

## A's News Clips, Friday, January 22, 2010

### Oakland A's third baseman Eric Chavez is eager to get started after several injury-plagued seasons

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune 1/22/2010

January always is a cheery month for Eric Chavez, when he can smile and joke and talk optimistically about the healthy season he hopes lies ahead.

Such was the case Thursday at the Oakland Coliseum, where the A's longest tenured player and several of his teammates held court during a preseason media gathering.

Chavez, sporting a full beard, spoke of his desire to avoid the disabled list after having the past three years sabotaged by back and shoulder problems.

He's in the final season of a six-year, \$66 million contract. Still just 32, he believes he can coax a few more seasons out of his battered body. But Chavez, returning from a second back surgery performed in June, also is a realist. He firmly stated that he'll retire if 2010 is once again washed away by injury.

"This is it," he said. "If I have back issues in the spring, and my shoulder is hurting and I don't make it through this year, then you probably won't see me on the field ever again."

But that's negative thinking, and right now Chavez is all positive with spring training a month away.

Last week, the A's traded for Kevin Kouzmanoff to be their regular third baseman, leaving the likelihood of Chavez being one extremely well-compensated utility man.

General manager Billy Beane has talked with Chavez about playing first base, getting DH at-bats, perhaps even playing some backup shortstop or outfield (the A's drafted Chavez as a shortstop).

Chavez is breaking in every type of glove imaginable for his role.

"I'm gonna have to get a bigger bag this year, I think," he said.

The A's don't enter the season viewing him in an everyday role — a claim few teams would make regarding their highest-paid player. They think resting him is the best way to keep him healthy and maximize his offensive contributions.

"He looks great," manager Bob Geren said. "I'm always optimistic (about Chavez staying healthy), but it's how he feels. To not have to go out and play every day is going to help his chances a lot."

Geren thinks Chavez, a six-time Gold Glove winner at third base, could easily adjust to first base, where the A's have options in Daric Barton, Jake Fox and stud prospect Chris Carter.

Jack Cust is penciled in as the regular DH, but Geren said he's open to playing Cust in the outfield periodically, which could leave DH at-bats for Chavez.

Chavez was cleared to start hitting three weeks ago, and he'll have taken lots of grounders by the time camp opens.

"I wanna be able to enjoy it, and the last few years have been very unenjoyable for me," Chavez said. "Whatever comes my way, I'm just gonna handle it. Enjoying myself playing baseball again is something I'm looking forward to."

Note: The A's dispatched player personnel director Billy Owens to watch right-hander Ben Sheets' workout in Louisiana on Tuesday. Oakland is considered in the thick to sign the free agent, who is thought to be asking for \$10 million per season but may not get that much. "We still have some flexibility," said Beane, declining to discuss Sheets specifically. "Right now we're trying to add the best players we can with what we have remaining." Sheets sat out last season following elbow surgery.

## **Missed time puts a strain on A's Eric Chavez**

By Monte Poole, Oakland Tribune columnist 1/22/2010

ERIC CHAVEZ watched through the years as members of his baseball family grew up and filed out of Oakland. Teammates with whom he had shared champagne-soaked clubhouses were routinely shown the door in the name of fiscal restraint.

Chavez accepted it, got used to it. He understood he was employed by a company unwavering in its core belief that individuals are replaceable but dollars are precious.

So he knew what it meant on that March afternoon nearly six years ago, when the A's honored him as the exception to their standard practice. He grasped the magnitude of the moment when Billy "Moneyball" Beane rolled a big ball of money into his lap.

It meant the general manager with a reputation for shrewdly shopping baseball's flea market was spending an unprecedented amount of cash and placing an infinite level of trust in Chavez. Because of events beyond the control of Chavez or Beane, that trust was misplaced and the money has gone unearned.

As Chavez attempts yet another comeback, his fourth in four years of what has been an injury-plagued prime, that's what gnaws at his gut.

Though it tugs at his conscience to know he has not been there for his teammates, that the paychecks will come whether he's in the clubhouse or rehabbing or recovering at home, the worst is being unable to reward the judgment of Beane, an intensely proud man who in some ways is like a big brother to Chavez.

"The organization made a huge commitment to me, and I don't feel like I've lived up to my part of the bargain," Chavez said Thursday. "Billy told me when I signed the deal that 'I don't need you to be any more or any less than what you've already done here.' And I've done a lot less."

Entering the final year of the six-year, \$66 million deal he signed in 2004, Chavez has missed 390 of Oakland's past 647 games. He has undergone five surgeries, two on his back and three on his right shoulder. He has been, in short, a wealthy myth.

Though the decision to invest in Chavez was somewhat puzzling when MVPs Jason Giambi and Miguel Tejada were invited to walk, Beane defended the move. He valued having a Gold Glove third baseman, a lefty swinger with power and durability. In the four years prior to the big contract, Chavez averaged 153 games.

"I took a lot of pride in playing 150 to 155 games a year," he said. "Regardless of how streaky I was as a player, I wanted to be on the field."

