

Oakland A's fall to Cleveland Indians 4-3

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

Yoenis Cespedes had a major league first Friday night with his first three-hit game.

Alas, according to A's starter Graham Godfrey, he also had a first -- the worst control game of his life.

"That may have been the most walks I've ever given up in a game," Godfrey said after he issued five bases on balls and hit two batters in the A's 4-3 loss to the Cleveland Indians before 14,340 fans at the Oakland Coliseum.

Godfrey (0-3) gave up all four Indians runs, and three of those runs were a result of batters he either walked or hit. What was particularly frustrating was that he said he had good stuff but just couldn't command it.

"Everything felt great, and I made a lot of good pitches that ended up not being called a strike," he said. "I'm a control guy, and that's very uncharacteristic of me. There's something not right, but I still have a lot of confidence in my stuff and I'm looking forward to my next outing."

To wit, Godfrey walked just five batters in 25 innings in 2011 with the A's (five appearances, four starts).

"He got behind some guys and he's done that a little bit in the past, but he seems to be able to recover," manager Bob Melvin said. "It didn't get out of hand tonight, but it was not his best effort."

Former Oakland third baseman Jack Hannahan drove in three of the Indians' runs with a second-inning sacrifice fly and a two-run double in the fourth. Shin-Soo Choo gave Cleveland a 4-1 lead in the fifth with a run-scoring single after Jason Kipnis had been hit by a pitch by Godfrey and stolen second. Kipnis managed to score despite a fabulous pinpoint throw by Josh Reddick from right field.

Godfrey was done after five innings having thrown 93 pitches. The bullpen kept it close over the final four innings as Jerry Blevins and Jordan Norberto each pitched a pair of scoreless innings, and while the A's chipped away, they couldn't break through with a big inning.

Cespedes, who came into the game with just six hits in his previous 32 at-bats (.188), had RBI singles in the fifth and seventh to get the A's to within a run. He then came up in the ninth with one out and nobody on but struck out against Indians closer Chris Perez, who recorded his fifth save of the season. Ubaldo Jimenez (2-0), who pitched the first six innings for Cleveland, got the win.

As it turned out, the pivotal inning for Oakland turned out to be seventh. Jemile Weeks led off with a triple off the wall in left-center against Indians reliever Tony Sipp, and Cliff Pennington followed with a walk. Sipp struck out Reddick, but Cespedes looped a single to right against side-arming right-hander Joe Smith to bring home the run.

The A's seemed set up for more, but Smith struck out Seth Smith and, after a walk to Jonny Gomes, retired Kila Ka'aihue on a grounder to third.

"It was certainly an inning where we hoped to add on a couple more runs," Melvin said. "We had our opportunity -- we had several opportunities to add on -- but at the time you don't think you're not going to come back. We seemed to have some momentum going into the next couple innings, but we just didn't get it done."

Even though the A's three-game win streak ended, Melvin was pleased by Cespedes' night, as well as with Reddick, who tied the score 1-1 with a solo homer in the third.

"It's a progression for him," Melvin said of Cespedes. "He does better each and every day and gets more comfortable. He's a very confident guy."

Cespedes has been working hard trying to figure out how to hit major league breaking pitches, but off the field, he's also learning a thing or two about dangling participles.

He is making a concerted effort to learn as much basic English as he can to better communicate with teammates and coaches. His personal "coach," former A's pitcher and fellow Cuban Ariel Prieto, has been his primary instructor on all things regarding American culture -- including the language -- but Cespedes wanted more.

In recent days, he has also enlisted Weeks to help him with English, and he received a clubhouse lesson Friday from the young second baseman. His goal for the day? He wanted to learn how to say "how do you feel?" so he could ask the ailing Coco Crisp that question. Crisp has been battling from a flu bug the past few days.

Cespedes sat intently with Weeks at a table before the game and school was definitely in session. The center fielder would write a sentence in Spanish, and Weeks would translate in English. Cespedes also wrote out the alphabet and spoke the letters in English pronunciation.

So why Weeks?

"He just asked me if I would help him," Weeks said. "I happen to know a little bit of Spanish to help, so I want to lend a helping hand. Since I spent a lot of time in South Florida, so I've been around a lot of Latin Americans."

Weeks isn't fluent in Spanish but took two years of it in high school and retained much of it since he was able to put it to practice on baseball fields as a teenager. Weeks said he's had two or three sessions with Cespedes and already can see distinct progress.

"He's been coming along with it and working hard," he said. "He knows a lot of words, and the more he understands, it gets easier to teach him. As time goes by, it'll get even better."

Crisp said he was feeling significantly better but that his head still felt a bit cloudy. He said Saturday or Sunday was a possibility for his return to the lineup.

The A's optioned right-handed pitcher Neil Wagner to Triple-A Sacramento to make room for right-handed pitcher Rich Thompson, who was claimed off waivers from the Los Angeles Angels earlier in the day.

Thompson, 27, appeared in two games for the Angels this season, allowing four runs in 21/3 innings. A native of Australia, Thompson was signed by the Angels in 2002 as a 17-year-old and made his big-league debut in 2007. In 2011, he made 44 appearances for the Angels with a 3.00 ERA.

1972 A's are still Swingin' 40 years later

By Daniel Brown, San Jose Mercury News

Technically, the 40th anniversary bash at the Oakland Coliseum on Saturday is for the 1972 Swingin' A's, the first Bay Area team to win a World Series.

It also happens to be the 40th anniversary of Rollie Fingers' mustache.

"Spring training '72," the Hall of Fame reliever said Friday night, tracing the origins of his trademark handlebar. "The reason I grew it was to get 300 bucks out of Charlie."

Owner Charlie Finley promised everyone who had a mustache a \$300 bonus. Fingers said the owner wound up distributing 30 checks on opening day -- all 25 players, four coaches and manager Dick Williams.

Fingers was the only one with the handlebar.

"Just being different," the 65-year-old said. "Everybody else was just growing a mustache. I said, 'What the heck, I'll do a handlebar.'

"It was probably stupid, but then we win the World Series in '72 and then you win in '73 and then you win in '74, it's kind of tough to shave it off after that. That's why I kept it."

That hirsute and historic '72 team will be honored before Saturday's game, with Fingers being joined by about a dozen other of the colorful characters who helped knocked off the Cincinnati Reds. The classic seven-game series was billed as The Hairs vs. The Squares.

Joe Rudi, who famously robbed the Reds' Denis Menke of extra bases with a game-saving catch in Game 2, is in Oakland this weekend. So is Gene Tenace, who won series MVP honors by hitting four home runs and driving in nine. So are Bert "Campy" Campaneris, Vida Blue and Ken Holtzman.

Together, those A's made for such a cast of wacky of vagabonds that Tenace said Hollywood made a movie about the wrong team.

"If you really look back at our A's -- the Swingin' A's -- that was 'Moneyball,' " he said. "Compare our payroll and what we accomplished. And we won. We had two or three guys making \$100,000 back in those days. The rest of us were down the map."

Reggie Jackson, now a New York Yankees employee, will not be in attendance Saturday. He was unable to play in the '72 series because of a strained hamstring.

In advance of Saturday's on-field tribute, players gathered Friday and signed autographs for more than two hours as a fundraiser for the Jim "Catfish" Hunter ALS foundation. Hunter, who died of ALS in 1999 at age 53, was the winning pitcher in Game 7 of the '72 World Series. He remains a beloved figure.

"Sir Catfish Hunter," Blue called him. "The gentlest man I ever met."

"The only word to describe him is 'class,' " Tenace said.

