

## A's News Clips, Monday, February 22, 2010

### Rickey Henderson to spend time in A's camp

By Joe Stiglich\_Oakland Tribune

The A's hold their first full-squad workout Friday, and they'll have a VIP guest in attendance.

Hall of Famer Rickey Henderson will spend a few days in camp as a special instructor, spreading his baserunning wisdom to a team that will rely greatly on speed to score runs this season.

Henderson spent time in October helping out with the A's instructional league program in Phoenix, but this will mark his first major league coaching venture with Oakland, the team with which the all-time stolen base king spent four stints during his 25-year big league career.

"He'll be here the first day of position players (working out), and he'll be here four days," A's general manager Billy Beane said.

The plan calls for Henderson to offer more tutoring at the A's minor league camp, which opens full-squad workouts March 12.

"He's a smart baseball guy and a lot of fun to be around," said Beane, an A's teammate of Henderson's in 1989. "When a guy like that speaks, they're going to listen, especially all the young guys we have."

This won't be Henderson's first coaching gig. The New York Mets hired him as a special instructor in 2006, and he was credited with helping develop shortstop Jose Reyes into a top-of-the-lineup threat.

Henderson took over as Mets first base coach midway through the 2007 season but was not retained the following year. Even while coaching, Henderson created more buzz by insisting he still could contribute as a player.

He played his final major league season in 2003 with the Los Angeles Dodgers at age 44, and remains the major leagues' all-time leader in runs scored and stolen bases.

He continued playing independent league ball off and on through 2005.

The A's invited him to instructional league during the fall primarily to tutor second baseman Jemile Weeks, a 2008 first-round pick whom the A's envision as a future leadoff man.

"Really, once you meet him, it's an inspiration just knowing you're with a Hall of Famer," Weeks told Bay Area News Group recently. "He was showing me, I think, personal points that proved successful when he played. I just felt respected because a man of his caliber came down to my level and shared some information."

A's director of player development Keith Lieppman watched Henderson during instructional league, and says he excels in giving one-on-one instruction.

"He did a great job with those guys," Lieppman said. ... "Obviously the baserunning is the main thing, but he has some pretty good ideas about hitting. He brings a lot to the table."

A's manager Bob Geren said Henderson can be particularly helpful with a player such as Rajai Davis, who has terrific raw speed but still is mastering how to get a great jump on stolen-base attempts.

"Keith said he had pitchers on the mound (during instructional league), and after three or four pitches, Rickey saw something that (base runners) could key off of," Geren said.

Henderson, who grew up in Oakland, set the single-season and career stolen base marks in an A's uniform, so the reunion is a natural. The only question is why it didn't happen sooner.

Relations appeared frosty between Henderson and the organization after his playing career. But A's co-owner Lew Wolff was quoted in 2008 as saying Henderson could eventually take on some sort of role within the organization.

Henderson was inducted into the Hall of Fame in July of last season, and the A's held Rickey Henderson Day on Aug. 1, retiring his No. 24 in a nostalgic ceremony before a packed Oakland Coliseum crowd.

## **A's notebook: Pitcher Justin Duchscherer will undergo procedure today to alleviate discomfort in his back**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Justin Duchscherer couldn't take the mound with some of the A's other starting pitchers Sunday, but the right-hander isn't overly concerned with his latest medical setback.

Duchscherer has irritation in his sacroiliac joint, which lies at the junction of the spine and pelvis. The problem has bothered him going back to last season. He's scheduled to undergo a procedure in the Phoenix area today to alleviate the pain.

"They're going to do a procedure where they actually burn the nerves, kill the nerve endings, so my pain just doesn't get there," Duchscherer said.

A's head trainer Steve Sayles told him that he can throw whenever he feels capable of doing so after the procedure.

"It could be a day, it could be a week," Duchscherer said. "It's how I respond."

That registers as good news for the A's, who like their rotation if everyone comes out of camp healthy. Duchscherer and newcomer Ben Sheets were sidelined all of last season, and Dallas Braden still feels effects from a foot injury that cut short his 2009 campaign.

Although elbow surgery kept Duchscherer on the shelf for part of last season, it was pain in his SI joint that was his biggest physical hurdle after his elbow healed. He also underwent treatment for clinical depression.

Pitchers and catchers took the field for their first workout Sunday, but immediate rainfall set them ducking for cover indoors. They returned

after 15 minutes, and Sheets, Brett Anderson, Trevor Cahill and Brad Ziegler were among those throwing off the mound while a light rain continued falling.

Sheets bounced several pitches to catcher Kurt Suzuki, but he was generally happy with the session. More importantly, his surgically repaired elbow felt fine.

