

Oakland A's lose home opener, 7-3 to Seattle Mariners

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Yoenis Cespedes provided a signature moment in his home debut Friday night, blasting a monster homer in the fourth inning that sent a charge through a sold-out Oakland Coliseum crowd.

The A's could have used a rewind button on the rest of the night.

They genuinely looked out of sync in all phases in a 7-3 loss to the Seattle Mariners, who spoiled the A's home opener and have taken two of the first three in a four-game series that began in Tokyo.

The A's went 15-7-2 during spring training, the third-best record in the major leagues. They pitched well and played sharp defense in splitting a season-opening series with the Mariners in Japan on March 28-29.

But that crisp play was nowhere to be found as they resumed their regular season Friday.

"The whole game was very disappointing to me," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "You want to put on a good show. We don't get many crowds like that."

No. 1 starter Brandon McCarthy (0-1) labored through five innings, and though just two of his five runs were earned, he ran his pitch count up to 95 and lacked his characteristic command.

The right-hander allowed just one run in seven innings in Tokyo against Seattle and didn't walk a batter. He had two walks Friday but was well off the mark on several other pitches.

"It was as bad as I've been in a long time," McCarthy said. "I had very little feel, kind of the complete opposite of how I felt in Japan."

Seattle took charge with a four-run third, an inning that began unraveling for the A's after an error from catcher-turned-third baseman Josh Donaldson.

With Brendan Ryan on second after a double, Donaldson charged Chone Figgins' bunt and his off-balance throw was wide of first, allowing Ryan to score.

With the bases loaded and one out, Jesus Montero delivered a sacrifice fly, and McCarthy had a chance to escape the inning with minimal damage.

But Kyle Seager's two-run single up the middle was a damaging blow, pushing the A's deficit to 4-0.

The saving grace for the A's was Cespedes, who crushed a 2-1 pitch from Jason Vargas (1-0) for a two-run homer that was measured at 462 feet by espn.com's home run tracker.

The ball cleared the section of seats that sit high above the wall in left-center, and it nearly took out a luxury suite window.

Cespedes said he's hit them longer in Cuba, and Melvin added: "He'll hit them farther than that."

It was quite a way for Cespedes to mark his first regular-season game at the Coliseum. If there's one thing he might change, it was the pause he took at home plate to watch the ball before breaking into his trot.

He admitted such an action is more acceptable in Cuban baseball than in the majors.

"I followed the ball," Cespedes said through interpreter Ariel Prieto. "I don't like to do that again."

Cespedes, who hit fifth behind cleanup man Jonny Gomes, finished 1 for 4 with two strikeouts. Both of them came on fastballs, one swinging and one looking.

Melvin is placing a big emphasis on better defensive play after the A's led the American League in errors last season. But teams are likely to test Donaldson, still finding his way at third base, by dropping bunts his way as Figgins did.

☐ Melvin batted Josh Reddick in the third spot, bumping Coco Crisp from third to second and dropping Cliff Pennington to ninth in the order.

The switch-hitting speedster Crisp is a more natural fit batting second as opposed to third, where he hit in the season-opening series in Tokyo against Seattle.

"I want to see what Reddick can do in the third spot," Melvin said. "He's shown he can hit left-handers. ... He's swung the bat consistently, and you want to have your most consistent hitter hitting third for you."

The A's don't have prototypical fits for the middle of their lineup, but Reddick, who hit .304 in the spring with three homers, might offer the best skill set in the third spot, where traditionally a team's best overall hitter resides.

□ Cespedes received advice from Crisp -- whom he's replaced in center -- about how to judge the wind at the Coliseum.

The Mariners had so much respect for Cespedes' throwing arm that Figgins didn't even try to tag on a somewhat shallow fly ball that Cespedes caught in left-center in the third. That decision looked silly when Cespedes dropped the ball while making the exchange from his glove to his throwing hand.

He nearly threw out Brendan Ryan tagging up on Ichiro Suzuki's sacrifice fly in the sixth, but his throw was up the third-base line.

□ Bartolo Colon takes the Coliseum mound for the first time Saturday as an Athletic, but the right-hander is 5-1 with a 2.14 ERA in seven career appearances (six starts) in the ballpark.

"I don't think he's afraid to let you hit the ball," Melvin said. "He knows where it's going, so he can keep you in the big part of the park."

Poole: Opening night in Oakland just cruel facade for A's fans

By Monte Poole, Bay Area News Group

They still rush the turnstiles on opening night, dancing into the old gray bowl known as the Oakland Coliseum. And they still root for the A's, a once-potent brand now devolved into baseball's sickliest franchise.

Opening night in Oakland has become the joy before the sadness, the moonlit party before the six-month hangover.

And Friday night, good fans received a glimpse of the storied past -- hey, there's Gene Tenace throwing out the ceremonial first pitch -- while cheering through an unfulfilling and interminable present.

After playing two regular-season games against Seattle last week in Tokyo, the A's opened their 2012 domestic regular season with a 7-3 loss to the Mariners before a sellout crowd (35,067) in Oakland, where the lightness of hope is offset by the gravity of reality.

"The whole game was disappointing for me," manager Bob Melvin said. "We really wanted to put on a show. ... We don't get many crowds like that."

That's reality in Oakland, which is a great bet to lose more than it wins with this formula: Earnest coaching staff and underwhelming talent assembled by bosses presiding over baseball's lowest payroll and focused on a future that includes, in order, a new city, a major retail/residential development and an intimate new ballpark.

For all the fireworks that might be produced by Yoenis Cespedes -- the promising Cuban rookie who in the fourth inning launched a two-run bomb about 30 feet beyond the fence in left-center -- no individual is capable of overcoming the oppression and uncertainties faced by this franchise.

Yes, the serial drama of the "Oakland A's Seek a New Home," now in its eighth year under current ownership, drags on. And on. And on. It's so routine that it was referenced by only one sign, with the single word "Stay," visible above the right-field fence.

The latest twist, fresh from a story at Slate.com, proposes the A's move to New Jersey or Long Island or Brooklyn. The rationale is a third team in greater New York, joining the Yankees and Mets, would be more profitable than a second in the Bay Area. And it's true, when you consider the potential local TV revenue.

For now, the A's are in Oakland -- with San Jose on hold, MLB commissioner Bud Selig staunchly silent, and co-owners Lew Wolff and John Fisher on the brink of madness.

Wolff and Fisher want out, have long wanted out yet haven't been allowed to leave. The three-man committee Selig appointed in 2009 to determine a feasible site for the A's has offered nothing. It's as if they're sitting in the private room of a Half Moon Bay resort drinking Scotch, smoking Cuban cigars and blowing smoke rings.

Those of you keeping track, and I know you're out there, realize this is the committee's 38th month of indecision -- or that Selig & Co. have an answer they can't bring themselves to announce.

The charade will end soon. With the kinks finally out of the Mets ownership situation and an agreement to sell the Dodgers, Selig and his unofficial advisers, with powerful White Sox owner Jerry Reinsdorf at the point, are running out of reasons to stall the A's.

A's fans know that when you stall the A's, you stall the efforts of general manager Billy Beane, whose cinematically celebrated genius is on sabbatical until further notice. That, as much as anything Wolff says or does, irritates fans in Oakland.

They once believed in Billy, still want to believe.

But with so many talented faces coming and going -- Beane last December shipped out Oakland's last three All-Stars -- they're leery of accepting everything he says or does.

They recall the dynamic Billy and the New Millennium A's, who were populated with marquee players and All-Star pitchers. Those stars eventually were reduced to small print by the "Moneyball" hype machine, but local fans still cherish their contributions.

They'd like to think those days can be repeated, and their hearts leap when they see Cespedes, Billy's biggest gamble yet, go deep in his Oakland debut.

But how much of themselves should they invest? As intoxicating as it is to watch young Jemile Weeks, do they dare get attached? Buy a Josh Reddick jersey, or wait to see if he lasts past July?

Meanwhile, Melvin is caught in between. He's solid, he's principled and he's passionate. He's also a middle manager for a downsizing company.

Melvin and his players want to believe they, like the 2010 San Diego Padres, can surprise the oddsmakers. A's fans would like that, too.

They didn't see it Friday night, but they believed loudly anyway, at least for a while. By the end, the place was two-thirds empty, as it will be on many nights this season.

Inside the Oakland A's: Postgame thoughts following A's 7-3 loss to the Seattle Mariners

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 4/6/2012, 11:58pm

My full game story w/quotes is on our websites for you to check out ...

Disappointment was the general theme in the A's clubhouse, as you would expect after their 7-3 loss to the Mariners in their home opener Friday. I couldn't help but think how much this game reminded me of last year's season-opening loss to Seattle at the Coliseum. That game was much uglier — the A's committed five errors in a 6-2 defeat — but it was similar in that there was a jacked-up sellout crowd that saw the home team lay an egg. The A's have to hope Friday's game isn't an omen of things to come.

—The one bright spot for the A's, obviously, was Yoenis Cespedes. His fourth-inning homer was something to watch — you don't see many balls reach the area where that ball hit. But something also struck me about his two strikeouts — they both came on fastballs. Cespedes swung through a 95 mph offering from right-hander Steve Delabar in the sixth and then watched a 93 mph fastball on the inside corner from right-hander Tom Wilhelmsen in the eighth. For all the breaking balls that Cespedes is likely to see — especially when he's willing to chase them out of the strike zone — a well-spotted fastball on the black will be tough for him to combat if he's looking for off-speed stuff.