"I know a lot of people looked at my numbers and were like, 'I don't know if he's worth the money.' But I was healthy. My track record of playing a lot, preventing runs at third base, that's why (Beane) wanted me out there so badly."

Chavez anticipated he'd always be there, diving and throwing on defense, batting in the heart of the order. He looked forward to validating Beane's decision. It's how Chavez was raised, with parents, Cesar and Ruby, who taught Eric and his siblings to value the dollar, to spend wisely, to earn his keep and to reward loyalty.

Growing up with more love than money, Chavez shared with his family much of the \$1.14 million check he received upon signing with the A's out of San Diego's Mount Carmel High — the school Beane attended 15 years earlier — buying his dad a Ford Explorer, his mom a 2-year-old Toyota Camry and his brother a used Nissan Maxima.

Just as generosity is part of his makeup, so is getting something for nothing. It was uncomfortable enough that Billy chose him — not Giambi or Tejada — as the centerpiece of a constantly evolving roster.

Disappointed in his inability to stay in the lineup, Chavez expressed to Beane a measure of remorse. He offered an apology.

"I said, 'I'm not holding up my part of the bargain,' " Chavez recalled. "He told me, 'I know you want to be out there more than anybody. It's not like this is sitting well with you and you're happy to be making money and living life. I know how much this bothers you.' That meant a lot to me. At that point, I knew I could look him in the eye."

Chavez, 32, says 2010 is his "last gasp" attempt to revive his stagnant career, that he'll retire if his body fails him again.

If so, he'll be forever dismayed over what might have been. And he'll forever wish, having been betrayed by his body, he had not been the worst nightmare of a heralded investor like Beane.

## **Report: A's prospect Grant Desme retiring from baseball to become a priest**

Oakland Tribune staff and wire report

Grant Desme, one of the Oakland A's top prospects, has retired from baseball in order to enter the priesthood, [FOXSports.com](http://FOXSports.com) reported Friday morning.

[FOXSports.com](http://FOXSports.com) said an A's official confirmed Desme's decision.

Desme, 23, established himself as a potential big-league standout by batting .288 with 31 home runs, 89 RBI and 40 stolen bases in a combined 131 games over two levels of minor-league play this season. He was minor league baseball's only 30-30 man.

Desme capped off his season by dominating the Arizona Fall League, where many of the game's top prospects compete in each season. Desme was named the league's Most Valuable Player.

Baseball America recently named Desme as the A's 8th-best prospect. Other publications had the outfielder ranked among the Top 5 of Oakland's prospects.

Desme was a second-round draft choice by the A's out of Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo in 2008.

## **A's to Fremont supporters to rally on Monday**

By Matthew Artz, Oakland Tribune

The Chamber of Commerce is sponsoring a rally in support of bringing the Oakland A's to Fremont.

Mayor Bob Wasserman is scheduled to attend the event, scheduled to begin at 6 p.m. Monday at the Saddle Rack, 42011 Boscell Road.

"We're doing it to demonstrate that there is support for the A's coming to Fremont," said the chamber's Nina Moore.

With the A's looking to move to San Jose against the wishes of the San Francisco Giants, Major League Baseball is studying alternative stadium sites in the East Bay, including a new plan to build a stadium in south Fremont on land owned by the NUMMI auto plant.

Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig is expected to receive the study this month.

The A's abandoned their plans to move to Fremont early last year amid opposition from local businesses and residents.

However, the new location at South Grimmer and Fremont boulevards is farther from both the residential neighborhood and businesses that opposed two previous ballpark sites. Also, NUMMI, which opposed both previous stadium plans, is scheduled to shut down April 1.

## **Crisp is healthy, happy, at center of defense**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer 1/22/2010

**Coco Crisp** wanted to make sure that everyone at the Coliseum on Thursday knew this story straight off: The A's new center fielder hit his very first home run in Oakland.

There's no need to race to [baseballreference.com](http://baseballreference.com) if that doesn't sound familiar. Crisp reckons he was 11 years old, and the home run was at a ballpark near his aunt Diane's house and, well, it was actually in Richmond.

"It was a tennis ball, and I hit it over the big fence - have you ever seen 'The Sandlot?' " said Crisp, who was born and raised in the Los Angeles area. "I was all excited and then I realized we had no more ball to play with. It was a huge fence, plus there was a dog on the other side."

Crisp, 30, showed up for his first official A's events Thursday wearing a cheery expression and a jersey with no number. ("That's what I'm going to do this season, no number," he joked. "They'll announce me, 'Now batting, no number, Coco Crisp!'"

He regaled reporters with the tale of how he became "Coco," which he's surely told hundreds of times. It was a little-used childhood nickname, a reference to his resemblance to a cereal-box character, but the Double-A scoreboard operator used it one day and Crisp went on a hot streak, so it stuck. He said it's also OK to call him by his given name, Covelli.

"Fans try to get under my skin by calling me Covelli, and that's fine, because I like my name," Crisp said.

Last year in Kansas City, fans were more likely to yell, "My grandmother throws better than you," Crisp said, adding that it rankled him because it was true, the result of labrum and rotator cuff tears in both shoulders. He missed nearly the entire season after surgery, and he said his recovery is going well. Dr. **James Andrews**, who performed the procedures, told him "everything is coming back perfect."