Hunter won Game 7 with 2 2/3 innings in relief of Blue Moon Odom. Fingers took it from there, closing out the Reds with two scoreless innings.

That's right two scoreless innings. In the era before super specialization, Fingers was a workhorse. In '72, 11 of his 21 saves came in outings of three innings or more.

"They wore me out," Fingers said. "I was basically the long man, the short man, and the closer and everything. That's the way it was back then."

The game has changed, but the mustache remains the same. It's even on the Rollie Fingers bobblehead that will be given out Saturday. The handlebar was only in jeopardy once -- the reliever stumbled in both games of a doubleheader.

"I had the razor right there," Fingers recalled. "I said, 'Nah, I better not, I'm afraid what I'll look like without it.' "

Cespedes working hard to grasp English, Crisp improved but still out, Melvin recalls the '72 A's

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

In for Joe Stiglich tonight ...

Yoenis Cespedes has been working hard trying to figure out how to hit major league breaking pitches, but off the field, he's also learning a thing or two about dangling participles.

Cespedes is making a concerted to learn as much basic English as he can to better communicate with teammates and coaches. His personal "coach," former A's pitcher and fellow Cuban Ariel Prieto, has been his primary instructor on all things regarding American culture -- including the language -- but Cespedes wanted more.

In recent days, he has also enlisted second baseman Jemile Weeks to help him with English, and he received a clubhouse lesson Friday from the young second baseman. His goal for the day? He wanted to learn how to say "how do you feel?" so he could ask the ailingCocoCrisp the question. Crisp has been battling from a flu bug the past few days.

Cespedes sat intently with Weeks at a table before the game and school was definitely in session. The outfielder would write a sentence in Spanish and Weeks would translate in English. Cespedes also wrote out the alphabet and spoke the letters in English pronunciation.

So why Weeks?

"He just asked me if I would help him," Weeks said. "I happen to know a little bit of Spanish to help, so I want to lend a helping hand. Since I spent a lot of time inSouth Florida, so I've been around a lot of Latin Americans."

Weeks isn't fluent in Spanish but took two years of it in high school and retained much of it since he was able to put it to practice on baseball fields as a teenager.

"InMiami, I had a lot of Cuban and Latin American teammates," he said. "They would say some funny words now and then and we'd correct them. We'd be trying to learn Spanish, they'd be trying to learn English. So helping comes natural for me. Plus, I know some good Spanish lingo."

Weeks said he's had two or three sessions with Cespedes and he already can see distinct progress.

"He's been coming along with it and working hard," he said. "He knows a lot of words, and the more he understands, it gets easier to teach him. As time goes by, it'll get even better."

Manager Bob Melvin said Cespedes has already dropped a couple of English words and phrases on him and he's impressed.

"Every day he it seems he has another word or two," Melvin said. "I know he's got more English in his repertoire than I have Spanish, so he's passed me. He probably passed me in spring training."

Cespedes smiled when a reporter asked him, "How do you feel?"

"Very good," he said.

Many Latin players play their entire careers and never attempt to learn English. Cespedes does not appear to be one of those players.

"He's doing a good job putting the effort in," Weeks said. "He knows a few words and phrases and I don't think you can ask for much more. It's a process. I think he has a sense of which guys he can lean on when he really needs to ask a specific question, because there are a few Latin guys who can help him out. But the down side is that he's in a new country away from family and friends, and these are new friends that he's meeting. I think he wants to be able to communicate with everybody."

Weeks was asked if Cespedes, whom the A's signed in February for \$36 million over four years, knows how to say "show me the money."

"I think he knows that one already," he said.

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Coco Crisp said he was feeling significantly better in his battle with a flu bug but that his head still felt a bit cloudy. He wasn't in the lineup and said he wasn't sure he could contribute off the bench but said Saturday or Sunday was a possibility.

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Several members of the 1972 world championship A's team were on hand Friday night to sign autograph and chat with the media. They'll be honored in a 40th anniversary ceremony Saturday. In attendance were Joe Rudi, Ken Holtzman, Bert Campaneris, Gene Tenace, Mike Hegan, Dick Green, Tim Cullen, Ted Kubiak, Vida Blue, Joel Horlen, Darold Knowles, Rollie Fingers along with former coach Irv Noren and broadcaster Monte Moore.

Current manager Bob Melvin remembers that team well, even though he was only 10 years old in 1972. He was big fan growing up in the Bay Area and he actually attended a couple of the '72 World Series games. He wears No. 6 now in honor of his favorite player at the time, Sal Bando.

"I've often said, it was a lot easier to be an A's fan than a Giants fan at that point in time," Melvin said. "I remember sitting between home plate and the dugout maybe 15-16 rows back for the first World Series. At that point in time, it was the highlight of my baseball life at that time. I was kind of young, but I just remember feeling the atmosphere and that was such an entertaining team to watch.

"Not only were they good, they beat you any number of ways. You look at their offensive numbers and think they they were an offensive team but that wasn't always the case. At times they were challenged to score runs, but they played great defense, they great starting and relief pitching and they had guys who came up big in big situations."

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The A's optioned RHP Neil Wagner to Triple-A Sacramento to make room for RHP pitcher Rich Thompson, who was claimed off waivers from the Los Angeles Angels earlier in the day.

Thompson, 27, appeared in two games for the Angels this year, allowing four runs on five hits and a walk in 2 1/3 innings for a 15.4 ERA. A native of Australia, Thompson was originally signed by the Angels in 2002 as a 17-year-old, and he made his major-league debut in 2007. Last season, he made 44 appearances for the Angels and posted a 3.00 ERA. He is 3-4 lifetime with a 4.24 ERA in 81 games, walking 37 and striking out 105 in 104 1/3 innings.

Wagner was recalled Tuesday but did not appear in a game with Oakland.

Tonight's A's lineup: Weeks 2B, Pennington SS, Reddick RF, Cespedes CF, Smith LF, Gomes DH, Ka'aihue 1B, Recker C, Sogard 3B. Godfrey (0-2) P.

AEG moves a step closer to O.co Coliseum management contract

By Angela Woodall, Oakland Tribune

In the pursuit of the O.co Coliseum contract, entertainment and sports colossus Anschutz Entertainment Group spared little and offered a lot, including a \$4.8 million in sweeteners in the proposal to run the Coliseum complex, which includes the Oracle Arena and stadium.

The efforts have paid off so far.

The Coliseum Joint Power Authority voted Friday after hearing nearly an hour of contentious, politically charged public comment to begin negotiations with AEG for a five-year contract with a five-year extension.

But the decision was close.

The eight-member Coliseum authority split 4-3 with one abstention to move forward with negotiations at the recommendation of a subcommittee made up of Commissioners Ignacio De La Fuente and Scott Haggerty, as well as three administrative members. Haggerty and Commissioners Desley Brooks, Aaron Goodwin and Mary Warren voted to move forward. That means SMG's 13 years in Oakland will come to an end July 1. The other competitor was Global Spectrum. Haggerty called the process the most political in which he has ever been involved.

Rumors are likely to swirl for some time because of the way the process was handled. The information was kept as secret as possible to prevent competitors from getting the upper hand. It appeared the full board only had access to the thick, detailed proposals beginning Tuesday afternoon. And they only learned the final terms in a closed session less than an hour before their vote.

But Brooks argued the board had since Monday to read the proposals -- enough time to do their "due diligence."

De La Fuente and fellow Commissioners Chris Dobbins and Yui Hay Lee voted against proceeding.

Lee did not give a reason for his decision. Dobbins said he wanted more time.