Left-hander Gio Gonzalez squeezed in some prep work before spring training — pitching in the alumni game at his alma mater, Hialeah (Fla.) High. Gonzalez threw one inning and struck out the side, no doubt holding the edge in intimidation against Hialeah's varsity hitters. "I wasn't trying to overthrow," Gonzalez said, "just trying to get some touch and feel, see some hitters."

## **Chin Music: Justin Duchscherer scratched from throwing today; rain interrupts start of A's first workout**

By Joe Stiglich, Contra Costa Times 9:35AM 2/21/2010

Spring training = sunshine, correct? Not the case so far at A's camp. No sooner had pitchers and catchers taken the field at Phoenix Municipal Stadium this morning that it started raining. The team headed back indoors for about 15 minutes, and now they're back stretching again. ... The sun has made just a brief cameo in the two full days I've been here. It wants to come out .... I can feel it.

Lots of pitchers will get on the mound today, but Justin Duchscherer won't be one of them. He was scheduled to go, but the lower back pain he's experiencing likely will push him back a few days. No clear read yet on how much concern this should cause ...

## **Consider Oakland armed and dangerous**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Like most teams, the A's have a decision or two to make at the back end of the rotation and in the bullpen.

The bigger question for Oakland, however, as the pitchers and catchers got under way Sunday, is: How good could this staff be?

Last year, the club used mostly rookies in the rotation, and now there are two All-Stars, if Ben Sheets and Justin Duchscherer are healthy. And the bullpen has big potential. Closer Andrew Bailey was the Rookie of the Year and Michael Wuertz had the best season by an AL setup man; Joey Devine, last year's projected closer, is rejoining the group after missing 2009 with an elbow injury.

"I will stand by the fact that we have the best bullpen in baseball," A's starter Dallas Braden said. "All those guys who worked in 70 games last year, and then we add Joey Devine, really? That's almost not fair."

Preseason PECOTA projections have the A's finishing second in the AL West, five games behind Texas, and much of that is based on pitching - the projections show Oakland scoring even fewer runs this season (742, 17 fewer than 2009's total) but giving up only 736 runs, after allowing 761 last year.

(PECOTA, or Player Empirical Comparison and Optimization Test Algorithm, is a system that projects player performance based on many factors, including past performance and age.)

And those figures are based, among other things, on Sheets and Duchscherer missing all of last year. Sheets is projected for 99 innings and five wins, for instance.

It's all conjecture at this point, and Duchscherer already is nursing an injury; he'll have a procedure today for irritation in the sacroiliac (pelvic) joint. He'll have a nerve ablation, in which the ends of the nerves in the area are burned using radio frequency, reducing discomfort.

In six months or a year, Duchscherer might need to have it done again, but he should be back on the field in several days.

Sheets, meantime, threw a bullpen session in a light rain.

"Watching him on the side today, you wouldn't even know he missed a year," Oakland pitching coach Curt Young said. "He's a true ace."

Sheets already has been announced as the team's Opening Night starter, at home against Seattle on April 5. Duchscherer would pitch second, and then the team can choose between left-handers Brett Anderson, who is coming off a promising rookie year, and Braden, who was last year's Opening Night starter.

Trevor Cahill has the upper hand in the race for the fifth spot - he was in the rotation all of last year as a rookie - but Gio Gonzalez and Vin Mazzaro have a shot if Cahill stumbles, or if Duchscherer's return is delayed. All have big-league experience.

"If we have the choice of the fifth starter from three guys of that caliber, that shows the depth we have," A's manager Bob Geren said.

Gonzalez also has the potential to be a long man in the bullpen, if the team decides to carry one. Bailey, Wuertz, Devine, Brad Ziegler and left-hander Craig Breslow are assured spots, though Bailey, the closer, said he's still going to approach the spring as if he's trying to nail down a job, knowing that he was an afterthought at this point last year.

Then there are three or four men vying for the final two spots. Brad Kilby's nice September might give him a boost, and Jerry Blevins is likely to be the second lefty in the bullpen, but Gonzalez is there if more innings are needed.

Another consideration: Rule-5 draftee Bobby Cassevah has a good sinker, gets loads of groundballs, and he comes from the Angels' organization. He'd have to be on the roster all year or would have to be offered back to the Angels.

"Everyone says we have a great group," Sheets said. "That's what Billy (Beane) sold me on, the arms. And if you have arms, you can win in this league."

## **Powell a bit lighter on his feet**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

**Landon Powell** has dropped 10 pounds from his large frame, and even better news for the A's backup catcher is that it's because he has been weaned off prednisone.

The steroid, prescribed to manage Powell's chronic autoimmune hepatitis (a hereditary condition), leads to weight gain and to fatigue, things with which Powell struggled last year as a rookie. The disease is in remission, however, and Powell is down to one medication to help his autoimmune system and to protect his liver.

