

A's News Clips, Tuesday, December 1, 2009

Inbox: Should A's bring back Mulder?

A's beat reporter Mychael Urban fields fans' questions

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com 12/1/09

I say the A's need at least one veteran starting pitcher, and I have a feeling Justin Duchscherer will be out of their price range. What's Mark Mulder's status these days? Is he healthy yet?

--Gary J., Concord, Calif.

I spoke with Mark the Monday before Thanksgiving, and he said he's been throwing pain-free for some time. What he isn't able to do just yet is repeat his mechanics, i.e. find and hold the same arm slot. That's been a struggle for him for a long time; it basically traces all the way back to when he tried to pitch through the shoulder pain that led to his performance free-fall in the second half of the 2004 season with Oakland.

Mark wants to pitch in the big leagues again. He's even spent some time working with Rick Peterson, with whom he routinely butted heads when they were both with the A's. Now that Peterson is Ken Macha's pitching coach in Milwaukee, Mulder can't work with him, but he definitely wants to try a comeback.

He won't, however, try a comeback unless he feels like he can be the Mark Mulder of old -- the All-Star-quality, Cy Young-candidate Mark Mulder. He doesn't want to be a "project" who needs extra time and attention with the coaches. If he can't get to that point by the time he throws for interested teams in late January or mid-February, he'll probably just shut it all down and spend the rest of his days on a golf course.

Would the A's be interested in Mulder if he *does* come back? Of course. Who wouldn't?

I'm a big Jack Cust fan. Any chance the A's tell him to leave him glove at home this spring and just focus on mashing?

--Jason B., Brooklyn, N.Y.

No. That wouldn't make any sense from a depth standpoint. Given the A's recent injury history, you have to assume an outfielder or two will get hurt, so Jack is going to have to play a little in the field.

But I do get your point, and I do think Jack and the A's will be better off if all he's asked to do is hit. He had a rough year, but he still put up some decent numbers, and I don't see anyone as proven as Jack in the Minors who can be counted on to match those numbers.

Do you believe GM Billy Beane when he says he's not going to sign any free agents?

--Bob R., Bend, Ore.

He didn't say those exact words, Bob -- every team signs free agents. His point was that he's not going to rely on free agency for any sort of shortcut to sustained success, and I completely believe that he's as committed to that philosophy as he's ever been.

The A's HAVE to go young at this point. They don't have the cash to compete with "win-now" teams, and if they don't go young in a big way right now, what was the point of trading all of the stars over the past two or three years?

It's not just a smart plan -- it's the only plan.

How much will Andrew Bailey's Rookie of the Year Award cost the A's? Isn't he going to get a big raise now?

--Hank R., Philadelphia

Not unless the A's just give him one out of the kindness in their hearts. They have another couple of years of complete control over Bailey's salary, so they can pay him the big league minimum (for players with his service time) next season.

Where the award might end up costing the A's is down the road, in contract extension talks or arbitration. For now, it's just a trophy, and it doesn't cost the A's a dime.

Is Rajai Davis going to be the starter in center field next Opening Day?

--Jesse P., Walnut Creek, Calif.

If he's healthy, he sure ought to be. He's earned it, and the A's don't have anybody waiting in the wings at present. I assume Davis and Ryan Sweeney have starting jobs nailed down in center and right, respectively. As for left field, that's anyone's guess. Scott Hairston is probably the frontrunner, though.

A's International Program Continuing To Grow

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Nov 30, 2009

In the 1980s and 1990s, the Oakland A's had one of the model programs for developing talent in Latin America. However, the team struggled to develop top prospects out of their Latin American program for much of the 2000s, something the team vowed to change in the winter of 2007. Since that time, the A's have increased their investment in that program and are starting to see results.

The Oakland A's international program has gone through a bit of a revival in recent years. Back in the 1990s, the A's were among the league's best at producing talent out of Latin America. 2003 AL MVP [Miguel Tejada](#) and 2003 AL Rookie of the Year Angel Berroa were both graduates of the A's Dominican Academy in the 1990s, as were major league veterans Luis Vizcaino, [Miguel Olivo](#), [Oscar Salazar](#) and [Esteban German](#). However, for much of the 2000s, the talent drain ran a bit dry for the A's in Latin America, as the team was left on the sidelines while the top talents were being signed by larger market teams to seven-figure signing bonuses.

Two years ago, the A's decided to invest more money and resources into their Latin American scouting and development program, and that has produced a number of high-profile signings, including pitcher [Michael Ynoa](#) (who still holds the record for highest signing bonus for any Latin American amateur) and outfielder Jose Sayegh in 2008 and infielder Wilfredo Solano in 2009. The A's have inked more than 20 international amateur free agents since November 2007.

Oakland A's Director of Player Development Keith Lieppman recently returned from the team's Dominican Instructional League camp, where he got a close look at the talent the team has infused into the Latin American program.

"It's exciting to see the young players who are being brought into the system who are going to be good players for us," Lieppman said.

