

A's News Clips, Tuesday, October 6, 2009

Beane is vowing to stay course

By Joe Stiglich_Oakland Tribune

A's general manager Billy Beane didn't sugarcoat things during his season-ending media address Monday afternoon at the Oakland Coliseum.

He likes the young core of talent the A's have. But he sees a long road ahead to climb back to the top of the American League West.

"We have a long way to go," Beane said. "Using the (division champion) Angels and that type of team as a goal, there's still a long ways to go. I expect that that's going to take time. "... One thing we have to have is the discipline and guts to continue to go with these young players."

It's hardly the type of message that marketing slogans are built around. But the A's saw positive steps from several young players during a 75-87 season, and they want that development to continue.

The challenge that Beane and his staff face heading into the offseason: Balancing that commitment to youth with the urge to go outside the organization to fill needs for 2010.

The A's have top-shelf hitting prospects such as Chris Carter and Brett Wallace. But will they be ready next season? The team can pursue hitters through free agency and/or trades. But will that stunt the growth of some of the young talent?

The A's are just starting to map out their winter plans, so Beane didn't offer specifics on many roster issues. But he did share some thoughts:

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Although the young starting pitching is considered a strength, Beane thinks Oakland has to consider adding a proven starter to its rotation.

"We had a phenomenal bullpen," Beane said. "But it also led the league in innings pitched. These young guys need to take a step forward and get deeper in games. Whether it comes internally with them improving, or whether it comes in the form of augmenting it, that's a concern."

To Beane's thinking, the late-season loss of Dallas Braden, Vin Mazzaro and Brett Tomko to injury exposed a lack of depth.

The A's have two veteran starters of their own hitting free agency in Justin Duchscherer and Tomko. Duchscherer currently is being treated for clinical depression, but he could generate heavy interest among other teams if and when he's ready to return to the mound.

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Beane gave a hearty endorsement to Rajai Davis as next year's starting center fielder. Davis began this season as an extra outfielder before blossoming in an everyday role, hitting .305 with 41 stolen bases.

"He deserves it," Beane said. "You think about the connection. When we've played really well, it's usually when Raj has played really well."

But Beane also acknowledged the need for more power, and that the corner outfield spots must be a source of it. Expect the A's to shop for outside help in left or right.

The A's obtained left fielder Scott Hairston in a July trade to help solidify the lineup, but Beane added: "The opportunity will be there for him, but in the same sense it's one that he's going to have to grasp. Until that happens, you always have to look at ways to strengthen yourself."

Beane is optimistic about right fielder Ryan Sweeney's power potential, but as for getting consistent production from the corner outfielders, "we haven't gotten there yet with any of our players."

The A's are hopeful Carter, a first baseman who's been one of the minor leagues' top sluggers, gets some outfield time during winter ball in Mexico.

First baseman Daric Barton was praised by manager Bob Geren on Sunday for his improvement. Beane did the same, but cited first base as another position where the A's need more pop. It's also the spot where the A's appear deepest at Triple-A.

"But we still think highly of Daric and we're also cognizant of the fact he's very young," Beane said.

The A's are more sold on Cliff Pennington as their shortstop, based on what they saw after he took over for Orlando Cabrera.

"Let's put it this way — I don't think (shortstop) is going to be at the top of the list of things we need to address," Beane said.

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Discussing whether third baseman Adam Kennedy will be an early priority to re-sign, as Kennedy is a free agent.

The A's are hopeful Eric Chavez can return to health in the final season of his six-year deal. That's a shaky proposition.

But they also have a near-ready prospect at third in Wallace, who will get a good look in spring training.

Beane again gave a solid endorsement of Geren, who is still looking for his first winning season after three years as A's skipper.

"I think he's done a great job under very difficult circumstances," said Beane, citing the A's numerous injuries and trades during Geren's tenure.

Beane and Geren will meet this week to discuss the status of the rest of the coaching staff.

The Envelope, Please: The Baseball Awards

Without further ado, my baseball awards: Go ahead -- tell me why I'm wrong. You know you want to.

Dave Sheinin, Washington Post

NL MVP: Albert Pujols, Cardinals

When the best player in the game sets career highs in walks and stolen bases (!), and comes close in homers and RBI -- and has nearly a 100-point edge in OPS (1.101) over anyone else in the league - you simply bow before his greatness and hand over the hardware.

