

SECTION

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SUNDAY

FEBRUARY 28, 1993 □

## VIEW

Los Angeles Times

## HIGHLIGHTS

**THE A LEAGUE:** For five seasons, Times photographer Tammy Lechner has followed the fortunes of California's minor baseball league, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. The result: a gallery of life in "The Cal." **E1**

**ROBIN ABCARIAN:** Has the Year of the Woman bypassed the Los Angeles mayor's race? It's a question the columnist raises after attending a candidates' forum. **E1**

**LETTERS:** Days are exhausting not only for nannies, but for mommies too... Excellence in education means graduates should be able to support themselves... Praise is overdue for helpful restroom attendants. **E3**

**DIANNE KLEIN:** When the columnist and her husband named their daughter, they ignored popular appellations like Jessica, Nicole and Jennifer in favor of an old-fashioned moniker: Hannah. Imagine their surprise when they discovered they were not alone. **E3**



## PAGES

## Gauging the Pulse of a New Poem

**O**n the Pulse of Morning, the poem written and read by Maya Angelou to celebrate the inauguration of President Bill Clinton, has been published as a special commemorative paperback book by Random House.

The move is unusual because, except in cases of book-length verses, poetry is usually published in collections or anthologies, and not as individual works.

But Robert D. Loomis, Angelou's longtime editor at Random House, said the company decided to issue the single poem because Angelou "captured America's heart on Inauguration Day."

He added that "what's more satisfying about this new layer of recognition is that it is attracting even more readers to her remarkable and diverse body of work."

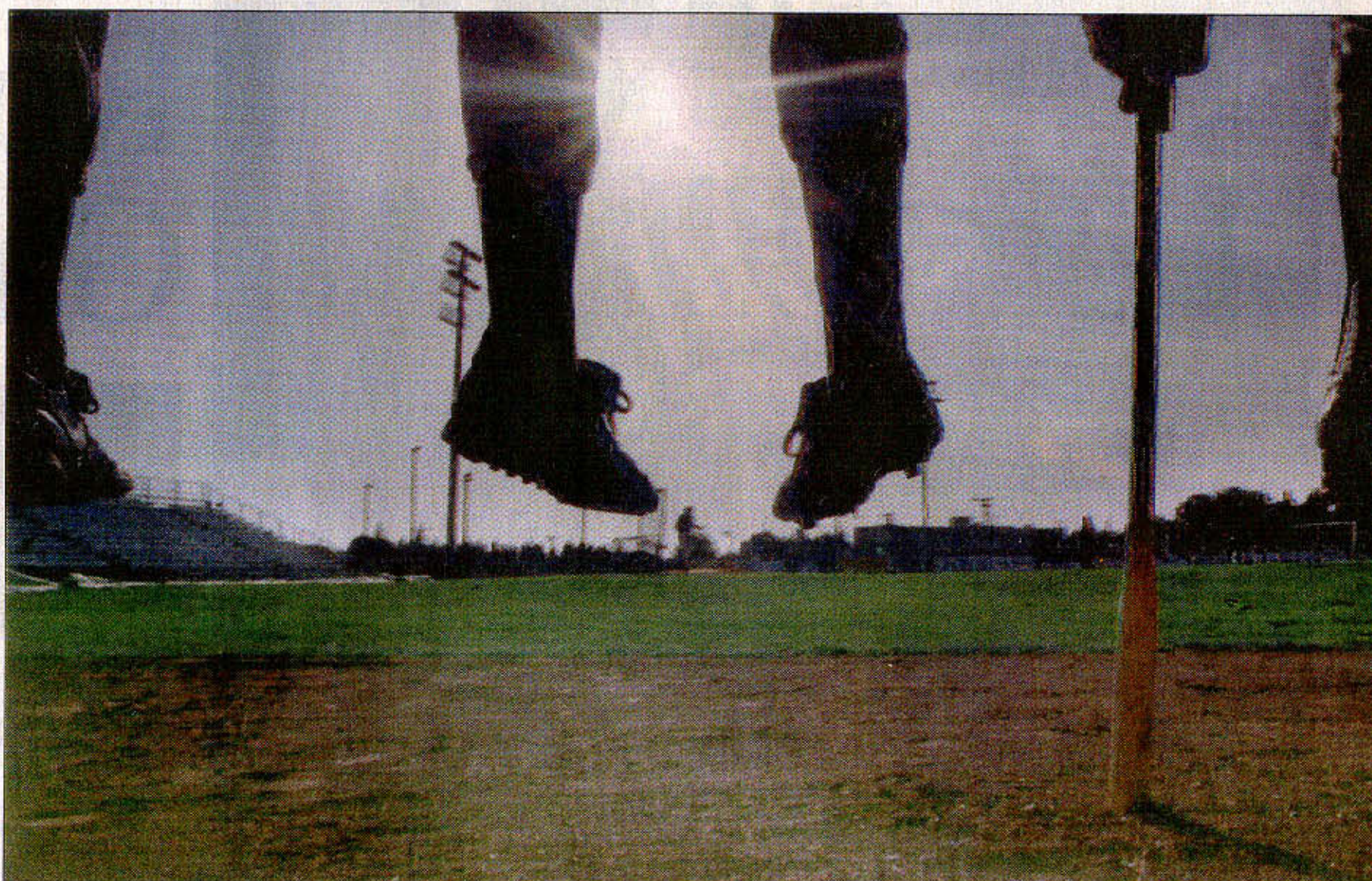
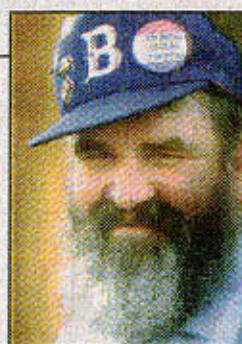
Random House is starting with a first printing of 50,000 copies of "On the Pulse of Morning"—enough to aim for bestseller status.

