

A's News Clips, Friday, February 12, 2010

Inbox: A's youth movement continues

Beat reporter Jane Lee answers fans' questions

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

With only 10 days remaining before A's pitchers and catchers report, plenty of questions surround the green and gold. That much is certain by a filled Inbox this week, although there is always room for more. So send in your questions, and if it's one to which an answer hasn't already been provided elsewhere on oaklandathletics.com, there's a chance it will be selected among the hundreds of queries that come in.

Who do you see as locks as relievers for Opening Day, and who is competing for how many open slots?

-- Mike P., Manhattan, Kan.

With every key member of a bullpen that compiled an American League-best 3.46 ERA last season under club control for 2010, you can expect to see many of the same faces. Manager Bob Geren likes to carry seven relievers, and there's not much guessing who those lucky seven might be, so don't anticipate hearing about any tense relief competition this spring.

That said, expect to see right-handers Andrew Bailey, Michael Wuertz, Brad Ziegler and a recovering Joey Devine join lefties Craig Breslow, Jerry Blevins and Brad Kilby to form one of the league's more enviable units.

As a side note to consider, though, Geren said this week he could possibly use a starting candidate in the bullpen for long relief, so that could come into play and jeopardize a roster spot for Blevins, Kilby or even Devine, who has yet to prove his health since undergoing Tommy John elbow reconstruction surgery. However, the only way I see that happening is if that guy is Gio Gonzalez, for reasons being he has bullpen experience and is a southpaw -- something the A's could use to diversify their relief corps even more.

Maybe I'm out of the loop, but any news on the young pitching phenom Michael Ynoa?

-- Jaime R., Oakland

It's safe to say the A's are taking it slow with the 18-year-old Ynoa, which is understandable considering the \$4.25 million signing bonus he was awarded in 2008. You probably haven't heard much about him lately, though, because he was shut down due to elbow soreness last year before he even made his professional debut. That time will hopefully come in a few months after Ynoa participates in Minor League Spring Training and, presumably, extended Spring Training in April. If Ynoa then receives a clean bill of health, he'll get playing time with either the A's Arizona Rookie League team or at Class A Vancouver.

When do you think we can expect to see Chris Carter and Michael Taylor make their big league debuts? Both appear ready, but will they start the year at Triple-A?

-- Trevor H., Reno, Nev.

I've received some form of this question multiple times, so A's fans need listen carefully, although you'll probably hear a lot more about them once Spring Training commences. The A's brass has made it clear that, while both Carter and Taylor represent large pieces of the club's future, they would ideally like to start the rising duo at Triple-A to not only preserve their Major League service time, but to give them a little more seasoning. The organization also wants to make certain that Carter and Taylor are here to stay once handed their tickets to The Show.

Carter has only 13 games of Triple-A experience under his belt, so the current plan is to give the more experienced, but still unproven, Daric Barton full-time responsibilities at first base in Oakland. Meanwhile, Taylor has played in only 30 games at the Triple-A level, giving the A's no reason to rush him when an already well-stocked defensive outfield is in tow. Thus, the club is interested in evaluating how both will perform with the big boys this spring. Geren, for one, can't wait to see if Taylor is the real deal. The A's skipper has only seen video of the outfielder, but said a couple weeks ago that he looked like "a man among boys."

The A's seem to be placing a strong bet on young Cliff Pennington at shortstop with only another inexperienced backup in Adam Rosales. What do you think is their rationale?

-- Jon D.W., Oakland

If you haven't noticed, the A's are going young in a lot of ways. With Bobby Crosby completely out of the picture now, the club sees great potential in Pennington while 2009 first-round pick Grant Green -- considered the team's shortstop of the future -- gets groomed in the Minors.

Pennington was essentially handed the starting job after Orlando Cabrera was dealt midseason, and he did extremely well under the circumstances, batting .279 while providing aggressive baserunning and other little things that make for good offensive ball -- especially for a team that can't rely on power. His defense was slightly shaky and not even close to perfect, but he displayed a cannon of an arm and turned in some impressive plays. If Pennington can work on his footwork this spring, he could enter the season as an above-average defender.

