

A's News Clips, Tuesday, October 20, 2009

Inbox: What's the latest on Duchscherer?

Beat reporter Mychael Urban answers fans' questions

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

What do you think the chances are of the A's re-signing Justin Duchscherer? I think we would be able to sign him for the same price as last year, and if he's healthy, to have him, Dallas Braden, Brett Anderson, Trevor Cahill and Gio Gonzalez would give us a pretty solid starting staff.

-- Mike S., Pleasanton, Calif.

There's no doubt that having a healthy Duchscherer would give the A's one of the more promising rotations in the American League, but his health -- both physical and mental -- is a huge question.

Duchscherer, as we all know, is dealing with clinical depression, and that's not something that goes away with a surgery or the ingestion of some magical pill. It takes a lot of time and therapy, and though he recently told me he's doing better, he's not kidding himself into thinking this will be a quick fix.

Clinical depression affects different people in different ways, and learning to deal with its symptoms isn't even close to half the battle. Getting to the root of the depression and learning to deal with *that* is what makes it such a monster to overcome.

As a free agent with a young son to support, Duke certainly has a career to consider -- at some point. For now, however, his focus is where it should and needs to be, and I think the A's, and any of the many teams that could benefit from his services, respect that.

Is it out of the question that Duchscherer will be back in Oakland next season? I don't think so. He won't break the bank, and his presence would help in a variety of ways. It's just difficult to put any sort of odds on it happening under the circumstances.

You mentioned in your Inbox last week that you were a little surprised at how many writers have said that they would give Andrew Bailey their support for Rookie of the Year in 2009. Why? Huston Street won the ROY in 2005, and Bailey's numbers this year were better than Street's in 2005. Also, is it just me, or have you also noticed that it seems like most players who leave or get traded from the A's often end up playing better and put up better numbers at their next club(s)? Carlos Gonzalez, Street, Matt Holliday, Marco Scutaro, Mark Kotsay ... just to name a few. Of course, there are some who play worse at their next club, like Barry Zito, but these examples seem to be in the minority. What are your thoughts?

-- Anthony O., Alameda, Calif.

Nice work sneaking in two questions, and I'll answer them both, because I won't spend much time on the first. I'm surprised at how much support Bailey has gotten because the A's were a bad team that played on the West Coast, so they got little to zero national attention, and position players typically get more love than pitchers when it comes to ROY and MVP voting. That's as simply as I can put it.

As for players performing better after leaving the A's, I see your point, but I think you could find plenty of examples on the Zito side of the fence. Start with Tim Hudson and Mark Mulder. Billy Koch. Terrence Long. Even Miguel Tejada, with the exception of 2004.

Did the A's make a mistake with Gonzalez? Absolutely. In my opinion, the Holliday trade was a bad one. But the Dan Haren trade, in my opinion, was a very good one. So I guess my point is that baseball is nothing if not an inexact science -- even to the best baseball scientists around, and general manager Billy Beane's an awfully good one.

Some players leave teams and play better. Other players leave and play worse. Some trades work out. Some don't. I don't think there's much of a pattern to any of it, and remember: Oakland is not a good place to put up big numbers at the plate, so it shouldn't shock anyone to see offensive players put up better numbers elsewhere -- especially when they go to somewhere like Colorado or Boston or New York, all of which have far more favorable hitting conditions.

My question is about offseason baseball and A's prospects. The future of the A's depends largely on the development of young prospects, and an important part of that development can be playing in Fall and Winter leagues. However, I have found it difficult to find information on where many of our prospects have ended up or how they're doing. Chris Carter, as it turns out, is playing in the Mexican League, and his stats are viewable through MLB.com. Grant Desme and Jemile Weeks are both with the Phoenix Desert Dogs of the Arizona Fall League, and they are relatively easy to keep track of via MLB.com, too. But it's been much more difficult to find any information on Brett Wallace, or how Michael Ynoa is doing in the instructional league, or information on many other prominent A's prospects. Is there a good resource for this, or if not, could you help fill me in on Wallace, Ynoa and Fautino De Los Santos in particular?
-- Rory L., Palo Alto, Calif.

You're right, Rory. Prospects are a big part of what the A's do, particularly right now, and I'd be failing at my job if I didn't do my best to get you as much information as possible on the kids who represent the future of the franchise.

It takes some digging on the Web to find some of the information for which you're looking, believe me. I've tried and failed in several cases. Thus I've decided to start a weekly feature for which I'll have regular chats with Keith Lieppman, Oakland's longtime director of player development, and Billy Owens, the director of player personnel.

It'll start next Wednesday, and it'll include updates on as many top prospects as possible. Want to name the weekly feature? Drop me a line. The winner will get some sort of fabulous prize, to be determined later.

In the meantime, I should probably tell Keith and Billy that I've volunteered their services. They're great guys, though, so I have no doubt they'll be on board. Thanks for the idea.