Angelou's previous works include a series of autobiographies that began with the classic "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings." Her newest book, "Lessons in Living," is a collection of essays examining her thoughts about spirituality and is due out in the fall.

—ELIZABETH MEHREN

**SOCIAL CLIMES:** Patrons dining at La Fonda restaurant on Wilshire Boulevard are treated to the music of Los Camperos de Nati Cano, one of the best mariachi bands in the country. Also... The Buzz. **E4**

**NEW LOOK:** Designers have taken the nerdiness out of eyeglasses. Today's frames and lenses blend fashion and function. **E5**



Clockwise from above, Visalia pitcher's shoes; Bakersfield Dodger fan; Stockton Ports stadium, where poem "Casey at the Bat" was written; "The Bug," mascot for San Bernardino Spirit; groundskeeper drags Modesto infield.



## On the Road Again

Times photographer Tammy Lechner has long followed "the Cal"—the single-A California League that is celebrating its 50th anniversary.

It's five weeks to opening day. That means I'll soon be on the road for my fifth and final season with the Cal. The road is Highway 395. It's also Highway 99—the league's main artery—unfolding for miles past small towns like Gorman, Weed Patch and Pumpkin Center.

At the end of each dusty ride is one of 10 Cal stadiums. The action on the field sometimes is overshadowed by the magical atmosphere that surrounds the game: 25-cent-beer nights, souvenir giveaways, crazy mascots and huge barbecue pits.

Part of that magic comes from fortunes made and lost. Salinas was bought for \$1 in '76 and sold for \$1 million in '87. One in 12 players makes it to the majors. One, Fernando Valenzuela, started in now-defunct Lodi, gained fame in L.A. and ended up in Palm Springs.