Another sign of the A's increasingly improving Latin American program is the addition of left-handed starter [Pedro Figueroa](#) to the team's 40-man roster this month. Figueroa was signed by the A's out of the Dominican Republic in November of 2003. He moved up through the A's system gradually, pitching for the A's Dominican Summer League team in 2004 and 2005 before finally arriving in the US in 2006. He had a breakthrough season in 2009, going 13-6 with a 3.38 ERA and 145 strike-outs in 152 innings for Low-A Kane County and High-A Stockton. Figueroa was recently named as the A's Minor League Pitcher of the Year by the organization and he will attend his first big league spring training in 2010. Other graduates of the A's Dominican Academy currently on the team's 40-man roster include [Santiago Casilla](#), [Gregorio Petit](#) and [Henry Rodriguez](#).

Left-handers [Omar Duran](#) and [Julio Ramos](#) and right-hander [Argenis Paez](#) may be following in Figueroa's footsteps in the near future. Duran was signed to an amateur free agent contract before the 2008 season. The Dominican native made his US debut this season and threw 15 innings for the A's Arizona Rookie League team. Although he had an ERA of 5.40, Duran struck-out an impressive 21 batters and wowed scouts with a fastball that was clocked as high as 96 MPH. He won't turn 20 until late February. Ramos joined the A's as an amateur free agent in 2006. The Dominican native had a 2.57 ERA and 75 strike-outs in 84 innings for the short-season Vancouver Canadians and the High-A Stockton Ports in 2009. The 21-year-old made his US debut in 2008 and was an Arizona Rookie League post-season all-star that year. Paez, a 2008 international free agent signing out of Venezuela, made his US debut in 2009. He threw 51.1 innings for the AZL A's and posted a 3.68 ERA with 46 strike-outs in 51.1 innings. He will be 19 for all of the 2010 season.

The A's aren't only expanding their international operations in Latin America, however. The team is also increasing their efforts in the Pacific Rim. Last off-season, the team signed their first amateur free agent out of Australia, catcher [Oliver Box](#). Box attended the A's US extended spring training program last April and May, but returned to Australia to finish off the summer. Box is expected to return to the US for extended spring training again in 2010 and may make his US professional debut in the Arizona Rookie League next season.

"He came to our extended spring program. He was maybe a little bit behind everyone else here. We felt like it was in everyone's best interest to send him back to the Australian league. They have a complex and an academy there. The caliber of baseball was more in-tune with where his development was. It would be like rushing one of our young Dominican kids to the US and then putting them at Double-A. It was just too much for him, too soon," Lieppman said.

"I would probably anticipate that he would come to the extended spring training program and from that point on, we'll re-evaluate and see how he is doing. According to all of the reports, he has really improved and has done a lot of better."

With the revival of the team's international program, the A's have been looking for ways to integrate their US and Latin

American development programs more closely. During the fall, the A's host two instructional camps for their most inexperienced rising prospects. One camp is held at the team's Phoenix complex and the other is based out of the team's Dominican baseball academy. Traditionally, the A's have hosted 35-40 players at their US-based Instructional League camp. These players are generally a mix of the team's best prospects from their short-season and A-ball affiliates. The Dominican camp, however, has predominantly been attended by the team's Latin American-born prospects, especially those still competing for the A's Dominican Summer League ballclub.

This year, Oakland sent two American-born prospects to their Dominican academy for extra work during that instructional camp: outfielder [Tyreace House](#) and reliever [Andrew Carignan](#). House was sent to the Dominican to work on developing particular baseball skills and to receive some one-on-one coaching with A's roving instructor Juan Navarette (who ran the Dominican Instructional League camp), while Carignan was in the Dominican to continue his rehab from an elbow injury that cost him most of the regular season.

There are a handful of organizations who make it a general practice to send a small group of American-born prospects to their Dominican Instructional League camp every fall. It is a practice that the A's themselves once had in place more than a decade ago, but hasn't done much of recently. That may be changing soon, according to Lieppman.

"It's something that over the next year or two we are going to look to find candidates to go down there because it is a great experience for the US kids to go down there and see how the Latinos live and the lifestyle," Lieppman said.

"Everything is so different than what they are used to in the States. It is a good exchange program. I think it is beneficial for the baseball and for cultural purposes. It is good for the organization because a lot of the Dominican kids are taking care of our US players now, which is a really interesting concept. Maybe when our Dominican kids come over [to the US], maybe our American kids will make a little more of an effort to understand what they are going through."

News and Notes: [Chris Carter](#) took home the A's Minor League Player of the Year award for a second consecutive season. Carter was the Texas League MVP in 2009 and he hit 28 homeruns and drove-in 115 runs for Double-A Midland and Triple-A Sacramento...The A's have come to terms with former top Angels prospect [Dallas McPherson](#) on a minor league contract. McPherson will be invited to the A's big league spring training camp and should have a chance to compete for a spot on the team's 25-man roster as a third baseman...The Sacramento River Cats hosted a memorial service for owner Art Savage at Raley Field on Saturday. Savage passed away suddenly on November 21st. Savage brought the River Cats to Sacramento in 1999 and turned them into one of the most successful minor league franchises – both on and off the field – in the US. He was involved in Bay Area sports for many years and was the first president of the [San Jose Sharks](#) hockey club. Savage was 58 years old...Catcher [Joel Galarraga](#), who was signed by the A's out of the Mexican League last season, is continuing to progress in his recovery from right shoulder surgery. He is in month six of an eight month recovery and has begun throwing short distances.