Last offseason, Beane basically stated that we were in serious rebuilding mode with the exodus of players in trades. I had just accepted the idea that 2009 would be difficult but held the greater hope of the long-term building of the club. Then Beane seemingly went back on his plan and got the rent-a-player type he's been so fond of the past few years in Holliday, Orlando Cabrera, Jason Giambi and Nomar Garciaparra. This short-term help was contrary to the long-term building he announced. Should we expect that kind of waffling on strategy this year again?
-- Eli R., Richmond, Calif.

Should you expect it? No. Beane, to me, seems more committed to the youth movement than ever, and I'm sure the backfiring of last winter's veteran acquisitions have something to do with it.

But should you be surprised if Beane goes out and adds a veteran here and there? Nope. He's a tinkerer and very competitive by nature, and if he sees someone that he can add on the cheap and thinks can help right now, he'll pull the trigger in a heartbeat.

Might Rich Harden return to the A's in 2010?
-- Joshua O., Puerto Rico

Sure. And I might lose 60 pounds and win a gold medal in Super G at the next Winter Olympics. In other words, don't hold your breath.

Harden is a free agent, but he's out of Oakland's price range, and I'm pretty sure he's not interested in a return. He was pretty happy to get out of town, if you ask me. There were lots of issues with the medical staff, on both sides of the fence, and I'll leave it at that.

2009 A's In Review: Rookies

Melissa Lockard
OaklandClubhouse.com

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The Oakland A's spent last off-season adding veteran players, but they wound-up with a rookie-filled roster for much of the season. Seventeen rookies appeared in games for the A's this season. We analyze the seasons of all 17 rookies and assess what their future might hold in 2010.

Only players who were technically considered rookies under MLB guidelines are featured in this article.

Brett Anderson: Anderson was one of five rookies to start the season on the A's Opening Day roster, a meteoric rise for the left-hander, who began the 2008 season at the High-A level. Although he got off to a rocky start to his big league career, he was arguably the A's best pitcher by the end of the season. He wound-up leading the team in wins and strikeouts and is a strong candidate for the American League's Rookie of the Year.

Early in the season, Anderson was plagued by the "one big inning" as he would have a tendency to allow a rally to escalate into a big inning at least once a game. He posted ERAs above five in each of the first three months of the season. However, the A's were patient with Anderson, who showed the ability to get stronger as the season went on last year in the minor leagues. The turning point for Anderson came in late June, when he strung together two solid starts in a row against San Diego (three runs in five innings) and Detroit (one run in 5.1 innings). Those efforts were followed by a brilliant two-hit shut-out of the Boston Red Sox at Fenway Park on July 6th. That start began a stretch of three straight starts in which he didn't allow a run. From June 20th until the end of the season, Anderson had only three starts in which he allowed more than three earned runs. His ERA before the All-Star break was 4.64, while his ERA after the break was 3.48. He struck-out nearly a batter an inning (86 strike-outs in 88 innings) after the break.

The A's will be thrilled if the second-half version of Anderson is the one they get for the entire 2010 season. His control throughout the season was excellent and his command within the strike-zone improved dramatically as the year went on, something that was evident by the fact that he cut down his homeruns allowed by nearly half after the All-Star break. He showed better velocity than he did in the minor leagues in 2008, a sign that he is still continuing to grow as a pitcher physically, as well as mentally. Anderson could still stand to improve against left-handed hitters (lefties hit .313 off of him, while righties batted only .247) and his defense and control of the running game are still works-in-progress, but otherwise, the 21-year-old left-hander doesn't have much he needs to look to improve on during his off-season program.

Andrew Bailey: Bailey was a surprise member of the A's Opening Day roster. The reliever was invited to spring training as a non-roster invitee after a 2008 campaign that saw him struggle as a starter and excel as a reliever with Double-A Midland. Bailey entered camp looking simply to make a strong impression on the A's coaching staff, but he was so good that the A's couldn't send him down, especially when the team lost [Joey Devine](#) to injury. Bailey began the year as a middle innings, mop-up reliever, but it didn't take long for him to earn the trust of manager [Bob Geren](#) in more high-leverage situations. By May, he was the team's closer, in July he was an AL All-Star, and by the end of the season, he had established himself as one of the top closers in all of baseball. He is a strong candidate to finish in the top two in the American League's Rookie of the Year balloting.

Bailey's consistency throughout the season was remarkable. He posted an ERA above three in only one month (May – 3.24) and his pre- and post-All-Star break ERAs were nearly identical (1.92 and 1.71, respectively). Bailey converted on 26 of 30 save opportunities and he didn't blow a save after the 17th of June. His WHIP was a remarkable 0.88, as he allowed only 49 hits in 83.1 innings while walking only 24. He also struck-out 91 batters, which put him among the league leaders for relievers in all of baseball. Bailey also did a good job controlling the running game, something that late-inning relievers often struggle with. Only one runner attempted to steal off of him all season.

