

Oakland A's call up Chris Carter before 5-3 win over Detroit Tigers

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Chris Carter's name still generates buzz in regards to the A's future.

But how the towering first baseman fits into that puzzle is an unknown.

Carter was recalled from Triple-A Sacramento on Saturday for his fourth stint in the major leagues.

And whereas his previous call-ups were met with anticipation, he'll be hard-pressed even to find playing time over the A's final 10 games.

The team faces many important decisions this offseason. One of them is how -- or if -- Carter fits into their grand scheme moving forward.

Still considered one of the A's top prospects, Carter, 24, has hit just .170 with 35 strikeouts in 34 career major league games and struggled defensively.

But he's coming off a recent tear in the minors, having hit four homers with nine RBIs in eight playoff games for Sacramento.

"One thing that stands out to me, it takes him a while to acclimate (to playing at a new level)," A's manager Bob Melvin said before a 5-3 victory over the Detroit Tigers. "Some guys are just like that. They struggle for a while and then all of a sudden they get comfortable and it clicks."

Carter averaged 33 homers and 104 RBIs in the minors from 2008-10, giving the A's hope he was a long-term answer to the power shortage in their lineup.

The going has been much rougher in his three previous big league stints, two last season and a 10-game call-up this year shortly before the All-Star break. In Carter's defense, he has never received an extended look.

"I still have things to work on," Carter said. "I had that little hot streak at Triple-A, so hopefully I can keep going with that."

Brandon Allen's presence at first base makes Carter's future cloudy. Allen, who took over at first upon his promotion from Sacramento on Aug. 13, has earned praise from Melvin for his defense and athleticism.

But he's hit just .145 over his past 20 games with 35 strikeouts, showing particular vulnerability to breaking balls.

Melvin has stuck with Allen, 25, in an attempt to let him work through his struggles. He said Allen will remain his first baseman through season's end, though he suggested he might give the right-handed hitting Carter a start soon against a lefty.

"We'll see if we can mix him in," Melvin said.

Because of Carter's shaky defense, some believe he projects as a designated hitter. But Carter's opportunities there hinge on whether the A's re-sign Hideki Matsui, a free agent after the season.

Because Melvin is still wearing the "interim manager" label, he's in an awkward position when discussing the team's future beyond this season. But he was asked whether he views Carter as a part of the 2012 plans.

"I think a lot would have to do with some of the free agents we have and whether they sign back or not," Melvin said.

His team has taken two of the first three games from Detroit in this four-game series.

Left-hander Gio Gonzalez (14-12) went seven innings Saturday and allowed one run on eight hits.

He's one win shy of the career-high 15 he posted last season, and if the current rotation holds, Gonzalez would have two starts left.

Second baseman Jemile Weeks, back in the leadoff spot after hitting second Friday, went 3 for 5 with an RBI. The rookie has 12 games of three or more hits.

Oakland A's update: Team has discussed opening 2012 season in Japan

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's could be making a return trip to Japan to open the 2012 regular season.

Though nothing is close to being final, A's general manager Billy Beane confirmed there have been discussions with Major League Baseball about the A's crossing the Pacific for the second time in five years to play their opener.

A's reliever Craig Breslow, the team's Players Association representative, said union officials have asked him whether his teammates would be receptive to the idea.

"It seems like the guys would be excited," Breslow said.

The A's split two games with the Boston Red Sox at the Tokyo Dome in March 2008 after an abbreviated spring training. They returned home to play the Bay Bridge exhibitions against the Giants, then resumed the regular season with two games in Oakland against the Red Sox.

It was an odd sequence. But catcher Kurt Suzuki -- one of three players on the A's current active roster who made that trip -- would love to repeat it.

"Count me in," Suzuki said.

Japan-based Kyodo News reported that Major League Baseball is talking to the Seattle Mariners, who feature outfielder Ichiro Suzuki, about playing the A's. If the A's were to re-sign designated hitter Hideki Matsui, the series would be huge in Japan.

Since joining the majors, the Japanese superstars haven't played each other in their native country.

Matsui said he wasn't giving it much thought considering he doesn't know if he'll be with Oakland.

There is skepticism about whether the plan comes to fruition, with one concern being that sufficient sponsorship might not be secured.

Closer Andrew Bailey iced the A's 5-3 win over Detroit on Saturday, but he gave up two runs in the ninth. He has a 6.75 ERA over his past 13 appearances.

Pitcher Dallas Braden -- rehabbing from season-ending shoulder surgery -- was spotted in the clubhouse during media access for one of the rare times since undergoing his procedure in May. A's manager Bob Melvin said Braden's recovery is going well and that he'll accompany the team on its season-ending road trip.

Right-hander Graham Godfrey was recalled from Triple-A Sacramento along with first baseman Chris Carter.

Chin Music: Chris Carter, Graham Godfrey join A's

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 9/17/2011 12:58pm

We had a little A's news this morning with the promotion of first baseman Chris Carter and right-hander Graham Godfrey from Triple-A. In talking to manager Bob Melvin this morning, it doesn't sound like Carter is slated for much playing time. Melvin says he would like to get Carter a start against a right-handed pitcher, whether it's at first base or DH. But Brandon Allen remains the regular guy at first base.

The bigger issue is how Carter fits into the grand scheme looking ahead to 2012. Though Allen has been racking up strikeouts in bunches, he's shown enough to definitely be considered for the everyday job going into next spring. Do the A's view Carter as a candidate to be the regular DH next season? That will certainly impact whether the A's consider re-signing Hideki Matsui. Melvin acknowledged that there's not enough time this season to evaluate Carter and get a good read on where he fits into the team's picture looking ahead to spring training. Melvin was asked how he sees Carter fitting into the 2012 plans. "I think a lot would have to do with some of the free agents we have and whether they sign back or not," he said.

Understand that it's hard for Melvin to look too far into the future because he's still wearing the "interim manager" label. Certainly he has some thoughts on the makeup of next year's squad, but he's not going to share too much right now ...

The lineups:

A's — Weeks 2B, Crisp CF, Matsui DH, Willingham LF, DeJesus RF, Pennington SS, Allen 1B, Suzuki C, Sizemore 3B; Gonzalez LHP.

Tigers — Jackson CF, Ordonez RF, Raburn LF, Cabrera 1B, Martinez DH, Peralta SS, Inge 3B, Worth 2B, Santos C; Porcello RHP.

Michael Lewis on A's 'Moneyball' legacy

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Nine years after the A's season chronicled in "Moneyball," and with the movie making its premiere Monday in Oakland, the author of the best-seller concedes that the book might have had some negative impact on the A's.

