

A's News Clips, Tuesday, October 27, 2009

Inbox: Do the A's need more power arms?

Beat reporter Mychael Urban answers fans' questions

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

Do you think the A's need more power arms in their rotation and the bullpen? Many teams have three pitchers, if not more, that consistently throw at least 95 mph. Do the A's have some pitchers in the Minors who throw hard? What are your thoughts on the subject?

-- Wylie G., Union, N.J.

First of all, let's get past that magic number of 95 and focus on the power-arm angle. I'm not sure any of us will every really know how hard a particular pitcher throws unless we take our own Highway Patrol-calibrated radar gun out to the yard and find an open seat close enough to do our own readings. In-stadium radar readings and those you see on TV are not always reliable or accurate.

Thus endeth thy rant. On to power arms. My opinion is that every team needs a couple of them in the rotation and at least two at the back of the bullpen.

Next year the A's figure to have Andrew Bailey and Joey Devine at the back of the bullpen; both throw hard and have what scouts call a "heavy ball," which means the ball seems to *pick up* speed on the way to the plate. Never mind that that is physically impossible. Bailey and Devine have power arms, Jeff Gray also has a very good fastball, and there are a few relievers in the A's system -- led by Henry Rodriguez -- who fit the mold as well.

I like the idea of a couple of power arms in the rotation because I like the idea of mixing up looks and styles from day to day, and while the A's don't really have any classic power pitchers, man cannot live by fastball alone. Guys we've been conditioned to think of as power pitchers -- Walter Johnson, Bob Gibson, Sandy Koufax, Nolan Ryan, Roger Clemens, etc. -- all had at least one nasty secondary pitch that got them as many strikeouts as did their heaters.

In short, velocity is somewhat overrated. Give me a guy who can command the ball any day. It's not like Brett Anderson and Josh Outman are finesse guys, and Trevor Cahill, Gio Gonzalez and Vin Mazzaro can run it up there pretty good, too. If the latter trio learns to locate better, the A's rotation -- don't forget about Dallas Braden, either -- will be just fine without a true flame-thrower.

I read an article that listed the A's as one of clubs that would go after Aroldis Chapman. The same article said he would likely get \$40-60 million. If the A's are showing interest, are they just kicking the tires?

-- Rich A., Fulton, NY.

For those of you who don't follow such things, a primer: Chapman is a 21-year-old lefty who is said to throw in the upper 90s and recently defected from the Cuban national team. He's considered by some in the industry to be the best Latin prospect in history to hit the free-agent market, and he's established residency in Andorra.

Does that sound like someone the A's will be able to land? Not from my angle. Are they interested? Sure. Every team in the game would love to have the kid, and among the teams already mentioned to be hot on his trail are the deep-pocket Yankees, Red Sox, Dodgers and Angels.

But if the first numbers we're hearing are in the \$40-\$60 million range and there's any sort of bidding war, the A's can't possibly hang with the big boys on this one.

I still applaud Billy Beane's decision to bring in the veteran Big 4 -- Matt Holliday, Orlando Cabrera, Jason Giambi and Nomar Garciaparra -- last year. And good for Beane for unloading three of them when it was obvious the plan wasn't working, which leads me to my question. Why the heck did he stick with Garciaparra for so long? I think he had only one clutch hit all year, and that was in April. He consistently let us down in key at-bats all summer. Beane showed Giambi, an Oakland icon, the door. Why not Garciaparra?

-- John C., Fresno, Calif.

Holliday and Cabrera had trade value. Garciaparra didn't. Giambi wasn't a huge fan of A's manager Bob Geren and was a major influence in a clubhouse full of young players. Garciaparra generally kept his opinions to himself. Do the math.

I'm not saying Giambi was a disruptive force on the A's. But the potential for disruption, from a management perspective, was definitely there more so with Jason than with Garciaparra. And that's all I have to say about that.

