

## **A's News Clips, Friday, November 27, 2009**

### **Oakland A's pitcher Dallas Braden gives back with more food, care**

By [Bob Highfill](#), Record Sports Editor 11/26/09

STOCKTON - Dallas Braden believes it isn't a question of why.

It's a matter of why not.

The Stagg High graduate and former Ports pitcher now with the Oakland Athletics helped raise nearly a ton of food and served hot meals to hundreds of people on Wednesday at the Fr. Alan McCoy OFM Dining Room at St. Mary's Interfaith in downtown Stockton.

"With all the opportunities I've been given," the 26-year-old near lifelong Stockton resident said, "this is the least I could do."

For the second consecutive year, Braden provided a Thanksgiving eve feast with the help of several area businesses. Last year, Braden and the dining room staff and several volunteers served 845 pounds of food to about 500 people. On Wednesday, the amount of food and the number of people who were served had grown - though no official numbers were given - a sign of the increased need in the community.

"It helps so much this year," said Lori Flickinger, who was with her 10-year-old daughter, Tanna. "This place has really helped me and my daughter."

Flickinger lost her job and her home in Lockeford after she had surgery in April to remove a massive brain tumor. She was given a 7 percent chance to survive, but she said the surgery and subsequent chemotherapy treatments have her looking at a long future. Lori and her daughter have lived the past several months at the Stockton Shelter for the Homeless.

"I hope to be back on track soon," Flickinger said. "I'm really happy for this place."

Wednesday's guests at the dining hall included men, women and children of all ages. They were served plates heaped with ribs, chicken, lasagna, salad and fresh fruit, just to name several items, and there was enough diversity to satisfy most anyone's taste.

The food was donated by Bottley's BBQ, Richard Eales Home of Stockton, El Super Mercado Mexican Meat Market, Fat's Sports Bar and Grill, Gaines Liquor, Gian's Deli, Graduate of Stockton, John's Incredible Pizza, Octavio Cruces' Casa Flores, Michael's Pizza and Gina's Cafe, Pepsi and Whirlow's.

"Everybody I went to doubled their orders and donations from last year," Braden said. "We have three new sponsors this year. It's growing, and it's going to continue to grow."

Earlier this year, Braden sponsored two boys' expenses to play at Hoover Tyler League and treated more than 200 area little leaguers to an A's game.

Braden graduated from Stagg and attended American River College and Texas Tech University before being selected by the A's in the 24th round of the 2004 Draft. He spent four years in the A's minor league system, including a stint for Stockton in 2005 and 2006, before he made his major league debut in 2007.

Braden was the A's Opening Day starter last season and went 8-9 with a 3.89 ERA in 22 starts before a rash led to nerve irritation in his left foot, which ended his season in August.

On Wednesday, Braden said his foot feels fine, though he still has some numbness in the toes. He recently had surgery to correct a nasal defect, which hampered his ability to breathe last season. Spring training for the 2010 season begins in February.

"I feel great," he said. "I spent all last year not being able to breathe fully.

"Now, I can train at a whole different level."

And Braden continues to contribute to his community at a very high level.

### **A's Pitcher Dallas Braden Helps Stockton's Needy**

Written for the web by Posted By: [Tim Daly](#), Reporter News10 ABC, Sacramento, CA

STOCKTON, CA - Lots of people drop by St. Mary's Interfaith Dining Hall during the holidays to donate food. Only one of them is a pitcher for the Oakland Athletics.

Stockton native Dallas Braden has once again collected food from local restaurants and stores, then delivered the food and drink to St. Mary's.

"Everybody that helped out this year, doubled what they donated last year. As far as this being a trying time for them, they looked past that and understood the need," said Braden.

This year's goal was literally a ton of food, and it seems Braden and his helpers came close. Michael's Pizza of Stockton donated 80 pies.

Braden made sure to visit the same restaurants now for donations that he dined at as a child.

"Michael's, for example, sponsored my Little League team when I was 8. I've been eating there since I was 4," he said.

Braden's determination to help the hungry came from examples set by his late mom and grandmother. "My mom being strong and independent, and my grandmother as well - they tried to help with the Women's Shelter as often as they could," he said.