"The book probably cost the A's an opportunity or two," Michael Lewis said last week.

Many around baseball believe that Lewis' in-depth look at the way Oakland general manager Billy Beane operated provided too much of a blueprint for competitors, especially when it came to the use by the A's of advanced statistics to help find market inequities to exploit.

"It's like Coke and their secret formula - you don't let the secret formula out," Yankees general manager Brian Cashman said when Oakland visited New York last month.

Lewis spent much of the 2002 season following the A's, and he was granted unprecedented access to the front office's daily activities. "Moneyball" - a business book - chronicled the rise of sabermetrics and the A's increasing interest in nontraditional statistics dating even to Sandy Alderson's time as Oakland's general manager.

Lewis believes the tide was about to turn toward wider acceptance of sabermetrics (the analysis of baseball through statistics) when "Moneyball" was published in 2003.

"I really feel like this was going to happen anyway. The book just accelerated it," he said. "There's a shadow team of players (who) would have been Oakland A's, you can see that, but Boston accumulated most of them.

"I think the book speeded things up, but just slightly. There is too much money at stake, and the Red Sox were already there."

An accepted approach

Cashman doesn't doubt that "Moneyball" had an impact on front offices.

"It explored a certain method that has exploded in the game - and we're all utilizing now," he said. "If you're not heavily invested in the statistical approach now, you've missed the boat. Obviously, 'Moneyball' helped propel a lot of that."

Among the criticisms leveled at "Moneyball" was that an understanding of the importance of on-base percentage, which the book said Oakland was trying to exploit as a market inefficiency, was nothing new. Many teams and executives had valued on-base percentage over the years.

Lewis, though, didn't argue that the A's had discovered the importance of on-base percentage, merely that it was one measure that was undervalued in the marketplace in the early 2000s.

"I always thought 'Moneyball' was interpreted too narrowly, somehow equated to baseball stats. I never saw it as that," said former A's assistant general manager Paul DePodesta, now vice president of player development and scouting for the New York Mets.

"To me, it was taking a critical eye to everything you do and being vigilant in the process, reassessing, challenging assumptions and constraints to find a way that works for you. And I see that everywhere, not just in baseball.

"At the time, one area we explored was statistics, because that was a proven area to compete, and these things shift, some of them faster than others. But it wasn't about on-base percentage - Branch Rickey was talking about on-base percentage 40 years earlier."

Job getting harder

Since then, the A's have looked for other potentially undervalued assets - defense for a year or two, high school pitchers in the draft (which netted them Trevor Cahill) - but it's much harder now for a smaller payroll team such as the A's to find niches to exploit when the big-money clubs are trying to do the same thing.

"What ended up happening is no surprise," Beane said last week. "When someone at the top of the food chain like Boston starts operating like a small-market team, it puts order back in the universe. From the top, there were significant adjustments that had a huge impact all the way down. We knew that was going to happen and that the smaller-market teams would be fighting uphill."

"The market inefficiencies have corrected," Lewis said. "Everyone is operating with the same information, and the opportunity to be smarter than everyone else isn't there. That dooms the A's. I'd really be shocked if they are able to get back into the playoffs in that stadium, with those revenues. ..."

"It's sort of a desperate situation, the one that the A's are in. Given that they don't have an edge they can use, the only thing they can do is not do stupid things. But they are more prone to that because they have to start to take longshot risks, shoot the moon."

With the release of the movie nationwide Friday, there will be a spotlight on the A's, who have not had a winning season in five years, giving critics of "Moneyball" strategy ammunition.

"The proof is in the pudding," said former Oakland manager Art Howe, who occasionally chafed under Beane's don't-give-up-outs philosophy, which was based on statistical probabilities. "It hasn't worked since then."

One common grumble about the book is that it focused on some of the A's more secondary contributors from 2002, such as Scott Hatteberg and Chad Bradford, great stories and nontraditional personnel selections who fit the "Moneyball" ethos well. Overlooked, for the most part, were the A's major stars: the pitching Big Three of Tim Hudson, Mark Mulder and Barry Zito, and shortstop Miguel Tejada - who was the American League MVP that year but is barely mentioned.

What about the pitchers?

"They did an incredible job of developing those young front-end pitchers and some premium talent in their lineup," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said last week. "But the book was more about the supporting cast. They had a terrific run for several years, and it was fueled by Hudson, Mulder and Zito. They were as good as any three pitchers on any staff at any time.

"To just focus on the peripheral pieces is like talking about the kind of wax you're putting on your Mercedes."

Scioscia's team won the World Series that "Moneyball" season, and he'd argue his club was every bit "the island of misfit toys" that the A's were, with numerous castoffs and unlikely stories.

"If there was ever a band of misfits, it was our 2002 team," Scioscia said.

That's another issue often raised about the book and now the movie: The A's didn't win a pennant with the "Moneyball" way. Though they did go to the playoffs five times in seven years, they were knocked out in the first round four times, including 2002, and didn't make it to the World Series.

"What I liked was that Billy and the A's gave guys chances who maybe weren't going to get a shot with another organization," Bradford said. "But when we got to the playoffs, we couldn't get far. Maybe we just didn't have quite enough firepower. We somehow just didn't get it done."

"It would have been cool if we'd actually won," former A's third baseman Eric Chavez said. "Then it would be a really interesting movie."

Matsui, Ichiro in A's-Mariners opener in Tokyo?

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

There is an increasingly likely chance that the A's will open the 2012 season in Tokyo - and that their designated hitter still will be Hideki Matsui.

The players' association has had conversations about Oakland and Seattle starting next season at the Tokyo Dome, and players' representative Craig Breslow said after the A's 5-3 victory over Detroit on Saturday that Oakland's players like the idea.

"Most of the guys think it would be pretty neat," Breslow said.

Were Matsui, a free agent, to return to Oakland - which appears to be a strong possibility - and if the A's and Mariners agree to the trip, Matsui would be facing Japan's other big-name position player, Seattle outfielder Ichiro Suzuki. That would be a major event in Japan. Matsui's longtime Japanese team, the Yomiuri Giants, plays at the Tokyo Dome.

Matsui said he must get an offer from Oakland first, of course, but if that happened and if the A's go to Tokyo, "Yes, that would be a good thing for myself and Japan, too. But honestly, I'm not thinking beyond this season."

And the Matsui against Ichiro angle?

"That would be awesome," Breslow said.

"I don't know if it's that big a deal if it happens," Matsui said, "but there would be a lot of fans who would really enjoy that."