With a healthy Crisp in center, **Rajai Davis** in left and **Ryan Sweeney** in right, the A's might have one of the best defensive outfields in the league.

"It's unbelievable from the pitchers' standpoint," A's left-hander **Brett Anderson** said.

"Anything hit in the air is going to be caught," lefty **Gio Gonzalez** said.

**Spring big for Chavez:** If **Eric Chavez's** twice-repaired back doesn't hold up during camp, that's it for the six-time Gold Glove third baseman-turned-utility man, Chavez said at Thursday's media event.

"This spring training is going to be the biggest spring training of my life," he said. "It's going to direct my career where it's going to go, or it's going to end my career. ... If my shoulder's not feeling well or my back can't handle the ground balls, then I pretty much know where I lay."

**Briefly:** There are six starters for five spots in the rotation. **Justin Duchscherer**, **Dallas Braden** and Anderson are set. **Trevor Cahill** is likely for the fourth spot, and Gonzalez gets the edge over **Vin Mazzaro** for the final spot, considering

that manager **Bob Geren** said Gonzalez has the "best stuff" on the staff. ... Individual game tickets go on sale Jan. 30. ... The A's will match funds donated by fans for relief efforts in Haiti, up to \$20,000; see [oaklandathletics.com/relief](http://oaklandathletics.com/relief).

## **Chavez doesn't mind utility role**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Kevin Kouzmanoff's arrival in Oakland means that Eric Chavez, a six-time Gold Glove third baseman, essentially will become a utility player if he is healthy.

"I've always been open to playing anywhere," Chavez said. "I've taken a lot of pride in being the best third baseman I can be, but I've never felt that third base is what I *have* to be."

The A's completed the trade Saturday for Kouzmanoff and minor-league infielder Eric Sogard, sending outfielders Scott Hairston and Aaron Cunningham to the Padres. Kouzmanoff will be Oakland's everyday third baseman, taking over for one of his idols.

"That guy is a heck of a ballplayer, man. I've got some competition," Kouzmanoff said on a conference call. "And he's one of my favorite players to watch. I've admired him for a long time."

When Kouzmanoff was a rookie with Cleveland, former A's hitting coach Dave Hudgens introduced him to Chavez.

"Hudgens told me, 'You're this kid's favorite player, can he get a jersey?' " Chavez said. "I talked to him and he was really polite. ... When I heard he was coming over, it was kind of exciting."

If Chavez is fully recovered after two back surgeries and three shoulder surgeries, he believes the plan is that he will spell Kouzmanoff once or twice a week, maybe DH once or twice a week, play first base on occasion, perhaps even serve as the team's backup shortstop, because it's Chavez's natural position. He said he might play there once a week, and he is also intrigued by the idea of playing in the outfield.

A's general manager Billy Beane said that Chavez "probably wouldn't have trouble transitioning" to other positions because of his athleticism. "If Eric is able to come back, it would be a good problem to have," Beane said of finding Chavez a spot.

After dedicating himself to improving his defense, Kouzmanoff set a National League record for fielding percentage by a third baseman last year, when he made only three errors, and Beane said that moving out of spacious Petco Park might help Kouzmanoff offensively.

Beane said the team has liked Sogard since he played at Arizona State. According to Beane, finding a backup for shortstop Cliff Pennington is the top priority before spring training, although Aaron Miles and Gregorio Petit are both candidates and a healthy Chavez might be the surprise option.

"Everything is predicated on my health," Chavez said. "Right now, all I want is to get on the field. My goal is just to make it through the season, and Kouzmanoff is helping me do that."

"Everyone thinks this is a big insult thing, but it's not - this will help me."

## **Healthy Crisp ready for season**

### **Outfielder thinks A's have chance for a special year**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- As expected, Eric Chavez undoubtedly proved to be the star of the A's preseason media gathering held Thursday.

The A's longest-tenured player not only sported a new look in the form of a full beard but, more importantly, answered questions surrounding his questionable baseball future in front of dozens of reporters at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum.

And just minutes after Chavez was rescued from the media mayhem, another injury-plagued player all too familiar with shoulder setbacks like the ones Chavez has endured took his seat.

"We haven't shared scars yet," said the next victim with a laugh, referring to his mending teammate.

Said victim was offseason pickup Coco Crisp, who arguably stole the show away from Chavez within minutes.

Oakland's newly acquired outfielder, signed as a free agent Dec. 23, quickly proved he not only makes a good story, but tells a great one, as well.

Just ask him about his ties to the Bay Area, and he'll promptly talk about the first home run he ever hit in nearby Richmond.

Crisp was 11 or 12 years old at the time, visiting his Aunt Diane, when he joined some buddies in a baseball game played with tennis balls.

Well, one ball to be exact.

"I hit it over the fence," Crisp said. "And then it was gone. We didn't have another tennis ball."

Already sounding eerily similar to "The Sandlot," a reporter asks why Crisp simply didn't climb the fence.