His grandmother, Peggy Lindsey, also helped serve the donated food at St. Mary's on Wednesday.

Braden said that next year he hopes to gather up even more food to be distributed at Thanksgiving.

***Video link to tv news feature on Braden's efforts:***

<http://www.news10.net/news/story.aspx?storyid=70904&catid=2>

## **A's committed to efforts in Bay Area**

### **Club's diverse work ranges from tutoring to holiday parties**

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com 11/26/09

OAKLAND -- Although they generated a modicum of excitement about their future by putting together a solid second half to the 2009 season, the A's weren't quite as successful as they'd hoped to be on the field overall.

Off the field, however, the organization's typically diverse altruistic work was a wild success, as more than 1,500 charitable organizations in the Bay Area benefited from the club's commitment to the community.

Long a pillar of charity work in the Bay Area and beyond, the Oakland A's Community Fund provided approximately \$650,000 in monetary contributions and donated auction items and tickets this year in its efforts to improve the quality of life for people throughout the region.

Specifically, the A's sought to fund endeavors to improve educational programs, aid the underprivileged, assist in crime and drug prevention, promote health awareness, and champion children and senior welfare.

"It is the mission of the A's Community Fund to support charitable organizations that seek to improve the quality of life for people in the Bay Area," said Detra Paige, the club's director of community relations. "With a special emphasis on the local youth, the combined endeavors of A's players and coaches, together with fans and sponsors, can make a meaningful impact that will last a lifetime."

One of the season's charity highlights came on Sept. 5, when the A's raised \$75,690 on Breast Cancer Awareness Day at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum, with proceeds benefiting the American Cancer Society, Northern California Cancer Center and Susan G. Komen for the Cure. In addition, as a part of "A Gift of Faith" grant, the A's donated \$5,000 to Tiburcio Vasquez Health Center in memory of the late Faith Fancher, longtime KTVU Channel 2 reporter.

On Aug. 6, the A's raised more than \$25,000 at the 10th Annual MUG Root Beer Float Day, with proceeds benefiting the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

Over the past 11 years, the A's Breast Cancer Awareness Day has raised more than \$1,075,000 for breast cancer education and research. Since 2003, the A's have raised over \$270,000 for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation through MUG Root Beer Float Day.

"Each season, the A's host unique events ... to raise funds for research and education, whether it be for breast cancer, juvenile diabetes or autism," Paige said. "The club is committed to a cure."

The A's remained committed to providing educational opportunities for Bay Area children as well.

More than 20,000 students in 100 local schools participated in the A's "Home Run Readers" program during the 2008-09 school year. Seventy-eight schools reached their goals, and 20 schools received a visit from a member of the A's front office and the A's mascot, Stomper.

Six of those schools received a visit from an A's player or coach to congratulate the students on reaching their goals and to encourage them to continue reading outside of the classroom. The program concluded with A's Home Run Readers Day, May 27, at the Coliseum.

The A's also designed and distributed more than 22,000 "Mathletics" workbooks, which utilize simple formulas for calculating statistics of A's players, to students in an effort to stress the importance of math among Bay Area youth. Both workbooks were also available online at [oaklandathletics.com](http://oaklandathletics.com).

Students who completed their workbooks correctly and submitted the answer sheet to the A's received two ticket vouchers. In addition, one school which demonstrated outstanding participation in the program received a visit from an A's player.

Since the program's inception in 2003, more than 170,000 Bay Area and Northern California students -- in first through eighth grades -- have participated.

Before selected A's home games, volunteers offered tutoring at the Coliseum for at-risk students as a part of the Green Stampede Homework Club. Students who attend the study group were rewarded with tickets to that night's game, and if the student attended all eight study groups, they received a visit from an A's player.

The A's Amigos program gave Hispanic children the opportunity to hear an A's player speak about the importance of education, sportsmanship and hard work. In addition to the pregame visit, each child received a game ticket and an A's hat.

"The A's feel that education is extremely important in our local schools, and that is why we focus on reading and arithmetic in our Home Run Readers and 'Mathletics' programs," Paige said. "We understand the challenges teachers face in motivating their students to read or do math, both inside and outside the classroom, so we put a rewards system together for these programs, such as tickets to a game or a visit by players such as Kurt Suzuki, Rajai Davis or Cliff Pennington."