Powell, listed at 6-foot-3, 260 pounds before his weight loss, got off prednisone in January, and says he feels great. He also is pleased to see his former college and minor-league teammate, outfielder-turned-reliever **Marcus McBeth**, back with the A's - McBeth was traded to Cincinnati three years ago for outfielder **Chris Denorfia**.

"Marcus was our center fielder at South Carolina and he had the best arm I've ever seen, really," Powell said. "He'd mess around throwing in the bullpen and we always wanted him to go into a game because he threw so hard."

**Briefly:** The A's will have an intrasquad game March 3 at Phoenix Municipal Stadium, with **Dallas Braden** a possibility to pitch, among others. If the team has a short intrasquad game the day before that, **Ben Sheets** might get in an inning, according to manager **Bob Geren**. ... Catcher **Max Stassi**, a high-profile draft pick last year from Yuba City High School, is wide-eyed at his first big-league camp. "It was a fun first day," said Stassi, 18. "I got some nerves out of the way. It's an honor to be here and I'm just seeing how everyone goes about their work."

## **A's reliever Devine is a man who deserves a break**

Ray Ratto, San Francisco Chronicle, 2/22/2010

Joey Devine really should have walked up behind Andrew Bailey one time last year and kicked him right in the hinder. Good-naturedly, we mean - we would never encourage teammate violence, unless we could derive some amusement or money from the effort.

But no, Devine didn't even consider it, if you believe him to be an honest and forthright fellow, because he has had plenty of experience as the guy who always draws seven-deuce. He was going to be the A's closer last year, then his arm blew and he got to have Tommy John surgery while Bailey came from the far suburbs of nowhere to win the closer's job and the American League Rookie of the Year award.

"No, I never really thought about that," he said with a laugh when asked if he'd even given any thought to putting thought to foot. "I've learned a lot about myself through my career, and I've learned a lot about the game. This is part of it. He came on, made the best of his opportunity and it's great for him."

Devine is by his count "a good three or four weeks ahead of schedule" to take his place in the surprisingly deep Oakland bullpen, but not as the closer. In fact, he's probably sitting as the third right-hander behind Michael Wuertz and Brad Ziegler, even though "I want to be a closer, I have a closer's mentality, and it's my goal to get there someday. I'm ready if the chance happens for me."

So far, though, the only chance Devine has gotten has been to feel the back of the game's chain-mailed hand. He has had a hip flexor and a back problem, he has had two successful grievances against his former team, Atlanta, to win his rightful pay, and his big moment on the field was a walk-off series-ending homer allowed to Houston's Chris Burke in the 18th inning of the fourth game of the 2005 National League Division Series.

In his eighth game in the majors. At age 22. So never mind kicking Bailey's seater - Devine should be aiming for the deity in charge of being gratuitously mean to baseball players. But again, no can do.

"Oh, I wouldn't change a thing, not even that," the almost disturbingly chipper right-hander said. "The injuries, the rehabs, all of it. It's made me the person I am. I've had my down moments, I wondered a few times why me, but I owe my brother Matt thanks for telling me not to be such a (whiner). So I finally just said, 'Screw it. I'm not going to worry about it.' "

So he doesn't worry about it. Unless bad luck decides to make a spot inspection this spring, he will resume the search for his big break without giving in to the urge to give Bailey a Nike hello.

At least we *think* he'll resist the urge. The man is only human.

## **Drumbeat: Duchscherer to get minor procedure; Sheets throws**

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser 1:30pm, 2/21/2010

Justin Duchscherer told me this morning that he's getting the nerve ablation I mentioned in this morning's paper tomorrow. He's a little apprehensive about the procedure, but it sounds as if it is a minor one; radio waves are used to heat and burn the nerve endings, effectively halting discomfort in the area, like a nerve block.

The procedure occasionally must be repeated six months or a year later when the nerves have re-grown. Soreness after the procedure generally lasts only a few days, and Duchscherer was told he'd miss no more than four days or so. That means he shouldn't be too far behind the rest of the starters, although it might delay his first spring appearance until closer to the middle of the month.

The key highlight from today was Ben Sheets' first bullpen session with the A's, which took place in a light rain. He threw hard and he threw strikes with his fastball, though his location was a little off with his curveball; he said that the curve generally takes longer to come but that he's only once left spring training without it showing up in its mid-season form. Sheets is wearing his usual number, 15, and outfielder Ryan Sweeney will shift to No. 21.

Sheets is funny, and never so much so as when he's talking about his hitting. He joked yesterday that the team might want to consider using him as a DH (he has an .076 career average) and he insisted today that he is the worst hitter ever and he bet me that he will be the A's worst hitter.

I mentioned that he did bat eighth in 2008 - quite memorably, because that meant that former A's catcher Jason Kendall was hitting ninth, behind the pitcher. Sheets made a big show of announcing, "That's right, you *might* be looking at the first Brewers pitcher *ever* to hit eighth." He followed with a hearty chuckle.