NL Cy Young: Tim Lincecum, Giants

In what amounts to a three-way tie between Lincecum, Chris Carpenter and Adam Wainwright, we're going with the guy with the most shutouts, complete games and strikeouts per nine innings (10.42) - plus the lowest opponents' OPS (.561). That's dominance.

NL Rookie of the Year: J.A. Happ, Phillies

It wasn't just the .750 winning percentage (from a 12-4 record) or the 2.85 ERA (both second overall in the league). It was the fact he did it in the crucible of a pennant race, amid a rotation that seemed to be in constant flux.

NL Manager of the Year: Jim Tracy, Rockies

When Tracy took over for the fired Clint Hurdle on May 29, the Rockies were 18-28 and in last place. Since then, they have the best record in the NL and won the wild card. If he's not the Manager of the Year, we don't understand this award.

AL MVP: Joe Mauer, Twins

You can try to fabricate reasons why it should be someone else - Mark Teixeira's impact on the Yankees? Derek Jeter's lifetime achievement? - but don't overthink things: Mauer is the league's best hitter by a wide margin, plays a premium position, and plays it exceptionally well. Ballgame.

AL Cy Young: Zack Greinke, Royals

By every measure except wins, Greinke's has been an historic season. Felix Hernandez's late push for the Mariners made things interesting, but Greinke (2.16) finished with the lowest ERA by an AL starter since Pedro Martinez in 2000 (1.74).

AL Rookie of the Year: Andrew Bailey, Athletics

The A's closer wasn't just the most unhittable rookie in the league -- he was the most unhittable pitcher, period. Opponents batted just .167 with a .476 OPS against him. That's not good--that's sick.

AL Manager of the Year: Ron Gardenhire, Twins

We have nothing but admiration for what the Angels' Mike Scioscia has done in the face of tragedy and injury misfortune, but no one has gotten more mileage out of less horse than Gardy, for our money the best skipper in the game.

Oakland A's Instructs Q&A: Jeremy Barfield

Melissa Lockard
OaklandClubhouse.com

Oct 5, 2009

Jeremy Barfield might only be 21 years old, but he is a grizzled veteran compared to many of his "camp-mates" at the Oakland A's Instructional League camp in Phoenix, Arizona. Barfield is in his second tour of duty at Instructs, having also participated in the camp last fall. We caught up with him over the weekend to learn how Instructs are going, which of his teammates has impressed him and more...

Jeremy Barfield appeared in the second-most number of games for any player on the Kane County Cougars this season, but there is no rest for the weary, as he is back on the playing field at the Oakland A's Instructional League camp. The outfielder is coming off of a solid first full professional season, having hit .262 with eight homers and 52 RBIs for the Cougars. He also made his first mid-season All-Star team and helped the Cougars make the post-season.

We caught-up with the A's 2008 eighth round pick over the weekend for a Q&A...

OaklandClubhouse: How are Instructs going? Are there things that you are working on in particular?

Jeremy Barfield: It's going well. I have been working a lot on getting more leverage with my swing. I didn't hit for as much power as I thought I should have last season for a player my size, so I think this will really help me in that area next year. I've also been working on some things on defense as well. I've been getting a lot out of it.

OC: How do you feel like your first full season went? Were there things that you thought you did well in Kane County and things you thought you needed to improve on?

JB: I thought it went well. It was a learning experience for me. It was a big adjustment playing a full year because there are so many more scouting reports and guys get to see you over and over. I wish I could have had more consistency throughout the year. But I was glad that I was able to stay healthy after missing the first two weeks of the year with the hamstring injury.

OC: Were there adjustments that you had to make physically to play that full season after playing shorter seasons in college?

JB: Yeah. I had a good off-season program, so my body was able to withstand the whole year. We had a lot of injuries [on Kane County], but fortunately I wasn't one of them.

OC: What were your thoughts on the Midwest League after having spent a full season there?

JB: Our division – the West division – reminded me a lot of the Northwest League just because the ball didn't really carry all that much. I really enjoyed playing in Kane County. That was a great place to play, but once we got out east into the nicer ballparks, the ball flew more and it would have been a lot nicer to play in that division on a regular basis. But it was a good league. Definitely a good league.

OC: You had that one game when you hit three homeruns. What were you feeling like at the plate when that happened?