A's manager Bob Melvin said during the spring that Cespedes wasn't really being tested defensively during Cactus League games. He had plenty of action in Friday's game alone — Michael Saunders' double hit directly over his head in the fourth (I didn't see how good of a jump Cespedes got on the ball or whether he had a chance to catch it); and Ichiro Suzuki's sacrifice fly in the sixth, when Cespedes almost nailed Brendan Ryan at the plate.

But Cespedes said he has something more basic to work on — tracking ground balls as they scoot through the Coliseum's outfield grass. One ball kicked away from him Friday, though it didn't allow anyone to advance. "I have to try to find a way to catch the ball when it's running on the grass because the ball goes like a snake," Cespedes said.

That's all for now ...

Inside the Oakland A's: Josh Reddick gets a shot as the A's No. 3 hitter

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 4/6/2012, 6:07pm

Checking in from the Coliseum for the A's home opener. Technically, their home opener took place at the Tokyo Dome, but this feels more like the authentic deal. And we should have a good atmosphere for it, with a sellout crowd expected. (Tomorrow night will be a different story. Expect half the turnout of what they get tonight). ...

The A's lineup took many different shapes during spring training and in the Tokyo series, and tonight brings another twist. Coco Crisp bats second with Cliff Pennington dropping down to the ninth spot. Josh Reddick is hitting third, followed by DH Jonny Gomes and Yoenis Cespedes in the fifth spot. The complete lineups:

A's: Weeks 2B, Crisp LF, Reddick RF, Gomes DH, Cespedes CF, Suzuki C, Donaldson 3B, Ka'aihue 1B, Pennington SS; McCarthy RHP.

Mariners: Figgins LF, Ackley 2B, Ichiro RF, Smoak 1B, Montero DH, Seager 3B, Olivo C, Saunders CF, Ryan SS; Vargas LHP.

"I want to see what Reddick can do in the '3' spot," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "He's shown he can hit lefties ... He's swinging the bat consistently, and you want the most consistent guy hitting third for you."

It's definitely a more conventional look — with Crisp, a speedy switch hitter, batting second rather than third — and to me it offers the most promise. It gives the A's two switch-hitting table-setters atop the lineup in Weeks and Crisp, and in Reddick, they have a No. 3 hitter with a little more pop in his bat. Batting Pennington ninth also makes the bottom of the order stronger, and as Melvin pointed out, he still has a speedy trio batting back-to-back-to-back in Pennington, Weeks and Crisp.

Now, it can all change quickly, as it did during the spring. But I would expect to see this batting order, or one very similar to it, often in the first couple weeks of the season.

What are your thoughts on this lineup, 1 through 9? ...

—Reddick provided the quote of the afternoon, and it had nothing to do with batting third. The right fielder was asked about the challenge of the language barrier between him and center fielder Cespedes. “As long as he knows how to say ‘I got it,’ we’re going to be all right,” Reddick said. “I don’t want that brick wall running into me.”

The Drumbeat: Josh Reddick batting third in A’s Coliseum opener

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the Coliseum, 4/6/2012, 5:55pm

The twist in the lineup for the opener at the Coliseum: Josh Reddick, who’d hit fifth and seventh in the order in Tokyo, is batting third tonight, with Coco Crisp sliding up from third to second and Cliff Pennington dropping from second to ninth.

The No. 3 spot is often considered the spot for a team’s best overall hitter, and during the spring, Reddick did hit for both average and power, and he hit lefties and right-handers.

Melvin also mentioned that Reddick can hit balls in the gap, and he can run. “You want your most consistent hitter hitting third, and he’s had a consistent approach against right-handers and left-handers, and he had good at-bats against (Jason) Vargas in Japan.”

I asked Reddick about hitting third and he said he feels relaxed there, well protected by the hitters around him. “It’s not like the fourth spot – I put too much pressure on myself,” he said.

Melvin said that Pennington did nothing wrong to be pushed down to No. 9, but he wants to keep Pennington hitting near leadoff man Jemile Weeks and Crisp. Three fast switch-hitters in a row, Melvin likes that for obvious reasons.

Pennington has made it fairly clear that he like hitting higher up in the order, but he told me today that he has no problem with dropping down. “Anywhere 1 through 9,” he said.

Yoenis Cespedes is playing in his first regular-season home game in Oakland, and he said the fans were very supportive in Tuesday’s game against the Giants. “I want them to continue to support me in good times and bad,” Cespedes said via interpreter Ariel Prieto.

Cespedes was asked about playing in the Coliseum, which is not a hitter’s park, and he said that if he gets the pitch he’s looking for and hits it, “It’s going.”

He might have to reassess that after a few weeks; plenty of guys crush balls here only to see them die at the wall on chilling evenings.

I asked him about the cold weather, and the Cuban smiled and said, “I’ve never been involved in cold weather. I’m going to fix it. I’m going to do something.”

I’m pretty sure that means he’ll dress more warmly, but I love the idea of him fixing the weather even more. That’d get him some Rookie of the Year votes for sure.

Here’s the A’s lineup vs. Seattle starter Jason Vargas: Weeks 2B, Crisp LF, Reddick RF, Gomes DH, Cespedes CF, Suzuki C, Donaldson 3B, Ka’aihue 1B, Pennington SS. Brandon McCarthy is on the mound for Oakland.

Yoenis Céspedes goes deep in home-opening loss

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

The A’s might have dropped their Coliseum opener on Friday night, but their new center fielder made a major impression, including one above the luxury seats in left center.

Yoenis Céspedes homered for the second time in three regular-season games, demonstrating that the A’s, expected to be light in the power department, have at least one big threat. And his two-run shot in the fourth off Jason Vargas was absolutely hammered, going 462 feet according to ESPN.

He stayed at the plate briefly to admire the blast. But, Céspedes said, he won't be doing that again.

"I followed the ball, but I don't want to do that again," he said, with Ariel Prieto translating. "I come from Cuba, where there's a little less quality games, so we do that. But here I don't want to do that."

Otherwise, Oakland's 7-3 loss was lackluster and forgettable, consisting of blah defense and near-misses before a crowd of 35,067.

"The whole game was very disappointing," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "We wanted to put on a good show tonight. We don't get many crowds like that; we wanted to make a good first impression."

An error by new third baseman Josh Donaldson, a converted catcher, on a bunt by Chone Figgins in the third led to three unearned runs off A's starter Brandon McCarthy. That same inning, Céspedes and right fielder Josh Reddick both dropped flyballs while making the transfer to their gloves. The outs were recorded, but the overall look: sloppy.

"We were a little jumpy," Melvin said.

McCarthy said his command was "as bad as it's been in a long time. I had very little feel."

He allowed another run in the fourth and Jordan Norberto gave up two in the sixth. Céspedes nearly threw out a runner at the plate that inning, but Kurt Suzuki couldn't quite reach far enough for the tag. Melvin credited Brendan Ryan for his early recognition of where to slide to avoid the tag.

Céspedes, moved up to fifth in the batting order, was playing in his first regular-season game in Oakland. He is still adjusting to the chilly evening temperatures.

"I've never been involved in cold weather," he said with a smile before the game. "I'm going to fix it. I'm going to do something."

Céspedes, signed to a four-year, \$36 million deal during spring training, is the first player in Oakland history to hit two homers in his first three games. The only other A's player to do so in franchise history was another Cuban player, shortstop Campy Campaneris.

The A's have lost 10 consecutive Coliseum openers.

A's fans miss Céspedes' batting-practice show

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

An A's official told me before Friday night's Oakland opener, "We've got what could be the two most exciting position players in the Bay Area." It wasn't a knock on the Giants as much as deservedly high praise for Yoenis Céspedes and Jemile Weeks.

A's fans already know the excitement Weeks brings to a game, based on what he showed after his promotion in June, and Giants fans would make a case for Buster Posey. But no everyday player in these parts is quite like Céspedes, tiny sample size or no tiny sample size.

Céspedes hit a home run Friday that nearly knocked over Mount Davis, an extension of the Cuban defector's mind-blowing batting practices. It was a shot-from-a-cannon kind of swing, reminiscent of Jose Canseco or Mark McGwire, hit so hard that fans 400 feet from the plate ducked for cover.

The ball sailed above the center-field wall, above the batter's eye, above a camera deck, above an overhang, above a sign marking sections 139 and 140, above a series of luxury boxes - a total of 462 feet, according to ESPN's home run tracker.

The furthest ball he ever hit?

"No," he quickly said. "I got a few more longer than that in Cuba."

Céspedes stood at the plate until the ball landed, which wasn't well received by the Mariners, including pitcher Jason Vargas. Céspedes said it's common practice in Cuba and that he'll try not to do it again. The thing is, the ball landed seemingly a split second after he hit it.

"He definitely puts everything he has into every pitch. You don't see many baseballs leave the park as fast as his do. We saw that in Japan," said teammate Josh Reddick, noting Céspedes' no-doubter off Seattle's Shawn Kelley on March 29. A mere 414 feet.

You've heard that Céspedes needs to learn about the league? Hitting coach Chili Davis has a different view.

"To tell you truth, I think the league needs to learn about him as much as he needs to learn about the league," Davis said. "They don't know him. They haven't seen him. The teams (training) in Florida go merely off scouting reports or what they see on TV. They don't know him, and they'll have to find out themselves. During that period, there will be mistakes made."

A few hours before Céspedes' homer, which accounted for Oakland's first two runs in a 7-3 loss, he staged another must-see batting practice. Folks following the team still talk about his BPs in Japan, Sacramento and San Francisco, and Friday's was just as grand, downright Bonds-like.

Too bad A's fans couldn't see it. The gates opened at 5:10 p.m., but Céspedes was done hitting. By the time fans arrived, the last couple of A's were in the cage, and one man behind the dugout yelled, "Hey, who are you guys?" Had the gates opened a half-hour sooner, fans would have known exactly who was hitting.