Opening Night starter Dallas Braden, second baseman Mark Ellis and relievers Brad Ziegler and Craig Breslow also provided examples of the players' willingness to get involved in charitable works on their own.

"A's players showed their commitment to giving back by becoming involved in events close to their heart," Paige said. "We saw this through Suzuki's fundraising for friend Jon Wilhite, Dallas Braden's commitment to his city of Stockton ... and Craig Breslow's dedication to raising funds and awareness for childhood cancer by working with Children's Hospital Oakland during the season and raising \$85,000 at his own foundation's fundraiser."

With the help of A's fans and the Community Fund, Suzuki and his wife, Renee, raised more than \$61,000 for the "Jon Wilhite Recovery Fund" this season. The Fund was set up to assist Suzuki's good friend and former teammate from Cal State Fullerton, Jon Wilhite, who was the lone survivor of the April 9 crash that took the lives of Angels pitcher Nick Adenhardt and two others.

Braden, intensely devoted to his hometown of Stockton, Calif., sponsored two brothers being raised by a single mother -- he paid for all costs associated with them playing Little League baseball in Stockton and hosted the entire league for a game in Oakland -- in the inaugural year of a program through which he'll annually assist families in similar circumstances.

Ellis and Zeigler helped push the total of donated A's tickets to 2,000, with local charities and nonprofit agencies such as Big Brothers, Big Sisters of the East Bay, Boys & Girls Club of Oakland and Operation One Family among the recipients.

The Oakland A's Community Fund Golf Classic, staged at Castlewood Country Club in Pleasanton, Calif., on June 25, raised more than \$150,000 for the A's Community Fund through the tournament and silent and live auctions.

Also, the team raised \$130,000 for the family trust funds of the four Oakland Police officers, Sgts. Mark Dunakin, Ervin Romans and Daniel Sakai and Officer John Hege, who were killed in the line of duty on March 21, 2009. Funds were raised through A's fan and player donations, the A's Silent Auction and a special law enforcement ticket offer, plus a matching donation by A's owner Lew Wolff and principal partner John Fisher.

Several other programs raised money for various charities, and the A's aren't done for the year just yet.

During the first week of December, Davis and Ziegler will participate in the Walnut Creek and San Jose holiday parades and host an autograph session at Stoneridge Mall. They also will host a holiday shop-a-long with Oakland children at the mall on Dec. 5; 10 children from the Henry Robinson Multi-Service Center in Oakland will receive a \$200 gift card for themselves and a \$50 gift card to purchase a gift for someone else.

On Dec. 11, the A's will hold their annual holiday party at the Oakland Zoo, with a Civicorp Academy charter school, featuring games, activities, Round Table pizza and a meet and greet with Vida Blue and pitching prospect Tyson Ross for 200 students.

"The A's organization," Paige said, "is a proud, reliable and dedicated member of its community."

## **A's reportedly interested in Cuban pitcher Noel Arguelles**

By Joe Stiglich, Bay Area News Group, blog 11/26/09

Check out this story from Yahoo's Jeff Passan, which discusses [the A's interest in Cuban defector Noel Arguelles](#), a highly touted left-handed pitcher. I know fans at Athletics Nation are all over this, too. The story says Arguelles attracted quite a crowd of major league executives while pitching in the Dominican Republic recently. It also mentions that A's GM Billy Beane and assistant GM David Forst met with him in the Dominican. I haven't asked Beane or Forst about Arguelles. But during my [interview with A's co-owner Lew Wolff](#) yesterday, Wolff mentioned more than once that continuing to sign international talent was a top priority for the team. Something to keep an eye out for ...

Here's wishing everyone a Happy Thanksgiving!!!

## **A's owner optimistic about team, San Jose stadium**

Joe Stiglich, Bay Area News Group 11/25/09

These can't be the rosier of times for A's co-owner Lew Wolff.

His battle to find a new home for his baseball team continues, with no obvious end in sight.

Discontent grows among the A's fan base, with the perception being the organization can't wait to bolt Oakland for greener pastures.