JB: To be honest, I did not feel good going into that game. I had just had a terrible day and I did not have a good batting practice at all. I was just like, 'whatever, okay, here we go.' And then that happened. It was unbelievable. I surprised myself with that absolutely. There was no way that I thought I could do something like that with the way that my day had started. It was just ridiculous.

OC: Was it hard to go home at the end of the season and then have to turn around not that long after that and go to Instructs? Or was the transition not that bad?

JB: It was a lot better this year because we made the playoffs and the season ended a lot later. Also, I drove, so I drove 17 hours home and then I was home for four nights. Actually, I would rather be home only for a short period of time so I didn't get too settled in. And then after being home for the four nights, I drove 16 hours [from Houston] to here in Arizona. I did a lot of driving, but it really wasn't too bad. My teammate Nino Leyja, we followed each other on both trips, so it wasn't too bad. I did not get settled in at home at all. I would rather it be that way because [if he had gotten settled] I would not have wanted to leave.

OC: Has Instructs changed at all now that the game schedule is fully underway? It is more enjoyable than being in meetings and practices all day?

JB: Yeah, the games help a lot. They are still really long days. We still have the meetings. Those will never end [laughs] and they are first thing in the morning, but it's not bad at all. I enjoy being there more now that there are games. Being there just for workouts can be a big time drag, but once you play games, it is a lot more enjoyable.

OC: Was it easier to know what to expect having done it last year?

JB: Yeah, definitely, because it is really like a spring training routine, but we are a little more laid back. I feel like I have gotten a lot more out of it than in spring training. You really get a lot more one-on-one time [with the coaches] because there really aren't that many guys here. The coaches are all available to help out.

OC: What are your plans for the off-season in terms of preparing for next year?

JB: Unfortunately, I had a little knee injury pop up here so I have got to have an operation on it. I'll be rehabbing that for a couple of months. I'll be fine for spring training but it kind of is going to throw off my off-season program a little bit. The good thing is that last year with my off-season program, I knew what I was doing, but then I pulled my hamstring [early in spring training]. Now I know that I have to maintain my flexibility. That injury was kind of a blessing in disguise. Now I know that with my weight program, I have to maintain my flexibility so I can actually stay on the field.

OC: With the knee injury, are you able to participate fully in Instructs still, or are you more in an observation mode at this point?

JB: A little of both actually. I am able to play. I'm DHing a lot. I am able to do certain drills, but they have kind of tapered me off so that I don't make the knee any worse than it currently is. It isn't really too bad of an injury. I will have to have surgery regardless, but I can wait until I get home. I am still getting a lot out of [Instructs], that's for sure.

OC: Have there been any of your teammates who have impressed you so far, either who you had seen a lot of prior to camp or who you have just met at Instructs for the first time?

JB: Yeah, for the most part, in terms of my teammates, there really aren't too many Kane County guys here. We are really the senior circuit now. Out of all of the guys from rookie ball and short-season, position player-wise, Max Stassi, he has ridiculous pop. Especially considering that he isn't really that big of a guy. He's put together, but he's not a real physical guy. He has ridiculous pop. His batting practice is really impressive.

OC: Looking at where you are at a year and a half into your career, is this where you thought you'd be at when you were drafted? Are you happy with the progress you have made?

JB: I'm satisfied with the year I had, but I feel like there is definitely room for improvement. That is just part of the progression. I am happy with what I have done thus far. I would be happy just moving up on a year-to-year basis, but it is always my goal to keep moving up and getting to the next level as quickly as possible. Hopefully I can do that the next

few years. So far, I am pretty happy with how things have gone.

OC: How eager are you to be able to play in the California League or the Texas League, two leagues where the ball actually carries a little truer than in the two leagues you have played in thus far?

JB: [laughs] It was ridiculous because in Kane County, I didn't even realize how much the ball did not carry until I came back here for Instructs and in my first day of batting practice, I was hitting ball after ball over the fence. At Kane County, those balls don't even get to the warning track. For me and a bunch of the other guys – Petey Paramore actually said it. He went to school out here [at Arizona State], and up there he said, 'man, I thought I lost all of my strength.' Then we get here and it's like, 'okay, we've still got it.' Just to play every day in an environment like [the one in Arizona], I'm definitely looking forward to that.