As for Rosales, the guy has been compared to Eric Byrnes, which should be enough to excite you. Furthermore, he has a career .945 fielding percentage at third base to go along with a perfect record at all other infield positions.

How come the A's didn't get a bigger bat that produces more home runs and RBIs? Why not go after Vladimir Guerrero, Jermaine Dye or Jim Thome?

-- Joseph N., Hayward, Calif.

The A's are simply not interested in taking another stab at a declining performer in his mid- to late-30s. Neither of the above mentioned are cheap, either. The same can be said for the still available Carlos Delgado. I'm guessing this inquiry is somewhat tied to the neverending Jack Cust debate. If you take a look at last year's stats, all three guys in question actually produced similar home run and RBI numbers as Cust.

What can we expect with our infielders this year, and who will start where in the infield?

-- Mikey A., Chicago

You can expect a pretty darn good defense and an average offensive showing from your 2010 infielders. The projected diamond will have Kurt Suzuki behind the plate, Barton at first, Mark Ellis manning second base, Pennington holding down shortstop and the newly acquired Kevin Kouzmanoff at the hot corner. Suzuki and Kouzmanoff are expected to make some noise in the middle of the lineup, and you really never know what to get from the streaky Ellis. The long-tenured second baseman, however, makes up for any offensive weakness with his always consistent glove. As for Barton, he could finally have a breakout year at the plate, but I also thought that last year.

I can't find any mention of a FanFest or Fan Appreciation Day. It seems like every other ballclub is having one, so why not the green and gold?

-- Chris D., Santa Barbara, Calif.

Sorry, Chris, no FanFest for the second year in a row. After hearing from some A's executives on this matter, though, I can tell you that the club is pleased to offer A's fans a preseason treat in the form of a Fan Appreciation Tailgate, which will be held prior to the team's final exhibition game against the Giants on April 3 at the Coliseum.

According to Jim Leahey, vice president of sales and marketing for the A's, the organization wanted to try something new last year. He says the field is not in baseball configuration and there is more risk to weather when holding a FanFest in January. An April event, however, gives fans what he says is a real feeling that the season is launching.

Also taken into consideration was the fact that FanFest was used in part to kick off the A's ticket sales for the upcoming season and they now do a majority of sales online. Furthermore, Leahey is big on value for fans and wants to put an emphasis on the fact that April's event will offer free admission, autographs, photos and the like -- which was not always the case with FanFest.

A's camp has battles worth watching

Fifth-starter competition among Spring Training attractions

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

Triple play: Three questions that need answers

1. Who will win the A's fifth starting spot?

Ben Sheets, Justin Duchscherer, Dallas Braden and Brett Anderson are penciled in to take the first four spots, with young right-handers Trevor Cahill and Vin Mazzaro and lefty Gio Gonzalez expected to duke it out for the last opening.

Cahill might have the upper hand, given the experience he gained last season, but he will need to develop his secondary stuff if he wants to be another constant in the rotation. Gonzalez doesn't plan to make the competition easy, though. If the 24-year-old can prove consistency and composure on the mound, he may very well land the gig. Meanwhile, Mazzaro needs to demonstrate both improved shoulder health and command and will probably start the year at Triple-A Sacramento.

2. Will Eric Chavez finally be healthy?

This is the million dollar question heading into camp -- actually, more than that. Chavez, who will make a team-high \$11.5 million for the final season of a six-year contract, will enter Spring Training with hopes of landing a roster spot as a consistent utility man.

In order to do that, the six-time Gold Glove third baseman will have to leave camp with no lingering questions about his surgically repaired back and shoulder. Chavez, if healthy, is expected to contribute at first base, in the designated hitter's spot or possibly in the outfield.

3. Is Daric Barton in Oakland to stay?

The organization has had big dreams for the 24-year-old Barton ever since he came to the A's in the trade that sent Mark Mulder to the Cardinals in 2004. As the starter for most of 2008, he hit just .226 in 140 games. Jason Giambi then stole some playing time in 2009, as Barton was demoted to Triple-A on the eve of Opening Day before getting another turn in June. He got off to another shaky start, hitting .163 in his first 20 games, but he redeemed himself with a productive September and October.

