

A's News Clips, Tuesday, October 13, 2009

Inbox: Can Bailey win Rookie of the Year?

Beat reporter Mychael Urban answers questions from fans

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

I'm sure you talk to other writers; do you think there's a chance Andrew Bailey has a shot at Rookie of the Year?
-- Henry J., Concord, Calif.

I do, and I've been a little bit surprised at how many writers have said they'll give him their support. As I've noted before, it's difficult for a pitcher to beat out a position player, but Bailey's numbers are so good relative to his role that they're harder to dismiss than I suspected they might be among voters.

I'm a little surprised at how much support Elvis Andrus seems to have, given his fairly pedestrian numbers, but Bobby Crosby's stats -- home runs excluded -- weren't exceptional when he won it in 2004 either. Shortstop is a premium position, though, and that obviously counts for something.

I'd say Bailey has at least a 50-50 shot.

Will Chris Carter be with the big league team next season?
-- Francis T., Burlingame, Calif.

Yes. But I can't say for sure that it'll be on Opening Day. There's so much time between now and then, and who knows what general manager Billy Beane has up his sleeve? The constitution of the roster as camp opens will have so much to do with that answer.

Is he a first baseman? Is he an outfielder? Is he a DH candidate? Will Jack Cust be back? All of those questions need to be answered before yours gets answered.

I have no doubt, though, that he'll be in Oakland at some point in 2010. He's a power hitter, proven at every level save one, and the A's simply don't have enough power to leave Carter on the farm all that long.

The good news: he's playing winter ball in Mexico, where they throw a ton of breaking balls, and that's where scouts tell me his weaknesses are. That experience will only expedite the transition from prospect to big leaguer.

What do you think of the job that Cliff Pennington did this year?
-- Kenneth L., Campbell, Calif.

I love what Pennington did. He proved to be a very good defensive player, albeit one with some work to do in terms of footwork, and he's an enthusiastic student of the game.

I love his speed and aggressiveness, too. Those are things that aren't coachable. Speed isn't coachable at all, and being aggressive is more of a mindset than a skill. It's tough to get someone who plays it safe to not play it safe, and Pennington goes for broke.

He's not a finished product by any means. He needs better pitch recognition, particularly with off-speed stuff, and he needs to continue to try to slow the game down. But he's a better player than I thought he would be at this point, and the A's are very happy with his progress. So happy, in fact, that I wouldn't be surprised to see him enter camp atop the depth chart.

If Joey Devine is healthy next spring -- 100 percent healthy -- who closes for the 2010 A's?
-- Rich S., Carmel, Calif.

Andrew Bailey. No way he loses that role without losing it, if you know what I mean. He's been so good at it, he'll have to fail at it a number of times before the A's even think of making a change.

That said, Beane has long envisioned having a bullpen in which roles aren't roles. He loves the idea of the 1980s Whitey Herzog Cardinals, who just had a bunch of really good relievers who could do anything. The great thing is that Bailey has

virtually no ego, and neither does Devine. They truly are team-first guys, and they'll co-exist nicely no matter what they're doing or how they're being used.

I hope you do more Inboxes this offseason. I love getting the beat guy's true, unfiltered take of the team. But what else can we expect this offseason? Why should I continue to come back [to oaklandathletics.com] during the offseason?

-- James C., Marin, Calif.

I have the cell phone number of every member of the team, so I'll be in constant contact with the guys and will be using that access to give you A's information to which other media outlets won't or can't dedicate the time or space during the offseason.

In the short term, starting Wednesday we'll be launching a four-part analysis series called "Making the Grade," through which I'll evaluate the 2009 performances of various units of the team. It'll start with pitching, followed by the offense on Friday. Next Monday, we'll have another Inbox, and on Wednesday and Friday, respectively, we'll break down the defense and coaching.

Then there's the breaking news aspect and special features and blogs. I can't promise something new every single day, but I can promise close to that. Stay right here. We'll keep you more than informed and, hopefully, entertained throughout the months without games.

And if you have a story idea, bring it. I'm always open to suggestions. The story I did with hitting coach Jim Skaalen recently came at the suggestion of a reader, and I troll fan sites regularly for ideas. Keep them coming. Thanks.

The Way It Was: A's ruled early '70s

Dick Heller, Washington Times

How good were the Oakland Athletics of the early 1970s? Don't ask them, because they would disagree.

Why not? After all, they seemed to disagree on almost everything else.

The Athletics were baseball's most dysfunctional family - and one of its most successful. Over 106 seasons, only two franchises have won three or more consecutive World Series: the New York Yankees from 1936 to 1939, 1949 to 1953 and 1998 to 2000 and those fightin', fussin' and feudin' A's from 1972 to 1974.

Oakland's third Series triumph was its most unexpected. After the first two, manager Dick Williams quit because of constant meddling and second-guessing by irascible owner Charlie Finley - the latest upheaval for a franchise rife with them. Williams was replaced by Alvin Dark, but the A's posted only a 90-72 record while winning the weak American League West in 1974 and then defeated the Baltimore Orioles in the AL Championship Series.