"I did my due diligence," Dobbins said. "But I just got the financials today."

Commissioner Nate Miley said he could not defend voting Friday, even though approval only allowed negotiations with AEG to begin.

"The best you're going to get from me today is an abstention," Miley told the crowd of about 30 people who attended the JPA board meeting to lobby on behalf of SMG or AEG.

Former state Sen. Don Perata, now an SMG lobbyist and close political ally of De La Fuente and Miley, was in the crowd, as were Len Turner and Ken Houston, of Turner Group Construction.

Delaying the vote by two weeks "won't do any harm or make any difference," De La Fuente said. But it would allow the board to go into the negotiations with a "more united front."

Haggerty, however, said he felt "very comfortable" with his decision to support AEG.

"This was the best deal for the taxpayers," he said, predicting AEG would help lower the \$20 million public subsidy to the Coliseum complex.

Among other things, AEG offered a \$3.5 million "capital investment" for the Coliseum complex and a \$1 million signing bonus for "revenue-enhancing projects."

AEG also promised to bring in 25 events, including bull riding and boxing, able to generate \$2.5 million by the end of the five-year contract.

And the company promised to reduce operating expenses by \$500,000 a year.

In exchange, AEG gets a foothold in the Bay Area, completing a string of venues between Washington state and Los Angeles.

AEG also offered \$300,000 worth of real estate planning and development consulting services -- another arm of the sprawling megacompany that also includes concert promotions, programming, ticketing and, in the near future, a cable channel.

Oakland modeled designs for the proposed Coliseum City entertainment and sports center to replace the Coliseum complex on AEG's L.A. Live entertainment district.

AEG also works with Oracle and Overstock.com, which own the respective naming rights to the arena and Coliseum.

AEG's pay would be performance-based instead of a flat fee, which poses a danger if the company does not meet expectations. But AEG founder Philip Anschutz -- former owner of the San Francisco Examiner and a major Republican Party donor -- is reportedly worth \$7 billion.

The company plans to sink more than \$1 billion into an NFL stadium in Los Angeles, called Farmers Field. AEG President Tim Leiweke has made overtures to numerous NFL teams, including the Raiders.

The potential that AEG could poach the Raiders raised one of the most urgent objections to AEG voiced at Friday's meeting.

AEG "has no desire, nor can they take the Raiders," Haggerty said, repeating the words "nor can they" for emphasis.

For one, AEG agreed to add a clause in its contract that it would not talk to the teams about moving. That prompted laughter from the crowd.

AEG has a stake in the failure of the coliseum, said Michael Seals, owner of a local construction company. "This is not the time to make a change."

"There's simply nothing to it," AEG Regional Vice President Chris Wright said when asked about the rumors shortly before the meeting began.

But it was the final vote, cast by Warren, that caused the most uproar. She had to be asked twice before casting her vote. "No," she said.

"I mean, yes, sorry," she added, when prompted by Haggerty.

That caused an uproar among SMG supporters.

"She was confused, sir," Haggerty said, when challenged by Sam Singer, president of SMG's public relations firm, Singer Associates, Inc. Warren challenged Singer's assumption: "I am the longest-standing commissioner, and I know how I'm voting," she said.

Indians strand A's chances at topping .500
Ron Kroichick, San Francisco Chronicle

They came home fresh off a triumphant visit to Anaheim, with a chance to climb above .500 for the first time in more than 11 months. Rollie Fingers, Vida Blue and many of their 1972 teammates were in the house, celebrating the 40-year anniversary of Oakland's first World Series title.

It all lined up nicely for the A's, until they started stranding runners on base.

They had abundant chances in Friday night's 4-3 loss to Cleveland, only to send 14,340 spectators home frustrated. Those fans witnessed the first three-hit game of Yoenis Céspedes' career, but that wasn't enough to prevent the Indians from walking away with the victory.

The A's squandered an opportunity to claim a winning record for the first time since May 18. They were 22-21 then, soon to fall into a rut that would cost manager Bob Geren his job. This year, under Bob Melvin, they now stand 7-8.

Oakland might have returned to the north side of .500 on Friday night, if not for starting pitcher Graham Godfrey's control issues. Godfrey walked five batters and hit two others in only five innings of work. (A's pitchers issued nine walks in all.)

Godfrey had walked only one batter in each of his previous two starts.

"I'm a control guy - that's very uncharacteristic for me," he said. "You give a team that many opportunities, they're going to find a way to push across some runs."

Josh Reddick did his part to pump life into Oakland's meek offense (11 runners left on base, including the bases loaded twice). He crushed a no-doubt-about-it homer over the right-field wall in the third inning, then smoked a double to right-center in the fifth.

Those swings stirred visions of another left-handed-hitting No. 16 with long hair spilling beneath his A's helmet - some guy named Jason Giambi.

Céspedes knocked home Reddick with an RBI single, but the A's ran themselves out of a potentially big inning. Céspedes and Seth Smith tried to pull off a double steal with one out, and Indians catcher Carlos Santana shrewdly threw to second to nail Smith.

Jonny Gomes then struck out to end the inning.

The A's inched closer in the seventh, on Jemile Weeks' first triple of the season and Céspedes' opposite-field RBI single. But the A's left the bases loaded when Kila Ka'aihue grounded out to third.

"We had chances and we just didn't get it done," manager Bob Melvin said. "We're going to swing the bat better. We came into the game hitting .200 - it's not going to stay that way."

Melvin found encouragement in the swings of his marquee hitters. Weeks, Reddick and Céspedes were 7-of-14 combined on the night.

Eric Sogard, not Josh Donaldson, started at third base for the A's, mostly because Donaldson is struggling (.094 on the season). Another factor: Left-handers were hitting .333 against Cleveland's Ubaldo Jimenez, while right-handers were hitting only .091.

Sogard defied the numbers in the second inning. He stepped to the plate with the bases loaded and two outs - and watched Jimenez zip a fastball across the inside corner for strike three.

Playoff tussle with Tigers got A's on track in '72

Bruce Jenkins, San Francisco Chronicle

As the A's honor their 1972 world champions Saturday night at the Coliseum, here's a trivia question: As he caught the final out of the A's-Detroit playoff series that year, which A's center fielder was nearly hit in the head by a whiskey bottle, thrown by an angry fan from the upper deck of Tiger Stadium?

The player in question (answer below) won't be a centerpiece of the festivities, scheduled to begin at 5:30 p.m. before the A's-Cleveland game, but that moment summarized a wild, tempestuous series that set the A's on course to win three straight World Series and enter the arguments concerning the greatest teams of all time.

Billy Martin was managing the Tigers, so "wild" is a given. Go against that man five games in a row, and you were bound to summon an old-fashioned hatred. Such a storm was building inside **Campy Campaneris**, and it didn't take long to explode. Hit on the ankle by a **Lerrin LaGrow** pitch in the seventh inning of Game 2, Campaneris - at that point 3-for-3 with two stolen bases - picked up his bat and hurled it straight at LaGrow's head.

This remains one of the most shocking on-field displays by a player in any era, and as the benches cleared, it took three umpires to keep Martin away from Campaneris. (The A's shortstop was suspended for the remainder of that series and for the first seven games of the 1973 season, but he was allowed to play in the World Series against Cincinnati.)

That Detroit series was a showcase for **John ("Blue Moon") Odom**, who pitched a Game 2 shutout, and for manager **Dick Williams**, who leaned heavily on his relief pitchers - not such a common practice in those days - the rest of the way. **Vida Blue**, who had held out until May and nursed a season-long grudge against owner **Charlie Finley**, relieved Odom in the climactic Game 5 and pitched four innings of shutout ball to close out a 2-1 win.