(Suggestion: Let the people watch the \$36 million man take BP.)

There's no bigger supporter of Céspedes than Davis, but Davis isn't all in with the center fielder's pregame laser shows. A big-leaguer for 19 seasons, Davis said the most awesome BPs he witnessed were Ken Griffey Jr.'s and Darryl Strawberry's, though he also enjoyed Dale Murphy's and Al Oliver's because liners were hit everywhere, and Edgar Martinez put on a daily clinic.

How about Céspedes' BPs?

"Mouth-opening," Davis said. "The thing is to contain that and not have it become an enemy to his swing."

Meaning?

"Sometimes you get homer happy in BP," Davis said. "You see 60 mph, if that much, from a coach. They're laying it right in there. I prefer sometimes he'd rather not display power as much as discipline, use the whole field."

Early in Friday's BP, facing coach Curt Young, Céspedes hit everything to right field, as if Davis got to him and told him to cool it. By the end, balls were flying out at a rapid pace. He cleared the wall on his final three swings.

"I've seen a couple of guys put on batting-practice shows like he does. It's few and far between," said Reddick, mentioning former Boston teammates David Ortiz and Adrian Beltre. "It's always a pleasure to watch."

On a team expected to go nowhere, Céspedes should keep the A's on the map. His speed, range and arm also are impressive. Plus, who else has rejected bigger offers elsewhere to play in Oakland?

"I tried to sign for four years, and I was going to be happy with the team that signed me," Céspedes said. "I like it. It's beautiful around here."

River Cats announcer Johnny Duskow fills in

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Many of the A's know radio broadcaster **Johnny Duskow** well after coming through Triple-A Sacramento - Duskow has called the River Cats' games for the past 11 seasons.

Now, Duskow, 45, is filling in at the big-league level for **Ken Korach**, who had knee replacement surgery last month, and the experience isn't much different for Duskow than it was for the ex-River Cats when they got promoted. **Ken Pries**, the A's vice president of broadcasting, brought Duskow into manager **Bob Melvin's** office, "And he said, 'You're getting called up,' " Duskow said with a laugh.

Duskow is beloved by Sacramento players, so former River Cats are delighted he's here.

"It's really cool," right-handed starter **Graham Godfrey** said. "Knowing how hard Johnny works, to see him in the big-league clubhouse and to see the smile on his face, I get just as much enjoyment out of it as he does."

Third baseman **Josh Donaldson** added: "It's awesome. He's such a character, and he does such a good job. For him to get this opportunity, everyone who knows him is happy for him."

Duskow's first A's broadcast came Monday during the Bay Bridge series, and he was so nervous to start off, he stumbled a bit.

"The first two things I said I butchered," Duskow said. "I called Bob Melvin '**Bob Brenly**,' and then I started mumbling. I was a mess, but by the bottom of the second inning, I was finally relaxed."

Duskow said that fellow broadcasters **Vince Cotroneo**, **Ray Fosse** and Korach have helped make things easy. Duskow is expected to do this homestand and probably the first two road trips.

Long time gone: After opening the season in Tokyo against the A's, the Mariners returned to Arizona for Cactus League games. Now they're in Oakland, and then they go to Texas. Total time before getting to Seattle: two months and two days. "And it feels like every bit of it," Mariners shortstop **Brendan Ryan** said. "I've pretty much gotten used to living out of a suitcase."

Seattle manager **Eric Wedge** praised how well his players have handled this stretch, but the A's might have had a little advantage being home for a full week, at least in terms of getting settled for the season. Ryan said he's still got an empty apartment in Seattle. "I'm ordering TVs online," he said. "It would be nice to be Oakland and have walked in the front door already."

No sympathy from the A's.

"It's a tough situation - but I don't feel sorry for them," Donaldson said. "They're our enemy. Anything that might help us is great."

A's On Deck

Saturday

vs. Mariners

6:05 p.m. **CSN+**

Hernandez (14-14) vs. Colon (8-10)

Sunday

Off

Monday

vs. Royals

7:05 p.m. **CSNCA**

Mendoza (2-0) vs. Milone (1-0)

Leading off

Lots of Felix: Felix Hernandez, who faced the A's in Japan, was shifted from starting Friday to Saturday, meaning Oakland now must also face him in Seattle's home opener next Friday. "Not cool, not cool," Mariners shortstop Brendan Ryan said. "I know if I were another team, I wouldn't be in favor of that."

Melky Cabrera, at least, in fine form for Giants

Bruce Jenkins, San Francisco Chronicle

So much to lament in the Giants' opener. **Tim Lincecum** grooved far too many pitches, and **Buster Posey** bobbled a chopper right in front of him for a costly error. **Aubrey Huff** was off-balance at the plate all night, runners stranded in the process, and nearly everyone in the lineup got a wheelhouse fastball they failed to crush.

The shining lights were **Pablo Sandoval**, who showed the plate discipline to get a two-out, off-field double to drive home a run in the ninth inning, and **Melky Cabrera**, who had a terrific spring and looms as a man who should not be batting second in this order.

During the Bay Bridge Series against the A's, Cabrera hit one of those **Barry Bonds**-like bullets with a dead-pull stroke, somehow keeping it fair (from the right side of the plate) for a stunning home run at AT&T Park as it traveled about eight feet off the ground. His left-handed homer Friday night was another laser beam. Study the numbers this man posted in Kansas City last year, and you figure he's up for an encore.

The last honest man

Stan Van Gundy might not last the weekend as coach of the Orlando Magic, but feel no pity. He's already gone, in his mind, and what an exquisite parting shot: publicly confirming rumors that **Dwight Howard** asked management to fire him. Howard has been pulling that backstab routine for months, figuring everything would be wonderful next season (the extent of his commitment to the team), but when Howard strolled into Van Gundy's news conference, he (a) didn't realize what his coach just said, and (b) pathetically tried to deny everything. What a classic bust. Maybe it was unprofessional on Van Gundy's part, but the oblivious Howard needed to be exposed ... Then Orlando took the court against the Knicks, and instead of showing exactly why he's the best center in the league, Howard went into a shell and didn't score until late in the third quarter. "He quit," as **Charles Barkley** put it so well on TNT ... Overmatched general manager **Otis Smith** insists that the Van Gundy-Howard crisis "will have to work out, for the rest of the season," and that's fine, if the Magic prefer a

summer in disgrace. If they have any designs on a playoff run, they should replace Van Gundy with an assistant (**Patrick Ewing** or **Brendan Malone**, who has 100 games of NBA head-coaching experience) right now, for the hell of it. Van Gundy won't care. He'll have a better job next year, ideally alongside a superstar with some integrity ... Does **Magic Johnson** have any idea how **Frank McCourt** destroyed the Dodger franchise? When the \$2.15 billion sale was announced, Johnson lamely said he intends to "build on the fantastic foundation laid by Frank McCourt." Then he sat right next to the hideous little fraud on the Dodgers' opening night in San Diego. It raises legitimate suspicions about the team's agreement to let McCourt stay in the picture with joint ownership of the parking lots and land surrounding Dodger Stadium. Clearly, he is not going away ... Quick word to Commissioner **Bud Selig**: Knock off the eternal mysteries of Opening Day. Have every team christen the season on a single afternoon - no night games allowed - and take it from there.

Jim Bowden, the former Cincinnati general manager who now works as an ESPN analyst, believes that **Trevor Cahill** has dropped his arm slot - due to either "shoulder problems or bad mechanics" - and that his sinker is no longer effective. Worth monitoring, although the Giants won't see the ex-A's right-hander in Arizona ... Seldom, if ever, will you hear music in a big-league clubhouse after a loss. Only a morgue-like mood is appropriate. The Cubs' players were so disgusted by the sight of the descending media after their season-opening loss to Washington, they turned up a **Bob Marley** CD full blast. That's a team going nowhere ... Opening Day left fielders and princes of humanity: **Mark DeRosa** (Nationals) and **Cody Ross** (Red Sox) ... As feared by some in Boston, manager **Bobby Valentine's** ego is spinning out of control. He had the gall to sign up for a weekly radio show throughout the season on ESPN New York, hosted by Yankees broadcaster **Michael Kay** ... The avalanche of false hope surrounding **Tiger Woods** is routinely overbearing, but by far the most ludicrous take comes from ESPN's **Rick Reilly**. Picking Tiger to win the Masters amid laments that he'll never be the old Woods, Reilly blurted out, "What if he's better?" Good lord, man. Pay attention.

The Drumbeat: Yoenis Cespedes goes deep – very deep – in A's loss to Seattle

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the Coliseum, 4/6/2012, 10:12pm

Looking for A's highlights? There was only one you're going to want to see, and that's this one of Yoenis Cespedes' towering two-run homer tonight.

ESPN measured the blast at 462 feet, and it struck the ledge *above* the luxury suites in left center in the fourth.

He stayed at the plate briefly to admire the blast, but, Cespedes said, he won't be doing that again.

"I followed the ball, but I don't like that to do that again," he said. "I come from Cuba, where it's a little less quality games, so we do that. But here I don't want to do that."

Cespedes is the first player in Oakland history to homer in two of his first three games. One other player also has done so in franchise history – his Cuban countryman, Campy Campaneris.

Cespedes was also part of Oakland's not-so-successful defense in a 7-3 loss to Seattle. He dropped a flyball while transferring to his glove; the out was recorded but still... And his throw to the plate in the sixth arrived before Brendan Ryan, but Ryan took a great path to the plate, well to the inside and away from Kurt Suzuki, set up behind the plate, and Suzuki couldn't reach far enough to get him.