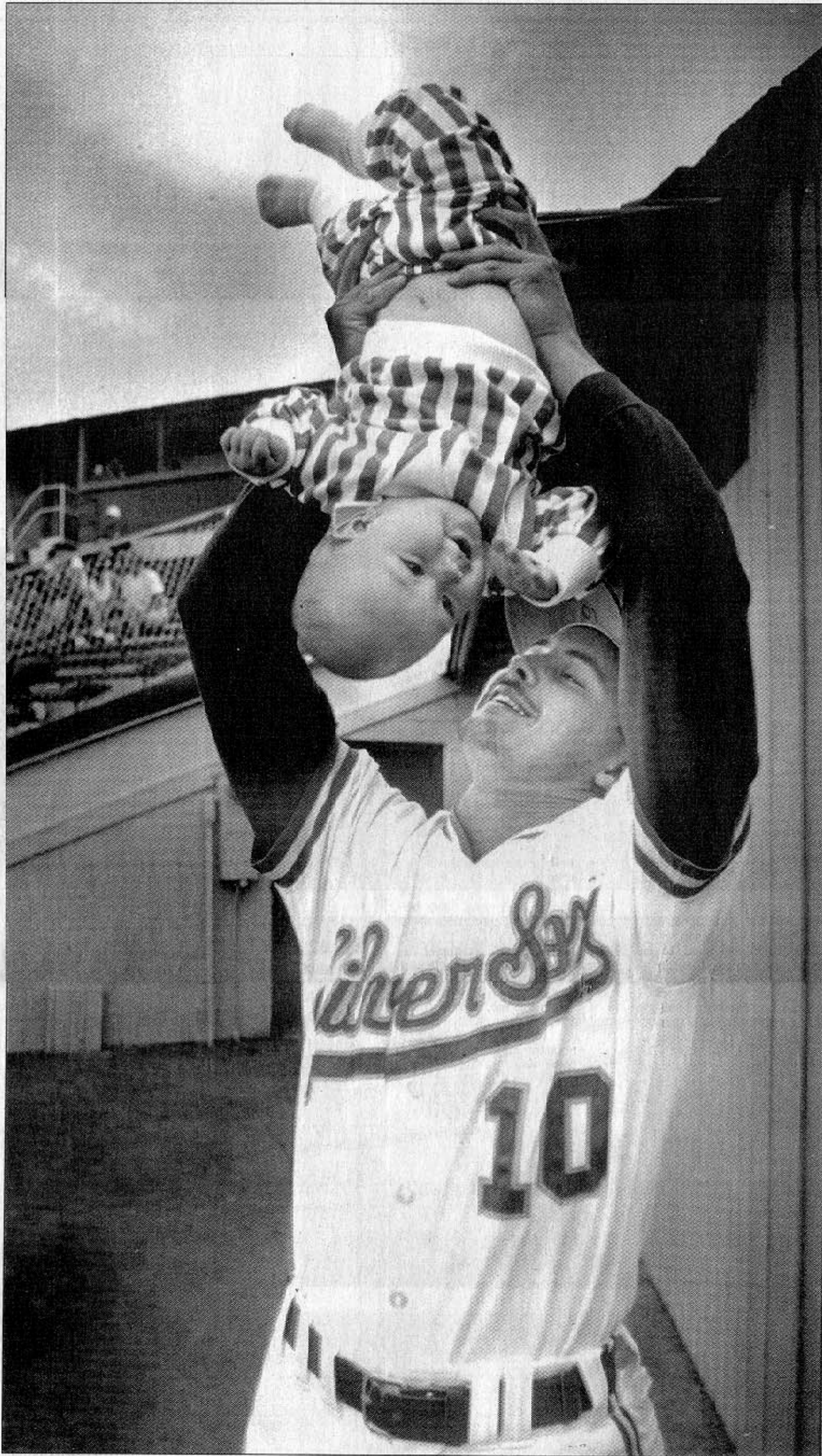
While players—and fortunes—come and go, the fans stay on. They take solace in the fact that the Cal has been in their back yards for 50 years—and they expect it to stay that way forever.