Dallas Braden told me earlier in the week he planned to bother Sheets about pitching "24-7," so I asked Sheets if he was prepared for that.

"I'm going to have Dallas throwing right-handed by the end of the year," Sheets said, grinning.

Catcher Kurt Suzuki was thrilled to catch Sheets for the first time. "He looked awesome," Suzuki said. "It was great - there's nothing better than catching Ben Sheets. Wherever I set up, inside, outside, he'd square me up."

Sheets' main thing is to stay healthy, but he's also got an immediate goal: He desperately wants a win. "A win would be tremendous," he said. I asked if spring counts (it's tough to get wins in the spring until near the end anyway; not enough innings) and he said, "No."

A reminder: I'm going to be on Twitter most days (@susanslusser) and I'll try to update the schedule at the field this first week or two whenever I can. Tomorrow, the pitchers will be throwing at Phoenix Muni. They'll be on the field to stretch about 9:30 a.m. - although it's supposed to rain again, so that might upset things.

Posted By: Susan Slusser (Email, Twitter) | February 21 2010 at 01:30 PM

## **Braden becomes both student and teacher**

### **A's lefty moonlights as pitching mentor for college team**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- When it came time for Ed Sprague to decide on a rotation for his team's season-opening series this weekend, the University of Pacific baseball coach called up a good friend for some advice.

Dallas Braden happened to be on the other end of that phone conversation. Sprague listened carefully to a pal 16 years his junior.

"I asked him who he likes of our guys, and we were pretty much on the same page," Sprague said. "We were pretty close, and I ended up going with the guys he chose."

Turns out the kid knows his stuff, as the Tigers enjoyed a 2-1 weekend against the University of San Francisco in their first regular-season games since being under the tutorage of Braden, who still makes his home in the university's location of Stockton, Calif.

Both Braden and Sprague went to high school in Stockton. Both have played for the A's -- Sprague in 1998 during a 11-year professional career. Yet neither knew of the other until 2006 when Braden asked Sprague if he could practice on the university's fields during the offseason.

In four short years, the 26-year-old A's left-hander has since transformed from an average Minor League pitcher bouncing back and forth from the bullpen to the rotation into a bona fide big league starter. Oh, and don't forget the college interim pitching coach stint on his resume, which Sprague proudly endorses.

"It seems like just yesterday he started asking if he could come out and play catch at our field," the Tigers coach said. "Ever since, he's come out every offseason to work out. This year he came out more, and our guys started watching him play catch and asking him questions.

"He ended up staying three or four hours and would watch them in the bullpen. It was great."

For Braden, making friends comes as easily as throwing strikes thanks to a contagiously inviting and witty personality, so before long, the A's pitcher was welcoming the college players into his home.

"I took some guys under my wing and had them come over to the house," he said. "They were asking me how to prepare, and I have DVDs in my office of all the games I've thrown, so I showed them and talked about approach. It was fun because I feel like the more you talk about that stuff the more you can actually learn."

Braden can only hope he can act out his own lessons this year as he returns from a season in which he was shut down after only 22 starts. His bizarre injuries coincidentally match his quirky personality -- for no rhyme or reason, other than maybe to allow the baseball gods to hear Braden interactively tell tales of his wacky body.

Take his deviated septum, for instance. Braden underwent a nasal endoscopy in December because of the resulting breathing and sleeping problems -- an operation that led to what he described as a "waterfall" of blood over his grandma's sink when he attempted to remove a cotton ball just days later.

"I was steadily flowing blood out of my face for the first few days," he said in a humorous nonchalant manner. "I can now breathe -- figuratively and literally."

On top of that, Braden still feels lingering effects from the nerve irritation that developed last year in his foot and has no feeling in two of his toes. The foot issues began midseason when his ankle suffered an allergic reaction to a neoprene brace he'd been wearing, which subsequently led to inflammation in the area where his foot meets his ankle.

"I don't know if it affects me," Braden said of the numb toes. "Sometimes I'll get a little too far on the back side of my foot and I'm not really sure how far I'm back there just because sensory isn't there. There's no motor sensory damage, which means my muscles are firing and I can feel that, which is awesome. But just to touch it, there's not much going on there."

"They said it could take six months, six years, or it could never come back. We just don't know."

Braden does know, though, that he's "right where I need to be" on the Spring Training schedule.

"I've thrown some bullpens and have no limitations really," said the southpaw, who is scheduled to throw a bullpen session Monday. "I'm running and doing everything that's required of a guy in camp."

"I was ready for this Aug. 5, which was about two days after I realized I wasn't going to pitch again. I even called [pitching coach] Curt Young and told him after the first day I threw a baseball I almost cried because I was just so excited that I could actually throw a baseball and I was ready to go. I started playing catch in late November or early December because I wanted that feeling. I wanted to know I was still a baseball player."