Cespedes' dropped transfer-to-glove was followed immediately by another one: Josh Reddick did it, too.

"The whole game was very disappointing," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "We wanted to put on a good show tonight. We don't get many crowds like that, we wanted to make a good first impression."

He called the A's defense "jumpy," especially when it came to taking balls out of gloves.

Earlier in the evening, Josh Donaldson's throwing error at third helped the Mariners score three unearned runs in their four-run third off Brandon McCarthy. McCarthy didn't use the error as an excuse – in fact, he said it was his fault the error was even made because he'd given up a double to Ryan to start the inning.

McCarthy said his command was worse than it's been in a longtime, starting in that inning. "I had very little feel," he said. "The opposite of how I felt in Japan. Tonight, I just couldn't execute. In the third inning, I lost my feel and it was an uphill fight to get it back."

Like Melvin, McCarthy had wanted the team to put on a better show for the first regular-season game in Oakland.

"It sucks," he said. "A game like that, all the fans here. They really support you and you'd like to go out and do your best."

Oakland fans aren't unaccustomed to poor showings in Coliseum openers: The A's have dropped 10 in a row.

Seattle got another run the next inning when Michael Saunders doubled and Chone Figgins singled him in, and then Jordan Norberto gave up two runs in the sixth.

Seth Smith drove in a run with a pinch-hit single in the eighth for Oakland.

Cespedes is the only A's player to record hits in each of the first three games.

Cespedes' shot lone highlight in loss to M's

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The A's suffered their second loss on Friday. But the majority of those in attendance for the home opener aren't going to remember this particular game for what the final box score said -- not after what they saw in the fourth inning.

The moment itself lasted mere seconds. But Yoenis Cespedes' first home run in the Coliseum -- an absolutely colossal two-run shot to center field, measured by ESPN at 462 feet -- will be talked about for much longer. Hundreds of home runs have surely surpassed that mark -- Cespedes even said he's hit longer ones in Cuba. But A's fans aren't so accustomed to the *long*, long ball in the confines of their spacious abode.

Some, then, would consider Oakland's 7-3 loss to the Mariners a side note to the Cespedes Show. For the game itself -- an affair characterized by a messy defensive scene -- wasn't pretty. Cespedes' homer was.

"Hopefully, they can get used to it," said Jonny Gomes.

Gomes was on base at the time, having reached on a walk issued by Seattle lefty Jason Vargas. With two outs, Cespedes approached the plate for his second at-bat of the night, following a flyout to right field in the first. He took a called strike, then two balls. And before most eyes could recognize the next pitch, Cespedes had sent it above the center-field luxury boxes.

"Fastball, in the middle," he said through translator Ariel Prieto.

"He was leaning out there and hit it pretty hard," Vargas said. "I didn't see where it went. But on the replay, it looked like it went pretty far."

Cespedes, like the sold-out crowd of 35,067, just watched the ball sail. In fact, Cespedes may have watched it a little too long. Afterward, he noted it's probably not an act he should repeat again. But, soon enough, he gradually made his way around the bases, his home-run trot seemingly mastered.

"They all pretty much make the same sound. So when he hits one, there's usually no doubt about it," manager Bob Melvin said. "It doesn't matter, really, the ballpark or where it's at."

It marked his second long ball in just three big league games, a feat not accomplished by any other player in A's history. If Cespedes keeps up his pace, he may find himself batting third or fourth, rather than in one of the three slots that follow, sooner than he thought.

As the A's learned, though, such an impact bat can't always impact the final score. And a visibly disappointed Melvin was not interested in dwelling on the home run.

"The whole game was very disappointing for me," Melvin said. "We really wanted to put on a good show tonight. We don't get too many good crowds like that. And on Opening Night, you want to make a good first impression. We didn't play [nearly] as well as we should."

And right-hander Brandon McCarthy didn't exactly enjoy a repeat performance of his one-run outing against the Mariners a week earlier. A four-run third plagued the A's No. 1 starter, who exited the lengthy inning with 59 pitches already in the books.

Brendan Ryan doubled to lead off the frame, and when a pesky Chone Figgins -- he went 3-for-4 from the leadoff spot -- bunted up the third-base line, A's third baseman-in-training Josh Donaldson's throw to first hit Figgins in the back. An ensuing base hit by Dustin Ackley and a walk to Ichiro Suzuki loaded the bases and McCarthy, who proceeded to tally two outs while letting just one run score, appeared close to exiting the jam. He subsequently surrendered a two-run single to Kyle Seager to put the Mariners ahead, 4-0.

"It was bad, about as bad as it's been in a long time," McCarthy said. "Just very little feel, kind of the complete opposite of how I felt in Tokyo. I felt very sharp there, could execute mostly everything I wanted to do. Tonight, [it] just wasn't the case. For some reason, I just lost all feel for anything I was trying to do. The first two innings felt sharp. Things just kind of sped up in the third, and I couldn't really get it back."

The A's right-hander, coming off a seven-inning performance, lasted just five this time, giving up five runs (two earned) on seven hits with two walks and three strikeouts on 95 pitches along the way. McCarthy, a perfectionist of sorts, will have to be as close to that this season while pitching for a mostly unproven offense.

Seth Smith tallied the only other RBI for the A's in the bottom of the eighth, a one-out single that plated Jemile Weeks. But that was all the team that compiled baseball's third-best spring record could manage.

"We have a lot of young guys, a lot of guys who haven't played together before," said Melvin. "And we're continually trying to move on in the process of playing together as a team. We got off to a good start in Spring Training, but tonight was not a good game for us."

But a memorable one, no doubt, for fans meeting Cespedes for the first time.

"He'll hit 'em further than that," Melvin assured.

Cespedes getting settled into Coliseum

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Never mind the pitching-friendly confines of the Oakland Coliseum. Yoenis Cespedes, gradually acclimating to his new digs, says if he hits the ball well, "the ball's gone."

The A's newest outfielder is more concerned about a different aspect of his big home: the weather. When asked about the cold conditions in the Bay Area, Cespedes smiled and told reporters through his translator Ariel Prieto that he's going to try to "fix it."

"He's going to try to do something about it," Prieto said, laughing.

Cespedes appears capable of many things, but controlling the temperature likely isn't one of them. In the meantime, he'll focus on what he can manage -- like working his way up in the lineup. For the club's home opener and his first regular-season game in Oakland on Friday, Cespedes was placed in the No. 5 spot in the order, after batting seventh and sixth, respectively, in the two-game Opening Series in Japan last week.

"I've said all along, we expect him to be a middle-of-the-order bat," manager Bob Melvin said. "He's got tremendous power. He's got the ability to drive in runs. We're not trying to put too much on his plate. He's got enough going on. But at some point in time, we'll sneak him up there. And maybe inching him up day by day or game by game, he won't notice when he's in the four hole one day."

Either way, it likely wouldn't faze the right-handed hitter, who entered the day as one of only two batters -- Cliff Pennington being the other -- who has hit safely in each of the first two games.

"I feel a lot better, really relaxed," Cespedes said.

The 26-year-old Cuban defector relayed that he felt "great and happy at the same time" when speaking of his Oakland debut, and said he hopes the fans "support me in the good times and bad times."

"I'm going to try to look for good pitches and make good contact," Cespedes said. "No matter how I hit the ball, if I find the ball I'm looking for, if I hit it and if it's gone, it's gone."

The spacious outfield, meanwhile, shouldn't prove too heavy a task for the speedster, who has been relying on left fielder Coco Crisp for some insight into the park's characteristics. Right fielder Josh Reddick, also new to Oakland, believes Cespedes is acclimating just fine, and jokingly called him a "ball hog."

"I guess that's a good thing, right?" Reddick said. "He's definitely taking charge out there, and that's what you want out of your center fielder. You just have to learn to know where he's out and get out of his way, because he's a little bit bigger than I am. So I don't want to be running into him."

Felix set to take on Colon in battle of righties

By Quinn Roberts / MLB.com | 4/7/2012 2:15 AM ET

Outlook: Colon will give A's innings for young staff

When the Mariners and Athletics take the field on Saturday, it'll already be Round 2 of the season for Mariners starter Felix Hernandez and A's starter Bartolo Colon.

Each took the hill during the two-game series in Japan last month, with Hernandez getting a no-decision March 28 after pitching eight innings of one-run ball. Colon earned a win on the 29th after tossing eight innings and surrendering only one run.

The Mariners' right-hander, who hasn't lost to the A's in over three seasons, will also see the team again next Friday in Seattle's home opener.

Yet, facing the same team for his first three starts doesn't bother Hernandez.

"Nope, I don't think it makes any difference. You make good pitches and you'll be out of there," Hernandez said. "It can help me and it could help them, too. They'll have seen me three times, but I'm not going to change anything. I'll just go out there and pitch."

The same could be said for Colon, who continues to build an impressive resume against the Mariners. With a 15-11 record and 4.01 ERA in 30 career starts against Seattle, Colon's win total is tied with John Lackey for the most among active pitchers.

Lights-out at the Coliseum, as well, the right-hander is 5-1 with a 2.14 ERA in seven career appearances (six starts).

"I don't think he's afraid to let you hit the ball, and he knows where it's going, which means he can keep you out of the big part of the ballpark, at times. And here, it doesn't carry as well to the big part, so he's aware of that," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "He's a veteran who has pitched in all kinds of scenarios, and I think he can acclimate to any one of them. His style of pitching, though, would lend to him feeling comfortable in this ballpark."

Mariners: Montero gets start at DH against A's

Jesus Montero was in the Mariners' lineup as the designated hitter on Friday against the A's in his first game since getting hit in the head with a pitch on Monday by Rockies right-hander Edgmer Escalona.