"Oh, it was a huge fence," he replied. "There was no way to climb that thing."

So what did you do the next day?

"Nothing," he said. "We had to save up to buy more tennis balls."

Crisp then paused before announcing, "So I have some rich history here."

Thus, come Opening Day, Crisp hopes to build on that history -- this time with a baseball.

"I'm very excited to be here with this team," Crisp said. "I think that we have the chance to do something special here."

Following a trade from Boston -- where he earned a World Series ring -- to Kansas City just a year ago, Crisp had those same hopes for the Royals.

"We got off to a hot start, we had a good team, and I thought that if we were able to stay healthy, we might actually be able to surprise some people there," he said. "I started off with probably one of my best years as far as seeing the ball and on-base percentage."

It only lasted for 49 games, though, as Crisp went out with a season-ending right shoulder injury before Kansas City decided not to exercise his option for 2010.

"I tried to play a little bit with it even though I couldn't, so that was frustrating," he said. "Nobody wants to get hurt and lose a whole season and lose a chance to make something magical happen. It's hard when you have fans out there telling you your grandmother can throw further than you -- even though she probably could."

"It was a tough decision to not play the whole season hurt. I think everybody who's a gamer would just play hurt. I tried to do that, and then the decision had to be made to have surgery."

Following the procedure on his torn labrum June 24, Crisp endured another operation -- this time on his left shoulder -- in late July.

The 30-year-old outfielder insists, though, that both shoulders -- which hold a combined 12 pins -- should not be cause for concern entering camp in a few weeks.

"I definitely don't think it's going to affect me at all," he said. "I'm excited to start a whole new season and come back in great shape and stay healthy."

Crisp is equally eager to share an outfield with the likes of Ryan Sweeney and fellow speedster Rajai Davis, who finished fifth in the American League with 41 stolen bases last season while mostly playing in center field -- Crisp's natural home.

"To bring me in here can be questioned, especially with [Davis'] capabilities of playing center too, but I believe we can have a special outfield in whatever order you put us in," he said. "I'm actually looking forward to learning more about his base stealing techniques. I think you can always learn from a guy who's very talented in something, and he really excels, not only in base stealing, but other aspects of his game as well."

Looking at Crisp's career numbers, it's easy to assume he'll become a popular go-to guy for help in the clubhouse, as well.

The outfielder, who is now on his fourth different team in eight Major League seasons, owns a career .277 average to go along with 137 stolen bases and a reputation for defensive prowess.

"I'm here now," he said. "I'm healthy. I'm happy. I feel like I'm going to have a good year."

## **Chavez eyes more versatile role with A's**

### **Third baseman looking forward to spending time at first in '10**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Eric Chavez has no interest in painting a perfectly pretty and pain-free picture of his future.

If he did, green and gold colors would likely stand out among the rest. Diamonds -- the four-base kind, of course -- would sparkle all around. Gold Gloves would surely add a nice touch.

The harsh reality, though, is that Chavez knows said picture isn't just a brushstroke away. In fact, the A's \$66 million man realizes the chances of any of those things actually coming to life are slim.

So Chavez is done thinking about plans, let alone making them. And he's done promising anything -- to fans, teammates, employers and, most importantly, himself -- until his body gives him permission to do otherwise.

"I'm going to go about it intelligently in Spring Training, but as far as I'm concerned, I want to know that I can do everything and not have to worry too much about how my body is going to respond," he says. "I don't want to have that injury factor in the back of my mind."

Chavez simply can't pinky swear a seventh Gold Glove or even a minimum number of plate appearances. After all, his surgically repaired right shoulder and back do most of the talking these days, leaving Chavez little to say about his baseball career without starting a sentence with "if."

And "If I'm healthy..." doesn't exactly ease any sort of planning process.

Thus, the one-time A's franchise player is throwing out the plans and sticking with options -- optimistic but realistic options catered toward his body's ever-changing health. And playing first base has recently become one of them.

Now, with fresh trade acquisition Kevin Kouzmanoff entrenched at third base, Chavez's longtime coveted territory, it has potential to be the best one.

"It's a good situation for me," Chavez says. "Kouz is the third baseman, no question, and that provides me the chance to make it through the year. It's not like third base or bust, and that's the way I see it. My biggest concern this year is obviously to be healthy. My second concern is to be productive offensively. And third is whatever I can do on the field.

"I'm thankful for the opportunity to not just have to be playing third base -- because that's kind of the pressure that I felt, that I was the third baseman and they had nobody else. Now we have positions that are filled all over the field, and there's opportunity for me to play first, split some time with Jack [Cust] at DH, maybe some short and some outfield."

General manager Billy Beane has no problem seeing Chavez spell probable starter Daric Barton at first base. The idea amuses the 32-year-old Chavez, who is promptly asked about his feelings toward playing a position where his experience adds up to "once or twice."

"I don't know, to be honest with you," he replies with a laugh.

His honest answer may seem apathetic at best, but don't think for a second Chavez isn't serious about the notion nor willing to learn the position. He's already one step ahead.