And the A's are trying to snap a string of three losing seasons in an American League West division that is getting stronger across the board.

But Wolff, 73, is optimistic the A's are pointed in the right direction. That was abundantly clear during a phone interview Tuesday afternoon with the Bay Area News Group.

"We could still use a hitter or two, but we could field the team we have, be a young team and be very competitive next year," said Wolff, the A's managing partner. "And I'm sure (general manager Billy Beane) will make some additions as we move through the winter."

The A's have designs on moving to San Jose, partly because the Oakland Coliseum is seen as a relic and partly because of sagging attendance that ranked last in the majors in 2009. The poor crowds seemingly could be attributed in part to the belief that the A's can't — or won't — hold on to their big-name players.

That perception was reinforced after the 2007 season, when they traded pitcher Dan Haren and outfielder Nick Swisher, then dealt pitchers Joe Blanton and Rich Harden during the 2008 season.

Solid baseball reasons were given, and those deals netted prospects who helped transform the A's farm system into one of the majors' best. Still, the A's traded four core players who were under team control and making reasonable salaries.

Wolff was asked if, in hindsight, he has considered the public-relations backlash to the strategy.

"It isn't like, if we had a winning team, we would have had double the attendance," Wolff said. "If you trace it back for a long time, we're in a market that's difficult to tap. We're close to the Giants, who have a beautiful ballpark. I don't think the fact that we traded some guys "... When you look back at what we sent out, I think the balance sheet is in our favor, thanks to Billy and his guys."

Wolff's optimism about next season stems from some promising young players — particularly on the pitching staff.

To retain their budding stars long term, the A's say they will need a new stadium that draws bigger crowds and provides more revenue.

San Jose city leaders have secured the land where a 32,000-seat stadium could be built. But plans are on hold until a panel appointed by Major League Baseball finishes its study of possible locations throughout the Bay Area.

Wolff is aware of the scorn he has generated for recent comments about the futility of trying to build a new stadium in Oakland.

"We spent three solid years trying to (look) in Oakland. There are some people who think we didn't do anything," Wolff said.

"If you sat down with me (to examine) the details with the effort in Oakland, it takes me about an hour and 45 minutes to go through my notes."

Of course, to get the coveted revenue that a San Jose stadium could provide, it's assumed the South Bay fan base would jump on the A's bandwagon. Wolff was asked if he is worried about alienating the team's East Bay fans.

"I don't need heavy research to tell me that if we can get farther away from the Giants, that's the best option for us," he said.

"In our East Bay market, especially around the city of Oakland, a lot of them may gravitate toward the Giants. I don't know. But you're talking about (a San Jose stadium) being the smallest ballpark in baseball at 32,000 seats. We're measuring our bet by not building 54,000 seats."

After the MLB panel concludes its findings, a big hurdle remains — the territorial rights to San Jose belong to the Giants. And major league owners would have to vote to waive those rights before the A's could move to the city.

Wolff points to the Angels and Dodgers — who share territorial rights to common regions in Southern California — and believes that no geographic distinctions are necessary.

"The Bay Area can have two football teams and survive," he said. "It should be looked at as one area."

## **A's relief duo up for TYIB Awards**

### **Wuertz, Bailey excelled at back end of Oakland's bullpen**

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com 11/25/09

OAKLAND -- In a season marked by wild inconsistency from points all over their roster, the A's got remarkably steady work from the two workhorses in their bullpen.

Oakland closer Andrew Bailey was named the American League's 2009 Rookie of the Year earlier this month, in part because the stellar work of fellow right-hander Michael Wuertz. Bailey, who didn't take over the closer role until the middle of May, had 26 saves. Wuertz racked up 23 holds.

Thus, Bailey is in the mix for another award, and Wuertz has a shot at earning his own.

For the eighth consecutive year, MLB.com is asking fans to help determine the winners of its annual This Year in Baseball Awards. Bailey is up for the top rookie honor, while Wuertz is a nominee for top setup man.

The ballot boxes will close at 4:59 p.m. PT on Dec. 11. In 2008, a record 12 million votes were cast for the TYIB Awards, and that figure could be surpassed this time around as fans weigh in on the year's top hitter, pitcher, moments and more. The results of the voting will be revealed during the week of Dec. 14-18.