Barton will have to show a consistent bat if he wants to remain at first base, where he is considered the front-runner for the job heading into camp. Waiting right behind him, though, is hotshot prospect Chris Carter. Newcomer Jake Fox, who provides some pop to the lineup, can also play first, as can backup catcher Landon Powell.

2009 record

75-87, fourth in the American League West

Projected batting order

1. LF **Rajai Davis**:
.305 BA, .360 OBP, .423 SLG, 3 HR, 48 RBI in 2009
2. CF **Coco Crisp**:
.228 BA, .336 OBP, .378 SLG, 3 HR, 14 RBI in 2009
3. C **Kurt Suzuki**:
.274 BA, .313 OBP, .421 SLG, 15 HR, 88 RBI in 2009
4. DH **Jack Cust**:
.240 BA, .356 OBP, .417 SLG, 25 HR, 70 RBI in 2009
5. 3B **Kevin Kouzmanoff**:
.255 BA, .302 OBP, .420 SLG, 18 HR, 88 RBI in 2009
6. RF **Ryan Sweeney**:
.293 BA, .348 OBP, .407 SLG, 6 HR, 53 RBI in 2009
7. 2B **Mark Ellis**:
.263 BA, .305 OBP, .403 SLG, 10 HR, 61 RBI in 2009
8. 1B **Daric Barton**:
.269 BA, .372 OBP, .413 SLG, 3 HR, 24 RBI in 2009
9. SS **Cliff Pennington**:
.279 BA, .342 OBP, .418 SLG, 4 HR, 21 RBI in 2009

Projected rotation

1. **Ben Sheets**, Did not pitch in 2009
2. **Justin Duchscherer**, Did not pitch in 2009
3. **Dallas Braden**, 8-9, 3.89 ERA in 2009
4. **Brett Anderson**, 11-11, 4.06 ERA in 2009
5. **Trevor Cahill**, 10-13, 4.63 ERA in 2009

Projected bullpen

Closer: **Andrew Bailey**, 26/30 saves, 1.84 ERA in 2009
RH setup man: **Michael Wuertz**, 2.63 ERA in 2009
LH setup man: **Craig Breslow**, 3.36 ERA in 2009
RH setup man: **Brad Ziegler**, 3.07 ERA in 2009

The new guys

RHP Ben Sheets: Despite not having pitched an inning last year, Sheets was awarded a one-year, \$10 million contract by the A's, who promptly deemed him their Opening Day starter. The four-time All-Star, who is coming off right elbow surgery, has no plans of slowing down a career that includes an 86-83 record and 3.72 ERA.

3B Kevin Kouzmanoff: Kouzmanoff represents what was previously a void at third base, where the team can no longer rely on the injury-prone Chavez for full-time duties. Acquired in a trade with the Padres, Kouzmanoff and his bat should provide a steady presence around the middle of the lineup.

CF Coco Crisp: Coming off shoulder surgery, Crisp joins fellow outfielder Rajai Davis as a sure 1-2 punch at the top of the lineup. Signed as a free agent, Crisp gives the A's additional speed both on the field and bases.

OF Gabe Gross: Signed late in the offseason as a free agent, Gross gives the A's a legitimate fourth outfielder with six years of big league experience.

DH Jake Fox: Fox came as part of a package from the Cubs and could represent the team's sleeper if he finds a way to get consistent at-bats. The A's may alternate him at the DH spot with Cust and occasionally put him on the field to spell the corner infielders.

Prospects to watch

1B Chris Carter: Carter tore it up in Double-A Midland last year and heads to camp with a spot on the 40-man roster. The success he's already achieved has firmly placed him in Oakland's big league picture at first base in the not-too-distant future -- though it probably won't be Opening Day.