**INSIDE:** "The Cal" offers a down-home brand of baseball. **E2**



## GALLERY





# The Grass Roots Game



The California League offers a down-home brand of baseball. Some teams like Bakersfield play in old, quaint stadiums that have wooden facades and outfield billboards advertising pest control, sunflower seeds and, these days, cellular phones.

During a Cal game, players dash out to the concession stand between plays or, if they're busy, they give fans money to buy them snacks.

One woman in San Bernardino always brings fudge to the home-team dugout.

Even the top brass join in the fun.

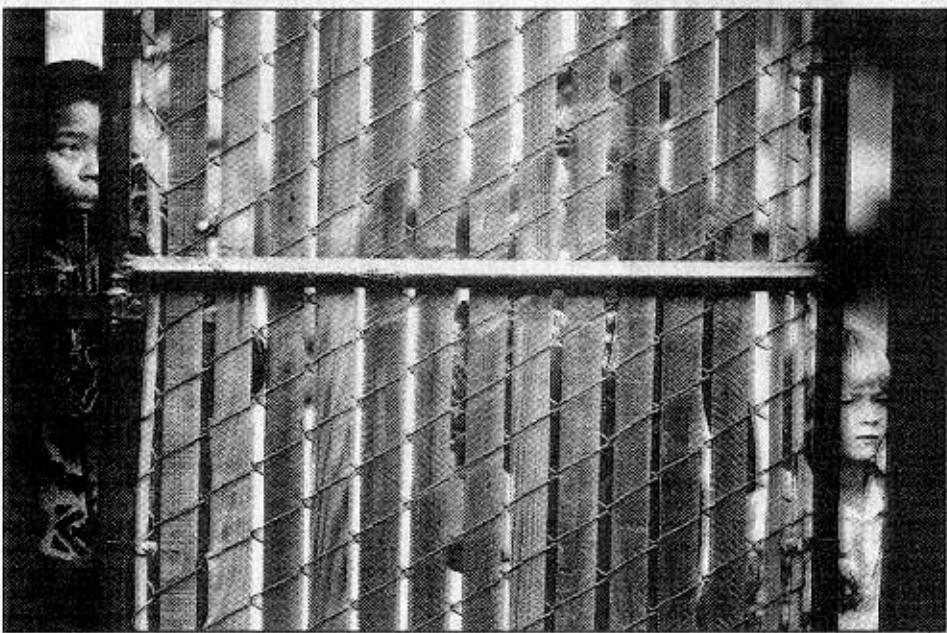
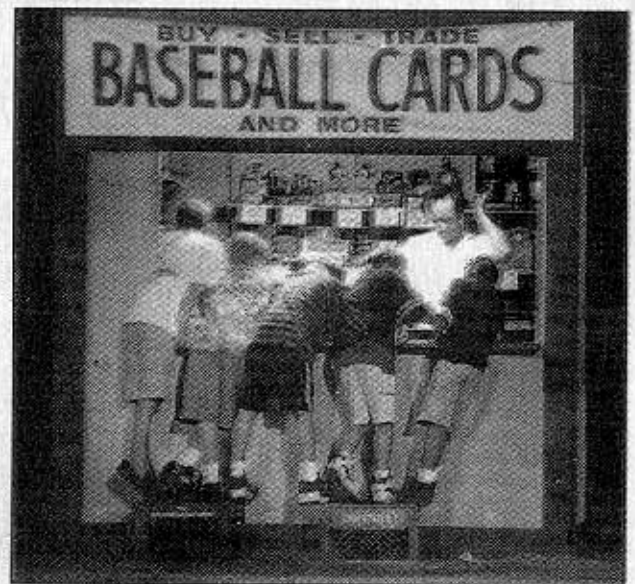
During ceremonies for opening day '92, the league president got a pie in the face, courtesy of the High Desert Mavericks.

His crime?

He'd warned the former Riverside Red Wave not to move to the desert in 1991.

The Mavericks ignored him and built a high-tech park. That year they set a Cal attendance record and won the championship.