The Los Angeles Dodgers, who finished 102-60 before beating the Pittsburgh Pirates in the NLCS, were solid favorites in the first all-California World Series. Instead, Dark's A's easily whipped Walter Alston's Dodgers in five games, closing out the Series on Oct. 17 and preserving their feats for horsehide posterity.

So much for unity, camaraderie and team spirit.

"We fought more in the clubhouse than we did on the field," recalled closer Rollie Fingers, who saved six career Series games on his way to the Hall of Fame. "That's the way we were. It was just that kind of ballclub."

Indeed. Fingers and starter Blue Moon Odom got into a fistfight during the season. So did slugger supreme Reggie Jackson and base-stealing whiz Billy North. Ace Catfish Hunter threatened to file for free agency if Finley refused to give him back pay Hunter claimed he was owed. And former second baseman Mike Andrews threatened legal action because Finley had ridiculed him and booted him off the team after an error in the previous World Series.

Plus, Jackson's arrogance likely didn't endear him to some teammates. This was the same Reggie who joined the New York Yankees several years later and conducted famous verbal battles with owner George Steinbrenner and manager Billy Martin. In Oakland, Reggie's ego was just as gigantic but didn't attract as much attention. He said things like, "The only reason I don't like playing in the World Series is that I can't watch myself play."

Despite, or maybe because of, all the hassling, the 1974 A's were a marvelous team whose record didn't really reflect its talent. Jackson, outfielder Joe Rudi and third baseman Sal Bando drove in 90 or more runs, although none of the regulars hit .300. Hunter won 25 games, Ken Holtzman 19 and Vida Blue 17 with low ERAs. North stole 54 bases and shortstop Bert Campaneris 34.

And the A's, of course, had the happy facility of delivering when it meant the most.

Pitching dominated the World Series, with three of Oakland's victories coming by 3-2 and the other by 5-2. The A's batted just .211 and the Dodgers .228. Oakland's ERA was a dazzling 2.05, with Hunter, Holtzman, Odom and reliever Fingers winning a game apiece.

Future Hall of Famer Don Sutton was the Dodgers' only winner, shutting out the A's through the eighth inning to beat Blue 3-2 in Game 2. It didn't faze the rollicking A's a bit.

As you might expect, the A's took their third championship in a row with relative calm. Said Fingers in retrospect: "Probably the most exciting moment I've spent on the field was getting Pete Rose to fly out for the final out of the 1972 World Series because that was the first one."

Still, tons of teams have won a single World Series; the A's are the only nonpinstriped club to collect three back-to-back-to-back. The Toronto Blue Jays lost a chance to do so when the 1994 Series was erased by the players' strike.

The A's quest for a four-peat was derailed in 1975, when they were swept by the Boston Red Sox in the ALCS after, oddly enough, winning eight more games during the regular season than in 1974.

Then the combination of free agency and cheapskate Finley selling off his star players sent the once-proud A's screeching toward the bottom of the AL West. By 1979, when the club went 54-108, it was known derisively as the Triple A's.

Yet nothing can dim the glory of their earlier times. For three seasons, unglamorous Oakland was the baseball capital of the world.

The earthquake that shook the baseball world

By Jorge L. Ortiz, USA TODAY

SAN FRANCISCO — Twenty years later, Dave Stewart's most vivid memory of the 1989 World Series isn't receiving his MVP trophy or celebrating the championship with his Oakland A's teammates.

Those moments of joy don't spring to Stewart's mind as quickly as the frightening images surrounding the Loma Prieta earthquake of Oct. 17, 1989, which interrupted the series for 10 days and left an indelible mark on the San Francisco Bay Area and those who lived through it.

"I can still see the light standards at the ballpark swaying side to side," said Stewart, who won Games 1 and 3 as the A's swept the San Francisco Giants.

Like Stewart, most people remember what happened in between his victories first and foremost, specifically the magnitude 7.1 tremor that struck 31 minutes before Game 3, and its deadly aftermath.

Sixty-three people perished as a result of the quake, which left about 3,700 injured and thousands without a home.

The natural disaster hit at a time of unprecedented sporting glory in area, with the NFL 49ers on the way to back-to-back Super Bowl titles, the A's in the midst of a three-year run of World Series appearances and the Giants returning to the Fall Classic for the first time since 1962.

"It was an electric atmosphere before the Series," said Carney Lansford, then the A's third baseman and now the Giants' hitting coach. "And then it was incredibly disheartening what happened with the earthquake."

Even after getting shut down by scores of 5-0 and 5-1 in the first two games in Oakland, the Will Clark and Kevin Mitchell-led Giants believed they could turn the series around at Candlestick Park with the same kind of heroics that had fueled their five-game victory against the Chicago Cubs in the National League Championship Series.

"Baysball" fever gripped the region.