The A's many personnel decisions might depend on whether Major League Baseball makes a decision on the team's stadium situation before free agency begins; if the A's remain in limbo, their spending is likewise uncertain. Decision from MLB or no, however, Matsui is a player the club has strong interest in retaining, according to a team source, though for less than his current \$4.25 million.

Kurt Suzuki and Rich Harden, both with Oakland when the team played Boston in Tokyo in 2008, are enthusiastic about returning; Suzuki said his wife, Renee, couldn't make the trip last time because she was pregnant, so she has already told him she wants to come this time if it happens.

A's general manager Billy Beane is considering attending the "Moneyball" premiere in Tokyo because he loved the A's experience there so much, and he said the team repeatedly has volunteered to go back.

The Chronicle reported last month that there had been talks about a 2012 Tokyo opener and that the door was open for more discussion. The A's and Mariners are currently scheduled to play April 6 at the Coliseum, so the games presumably would come off Oakland's home schedule, as they did in 2008. One baseball official said Saturday that he believes the trip to Japan will happen, though apparently concerns have been raised in Seattle about safety issues, particularly radiation leaks from power plants damaged by the March 11 earthquake in Japan.

"Obviously, we're all hoping to go," A's reliever Andrew Bailey said. "Matsui and Ichiro in Japan would be great."

With Matsui's return looking ever more likely, Chris Carter's future remains fuzzy. Carter, seen by some as the A's DH of the future, was recalled Saturday, and he has done everything he needs to at Triple-A, including recovering to post a strong second half at Sacramento this year.

"I found my stride at the end of the season," said Carter, who had thumb problems early in the year. "With everything that happened at the beginning of the season, it came out positive."

A's manager Bob Melvin said Carter might get a start this week; the Rangers have left-handers starting Tuesday and Wednesday.

Briefly: First baseman Daric Barton, demoted in June, had surgery on his right shoulder Monday, according to assistant general manager David Forst. Dr. Lewis Yocum inserted two anchors to strengthen the labrum, and he debrided some fraying of the rotator cuff. Barton should be ready for spring training. ... Dallas Braden (shoulder) has been cleared to begin a throwing routine. ... Right-hander Graham Godfrey was recalled.

Leading off

Good Gio: Gio Gonzalez is one win shy of his career high of 15, set last year, after allowing the AL Central champion Tigers one run on eight hits in seven innings. Gonzalez struck out four, extending his career high in that category to 181.

Drumbeat: A's call up Chris Carter, Graham Godfrey

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the Coliseum 9/17/2011 12:36pm

With Triple-A Sacramento's season ending Friday night, the A's recalled first baseman/DH Chris Carter and right-hander Graham Godfrey.

I asked about the plans for both, and manager Bob Melvin said that it's been hard getting time for outfielders Michael Taylor and Jai Miller, and he indicated that Carter is in the same boat, though he might get a start Tuesday or Wednesday against Texas, which has left-handers going in those games. Melvin also mentioned that Hideki Matsui could use a day or two off, so I'd imagine that's where we'll see Carter.

Godfrey becomes the long man and, if needed, spot starter, which frees Melvin up to use Josh Outman as maybe even a situational lefty at times. He'd been hesitant to use Outman much in case one of the starters wound up needing an extra day, but now Godfrey can fill in in the rotation.

Carter's future remains fuzzy. Melvin noted that he's been told by people in the organization that Carter always takes time to get acclimated at every level, but, Melvin said of Carter's adjustment at the big-league level, "We haven't see that yet here."

Carter performed well at Sacramento after being sent down July 14, hitting .289 with 13 homers and 51 RBIs in 52 games (51 RBIs in 52 games – very nice indeed) and he hit .370 with eight walks, four homers and nine RBIs in eight playoff games. There's no doubt at all that he's done all he can do at the Triple-A level, but what happens next? A lot will depend on what happens with the A's three free-agent outfielders and Matsui, who is also a free agent. Carter is fairly universally considered best-suited to DH, but if Matsui were to return next year, Carter might be out of luck yet again because Brandon Allen appears to be the first baseman in Oakland.

Could Carter and Matsui be a right-handed/left-handed DH platoon? Matsui did not fare well in limited playing time this year - but he played his very best when he also had starts in the field, so maybe the A's could wedge both onto the roster and get Matsui some time in the outfield and Carter a start here and there at first. He does need to prove he can hit consistently at the big-league level, but most young players struggle at times at the big-league level. Allen started off hot after the A's brought him up, but he has cooled off considerably.

Between the two of them, though, the A's could have quite a bit of power once they do acclimate.

Here's the lineup, with Gio Gonzalez on the mound for Oakland: Weeks 2b, Crisp cf, Matsui dh, Willingham lf, DeJesus rf, Pennington ss, Allen 1b, Suzuki c, Sizemore 3b

SHEA HEY

No-shows matter less in a sellout

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

At game time Monday, the Giants' park appeared half empty. Eventually, fans began filling in sections, though not completely, and the team announced another sellout.

Same night across the bay, it seemed fewer than 5,000 fans were at the Coliseum, but the A's announced a crowd of 12,858.

What gives?

For one, attendance figures are supposed to signify paid tickets, not no-shows. Apparently, using tickets is less desirable when games aren't so meaningful.

The no-show percentage clearly is higher in Oakland, and **Steve Fanelli**, A's ticket chief, said some no-shows might be people who bought tickets last winter thinking last week's Angels series — and this week's Rangers series — would have playoff implications for the A's.

The Giants have announced 81 straight regular-season sellouts going back to last year. Even when a chunk of empty seats is noticeable, especially in the outfield corners in the upper deck, it's hardly a concern compared with a team that tarps the entire upper deck.

Though the Giants report sellouts every home game, they're always announcing different numbers because only the paid tickets (not the comps) are figured in the official count, which is relayed to Major League Baseball for purposes of inventory and revenue sharing.

What constitutes a sellout? All tickets distributed, though that's not always true. The Giants, like any team, hold back tickets for last-minute purposes (if a luminary calls, for example) and also have give-backs — comp tickets returned that might or might not get sold.

Still, when you have a majorshigh 28,000 season tickets, as ticket boss **Russ Stanley** tells us, life ain't bad.

'Moneyball' a film about battles inside and out

Pam Grady, Special to The Chronicle

It's been six years since the release of "Capote," director Bennett Miller's acclaimed drama about writer Truman Capote's obsession with a Kansas murder case, a single-mindedness that led to the writer's groundbreaking novel "In Cold Blood," a book that transformed fiction.