**NEXT SUNDAY:** In the Cal, life on the road means a lot of hurry-up-and-wait. The life is far from glamorous, but the dreams are big.



The Cal's schedule includes a lot of travel with few days off. Players have little time with friends and family, so they catch up when they can. Before a Silver Sox game, a Reno pitcher plays with his son and autograph-seekers interrupt a couple during a private moment. The Cal's fans are young and old.







# Not Quite Prime Time



Times Staff Photographer Tammy Lechner has spent four years following the fans, fortunes and foibles of the single-A California League, whose 10 teams stretch from Palm Springs to San Jose. This is the second of two photo essays.

For players, life in the California League often seems like one long bus ride—with a little baseball squeezed in between. For five months, starting each April, teams criss-cross the desert and central valleys, stopping in Stockton, Bakersfield and other bastions of the grass-roots game. Single-A bus travel offers few luxuries. Like most teams, the Visalia Twins load their own gear and bring their own pillows, blankets and junk food to get through the hours of rolling highway.

Many like to pass time by dreaming—often aloud—about their big break: getting called up to the next level of the minors. Most single-A players are expected to make the majors within four years. Jose Conseco and Reggie Jackson are among the big-leaguers who started in the Cal.

While major-league salaries can soar to seven figures, most Cal athletes make \$1,200 a month during the season. Many hold second jobs. Money's so tight that fans often buy players lunch after a game and offer them cheap rates on room and board—a new meaning, perhaps, for team spirit.



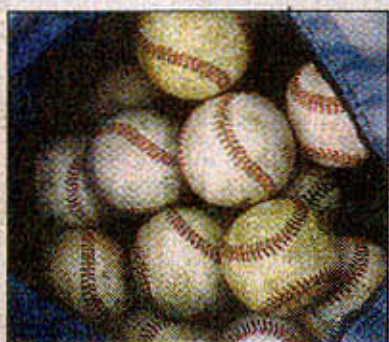
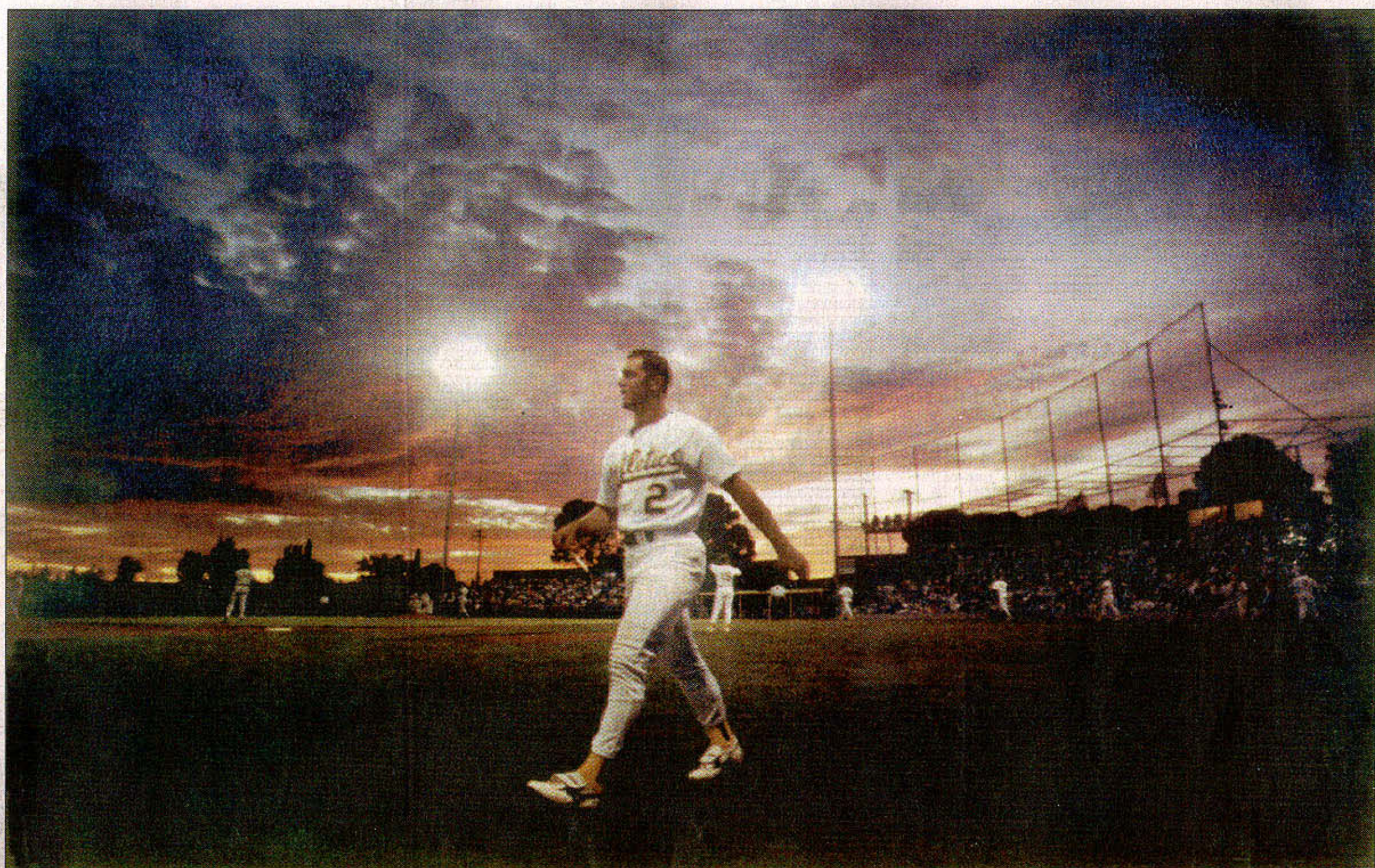
At the stadium, above, a Visalia player sprawls atop the dugout to rest after a long travel day. But at the hotel, it's close quarters in the "layover room" as the Twins wait for the team bus.