OF Michael Taylor: The club sees the versatile Taylor -- swapped for Brett Wallace this offseason -- taking a similar path as Carter. A little extra tutoring in the Minors wouldn't hurt either player, and the A's want to make sure both are in the big leagues to stay upon arrival. Taylor could eventually offer the team the type of power for which they've long been desiring.

INF Adrian Cardenas: Acquired from Philadelphia in the July 2008 Joe Blanton trade, Cardenas joins fellow prospect Jemile Weeks as the up-and-coming second basemen. He hit .251 with 24 RBIs in Sacramento last season and will surely be a staple in the A's infield -- just not this year.

SS Grant Green: Oakland's first-round pick in the 2009 First-Year Player Draft, Green is the shortstop of the future. He'll be in big league camp as part of his contract, but with only five Minor League games under his belt, he's not going to be in Oakland any time soon.

C Max Stassi: The loss of a second-round pick was certainly made less painful by the first-round selection of Stassi, one of the premier two-way catching prospects in last year's Draft. In his brief pro debut, the A's third-overall pick hit .280 in 14 games at short-season Class A Vancouver.

On the rebound

Duchscherer, Sheets, Crisp, Chavez and Devine: All five are recovering from major surgeries, but each could be ready by Opening Day. Chavez represents the biggest question mark, and Devine may not be up to full speed until the end of camp.

OF Travis Buck: He has quickly fallen out of favor with the A's and enters camp down on the outfield depth chart behind Gross and Eric Patterson. His batting average and on-base percentage have gradually dipped during stints in his last three years in the big leagues, yet he's a career .312 hitter in the Minors.

LHP Dallas Braden: The team's 2009 Opening Day starter's season ended after 22 starts because of a foot rash that developed into a medical nightmare and left him with nerve damage. Braden will be counted on in the middle of the rotation this year.

RHP Vin Mazzaro: Frequently mentioned in the same breath as Anderson and Cahill in terms of talent, Mazzaro posted a 0.00 while winning his first two big league starts but quickly phased out after eight consecutive losses and a shoulder injury in August.

Long gone

SS Bobby Crosby: The former AL Rookie of the Year lost his job to Orlando Cabrera, didn't get it back when Cabrera was traded and hit .223 while learning three new positions. He has since signed a \$1 million, one-year contract with the Pirates.

INF Nomar Garciaparra: Never healthy enough to make much of an impact for the A's last year, Garciaparra is expected to retire from the game.

INF Adam Kennedy: He was one of the biggest surprises of the season, providing steady production after being picked up in a Minor League trade in May. Kennedy finished third on the team with 63 RBIs before entering the free-agent market and recently signing with the Nationals.

OF Scott Hairston: Sent along with outfielder Aaron Cunningham to San Diego in the January trade that brought Kouzmanoff to the A's, Hairston said he played hurt for most of his time in Oakland and walked away with a .236 batting average.

LHP Dana Eveland: A struggling southpaw who could never quite hold on to a rotation spot, Eveland was traded to Toronto on Saturday after being designated for assignment five days earlier.

A's camp home to several comebacks

Sheets, Duchscherer, Chavez ready to get back to action

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- While an abundant number of outfielders will offer some sort of distraction come Spring Training, it's safe to say all eyes will be on Eric Chavez and his surgically repaired back and shoulder when the A's report to camp.

Ditto the rotation-leading duo of Ben Sheets and Justin Duchscherer, who are expected to throw out All-Star numbers and head a rather young staff despite not having pitched an inning last year due to their own injuries. Same can be said for reliever Joey Devine.

Thus, any optimism built up for the upcoming spring season must be tempered with the reality that the A's have a lot to overcome medically.

Slightly less than a year's time has passed since Devine, the 2008 rookie relief sensation, underwent Tommy John elbow ligament replacement surgery -- a few days after Duchscherer's own elbow procedure.

That news, combined with Chavez's decision to undergo yet another operation on his troubled back, merely represented the start of a siege of long-term injuries that saw the A's use the disabled list 17 times for a cumulative loss of 989 games by the affected players. That was on the heels of an Oakland-record 25 times in 2008, with 25 players combining to miss 877 games.