Now the Oscar-nominated director is back with his adaptation of "Moneyball," Michael Lewis' best-seller that focused on a similarly single-minded individual. Oakland A's Vice President and General Manager Billy Beane revolutionized baseball when he adopted statistical analysis as a new way to put a winning team on the field.

At the Toronto International Film Festival, where the Brad Pitt-starring drama made its premiere, Miller talked about his involvement in the film and his close encounters with local hero Beane.

Q: Before the film came up, had you read "Moneyball," and were you even a baseball fan?

A: No, I hadn't read it. I was a baseball fan when I was a kid. New York Yankees.

Q: Brad Pitt brought you onto this project. How did that come about, and how did your work together evolve?

A: I got a phone call saying he was interested in meeting about this. I read the (screenplay) drafts and the book and thought about it and found my way into it. I flew out to L.A. and sat with Brad for a few hours and we explored what we were thinking about it. We shared a vision for it. We found we were interested in the same thing and really kind of partnered on making the movie. He is a producer on the movie.

Q: What was your vision of the story after you read the book and all those drafts?

A: I was attracted to Billy Beane's drive and wanting to understand what it was that he was doing, what it was that he thought he was doing, why he thought he was doing what he was doing. I was attracted to this notion of exploring an ambitious mind. He's one of these characters who is uncomfortable - who seemed like he was going to be unsatisfied or uncomfortable in his own skin, in a way, until he climbed Everest or killed his white whale. He's like one of these characters who really needed to come back with the holy grail to just be OK. That's how I saw it.

I was interested in the undercurrents of the story of the guy who might be a little bit haunted and in telling a story from two perspectives, one on the surface of a guy who's trying to win baseball games and one that peeks behind the curtain and sees a person who's wondering if he's living the life he's supposed to be living, if he made a bad decision when he was a kid to take this course as opposed to another.

Q: At what point did you meet Billy Beane, and how involved was he in the film?

A: I was very curious to meet him and spend time with him, just be in a room with him and talk about what happened and see who he was, and Brad was the same. We both went up to Oakland, made numerous trips and spent time. He was really more of like a resource and like a reference. Just to be in a room with him and just kind of suss out that energy and behavior.

Q: After having read the book, what was your first impression of him when you met the man?

A: My first impression of him was that he has got a lot of charisma, which is a provocative quality, because it elicits a kind of feeling that has some real power to it. But you also have to question it, because charisma is not necessarily associated with good qualities. You can have charisma and be a saint and you can have charisma and be a devil. In both cases, you can attract mass support and interest. It's not always so easy to decipher. It's like being drawn in and shut out at the same time. That's very provocative. It makes you wonder what else is going on there.

With time and as things kind of played themselves out, we shot the movie and finished the movie and now it's done and Billy's here in Toronto, my feeling about him is extremely positive. He's a genuinely good person, but he's got a charisma, as I said, that is generous but is also kind of concealing. There's a part of him that's protected.

Q: You have ex-San Francisco Giant Royce Clayton playing Miguel Tejada and, in fact, you mostly cast athletes rather than actors to play the team. Can you talk about casting those roles and getting the performances you needed out of them?

A: I think it's a lot more realistic to expect that you would get a credible acting performance out of an athlete than it is to get a credible athletic performance out of an actor. Every one of those guys, with the exception of Chris Pratt, every one of the players had played at least on the college level and many of them in professional baseball and, in Royce's case, an All-Star. Yeah, I'm trying to get performances out of them, but also they were kind of showing me how it is. They brought a veracity to not just the movie but also to the atmosphere. It really was predominantly baseball people.

Comic actor Jonah Hill joins dramatic big leagues

Pam Grady, Special to The Chronicle

The 2002 Oakland A's, the lightly budgeted team that shocked baseball when it finished first in the American League West, were one kind of underdog.

Actor Jonah Hill is another. In comedies like "Superbad," "Cyrus" and "Get Him to the Greek," he is renowned for his comic talent. But "Moneyball," Bennett Miller's adaptation of Michael Lewis' book about that same 2002 Oakland team, is Hill's first attempt at drama, and he relishes the underdog status.

"When you say, 'Jonah Hill is the second lead in a Brad Pitt and Philip Seymour Hoffman drama,' I'm the underdog. I like being there and I like proving people wrong," he says, still basking in the afterglow the day after "Moneyball" had its gala premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival.

"I love a night like last night where people just really seemed to accept that I am a dramatic actor in this movie."

Yale economics grad

In the film, Hill plays Peter Brand, a Yale economics graduate whom A's General Manager Billy Beane (Pitt) hires to help him reinvent how to evaluate baseball talent, using statistical analysis instead of traditional scouting reports. The strapping, assertive former pro ballplayer with the high school diploma and the shy, diminutive Ivy Leaguer on the surface appear to hail from different planets, but what they have in common makes them an unstoppable force when it comes to altering a game that holds fast to its traditions.

"They form this 'Frankenstein' partnership where they meld into this - I think Peter's the ammo and Billy's the bazooka that can burst through the wall," says Hill. "There's such raw intelligence and courageousness behind it. They're trying to change the way things have been done for 100 years, and that's courageous and scary and ballsy."

To his mind, while the business at hand is baseball, "Moneyball" is not a baseball movie. Hill sees it as a buddy movie, a character portrait of the driven Beane, and something else.

"It's a movie about being undervalued," he says. "That's really what I saw. There are times in life when you feel undervalued and someone is courageous enough to shine a light on you or sees something in you and gives you the courage to execute what you have to say, what you believe in. My character really gets that opportunity through Billy."

The film reignited the 27-year-old Los Angeles native's love of baseball. As a child, he rooted for the Dodgers and played Little League, first relegated to the outfield and then, once he developed some skill, assigned to first base. But as he grew older, his interest shifted to basketball. Preparing for the role reintroduced him to America's pastime.

Baseball all the time

"Brad and I would just always have baseball on in the background whenever we were rehearsing," he remembers. "When I was at home, baseball on. When I was touring, promoting 'Get Him to the Greek,' every hotel room - boom! 'SportsCenter' baseball."

If that wasn't enough, making "Moneyball" meant going to work in big-league ballparks and experiencing a thrill that few people have had - unless they've spent time playing professional baseball.

"When you're there and you get to go and walk out of the dugout, you do feel like a little kid," Hill says. "It is like a little kid's dream. It's a lot like when I walk onto a movie set, still."

When he was 6 or 7, he recalls his parents asking him what he wanted to do when he was older. He said he wanted to live where "The Simpsons" lived, in Springfield.