Can Grant Desme crack the A's lineup out of Spring Training? He's currently leading the Arizona Fall League in home runs and looks like a dominant five-tool player. I know the jump from Class A ball to MLB is a big one, but he is 23 years old.

-- Matt A., Chico, Calif.

Sorry to be a tease, but Desme will be the headliner on Wednesday when I bust out the weekly offseason feature on A's prospects, so you'll have to wait a couple of days to get an answer on this one.

Thanks, by the way, for all of the suggestions for the name of the feature. There were a lot of great ideas, and some pretty bad ones, too. I'll be contacting the winner of the contest later this week and give him or her a few options on the prize.

In the meantime, check back here on oaklandathletics.com on Wednesday for director of player development Keith Lippmann's thoughts on Desme and a handful of other farmhands.

So Mychael, what do you do during the offseason?

-- Gary H., White Lake, Mich.

Well, MLB.com's team sites feature a fresh piece of original content -- Inboxes, features, analysis, winter/fall ball updates, etc. -- three times a week (Monday-Wednesday-Friday), and our beat writers are on-call to handle and report breaking news every day of the week, weekends included. We're the only media outlet that covers every club full-time, year-round, and between reporting and creating content that you won't find anywhere else, our writers are kept pretty busy.

That said, I focus on my family as much as possible during the months between games. I have a ridiculously cool and understanding wife and two young daughters, and after 33 weeks or so of being on and off the road, it's time to re-connect with what's truly important.

Monday's Arizona Fall League roundup

Desme tees off in fifth straight, Ashley hits walk-off slam

By / MLB.com

Desert Dogs 9, Solar Sox 5

Athletics prospect Grant Desme homered for the fifth straight game and Nevin Ashley (Dodgers) smacked a walk-off grand slam en route to the Phoenix Desert Dogs' victory over the Mesa Solar Sox. Desme has eight homers, including six in his last five games, and 16 RBIs in his last eight games for Phoenix. Ashley smacked an 0-2 pitch from Dustin Richardson (Red Sox) over the left-field fence for his first career grand slam, his only hit of the game.

Saguaros 10, Scorpions 2

Jon Gaston blasted a grand slam and doubled in the Peoria Saguaros' 10-2 victory over the Scottsdale Scorpions at Scottsdale Stadium. Indians prospect Zach Putnam tossed three scoreless innings to start the game and reliever Josh Judy picked up the win with 1 2/3 shutout frames. The Phillies' Domonic Brown went 2-for-3 with a triple and two RBIs for Scottsdale (6-6).

Javelinas 2, Rafters 1

White Sox prospect Justin Cassel allowed three hits over four scoreless innings as Peoria edged the first-place Surprise Rafters. Cassel threw 26 of 52 pitches for strikes and walked one en route to his first AFL victory in three starts this year. Former Yankees' fourth-round pick Colin Curtis had three hits for Surprise (7-4), raising his AFL average to .415.

Ashley's walk-off slam lifts Dogs

Desme goes deep for sixth time in five games

By Danny Wild / MLB.com

Good things happen when you eat with the team's hottest hitter.

"He's my favorite player right now," Rays prospect Nevin Ashley said of teammate Grant Desme. "I tell him that every day. I try to eat what he eats, sit next to him to get the good vibes. It's been working so far."

The pair may have company around the table after Ashley hit a walk-off grand slam and Desme homered for the fifth straight game en route to the Phoenix Desert Dogs' 9-5 victory over the Mesa Solar Sox on Monday afternoon.

Ashley, who hit just three homers in 97 Minor League games in 2009, smacked an 0-2 pitch from Boston's Dustin Richardson to left field for his first career grand slam, his only hit of the game.

"To be a walk-off, it makes it a little more exciting," said Ashley, a 25-year-old catcher out of Indiana State. "I got down early in the count, missed the first pitch, a fastball. I swung at a high fastball on the second pitch. Richardson is a hard thrower, so I knew he would come back with an up-and-in fastball. He just didn't get it up high enough."