"I just ordered some first baseman gloves from my agent the other day," he says. "So I'm just going to try to make the adjustment as best I can."

Right now, that's all anybody can ask of a guy who has played in only 121 games over the past three seasons. And that's really all Chavez can ask of himself.

Don't worry, his shoulder and back have responded quite well to the little baseball action he's been able to do at his Phoenix home. His back makes for bad mornings, but once in the gym stretching and exercising, "I feel like I can do anything," Chavez says. Furthermore, he can throw, hit and take ground balls on a steady basis. Whether he can maintain those exercises at a Spring Training pace, though, remains to be seen.

"This Spring Training is going to be the biggest Spring Training of my life," Chavez says. "It's going to direct my career where it's going to go, or it's going to end my career.

"Physically, I'm going to know whether I can handle it or not. If my shoulder's not feeling well or my back can't handle the ground balls, then I pretty much know where I lay."

Chavez has already repeatedly relayed much of this information to Beane, who has wholeheartedly stood by his injury-plagued player.

Says Chavez: "I told Billy, 'Look, without even talking myself out of feeling good, I really feel like the chances of me recovering and being healthy this year are really good.' But I told him I really can't give him any exact answers until I start playing."

And so the "if" game continues.

Former tutor Ron Washington, who was largely instrumental in Chavez's development as a Gold Glove defender and has since taken the managerial reins in Texas, is more than happy to play along with the game. He easily sees Chavez conquering a corner-infield switch.

"If he stays healthy, he will perform," Washington says. "I think if anyone could make that switch and get a Gold Glove at another position, it would be Eric. He simply has the hands, and he has the knowledge of ways to be a good defensive player. It all comes down to what I told Eric when I was with him. It's up to him. It's up to Eric. If he wants to do it, he will be very good at it."

Chavez sees himself more than ready for the challenges that come along with playing first base -- well, almost.

"Everybody I've talked to before has said, 'You just gotta remember when the ball is hit to go to first base,'" he says. "So that's going to be the biggest adjustment because when you're at third and the ball's hit, you just kinda watch and look at what's going to happen with the play. At first, you're involved in every play, so that's what I have to get to my head. That's going to be the biggest change for me."

He says this with a laugh and is quickly reminded that if remembering to go to first base is his biggest worry of the spring, then that could very well be an excellent sign of a healthy season ahead.



"That's true," he says. "If I'm out there pain-free, I'll manage finding first base."

Chavez would rather not think about the "if it doesn't work out" scenarios, explaining that he's excited for that next step in his life, but still eagerly wants to fulfill his current one.

"I'm still with the A's, and I'm still in the process of ending my six-year commitment to them, and it's important to me to fulfill that," he says. "My mind's focus is completely to get healthy, to enjoy myself, and to be a productive Oakland Athletic this year."

"They've obviously afforded me the luxury of being financially set for life, so I'm not really looking toward that next step yet. But if it comes, I'm definitely ready for it. Baseball's been a big part of my life, but I know that it could all come to an end, so I'm prepared for that if it happens to come this year."

Boy, what a story it would be if it's not for a couple more, though -- especially considering Chavez's strong desire to give back what he's been taught during his 11 Major League seasons.

"I feel like I've climbed so many hills now that I've gained so much knowledge, not only from just being successful in the game, but from having to work myself back from the bottom," he says. "At third, I really feel a lot of knowledge has been passed down to me from Ron Washington, and it really soaked in with me, and it's really helped me become one of the better third basemen in the league."

"Because of that, I feel like there's a lot of knowledge to pass on, and in the infield, it's all pretty much the same stuff, and there's a lot of stuff you can pass on, whether you're at third base or first base. I've really had to work hard at becoming a real good defensive player because it didn't come easy to me. I feel like it's now time for me to start passing that on. If the guys are wanting to talk to me, I'm definitely willing to help for sure."

Never mind his smaller role as a utility player -- if healthy, of course. His larger role will come as a mentor, Washington assures.

"When you are a teacher, you need to apply what you've been given," the Rangers skipper says. "Eric worked hard at it, and so I think all the credit of what he accomplished definitely goes to him. He'll be wonderful with the younger guys."

"That's what you do. Everything in this game of baseball is always about someone who's influenced you, and you want to take what they gave to you and continue to pass it on. That's how you keep the game moving."

All this talk, though, forces Chavez to pause before taking reality's hand again.

"None of it matters if I'm not healthy," he says. "You can't be an influence when you're only playing in 20 games during the season and spending three quarters of the year at home. So my presence won't even matter unless I'm on the field playing."

Only time will tell if Chavez's career takes a small step forward or a permanently large step back. Both prospects obviously present outcomes on two very different spectrums, but Chavez is ready to finally know which direction he needs to take.

"I've definitely been more nervous about it in the past, but I think the fact I'm pretty realistic with myself -- knowing that the odds are stacked against me -- helps," he says. "Baseball just hasn't been real too enjoyable for me over the last few years, so that's why my outlook on it is to just go out and have fun."

"I'm working my butt off to get healthy physically, and I want to allow myself to at least enjoy myself if it's going to be the last time I'm on the field."