"They were practically automatic, both of them," A's manager Bob Geren said in early October. "Andrew's numbers speak for themselves, but Wuertz was kind of the unsung hero for us. In my mind, there's no question he was the best setup guy in our league."

Thanks largely to his dominant slider, Wuertz held opposing hitters to a .188 batting average while leading AL relievers with 102 strikeouts in posting a 6-1 record with a 2.63 ERA over a career-high 78 2/3 innings.

"If we had the lead when [Wuertz] came into the game," Bailey said, "we pretty much always had the lead when he left the game."

And if the A's had the lead when Bailey entered the game, they pretty much always won the game. He converted his final 20 save opportunities.

Bailey set the Oakland rookie record for saves and posted a 6-3 record with a 1.84 ERA, a 0.88 WHIP and 91 strikeouts against 24 walks in 83 1/3 innings over 68 appearances.

"He had an incredible year," Wuertz said. "It would have been a great year for any closer, but to do it as a rookie makes it even more impressive."

## **Putting the pieces back together**

By Jerry Crasnick, ESPN.com 11/25/09

A pitcher's manhood is routinely defined by what he throws instead of who he really is. Does he have the self-assurance to pitch inside? Is he "man" enough to throw the breaking ball on a full count, or tough enough to go eight or nine innings and save the bullpen for the following night?

Justin Duchscherer became conditioned to view himself through the prism of wins, losses and ERA in five seasons with the Oakland A's. But in truth, his most enduring display of fortitude came far from the pitchers' mound, in a terminal at Phoenix's Sky Harbor Airport in late July.

The journey began with a flash of self-awareness, followed by a desperate plea for help.

While the baseball world was preoccupied with trade rumors at the July deadline, Duchscherer stayed busy completing his rehabilitation from spring training elbow surgery. After five months of doctor's visits and solitary workouts, a part of him exulted over the prospect of taking the final step and rejoining his teammates in Oakland.

But as crunch time approached, Duchscherer's competitive instincts gave way to a sense of isolation and despair. As he prepared to board a flight to Triple-A Sacramento for his final rehab outing, he placed a frantic call to Dr. Ray Karesky, the psychologist who runs the A's employee assistance program.

"I was in the airport and it was time to go and I froze," Duchscherer says. "I couldn't even get on the plane to do something I've loved my whole life. You go from excited and looking forward to being back with the guys and playing ball to sitting at your house saying, 'What happened?'"

"I guess the word that best describes it is 'overwhelmed.' I was so confused, I didn't know if I should retire or if I even cared about baseball anymore. I didn't know what was wrong."

In late August, Duchscherer revealed that he was putting his baseball career on hold to undergo treatment for clinical depression. Rather than mask his problems with a pulled hamstring or pseudo-malady, he chose to acknowledge his personal baggage and address the issue publicly.

Those efforts have taken him to a better place, less cluttered with internal conflict and self-doubt, and allowed him to concentrate on being a better father and person. If Duchscherer isn't necessarily a new man at age 32, he can take pride in being a more enlightened, grounded version of the old one.

That's a development worth celebrating as he spends Thanksgiving at his mother's house in Lubbock, Texas, with his son, Evan, age 6.

"It was really important for me to change -- to accept how I viewed myself and the things I've been through," Duchscherer says. "If someone says, 'He's weak' or 'He's soft,' that's not my problem. It's on them."

### **A downward spiral**

Baseball players, like all male athletes, inhabit a culture in which sensitivity is perceived as a sign of weakness, and the inability to deliver a base hit in the clutch is regarded as a character flaw. But as society grows more cognizant of emotional disorders in the age of Oprah, the clubhouse seems more accepting of frailties that can't be measured on the 20-80 scouts' scale.

Cincinnati first baseman Joey Votto, St. Louis shortstop Khalil Greene and Detroit pitcher Dontrelle Willis made news for their struggles with anxiety-related issues last season. And Zack Greinke, the brilliant young Kansas City Royals pitcher whose career was nearly derailed by a depression and social anxiety disorder, won the American League's Cy Young Award last week.