Ashley's homer was his second in three games after going deep against Surprise on Oct. 23. It took him 62 games with the Class A Advanced Charlotte Stone Crabs to get two homers this summer.

"I just wanted to get it out there far enough to score a run," Ashley said. "And it just kept going."

Desme, meanwhile, has been the Arizona Fall League's hottest hitter of late. The Oakland farmhand has eight homers, including six in his last five games, and 16 RBIs in his last eight games for the Desert Dogs. His three-run shot in the first inning off Twins right-hander Mike McCardell put the Dogs up early.

Ashley inches closer to the slugger in the dugout, hoping some of the magic will rub off.

"It's a lot of fun, this is a great group of guys and we're bonding really well," said Ashley, Tampa Bay's sixth-round pick in the 2006 Draft. "When I came around third base, I was thinking about throwing the helmet off. I figured I'd get hit on the head, and sure enough they attacked me right as I hit the plate," Ashley laughed.

"I'm thinking, thank goodness I didn't have to go out and catch another half inning," he said.

Ashley, a Florida State League All-Star this summer, split his fourth season between the Stone Crabs and Double-A Montgomery. He struggled against Southern League pitchers, hitting .212 with a homer and 15 RBIs in 35 games and came to Arizona to work on his swing and mechanics.

"I'm working on my hitting, trying new stuff, doing a little leg kick now and I'm feeling really good," he said. "I've just gotta keep it going and turn it on."

If the Desme Diet is the secret, consider Ashley a convert.

"I'm looking to have a good time, work on my hitting and keep improving as a baseball player," he said. "I want to try and show everybody how good I can be."

Desme, Oakland's second-round pick in the 2007 Draft, isn't having any trouble showing off. The 25-year-old Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo product is batting .425 with 17 hits and a dozen runs scored in his last 10 games. The California native has gone deep in seven of his last eight contests.

Phoenix, with an early edge after Desme's homer, took a 5-3 lead in the fourth on consecutive RBI triples by Athletics prospects Corey Brown and Jemile Weeks. Mesa clawed back and eventually tied the game in the ninth when Chris Parmelee (Twins) singled home Bryan Petersen (Marlins) with two outs. In the bottom of the frame, Orioles third baseman Josh Bell hit a one-out single and Brown and Weeks worked consecutive walks, setting the stage for Ashley.

"We had the lead going into the ninth," he said. "We had confidence in our hitters to come back."

Nationals' 2009 first-round pick Drew Storen picked up the win after allowing a run in the ninth, the first earned run in five AFL appearances for the Stanford product. Jays right-hander Robert Ray, a seventh-rounder out of Texas A&M in 2005, started and allowed three runs on six hits and a walk over four innings. He struck out five.

Richardson, who recorded one out, was charged with four runs on two hits and a pair of walks for the loss. McCardell allowed five runs on five hits and a walk in 3 2/3 frames for Mesa.

2009 A's MiLB Player & Pitcher Of The Year

Oct 26, 2009

OaklandClubhouse.com

With three of four Oakland A's full-season minor league affiliates making the post-season, it isn't a surprise that there were some impressive individual performances among A's minor leaguers. With so many good choices for our annual Player and Pitcher of the Year awards, we decided to open up the voting to our readers. Click inside to find out who was given the awards by our staff and our readers

Every year since 2004, OaklandClubhouse.com has named an Oakland A's Minor League Pitcher and Player of the Year. This year, we decided to make the award process interactive, allowing our messageboard community to chime in with their picks for each trophy. Below are the results of both our staff poll and our readers' poll.

To view the readers' poll results, click [here](#) for the pitchers and [here](#) for the players.

Player of the Year

OaklandClubhouse.com pick: Chris Carter

Readers' pick: Chris Carter

Not surprisingly, Chris Carter was the unanimous winner of the A's Minor League Player of the Year award from both OaklandClubhouse.com staff and readers. Our other candidates were Grant Desme, Tom Everidge and Eric Patterson.