There were obscure heroics from the likes of **Gonzalo Marquez** and **Matty Alou**, and there was a most unfortunate injury: **Reggie Jackson** tore a hamstring in the process of scoring the tying run in Game 5 (as part of a double steal) and was unable to play in the World Series.

With Alou playing right field, Jackson had started that game in center. And thus, the answer to the trivia question: It was Reggie's replacement, **George Hendrick**.

That wasn't the city

There will be a ton of nostalgia when the 49ers play their final game at Candlestick, and rightly so. A massive chunk of NFL history was written on that patch of land. To call it a "farewell to San Francisco," though, is a bit of a stretch from this corner. There isn't a hint of the city's charm in the stadium or surrounding area; never was, never will be. The 49ers haven't played in an authentic San Francisco atmosphere since 1970, their last season at Kezar Stadium ... The NFL's scheduling process doesn't allow for such a thing, and it's a shame: There should be 49ers-Raiders and Giants-Jets games every year in the regular season. Far too much passion to go to waste ... Two good reasons why **Pat Summitt** had no regrets stepping aside as the Tennessee women's basketball coach: She lost her last game to the future, Baylor's **Brittney Griner**, in a regional final. And she patched up her long-running feud with UConn coach **Geno Auriemma**, each of them in tears after a warm embrace at the Final Four ... Has there ever been a crazier year for sports scheduling? Seattle's **Felix Hernandez** has already made three starts against the A's, and the Giants don't play the Dodgers until the second week of May. The NBA schedule prevented **Kevin Durant** from playing at Madison Square Garden, as well as **Kobe Bryant** in Chicago, and yet the Lakers played San Antonio *three* times within a recent 10-day stretch ... Wait a minute, 38 strikes in a row? We belittled the notion of the A's signing **Bartolo Colon**, and he's damn near unhittable ... When **Yoenis Céspedes** hit titanic home runs in

Cuba, "I would stand and watch it and it was no big deal," he recalled this week. "Here, the next time up, they hit you." That's right. And the Cubans' way is superior ... There is hope for mankind: **Matt Cain** vs. **Cliff Lee**, scoreless after nine, 1:49 on the clock ... **Brandon Crawford** shouldn't feel too bad about his occasional defensive lapses. The best shortstop in the National League, Colorado's **Troy Tulowitzki**, was given a night off Wednesday after making six errors in 11 games. Neither slump will last, for there's a touch of genius in both ... In the spirit of nostalgia, let's hope the A's pay tribute this weekend to **Dom Valentino**, who passed away this week at the age of 83. Valentino shared the radio booth with **Red Rush** in the early '80s, providing some uproariously good fun. We've mentioned our favorite call from the beloved Dom, but it bears repeating: "And there's a fastball, high and low."

The Drumbeat: They're the Runnin' A's. Really.

The A's enter tonight's game against Cleveland with 11 stolen bases, tied for most in the American League (with the Yankees). Yes, these are the same A's who not long ago shunned any sense of boldness on the basepaths, preferring to take the Earl Weaver approach of waiting for a three-run homer.

"There are times I've talked to Billy," said manager Bob Melvin, "and he says, 'We need to run more! We need to run more!'"

One reporter, after an awkward pause, asked, "Billy Beane?"

Melvin smiled.

"Yes, Billy Beane," he said.

Beane once loathed the idea of potentially giving up an out on the bases. He's changed his tune, in part because the A's no longer field a Bash Brother, homer-swatting lineup. They also enter tonight's game with a league-low team batting average of .200.

Here's the thing about those 11 steals: The swiftest players, Jemile Weeks and Coco Crisp, have barely contributed. Weeks is hitting only .190 with one stolen base, and Crisp stands at .156 with two steals.

Add those two to the mix and Oakland might really become the Runnin' A's.

"That's something we have to do to create runs," Weeks said. "We haven't really had 25 to 30 homer guys the past few years, so we have to create runs in other ways. We have to play more of a hustle man's game. And that's my game."

Some other news and nuggets from the Coliseum:

**Crisp is still out of the lineup with flu-like symptoms. Melvin described Crisp as "a little better" and suggested he could rejoin the outfield this weekend.

**Eric Sogard, not Josh Donaldson, will start at third base tonight. Donaldson is struggling big-time (.094 on the season). Another factor: Left-handers are hitting .333 against Cleveland starter Ubaldo Jimenez this season, while right-handers are hitting only .091.

**Tonight's lineup for the A's behind pitcher Graham Godfrey: Weeks 2B, Pennington SS, Reddick RF, Cespedes CF, Smith LF, Gomes DH, Ka'aihue 1B, Recker C, Sogard 3B.

The Drumbeat: Rollie Fingers & the origin of The Mustache

Not all A's players from 1972 were easily recognizable at tonight's reunion of Oakland's first World Series championship team.

Rollie Fingers, as always, was easily recognizable.

Fingers, at age 65, still sports his famous handlebar mustache. It's as sleek and curly and distinctive as ever, 40 years after he first grew the mustache during spring training of 1972.

As he explained, the roots of The Mustache were simple: pure, unapologetic greed. Owner Charlie Finley offered his players \$300 to grow a mustache, so Fingers and his teammates complied, turning the A's into "The Mustache Gang."

Fingers figured it made no sense to grow any old mustache. So he found his signature.

"Just being different," he said of the unique shape. "Everybody else was just growing a mustache. I said, 'What the heck, I'll do a handlebar.' It was probably stupid, but then we win the World Series in '72 and then we win in '73 and then we win in '74 — and it's kind of tough to shave it off after that. That's why I kept it."

Godfrey struggles with control in loss to Tribe

Reddick, Cespedes, Weeks swing hot bats as win streak ends

By Rick Eymer / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Graham Godfrey searched his memory banks for anything that came close to his control problems on Friday night. Nothing came up.

"That might be the most I've ever walked in a game," Godfrey said following the Oakland Athletics' 4-3 loss to the Cleveland Indians. "Something is not right. Stuff-wise I was very pleased. I couldn't locate when I needed."

Godfrey (0-3) was effective when he was able to get the ball over the plate, taking a no-hitter into the fourth and finishing with a three-hitter over five innings. It's just that he walked five batters and hit two others while striking out three.

"When you give them that many opportunities they will figure out a way to push some runs across the plate," Godfrey said. "It came down to the walks. It could have been better." His personal losing streak reached four, dating to last year. He won his first game in his second career start and it has been a rough road ever since.

"He got behind some guys, which he has done in the past but usually recovers," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "It was a struggle tonight. It didn't get out of hand but it was not his best effort."

The loss dropped the A's below .500 again. Oakland has not been above the mark in over a year.

"At this point in time you're looking where you are in relation to .500," Melvin said. "We're going to swing the bats better than we have been doing."

Josh Reddick had two hits, including a home run, and Yoenis Cespedes had three hits and drove in two runs for the A's. Jemile Weeks also had two hits for the A's, including the team's first triple of the season.

"Weeks is starting to hit the ball better and we'll get Coco Crisp back soon," Melvin said. "Reddick has been consistent all year and Yoenis continues to get better."

Oakland had its three-game winning streak snapped and is now 2-2 in one-run games.

While run production has been a problem, Melvin can at least look at the middle of the batting order with some hope -- and Manny Ramirez lurking on the horizon.