No matter where Braden's health leads him this year or the next, Sprague believes the A's pitcher will be a mainstay in the game thanks to a maturity the coach has watched progress during Braden's time in Stockton.

"I think he's definitely got a gift for coaching," Sprague said. "He did a very good job of relaying stuff on the coaching level. I definitely think he'll have a long career in baseball, especially after he's done playing."

For now, though, Braden hopes to stay busy on the mound in an effort to turn some of the Giants fans present on Pacific's baseball team into followers of the green and gold.

"I don't know if we've converted all of them," said Sprague, "but we've certainly turned them all into Dallas Braden fans."

## **Mixed results on first day of A's workouts**

### **Sheets looks good; Duchscherer a no-go with back issue**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- A sense of renewed optimism, along with plenty of fresh faces, made their way onto the field Sunday as A's pitchers and catchers enjoyed their first official workouts of the spring under a steady rain.

A total of 28 pitchers and five catchers -- including seven non-roster pitchers and three non-roster catchers -- found themselves on the diamond at Phoenix Municipal Stadium for less than 10 minutes before escaping to reach cover in the inside facilities.

"The work will get done today," manager Bob Geren said. "Either way, we will get our work in, no problem."

Such was the scene within minutes, as drops diminished and the workouts increased, leaving all eyes eagerly awaiting the sight of a healthy Ben Sheets and Justin Duchscherer, two of 14 pitchers scheduled to throw bullpen sessions for the day.

Sheets threw several hard strikes while debuting No. 15 -- digits he graciously acquired from Ryan Sweeney. Duchscherer, meanwhile, never made it out of the clubhouse.

The A's right-hander, who missed all of last year because of an elbow injury and a bout with clinical depression, revealed he is dealing with an irritated sacroiliac joint, which connects the base of the spine to the hip bones.

Duchscherer was bothered by the same problem last year while rehabbing from elbow surgery and has had three cortisone shots for the joint, but it is no longer responding to the treatment like it did before. Thus, on Monday he will undergo a short nerve ablation procedure, which involves the burning of the nerve ends of his SI joint using radio waves to produce heat that will destroy the nerve and relieve pain.

"It's frustrating," he said. "I thought all I was going to have to worry about this season was my mental problems, and now something like this happens."

However, Duchscherer insists it's a minor setback and was told that recovery time usually varies from one day to one week, leaving questions of when he'll make it back on the mound lingering once again.

His recovering partner in crime, however, made impressive strides Sunday morning. Sheets, who has insisted since his arrival in Oakland that he's 100 percent healthy despite missing all of last year due to elbow surgery, proved his word to be true in front of several coaches and media members who stood closely watching his bullpen session.

"I'm feeling good today," Sheets said after throwing. "I can't compare it to how I felt before in previous seasons because that seems so long ago, but I felt comfortable today."

The four-time Milwaukee All-Star, who represents the team's biggest offseason acquisition with a price tag of \$10 million, has thrown the same two pitches -- fastball and curveball -- since he was 11 and was asked about both.

"The fastball was obviously not 95 [mph], but I don't need to be there right now," he said. "I'm dialing it back up, and it might take awhile, but there's no sense in rushing it."

As for his curveball, "it will take awhile for it to come, but it's going to come when it wants to come. It only ever didn't come once in eight years."

Trevor Cahill, Brett Anderson and Brad Ziegler were among some other pitchers who took to the mound Sunday, with plenty more -- including Dallas Braden and Andrew Bailey -- expected to throw a bullpen session Monday.

Catcher Joel Galarraga, who is waiting on a visa in Mexico, and pitcher Henry Rodriguez -- expected to make it in from Venezuela late Tuesday -- were the only two missing from the day's events.

Geren said Sunday's happenings were mostly about making the team familiar with certain procedures. The big pep talk, the one that sends out an annual message of optimism to his team, comes Thursday when the entire squad, including position players, is in camp.

"Everybody's undefeated," Geren said. "It's an exciting time."

## **Lee's Leftovers: Pitchers and catchers report: Rainy day roundup**

Jane Lee, mlb.com 2/21/2010

Seems like just a day ago I was teasing my sister about the rain she was getting in Northern California. And there I was, texting her from my patio while working under the perfect 75-degree sun in Arizona. Silly me, for not thinking karma would actually come back to get me so soon. But such was the case this morning as I stepped out of the car bright and early on pitchers/catchers reporting day under dark clouds just waiting to topple me with big, cold raindrops. Out of courtesy, they waited a whole hour before letting loose, but that didn't help the fact I was standing sans umbrella and rain coat while waiting for A's players to enter and leave the clubhouse facilities, which were closed all day due to physicals. Luckily, all



seven of us media people didn't have to shiver much longer before being allowed to stand in a small hallway just around the corner from the clubhouse. The players must have loved it, as we created somewhat of a red carpet entrance by standing on both sides of the walkway. At the same time, they must have also rolled their eyes after passing us, knowing full well it would be hard to escape without coming back from their physicals to talk to us. A few got by, but we did catch up with several notable guys. Here's a good-size collection of what I heard today:

**Bob Geren** reported that **Justin Duchscherer** has been experiencing stiffness off and on in his lower back for a couple of weeks, the most recent time being this morning after throwing a 20-pitch bullpen session yesterday. He'll be reevaluated tomorrow morning before pitchers and catchers begin their first official workouts at 9:45 a.m. Geren didn't sound overly concerned, but the team must be slightly worried given Justin's history with back injuries. Should be interesting to see if he is limited to certain activities tomorrow.

**Ben Sheets** held an informal media session after his physical and appeared very confident heading into tomorrow's workouts with zero restrictions. He is following the same throwing program as the other A's pitchers and will throw his second bullpen session (his first one came Friday) tomorrow. The A's big offseason acquisition admitted it was a little strange "putting on the green" after being in Milwaukee for so long, but he said he's excited for the challenge of a new league. Sheets added that he tries different things every spring but usually comes out of it with the same two pitches (fastball and curveball) he's used since he was 11 years old. "They ask about the changeup and I'm usually *eh* about it," he said. "I'll throw it here and there." He's tried all forms of a cutter but insists they all look the same - "straight as a string." However, he might try learning what he called his 12th cutter since he likes what he sees of Duchscherer's cutter. Said Sheets: "I believe in location and a breaking ball, and we'll go from there."

On another note, Sheets said he attended the Super Bowl. He grew up a life-long Saints fan and even used to wear a Saints jersey to the ballpark every Sunday when he played with the Brewers. We'll have to see if that tradition continues here in Oakland. Sheets on the game: "Great results. Maybe I'll get that feeling soon." A's fans can only hope...

**Vin Mazzaro** has completely recovered from the shoulder tendinitis that shut down his season early last year. Like every other pitcher (aside from maybe Duchscherer now), he is not limited in any way.

**Brett Anderson** told us he'd like to work on his changeup to have another weapon against right-handed hitters. He said he feels a little more relaxed entering camp knowing that he has a better grip on job security, which allows him the chance to work on different aspects of his game. Brett recently turned 22 and celebrated with family and friends at a dinner in Stillwater, Okla., where he spent his offseason.

The always entertaining **Dallas Braden** provided a much-needed 20 minutes worth of comic relieve for us reporters in the hallway. First of all, on a more serious note, he spoke of the left foot that caused him to put a hold on his season last year after only 22 starts. He still feels lingering effects from the nerve irritation that developed last year and still has no feeling in two of his toes. On top of that, Braden had a nasal endoscopy in December because of a deviated septum and resulting breathing problems. He can now breathe and sleep comfortably, but that wasn't before he experienced a few days of post-

procedure effects. If you don't like blood, I advise you to skip to the next paragraph, but this story is too good not to share. After his operation, Braden had to keep a cotton ball under his nose. One day, his grandmother ran to the store to get more cotton balls and Dallas decided to remove the one he had on. The result: a "waterfall" of blood everywhere. He called his grandma and yelled: "You gotta come back here. I don't know what's going on. You gotta take me to the hospital." Upon grandma's return, blood was all over the sink and she thought he had shot someone or something. Now, a flood of blood should normally not be so humorous, but leave it to Dallas to make it such.

**Josh Outman**, another recovering pitcher, talked about his recovery from Tommy John elbow ligament replacement surgery and the resulting surgical effects in the form of shoulder soreness, which shut him down for six weeks. However, he says he still plans to be back with the team by midseason -- hopefully in the rotation rather than the bullpen. For more on Outman, see a full story on him later tonight at the A's site.

Heard more from **Michael Taylor** today. He basically said he's going to be the best he can be to win a roster spot, but if the team doesn't deem him ready, that's OK too because it will give him more to work on at Triple-A Sacramento. With all the outfield commotion going on this spring, I see Taylor starting the year in Sacramento, mostly because I believe the A's want to preserve his service time and make sure he's up for good once he arrives. Until that time, I suspect he'll tear it up with the River Cats.

We also talked to **Andrew Bailey** for a bit. He once again described his whirlwind of an offseason and how he's not taking anything for granted this spring despite a guaranteed roster spot. "There are guys here like me last year," he said. "You never know who's behind you." Bailey spent the offseason working out with fellow bullpen mate **Craig Breslow**, whose offseason home was about 10 minutes from Bailey's.