"They said, 'That's not possible,' " he says. "They said, 'It's a show. They have animators who animate them, the artists. They have people who write what Homer says and a guy who is Homer's voice.' I said, 'I want to write what Homer says.' For a 6- or 7-year-old to have a cognizant idea, to be cognizant of the fact that they want to be a prime time, animated sitcom writer is a pretty bizarre 6- or 7-year-old childhood ambition."

That desire never wavered, and while Hill and Brand are opposites in many ways, he sees one vital parallel between them - someone older and more powerful recognized their potential and helped them achieve their dreams.

First big break

In Hill's case, it is a lot of someones. He got his first big break when Dustin Hoffman helped him secure the role of Bret in "I Heart Huckabees." Frequent collaborator Judd Apatow first cast him in a small part in 2005's "The 40-Year-Old Virgin," and two years later ensured Hill's stardom with a lead role in "Superbad." Miller and Pitt gave him the opportunity to transition to drama. More recently, he credits producer Neal Moritz with allowing him to cross over to action, with the forthcoming "21 Jump Street," in which Hill will also have his first feature writing credit.

"I'm so lucky," he says. "I've been so lucky to encounter - I think about Billy Beane and 'Moneyball' all the time. I keep having Billy Beanes. If I'm Peter, I keep having all these Billy Beanes. I'm really lucky to find these people.

"Last night, the premiere, it's just so surreal and dreamlike," he adds. "The 'Superbad' premiere and the 'Moneyball' premiere in Toronto last night, I think were the two best nights of my life. It actually feels like a dream. It does not feel real.

Emotional moment

"When the lights went up and I saw my parents and they were crying, and to stand next to Brad and Bennett when the lights came on in a 2,500-person theater after watching that movie, I was uncontrollably emotional. It was really the most dreamlike moment in my entire life. It was really special."

Management story 'Moneyball' swings for the fences

Steven Winn, Special to The Chronicle

In baseball, a very successful .300 hitter is one who fails 7 out of 10 times. Baseball movies face even longer odds.

For every solid hit like the heroically arced "The Natural" or admirably textured piece of history like the 1919 Black Sox scandal film "Eight Men Out," scores of cartoonish biopics ("The Babe Ruth Story"), sentimental wallows ("Field of Dreams"), sniggering farces ("Major League" and its sequels) and cuddly kiddie tales ("Little Big League") litter the field like so many hot dog wrappers. Even the fondly embraced "Bang the Drum Slowly" and "Bull Durham" pile on heart-tugging contrivances, romantic soupiness and buddy-story cliches.

This week "Moneyball" arrives to try its luck. The film, which tells the story of the Oakland A's 2002 season through the eyes of maverick General Manager Billy Beane, figures to enjoy certain hometown advantages for Bay Area audiences. It tells the story of a local team, with lots of East Bay footage, familiar names (manager Art Howe, shortstop Miguel Tejada) and the authentic voice prints of, among others, announcers Greg Papa and the late and beloved Bill King. The original story is the handiwork of Oakland all-star writer Michael Lewis ("The Big Short," "Liar's Poker"), who told the "Moneyball" tale in his 2003 best-seller of the same name.

Like baseball itself, baseball movies are steeped in certain time-honored traditions and conventions. "Moneyball" is no different. It invokes the specter of failure and adversity that nourish any dramatically satisfying story. It features a gruff manager, a grizzled veteran and a fresh-faced newcomer who must overcome his own doubts and insecurities. The inevitable Big Game that comes late in the narrative concludes with a rhapsodically stylized home run that's straight out of "The Natural."

Even the making-of-the-movie backstory plays into the late-inning miracle conceit. Two years ago, when then-director Steven Soderbergh was set to begin filming, the producer abruptly scuttled the shoot. "Moneyball" appeared to be dead until writer Aaron Sorkin ("The Social Network") and director Bennett Miller ("Capote") strode out of the bullpen to rework and rescue the project.

Familiar as it may seem to those who adore "The Pride of the Yankees" - with Brad Pitt's brooding Billy Beane a 2011 Hollywood superstar answer to Gary Cooper's regal Lou Gehrig of 1942 - "Moneyball" stakes out its own distinctive turf. By placing a cerebrally inclined general manager at the center of the story, "Moneyball" takes an off-field perspective that no baseball movie ever has done in quite this way. Portrayals of upper-level management have tended to settle on owners who

are either generically venal ("The Natural," "The Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars") or selflessly virtuous ("Damn Yankees," "Ed").

With a Yale-educated prodigy (Jonah Hill) as his unlikely buddy, Beane sets out to transform the small-budget A's by means of complex statistical analysis that flies in the face of traditional baseball wisdom about ballplayers' potential and performance. The screen fills with scrolling columns of numbers while games and players flicker on TV screens somewhere in the distance. A failed outfielder turned genius GM, Beane becomes a wonkish hero more in the mode of Bill Gates or Steve Jobs than Gehrig or Joe DiMaggio. For Beane, the romance of baseball is a solitary obsession, a quest for some perfect, code-cracking abstraction that will transform the game and free it from the thudding dominance of the heavily bankrolled, big-market franchises.

As a meditation on the science and mystery of management, "Moneyball" enters a heady realm. It remains to be seen if a film that marries old-school characters and plot devices to a parable about the risks and rewards of innovation can enter the very exclusive Hall of Fame for baseball movies. If it wins approval, it will have to do so from some finicky and demanding constituents who stand guard over the shrine.

Critics have mused on the daunting calculus of baseball films for decades. "Sports are now. Movies are then," wrote Andrew Sarris in 1980. "Sports are news. Movies are fables." The attempt to mine mythic content from the day-to-day reality of baseball, in other words, is fundamentally flawed. Wilfred Sheed, in his 1989 essay "Why the Movies Can't Play Ball," argued that the game's zen-like subtlety simply can't be captured on the screen. "We smile unpleasantly in the dark," noted longtime New Yorker baseball scribe Roger Angell in 1989, "smug in our knowledge that the sport and its practitioners are beyond imitation."

The Ken Burns documentaries "Baseball" and "Baseball: The Tenth Inning" work because they serve up, in the filmmaker's cozy scrapbook style, the real deal - a time-spanning highlight reel of actual players displaying and discussing their extraordinary skills. The game, as Burns shows, tells its own expansive stories and creates its own distinctive characters. "Moneyball" straddles the baseline, by merging video footage of actual games from the 2002 season with clubhouse scenes and some field action played by actors.

Too sweet to resist?

Despite the genre's low batting average, baseball movies keep coming. More than 200 have been made since the silent film era's "The Ball Game" (1898) and "Casey at the Bat" (1899). Why can't filmmakers keep bats and balls out their hands? Are the idyllic allure and ready-made archetypes of the national pastime just too sweet to resist? Do Hollywood's cynical calculations and its wised-up irony melt away whenever the National Anthem plays and the umpire yells "Play ball!"?