## **Is Chavez's body friend or foe?**

Lowell Cohn, Santa Rosa Press Democrat, 1/22/2010

OAKLAND — With some baseball players, you talk about home runs or steals or great fielding plays. With Eric Chavez, you talk about health.

Mostly you talk about backs and shoulders. The words back and shoulder figure in his conversation more than the average conversation.

The A's held their annual Media Day on Thursday in the fancy Westside Club at the Coliseum, rain flashing across the big windows overlooking the deserted field. And Chavez sat at a table with the media and the first thing he said was, "So how's my back feel right now?"

He was interviewing himself. He knows he has been reduced to body parts for the purposes of baseball and interviews. Last year, he appeared in eight games before season-ending back surgery. It was the third year in a row he had season-ending surgery. He played 23 games in 2008. For a long time, he has not been hardy or resilient or, well — five surgeries on his back and shoulders.

Where he should have been a presence on the A's, he has been an absence and, although the A's respect him and are polite with him, they brought in another third baseman, Kevin Kouzmanoff, because no sports organization in its right mind would depend on Chavez any more.

"I view it (Kouzmanoff's acquisition) not as a threat to me," he said, "but as a way to get me on the field as much as possible without having to rely on me to play third base 135, 140 games a year. When the move was made, I felt real comfortable about it. I don't know how much I'm playing first. I don't know if I'm the first baseman. I don't know if I'm splitting time at first base. I'm not sure. If I'm healthy, (general manager Billy Beane) will throw me in the mix and we'll take it from there."

As of Monday, he didn't know his role on the team. Beane told him not to worry about being an everyday player. Beane took that burden off Chavez — a man who, in the past, wanted that burden. Beane said Chavez might play some third and some shortstop and some first base and some DH, even some outfield — Chavez has ordered an infield glove, a first-baseman's glove and an outfield glove. He will move around the field if his body cooperates, a generalist instead of a specialist. This is what his career has become.

"I don't have to be the star guy," he said. "I don't have to be playing 155 games like I used to."

And surely when a man who won six Gold Gloves at third base becomes a roving generalist, that is the beginning of the end, the onset of what sports people call the little death. This is the final year of Chavez's contract, which made him a rich man.

"Eventually I'm going to have to move on in life," he said, "and I'm ready to do that if that's the case."

He says he feels fine, OK, ready to go. But he doesn't know if his right shoulder will hold up, be stable, allow him to hit. He doesn't even know what kind of hitter he will be, the power hitter he once was or a singles hitter with a different stroke. He doesn't know what the bending down of his job, the bending for ground balls and throws, will do to his back. So much he doesn't know.

Mostly Chavez doesn't know if his body is an ally or an enemy. It is a serious situation when a professional athlete views his body as a subversive. In the past he let doctors shoot up his back with epidurals, two or three a year. He is willing to take two or three epidurals in the 2010 season if that's what it takes.

"My back issues aren't going away," he said. "That's one thing I know for sure. That will be one thing I'll be dealing with the rest of my life. As long as I play this game, there are certain measures I'll need to do if they (back issues) arise, and I've done them in the past."

What if his health problems persist? What if the sad narrative repeats, high hopes dashed by an uncooperative body?

"This is it," Chavez said. "If I have back issues in spring, my shoulder's hurting and I don't make it through this year, then you probably won't see me on the field ever again."

Should we feel sorry for him?

"No. I have a good life," Chavez said. "Other than being disappointed, not being able to be on the field, I've been pretty blessed in my life. No one should feel sorry for me. Trust me. I feel like I've already had a good career, long career, longer than most, more productive than most."

So, he'll make the brave effort one more time, not knowing what position he'll play or for how long or if his back and shoulders will let him play baseball. This is what Eric Chavez's career has become.

## **Eric Chavez Addresses his Future**

Lowell Cohn, cohn zone, Santa Rosa Press Democrat 1/22/2010

Eric Chavez spoke to reporters at the A's Media Day on Thursday. He spoke about his health and about losing the third-base job to Kevin Kouzmanoff. Here is a transcript of what he said. He began by asking himself the first question and then the media took over.

Chavez: So how's my back feel right?

Yeah, how does your back feel?

My back's good. I've had the last two months to work on my physical status. I feel very good.

How about your shoulder?

Great, great. With the move to potentially first base, I'll see if that will help me out at all. (He has not started practicing at first.)

What's harder swinging a bat or bending over?

Bending over. Every once in a while I have issues with that.

How many procedures has he had -- operations?

Five, both shoulders, twice on the back, twice on the right shoulder.

How does he feel about playing positions other than third?

A lot of other people have had issues dealing with it. I'm excited about it. Wherever I can get on the field that's where I want to be. Billy's told me if I need 3, 4, 5 days of recovery during the season that I have that time to recover. That's not how it's been in days past. I'm going to go to spring training ready to play third knowing I'm going to have to play some first. He actually threw out shortstop a little bit. Come spring training I'll gauge where I'm really at. It's hard to gauge now.

