

## A's News Clips, Tuesday, September 29, 2009

### A's core secure, but others are likely to move on

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's take comfort knowing that several of this season's core players are locked into the picture for next year as well.

Brett Anderson and Trevor Cahill lead a young starting rotation that's expected to improve with experience. Closer Andrew Bailey heads a strong group of relievers. Catcher Kurt Suzuki is developing into one of the American League's best at his position.

But the front office has several tough roster calls to make this offseason. The following players could be waving goodbye to Oakland after the regular season concludes Sunday:

**3B Adam Kennedy:** A case could be made for Kennedy, 33, as the team's most valuable player, and he should attract interest as a free agent.

He was acquired in May to play second base after Mark Ellis was injured. Kennedy eventually moved to third and adapted nicely after never having played the position in the majors.

He's hit .371 with runners in scoring position and chipped in 20 stolen bases.

"I don't think I've held back my feelings about enjoying it (in Oakland)," he said.

The A's maintain hope that Eric Chavez, signed through next season, can return from back surgery and play third.

If Chavez can't, the A's could thrust marquee prospect Brett Wallace into the lineup.

"(Kennedy) really has been great from the minute we got him," assistant general manager David Forst said. "We'll absolutely have a conversation after the season as to whether it makes sense for both sides for him to come back."

**OF/DH Jack Cust:** For the third straight season, he'll finish as the home run leader on a team starved for power. But that doesn't guarantee Cust returns.

He's making \$2.8 million this season and would seem due another raise as he's eligible for arbitration. The A's must decide whether that's worth it. Cust is on pace to lead the AL in strikeouts for a third straight season, and he can be a defensive liability.

But he's found his niche with the A's and wants to return for a fourth season.

"I feel like I definitely bring some things to the table in this lineup that can help," Cust, 30, said. "But they've got some guys they're going to look at. Hopefully I'll be able to come back and help us get to where we need to be."

**RHP Justin Duchscherer:** Duchscherer, 31, will be a free agent for the first time. But he's missed the entire 2009 season, primarily because of injury and more recently while being treated for clinical depression.

Forst said the A's will wait for Duchscherer to let them know when he's ready to think about baseball. Duchscherer, a two-time All-Star who made \$3.9 million this season, would bring veteran savvy for an inexperienced rotation.

"There's going to be no shortage of teams, I think, interested in him," Forst said. "If he's ready to go, we'd love to have him back under the right circumstances."

**RHP Santiago Casilla:** The reliever simply hasn't panned out as the A's hoped. Casilla, 29, is eligible for arbitration this winter, and it's doubtful he'll be tendered a contract.

**RHP Brett Tomko:** Tomko, 36, was effective over six starts with the A's, and that should garner some interest for him in free agency.

IF Bobby Crosby: This relationship has run its course. Crosby, 29, is ready for a change of scenery, and the A's figure to oblige as he'll be a free agent for the first time.

IF Nomar Garciaparra: He's hardly played since the A's have gone with youth. Whether he keeps playing or retires at age 36, expect Garciaparra to put Oakland in his rearview mirror.

## **Garciaparra: Season is a bust**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Oakland's strong finish is not enough to satisfy Nomar Garciaparra. Only a playoff spot would make him happy, so the infielder really does not like finishing in last place.

"This is how I evaluate this season: I'm disappointed, upset and embarrassed," he said. "I hope everyone feels that way. I've always believed one team has a great year, seven have decent years, and the rest have awful years. And to be out of it for the past two months is an embarrassment - you want to at least have a chance. We didn't do enough."

Will the A's failures keep Garciaparra, 36, from wanting to play another season? He nearly retired after last season before flirting with the Phillies, then signing with Oakland in March.

"I really haven't thought about it," he said. "We'll just finish off the week. I'll go home and enjoy the kids. I don't know what the future will be. I do still love playing, for sure."

Though he is batting nearly 40 points below his career average, Garciaparra believes that physically he is still capable of handling the type of limited role he had most of the year. That was the plan initially, but early in the season, Garciaparra and Jason Giambi both wound up on the field every day because of injuries. Neither thrived as a result.

"We both kind of paid for that," Garciaparra said. "Look what Jason's doing now in Colorado, and I'm feeling fine."

There is no chance, really, that Garciaparra would return to Oakland. Beyond his dislike of the team's finish, there's the fact that owner Lew Wolff has said he does not want to sign more older players after that strategy has failed the past few years.

Garciaparra has been a help to the team's younger players; shortstop Cliff Pennington and first baseman Tommy Everidge are among those who praised his input over the final months.

"I hope I've helped from that standpoint," Garciaparra said. "I'm disappointed with the results we've had, but I like the guys and the kids on this team."

## **A's leading off**

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Rolling: The A's have not lost any of their past nine series, going 5-0-4, their longest stretch of series without a loss since July 27-Sept. 3, 2006 - the year Oakland went to the ALCS.

## **Kids are all right under Suzuki's tutelage**

### **A's catcher ahead of curve when it comes to mentoring**

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Imagine being a young student, charged with babysitting someone only a few years younger, while also prepping for the SAT.

Tough, right?

Now imagine doing that babysitting while actually taking the SAT.

