

A's News Clips, Wednesday November 18, 2009

Oakland A's hope Andrew Bailey just the first sign of youth-driven success

By Gary Peterson, Oakland Tribune columnist 11/18/09

If you're going to tout yourself as an organization committed to player development, it helps when you can trot out a fully developed player. So it was that the A's flew Andrew Bailey in from the East Coast for a 6,000-mile-round-trip media hit and run, then filed the expenses under Money Well Spent.

Bailey, you may remember from about 36 hours ago, was voted the 2009 American League Rookie of the Year. That developed enough for you?

"We've always been proud of our player development history here," general manager Billy Beane said. "Really, if you look at when the club has been good, this has been a precursor to many of those good years. This is the fourth (Rookie of the Year) we've had since '98, and usually following that we've had some pretty good success."

Go back further than that, and the A's have had seven thusly honored rookies since 1986 — Jose Canseco, Mark McGwire, Walt Weiss, Ben Grieve, Bobby Crosby, Huston Street and Bailey. The first six made it to the postseason with the A's, five made it to the ALCS, and three won World Series rings.

Bailey has done none of the above as we speak, but he did save 26 games and fashion a 1.84 ERA in his first major league season. Thus he represents a welcomed moment of triumph for Beane, whose pipeline has spit out more air than oil the past few years.

It's an important point for the A's, whose ownership isn't inclined to pump up the payroll.

Their roster is in a constant state of churn. Nice for Beane, then, that one of the organization's promising young'uns finally rose to the top. The question is, how many more will follow?

"It's a fair response from fans and people who follow the team," Beane said. "Ultimately when you start winning games is when they get really interested. I'm aware of that. So the next step is to continue to bring guys like Andrew up here. That's our responsibility, and I know the deal."

It seemed as if Beane had lost focus on the deal last offseason when he traded for slugging outfielder Matt Holliday, signed former A's fan fave Jason Giambi and scooped up Nomar Garciaparra and Orlando Cabrera.

"We're getting the band back together," a chuckling Beane said at the Giambi news conference.

It was a curious ensemble. Holliday was a big-time bat but had no table-setters in front of him and was a short-timer from the first time he stepped into white shoes — as was Cabrera. Giambi was a marketing ploy, and Garciaparra was the injury-prone answer to a perceived need.

Come July it was a failed strategy. Holliday, Giambi and Cabrera finished the season in the playoffs — for other teams. Garciaparra finished the season in Oakland. None of their comings and goings meshed with the A's long-standing mission (Draft, Develop and Let 'em Seek Their Fortunes Elsewhere) that led to five playoff appearances from 2000-06.

Tuesday Beane spoke like someone who had reacquainted himself with the mission statement.

"I think our first goal this winter is, the positions we need to fill, fill them with young guys," he said. "If we get into January and we haven't acquired a young player, then we'll consider a guy to fill in temporarily. The first goal is to find a young guy. Our long-term goal is to create a team with continuity, that is going to be here for a number of years."

That team has more form than it did a year ago. For starters, Beane can scratch "closer" off his to-do list. Trevor Cahill and Brett Anderson acquitted themselves well enough as rookies to maintain their spots at the top of the rotation. Center fielder Rajai Davis appeared to break through during the last half of last season.

"When you start the process, you're trying to fill some veterans in and you're hoping some rookies take over," Beane said. "So this year, it's like (filling in) a bingo card a little bit."

It's not as sexy as unveiling a CC Sabathia or Mark Teixeira. But it's the only strategy that makes sense given the parameters the A's have imposed upon themselves.

"To sign a couple free agents and have three or four press conferences during the winter doesn't get it done," Beane said. "We're going to be disciplined."

And if it winds up costing them another first-class airfare from the East Coast and back, so be it.

Young players top Beane's wish list

By Joe Stiglich_Oakland Tribune 11/18/09

A's general manager Billy Beane reiterated Tuesday that the A's are targeting for acquisition young players who could fit into the team's long-range plans.

And he gave his strongest confirmation yet that any additions this winter are likely to come through trades rather than free agency.

Though Beane says re-signing third baseman Adam Kennedy, 33, is "still an option for us," he implied the A's are looking to go younger there.

It's also evident the A's aren't ready to anoint prospect Brett Wallace the starter at third — not yet anyway.

"It's a position that other than Brett, we don't really have a long-term answer," Beane said. "Our first goal this winter, at the positions we need to fill, is to try and fill them with young guys first. If we get into January and we haven't acquired a young player, we'll consider guys to fill in temporarily (through free agency)."

A day after A's closer Andrew Bailey was named American League Rookie of the Year, Beane said he thinks several of the A's other top prospects could help Oakland in 2010.