Like Anderson, Bailey doesn't have much to work on this off-season in terms of improving his game. Bailey's biggest objective this off-season will be to maintain his health. A survivor of Tommy John surgery in college, Bailey's arm was sound all season despite a heavy workload, but he struggled with knee soreness throughout the year. The knee soreness didn't alter his mechanics, but it will be something for the A's and Bailey to monitor next season. Bailey will enter 2010 as the prohibitive favorite to serve as the 9th inning man for what figures to once again be one of the best bullpens in all of baseball.

Trevor Cahill: Cahill followed the same career arc as Anderson, making the A's Opening Day roster one year after starting the season at the High-A level. The 21-year-old was inconsistent during his rookie season, but still managed to be competitive in most of his starts, a good sign for Cahill's future as he continues to grow as a major league pitcher. The right-hander finished the season second behind Anderson for the team lead in wins with 10 and first on the team in innings pitched with 178.2. He also was tied for the team lead in quality starts with 15, although he led the team with 13 losses.

After posting a 2.68 ERA in two-plus minor league seasons, Cahill's ERA was 4.63 as a major league rookie, which put him near the bottom among AL starters who pitched enough innings to qualify for the ERA title. His other numbers were also shaky compared to his minor league totals. He walked 72 (seventh most in the AL) and struck-out only 90 after posting K:BB rates of roughly 3:1 in the minor leagues. Cahill also allowed 27 homers after giving up only eight in 238.2 minor league innings. He did manage to cut his homer totals in half after the All-Star break, however.

Cahill's best pitch is his sinking fastball, but he left his pitches up in the strike-zone a lot more frequently as a rookie than he did in the minor leagues. He also struggled at times to throw strikes, as big league hitters were less willing to chase his pitches off of the plate than were minor league batters. Despite all of that, however, there were things to like about Cahill's rookie performance. For one, he continued to battle throughout the season despite his struggles and showed

improvement over the final six weeks of the season before struggling in his last start of the year. He remained healthy the entire season despite throwing 50 more innings than in any other season in his career. Despite his struggles, Cahill is still likely to be a big part of the A's rotation next season. Going into next season, Cahill will need to show improvement in the location of his sinking fastball and the consistency of his secondary pitches.

Matt Carson: The A's signed Carson to a minor league free agent contract before the 2009 season. Prior to joining the A's, he had spent eight years in the New York Yankees chain and had never come close to being on the team's 25-man roster throughout that time. For much of the season, it looked as though Carson wouldn't have a shot to make the A's 25-man roster in 2009 either. Assigned to Triple-A Sacramento, Carson got off to a slow start with the River Cats. Through July, he had yet to have a month in which he had hit higher than .250. Things changed dramatically for Carson in August, however. He hit .356 with 10 homers and 26 RBIs. The big month helped him finish as the River Cats' team leader in homeruns with 25. When the A's needed outfield depth in mid-September, they turned to the red-hot Carson, who responded by batting .286 with a homer and five RBIs in 21 big league at-bats.

Carson earned his shot with the A's late in the season not only with his hot-hitting August, but also with a strong spring training performance in big league camp and consistently excellent defense in all three outfield spots (but most frequently in center). The A's have a lot of depth in the outfield, but they may choose to keep Carson on the 40-man roster this off-season to compete for a spot as the team's fourth or fifth outfielder this spring. Carson has good power, above-average speed and strong defensive skills. He is also a right-handed batter, which could make him a valuable bat off of the bench against tough left-handers late in games. Carson is a free swinger at the plate, which probably makes him better suited to be a pinch-hitter and occasional starter in the big leagues than a full-time player, especially for Oakland. He is currently playing in the Dominican Winter League, where a strong winter performance would only help his chances in the spring.

Aaron Cunningham: Cunningham made his major league debut in 2008, but he was still rookie eligible in 2009. The outfielder began the season in Triple-A, but was knocked out with an early season injury during the season's first week when he injured his shoulder crashing into homeplate. That injury cost Cunningham most of April and he didn't have much time back on the field with the River Cats before he was called up to Oakland in mid-May. Cunningham appeared in 16 games over an 18 game schedule, but he wasn't able to get on-track, batting only .152 with one homer and six RBIs in 46 at-bats. He struck-out 15 times and walked only three times. Cunningham was sent back to Sacramento in early June and spent most of the rest of the season with the River Cats, save for a brief stay with the A's in August during which he received only seven at-bats. He was surprisingly left off of the A's roster in September in lieu of Carson and Travis Buck.

Cunningham's brief major league appearances were disappointing, although 53 at-bats are hardly enough to judge a player. He did nothing to hurt his standing within the organization in terms of his play at the Triple-A level, batting .302 with 11 homers and an 851 OPS in 83 games (334 at-bats) with Sacramento. Cunningham is expected to be part of what will likely be a heated competition for one of the A's five outfield spots this spring. In Cunningham's favor will be his minor league track record of putting up big offensive numbers wherever he has played. Working against him will be the fact that he is limited defensively to the corner outfield spots and that he isn't a patient hitter. In a lot of ways, he profiles similarly to Scott Hairston, who the A's acquired from San Diego during the 2009 season and who will enter spring training as the favorite to be the A's starting left-fielder. Hairston was a disappointment in his first stint with the A's in 2009, and if he doesn't show much in spring training or early next season, Cunningham should be in position to take Hairston's place, especially if Cunningham has a strong spring.