Carter takes home the award for the second straight year. In 2009, he put together one of the most impressive statistical seasons for any A's prospect since Jose Ortiz won the Pacific Coast League MVP award in 2000 when he hit .351 with 24 homers and 108 RBIs. Carter's season stacked up well with Ortiz's campaign, as Carter hit .329 with 28 homers, 115 RBIs and a 992 OPS.

Most of Carter's damage in 2009 came as a member of the Double-A Midland Rockhounds, for whom he hit .337 with 24 homers and 101 RBIs in 125 games. Those numbers earned Carter a Player of the Year award from the Texas League. He was instrumental in putting the Rockhounds in a position to make the Texas League playoffs. Although Carter wouldn't be part of the team during the post-season, he certainly played a central role in the Rockhounds' eventual Texas League title. Carter finished first in all of the minor leagues in hits and total bases, 12th in homeruns, ninth in doubles, second in RBIs and extra base hits, and 11th in walks.

Carter might not have been with Midland during the post-season, but he was hardly idle during the playoffs. He was promoted to Triple-A Sacramento for the final two weeks of the season and he hit four homers and drove-in 14 runs for the River Cats in 13 regular season games. He then added four more homeruns in seven post-season games for Sacramento, as the River Cats made the PCL finals.

Since joining the A's organization before the start of the 2008 season, Carter has put together some impressive statistics. In 275 regular season games, Carter has hit 67 homers and has driven-in 219 runs. He has also been a huge force in the post-season, hitting nine homeruns in 19 playoff games over two years. Carter has earned two championship rings during that time, with Stockton in 2008 and Midland in 2009. He will enter the 2010 season as one of the A's top prospects.

Finishing second in both the OaklandClubhouse.com staff voting and the readers' poll was Grant Desme, who put together an outstanding season for Low-A Kane County and High-A Stockton. Desme, who missed virtually all of the 2008 season with injuries, hit .288 with 31 homers, 89 RBIs and 40 stolen bases in 131 games. Desme was the homerun leader for the entire A's organization and he finished second amongst A's minor leaguers in stolen bases.

Pitcher of the Year

OaklandClubhouse.com pick: Anthony Capra

Readers' pick: Mickey Storey

The voting for the A's Minor League Pitcher of the Year was less clear cut. There were a number of pitchers who put together solid seasons, but no one blew away the field with numbers like Carter put up from an offensive perspective. Our candidates were Graham Godfrey, Mickey Storey, Kenneth Smalley, Anthony Capra, Ben Hornbeck and Carlos Hernandez. It was a split decision between our staff and our readers. Our staff gave the award to Anthony Capra, while the readers gave the award to Mickey Storey.

Capra put together a quietly outstanding season in his first full professional campaign. The left-hander from Wichita State split the year between Kane County and Stockton. Despite struggling at times with his mechanics early in the season and receiving little run support from his teammates throughout the year, Capra still managed to post a 3.20 ERA in 152 innings spread over 27 starts. He was the A's minor league leader in strike-outs with 170 and he finished second among all minor leaguers in that same category.

Capra was also extremely difficult to hit throughout the year. He allowed opposing batters in the Midwest League to hit only .197 off of him and California League batters didn't fare much better, posting only a .223 BAA. Perhaps most impressive was Capra's smooth transition from a pitcher-friendly environment in the Midwest League to a more hitter-friendly California League. After allowing five runs in his first 11 innings in the California League, Capra allowed only 13 runs over his final 41 innings. He actually finished with a lower ERA in the Cal League (3.12) than he did in the Midwest League (3.24).