Duchscherer, a bright and introspective Texan, is the type of player who's routinely described as an "overachiever." Boston selected him in the eighth round of the 1996 draft, and he spent eight years in the minors before sticking with Oakland in 2004. Duchscherer went on to make two All-Star teams -- one as a reliever and another as a starter -- despite a skinny frame and a fastball clocked in the 86-88 mph range.

"

I felt like a total failure. I felt like, 'I can't stay healthy enough to perform, so I'm not doing my job, and I failed at my marriage.' I started to get into a lot of negative thought patterns.

" -- *Pitcher Justin Duchscherer*

Yet the same perfectionist's streak that drove Duchscherer to succeed also made him brutally hard on himself. Damon Lapa, Duchscherer's agent, saw it firsthand in a game against Boston in late May 2008: After throwing eight one-hit innings to beat Josh Beckett and the Red Sox 3-0, Duchscherer spent more time lamenting the fastball that David Ortiz hit for a single than celebrating his victory.

"Instead of looking at the game as a success -- like, 'I just one-hit one of the best offenses in the game' -- I went home and I was disappointed because I gave up a hit," Duchscherer says. "I kept ruminating over what I could have done differently to Ortiz. It was just a terrible way to look at things."

Even as Duchscherer's baseball career blossomed, his personal life began to unravel. He separated from his wife, Michele, in April 2007, and their four-year marriage officially ended in late 2008. The ordeal dredged up unresolved issues from Duchscherer's parents' divorce when he was 10, and led to feelings of guilt and shame.

The strain of a ballplayer's life didn't help. Since he's on the road eight months a year and Evan lives in New Jersey with his mother, Duchscherer sees his son sporadically. During the 2008 season, he was able to channel his anguish over his failed marriage into his pitching, but he didn't have that luxury this year. When the A's broke camp in April, Duchscherer stayed behind in Arizona to focus on his rehab. The more time he spent alone, the more he missed Evan and dwelled on his shortcomings as a husband and a father.

"It was a combination of baseball and the divorce," Duchscherer says. "I felt like a total failure. I felt like, 'I can't stay healthy enough to perform, so I'm not doing my job, and I failed at my marriage.' I started to get into a lot of negative thought patterns."

Duchscherer's downward spiral took him to a dark, lonely and all too common destination. The World Health Organization defines depression as a "a common mental disorder" that results in "depressed mood, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep or appetite, low energy and poor concentration." The malady affects about 121 million people worldwide, and is a significant factor in the estimated 850,000 suicides annually. Depression can be treated successfully up to 80 percent of the time by psychotherapy, medication and changes in diet, exercise and lifestyle, but the WHO reports that fewer than 25 percent of people afflicted receive treatment.

### **Ballplayers aren't immune**

Karesky, who has a master's degree in education from Harvard and a Ph.D. in counseling psychology from Arizona State, has seen dozens of Justin Duchscherers in big league clubhouses. He runs employee assistance programs for the A's, Toronto Blue Jays and San Diego Padres, and has done counseling work for the Arizona Diamondbacks, Tampa Rays, Washington Nationals and the Major League Baseball umpires.

In a sense, Karesky was ahead of the curve. He was working at St. Luke's Hospital in Phoenix in the mid-1980s when A's officials Sandy Alderson and Karl Kuehl met him during a search to find someone to organize a counseling program for the Oakland players.

"They asked about my background, and I told them I had worked a great deal with disturbed adolescents," Karesky recalls. "They looked at each other, smiled and said, 'Sounds good to us.'"

Karesky has been a counselor to corporate executives, firefighters and Vietnam War veterans as well as ballplayers. Although he acknowledges the unique pressures faced by those in life-or-death occupations, he says it doesn't minimize the challenges that professional athletes encounter.

"The public doesn't recognize that it's a stressful lifestyle," Karesky says. "Most of these kids leave the security of home and have heavy demands placed on them at a young age. They're expected to perform at the highest level of their profession in front of vast amounts of people, in a 24-hour news cycle where everything they do wrong is repeated over and over on the Internet and blogs.