So, to say that health is not one of the most -- if not the most -- pressing issue facing the club this spring would seem somewhat silly. After all, it's what has kept players like their \$66 million man from truly earning their keep.

Chavez, who will make a team-high \$11.5 million this year, has played in only 121 games over the past three seasons. The six-time Gold Glove third baseman is looking to put his injury-prone past to rest to serve in a utility role -- whether in the outfield, infield or designated hitter spot -- during the final season of his six-year contract.

Manager Bob Geren, for one, believes the team's offseason acquisition of third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff from San Diego will relieve much of the pressure faced by Chavez in recent years.

"I'm always optimistic about him," the A's skipper said, "but it's how he feels. To not have to go out and play every day is going to help his chances a lot."

A healthy Chavez in the lineup gives the team a boost of some much-needed power, an area in which they've been lacking for several years now. The 2009 club hit 139 home runs, which was the fewest in the American League and fourth fewest in the Majors while it also marked the first time in Oakland history the A's ranked last in the American League in that category.

In seasons during which the 32-year-old Chavez has played in at least 120 games, he has averaged 28 home runs. Only Jack Cust, who will mostly provide DH duties this season, has averaged more than 25 homers during 120-plus-game seasons. And while it's unlikely Chavez will hit that 120-game mark -- even if healthy -- the power he would provide a team that collectively batted .262 last year is unquestionable.

"He obviously is one of the more experienced players in the game and has power from the left side," Geren said. "He has the chance to get back the form he was in a couple years ago, and he could provide us with the versatility that would give us a lot of flexibility."

Along with Chavez at the top of the list of expected key contributors stand Sheets and Duchscherer -- both proven All-Stars who are looking to put aside a blank 2009.

Sheets, signed as a free agent for \$10 million on Jan. 26, missed the entire 2009 season after undergoing surgery to repair a torn flexor in his right elbow. At the same time, it's hard to ignore the right-hander's resume. The four-time Milwaukee All-Star tallied double-digit wins seven times while recording an ERA under 4.00 in each of his past five seasons, and he went 13-9 with a 3.09 ERA in 31 starts for the Brewers during the 2008 season.

Sheets insists he's healthy, as does general manager Billy Beane and Geren, who promptly deemed the new A's addition his Opening Day starter on the same day he was officially welcomed into the fold. Whether that health bill proves to stay clean throughout Spring Training, though, remains to be seen.

"I don't think it's a secret we have guys that are projected on the roster who didn't even pitch last year," Geren said. "It's really going to be about these guys staying in form and staying healthy in order for us to win games."

Winning games is something Duchscherer became very familiar with before undergoing right elbow surgery March 27 last year. The 32-year-old right-hander has a 2.82 ERA in 214 career appearances with Oakland, which is third lowest in Oakland history. But when he reports to camp on Feb. 20, he will not only have to prove he's physically ready but also mentally stable after ruling out a midseason return last season to receive treatment for clinical depression.

That gives the A's two starting pitchers with question marks still surrounding their respective futures. Add in Devine, who is expected to serve a pivotal bullpen role this season, and the count is three. Don't let that shake Beane's nerves, though.

"Bigger anxiety was going into last year having so little experience in our starting rotation," the A's general manager said. "Ben opted to have the surgery a year ago in an effort to make sure he was completely healthy, so I have less concern than I would had he not had the surgery. Quite frankly, we were very pleased with the physical he went through. Ben keeps himself in great shape, as does Justin, so we're anticipating them having a real good year."

So are the fans, who the club believes should be watching a contender if health stays in check. The organization feels it did its part in improving 2009's team, which finished last in the AL West with a 75-87 record, by stocking up on depth and giving a little more life to the lineup by adding Kouzmanoff, Jake Fox and outfielders Coco Crisp and Gabe Gross.

Thus, the roster looks complete, as does the rotation -- boasting Sheets, Duchscherer, Brett Anderson and Dallas Braden -- aside from the fifth spot. Whether the former two, along with Devine and Chavez, are able to give the A's a formidable chance to compete against their division rivals will play out soon enough.