Along with Wallace and highly touted first baseman Chris Carter, Beane mentioned second basemen Jemile Weeks and Adrian Cardenas, first baseman Sean Doolittle and outfielders Grant Desme and Corey Brown among players "you're probably going to see at some point during (next) season. (Guys) that we may not think are quite ready to start the season, but you never know."

A's hope to find an Andrew Bailey on offense

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer 11/18/09

What the A's need is a hitting version of Andrew Bailey, someone to come from virtually nowhere and do for Oakland's lineup what Bailey did for the bullpen.

It would be a long shot, but so was Bailey, who won the American League Rookie of the Year Award one year after losing his job in the Double-A Midland rotation.

Bailey helped solidify the bullpen as an All-Star closer, and now the offense needs its own boost after ranking last in the league in home runs, total bases and slugging percentage.

"We want long-term answers, guys similar to Andrew who'll be here for a number of years," general manager Billy Beane said after Tuesday's news conference at the Coliseum to acknowledge Bailey's improbable rise, a tribute to the 25-year-old and the organization's scouting and player development departments.

Comforted by having a young rotation and young closer, Beane said his offseason priority is to beef up the offense - naturally, with youth. Two candidates are corner infielders Brett Wallace and Chris Carter, both middle-of-the-order guys, and Beane mentioned several other hitters who could arrive at some point in 2010.

For now, he's focusing on trades.

"We're going to look at young players to fill spots, first and foremost," Beane said. "If those players we'd like to acquire aren't obtainable, we'll consider bringing in guys who can hold the positions down. We're going to stay disciplined and try to do everything we can to fill those spots with young players."

Despite the power deficiency and last-place finish, the offense picked up in the second half - a .246 team batting average before the All-Star break (last in the AL) and .280 after (third). The A's led the league in doubles and stolen bases after the break.

In their final 88 games, they played .500 ball.

"We had a lot of rookies on the field, too," Bailey said. "I think our team can be a lot better. If we play like we did in the last 80-some games, I think we'll be a force to be reckoned with. The year's experience will help, and now we're definitely looking to win the West."

Win the West?

"Well, I mean, that's our goal, obviously," Bailey said, "and I hope we achieve our goal."

Bailey was selected in the sixth round in 2006, thanks to a push by scout Jeff Bittiger, and his stardom began when he was removed from the Midland rotation, turned into a reliever and taught to throw a cut fastball by minor-league coach Gil Patterson.

The pitcher is a walking advertisement for the scouting and player development departments.

In a related note, Keith Lieppman, 60, won this year's Sheldon "Chief" Bender Award, a lifetime achievement honor presented by Minor League Baseball for accomplishments in player development. The 2010 season will be Lieppman's 40th with the A's. He has been director of player development since succeeding his mentor, Karl Kuehl, in 1992.

Lieppman was as thrilled to speak of Bailey's award as he was his own.

"It's such a thrill to see someone go from frustration and anguish to moving to the bullpen and succeeding," Lieppman said. "With hard work and preparation on his part, he pulled it off. He called a lot of minor-league personnel and thanked them for helping him. When you get a class individual like Andrew who understands the process, that's probably the greatest reward."

Patience pays off in honors for Bailey

A's staff has praise for Rookie of Year's vast improvement

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com 11/18/09

OAKLAND -- Should anyone decide to put together a motivational video for struggling Minor League baseball players, they could do a lot worse than landing A's right-hander Andrew Bailey as their subject and spokesman.

A day after being named the American League's 2009 Rookie of the Year, Bailey on Monday spent the better part of a news conference at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum on Tuesday espousing the power of self-faith.

A struggling 24-year-old starting pitcher languishing in Double-A ball during his third season of professional baseball last summer, Bailey had every right to wonder if his dream of playing big league ball was dying in the dust at Midland, Texas.

Midway through the 2008 season, he was 1-8 with a 6.18 ERA.

Any sort of concessionary thoughts, however, never entered his mind.

"I always had a belief that I could make it," said Bailey, who was flanked at the news conference by A's general manager Billy Beane and skipper Bob Geren. "There was never a time that I gave up on myself."

The A's never gave up on Bailey, either. But they did come up with a new plan.

Tantalized by his power arm and impressed with his high strikeout totals as a starter, they decided to turn him into a relief pitcher.

"Even though he was struggling as a starter," Beane said, "we were still high on him."

Midland pitching coach Scott Emerson and Minor League roving pitching instructor Gil Patterson were charged with overseeing the transition, but first they asked Bailey if he was open to the career move.