Tom Everidge: Everidge's rise to the major leagues was one of the most "feel good" stories of the A's 2009 season. The North Bay native had been fighting his way up the A's system since 2004, with his avenues for advancement seemingly blocked every season. He began the 2009 campaign back in Double-A despite the fact that he was the Texas League leader in RBIs in 2008. Everidge continued to hit at Double-A, however, and when injuries and ineffectiveness at the first-base/DH spots in Oakland created openings, Everidge's numbers made him too difficult to ignore. He was promoted to Triple-A in June and hit .359 in 20 games before he was given his first taste of the big leagues. Everidge got his big league career off in style by doubling in his first start in the ninth inning off of Jonathan Papelbon to ignite a two-out, game-tying rally in a contest the A's would eventually win in extra-innings. He would eventually get 85 at-bats with the A's and he hit .224 with two homers and seven RBIs. Everidge would return to Sacramento in late August and he finished his minor league season with a .335 average, 20 homers and 94 RBIs in 107 games.

Although Everidge's overall major league numbers were not impressive, he did show – in a limited sample size – that he could handle left-handed pitching, batting .333/.393/.583 in 24 at-bats versus southpaws. Throughout his minor league career, Everidge has been an excellent hitter against left-handed pitchers. Over the past few years, the A's have often carried a right-handed first-base/DH-type who can start or pinch-hit against southpaws. Nomar Garciaparra filled this role for Oakland in 2009. Should the A's decide to carry a player with this skill-set again in 2010, they will likely give Everidge a long look. The A's do have a number of first base prospects at the Triple-A level, however, so there is a chance that Everidge will be moved off of the 40-man roster this off-season. If he survives on the roster until spring training,

however, he should get a long look in camp.

Gio Gonzalez: Like Cunningham, Gonzalez actually made his big league debut in 2008, but was still considered a rookie in 2009. At the start of spring training, Gonzalez was one of the favorites to win a spot in the A's Opening Day starting rotation. However, he was inconsistent during the spring and he missed time towards the end of camp with shoulder soreness, sealing his fate to start the season in Triple-A. Gonzalez responded well to the disappointment of being back in Triple-A, dominating the PCL to the tune of a 2.51 ERA and 71 strike-outs in 61 innings spread over 12 starts. He was given two brief stints in the big leagues in May, but it wasn't until [Josh Outman](#) went down for the season with an elbow injury that Gonzalez was given a permanent spot in the A's rotation.

In a word, Gonzalez was inconsistent during his time in Oakland. Although he improved over his 2008 stint with the A's when he had a 7.68 ERA in 34 innings, Gonzalez still posted a mediocre 5.75 ERA over 98.2 innings in 2009. The ERA was slightly better in his 17 starts (he had three relief appearances) at 5.56, but, for the most part, it was a rollercoaster season for Gonzalez with the A's. On the plus side, Gonzalez struck-out 109 batters in those 98.2 innings. However, he walked too many hitters (56) and allowed 14 homeruns. He did show some improvement towards the end of the season. Over his final two starts, he allowed four runs and one walk in 12.1 innings and he struck-out 17. At times, Gonzalez looked brilliant on the mound. However, for every brilliant outing, there was a poor one. To Gonzalez's credit, he often backed up his worst outings with one of his best starts, showing a short memory from start to start.

Even in the minor leagues, command was an issue for Gonzalez, so it is no surprise that high pitch counts and bases-on-balls have continued to plague him in the big leagues. Gonzalez has demonstrated that he has the stuff to be a big league starter, but he will need to develop more trust in his change-up and more command of his fastball to be more than a back-of-the-rotation type. With those refinements, Gonzalez could carve-out a Ted Lilly-like career in the big leagues. Gonzalez will enter spring training with little to prove at the Triple-A level, so it would be an upset if he wasn't in the A's Opening Day rotation. He'll need to show continued improvement to stay there, however.

Jeff Gray: Gray was another A's rookie who got his feet wet in the big leagues in 2008 before getting a longer look in 2009. Despite finishing the 2008 season on the A's roster, Gray didn't get much of a look in big league camp this spring before being sent back to Triple-A. He was the River Cats' closer for the first four months of the season, putting up outstanding numbers for Sacramento (1.54 ERA and 16 saves in 44 innings). After brief stints with the A's earlier in the season, Gray was promoted to Oakland for good in the beginning of August and he wound-up making 24 appearances with the A's, posting a 3.76 ERA with 19 strike-outs and four walks in 26.1 innings.

Although Gray faded during his final five appearances with the A's, he showed enough during his first 20 or so outings that he should be in a good position to be on a major league roster in 2010. Gray's fastball was regularly clocked in the mid-90s with good movement and he showed improved command after struggling to hit his spots in 2008. The A's have an abundance of bullpen talent and Gray's emergence in 2009 may give Oakland the option of trading one of their top right-handed relievers for help in other areas this off-season.