Doing laundry is one of the most-despised rituals of the road. The Twins trade off the duty, each giving the designated launderer \$1 to clean his uniform. This player realized—too late—that his friends had stuffed extra clothes into the laundry bag. He got even by leaving everything in a pile on the hotel room floor. The ensuing chaos almost turned into a brawl. Such high spirits carry onto the field, where teams like the High Desert Mavericks like to play chain-reaction "pepper" before a game.



This new Sunday feature will showcase books, photo essays, historic and family albums—ways we use images to capture the soul and spirit of the world around us. Reader suggestions are welcome. Write to Gallery, View, Los Angeles Times, Times Mirror Square, Calif. 90053.





Stockton's weathered stadium can be a lonely place to play for visitors. This Visalia pitcher celebrated a victory with one of the few Twin fans in the park—his father, who had driven over from the Bay Area.



After four seasons, the stadiums of the Cal were old friends to Lechner, seen here in Reno in 1989, her first year following the league.

"Reno, in all honesty, had a pretty rundown stadium," she says. It also was known for nasty winds that could turn pop flies into homers. But everyone loved to play there because of the night life and the fact a steak dinner cost \$3. [The team moved to Riverside this season.]

Lechner says Bakersfield's quaint, wooden park has an architectural *faux pas*: the sun sets over the centerfield fence.

She favors the more picturesque and less pesky sunset in Modesto, above. But her favorite sky views come in Palm Springs, especially early in the season, when the desert stadium is rimmed with snow-capped mountains.

"No matter how far I had to travel to get to a game . . . one of these stadiums always made me forget how far from home I was," she says.



Pre-game warmups: Don Drysdale, perhaps the best-known Cal graduate, with umpires. Modesto players sign autographs. Bully, the bullpen dog of the old Riverside Red Wave, joins in calisthenics.