You spent the last 3 years rehabbing. Do you wonder can I still do this?

I've been rehabbing for 10 years to be honest with you. The last few years have been very unenjoyable. I'm going to be optimistic. Whatever comes my way I'm going to handle it. Enjoying playing baseball again is something I'm looking forward to. If it works out it works out. I know there's another side to this, too. And eventually I'm going to have to move on in life and I'm ready to do that if that's the case.

Are you going to be a fill-in player?

That's what it sounds like. I'm not completely 100 percent sure on that. Whatever the case I think with my history being able to count on me to be an everyday player now is secondary and if I'm healthy and moving to first if that's going to help out I think Billy's willing to do whatever he can. And I see that. I don't see it as a threat. Kouzmanoff is a great player and I thought it was a great move for the organization. This is the last year of my contract, obviously with an option year.

What does he expect about his health?

By spring training I want no surprises and that was different from last year. I had a whole offseason to work out. I went to spring training feeling good. I thought I felt good and then I got on the field and things kind of went differently. Hopefully when I see you guys in the spring I'll already have known what's going to happen and how my body's going to feel.

How will he adapt to a backup role?

I don't have to be the star guy. I don't have to be playing 155 games like I used to. Being healthy, enjoying myself is kind of at the top of that list for me. If it means move to first for a while, if I can't bend over, then move to the outfield - that's an option.

How does he deal with his back?

I'm real comfortable with my back situation. I've managed that for years. And with the help Billy's offering me, taking three or four days off, taking epidurals, getting shots, doing what I have to do. I've dealt with it before.

Should we feel sorry for you?

No. I have a good life. Other than being disappointed, not being able to be on the field being competitive I've been pretty blessed in my life. No one should feel sorry for me. Trust me. I feel like I've already had a good career, long career, longer than most, more productive than most. Now I'd like to get on the other side of that and fulfill that. I know I have one year left. If I play longer I'd like to continue to be in an Oakland A's uniform. There's a few more years I'd like to get out of baseball.

Is he concerned about hitting after being away?

The ability and the hand-eye coordination are definitely there. I just need my shoulder to hold up. If it can do that, even with some back issues, if I can get that shoulder stabilized and healthy and strong I know for a fact I can be productive.

Will he be a different type hitter?

I don't know. The shoulder was something that was progressively going downhill. (He said his forearm tendinitis was caused by shoulder problems.)

You said you take epidurals. Isn't that serious?

My back issues aren't going away. That's one thing I know for sure. That will be one thing I'll be dealing with for the rest of my life. As long as I play this game there are certain measures I'll need to do if they arise and I've done them in the past. I've been willing to do everything. The doctors tell me two or three (epidurals) a year are acceptable so I follow those guidelines.

You took them the last couple of years?

Two or three a year.

His thoughts about Kouzmanoff on the team?

I view it not as a threat to me but as a way to get me on the field as much as possible without having to rely on me to play third base 135, 140 games a year. When the move was made, I felt real comfortable about it. Like I said I don't know how much I'm playing first. I don't know if I'm the first baseman. I don't know if I'm splitting time at first base. I'm not sure. If I'm healthy he'll throw me in the mix and we'll take it from there. (He said he's buying an outfielder's glove, first base and third baseman glove.)

What if he has health problems again this season?

This is it. If I have back issues in spring, my shoulder's hurting and I don't make it through this year then you probably won't see me on the field ever again.

Will you undergo any more surgeries?

No, not to get on the field.

## **Fuson looking for job with A's?**

## **Former Padres scouting director wants to return to baseball after firing**

By DAN HAYES, North County Times, 1/22/2010

SAN DIEGO ---- Grady Fuson, who was fired from the Padres front office this offseason, could be returning to the Oakland A's in time for spring training.

Fuson ---- who began as a scout with the A's in 1982 and worked his way up to scouting director during 19 seasons with the team ---- said Thursday he's in talks with at least one unspecified team about a position for next season. But multiple baseball sources indicated Fuson is talking to the A's with more discussions planned for next week.

Fuson, a San Diego native who attended Kearny High, said wherever he lands, he isn't interested in being there for just one season and moving on. It's also believed Fuson would prefer to stay close to home.

"If I'm going to back, I want it to be with a club that has some bite, some substance for next year," said Fuson, the Padres' former vice president of scouting and player development for four seasons.

Fuson worked with the A's through 2001, including four seasons alongside current general manager Billy Beane, before taking a position with the Texas Rangers from 2002 to 2004. He was hired by the Padres in 2004 and took over as vice president in 2005. Tim Hudson, Barry Zito, Mark Mulder, Eric Chavez (Mt. Carmel High) and Miguel Tejada were all drafted and developed during Fuson's previous tenure with Oakland.

While he's definitely interested in returning to baseball this season, Fuson said there's no urgency to make a decision. Instead he's making the most an offseason vacation which was forced upon him.

"I'm taking it slow," Fuson said. "I've hung around, taken a few trips and done a couple things I haven't done in a while."