Brad Kilby: Like Everidge, Kilby rose from relative obscurity to the big leagues in 2009 by posting numbers that the A's could no longer ignore. Kilby has put together an impressive career since being drafted by the A's in 2005, but while he was moved up to Triple-A in relatively short order, he wasn't considered for a spot on the A's roster at all in 2008 or for the first few months of 2009. In fact, he was left unprotected from the Rule 5 draft last off-season, although that may have been in part because Kilby was struck in the head with a line-drive during the Dominican Winter League season and there was some question as to whether he'd be ready to pitch at the start of the 2009 regular season. As it turned out, Kilby showed no ill effects from the line-drive incident and he dominated for the River Cats, posting a 2.13 ERA with 77 strike-outs in 63.1 innings. That earned him a September promotion to the big leagues, and he was impressive in his first taste of major league baseball. In 17 innings, he allowed only one run on 10 hits and four walks while striking out 20.

Kilby has never been an over-powering pitcher, which is likely the reason that he has gone relatively overlooked despite posting impressive strike-out totals in the minor leagues. He has a deceptive throwing motion and good movement on all of his pitches, which helps to make up for not possessing a mid-90s heater. He did show a slight up-tick in velocity in 2009, however, making him even more effective than he was in previous years. He also showed better command, something that he had struggled with off and on during his minor league career. Kilby isn't a true lefty specialist – he has actually been more successful against righties during his career, although he has done well against all hitters – and he has shown the ability to work multiple innings and on back-to-back days. The A's carried only one lefty in their bullpen for much of the 2009 season, but their modus operandi is to carry at least two. Kilby will likely be competing with two talented lefty relievers for a spot in the A's 'pen this spring: [Craig Breslow](#) and [Jerry Blevins](#).

Vince Mazzaro: Mazzaro was a non-roster invitee to the A's big league spring training camp after a breakout 2008 minor league season that saw him take home our A's Minor League Pitcher of the Year award. Mazzaro pitched well early in camp, but he was sent back to Triple-A to start the year after two poor outings towards the end of spring training.

Mazzaro got off to a fast start with Sacramento, tossing four hitless innings on Opening Day, and he didn't look back. In 10 outings with the River Cats, Mazzaro posted a 2.38 ERA and allowed only 42 hits in 56.2 innings. When there was an opening in the A's rotation in early June, Mazzaro was recalled to Oakland.

His big league career got off to a terrific start. In six June starts, he posted a 2.95 ERA and struck-out 28 in 36.2 innings. Things weren't as easy for Mazzaro in July, however, as he slumped to an 8.51 ERA in five starts. He improved some in August, posting a 5.64 ERA. He threw exactly five innings in each of his six August starts, allowing three runs or less in five of those outings. Mazzaro was shut-down for the season at the end of August with what was described as shoulder tendonitis. He finished the year with a 5.32 ERA and a 1.74 WHIP in 91.1 major league innings.

The shoulder fatigue at the end of the season is worrisome, but Mazzaro has been very durable during his professional career. The missed starts this season were his first because of injury in his career and he threw 171 innings in 2008 without incident. Assuming he is 100 percent healthy by spring training, Mazzaro will be competing for the A's fifth starter spot. Like Cahill and Gonzalez, Mazzaro proved that he has the stuff to compete in the big leagues, but, also like Cahill and Gonzalez, he has to make some adjustments to succeed at the big league level. Of the A's rookie starters, Mazzaro throws the hardest, but at times, it appeared that he was trying to over-throw to big league hitters. At his best, Mazzaro is a groundball machine who gets outs early in counts, but when he was struggling in the major leagues, he was allowing more flyballs than groundballs and working in a lot of deep counts. He turned 23 in September, so he is still very young and he may need a little more seasoning at the Triple-A level. However, even if he starts the season in Triple-A, he is likely to see significant time in the big leagues next year, health-permitting.

John Meloan: Meloan was a man with many suitcases in 2009. He began the year in the Cleveland chain, was briefly in the Tampa organization and was then claimed by Pittsburgh before ending his odyssey with Oakland when the A's claimed him in early September. He made only three appearances for the River Cats before the end of the regular season and Oakland promoted him to the big leagues at the conclusion of the Triple-A post-season. He made a strong impression with the A's, working 8.1 innings over six appearances with no earned runs allowed. He gave-up only three hits, walked only two and struck-out 11.

Meloan's many travels in 2008 and 2009 (he was traded from the Dodgers to the Indians in 2008) may make him seem like a minor league journeyman, but Meloan, in fact, was a top prospect as recently as 2007, when he was still with the Dodgers (he was MLB.com's Double-A Relief Pitcher of the Year in 2007). Despite Meloan's success as a reliever in 2006 and 2007, he was inexplicably moved into the starting rotation by Los Angeles in 2008, and he struggled in that role. The Indians moved him back into the bullpen after the trade, but he continued to struggle for Cleveland's Triple-A squad early in the year. He pitched better during his time with Tampa, but he didn't hit his stride until he joined the Pittsburgh chain and he continued to throw well with Oakland. As has been previously noted, the A's are particularly deep with bullpen arms right now, but Meloan's late-season performance will merit him a long look this spring. He has the stuff and the build to be a late-innings work-horse. The A's have done well over the years picking up relievers off of the waiver wire and Meloan may prove to be the next in this line of success stories.