Position players spotted in camp today: **Eric Chavez, Mark Ellis, Eric Patterson, Cliff Pennington, Landon Powell and Travis Buck**

That should do it for now. Expect more tomorrow as pitchers and catchers begin workouts at Phoenix Municipal, where I'll be reporting from all day -- hopefully under the sun. Take care, and enjoy what's left of your Saturday night.

## **Athletics open camp with recovering pitchers**

AP, 2/21/2010

Ben Sheets and Justin Duchscherer didn't pitch in the majors last season. Now, they're expected to anchor the Oakland Athletics' rotation.

Sheets had right elbow surgery last February. Duchscherer had problems with his elbow, hip and back, then was sidelined with clinical depression.

"I have been throwing every day," Sheets said Saturday, when Oakland's pitchers and catchers reported to spring training. "I threw a bullpen a couple of days ago and I'm throwing another one tomorrow. When you're 31 and coming off surgery you start slow and build yourself up."

A's manager Bob Geren said there are no restrictions on either of them and he expects Sheets to return to the form that made him a four-time All-Star with the Milwaukee Brewers.

"Ben is right on. I caught him one time and he was bringing it," Geren said. "The last couple of fastballs he threw came at me in a hurry."

The A's are confident Sheets, who had six stints on the disabled list before the operation, has a clean bill of health. The pitcher said he feels good.

"The big key is staying healthy," he said. "I'm confident I'll have the two pitches I need come April. I've thrown the same two pitches, a fastball and a curve, since I was 11 years old. I believe in location and having a breaking ball to go with the fastball. I've tried to learn the cutter and the change but they both end up looking the same."

Duchscherer was on schedule until he came to camp Saturday with lower back stiffness. Geren said the two-time All-Star threw a 20-pitch bullpen session Friday and reported soreness the next morning.

Top reliever Joey Devine also missed last season and is expected to become an important part of a bullpen that includes closer Andrew Bailey, the AL Rookie of the Year, and former closer Brad Ziegler.

Devine appeared in two spring training games last year before undergoing ligament replacement surgery on his right elbow. He also threw off a mound Friday and seems to be on track.

In addition, left-hander Josh Outman and right-hander Vin Mazzaro missed significant time with injuries. Outman had Tommy John surgery on June 30 and Mazzaro sustained a shoulder injury that ended his season in late August.

Outman is on track to return by the All-Star break and is using Devine's recovery as a measuring stick.

"He had the same kind of surgery as me and I can see where he is at," Outman said. "He's about four months ahead of me. Right now I'm on a modified throwing program. I hope to get a couple of simulated games in before the team breaks camp. That would be the ideal situation for me to return by midseason."

Mazzaro said he began his throwing program six weeks ago.

"I wanted to come in ready, healthy and feeling strong," he said.

NOTES: RHP Henry Rodriguez and C Joel Galarraga are dealing with visa issues. Rodriguez is expected to report on Tuesday, while Galarraga is still working on his problem. ... Grady Fuson, former A's scouting director, returned to the team as a special adviser to baseball operations. Fuson, who began his career as an area scout with Oakland in 1982, spent 19 seasons with the A's organization, including the last seven years as scouting director (1995-2001). Most recently, he served as vice president of scouting and player development with San Diego from 2006-09 after joining the Padres in 2005 as a special assistant to the general manager.

## **Duchscherer doesn't throw because of back problem**

The Associated Press 2/21/2010

Oakland Athletics pitcher Justin Duchscherer is off to a slow start at spring training.

The two-time All-Star, who missed all of last season after having surgery on his right elbow and being treated for clinical depression, didn't throw Sunday during the first workout for Oakland pitchers and catchers.

Duchscherer is feeling pain in his lower back and is likely to undergo some procedure Monday to treat the problem.

While Duchscherer missed out, oft-injured Ben Sheets was at work.

The four-time All-Star was pounding the strike zone, and the sound of his fastball hitting the catcher's mitt echoed during the Athletics' practice.

"Any baseball player is going to be excited about the start of a new season," Sheets said. "You tend to get a little antsy as spring training draws near."

Sheets will be one of the most closely watched pitchers of the spring as he returns from the right elbow surgery he underwent nearly a year ago to the day.

Sheets, who signed a one-year contract worth \$10 million plus incentives in late January, wants to show he can still pitch.

"It was an alone year but that's in the past," Sheets said. "I felt like I had a chance to get healthy and do other things in my life."

Sheets grew up in the Milwaukee Brewers' organization, which has its spring training headquarters in another section of Phoenix.

"It was kind of strange putting on the green for the first time," said Sheets, who owns a major league record of 86-83. "When you're with one organization for so long, you tend to identify with that color. I even made a wrong turn out of where I stay the first day I was in town. Old habits die hard."

Left-hander Dallas Braden, the Athletics' opening day starter last season, was also anxious to get going after having his season end prematurely with a foot injury.