"We had several innings where we felt we had an opportunity to score more runs," Melvin said. "We just didn't get it done." Reddick's second home run of the season tied the game at 1-1 in the third. Cespedes drove in runs in the fifth and seventh.

The Indians scored their first run without benefit of a hit as Godfrey walked the bases loaded ahead of Jack Hannahan's sacrifice fly in the second. Hannahan added a two-run double in the fourth and Shin-Soo Choo drove in a run in the fifth.

"I have a lot of respect for a lot of these players and Billy Beane for giving me the opportunity," Hannahan said of facing his former team. "It's always good to see good fans and old teammates."

A's honoring 1972 title team this weekend

By Rick Eymer / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- They've enjoyed each other's company for over 40 years and any chance to get back together is a chance accepted.

The 1972 World Series Champion Oakland Athletics are in town this weekend for a team reunion and celebration. Saturday's pregame ceremonies will be carried live on oaklandathletics.com. Rollie Fingers is scheduled to throw out the first pitch.

"You have to remember that most of these guys played in the Minors together," A's outfielder Joe Rudi said Friday. "We all grew up together. A lot of these guys I haven't seen for 10 years, and yet it's like we never lost contact."

The 1972 team was the first of three consecutive World Championship teams for Oakland, and there may have been even more titles had former owner Charlie Finley decided to try and keep the team together instead of breaking up the core of the team.

The A's won the West Division title in 1971, and won the division again in 1975, when Catfish Hunter was pitching for the New York Yankees.

"When you stop and think about it, we beat the Reds, the Mets and the Dodgers," former A's infielder Tim Cullen said. "But what amazes me is the Reds were voted the Team of the '70s."

Cullen, who grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area and currently resides in Napa, retired after the 1972 season, at the age of 30.

"Finley had the same problem in the Coliseum that they are having now," Cullen said. "It's a small market and the facility is the worst. Frankly, I'm pulling for them to get something in San Jose. It would be good for baseball."

A's manager Bob Melvin, who wears No. 6 in honor of his favorite player, A's third baseman Sal Bando, was among those in attendance, at age 11, during the 1972 Series.

"It was easy to be an A's fan at the time," Melvin said. "I remember the atmosphere and how entertaining the team was to watch."

Rudi's first game in Oakland turned out to be Hunter's perfect game in 1968. It was also his first game as an outfielder.

"I was an outfielder when I signed but they wanted me to play first base," Rudi said. "Joe DiMaggio was with us then and he helped me in the outfield. He was a lifesaver for me."

DiMaggio hit fly balls to Rudi for a half-hour every day, so by the time he made his miraculous catch in the 1972 World Series, he'd done it in practice a thousand times already.

"When it came off the bat it was like deja vu for me," Rudi said. "I had practiced that play a lot. I caught it and rolled my glove so it wouldn't come out. Those are things Joe DiMaggio taught me."

Rudi's teammates included a pair of future Hall of Famers in Fingers and Reggie Jackson, Cy Young Award winner Vida Blue, World Series MVP Gene Tenace and fellow All-Stars Bert Campaneris and Ken Holzman.

Cullen, Dave Duncan, Dick Green, Dave Hamilton, Mike Hegan, Joe Horlen, Darold Knowles, Ted Kubiak and Bob Locker also were expected to be in attendance.

Rudi said he continues to get more requests for autographs now than he did when he played.

"It's interesting," he said. "It has stayed pretty strong. I still get a couple of letters every day."

Fans were able to get Rudi's autograph, along with the other members of the 1972 team, on Friday night in a benefit for the Jim "Catfish" Hunter ALS Foundation.

A's celebrating return of 1972 championship team

By AJ Cassavell / Special to MLB.com

Before Saturday's game, the Oakland A's will party like it's 1972, with members from that World Series-winning team in town for a team reunion and celebration.

During the game, the current version of the A's are hoping they can emulate that '72 club, which 40 years ago won the first of Oakland's four titles.

Brandon McCarthy gets the ball for Oakland on Friday, opposed by Indians righty Jeanmar Gomez, who is making the start after appealing his suspension for throwing at Kansas City's Mike Moustakas.

"I think you can feel like you're part of something," Oakland manager Bob Melvin said of the festivities. "I think you gain something from that. I love having those guys come back as often as possible, especially in Spring Training. You can only gain from them."

Rollie Fingers is scheduled to throw out the first pitch, and the fans in attendance will receive a bobblehead of the former A's reliever.

The red-hot Indians, who have won six of their last seven, will be looking to spoil the party. They send Gomez to the mound after he was ejected for hitting Moustakas with a pitch in the third inning.

Gomez, who hasn't recorded a decision this season and has a 2.25 ERA, is likely to drop his appeal of the five-game suspension and pitch again next Saturday.

As for McCarthy, he was hit hard by the Angels' Kendrys Morales in his last outing. Morales drove in four of the five runs that McCarthy allowed, including three on a first-inning homer. But aside from Morales, McCarthy did a good job against the Angels, working his way into the eighth inning.

McCarthy will be making his fourth start and is 0-2 this season with a 3.60 ERA.

Indians: Walk this way

Heading into Friday's game against the A's, the Indians ranked first in the American League with 57 walks despite having played the fewest games of any team. The team's on-base percentage of .333 ranked fourth in the AL.

Manager Manny Acta said that is a direct result of the club working in Spring Training to lower strikeout totals and increase walks from last season. Cleveland was in the middle of the pack, ranking seventh and eighth in the league, respectively, for walks (494) and OBP (.317).

"We've done a very good job of keeping traffic on the bases," Acta said. "You put pressure on the other pitcher by doing that kind of stuff. We try to educate these guys on, when you go to the plate, you go to hit to walk, not walk to hit."

- With a win on Saturday, the Indians would assure themselves of series victories in all three stops on their nine-game, 10-day road trip. They are currently 6-1 during that stretch.
- In the last 13 innings, the Cleveland bullpen has allowed just one run.

A's: Thompson claimed

Oakland claimed right-hander Rich Thompson off waivers from the Los Angeles Angels on Friday, and Thompson made it to Oakland in time to be available for the series opener against Cleveland, though he didn't pitch.

Thompson appeared in two games for the Angels this year, allowing four runs on five hits in 2 1/3 innings. In 81 career games -- all relief appearances -- he is 3-4 with a 4.24 ERA.

To make room for Thompson, the A's optioned right-hander Neil Wagner to Triple-A Sacramento.

- The A's pitching staff has three shutouts, which is tied for the most in the Majors this season. The offense also has been shut out three times, which is the most in baseball.
- Outfielder Coco Crisp has been successful in each of his last 25 stolen base attempts. It's the longest streak of his career and tied for the fourth longest in Oakland history.

Worth noting

- With his save on Friday, Indians closer Chris Perez lowered his ERA to 0.84 against the A's. He has five saves and just one run allowed in 10 2/3 innings vs. Oakland.
- The Indians have won six of their last eight against the A's including three of four in Oakland.

Cespedes making big league adjustments

By Rick Eymer / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Yoenis Cespedes opened his Major League career with a flourish, hitting three home runs in his first four games. Then came a series of struggles before hitting another home run on Wednesday, in his 12th game.

"He's always a threat at the plate," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "He doesn't get down on himself. He's a tough kid and he's serious about baseball."

Cespedes' roller-coaster beginning is the result of opposing pitchers making adjustments, and then Cespedes making his own adjustments.

"Early on they saw what he could do with a fastball," Melvin said. "Now they are starting to see what he can do with a breaking ball. You can see how much he's learning, how much he is processing."

That includes the English language too, with help from teammate Jemile Weeks and coach Ariel Prieto.