Clayton Mortensen: Mortensen was acquired by the A's mid-season from the St. Louis Cardinals as part of the Matt Holliday trade. The right-hander had been with Triple-A Memphis at the time of the trade and he was sent to Sacramento to make his debut in the A's organization. He made six starts with Sacramento, pitching well in three of them and struggling in the other three outings. Thanks to injuries in the A's rotation, Mortensen was called upon to start for the A's down-the-stretch. He made one spot start versus Kansas City in early August, and he allowed eight runs in four innings. He returned to the A's with better success in September, allowing seven runs in 18 innings over three starts before struggling during his final two starts of the year. He finished the year with a 7.63 ERA in 30.2 innings at the major league level and a 4.39 ERA in 137.1 minor league innings.

Mortensen was a first-round pick of the Cardinals in 2007 and he has moved through the minor leagues quickly, reaching Triple-A in 2008. His career minor league numbers have only been so-so, as he has a 4.34 ERA and a 1.39 WHIP in 442.2 innings. However, the A's like his stuff and think he has the potential to be a major league starter in the future. Fastball command has been Mortensen's biggest bugaboo. He was scheduled to work on that aspect of his game this off-season at the Arizona Fall League, but he was scratched from that league after throwing those extra innings in the big leagues in September. Mortensen was still expected to drop into the A's facilities in Phoenix this off-season to get some one-on-one instruction on his mechanics. He has some work to do, so it would be a surprise to see him earn a spot on the A's Opening Day roster next year, especially given the team's returning pitching depth. However, if he shows improvement with his command early next season, he will be in-line to be the first option should the A's have an opening.

Josh Outman: In mid-June, if one were to have asked for the name of the A's top starting pitcher, the likely responses would have been either Dallas Braden or Outman. Through June 19th, Outman had a 4-1 record and a 3.48 ERA in 67.1 innings. Unfortunately, he left his start on June 19th with elbow soreness. That soreness wound-up requiring Tommy John surgery, and he would miss the rest of the season.

There has always been a debate surrounding Outman in terms of whether he is best suited to be a starter or a reliever. He is a hard thrower, especially for a left-hander, and has a compliment of secondary pitches that makes his repertoire suitable for starting, but he also uses a max-effort delivery that some scouts felt would be best suited for the bullpen. Outman proved he has the stuff to succeed as a major league starter in 2009, but his injury leaves the question open as to whether the wear-and-tear of starting will be too much on his elbow with his high-effort delivery. He will be rehabbing well into the 2010 season, so the question will likely remain unanswered through next season. The A's are deep both in the rotation and in the bullpen, but assuming that Outman makes a full recovery, Oakland will most certainly find a prominent spot for him somewhere on their pitching staff.

Cliff Pennington: The A's top pick in 2005 was given his first taste of major league baseball in 2008. Although he played well in September for the A's in 2008, Pennington wasn't given much of a chance to make the team in spring training, and he began the year in Sacramento. He spent the first four months of the season as the River Cats' starting shortstop and was actually passed over for big league promotions early in the season when [Eric Chavez](#) and [Mark Ellis](#) landed on the disabled list. However, when [Orlando Cabrera](#) was traded on July 31st, Pennington was promoted to the big leagues for good. In 99 games with Sacramento, he hit .264 with a 712 OPS and 27 stolen bases. He actually hit better than that in the big leagues, batting .279 with a 760 OPS in 60 games. Pennington was particularly good in September, batting .313 with a 904 OPS. Defensively, he handled the shortstop position extremely well for the first six weeks of his stint in the big leagues before falling apart and committing a slew of errors over the final three weeks of the season.

Pennington's play was impressive enough that A's GM [Billy Beane](#) is on record as saying that the A's won't be in the market for a shortstop this off-season. Beane, of course, has the right to change his mind as the market establishes itself, but Pennington has clearly put himself in a good position to make the A's 2010 roster. A switch-hitter with good speed and the ability to work the count, Pennington gives the A's a "second lead-off hitter" out of the ninth spot in their line-up. His .418 SLG in 2009 with the A's is probably higher than one would expect from him moving forward, but it isn't unreasonable to think that he could get on-base at a .340-.350 clip and steal 20 bases if he is playing everyday. Pennington was caught stealing five out of 12 times in the big leagues this year, but he is normally a very efficient base-stealer, having stolen 107 bases in 128 chances during his minor league career. The A's are extremely thin at the shortstop position in the minor leagues, and Pennington has an opportunity to establish himself as the A's everyday shortstop for the next several years if he can get on-base regularly, steal some bases and play solid defense next season.