Linda K. Fuller maintains, in her essay " 'Triumph of the Underdog' in Baseball Films" that these movies persist because they "allow us to play out childhood fantasies, teach us to distinguish between the heroes and ... reflect some of our most basic concerns."

Ideal community

Marshall G. Most and Robert Rudd go even further in their book, "Stars, Stripes and Diamonds: American Culture and the Baseball Film." By defining an "ideal community and the ideal citizen within that community," they write, "baseball films are

part of the disciplinary project of modern American society. ... These films have sought to teach us the way we, and the world - at least according to baseball - are meant to be."

"Moneyball," which is at once ardent about and bemused by baseball's emotional baggage and bigger meanings, steers clear of ponderous life lessons. With one exception, Pitt's Beane emerges as a singularly driven figure scrubbed clean of sentimentality. But the movie is very serious about one message it means to get across. This, "Moneyball" instructs, is the way you ought to build a baseball team.

Michael Lewis on A's 'Moneyball' legacy

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Nine years after the A's season chronicled in "Moneyball," and with the movie making its premiere Monday in Oakland, the author of the best-seller concedes that the book might have had some negative impact on the A's.

"The book probably cost the A's an opportunity or two," Michael Lewis said last week.

Many around baseball believe that Lewis' in-depth look at the way Oakland general manager Billy Beane operated provided too much of a blueprint for competitors, especially when it came to the use by the A's of advanced statistics to help find market inequities to exploit.

"It's like Coke and their secret formula - you don't let the secret formula out," Yankees general manager Brian Cashman said when Oakland visited New York last month.

Lewis spent much of the 2002 season following the A's, and he was granted unprecedented access to the front office's daily activities. "Moneyball" - a business book - chronicled the rise of sabermetrics and the A's increasing interest in nontraditional statistics dating even to Sandy Alderson's time as Oakland's general manager.

Lewis believes the tide was about to turn toward wider acceptance of sabermetrics (the analysis of baseball through statistics) when "Moneyball" was published in 2003.

"I really feel like this was going to happen anyway. The book just accelerated it," he said. "There's a shadow team of players (who) would have been Oakland A's, you can see that, but Boston accumulated most of them.

"I think the book speeded things up, but just slightly. There is too much money at stake, and the Red Sox were already there."

An accepted approach

Cashman doesn't doubt that "Moneyball" had an impact on front offices.

"It explored a certain method that has exploded in the game - and we're all utilizing now," he said. "If you're not heavily invested in the statistical approach now, you've missed the boat. Obviously, 'Moneyball' helped propel a lot of that."

Among the criticisms leveled at "Moneyball" was that an understanding of the importance of on-base percentage, which the book said Oakland was trying to exploit as a market inefficiency, was nothing new. Many teams and executives had valued on-base percentage over the years.

Lewis, though, didn't argue that the A's had discovered the importance of on-base percentage, merely that it was one measure that was undervalued in the marketplace in the early 2000s.

"I always thought 'Moneyball' was interpreted too narrowly, somehow equated to baseball stats. I never saw it as that," said former A's assistant general manager Paul DePodesta, now vice president of player development and scouting for the New York Mets.

"To me, it was taking a critical eye to everything you do and being vigilant in the process, reassessing, challenging assumptions and constraints to find a way that works for you. And I see that everywhere, not just in baseball.

"At the time, one area we explored was statistics, because that was a proven area to compete, and these things shift, some of them faster than others. But it wasn't about on-base percentage - Branch Rickey was talking about on-base percentage 40 years earlier."

Job getting harder

Since then, the A's have looked for other potentially undervalued assets - defense for a year or two, high school pitchers in the draft (which netted them Trevor Cahill) - but it's much harder now for a smaller payroll team such as the A's to find niches to exploit when the big-money clubs are trying to do the same thing.

"What ended up happening is no surprise," Beane said last week. "When someone at the top of the food chain like Boston starts operating like a small-market team, it puts order back in the universe. From the top, there were significant adjustments that had a huge impact all the way down. We knew that was going to happen and that the smaller-market teams would be fighting uphill."

"The market inefficiencies have corrected," Lewis said. "Everyone is operating with the same information, and the opportunity to be smarter than everyone else isn't there. That dooms the A's. I'd really be shocked if they are able to get back into the playoffs in that stadium, with those revenues. ...

"It's sort of a desperate situation, the one that the A's are in. Given that they don't have an edge they can use, the only thing they can do is not do stupid things. But they are more prone to that because they have to start to take longshot risks, shoot the moon."

With the release of the movie nationwide Friday, there will be a spotlight on the A's, who have not had a winning season in five years, giving critics of "Moneyball" strategy ammunition.

"The proof is in the pudding," said former Oakland manager Art Howe, who occasionally chafed under Beane's don't-give-up-outs philosophy, which was based on statistical probabilities. "It hasn't worked since then."

One common grumble about the book is that it focused on some of the A's more secondary contributors from 2002, such as Scott Hatteberg and Chad Bradford, great stories and nontraditional personnel selections who fit the "Moneyball" ethos well.

Overlooked, for the most part, were the A's major stars: the pitching Big Three of Tim Hudson, Mark Mulder and Barry Zito, and shortstop Miguel Tejada - who was the American League MVP that year but is barely mentioned.

What about the pitchers?

"They did an incredible job of developing those young front-end pitchers and some premium talent in their lineup," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said last week. "But the book was more about the supporting cast. They had a terrific run for several years, and it was fueled by Hudson, Mulder and Zito. They were as good as any three pitchers on any staff at any time.

"To just focus on the peripheral pieces is like talking about the kind of wax you're putting on your Mercedes."

Scioscia's team won the World Series that "Moneyball" season, and he'd argue his club was every bit "the island of misfit toys" that the A's were, with numerous castoffs and unlikely stories.

"If there was ever a band of misfits, it was our 2002 team," Scioscia said.

That's another issue often raised about the book and now the movie: The A's didn't win a pennant with the "Moneyball" way. Though they did go to the playoffs five times in seven years, they were knocked out in the first round four times, including 2002, and didn't make it to the World Series.

"What I liked was that Billy and the A's gave guys chances who maybe weren't going to get a shot with another organization," Bradford said. "But when we got to the playoffs, we couldn't get far. Maybe we just didn't have quite enough firepower. We somehow just didn't get it done."