Beyond tough, right?

Now imagine doing it virtually every night for six months.

Impossible, right?

Not for A's catcher Kurt Suzuki. Not by a long shot.

The aforementioned scenario is the big league baseball equivalent of what Suzuki has been up against in 2009, and not only has he taken great care of the youngsters with whom he's been entrusted, but he's aced the test with flying colors.

In fact, he's graduated with honors, at the top of his class. And with a diploma firmly in hand at the age of 25, he's well on his way to a Master's Degree in the art of Major League stardom.

The kids he's been handling are Oakland's starting pitchers, a collection that's been, in various forms, the youngest rotation in the bigs. Two 21-year-olds have been in the mix all year; a 22-year-old entered the fray a couple of months in; and a handful of hurlers -- mostly rookies -- ranging in age from 23 to 25 have played significant roles for large chunks of the season.

The nightly tests? Guiding these gifted-but-green young men through the minefield that is a 162-game grind.

"I've never looked at it quite like that," says Suzuki, who will play in his 142nd game of the season on Tuesday when the A's open their final road series of the year in Seattle with their 157th game. "I don't think it's been that difficult. It's a challenge, definitely, but I love it. It's exciting to me."

Suzuki, who made his big league debut in 2007 and was handed the reigns that July to what was a fairly established staff, is the source of tremendous excitement within the Oakland organization.

In less than 2 1/2 seasons, he's established himself as one of the top catchers in the American League, and 2009 is -- to this point -- his crowning achievement.

"We knew Kurt was going to be an excellent player," says A's general manager Billy Beane, who admitted he was putting Suzuki into a "trial-by-fire" situation upon trading respected veteran Jason Kendall to the Cubs before the '07 non-waiver Trade Deadline.

"But it'd probably be disingenuous of me to say we knew he'd be this good, this fast."

Just how good is Suzuki? Well, in addition to being extremely durable, as evidenced by the fact that he's leading AL catchers in starts for the second consecutive season, he's been so productive at the plate and behind it that, in the minds of many, only MVP candidate Joe Mauer of the Twins ranks ahead of him among the best backstops in the league.

"He's my No. 2, and it's a clear No. 2," says former Athletics infielder Shooty Babitt, a current big league scout and baseball analyst for Comcast SportsNet California. "And he's not far behind Mauer, if you ask me. We're talking about a guy who can do it all, and he's less than three years in."

"The sky's the limit for this kid."

It might be a stretch, though, to call Suzuki a kid. Yes, 25 is young. But he's had to grow up in a hurry since being named the Johnny Bench Award winner as the country's best collegiate catcher in 2004 after helping Cal-State Fullerton to that year's College World Series title.

Nicknamed "Kurt Klutch" as a Titan, Suzuki, who drove in what proved to be the CWS-winning run for Fullerton against the favored Texas Longhorns, was drafted in the second round of the 2004 First-Year Player Draft and quickly rose through the ranks.

Known primarily for his defensive acumen -- excellent footwork, speedy release, strong and accurate throwing arm, solid game-calling -- early on, he's developed offensively at a breakneck pace.

After batting .249 in 68 games with the A's in 2007, he bumped that up to .279 in 2008, and this year he's increased his power numbers from seven homers and 42 RBIs last season to 15 homers and a team-high 85 RBIs heading into the Seattle series.

"It's really incredible what he's done, even taking the offense out of it, and we're talking about a guy we're hitting cleanup a lot these days," offers Oakland manager Bob Geren, a former big league catcher. "When he first came up, he was in a tough spot. We had guys like Dan Haren and Rich Harden and Joe Blanton in the rotation that year, and not only were they established, they had a great rapport with Jason, a lot of trust in him.

"But Kurt came in and did it right. He learned, he listened, he took his time getting to know everyone. Veterans appreciate a rookie who comes in and does it right, and he earned their trust pretty quickly.

Eventually, however, Haren, Blanton and Harden were traded, and the A's committed to a rebuilding project. The composition of the starting staff has turned over completely since Suzuki arrived, presenting him a formidable dual challenge.

"After those trades, we basically went young, and we went really young, particularly this year," Geren explains. "So now it's not just getting to know a whole new set of personalities, which is difficult enough, but it's doing more of the thinking for the pitchers than he'd been asked to do."

Even the youngest of the young recognizes as much.

"I can't imagine how difficult it's been to do what he's had to do here," says left-hander Brett Anderson, an 11-game winner who is a month younger than 21-year-old righty Trevor Cahill, who'll be going for his 11th win on Tuesday. "Having a guy like Kurt makes our jobs so much easier. He deserves a ton of credit."

He's getting it, too.

Teammates recently named Suzuki, who has helped raise thousands of dollars to offset the medical bills of good friend and former Fullerton teammate Jon Wilhite, who survived the horrific automobile accident that in April took the life of Angels pitcher Nick Adenhardt and two others, the recipient of the organization's highest internal honor, the Jim "Catfish" Hunter Award.

The honor annually recognizes an A's player for excellence on and off the field.

"Kurt isn't just the backbone of what we're doing here," says 25-year-old righty Dallas Braden, the Opening Night starter this year in his first full season as a starter. "He's the backbone and the brains."