Landon Powell: Coming into spring training, it was hard to know what to expect from Powell. The A's top pick in 2004 had suffered through two major knee injuries since 2005, had minor knee surgery in 2008 and was coming off of a health scare involving his liver during the off-season before the 2009 campaign. Despite all of that, Powell arrived at A's big league camp ready to play and he earned a spot as the A's back-up catcher on Opening Day. That was a role that Powell would play for the entire 2009 season. Although he was on the A's roster for the entire season, he would collect only 140 at-bats, as A's starting catcher [Kurt Suzuki](#) played nearly everyday. Powell played well defensively and hit pretty well despite his irregular playing time, posting a 726 OPS, slugging seven homeruns and driving in 30 runs in 46 games. Oakland got below-average offensive contributions from the majority of their positions in 2009, but with Suzuki and Powell behind the plate, the A's finished first and fifth in the major leagues in RBIs (111) and homeruns (22) from their catchers.

Thanks to the medication that Powell takes for his liver problem and his history of knee injuries, Powell is more susceptible to leg ailments than most players. Given that, it is probably unrealistic that he will develop into a 120+ games a year catcher. However, he is an excellent defensive catcher and his power (especially from the left-side of the plate) make him a good fit as a back-up catcher to Suzuki. The A's may look to expand his role some in 2010 by working to get his bat in the line-up even on days when he isn't catching, but as long as Suzuki is healthy, Powell isn't likely to catch more than once a week. Still, he should be a valuable member of the A's roster once again in 2010.

Chad Reineke: The A's acquired Reineke from the Padres for a player-to-be-named-later just before the start of the minor league regular season. He spent the majority of the season as a member of the River Cats' rotation, making 22 starts and eight relief appearances. In 125 innings for Sacramento, Reineke had a 9-4 record and a 4.75 ERA. Reineke made only one appearance for Oakland, a spot start on August 5th. He allowed four runs on seven hits in those five innings. Reineke had appeared in four games with the San Diego Padres in 2008, his first taste of the big leagues.

Reineke's spot on the A's 40-man roster is a tenuous one, at best. The 27-year-old is a solid Triple-A pitcher who could have a future as a long reliever or fifth starter in the big leagues, but given the A's current pitching depth, Reineke could become expendable this off-season if Oakland needs to free up a spot on the roster. If he does remain on the roster throughout the off-season, he will enter spring training competing for a spot as a long reliever/swingman on the A's roster.

Henry Rodriguez: Over the past few seasons, Rodriguez has been one of the A's top prospects, so his major league debut was met with some anticipation when it finally occurred in late September of this season. The Venezuelan right-

hander captured the attention of A's fans everywhere last season when he threw multiple 100+ fastballs in big league spring training. Rodriguez began the 2008 season as a starting pitcher, but his suspect control eventually forced the A's to move him to the bullpen, where he remained this season. Rodriguez's 2009 campaign got off to a slow start because he was sidelined for the first six weeks of the season while recovering from off-season hernia surgery. He appeared in three games for High-A Stockton before he joined the River Cats, for whom he appeared in 40 games. Rodriguez struck-out an incredible 82 batters in 48.2 innings for Sacramento, but he walked 39 and posted a mediocre 5.18 ERA. His struggles were especially acute in August, when he posted an 8.74 ERA. Despite the end-of-the-season struggles, Rodriguez was given a September call-up after the PCL post-season. He pitched reasonably well in four major league outings, allowing one earned run in four innings with four strike-outs and two walks.

Rodriguez has the stuff to be an elite reliever in the major leagues. In addition to that triple-digit fastball, he has a nasty slider. However, he still needs to find away to hit his spots more consistently. Over the past 10 years, the A's have built some terrific bullpens and a unifying factor for most of those bullpens has been the fact that their relievers rarely give up free passes. Rodriguez will probably always walk his share of batters, but he will need to cut down those walks from their current levels to be an effective member of the A's bullpen. He is pitching in Venezuela again this winter and will likely enter spring training with a chance to compete for a spot as a middle reliever with Oakland.

Boys of autumn return to play in Arizona

By Harrell Miller, Napa Valley Register

The Arizona Fall League is one of Major League Baseball's best kept secrets. It is minor league baseball at its best for a price that fits almost any budget.

Play began in this year's AFL season last week at five spring training ballparks scattered in and around the Valley of the Sun — Phoenix, Scottsdale, Mesa, Surprise and Peoria.

With the exception of an invitation to spring training, being selected to play in Phoenix during October and November is one of the really positive things that can happen in a player's minor league career. It is an opportunity to play with the most promising players from every team in both leagues. It is a showcase out of which tomorrow's stars emerge.

For example, 38 of the players who played in last year's major league All-Star Game played in the Arizona Fall League on the way up their baseball career ladder. Of course, not everyone is an All-Star, but over 1,700 players who spent time in the AFL have gone on to play in the major leagues.