Storey had an outstanding season, as well. The reliever began the year as a forgotten man in the A's system, as he wasn't even invited to regular spring training. However, he fought his way onto the roster of the full-season Kane County Cougars by May. Storey quickly proved that he was too good for Low-A baseball by allowing only one run in 17.1 innings with the Cougars. He struck-out 23 and walked only one and saved nine games before being promoted to High-A Stockton. Like Capra, Storey handled the jump to the California League well, as he posted a 2.28 ERA in 23.2 innings and saved nine games for the Ports. He would make two scoreless appearances for the Triple-A Sacramento River Cats late in the season and finished the year with Double-A Midland, where he threw 7.2 scoreless innings during the regular season before becoming one of the Rockhounds' top relievers in the post-season. His impressive campaign earned him a spot in the Arizona Fall League. Not a bad result for a player who began the year in extended spring training.

Capra finished second in the readers' poll, while Midland starter Graham Godfrey was the runner-up in the staff poll. Godfrey was the top starter for the Midland Rockhounds in 2009, leading the team with a 3.50 ERA and 159.1 innings. He went 11-8 for Midland and the Rockhounds won both of his post-season starts. Godfrey was named to the Texas League's Post-Season All-Star team for his efforts.

Week 2 AFL Players of the Week

Desme, Gutierrez and Lo share weekly award

Mlb.com, Arizona Fall League

PHOENIX, Ariz. -- Phoenix Desert Dogs outfielder Grant Desme (OAK), who launched five home runs in five games last week, is the Arizona Fall League's Week 2 Player of the Week.

He is joined by two co-Pitchers of the Week: Surprise Rafters right-handed starter Danny Gutierrez (TEX) and Peoria Saguaros right-handed reliever Chia-Jen Lo (HOU).

Grant Desme, Phoenix Desert Dogs

The 6-foot-2, 205-pound Desme hit .478 (11-for-23) for the week with eight runs, nine runs batted in and a 1.174 slugging percentage.

The 23-year-old Bakersfield, Calif. native leads the Fall League with seven home runs. He is on pace to threaten the league single-season home-run record of 14 (Brandon Wood, 2005).

He also paces the league in hits (17), total bases (40) and slugging percentage (1.026). He is tied for second in runs (11), tied for third in runs batted in (13) and ranks sixth in batting (.436).

A second-round (74th overall) Draft choice of Oakland in 2007 out of Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo, Desme is a .286 hitter in three Minor League seasons with 33 home runs and 97 RBIs in 145 games. He split his 2009 campaign between Class A Kane County (.274 with 11 home runs and 38 RBIs in 69 games) and Class A Advanced Stockton (.304 with 20 home runs and 51 RBIs).

Danny Gutierrez, Surprise Rafters

One of five Fall League pitchers who enter Week 3 with two victories, the 22-year-old Los Angeles product also sports a 0.00 earned run average in his two appearances (both starts). He has allowed no runs, two hits and four walks with three strikeouts in 6.2 innings.

A four-year professional, the 6-foot-1, 180-pound Gutierrez was drafted in the 33rd round (982nd overall) in 2005 out of Rubidoux (Calif.) High School. He split 2009 between Class A Advanced Wilmington (1-0 with a 1.65 ERA in eight games) and Double-A (0-0, 3.60 ERA in one game). His 6-10 career record includes a 3.80 earned run average in 50 games. He has struck out 198 batters in 206 innings.

Chia-Jen Lo, Peoria Saguaros

A native of Taiwan, Lo, 23, posted three consecutive scoreless two-inning stints in the first two weeks of the Fall League season. The reliever owns a 1-0 record and 2.45 ERA in 7 1/3 innings, allowing two earned runs, three hits and one walk with nine strikeouts in four appearances.

The 5-foot-11, 181-pound Lo, who attended Chinese Culture University in Taiwan, split 2009 -- his first season of professional baseball in the United States -- between Class A Advanced Lancaster (1-0 with a 1.78 ERA in 12 games) and Double-A Corpus Christi (0-2 with a 2.31 ERA in 30 games).

Other Nominees

Other hitters receiving consideration were Peoria Javelinas outfielder Jordan Danks (CWS) and Phoenix Desert Dogs OF Matt Angle (BAL). Scottsdale Scorpions RHP Joe Martinez (SF) also received consideration for Pitcher of the Week.