## **The man who would've kept A's in Oakland**

By Dave Newhouse, kland Tribune Columnist 1/21/2010

WE CAN ONLY speculate what the Oakland A's would be like now if Bob Piccinini's attempt to buy the franchise in 1999 hadn't been shot down inexplicably by Major League Baseball.

One smart guess is that nobody would be talking about Fremont or San Jose.

Eleven years later, the A's boll weevil ownership keeps looking for a new home, the team's roster has had more face lifts than Joan Rivers and Phyllis Diller combined, and, predictably, community involvement has suffered.

That's not what Piccinini, the Modesto-based supermarket mogul, had in mind when he deemed Oakland the ideal spot for A's baseball.

"We were under the belief," Piccinini said, "that the ownership (of Steve Schott and Ken Hoffman) had really done less than an adequate job of creating a relationship between the community and the ballclub. We thought we could go in and do a much better job in the community and getting businesses involved.

"Create action as you will ... raise the whole standard. We thought if we could raise the attendance, and make it something that everyone was proud of, we then would have an opportunity to get a new facility."

Then in October 1999, in Cooperstown, N.Y., MLB rejected Piccinini's group.

"The biggest thing I remember," Piccinini reflected Monday in his Modesto office, "was the huge disappointment. We had worked for close to a year, and through that whole process, we didn't see anything that was a stumbling block. When the rejection occurred, I thought it was bogus. We passed all of the tests. I've got several suspicions, none of which I can validate."

He'd like to suspect collusion between MLB Commissioner Bud Selig and A's co-owner Lew Wolff, the college fraternity buddies, but he can't prove it because Selig didn't approve Wolff's purchase of the A's from Schott and Hoffman until 2005.

More likely, Piccinini suspects the San Francisco Giants ownership had a hand in convincing Selig to make sure the deal never materialized, especially since Selig has called the A's move from Kansas City to Oakland "a terrible mistake."

"I can tell you there's an executive with the Giants, who shall go unnamed," Piccinini said. "I ran into him at a Warriors game. He said, 'I hear you're getting involved with the Padres. We want you in San Diego; we just didn't want you here.'"

Piccinini owns "a little, tiny piece" of the Arizona Diamondbacks, and a "much larger piece, though not substantial" of the Padres.

"And those applications sailed right on through," he said. "So what's the difference?"

The difference? They weren't mailed from Oakland.

And Piccinini is a baseball man. At different times, he's owned minor league franchises in Modesto, Fresno, Stockton and Sacramento.

In 1999, he assembled an ownership group that included William Dean Singleton, chairman and chief executive of Media News Group, the parent company of this newspaper; George Zimmer, owner of Men's Wearhouse; Andy Dolich, a former A's executive; and Hall of Famers Reggie Jackson and Joe Morgan (Morgan later backed out).

At the same time, a rival group involving former major league players Steve Stone and Bob Watson, and San Mateo lawyer Michael Lazarus, also bid on the A's and was rebuffed.

Piccinini's group offered \$122 million — Schott's and Hoffman's asking price was \$120 million. Wolff was able to buy the team six years later for, reportedly, \$165 million.

"I'd make that deal every day of the week," Piccinini said of the latter price. "I think baseball is as appealing as ever."

Piccinini, who'll turn 68 next week, was asked if he would take another shot at owning the A's if the opportunity ever arose.

"As I sit here right now, I would say probably not," he said. "However, never say never. I've had other ... I won't say opportunities, but people have said such and such a franchise is available. They were franchises that were Kansas City or whatever. Part of the reason I was excited about the A's was that it was local."

It's a shame Selig flubbed badly in 1999 because Piccinini has grown his grocery business into an empire that was far beyond his expectations when he became president of Save Mart Supermarkets in 1981.

He's since bought Lucky Stores and now owns and operates 244 supermarkets from Redding to Santa Maria and over to the Tehachapi Mountains. He's also in the concert business with Berkeley's Another Planet, which puts on 200 to 250 shows a year. And he's a major sponsor of the annual Toyota/Save Mart 350 NASCAR race at Sonoma's Infineon Raceway.

"I consider myself an opportunist," he said. "I'm involved in a lot of things, none of which I run, except for (Save Mart), which is the golden goose."

Can he imagine the A's leaving Oakland?

"If the A's went to Fremont, I think they would still be the Oakland A's," he said. "To bring the whole East Bay thing together, Oakland has to be the flag stick."

"If I were betting, I'd bet the Giants weren't as much interested in territorial rights as they were that the A's aren't successful and that they would move."

Somewhere out of Oakland, he meant, but not in San Jose.

Eleven years later, we can only fantasize about Piccinini's owning the A's. He surely would have restored the revered Haas family's team-community love-fest.

However, to get a new ballpark in any big-league town, it takes a committed mayor. Jerry Brown was the worst in that regard, and Ron Dellums falls somewhere between distracted and disinterested (until recently).

Piccinini certainly had the wealth — and he's even wealthier now — to privately lead the charge for a privately built ballpark like the one across the bridge.

So now all Oakland can do is wait for Major League Baseball's announcement about the A's future, which could come soon.

But it's hard not thinking of Selig as Oakland's executioner.