"It would have been cool if we'd actually won," former A's third baseman Eric Chavez said. "Then it would be a really interesting movie."

A's hold on as Gio notches his 14th win

By Rick Eymer / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- A's left-hander Gio Gonzalez appears to be entering another stage of his young career. He's discovering ways to win even without his best stuff.

Gonzalez has evolved from being a frantic rookie who rushed everything, spoke fast and raced around into an experienced pitcher who is thoughtful, resourceful and patient.

Gonzalez pitched seven strong innings to win for the fifth time in six starts, as the A's defeated the American League Central champion Tigers, 5-3, on Saturday at Oakland Coliseum.

The AL All-Star started off hitters with a strike less than a third of the time, yet managed to keep one of the top offensive lineups in check.

"He was resilient," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "Maybe he didn't have his best stuff and he got behind hitters, but he made pitches when he had to. I'm surprised he got us through seven, but that's what good pitchers do: They make it work even without their best stuff."

Gonzalez's effort was even more impressive considering that the Tigers, one day removed from clinching their first division title since 1987, had most of their regular starters on the field, including slugger Miguel Cabrera.

"We did our job as a team," said Gonzalez. "It was a good win, a step in the right direction for us. The defense played unbelievably well."

Gonzalez (14-12) allowed one run on eight hits while walking two and striking out four. The Tigers' Magglio Ordonez, who extended his hitting streak to 14 games, had three hits and scored a run.

"They were swinging the bats, being aggressive," Gonzalez said. "We tried to take advantage of that. I was fortunate enough to have a few balls hit right at people."

Gonzalez threw a first-pitch strike to just nine of the 28 hitters he faced, usually a recipe for disaster. It would have been for the younger Gonzalez, but not for the calmer version of the present.

"I felt like I was around the zone," Gonzalez said.

Coco Crisp had two hits, drove in two runs and stole his 42nd base -- second in the AL -- as the A's improved to 3-3 on their current homestand.

Jemile Weeks, Kurt Suzuki and Scott Sizemore also drove in runs for the A's. Weeks had three hits and John Willingham added two.

"He's an ignitor for us," Melvin said of Weeks. "He and Coco at the top of the lineup get us going. And it's not just getting on base, but taking the pitcher's attention away from the batter because of their basestealing abilities."

The A's got it started in the second inning, with Sizemore and Crisp each singling home a run to put Oakland ahead, 2-0.

Consecutive singles to open the third by Willingham, David DeJesus and Cliff Pennington loaded the bases to set up Suzuki's sacrifice fly.

The Tigers did get one run back in the sixth, but Gonzalez set down the final five hitters he faced, finishing on a good note.

Weeks and Crisp drove in insurance runs in the eighth, which proved important when Tigers pinch-hitter Don Kelly doubled home two runs in the ninth against Andrew Bailey, who settled down to end the game by striking out Austin Jackson.

Verlander going for 24th win against A's

By Spencer Fordin / MLB.com

The Tigers have two weeks to enjoy a great achievement and prepare for the playoffs. Detroit, which clinched its first division championship since 1987 on Friday night, will match Justin Verlander against Oakland's Guillermo Moscoso in the series finale on Sunday.

Verlander hasn't thrown a no-decision since May 24, and he's won each of his last 11 starts while holding hitters to a .192 average in that span. Verlander has completed at least six innings in every start this season and leads the American League in wins (23), ERA (2.36) and strikeouts (238).

The A's, meanwhile, are playing to end one streak and give themselves a positive end to a trying campaign. Oakland has gone seven straight months without a winning record -- a skid that dates all the way back to August of 2010 -- but has gone 9-7 thus far in September.

Oakland has hit just 105 home runs, the third-lowest total in the AL and the team's worst mark since hitting 100 homers in 1978. The A's will play host to Texas next week, and manager Bob Melvin wants to evaluate younger players like Chris Carter, Michael Taylor and Jai Miller.

Moscoso took a no-hitter into the eighth inning two starts ago, and he's pitched well for the A's this season. The right-hander has gone 6-2 with a 2.50 ERA at home, compared to 2-6 with a 4.82 mark on the road.

The Tigers have roared out to a 23-6 record since Aug. 19, and they've won 25 of their last 37 games on the road. Designated hitter Victor Martinez has 17 RBIs in his last 16 games, and Miguel Cabrera is on the verge of becoming the fifth Tiger to break 100 runs, walks and RBIs in a season.

Tigers: Valverde shutting games down

Jose Valverde didn't get a chance to pitch Saturday, but he extended his franchise record to 45 consecutive saves converted in Friday's series opener. Valverde has finished 65 of his 69 appearances this season, and he's held the opposition scoreless 58 times.

Valverde leads the AL and can set a new career high with three more saves. The right-hander has eight saves in his last 10 games and has allowed just two home runs in the second half.

A's: Matsui to get some rest

Hideki Matsui went hitless in Saturday's victory, and Melvin said he'd like to rest the veteran a bit down the stretch. The 37-year-old is currently posting career lows in batting average (.255), on-base (.327) and slugging percentage (.388), but the A's have been impressed with his work.

"He's played a lot. I'd like to give him a handful of games off," said Melvin. "He might have swung at a couple pitches out of the zone, and that's an indication he's tired, which is normal for some of the veteran players at this time of the year. What he has done this year is notable."

Worth noting

- Detroit has won a division title four times since divisional play began in 1969.
- Hank Greenberg, Charlie Gehringer, Rocky Colavito and Norm Cash have all finished with 100 runs, RBIs and walks for the Tigers.
- The A's are 47-21 when scoring first this season.

Carter, Godfrey return to A's from Sacramento

By Rick Eymer / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- First baseman Chris Carter and right-hander Graham Godfrey returned to the Majors after Triple-A Sacramento lost, 11-6, to the Omaha Storm Chasers, who completed a three-game sweep in the Pacific Coast League Championship Series on Friday.

Godfrey is making his third stint with the A's this season. He's 1-2 with a 4.71 ERA in four starts. He went 14-3 with a 2.68 ERA in 19 games, 18 starts, for the River Cats. He led the PCL in wins.

Carter was with the A's from June 23 to July 14 this year, appearing in 10 games. At Sacramento, he hit .274 with 18 home runs and 72 RBIs in 75 games.

"History suggests he takes awhile to acclimate," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "The numbers he's putting up recently suggest he's pretty comfortable."

Carter batted .133 (4-for-30) with the A's earlier this year.

Braden to travel with A's in Anaheim and Seattle

OAKLAND -- A's left-hander Dallas Braden, who has been on the disabled list since April 17 and had surgery to repair a torn anterior capsule in his pitching shoulder in May, was with the club Saturday and will join them for the final six games of the year on the road in Anaheim and Seattle.