"I said, 'That's fine with me,'" Bailey recalled. "[I figured] as long as I have a name on the back of my jersey, I have a chance to make it to the big leagues."

That same day, Patterson showed Bailey how to throw a cut fastball. After several days of working on it in side sessions, with Patterson actually dropping into the squat to catch his new convert, the cutter was unleashed in competition.

2009 AL roy voting

| Player | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | Points |
|----------------|------------|------------|------------|---------------|
| Andrew Bailey | 13 | 6 | 5 | 88 |
| Elvis Andrus | 8 | 6 | 7 | 65 |
| Rick Porcello | 7 | 8 | 5 | 64 |
| Jeff Niemann | x | 5 | 6 | 21 |
| Gordon Beckham | x | 2 | 4 | 10 |
| Brett Anderson | x | 1 | 1 | 4 |

And away Bailey went. He ripped through the second half of Texas League action, posting a 0.92 ERA over 22 appearances, and after a similarly dominant turn in the Arizona Fall League, Bailey wowed the A's brass as a virtual unknown during his first trip to big league Spring Training, where he didn't allow a run in Cactus League play until the final week before the 25-man roster was set.

Every Friday during camp, Beane, Geren and the rest of Oakland's personnel men got together to discuss the next round of cuts. Every Friday, Bailey escaped the reaper.

"I don't think we went into Spring Training thinking he'd break with us," said Beane. "But we kept coming back to, 'We can't cut a guy who hasn't given up a run.'"

So Bailey made the team, and Geren eased him into action. Bailey was used in fairly low-stress situations early on, earned more trust by thriving, and eventually ascended into the closer's role, out of which he set the Oakland rookie saves record with 26.

"Bob did a great job of putting him in a position to succeed early," Beane offered.

Geren deflected the praise, echoing earlier comments by Beane that lauded the scout -- Jeff Bittiger -- who discovered Bailey at tiny Wagner College in New Jersey, and serving props to the men who work with Oakland's prospects throughout the Minor League system.

"A lot of the guys in the scouting and development [departments] of this organization should be congratulated along with Andrew," Geren said.

Bailey has had his fill of congratulatory messages since being named Oakland's third ROY in six years, but his appearance alone suggested that he's not likely to rest on his laurels.

Noticeably trimmer than when the season ended, he said he's been working out four times a week in an effort not to lose weight, but to "turn bad weight into good weight."

"There's definitely room for improvement; 27 saves is better than 26," Bailey said. "My goal was to get to the big leagues, and I've already achieved that goal. My goal now is to stay."

A's view Bailey's AL Rookie of the Year award as a positive sign

Associated Press, 11/18/09

General manager Billy Beane is committed to a youth movement for his small-market Oakland Athletics, even if the payoff takes time.

One positive sign of progress: closer Andrew Bailey's AL Rookie of the Year award Monday. That helped reinforce to Beane that his plan is the right one for a club determined to become a perennial contender again. Beane's model calls for building from within and giving young players chances at the big league level while weathering their growing pains.

"We're going to stay disciplined," Beane said Tuesday at a news conference for Bailey. "We're going to go with young players. We want long-term answers, like Andrew."

The 25-year-old Bailey was an All-Star in his first season as a reliever, with 26 saves and a 1.84 ERA.

"For me, it's a building block, something I can always fall back on -- look what you did this year," Bailey said.

Everybody around this financially challenged organization was pleasantly surprised -- even the power pitcher himself -- that Bailey beat out Texas shortstop and runner-up Elvis Andrus and Detroit pitcher Rick Porcello in the voting.

"That's why having a lot of young players is great," Beane said. "Some are going to disappoint and some are going to surprise. ... It's really been a great story."

Bailey's special season and a talented young pitching staff were among the few bright spots for the franchise in 2009. Oakland finished with 75 wins for the second straight season and in last place in the AL West, losing its final seven games.

Bailey realizes he is only a small part of the solution for the A's, who haven't made the playoffs since a run to the AL championship series in 2006. Bailey showed in the second half, and way back in spring training, that he can be downright dominant.

His award is just starting to sink in. He said he got to think about it on the cross-country flight to the Bay Area from his home in New Jersey "when I got to shut my phone off for six hours."

"The goal is to stay here," Bailey said. "This whole year was a learning experience for me, thrown into a different situation. It was my first year of relief work, so everything was new to me."

A's scout Jeff Bittiger pushed hard for Bailey on draft day in 2006 and Beane listened. Oakland selected him in the sixth round and hoped he wouldn't be hampered by past arm trouble.

"Jeff really went to the mat for him," Beane said.

The GM acknowledged Bailey's name regularly came up this season when the A's discussed who to send down to the minors, but nobody could do it.