Montero was cleared to play after going through a full workout on Thursday after the Mariners got to Oakland.

"Yeah, everything is good," Montero said. "It took a couple days. The next day, I was feeling dizzy and [had] a lot of headaches. But after that, I was good. It was a big hit."

- Since the A's moved to Oakland in 1968, no player has recorded more hits against the Green and Gold than Ichiro Suzuki with 284.

Athletics: Reddick hits third against M's

Manager Bob Melvin decided to pencil Josh Reddick's name into the three hole for Friday's game against the M's, behind Jemile Weeks and Coco Crisp. The move also forced Cliff Pennington into the ninth spot.

"We're going to work the lineup around a little bit and try to find what we feel is the best combination," Melvin said. "We've been doing that all spring. Penny's been hitting, for the most part, second. I want to see what Reddick can do in the third spot. He's shown he can hit left-handers, as well, so we're playing a little bit more to him today."

Worth noting

- Eighteen of the Mariners' first 27 games, and 28 of their first 43, will be played on the road.
- The last time the A's hit more than three home runs in a game was June 3, 2010, at Boston.

Major League: Cespedes batting fifth in Oakland debut

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 4/6/2012, 6:20pm

Nevermind the pitching-friendly confines of the Oakland Coliseum. Yoenis Cespedes, gradually acclimating to his new digs, says if he hits the ball well, "the ball's gone."

The A's newest outfielder is more concerned about a different aspect of his big home: the weather. When asked about the cold conditions in the Bay Area, Cespedes smiled and told reporters through translator Ariel Prieto he's going to try to "fix it."

"He's going to try to do something about it," Prieto said, laughing.

Cespedes appears capable of many things, but controlling the temperature likely isn't one of them. In the meantime, he'll focus on what he can manage, like working his way up in the lineup. On Friday, for the club's home opener and his first regular-season game in Oakland, Cespedes was spotted in the fifth spot of the order after batting seventh and sixth, respectively, in the two-game Opening Series in Japan last week.

"I've said all along, we expect him to be a middle-of-the-order bat," manager Bob Melvin said. "He's got tremendous power. He's got the ability to drive in runs. We're not trying to put too much on his plate. He's got enough going on, but at some point in time we'll sneak him up there and maybe inching him up day by day or game by game, he won't notice when he's in the four hole one day."

Either way, it likely wouldn't phase the right-handed hitter, who entered the day as one of only two batters — Cliff Pennington being the other — who has hit safely in each of the first two games.

"I feel a lot better, really relaxed," Cespedes said.

The 26-year-old Cuban defector relayed feelings of "great and happy at the same time" when speaking of his Oakland debut and said he hopes the fans "support me in the good times and bad times."

"I'm going to try to look for good pitches and make good contact," he said. "No matter how I hit the ball, if I find the ball I'm looking for, if I hit it and if it's gone, it's gone."

The spacious outfield, meanwhile, shouldn't prove too heavy a task for the speedster, who has been relying on left fielder Coco Crisp for some insight into the park's characteristics. Right fielder Josh Reddick, also new to Oakland, believes Cespedes is acclimating just fine and jokingly called him a "ball hog."

"I guess that's a good thing, right?" Reddick said. "He's definitely taking charge out there, and that's what you want out of your center fielder. You just have to learn to know where he's out and get out of his way, because he's a little bit bigger than I am, so I don't want to be running into him."

The full lineup for tonight's home opener: Weeks 2B, Crisp LF, Reddick RF, Gomes DH, Cespedes CF, Suzuki C, Donaldson 3B, Ka'aihue 1B, Pennington SS

And for the Mariners: Figgins LF, Ackley 2B, Ichiro RF, Smoak 1B, Montero DH, Seager 3B, Olivo C, Saunders CF, Ryan SS

Melvin pointed to Reddick's consistency when discussing his decision to hit him third. Last year, while with Boston, Reddick never hit higher than fifth, but when I talked with him about the move today, he said he almost treats the two spots the same. It's the fourth hole, he said, that adds a little too much pressure for him to hit the long ball. While batting third, he can just worry about putting the ball in play enough for tablesetters Jemile Weeks and Coco Crisp to get around the bases.

Reddick's positioning forced Melvin to place Pennington all the way down in the ninth spot — a move, he said, that not necessarily reflects Pennington but, rather, Reddick. He likes having Pennington batting next to fellow speedsters Weeks and Crisp.

...Like we saw against Seattle lefty Jason Vargas last week, it's Jonny Gomes getting the nod at DH tonight. Expect him to see the majority of action vs. southpaws, with Seth Smith likely reserved for the right-handers.

...On the mound, it's Brandon McCarthy again, with Bartolo Colon set for tomorrow's start. McCarthy pitched 7 innings in his first start, and Colon went 8, marking the first time since 1991 the A's had their starters pitch at least 7 frames in each of the first two games.

...One final note: Seven A's players (Balfour, Blevins, Crisp, Fuentes, McCarthy, Pennington, Suzuki) returned from last year's Opening Day roster. Those are the fewest returning players from a previous OD roster since OD rosters were first available in 1992.

COHN: In Cespedes, a reason to watch A's

Cuban slugger drives homer off second-deck facade, also strikes out twice

By LOWELL COHN, THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Friday night. A's home opener 2012. A sellout. Mariners 7, A's 3.

Not much expected of the A's. But teams can be surprising. And the A's have an intriguing new player.

That would be Yoenis Cespedes, 26. The Cuban expatriate, star of Cuban baseball, hit a two-run home run, his second of the season, in the bottom of the fourth, an electric 462-foot bomb off the facade of the lower suites in left field. He said he hit them farther back in Cuba.

He's a newcomer to Oakland, newcomer to the big leagues, and he's 5-10, 210 — think Mike Tyson's size — and he's earning big bucks and might be able to carry a team if the team has something worth carrying.

He has a great throwing arm — he threw a one-hop strike to second base from the center-field wall in the top of the third after fielding a double by Brendan Ryan. In the same inning, Mariners left fielder Chone Figgins didn't dare run home on a potential sacrifice fly ball because of Cespedes' arm. And to top things off, Cespedes has his own personal translator, former A's pitcher Ariel Prieto.

So, even if we can't take the A's seriously — that will be determined pretty soon — should we take Cespedes seriously?

To answer that question and others, here are two experts.

First expert: Chili Davis, a familiar name in these parts. He is the A's new hitting coach and he was an overwhelmingly popular Giants player, and at 52, he is what he always was — charming, sincere, funny, talkative, smart. Please enjoy the lengthy quotes from Davis. He's studied Cespedes and has lots to say.

What's impressive about Cespedes?

"What's not impressive?" Davis said. "Good hands, good power, hits the ball all over the field hard. I don't see any reason why he wouldn't be a good hitter here. He's got all the tools to be a good hitter."

Does he think well at the plate?

"We're working on that. Really and truly, he hasn't seen this league yet. They haven't seen him. Just let him be himself right now, because they (opponents) need to figure him out. I think once they start figuring him out, he will have done some damage by then, and that's when we start — we've already started talking about the difference in the style of pitchers and talents and innings and score. All that's going to determine how they're going to pitch to him.

"A lot of guys are going to run away from him because of his power. If they don't have the fastball, the stuff to get by him, they're not apt to challenge him the way they would other hitters. We talk about that every day. I think he's starting to comprehend a lot about the discipline of hitting instead of going up there and swinging. If he can grasp that concept, with the ability he has, I think he's going to be a big threat."

Have pitchers thrown sliders to him?

"Yes, they're testing him. If they make a mistake with that pitch, he hurts them. He's not one of those guys you can hang a pitch to and get away with it. He's going to hurt you. He's got great hands. His bat speed comes from his hands. I don't think anyone's going to consistently throw the ball past him.

"This guy's batting practice sessions can be mouth opening. He drives the ball. The thing with him is try to contain that and not have it become something. It (batting practice) can be an enemy to your swing. Sometimes, you get home-run happy in BP. You're seeing 60 miles an hour, they're laying it right in there. I prefer sometimes for him not to display power as much as discipline and use the whole field.

"A lot of times, you get opposing pitchers sitting out there watching you take BP. They already know how dangerous he is. You don't want them looking at any holes — not that he has holes. Just maintain the discipline throughout practice, not so much the impressive BP. You being strong enough, if you're consistent in your work habits, game time you're going to get that pitch and you're going to square it up, and there's no ballpark in this league that's going to contain him.

"The more people write about you, they can build you up and they can tear you down. I just want him to enjoy the year. I want him to go out and do what he knows he can do. I'm not here to throw things at him all the time. If he's having a good time, if he's in a groove, just let him be. When you see things working their way the opposite direction, then you try to grab him before it gets out of hand.

"I think the league needs to learn about him as much as he needs to learn about them. They don't know him. They haven't seen him. A lot of these teams that were in Florida, they're going off scouting reports or whatever they may have seen on TV. They don't know him. They're going to have to find him out themselves and during that period there can be some mistakes made. The adjustment is made pretty much after the first time around — that's the way I remember it."

How well does he play center field?

"He's defensively sound. I was like you guys are when I got to spring training: 'Let's see what this guy can do.' I've been really impressed with his play and more so with his work ethic."

Expert No. 2. This is a major-league scout who requested anonymity. Scouts generally request anonymity — they are stealth creatures.

"He's exciting," the scout said of Cespedes. "He's got tools. He's got ability. He's got instinct and presence. He's got everything. Time will tell. He'll have to grow up and learn fast. This is the hardest league in the world and to expect him to dominate the best league in the world is not fair.