"I understand he's on schedule, if not ahead of schedule," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "I have been in his vicinity and I hear him all the time, but I haven't had a chance to talk to him. I love his energy."

Braden, who pitched a perfect game on Mother's Day in 2010, was simulating his pitching motion as part of his rehab before the game.

"He wants to pitch," Melvin said. "He's chomping at the bit."

Worth noting

- A's manager Bob Melvin said he's noticed Hideki Matsui has extended his strike zone and swung at a few pitches he would normally lay off. That's all part of a long season, said the A's manager, and means Matsui will likely get a day or two off soon.
- Ryan Sweeney (strain in upper quad of his right leg) rode a bicycle to test the injury and said he felt fine. He is still a day or two away from resuming baseball activities.
- Melvin said he is impressed with right-hander Andrew Carignan, who has pitched at four levels this year, beginning with Class A Stockton. "He seems to be a kid who doesn't get rattled," Melvin said. "He comes into games and throws strikes."

Gonzalez struggles but A's still beat Tigers

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — A's left-hander Gio Gonzalez threw only nine first-pitch strikes, struggled with his control and worked with runners on base in almost every inning.

Earning his 14th win of the season sure didn't come easily for Gonzalez. Then again, not much has this season. Not for the A's or their All-Star.

"Maybe he didn't have his best stuff and he got behind hitters, but he made pitches when he had to," manager Bob Melvin said following Oakland's 5-3 win over the Detroit Tigers on Saturday. "I'm surprised he got us through seven, but that's what good pitchers do. They make it work even without their best stuff."

Gonzalez allowed eight hits over seven innings, struck out four and walked two while improving to 5-1 over his past six starts.

He got plenty of help from Oakland's error-prone defense, which turned three double plays while holding Detroit scoreless for the first five innings.

"The defense played unbelievable," Gonzalez said. "I felt like I was around the zone. They were swinging the bats, being aggressive so we tried to take advantage of that."

Coco Crisp drove in the deciding run with an RBI single over the head of shortstop Jhonny Peralta in the second inning while Josh Willingham singled twice and scored for Oakland.

The A's won for only the second time in five games, both coming in this series with the Tigers.

Detroit still had the tying run at the plate in the ninth following Don Kelly's pinch-hit, two-run double off Andrew Bailey.

Oakland's two-time All-Star closer, who missed 53 games earlier this year with a strained forearm, got out of it by striking out pinch-hitter Alex Avila and Austin Jackson.

No one could blame the Tigers for being a little off after toasting their first division title in nearly a quarter-century with a champagne-and-cigar celebration in the tiny visitors' clubhouse at the Oakland Coliseum.

Magglio Ordoñez had three hits and scored a run for Detroit, who had men on base most of the afternoon but failed to capitalize.

Gonzalez limited the damage to beat Detroit for the first time in five career starts. He did it despite twisting his ankle trying to make a pickoff throw to second base in the first inning.

After Ordoñez and Ryan Raburn hit back-to-back one-out singles, Gonzalez (14-12) tried to catch Ordoñez straying off second base. He turned to throw, but slipped on the mound and appeared to roll his left ankle.

Gonzalez walked around behind the mound to test his foot, threw one warmup pitch then returned to the mound. He got out of the inning when Miguel Cabrera flew out to right fielder David DeJesus, who doubled up Ordoñez at second.

Detroit was stymied by Gonzalez in the third and fourth and managed only one run after loading the bases with one out in the sixth. Peralta hit a sacrifice fly to score Ordoñez, but that was all the Tigers could get off Gonzalez.

"It was a good win, a good step in the right direction for us," Gonzalez said. "We did our job."

Grant Balfour pitched a scoreless eighth inning and Bailey worked the ninth for Oakland.

The Tigers had plenty of opportunities — they had at least two runners on base in five innings — but stranded seven runners and lost for only the third time this month.

Right-hander Rick Porcello took the loss, allowing three runs over seven innings. Porcello (14-9) struck out four and walked three.

Raburn went 2 for 4 while Victor Martinez singled twice to raise his batting average this month to .349.

The A's stranded a pair of runners in the first, then took a 2-0 lead in the second on RBI singles by Scott Sizemore and Crisp.

Oakland loaded the bases against Porcello with no outs the following inning, but Detroit's right-hander allowed only a sacrifice fly to Kurt Suzuki then got Sizemore to ground out to end the inning.

Jemile Weeks singled in Suzuki in the eighth to make it 4-1 and Crisp followed with his second RBI single.

Weeks finished 3 for 5 while Crisp and Sizemore added two hits apiece.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Ports Force Game Four With 15-1 Win

Stockton Ports

The Ports staved off elimination in style on Saturday defeating the Lake Elsinore 15-1 courtesy of a monstrous seventh inning. The Ports took it to the Storm in the seventh, plating an impressive 11 runs to extend the series to a game four.

Ports pitching was dominant once again, beginning with starter AJ Griffin, who is now 2-0 in postseason play. Griffin went 7.0 innings with eight strikeouts. Griffin kept the Storm off the board through four innings, before giving up the lone run of the game for the Storm. In the fifth, Jonathon Galvez singled to shortstop and then stole second. Edinson Rincon drove in Galvez with a single of his own up the middle.

The Ports broke through in a big way in the sixth inning. Dusty Coleman led off the inning with a double to left field that was just feet from being a home run. Coleman advanced to third on a throwing error. Leonardo Gil drove in Coleman with a single lined through the hole at shortstop. Anthony Aliotti walked to put runners on first and second. Jeremy McBryde then replaced starter Andrew Werner, before giving up a three-run bomb to Myrio Richard.

The Ports seriously took it to the Storm in the seventh, where they put up 11 runs to put the game well out of reach. The Ports loaded the bases early in the inning, which helped them walk in three runs. Aliotti had an RBI-single, and Rashun Dixon had a two-RBI single as well. Ryan Lipkin had a sac fly to score the seventh run of the inning. Josh Whitaker, who in his first at bat of the inning was hit by pitch, then hit a gigantic grand slam to drive in the final four runs of the inning.

Newcomer Blake Treinen came in to pitch the eighth inning for the Ports. Treinen gave up just one hit in his first appearance for the Ports to keep the Storm off the board. Chaz Mye came in to pitch the ninth and had a quick 1,2,3 inning to close out the game and force a game four.

Game four of the Cal League Championship series is tomorrow at 6:05 p.m. RHP Dan Straily will get the start for the Ports.