"You have to make sure they're not only healthy enough to play but also performing to the best of their capabilities," Geren said. "I don't think we have any questions facing our personnel. I think we're deeper and more talented than we've been in the last three years. At the same time, we don't want to just be healthy. We want to win."

Big Hurt decides to call it a career

Longtime White Sox star Thomas is 18th on home run list

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com

CHICAGO -- He was aptly dubbed the "Big Hurt" by long-time White Sox television play-by-play announcer Ken "Hawk" Harrelson.

And his 6-foot-5, 265-pound frame would have been enough for Frank Thomas to earn that nickname. The authority with which he put the bat on to baseball, though, made the moniker even more fitting.

For 19 seasons, Thomas tore apart opposing hurlers with his immense power and keen batting eye to the tune of a .301 average, an amazing .419 on-base percentage, .555 slugging percentage, 521 home runs and 1,704 RBIs. Sixteen of those years came on the South Side of Chicago, so it's only fitting Thomas announced the end to what looks like a Hall of Fame-bound career Thursday night in the same city.

Thomas was in town to receive lifetime achievement recognition from the Comcast SportsNet Sports Awards to benefit the March of Dimes at the Hilton Chicago. The big man told MLB.com a few hours prior to receiving this honor how he was done playing baseball and moving on to other ventures.

"No, I'm done, I'm done," said Thomas, who figures to talk more about his decision during a press conference Friday at U.S. Cellular Field. "I've had a great career. I've had 20 Spring Trainings, 21 Spring Trainings, and I'm happy where I'm at right now.

"Life goes on. I have a 15-month old baby, and I've spent a lot of time with my [four] kids during this last year and a half. I caught up with the time that I missed away from them. I'm really happy. I'm taking care of myself and I feel good."

The 2008 season marked the last time Thomas suited up, hitting .240 with eight home runs and 30 RBIs while splitting time between the A's and Blue Jays. His last truly Thomas-like showing came in 2006 during his first year with Oakland, when he hit .270 with 39 home runs and 114 RBIs.

Even after his injury-plagued struggles in 2008, Thomas felt as if he could contribute during the 2009 campaign but never found any takers on the open market. As he watches friends such as Jermaine Dye go through the same free-agent angst during this offseason, Thomas decided to put baseball behind him.

"I still could play right now, but with this body and I'm 41," said Thomas, who has not officially filed retirement papers. "I can walk away and say I was just as good at the end as I was at the beginning, probably better because I was much smarter.

"It's just one of those things that you can't play forever. I've had time to focus on what my future would be over the last year and a half and I have some interesting things going on. I'm doing well."

Moving into the broadcasting field is one option for Thomas, who received extremely positive reviews for his pregame and postgame work with Comcast during coverage of the Crosstown Showdown last year. Thomas mentioned other business ventures, without going into detail, but ruled out moving into the coaching profession.

"That's not in my future right now, not at all," said Thomas of coaching. "I have other things in my life I really want to do."

A look at the White Sox record book on the offensive end shows Thomas atop no fewer than 12 separate categories, including 448 home runs, 1,466 walks, 1,327 runs scored and 1,465 RBIs. The first baseman/designated hitter joins Jimmie Foxx and Albert Pujols as the only first basemen in baseball history to win back-to-back Most Valuable Player awards, doing so in 1993 and 1994.

He was selected to five All-Star Games, took home four Silver Slugger honors and captured the 1997 batting title with a .347 average. From 1991-97, Thomas drew at least 100 walks, scored at least 100 runs, drove in at least 100 runs, batted at least .300 and launched at least 30 home runs in every year but 1992, when he hit 24 home runs.

Some pundits have termed that stretch as impressive as any for a right-handed hitter in the history of baseball, although Pujols' current numbers might add fodder to that critique. Thomas won't disagree with this particular praise.

"When you get to this point, you have to realize I've had a special, special career," Thomas said. "Thank God I've had a career only a handful could have.