"It's a breath of fresh air to see a player like this here (in Oakland). He's a great addition, but nobody is that smart to say he will be a great major-league player. I'm not smart enough to, but the things he does, not everyone on the field can do."

Cespedes went 1 for 4 in the opener. In his final at-bat, he struck out looking with two runners on base. So, he did well and he did not so well, and he's still learning.

Mariners top A's 7-3 in stateside opening night

By ANTONIO GONZALEZ, AP Sports Writer

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) The Seattle Mariners are getting good at spoiling the Oakland Athletics' openers. This year, they've done it twice.

On two different continents, no less.

More than a week since pausing a series that began in Japan, Chone Figgins had three hits and two RBIs, and Kyle Seager singled twice and drove in a pair of runs to lead the Mariners past the A's 7-3 on Friday night in the stateside opener for both teams.

"Great reopening day," said Seattle shortstop Brendan Ryan, who had two hits and a walk. "It's great to get restarted on a great note and doing the best we could to make them pay."

Again.

Seager's two-run single highlighted a four-run third inning that broke the game open for the Mariners, resuming the second half of a four-game series that started with a split in Japan. With the first victory going to the Mariners in each, Seattle has won its opener in Oakland three straight seasons.

"Opening day has been pretty good to us," said Jason Vargas (1-0), who allowed five hits in 5 1-3 innings. His only mistake was a cutting fastball crushed by Cuban defector Yoenis Cespedes to deep left-center field for a two-run homer, the second long ball of the season for Oakland's new center fielder.

McCarthy (0-1) gave up five runs - two earned - on seven hits in five innings. The A's never really mounted a threat, and settled for another setback against Seattle.

A wacky way to start the season finally began to resemble normalcy in the Coliseum's confines.

The series began March 28 in Japan. Both teams returned to the U.S. to finish up the spring training schedule - oddly squeezed between the series and spread out over more than a week - before resuming meaningful games.

The Mariners moved back into regular-season mode fast.

For that matter, so did the A's.

After Brendan Ryan doubled to lead off the third, Figgins bunted up the third-base line. Josh Donaldson's throw to first pushed hustling second baseman Jemile Weeks into the baseline, getting his hand crushed by Figgins and sending the ball - and Weeks' glove - into the spacious grass in foul territory.

McCarthy gave up a single to Dustin Ackley and a walk to Ichiro Suzuki to load the bases. He almost squeezed out of the jam when Justin Smoak flied out and Jesus Montero hit a sacrifice fly to right.

But Suzuki stole second and Seager followed with a two-run single to put the Mariners ahead 4-0, earning a smattering of boos from a rare crammed Coliseum crowd - announced a sellout at 35,067 - that has saved its best dismay for July, August and September in recent years.

"The whole game was disappointing," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "You want to make a good first impression. We don't get to play in front of too many crowds like that."

Only the newest and highest paid A's player gave fans something to cheer about.

Cespedes smacked a cutting fastball off Vargas that hit the second-deck facade in left-center in the fourth, taking a long stare at the ball and bringing the bright yellow-and-green clad fans roaring to their feet for a soaring shot sparingly hit by the home team. The two-run homer sliced Seattle's lead to 5-2 and gave A's faithful some hope they might've finally signed some pop.

"I've hit longer home runs in Cuba," Cespedes said. "For me, I just want to bring the power to the team. I tried to get a good pitch and make better contact."

Cespedes' home debut wasn't a complete success. He also struck out with two on in the sixth and again in the eighth after Jonny Gomes' run-scoring single to finish 1 for 4.

The Mariners added two more runs in the sixth off reliever Jordan Norberto to go ahead 7-2, spoiling one of Oakland's biggest nights of the year and setting the stage to take the season-opening series. Seattle will send ace Felix Hernandez to the mound opposite fellow right-hander Bartolo Colon for Saturday night's finale.

The Mariners pushed Hernandez's second start back so he could pitch the home opener in Seattle next Friday against Oakland.

NOTES: Oakland RF Josh Reddick is learning to speak a few Spanish words now that Cespedes is in center. Asked how the two communicate, Reddick joked, "As long as he knows how to say 'I got it,' we're good. I don't want to run into that brick wall." ... A moment of silence was held before the game for victims of a shooting at nearby Oikos University on Monday that killed seven people. ... Gene Tenace, who won the 1972 World Series MVP for Oakland, threw out the ceremonial first pitch.

'Opener' isn't much to get excited about

Matt Kawahara, Sacramento Bee

OAKLAND – Each team, officially, already had a win and a loss.

The pitchers came in with ERAs and the leadoff hitters with batting averages.

But those games were played more than a week ago in Japan, so the A's 7-3 loss to the Seattle Mariners on Friday night had the feel of an Opening Night.

"We had a unique opener in Japan, but the home opener's the one you always point to," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "It's the most exciting one, it's the one you get a little more nervous about.

"You always want to have a great first impression for your fans. You know they're going to be out in full force, so this is the one that everybody's a little more excited about."

The fans did turn out – an announced 35,067 of them making up a sellout. But they didn't have much to get excited about beyond their first close-up look at the power of new center fielder Yoenis Cespedes.

Oakland's main offseason acquisition launched a two-run homer in the fourth inning that ricocheted off the suite windows beyond left-center field. It was his second homer of the season, and he paused momentarily to watch its flight.

Applauded loudly before each at-bat, the Cuban defector had chances to further endear himself to the home crowd. But batting with two runners on and one out in the sixth inning and the A's trailing 7-2, Cespedes struck out swinging. In the same situation in the eighth inning, with the A's down by four, he struck out looking.

The A's never led in the game.

Starter Brandon McCarthy got into trouble in the third inning, when Mariners shortstop Brendan Ryan led off with a double. Chone Figgins followed with a bunt, but A's third baseman Josh Donaldson's throw to first base hit Figgins in the back and bounced away, allowing Ryan to score.

Dustin Ackley singled and Ichiro Suzuki walked to load the bases, and with one out, Jesus Montero's sacrifice fly to right scored Figgins.

Kyle Seager followed with a two-run single to put the Mariners up 4-0.

That was enough support for Seattle starter Jason Vargas, who earned the win, and three relievers. The Mariners, though, tacked on runs in the fourth and sixth innings, two of them on singles by Figgins, who was 3 for 4.

McCarthy lasted five innings and gave up five runs, two earned, and took his first loss.

In the spirit of the home opener, both teams were introduced before the game and aligned near an "Opening Series" logo painted along each foul line. Tailgaters were grilling in the O.co Coliseum parking lot five hours before the first pitch.

Eamonn Murtagh, 51, of Gilroy, was among the tailgaters. He said he feels "optimistic but realistic" about an A's team that opened in Japan with seven rookies on the roster and now, including starting pitcher Tommy Milone, has eight.

"I get what they had to do," Murtagh said, referencing the A's trading several of their top pitchers for prospects during the offseason. "I think all of us are expecting a new stadium soon, and that's what the A's are building for."

The arc of this season, meanwhile, said 67-year-old Dean Cunningham, will "depend on if the pitching holds up."

"I don't have real high expectations," said Cunningham, of Roseville. "But they could surprise us."

Cespedes more than introduced himself Friday

Paul Gutierrez, csnbayarea.com

As the A's went through the paces of opening night batting practice, a solitary voice cried out from the stands.

"Hey," the male fan yelled out to the guys in green and gold, "who *are* you guys?"

Some three hours later, Yoenis Cespedes gave not only the paying customer, but the entire sold-out crowd at the Oakland Coliseum an answer. A thundering, 462-foot, shake-Mt. Davis-to-its-bloody-core retort.

Cespedes, the Cuban defector whose rights were surprisingly won by the notoriously thrifty A's, announced his presence with authority, to borrow a line from the seminal baseball classic "Bull Durham." His fourth-inning home run, a two-out, two-run blast on a 2-and-1, 84-mph fastball down the pipe that ricocheted off the facade of the second deck in left-center field, was a thing of monstrous wonder...and beauty.

It echoed Miguel Tejada at the height of his powers. Bo Jackson in the 1989 All-Star Game. Frank Thomas in his epic 2006 season with the A's.

"I've hit some farther in Cuba," a chagrined Cespedes said in Spanish.

Indeed, it was the hardest-sounding hit ball by an A's batter since The Big Hurt made a run at the MVP award six years ago. Yes, "sounding."

Because even when Cespedes took batting practice, you could tell when it was him in the cage. Simply by the sound of the ball coming off his bat. The same way you could tell it was Thomas taking his hacks.

"You don't see too many here at night that go that far," offered A's manager Bob Melvin. "He'll hit them farther than that."

Granted, Thomas should be in Cooperstown in a few years while Cespedes was playing his third -- ever -- game in the major leagues. So the comparison is oh-so unfair. But this is what happens when a moribund franchise in desperate need of a marquee player that makes you stop what you're doing every time he comes to the plate lands such a hitter.

The way Tejada did. And Jackson. And yes, Thomas.

Even when the 5-foot-10, 210-pounder -- he looks much larger -- is striking out. As he did in the sixth inning. Swinging. And in the eighth. Looking.

These A's, though, seem to get stage fright under the bright lights of opening night. In falling to Seattle, 7-3, the A's lost their eighth straight Coliseum opener.

And you expected Cespedes to have butterflies?

Nerves are what Cespedes experienced as he planned his defection last summer to the Dominican Republic. When the five-tool player left behind everything and anything he has ever known. When he put pen to paper to sign that four-year, \$36-million contract with the A's to realize a dream of playing in *Las Grandes Ligas*.