"The Bay was way into it. That was the funnest part," said Giants broadcaster Mike Krukow, who pitched for the team that season but missed the playoffs with an injury. "Everywhere you went it was either orange and black or green and gold. There was no gray area. We were excited about it."

The baseball excitement would give way to real-life drama.

With about half the crowd of 62,000 already at Candlestick Park, 60 miles north of the epicenter, the quake struck at 5:04 p.m. Pacific time — minutes after ABC began its broadcast — with such force that it rocked the stands back and forth and knocked power out.

Giants executive vice president Corey Busch, who had just reached his upstairs suite, feared the worst as he saw the 29-year-old building quiver.

"You've never seen anything move like that," said Busch, a longtime Bay Area resident. "The upper deck was undulating. It almost looked like it was a wave. And the light towers started to sway like a metronome. I just had this horrible image of the stadium beginning to collapse."

It did not, but many other structures did, including the Cypress viaduct of the Nimitz Freeway in Oakland, where about 40 people lost their lives. The 15-second tremor also caused a 50-foot section of the Bay Bridge to break off, set off fires in San Francisco's Marina district and did an estimated \$6 billion in damage.

Temblor hits

At ground level, Giants outfielder Candy Maldonado said the rumbling felt like a herd of horses was approaching. Maldonado, who came up with the Los Angeles Dodgers, had experienced an earthquake two years before, in addition to hurricanes in his native Puerto Rico. None of them compared to this powerful temblor.

"The place started to move like a wave you were surfing," said Maldonado, who at the moment was about to head out from the clubhouse to the field. When the shaking stopped, few at Candlestick could have imagined the extent of the devastation elsewhere in the Bay Area. The much-maligned ballpark had endured the quake in good shape and the fans were eager for the game to start.

Jorge Costa, who was in charge of operations and security at Candlestick, said there was an initial euphoria in the stands.

"The crowd roared after it was over," Costa said. "And then there were some signs that came out, 'Hey, if you think that was something, wait till the Giants come to bat.' People made it up right on the spot. It was hysterical.

"Then about 15 minutes later, you could tell the mood changed. It went from that to, 'Oh, wow, this was bad.' The first thing they (heard about) was the bridge was down, then the fires, then the freeway collapsed. That's when we knew we were not going to be able to play."

Fay Vincent, in his second month as commissioner, surveyed the scene and took in reports from a golf cart on the field. Players sought out their families from the stands and waited with them by the dugouts.

After about 30 minutes, Vincent postponed the game. But with the scoreboard and public address system inoperable, there was no efficient way to inform the fans.

Eventually, San Francisco Police Commander Isiah Nelson drove around the perimeter of the outfield telling people via megaphone the game had been called off. The reason given was a power disruption, not the earthquake, to avoid a panic.

As it was, thousands of fans filed out in an orderly fashion. Vincent also credited Nelson's sound judgment with helping him reach his decision and maintain calm in the crowd, calling him "the real hero of the 1989 World Series."

Relief effort

During the layoff, players and other personnel from both teams got involved in the relief effort. Stewart, an Oakland native, helped gather food for workers sifting through Nimitz Freeway rubble and clothing for displaced families.

Krukow and A's reliever Rick Honeycutt were among those who visited the injured.

"Going to the hospitals and seeing so many tragedies, it really opened my eyes that life's more precious than a game," said Honeycutt, now the Dodgers' pitching coach.

The time between games provided lessons that went beyond baseball.

"It changed the priorities of that whole World Series," Krukow said. "We obviously wanted to win. We did not. We got swept. But it's a period I look back on and I learned a great deal as a human being."

When the delay dragged on, A's manager Tony La Russa took his club to Phoenix to play intrasquad games — which turned heated at times, with Dennis Eckersley drilling Jose Canseco in the back during one of them — in an effort to stay sharp.

When the Series resumed Oct. 27, the A's went back to trouncing the Giants, pounding five homers in a 13-7 victory in Game 3 and completing the sweep with a 9-6 victory the next day. Overall, Oakland outscored San Francisco 32-14 and never trailed in the series.

A's and Giants players from those teams generally agree the outcome would have been about the same if the series had not been interrupted. The A's — featuring future Hall of Famers Eckersley and Rickey Henderson, plus Canseco, Lansford, Mark McGwire, Dave Parker and a rotation that included Stewart, Mike Moore and Bob Welch— were simply superior.

The powerhouse A's teams did not get to celebrate much. As a sign of respect for the pain the area was still enduring, A's general manager Sandy Alderson banned champagne from the winning clubhouse.

And because Oakland was upset by the Los Angeles Dodgers in the 1988 Series and the Cincinnati Reds in 1990, its stretch of excellence faded to secondary status.

"If you win three World Series, then you deserve to be talked about. But if you only win one of the three, there's nothing to be said except we underachieved," Stewart said.

"We had three shots at it, and it just so happens the one we won, there was an earthquake, and people are going to remember the earthquake."

Twenty years later, they still do.