"There's no sadness. I tell people I was blessed to be 41 years old and people were talking about, 'Will you still play?' No, I had a long run, over 23 years involved with professional baseball."

During that time, Thomas' legacy has grown because he went about his work the right way. If not for injuries that left him with 659 at-bats combined between the 2001, '04, '05 and '08 seasons, his already impressive numbers would be even greater.

"I'm happy my career is what it is," said Thomas, who finished with 1,667 walks and just 1,397 strikeouts. "I'm happy to say that Frank Thomas had an incredible career through hard work."

Randy Johnson, A's special assistant to GM, leaves for Padres

By Joe Stiglich, Bay Area News Group, 2/11/2010

Some A's front office news to report: Randy Johnson, a special assistant to GM Billy Beane for the past seven seasons, was hired by the San Diego Padres to be their minor league field coordinator.

Johnson has been a jack-of-all-trades for the A's, helping out with major and minor league scouting. In recent seasons, he'd logged a lot of miles scouting in Asia and Australia.

He'll bounce around to all of the Padres' minor league affiliates throughout the season, evaluating and doing some on-field instruction, working closely with Padres farm director Randy Smith.

On a personal note, my favorite memory w/Randy took place in the Tokyo Dome as the A's were taking batting practice before playing Boston in the 2008 season opener. I was in the first base dugout interviewing Randy about his playing career in Japan, when a ball ricocheted off the pitcher's L-screen and nailed him right in the chest ... hard.

Randy rubbed his chest for a few seconds, and we continued right on talking like nothing happened. I had a great interview in the bag, and he had a sizable bruise, I'm sure. I owe him one ...

I can't say right now if the A's plan to replace Johnson, but given their renewed emphasis on international scouting, I'm sure they'll fill his void somehow. ...

Nine days until A's pitchers and catchers report ...

Carney Lansford joins A's broadcast team; all Comcast games in high-def

By Joe Stiglich, Bay Area News Group, 2/11/2010

Comcast SportsNet California just released the A's 2010 television schedule. They're showing 145 regular-season games (plus two exhibitions), with all the regular-season games in high-definition for the first time.

Also, former A's third baseman (and Giants hitting coach) Carney Lansford joins the broadcast team as a pregame and postgame analyst. He'll join Mindi Bach, Matt Morrison and Shooty Babitt on camera.

San Francisco Giants, pitcher Tim Lincecum appear headed for arbitration hearing

Wire services 2/12/2010

Despite reports of a multiyear contract offer from the Giants, Tim Lincecum appears headed for a salary arbitration hearing today in St. Petersburg, Fla.

The San Francisco Chronicle reported the club offered Lincecum a three-year, \$37-million deal. The two-time NL Cy Young Award winner reportedly responded with a counteroffer exceeding \$40 million.

If there's a hearing, a panel of three arbiters would select either Lincecum's requested one-year salary of \$13 million or the Giants' \$8 million bid, after listening to pitches from each side. He made \$650,000 in 2009.

Meanwhile, outfielder Corey Hart became the first player to have his hearing. He asked for \$4.8 million, and Milwaukee argued for \$4.15 million. Besides Lincecum and Hart, 10 other players are scheduled for hearings through next week.

A's: Former Oakland great Carney Lansford is turning to broadcasting, joining the A's Pregame Live and A's Postgame Live shows on Comcast SportsNet as an analyst. He had been the Giants' hitting coach the past two years ... Oakland outrighted infielder Gregorio Petit to Triple-A Sacramento but invited him to spring training. ... Randy Johnson, a special assistant to A's general manager Billy Beane, left the team to become San Diego's minor league coordinator.

Etc.: Frank Thomas, who's tied for 18th on the all-time home run list with 521, told MLB.com he's retiring. Thomas, a two-time AL MVP, had a .301 career average with 1,701 RBI. He played for the Chicago White Sox from 1990-2005 and split the 2006-08 seasons between the A's and Toronto. Thomas, 41, didn't play last season. ... Former Atlanta pitcher Tom Glavine rejoined the Braves as special assistant to team president John Schuerholz.