"Every day he seems to have learned a new word or two," Melvin said. "He has more English in his repertoire than I have in Spanish, so he's ahead of me already."

Thompson claimed off waivers from Angels

OAKLAND -- Right-hander Rich Thompson was claimed off waivers from the Los Angeles Angels earlier Friday and made it to Oakland in time to be available for the series opener with the Cleveland Indians.

Thompson, who will wear No. 54, appeared in two games for the Angels this year, allowing four runs on five hits and a walk in 2 1/3 innings. He is 3-4 with a 4.24 ERA in 81 career appearances, all in relief.

To make room for Thompson, the A's optioned right-hander Neil Wagner to Triple-A Sacramento. Wagner was recalled by the A's on Tuesday but did not appear in a game with Oakland. He made three relief appearances with Sacramento and was 1-0 with a save, a 5.06 ERA and .273 opponents batting average.

Cespedes looks to make All-Star splash for A's

Cuban sensation leads group of nine hopefuls for Classic

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

Cuban sensation Yoenis Cespedes, who hasn't shied away from displaying his tremendous power stroke in the early goings of the season, headlines a list of nine A's players on the **2012 All-Star ballot**.

The home run-friendly Cespedes is joined on the ballot by speedsters Jemile Weeks and Coco Crisp, along with right fielder Josh Reddick and catcher Kurt Suzuki. Also appearing on the list are first baseman Daric Barton, shortstop Cliff Pennington, third baseman Josh Donaldson and designated hitter Seth Smith.

All will need a strong showing of votes from fans to be considered serious choices around the country. The A's haven't sent a position player to baseball's storied summer game since 2003, when catcher Ramon Hernandez was selected.

Fans can cast their votes for starters up to 25 times at MLB.com and all 30 club sites -- online or via your mobile device -- using the 2012 All-Star Game MLB.com Ballot until Thursday, June 28, at 8:59 p.m. PT.

Fans can also once again participate in the State Farm Home Run Derby Fan Poll. Fans will have the opportunity to select three players in each league who they would most like to see participate in the State Farm Home Run Derby. The 2012 State Farm Home Run Derby -- part of Gatorade All-Star Workout Day -- will be broadcast live on ESPN, ESPN HD, ESPN Deportes and ESPN Radio in the United States beginning at 8 p.m. ET on Monday, July 9.

The 2012 American League and National League All-Star teams will be unveiled on Sunday, July 1, on the 2012 MLB All-Star Game Selection Show, televised nationally on TBS. Baseball fans around the world will then be able to select the final player on each team via the 2012 All-Star Game Final Vote on MLB.com.

And the voting doesn't end there. The final phase of All-Star Game voting will again have fans participating in the official voting for the Ted Williams All-Star Game Most Valuable Player Award presented by Chevrolet. During the Midsummer Classic, fans will vote exclusively online at MLB.com via the 2012 All-Star Game MLB.com MVP Vote, and their voice will represent 20 percent of the official vote determining the recipient of the Arch Ward Trophy.

The 2012 All-Star Game will be played at Kauffman Stadium on Tuesday, July 10. Come to MLB.com for extensive online coverage of the All-Star Week festivities.

Fans can also place their vote at Oakland Coliseum, beginning May 8 and lasting through June 22.

The 83rd All-Star Game will be televised nationally by FOX Sports, in Canada by Rogers Sportsnet and RDS, and worldwide by partners in more than 200 countries via MLB International's independent feed. ESPN Radio and ESPN Radio Deportes will provide national radio coverage of the All-Star Game. MLB Network and Sirius XM also will provide comprehensive All-Star Week coverage. For more information, please visit **allstargame.com** or **royals.com/asg**.

Hannahan drives in 3 in Indians' 4-3 win

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) Jack Hannahan remains respectful when he talks about his former team. That won't stop him from taking some satisfaction in a job well done.

Hannahan drove in three runs against his former team and Shin-Soo Choo added two hits and an RBI, leading the Cleveland Indians to a 4-3 victory over the Oakland Athletics on Friday night.

"It's always good to come back and see some old faces, good fans and old teammates," Hannahan said. "It's good to get on the road and go out and play baseball, believe in ourselves and continue to put together good, consistent at bats."

Ubaldo Jimenez (2-0) gave up two runs and six hits over six innings as the Indians won for the sixth time in seven games, all on the road. He walked five but proved more effective in tight situations.

"Ubaldo battled," Indians manager Manny Acta said. "He lacked command of his breaking pitch but he went to his fastball and made some good pitches."

Chris Perez pitched the ninth for his fifth save in six chances.

Yoenis Cespedes had three hits and drove in two runs for the A's, who saw their three-game winning streak end. Josh Reddick had two hits, including a home run.

A's starter Graham Godfrey (0-3) lasted five innings, allowing four runs and three hits. He walked five batters and hit two. He struck out three.

"That's uncharacteristic for me," Godfrey said. "I'm a control guy. That might be the most I've ever walked in a game."

Travis Hafner singled, walked three times and was hit by a pitch as the teams combined for 16 walks, and each team left 11 runners on base. Jason Donald was the lone Indian not to reach base.

"When people get on base I'm not trying to do too much like I used to do," Hannahan said. "I'm just looking for something to hit. I swung the bat pretty well the second half last year and I've been able to take that into the offseason and into this year."

The Indians have won six of the last eight meetings with Oakland.

Jemile Weeks had two hits for the A's, including the team's first triple of the season.

Godfrey, on a four-game losing streak dating to last season, took a no-hitter into the fourth inning, though he allowed a run in the second on three walks and Hannahan's sacrifice fly.

"He got behind some guys, which he has done in the past but he usually recovers," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "It was a struggle tonight. It didn't get out of hand but it wasn't his best effort."

Hannahan hit a two-run double in the fourth that made it 3-1.

"It's good to see him do that," Acta said. "We've always felt he was a better hitter than what he showed in the minor leagues the last couple of years. As long as he doesn't try to do too much and continues to spread the ball around he's going to be OK."

Reddick had tied it for the A's in the third with a two-out solo home run.

Jason Kipnis was hit by a pitch with one out in the fifth, stole second and scored when Choo singled sharply into right field to give the Indians a 4-1 lead.

NOTES: RHP Rich Thompson reported to the A's after being claimed off waivers from the Los Angeles Angels and will wear No. 54. ... RHP Neil Wagner was optioned to Triple-A Sacramento to make room for Thompson. ... Indians OF Grady Sizemore (herniated disc) is expected to begin baseball-related activity next week. ... That the Indians lead the AL in walks is no accident. "It's part of getting quality at-bats," Acta said. "The last few years we've had the most strikeouts in franchise history. We needed a different mindset. Now we're doing a good job of keeping traffic on base." ... 1B Casey Kotchman's defense "has saved a few runs for us already and that doesn't go unnoticed," Acta said. ... The A's 1972 World Series championship team will be honored before Saturday's game. ... The A's send RHP Brandon McCarthy (0-2, 3.60) to the mound against the Indians on Saturday night. He is 6-3 with a 4.61 ERA in 16 games, eight starts, against the Indians. Over the past two years McCarthy is 8-0 in 10 starts with run support of four runs or more and 1-11 with run support of under four runs. ... RHP Jeanmar Gomez (0-0, 2.25) starts for the Indians. He has retired 12 of the 13 batters he's faced this year. He faces a suspension for hitting Mike Moustakas of the Royals last Saturday. Gomez is 1-0 with an 0.79 ERA in two games (11 innings) against the A's.