"I can see people out there saying, 'How can we feel sorry for these overpaid, pampered guys?' Baseball players have the attitude, 'Hey, we're not asking for anybody to feel sorry for us. We know we have a good deal.' But one of the problems is, they buy into the idea that they shouldn't have these issues. They're very hard on themselves.

"Just because somebody gives you money and fame doesn't mean it gives you wisdom, common sense or maturity. The reality is, ballplayers are in an extremely demanding environment that produces stress they're not trained to deal with. It's a pressure cooker, and over time that stress can build up and take a real toll."

To those who contend that baseball players were tougher or more "manly" in the good old days, Karesky counters that depression and other mental disorders were just as prevalent in previous generations. Just because ballplayers failed to acknowledge it and drifted toward alcoholism or other destructive behavior didn't mean the problems were nonexistent. In his work with the A's and other clubs, Karesky tries to break the barriers gradually. He engages players in casual conversation at the ballpark, where they're in their element and more inclined to let down their guard and confide in "Doc Ray." It was that sense of trust and comfort that prompted Duchscherer to call him from the airport that fateful day in Phoenix.

### **Self-acceptance, unconditionally**

Duchscherer has been on a journey of self-discovery during his ordeal. He's read books on anxiety, depression and psychosomatic disorders. He has also become a devotee of Albert Ellis, a renowned psychologist who pioneered the concept of U.S.A. -- or "unconditional self-acceptance."

You're going to have the same emotions whether you have a million dollars or five dollars in the bank. Sure, it makes it easier to pay your rent. But when you're divorced and separated from your son, having money doesn't make it feel any better.

*" --Justin Duchscherer*

During his treatment, Duchscherer was fortunate to receive whole-hearted support from his agent, Lapa, and the A's, who treated him as a friend in need of help more than a commodity or a drain on the payroll. David Forst, Oakland's assistant general manager, declined to address the specifics of Duchscherer's condition because of medical confidentiality laws, but said the A's are aware of the burden that depression places on players.

"It's not something we have a ton of experience with, but we recognize that being a Major League Baseball player doesn't make someone immune from the issues that people in everyday life have to deal with," Forst says. "That certainly extends to mental health issues. We know it's serious, and we would always say that life comes before baseball."

The A's aren't alone in this age of enlightenment. Every news flash puts a crack in the traditional male culture, which regards it as a sign of weakness to admit to emotional or mental setbacks.

"Teams are becoming more educated and aware about the severity of this condition," Lapa says. "It's not just an old boys' attitude anymore of, 'Rub some dirt on it and get back out there.' There's a newfound understanding that this cuts across all lines, all races, all economic statuses. It's something that knows no boundaries."

For all the progress Duchscherer has made in sorting out his life, there is still work to be done and a career to resume. He's looking to land a job as a starting pitcher through free agency, and works out regularly at trainer Brett Fischer's facility in Phoenix.

It appears that he'll have no difficulty finding work. Lapa says that interested teams seem to regard Duchscherer's history of depression as more a "technicality" than an "obstacle" to overcome. As long as clubs think he can still pitch, it's more a yellow caution light than a red flag.



If Duchscherer can help remove the stigma of depression by sharing his story -- and convince another athlete to seek help - it will be a wonderful fringe benefit. That consideration pales next to the feeling he has when he wakes up each morning. He's discovered that it's liberating to live by his own definition of success, and not somebody else's.

"I thought once I got to the big leagues and made my first million dollars, that's where true happiness was," Duchscherer says. "It's not the case. You're going to have the same emotions whether you have a million dollars or five dollars in the bank. Sure, it makes it easier to pay your rent. But when you're divorced and separated from your son, having money doesn't make it feel any better."

Duchscherer continues to miss Evan when they're apart, but he's come to realize that the paternal bond is rooted more in quality time than the quantity of hours spent together. Father and son talk daily on the phone about Evan's fondness for soccer, karate and video games. And when the schedule brings them together, they cherish their trips to the zoo or the amusement park or Chuck E. Cheese.

Four short months ago, Justin Duchscherer was paralyzed at an airport gate and barely knew where to turn. Now he's content with his life's direction and comfortable in his own skin. It's amazing how far a man can travel when he's willing to take that first step.