In eight seasons playing for Granma in Cuba's Serie Nacional, Cespedes hit 177 home runs. And in his final season, he batted .333 with 30 homers and 99 RBI in 90 games.

So yeah, he could rake. But the Mariners also showed respect for his arm, the speedy Chone Figgins not daring test him by tagging from third base on a medium-range fly ball in the third inning.

"He looks to be a true center fielder," Melvin said.

But in getting full extension on his home run, the 26-year-old rookie pulled the most veteran of moves in admiring his shot at the plate before embarking on his fanciful trip around the bases.

In Cuba, where the games have more showmanship than stateside, Cespedes would have watched the flight of his ball longer, and with more aplomb.

Instead...

"What are you doing?" Cespedes asked himself, before sheepishly realizing where he was and exiting the box.

Eight days earlier, on another continent, Cespedes homered off Seattle's Shawn Kelly in the Tokyo Dome. So when his 462-foot bomb off Jason Vargas cleared the fence, Cespedes become only the second A's batter since 1918 to homer twice in his first three games.

The other? His Cuban countryman Bert Campaneris, who did it in 1964...for the Kansas City Athletics.

Cespedes raised his brow in wonderment.

"I'm very content to hear that," he said. "He was not only one of the best players with the A's, but one of the best to come from Cuba. So to be in his company, that makes me very happy."

Who are these guys?

Cespedes more than introduced himself.

A's drop eighth consecutive home opener

Nate Stuhlbarg, csnbayarea.com

OAKLAND -- For the first time in 2012, the A's took the field for a regular season game at the Oakland Coliseum Friday night in front of an announced sellout of 35,067.

Starting pitcher Brandon McCarthy could not maintain his dominance over the Mariners, who chased him after five innings. Yoenis Cespedes provided A's fans something to cheer for, but Oakland never posed a serious threat after the Mariners' four-run third inning.

The A's lost their eighth consecutive home opener by a score of 7-3, and fell to 1-2 on the young season.

"The whole game was very disappointing to me," manager Bob Melvin said after the game. "We wanted to put on a good show tonight."

Co-Players of the Game: Batting eighth and ninth for the Mariners, center fielder Michael Saunders and shortstop Brendan Ryan went a combined 4-for-7. They were catalysts for all three of Seattle's scoring rallies and crossed the plate four times between them.

"You have to bear down one through nine," Melvin said.

Turning point: After Brendan Ryan's double to lead off the third inning, Chone Figgins laid down a sacrifice bunt. Charging hard, Josh Donaldson threw off balance to first base. His throw sailed right and nailed Figgins between the numbers. Ryan scored, Figgins advanced to second, and the Mariners' four-run inning was in motion.

Where he left off?: In his previous five starts against the Mariners, McCarthy was dominant to the tune of three complete games, a 1.86 ERA, a .182 Mariners batting average, 30 strikeouts and three walks.

The first two innings went as McCarthy planned. Aside from a couple of base hits -- one from Dustin Ackley who homered off McCarthy in the season opener -- the Mariners looked innocuous.

The third inning was a different story. It started double-error-single-walk. All four base runners scored.

"In the third inning I just lost feel," a frustrated McCarthy said in the clubhouse.

In Game 1 this season, it took McCarthy just 82 pitches to get through seven innings of one-run ball against Seattle. He threw 59 strikes. Friday, McCarthy had to wind and throw 95 times to get through five innings. He threw 58 strikes.

Melvin noticed. "His command was off a bit," the manager said after the game.

McCarthy agreed: "That's as bad as it's been in a long time." But he wasn't discouraged. "That's going to happen, you just make sure it's not a trend."

G-G-G-G-Get the tape!: Before the game, Bob Melvin said, "You want to make a great first impression on the fans."

That's exactly what Yoenis Cespedes did with the A's trailing 5-0 in the fourth inning. His mighty hack connected with a 2-1 pitch from Jason Vargas and sent fans, media, and the Twitter world into a frenzy.

Cespedes' shot may have dented the concrete facade *above* the luxury suites in left center field, a solid 40 feet above the 388-foot sign. His trot looked awfully comfortable.

Was it the longest home run he's ever hit? "No," Cespedes replied immediately. "I had a few more in Cuba."

Cespedes, who unleashed an almost identical shot in BP, now has two home runs in three MLB games, becoming the first A's player to accomplish the feat since fellow Cuban national Bert Campaneris did so in 1918.

When asked about hitting in the cold Oakland weather before the game, Cespedes said through his translator that when he hits it well, it's gone.

He wasn't lying. This one measured 462 feet.

Squandering the sixth: The A's got a break in the sixth inning when, following Coco Crisp's leadoff single, Vargas threw Josh Reddick's comebacker into center field.

With two runners on, none out, and Jonny Gomes, Cespedes and Kurt Suzuki coming to the plate, things looked good for the A's.

But Oakland's extensive foul ground victimized a visibly frustrated Gomes, Cespedes struck out after corkscrewing himself into the ground and visiting with trainers, and Kurt Suzuki grounded out to third to end the threat.

Wearing an ice pack around his left shin after the game, Cespedes said the medical staff visit was a result of taking a foul ball off his left leg. Cespedes wears a protective shinguard because he was hit there badly once in Cuba.

Is it something the A's should be concerned with? "No problem," he said in English.

Squeeze it: Every so often you see an infielder fail to transfer the ball to his throwing hand. Rarely do you see it happen to an outfielder.

In the third inning, with the bases loaded and nobody out, Mariners cleanup hitter Justin Smoak skied a ball to left-center field. Coco Crisp stood under it, but Yoenis Cespedes came flying in, called off Crisp, made the catch, and squared to home.

Cespedes' reputation was enough to keep the speedy Figgins from attempting to tag up, but had he broke for home it would have been an easy score as the ball slipped from Cespedes' glove on the transfer.

One batter later, Jesus Montero flied to right, where Josh Reddick waited. He made the catch, but as he prepped to throw, the ball slipped out of *his* glove. Figgins, who was tagging this time, scored easily, and the Mariners' big inning continued.

"We were just a little jumpy," Melvin admitted. "We didn't play nearly as well as we should."

It was even more frustrating, Melvin said, because the team has emphasized defense of late.

Both Cespedes and Reddick attempted their catches with one hand.

In the pinch: Seth Smith was called upon in the bottom of the eighth inning, pinch hitting for Gomes, who might have still been fuming from his pop out with two runners on, two innings prior.

Smith fouled off two pitches in a 1-2 count before roping a 96-mph fastball to right field.

Jemile Weeks scored, Coco Crisp advanced, and Bob Melvin gained a little trust in Smith.

Delaying history: Ichiro Suzuki, batting third for just the 16th time in his career, went 0-for-3. He needs three hits against the A's to surpass Rod Carew as the all-time leader.

The A's still have 16 games against Ichiro's Mariners this year.

Look ahead: The A's and M's are back at it Saturday, when Bartolo Colon (1-0, 1.13 ERA) and Felix Hernandez (0-0, 1.13 ERA) square off at 6:05 p.m. on Comcast SportsNet.

Cespedes -- "The athlete you postpone a trip to bathroom to see"

Ray Ratto, csnbayarea.com

The pitch was a cutter that didn't cut anything but the air on the way back – a plane taking off, or a car taking air off a San Francisco hill in a cop chase movie.

Yoenis Cespedes' first exposure to the full American audience resulted in 462 feet of legend, an enormous bomb of a home run that leavened Seattle's 7-3 victory over Oakland Friday and established Cespedes as that most feared of cultural phenomena:

The athlete you postpone a trip to the bathroom to see.

There is no higher form of praise, not written nor spoken, than someone who can make you tell your innards they'll just have to wait. But when Cespedes took that 1-0 cutter from Jason Vargas and sent it shrieking off the façade above the luxury suites in left-center field, he became an Internet word-of-mouth sensation.

Comrade Gutierrez will cover this in greater detail from Cespedes' view, but the Oakland rookie has produced the one thing the A's have been starving for since before Jose Canseco snapped off the rails – a bathroom blocker.

There aren't many of them in sports, and really, there can't be. Most other sports possess more continuous action and therefore you can't really plan when to postpone a W.C. excursion. That right is reserved for baseball and golf, mostly.

But Cespedes, the Cuban expat who is making more money than any other Athletic not directly involved in ownership, is there now, three games into his major league career. He hit a ball 1½ football fields long, it went viral in about the time it took to ricochet off the concrete facing, and a Twitter hero is born.

The benefit for the A's is that it happened before a rare sellout crowd, and Cespedes' homer was by far the highlight of an otherwise turgid game. That means he will become a word-of-mouth phenomenon as well, and word-of-mouth remains the best marketing tool there is because word-of-mouth is controlled not by the marketer but by the market-ee, and even more by the audience.

The fan base talks about what it wants to talk about, and here, Yoenis Cespedes is suddenly the thing in a way he wasn't before the National Anthem was played.

In that way, the A's won Friday night, despite the seven Mariner runs, the balls kicked and thrown about, and the four other hits. They found someone worthy of the title, "I'll go to the bathroom in a minute."

Seattle drops Oakland at Coliseum behind unearned runs

Sam McPherson, examiner.com

Some things don't change about the Oakland Athletics now, year to year, and unfortunately, one of them is the disappointing pattern of giving up unearned runs by the bushel.

The A's were one of the worst teams in the American League last year at giving away free runs due to defensive blunders, and that pattern continued tonight at the Coliseum as Oakland miscue led to three unearned runs for the Seattle Mariners as [the A's lost, 7-3](#).

Third baseman -- and that's a loose term, of course -- Josh Donaldson committed a costly throwing error in the third inning, and Oakland never recovered. Brandon McCarthy pitched well enough for the A's, and Yoenis Cespedes hit another home run, as well.