A's reunion of 1972 champs harkens memories

Paul Gutierrez, csnbayarea.com

OAKLAND -- The jerseys were the same garish, canary yellow.

The smack talk was the same, too, even if time has the propensity to add a wrinkle or two to the stories being told, and told again.

Members of the 1972 A's, the first professional sports team in the Bay Area to win a world championship, gathered here at the Coliseum two hours before Oakland began a three-game series against Cleveland. They were here to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the first of their three consecutive World Series titles and, well, the years melted away with each memory.

"It seems like yesterday," said Vida Blue, then coming off winning both the Cy Young and MVP awards, now working as a baseball analyst for CSN Bay Area.

"But it was about 20 pounds ago and 10,000 hairs off our heads. The thing now is about getting healthy and enjoying life."

Forty years ago, the Swingin' A's were all about living the good life. And winning games. Lots of them.

"We set the standard of what Oakland A's baseball should be," Blue added.

Indeed, Joe Rudi, whose Game 2, ninth-inning catch off the wall in left-center in Cincinnati is the stuff of legend, said the A's matured together after arriving from Kansas City in 1968.

Rudi grew up in Modesto.

"So when we moved from Kansas City, being this close to home was very nice," he said.

The arrival of Dick Williams as manager in 1971 set the stage.

"He was a strict disciplinarian," Rudi said.

And yet...

"Everybody always talks about all the fights there were in our clubhouse," Hall of Famer Rollie Fingers with a grin. "And there were. But when we crossed those white lines, don't be wearing that other uniform. That's why we were in so many other fights."

"There was something going on every day," Blue added. "We were good copy."

Fingers concurred.

"Everybody wanted to see the crazy guys from Oakland," he said, "with the white shoes and long hair and handlebar mustaches."

Fingers, his own trademark handlebar mustache still as tight as it was 40 years ago, smiled at the memory.

And why not?

Current A's manager Bob Melvin, who grew up in Menlo Park, was not yet 11 years old when the A's won their first World Series in Oakland. Yes, he remembers that Fall Classic vividly.

"I sat right behind home plate, about 15 or 16 rows back, and at that point in my life, that was the high point," Melvin said. "I just remember feeling that atmosphere."

Melvin's hero was Sal Bando, and he wears the former A's captain's No. 6 in tribute.

"It was easier to be an A's fan back then than it was to be a Giants fan," Melvin said.

"I want these guys to be around. It lets (the younger A's players of today) know they're part of something special."

In the East Side Club, all around were key components of the team that ushered in a dynasty.

Fingers was talking about sharing the joint with the Raiders.

Blue was talking about how Tommy Davis got himself cut by owner Charlie Finley because he introduced Blue to his agent.

Shortstop Bert Campaneris, the team's sparkplug, was talking about his pride for Cuban countryman and current A's slugger Yoenis Cespedes.

And catcher Gene Tenace, that World Series MVP with four home runs in seven games after hitting five the entire season, was still a ringleader, whistling at his old teammates with a shrill sound that got everyone's attention. It was, after all, time to shuffle off and eat.

And melt away some more years.

Cespedes learning English, baseball with help of Weeks

Paul Gutierrez, csnbayarea.com

OAKLAND -- Yoenis Cespedes has a goal in mind. A simple one at that.

No, not being a 30-30 man. Not being a Gold Glove center fielder. Not even cutting down on his strikeouts.

This target involves an off-the-field accomplishment...before the end of his rookie season in *las grandes ligas*.

"In July," he said, "I want to do an interview in English."

Of course, the Cuban defector said this in Spanish.

"I'm very smart," he added with a knowing wink. "I'm feeling better every day."

Jemile Weeks is a major reason. The A's second baseman has been tutoring Cespedes in English. Friday, before the A's 4-3 series-opening loss to Cleveland, the two sat at a table in the middle of the clubhouse, writing out words and their English-Spanish equivalents on paper before sounding them out. As a crowd of reporters gathered, they did the same with the English alphabet.

They also talked about the difference between a dress shirt and a baseball pullover shirt, and why, exactly, the word was the same in English.

Baseball, meanwhile, is universal.

Cespedes would have the first-three-hit night of his nascent career, including two RBI and a walk, and his third hit was perhaps the most impressive as he showed maturity in going with the pitch and driving it into right field for an opposite field single in the seventh inning.

Of course, the base hit drove in Weeks, who led off the inning with a triple.

There would be no storybook ending to this night's story, though, as Cespedes also struck out in the ninth against Indians closer Chris Perez.

Horseshoes and hand grenades may translate in a literal sense, but in a sporting parlance?

While not fluent, Weeks understands the language, comprehending the written word better than the spoken word.

"I've just always been around the Latino community," said Weeks, who also took two years of high school Spanish. "In Orlando, there's a huge Puerto Rican population. And in Miami, there's a huge Cuban population. And playing baseball, there's a lot of Latino ballplayers."

Weeks, who grew up in Orlando and played college ball at Miami, is not trying to take the place of Cespedes' personal translator, former pitcher Ariel Prieto. Far from it.

On this day, Cespedes approached Weeks because he wanted to know how to say, "Como te siente?" in English to flu-ridden teammate Coco Crisp.

How do you feel?

"He's doing a good job putting the effort in," Weeks said of Cespedes. "It's a process."

The same work ethic is evident on the field.

"He's going to the (batting) cage, doing a good job," Weeks said. "He's staying true to himself and humble but at the same time staying confident and working hard."

A's great Bert Campaneris, meanwhile, praised Cespedes, whom he mentored in spring training, for his hot start with a team-leading four home runs. But he also added there was room for improvement in the five-tool player's arsenal.

"He's learned much, but there is always something new," Campaneris said in Spanish. "You can always learn something new. You're not going to hit a him run every at-bat."

Campaneris, the former A's shortstop in Oakland for a reunion of the A's 1972 World Series champs, said he'd like to see Cespedes bunt for hits.

"Mickey Mantle used to do it," Campaneris said.

And if he's on base more, Campaneris reasoned, he can steal more bases.

"Take advantage of all your tools," he said.

For now, learning the language is another.

"Every day he has another word or two," A's manager Bob Melvin said of Cespedes. "You can almost see him processing it."

After all, July is right around the corner.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Mitchell Leads Cats Past Rainiers, 7-4

Sacramento River Cats

West Sacramento, Calif. - Outfielder Jermaine Mitchell went 3-for-4 with two runs scored and was a home run short of a cycle Friday night, helping the River Cats snap a two-game skid with a 7-4 win over Tacoma to earn the series-split.

The River Cats scored early and often on Toyota Family Value Friday, powering their way to their 11th win of the season. Mitchell led off the top of the first inning with a triple and was brought home on a grounder by designated hitter Michael Taylor. Outfielder Grant Green then drove in fellow outfielder Collin Cowgill, who had drawn a walk earlier in the inning, putting the Cats ahead 2-0 after one inning of play.

The Rainiers put a run on the board in the second and third innings, tying the game at two. In the bottom of the third inning, however, the River Cats retook the lead. A leadoff double from Jermaine Mitchell was followed by four more hits including a single from first baseman Chris Carter and Taylor's ninth double of the season. In all, the Cats scored four times in the inning, giving them the 6-4 advantage they would not relinquish.

River Cats right-handed starter Travis Banwart (2-0) earned the win, giving up four runs, seven hits and one walk with two strikeouts in six innings. Andrew Carignan, in his first appearance of the year with the Cats, pitched two perfect innings with three strikeouts. Evan Scribner earned the save with one scoreless inning of work.