The idea for the league is relatively simple. Each major league team sends six or seven players to Arizona. These players stay together and are combined with other groups to form six teams divided into two divisions. For example, this year the seven A's players are on a team — the Phoenix Desert Dogs — with players from Baltimore, Tampa Bay, Toronto and Washington. Giant players are teamed with players from Arizona, Colorado, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh on the Scottsdale Scorpions.

League play begins in mid-October and continues six days a week — no games on Sunday — until late November. This year a single championship game between the winners of their divisions is scheduled for Nov. 21.

Tickets are \$5 for seniors and \$6 for adults. You can sit wherever you like. Crowds are small, but the quality of the games is exceptional. Autographs are easy and the players are eager to please. Of course, the weather borders onto

unbelievable — most of the time.

Jan and I had the good fortune to be soaking up the sun on this year's Opening Day at Phoenix Municipal Stadium with a little crowd of 459 fans. The Desert Dogs with their seven players from the Oakland organization played the Mesa Solar Sox with players from the Angels, Cubs, Marlins, Red Sox and Twins.

Three Oakland position players started the game. Jemile Weeks, who finished play this season with Oakland's AA Midland (Texas) Rock Hounds, was at second base. Corey Brown, another Rock Hound, was in right field and Grant Desme, who played 66 games for Oakland's high A Stockton Ports, was in center.

The A's have four young pitchers on the Phoenix roster. Sam Demel appeared this year in 27 games for the Rock Hounds and 28 games for Oakland's AAA Sacramento Rivercats. James Simmons was 7-7 in Sacramento this year with a 5.72 earned run average. Justin Friend spent most of the year in Stockton with a short trip to Midland and a one-game appearance in Sacramento. Mickey Storey, the only A's pitcher to appear in the Dogs' opening game, had a well traveled summer with stints in Kane County (Ill.), Stockton, Midland and Sacramento. In his AFL debut, he pitched one hitless, scoreless inning.

I had a chance to talk with Mickey Storey and Justin Friend before the game. Both had been in Midland at the end of the season when the Rock Hounds won their league championship. They had been informed about being invited to play in the AFL shortly after the season ended in Texas. Both considered the invitation to be a "great honor" and were thrilled and excited to have the chance to be seen in the way fall league players are seen.

Mickey was born in Florida, attended college at Florida Atlantic, was drafted by the Twins in 2007 and picked up by the A's in 2008.

Justin was born in California and played high school ball in Manteca. After a couple of years in community college, he went to Oklahoma State where he played for a year before being drafted by the A's in 2007.

As you might expect, wins and losses are not the bottom line in the AFL. It is a showcase for individuals. Of course, individual performances meld together for team wins but the important information from each game tends to show up in the box score more than it does in the final score.

For example, in a recent opener, Mesa managed 10 runs while Phoenix scored just 6; however, that's not really the story of the game. You have to check out the "box" to see what really happened. For the boys in the green and gold, there was more than a little good news with just a tad of bad. Jemile Weeks and Corey Brown both had hits and Mickey Storey's earned run average stayed at zero with his brief appearance in the last inning. Grant Desme, on the other hand, went 0-for-4.

It's not too difficult to guess who might sleep well and who might not, and it has nothing to do with who won the game.

Finally, for my friends and readers who have faithfully read all the way to the end of this little piece hoping for some word about the Giants, I'm really sorry. I just couldn't be in two places at once. I promise I will check out the boys in the orange and black and let you know what's happening before they turn off the lights in November.

Monday's Arizona Fall League roundup

Sizemore plates four runs in Javelinas' win over Solar Sox

MLB.com

Javelinas 8, Solar Sox 1

Scott Sizemore, who had three long balls in the previous two games, went 3-for-4 and drove in four runs as the Peoria Javelinas beat the Mesa Solar Sox. The Tigers prospect hit a sacrifice fly in the first inning, lined an RBI double in the third, a two-run double in the fourth and added an infield hit in the ninth. Jordan Danks hit a pinch-hit homer in the eighth and fellow White Sox prospect Dayan Viciedo knocked in two runs for Peoria. Scot Drucker (Tigers) held the Solar Sox to three hits over three innings, striking out one in the start for his first AFL win. Ryan Kalish (Red Sox) went 2-for-4 and drove in Mesa's lone run.

Desert Dogs 6, Saguaros 2

Josh Bell smacked four hits, fell a homer short of the cycle, scored three times and drove in a run in Phoenix's victory over Peoria. Pitcher-turned-outfielder Adam Loewen hit a three-run homer in the sixth to give Phoenix the lead for good. Chris Heisey blasted a long ball for the second straight game and Nick Weglarz collected three hits, including a double. Justin Friend (A's) struck out two in two perfect innings of relief to pick up the win.

Scorpions 7, Rafters 3

Thomas Neal smacked a two-RBI double in a six-run fourth inning that rallied Scottsdale past Surprise. Brandon Allen (White Sox) capped the fourth with a two-run double of his own and Dominic Brown (Phillies) hit his second homer of the young Arizona Fall League season on a two-RBI night. Joe Martinez allowed one run on three hits in three innings of work for the win. The Giants righty also struck out three.