But the experiment of moving Donaldson from behind the plate to replace the injured Scott Sizemore at third base didn't pan out for Oakland in this one.

And that's okay -- although it's disappointing to see the A's struggle in the same ways they have for years now.

Oakland is not going to be fighting for a playoff spot, but even so, any fan or individual with a vested interest in the team wants to see the A's play as well as they can. Their talent level may not be the highest, but what they have needs to be maximized on any given night to produce the best results.

Obviously, the A's didn't play their best Friday night.

As Oakland manager Bob Melvin told the Associated Press after it was over, "The whole game was disappointing. You want to make a good first impression."

In addition to the defensive error by Donaldson, the offense also struggled: A's hitters collected only one hit in seven at-bats with runners in scoring position -- another weakness that will probably hurt the team all year.

So the impressions may not have been great tonight, but the expectations aren't high, either.

Perhaps it was just par for the course, although it's going to make for a long season -- again.

Giants, A's organizations headed in opposite directions

Glenn Dickey, San Francisco Examiner

As the full-blown major league baseball season starts today, the Giants seem headed for consistent success while the A's are still on the path to nowhere.

It's been a week of good news for the Giants. The Mission Rock development is a positive, not just for them, but for San Francisco. But the signing of Matt Cain to a long-term contract was the really good news for fans.

Before the 2008 season, the Giants had a media lunch celebrating their 50 years in San Francisco. Willie McCovey and Orlando Cepeda were both there. So were Cain and Tim Lincecum. Cain praised the stars of the past and said he hoped that he and Lincecum could be part of a group of young players who stayed with the Giants.

That's much harder to do now than in earlier times, when clubs controlled players, but the Giants are trying to do that.

And, the good news is that they've revived the farm system. When they take the field in Phoenix tonight, they will have at least four players from their farm system in the infield and perhaps even a fifth if Emmanuel Burriss gets the start he deserves at second.

There is only one homegrown outfielder in the mix, Nate Schierholtz, and he probably won't start because he's had a terrible spring. But he could fight his way back into the lineup, and by midseason, it's possible that center fielder Gary Brown will be promoted from Triple-A Fresno.

The A's once had a great farm system but since 2006, the ownership of managing general partner Lew Wolff and John Fisher have starved it, so general manager Billy Beane had to trade his two top starters and his closer to get prospects.

Jemile Weeks came up last year and was very good, at the plate and in the field, but the A's still have not been able to develop the power hitters they need. Chris Carter is out of options; his swing has huge holes. Michael Taylor has seemingly been a "prospect" forever without developing.

That's what happens when you lose good scouts and minor league coaches and don't replace them. Beane got some good prospects with his trades in the offseason but that's no way to run a baseball operation.

The Giants ownership has consistently put money into the operation, even during the last years at Candlestick when they took losses to bring a good team into their new park which they built without public financing.

Their decisions haven't always been the best — hello, Barry Zito! — but they've tried.

Wolff and Fisher haven't even tried. Wolff has concentrated on his quixotic effort to get to San Jose, while driving down attendance in Oakland. But because of the way major league baseball is set up, it pays to lose. The A's ownership has made money every season because of revenue-sharing payments, a whopping \$32 million last year.

Giants fans can expect their team to be a strong contender for the NL West title, and it's almost certain they'll be in the postseason.

The A's, meanwhile, will be in a second-tier race with the Seattle Mariners for third place in the AL West.

Ownership does matter.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Oakland A's MLN: Midland Pitching Shines

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Apr 7, 2012

On the second night of the minor league regular season, the Oakland A's four affiliates split their games, leaving three of the affiliates with a 1-1 record and the other at 2-0. Find out who won and who lost inside...

Sacramento Falls In 10

The Sacramento River Cats dropped a heartbreaker on Friday night, losing to the Las Vegas 51's by a score of 4-3 in 10 innings. The winning run for the 51's came with two-outs in the bottom of the 10th.

Jarrold Parker made his first regular season appearance for an A's affiliate and he displayed much better command than he had during his final three spring training appearances. The A's top pitching prospect walked only one in six innings of work. He allowed three runs on six hits (including a homer), and he struck-out four. Jim Miller and Pedro Figueroa each had

scoreless one-inning relief appearances. Justin Souza pitched a scoreless ninth inning but was hung with the loss when he allowed the winning run on a David Cooper single with two-outs in the 10th.

After scoring 11 runs in their season opener, the River Cats were relatively quiet offensively on Friday night. Sacramento managed only eight hits and they struck-out 14 times while walking five times. Chris Carter had three of those strike-outs, but he did have two of the team's hits, including a double. He was the only River Cats' player to have more than one hit. Jermaine Mitchell, in his season debut, had a hit and two walks in three official at-bats before giving way to Jeff Fiorentino in the bottom of the 10th inning.

Before the game, it was announced that reliever Travis Schlichting was placed on the seven-day disabled list and Carlos Hernandez was added to the roster from High-A Stockton.

Midland Blanks Arkansas In First Win

The Midland Rockhounds may be only 1-1 on the season, but their pitching has been nearly flawless. In game one of their 2012 season, the Midland staff allowed only an unearned run, but it was the only run of the game in a 1-0 loss. On Friday, the Midland pitching staff completed the shutout and the Rockhounds' offense came to life in a 4-0 victory.

Dan Straily got the start for the Rockhounds and he nearly matched the Opening Night effort of A.J. Griffin, who struck-out eight in five scoreless frames. Straily whiffed seven and walked one in 4.2 scoreless innings before giving way to Paul Smyth with two outs in the fifth inning. Smyth retired the only batter he faced, getting the Rockhounds out of the fifth inning.

Bruce Billings would take over in the sixth and he was dominant in a three-inning outing. The right-hander earned the win by allowing only two hits and a walk over three frames. He struck-out two. Jonathan Ortiz pitched a scoreless ninth to secure the win.

On offense, Conner Crumbliss followed his two-walk, two-stolen base Opening Night performance by reaching base three times. He hit his first homerun of the season and singled and walked in four official at-bats. Crumbliss played leftfield on Friday after DHing on Opening Night.

Third baseman Josh Horton added two hits and two RBIs, while Michael Choice had a double, a walk and an RBI. Midland batters drew seven walks in total, although they also struck out 11 times.

Bad Second Inning Trips Stockton In Loss

A nightmarish second inning for the Stockton Ports was all it took for the Lake Elsinore Storm to avenge their Opening Night loss, as the Ports fell to the Storm by a score of 5-1. All five of the Storm's runs came in the second inning, but Stockton could manage only one run of its own in the Ports' first defeat of the season.

A.J. Cole got the start for the Ports and lasted five innings in his debut as a member of the A's organization. He was touched for five runs (three earned) in those five innings. He allowed five hits and a walk and struck-out three.

Cole was hurt by some poor defense and some bad luck in that second inning. He allowed the first three batters to reach in the inning to load the bases. A bad situation was made worse when a pop-up fell for a two-RBI hit and then two errors led to two more unearned runs. Five runs in total scored in the inning and put the Ports in a 5-1 hole they wouldn't dig out of.

The Stockton pitching staff gave the offense a chance to come back, retiring the final 16 batters of the game. However, the Ports managed nothing after the first inning offensively. Nathan Long and Connor Hoehn pitched in relief of Cole and combined to toss three perfect innings.

Shortstop Michael Gilmartin was a bright spot offensively for the Ports. He doubled twice and scored Stockton's only run when he reached in the first inning on a three-base error. Rashun Dixon also had two hits in the loss.

Burlington Moves To 2-0

It took the Bees' offense a little while to warm up, but they came through late in a 6-4 win over the Clinton Lumber Kings. The Bees didn't score until the fifth inning but scored at least a run in the final five innings of the game. Chad Oberacker had three hits and Dusty Robinson homered for a second straight night to pace the Burlington attack.

Jonathan Joseph got the start for Burlington and lasted five innings. He allowed three runs on six hits and two walks and he struck-out two. Brent Powers would take over for Joseph in the sixth and he earned the win with three scoreless relief innings. The left-hander struck-out four and didn't walk a batter. Drew Tyson earned his first save of the season despite allowing a run in the ninth inning.

Five of the Bees' 10 hits came out of the first two spots in the order, as Oberacker had three singles and Royce Consigli added two singles of his own. Robinson scored three runs and stole his first base of the season. B.A. Vollmuth, Sean Jamieson and Chad Lewis joined Robinson and Consigli in collecting RBIs.

River Cats' tri-tip among best ballpark food in U.S.

Bill Lindelof, Sacramento Bee

Men's Health magazine says the River Cats' tri-tip sandwich is among the best ballpark food in baseball.

The tri-tip served at Raley Field went up against anything served at any ball park, major league or minor.

Here's what they say about the tri-tip:

"At Raley Field, fans of the minor-league River Cats are loyal to the tri-tip sandwich. Marinated beef is slow-cooked on-site to medium rare, hand-carved, and piled onto a French roll with a smear of horseradish aioli."

Here's the other ten on the magazine's best ballpark food list:

Dungeness Crab Sandwich, AT&T Park.

Fish Tacos, Dodger Stadium

Cheesesteak, Citizens Bank Park, Philadelphia.

Cheese curds, Miller Park, Milwaukee.

Turkey Leg, Target Field, Minneapolis.

Elote corn, U.S. Cellular Field, Chicago.

Pulled Pork Sandwich, Citi Field, New York.

Pickle Dog, Joseph P. Riley Jr. Park, Charleston S.C.

Fajitas, Minute Maid Park, Houston

The Ichiro, Safeco Field, Seattle