Moving Bailey from the rotation to the bullpen at Double-A Midland last year sure seems brilliant now. Bailey said he never questioned the decision and actually embraced the idea. Struggling as a starter, he was putting too much pressure on himself and had gone away from what always had worked: going after hitters, being aggressive with every pitch.

"I was 1-8 with an 8.50 ERA," he said with a smile, glancing at Beane. "The mindset change was big for me getting back to who I am and where I am today and winning this award, which is crazy. I always had the belief I could make it."

That's how Beane wants his young players to think. Bailey can be an example in Oakland's system. So can Brett Anderson, Trevor Cahill and the other rookie pitchers who performed so well last season.

Beane points to the old A's under then-owner Charlie Finley, a notorious micro-manager, for using the same approach and finding success. Finley moved the team from Kansas City to Oakland in 1968 and the A's won three straight World Series from 1972-74 and five consecutive division titles from 1971-75.

"It's the same recipe," Beane said of building from the bottom up. "It's whether we've got the guts and whether the people who follow the team realize it's the way to do it."

Footprints in the Snow: Athletics

Jeff Fletcher, aol.com, 11/18/09

Footprints in the Snow is FanHouse's look at the paths to be forged by MLB teams this winter as they look ahead to 2010.

Depending on your perspective, the rebuilding plan general manager Billy Beane started after the 2007 season has either worked well or has stalled out. The A's have filled up their organization with young prospects, and they had the makings of a very good young pitching staff last year. However, they still managed to win only 75 games -- the exact same total as the year before -- because their everyday lineup is still in flux.

The only position player who has established himself as the long-term answer at his position is catcher Kurt Suzuki. Otherwise, players like Ryan Sweeney, Cliff Pennington and Rajai Davis have played just well enough to have jobs going into spring training, but not well enough to be considered established.

The good news is the A's gave their young pitchers plenty of opportunity to learn in 2009. They started a pitcher 25 or younger in 147 of their games, most in the majors, and just about all of them showed flashes (or more) of brilliance.

More Footprints in the Snow

Who Might Leave

Bobby Crosby, SS; Jack Cust, DH; Nomar Garciaparra, IF; Edgar Gonzalez, RHP; Adam Kennedy, IF; Brett Tomko, RHP.

Shopping List

The A's most acute need is at third base. Technically, they have Eric Chavez in the final year of his disastrous six-year, \$66-million deal, but he's had two major back surgeries and two shoulder surgeries in the past 15 months, so the A's are not counting on him. They have a couple prospects -- Brett Wallace (from the Matt Holliday trade) and Adrian Cardenas (a middle infielder from the Joe Blanton deal) -- who could be long-term answers at third, but the A's will likely need someone else until they are ready. A guy like Pedro Feliz might be an affordable filler.

Somewhere the A's need to find a legitimate, big-time bat -- yes, them and 20 other teams -- because they don't really have a prototypical 3-4-5 hitter. Jason Bay would fit nicely, but the A's probably can't afford to get into the bidding for him, even though they do seem to have some money. A Beane-like thing to do would be to get Dan Uggla and have him play third or the outfield, or to try to pry Josh Willingham from the Nationals.

The A's also are likely to go after one veteran starting pitcher. They neglected to do that last year, and ended up grabbing Brett Tomko late in the season, just to soak up some innings. With a staff of such young, inconsistent, pitchers, the A's may want someone like Jason Marquis or Randy Wolf be an anchor.

Money Matters

If they are so inclined, the A's have some money to spend. They are committed to \$12.5 million for Chavez and \$5.5 million for Mark Ellis. Jack Cust and Scott Hairston could be due arbitration bumps of around \$4 million, but the A's also could nontender either or both of those players if they find someone better. Michael Wuertz and Joey Devine are both arbitration-eligible, but neither figures to make more than \$2.5 million. The A's fifth arbitration-eligible player is reliever Santiago Casilla, who is likely to be non-tendered. Every other player currently on the A's roster figures to make less than \$1 million in 2010.

The A's Opening Day payroll was \$62 million in 2009, so if they simply remain steady with that, they've got, conservatively, \$25 million they could invest in new players for 2010 alone. Of course, Beane is the last guy to spend for the sake of spending. If he can't find the right players, the A's will hang onto the money and wait.

Offseason Goals

This is a big offseason for Beane to figure out just how much he wants to step on the gas pedal with the rebuilding process. The A's have one of the deepest farm systems in the majors, and they have a lot of promising pitchers already in the majors. Beane will have to decide if he wants to use some of that money and get some bats right now, or just wait for guys like Wallace and Chris Carter to establish themselves in the big leagues, which may not be until 2011