Taylor went 2-for-4 with two runs scored and an RBI, while Derek Norris went 2-for-4 with a run and two RBIs. The River Cats had 10 hits in all.

The loss fell to Tacoma starter Jarrett Grube, who allowed six earned runs on seven hits and two walks with no strikeouts in three innings pitched. Right-handed reliever Brian Sweeney pitched 3.2 innings of relief, allowing one hit, one walk and no runs with two strikeouts.

The River Cats now travel to Reno for a four game set. Saturday's game will pit Sacramento right handed pitcher Jarrod Parker (1-0, 2.50 ERA) against Aces righty Chris Jakubauskas (1-2, 4.08 ERA) and can be heard on 650 KSTE. They return to Raley Field for a Miller Lite Thirsty Thursday on April 26 to face the Tucson Padres at 7:05 p.m

Gray Stymies Missions For First Win

By Jonathan Raymond

One of Sonny Gray's favorite quotes is "Walk softly and carry a big stick." He interprets the famous Theodore Roosevelt line as a call to carry himself with a quiet confidence every time he takes the mound and let his pitches do the talking.

In his first two starts of 2012, Oakland's No. 4 prospect felt he'd let his excitement level get too high. On Thursday, though, he was back to walking softly.

Gray (1-1) allowed one run on four hits and a walk while striking out five over seven innings en route to his first win of the year as Midland topped San Antonio, 4-1.

The 22-year-old had allowed nine runs -- six earned -- in his previous two starts, but put it together against the Missions in an outing reminiscent of the success he had in his first professional exposure last season, when he sported a 0.45 ERA in 20 Texas League innings.

"I've been trying to curb my energy level. My excitement out there has been really high, but today I was a little more quiet," said the Vanderbilt University product. "I was just out there doing my thing, making my pitches and not getting too excited."

MLB.com's No. 85 overall prospect said he noticed San Antonio hitters swinging early and often as the game got underway.

"We figured out in the first two innings they were going to be super-aggressive, and then we tried to use that to our advantage," Gray said. "I tried to expand the zone on the first pitch and got a lot of weak contact that way. The two-seam fastball was running in on right-handers and they were swinging at it, and the breaking ball was there for me finally again. It hadn't kind of been there the first two outings, but it was there tonight."

The outing, Gray's longest in three starts, brought his ERA down to 3.50 in 18 innings to begin the season. The No. 18 pick in the 2011 Draft had walked six in his previous 11 innings, but issued just one free pass against the Missions.

The right-hander credited his calmer nerves and a solid defense behind him for the reversal of course after his first two outings.

"I just felt like I was getting more into my rhythm. I didn't try to do too much," he said. "They were making great plays behind me, sucking it up and throwing them out at first. All you can ask for is to get up there and give your team a chance to win. Hopefully, I can continue to do that."

The left side of the RockHounds' infield provided Gray with most of his run support. Shortstop Dusty Coleman collected three hits and drove in two of Midland's four runs, while third baseman Josh Horton added two doubles.

Stockton Gets Even With 9-0 Shutout Of Modesto

MODESTO, Calif. - For the fifth night in a row, the Stockton Ports were involved in a shutout. For the second time in those five nights, the Ports found themselves on the winning side of the ledger. After the Modesto Nuts shut them out to open their four-game series, the Ports returned the favor on Friday night, beating Modesto 9-0 and receiving another outstanding pitching performance from starter T.J. Walz (2-0).

The Ports scored their first of nine runs in the third. Rashun Dixon drew a walk to start the inning, and would score on a one-out RBI single from Myrio Richard to give the Ports a 1-0 lead.

Stockton extended its lead with a pair of runs in the fifth. Dixon opened the frame with a double and scored three batters later on a two-out triple from Richard. Michael Gilmartin came up next and lined one at the shortstop Tim Smalling. Smalling had the ball go off his glove and into left field, an error that allowed Richard to score and give the Ports a 3-0 advantage.

Meanwhile, Walz was in command for Stockton. Walz scattered five hits over seven scoreless innings, never allowing more than a hit per inning. Walz picked up the win as he struck out a career-best nine and walked just one.

Stockton's first three runs came of Nuts starter Juan Gonzalez (0-2), who took the loss after going six innings and allowing three runs (two earned) on six hits while striking out seven.

Over the final three innings, the Ports scored six additional runs and took advantage of two more Modesto errors in that span. In the seventh, Stockton added an unearned run off Nuts reliever Kraig Sitton. In the eighth, after Sitton allowed a leadoff walk to Josh Whitaker, Miles Head hit a ball to deep right-center that went off the glove of right-fielder Corey Dickerson, a play that was ruled an error and resulted in another run. Two batters later, Tony Thompson doubled off Craig Bennigson to drive in Head and make it a 6-0 lead.

In the ninth, the Ports tagged Bennigson for three more runs. With two on and nobody out, Gilmartin drove a two-run double to right to make it 8-0. Gilmartin scored two batters later on an RBI groundout from Head to stretch the Stockton lead to 9-0.

Sean Doolittle tossed a scoreless eighth for Stockton, adding two more strikeouts to his season total. Jose Guzman pitched a perfect ninth to close out the ballgame.

Head, who went 2-for-5 with an RBI and a run scored, extended his hitting streak to a league-leading 15 games. He is now the only player in the California League to hit safely in every game thus far on the season.

The Ports and Nuts will play the third game of their four-game set on Saturday night at John Thurman Field. Blake Hassebrock (1-0, 5.91 ERA) will toe the rubber for Stockton, opposed by Modesto left-hander Tyler Matzek (0-2, 1.72 ERA). First pitch is set for 7:05 p.m. PDT.

Pitchers' Duel - Part Two

By Daniel Trivinos / Burlington Bees

BURLINGTON, Iowa - The Burlington Bees (7-8) shut out the Lansing Lugnuts (12-3) in game two of a three game series with a great pitching performance from right-hander, Sean Murphy. The two teams have now defeated each other by the same, 2-0 score in two straight games.

Sean Murphy took the hill for the Bees and looked outstanding in 6.2 innings pitched. Murphy used all of his pitches and looked determined to attack the strike zone throughout the game. His slider was sharp, his change-up disappeared as it reached the plate, and his heater consistently blew past the Lugnuts' batters. The tall right-hander threw 6.2 innings and gave up only four hits, four walks and struck out seven.

Murphy faced trouble in the sixth when leadoff man, Jon Berti reached due to an error by first baseman, Douglas Landaeta. Berti went all the way to second base then advanced to third when the second batter of the inning, Kenny Wilson put down a successful sacrifice bunt. But Murphy was saved by an impressive defensive play by second baseman, Chih-Fang Pan and catcher, John Nester. With the infield drawn in, K.C. Hobson lifted a shallow fly ball to rightfield. Pan raced after it and snagged it for one out. Then Berti tried to tag up from third base and was ruled out at the plate by a well-placed tag from Nester.

When Murphy put two runners on with two outs in the top of the seventh, manager Aaron Nieckula brought Jeff Urlaub in to put out the fire. Urlaub struck out Kellen Sweeney with a 3-2 fastball to hold onto the lead. Opposing batters are only hitting at a .083 clip against Urlaub.

The offense did enough by scoring one run in the bottom of the sixth. Douglas Landaeta doubled to lead it off and scored on a base hit from Bobby Crocker. In the bottom of the eighth, John Nester crushed a pitch for a solo homer and some insurance heading into the ninth. Right-hander Ryan Doolittle earned his first save of the season by pitching a perfect top of the ninth and striking out the final batter.