seventh.

Frisco (34-29) didn't need either of them to get started in the second, when it scored on a double steal where Engel Beltre beat Mitch Canham's throw to second, then Elio Sarmiento beat Jason Christian's throw home to put Frisco up 1-0.

Later in the inning, Osuna drove Beltre in on a single up the middle that made it 2-0.

It didn't get better for Midland (32-30) in the fourth when Stoneburner crushed an RBI double to deep left center after Beltre reached on a leadoff hit by pitch.

Osuna came up with his second RBI two batters later when he ripped a double down the left field line to put the RoughRiders up 4-1.

"They came out swinging the bats pretty well, got some rallies early," Scarsone said.

Snyder, meanwhile, started the game off with four shutout innings before giving up his only run on an RBI single by Adam Heether that made it 4-1.

"He kept himself from getting into big trouble," Scarsone said. "He did get some big breaks with some of their defense, but that's baseball."

Frisco got going again in the sixth on Osuna's second RBI double, which put them up 5-1.

Stoneburner seemingly put it away in the next inning when he launched a full-count pitch over the left field wall for a three-run homer off Polin Trinidad and an 8-1 lead.

"Great for him," Osuna said. "It was a big homer for that inning."

Midland, though, didn't go easy when, with two men down, it strung together three straight RBI singles in the eighth to cut the lead to 8-4.

But Frisco didn't blink.

"It's part of the game," Osuna said. "That team, they hit so well that you have to play inning by inning."

The RockHounds put a man on with one out in the ninth but saw its next two batters fly out to end the game.

Midland will look to play better in its home finale today when it wraps up its three-game series with Frisco at 6:30.

"We'd like a good showing for the home fans on the last day. They've been very good to us all year," Scarsone said.

The RockHounds' end the season on a seven-game road trip with the regular season finale coming Sept. 5 in Frisco.

Jordan Mason can be reached at jmason@mrt.com

'HOUND BITES: RockHounds starter Gary Daley entered Sunday with an impressive 3-0 record and 1.19 ERA in games against Frisco this season, but saw his string of success end there. The RoughRiders jumped on Daley at Citibank Ballpark as he went five innings and gave up four runs, all earned, on six hits. ... RoughRiders center fielder Engel Beltre had the defensive play of the night Sunday when he robbed Matt Sulentic of an extra-base hit in the bottom of the ninth, sprinting to his right and diving for Sulentic's line drive to make the catch and the second out of the inning.

TODAY'S PROBABLES: The RockHounds will wrap up their 2011 home schedule today at 6:30 p.m. as lefty Anthony Capra (1-6, 5.70) is expected to take the hill. Right hander Carlos Pimentel (6-9, 5.21) is expected to get the start for Frisco.

Choice Grand Slam Lifts Ports to 6-3 Win

Stockton Ports

The Stockton Ports offense figured out the 66ers on Sunday evening as they defeated Inland Empire 6-3 as they inched ever closer to clinching a 2011 playoff berth. The Ports are now just one win away from clinching their fifth playoff berth in the seven years Stockton has been an Athletics affiliate.

Ports pitching held strong on Sunday, limiting the 66ers to just three runs in the game, two of which were charged to Ports starter Dan Straily. Despite giving up two of the three Inland runs, Straily earned the win, his eleventh of the season.

Straily gave up both runs in the second inning, making it appear as though the night might follow in the same fashion as the previous two games: with Inland hitters making Ports pitching pay. Randal Grichuk doubled with one out in the inning, which was followed by a Carlos Ramirez double to score Grichuk. Adam Younger then singled to plate Ramirez for the second run of the inning.

While Straily was able to get out of the inning, things were not always smooth sailing for the righty. Straily gave up a season-tying four walks through 6.0 innings, as well as hitting a batter while striking out just five.

Despite looking like the Ports offense would not be able to give Straily any run support early in the game-they were retired seven straight to start the game, including four strikeouts-the bats came alive in the third inning. The Ports recorded four straight singles off 66ers starter Max Russell. Rashun Dixon, Leonardo Gil, Myrio Richard and Conner Crumbliss all singled to put the Ports on the board before Michael Choice stepped up to the plate. Choice then hit his second grand slam of the season on a 1-0 pitch to put the Ports up 5-2.

Oakland Athletics reliever Michael Wuertz made a rehab appearance, pitched an inning of relief in the seventh, giving up a leadoff single before striking out the side. This marks Wuertz's third rehab appearance with the Ports, having made two previous appearances with Stockton in April.

The Ports tacked on an extra run in the seventh inning. Dixon singled, stole second base, and then advanced to third on a wild pitch. Crumbliss then singled to plate Dixon for the final run of the game for the Ports.

Mike Hart replaced Wuertz in the eighth. Hart quickly recorded a strikeout for the first out of the inning before being taken yard by Eric Oliver. Oliver was 0-for-2 on the evening before hitting the solo shot to left-center field.

Connor Hoehn closed the game for the Ports, coming in for just his sixth save opportunity of the season. Hoehn quickly recorded back to back strikeouts before getting Travis Witherspoon to ground out to end the game.

The Ports look to earn the series split tomorrow as RHP Murphy Smith faces off against RHP AJ Schugel at 7:05 p.m.

River Bandits Take Game Two

By Jon Versteeg, Burlington Bees

DAVENPORT, IA-The Quad Cities River Bandits (37-25) scored seven runs over the fifth and sixth innings to earn a 10-6 win over the Burlington Bees (26-36) before 3,085 fans at Modern Woodman Park on Sunday afternoon.

Burlington scored two runs in the first inning. LF Royce Consigli (1-4) doubled and RF Josh Whitaker (3-4) singled Consigli to third base. 1B A.J. Kirby-Jones (0-3) walked to load the bases. DH Beau Taylor (3-5) hit a two-run single to score Consigli and Whitaker and make it 2-0.

Quad Cities pushed across two runs in the first inning against Burlington RHP Nate Long (7-8). 2B Kolten Wong (1-4) and SS Ronny Gill (4-5) each hit singles. 1B Jonathan Rodriguez (0-0) walked to load the bases. LF Chris Edmondson (0-4) reached on a fielder's choice and Wong scored. Gill scored on a throwing error to tie the score at 2-2.

The River Bandits scored four runs in the fifth inning to take the 6-2 lead and three runs in the eighth inning on a three-run home run by RF Oscar Taveras (3-3) to jump on top 9-2.

Burlington scored four runs in the seventh inning to make it 9-6. 2B Nino Leyja (1-5) singled and moved to second base on a walk issued to Consigli. Whitaker followed with an RBI single to score Leyja.

A Kirby-Jones walk loaded the bases. CF Douglas Landaeta (1-4) followed with a three-run triple to clear the bases and trim the deficit to three runs at 9-6.

The Bees and River Bandits play game three of their series on Monday night at 7:00 p.m. RHP Josh Bowman (8-6, 3.47) gets the start for Burlington against RHP Zach Russell (7-10, 4.21) for Quad Cities.

Sunday's Games At Centennial Field Postponed

Vermont Lake Monsters

Due to concerns with Hurricane Irene, Sunday's two games at historic Centennial Field with the Connecticut Tigers were postponed. The two teams will complete a suspended game from June 25th and then play a 7-inning game on Monday starting at 6:05. Tickets for Sunday are now vouchers good for any of the remaining 2011 home games.