"There's no way you can be disappointed entering spring training," said the animated Braden, who dealt with breathing issues all of last year in addition to his aches and pains. "I was ready for this on Aug. 5, two days after I realized I wasn't going to pitch again. I started playing catch in late November. I wanted that feeling. I wanted to know I was still a baseball player."

Braden underwent surgery to correct blockage in his nasal passages and has been able to sleep better ever since.

"There were days I would go workout where after 30 minutes I wanted to pass out," he said. "But sleep is the biggest thing. It's taken a lot of weight off me mentally."

## **Beane critic returns to A's fold**

Ray Ratto, San Francisco Chronicle, 2/21/2010

Grady Fuson's first day at work was uneventful – mostly a four-hour staff meeting discussing the minutiae of the Oakland Athletics' upcoming spring training, the kind that even those in the meeting would find both necessary and tedious.

But when Billy Beane asked Fuson if he had met everyone in the room, Fuson said, "It was kind of funny in a way. I think I'd worked with and/or hired all but two guys in the room."

Fuson returned to Oakland more than eight years after leaving the A's to expand his baseball fortune, and nearly seven since publicly and thoroughly excoriating the man who re-hired him for the portrayal of the A's scouting department in "Moneyball," the book by Michael Lewis which has defined, promoted and in some ways dogged Beane ever since.

"Actually, he and I got over it pretty quickly," Fuson, who is essentially a catch-all advisor both to Beane and the development staff he helped build. "I kind of jumped on him when I saw what was in the book because of what it said about the people (in the scouting department) who worked for us. I kind of let loose, and he sent me a message that said, 'Touché.'"

What Fuson said about the portrayal of Beane in the book was more than "touché," though. It was both comprehensive and combative, as these quotes from Comrade Slusser's interview with Fuson in 2003 reveal.

"This (book) makes him look like a mad scientist, and if that's how he wants to be perceived, that's what he's accountable for. If he wants to show no appreciation to the team he had in place, it's his prerogative, but it's sad because of the loyalty of those people who traveled from city to city and spent nights and nights away from home and are now called old codgers."

And:

"Billy never really went out and saw players, and that's fine and dandy, but I've never tried to take all the credit; I thought we were a team."

And:

"He was obviously very remorseful and said that was not what he said, but I told him, 'You're the one who ultimately will be held responsible for what's in this book.'"

Put simply, Fuson wasn't happy about the book and the portrait of his relationship with Beane therein, and he let Beane have it with as many barrels as were open to him. But time heals many wounds, and if you don't let the scar tissue bother you, you can go home again.

"When I got let go (in San Diego, where he was vice president of scouting and development until being fired in October by new general manager Jed Hoyer), it wasn't that Billy was my first call. I was his first call. He called me that afternoon."

And though Fuson's new job was revealed only a few days ago and announced in a release on Saturday, he had already landed back in the place that sprung him 28 years ago.

"We sort of knew what was in the wind (in San Diego), and if he came available, I was going to try and get him back," Beane said. "He's always been a guy who speaks his mind, and we need people who speak their minds."

This is an interesting assessment given Beane's reputation for having an ultra-hands-on working style and a prodigious temper. But he also has a tendency to cool rapidly, though that isn't universally true, and as he said, "I like to think I'm better at not blowing up so often."

In any event, he and Fuson reached a relatively quick rapprochement. "I don't know how long it took for everything to calm down, but it couldn't have been too long because I don't remember. I know we've kept in touch over the last eight years, and I always thought he'd feel comfortable here."

Fuson's story matches Beane's, and while everything sounds good and meshes well when your old boss becomes your new boss, the fact is he came back to Oakland without much hesitation years after a blow-up that one would think would have become a blood feud.

Fuson will be a hands-on resource across the player development spectrum, but Beane said one of his principal duties would be to help with the evaluations required before the amateur draft in June. The A's pick 10<sup>th</sup>, their highest first round position since they took Barry Zito at No. 9 11 years ago, and Fuson expects tension in the draft room as there was when the book outlined Beane's famous chair-toss.

"But there's always tension in a draft room, because you have so much money at stake and so many smart people with so many opinions who worked their tails off to get all the information they bring with them," Fuson said. "That's normal on every team, every year."

But Fuson also sees beneficial change in the Beane of today from the Beane of the book period.

"My last year here, I think they were using numbers for maybe 80 percent of the opinions they formed," Fuson said. "I'd like to think now that it's 60-40, with scouting being the 60. But scouts have always used metrics of one sort or another for their opinions, and your eyeballs can't tell you everything. You can't do this by feel, or by ego. You have to have that balance."

And presumably that balance has been re-struck by both Beane and Fuson, two opinionated and strong-willed baseball men who have learned the values of flexibility and the bygone of bygones.

Not to mention the most valuable lesson of all, that in any long working relationship the good times typically outnumber the bad, which explains Grady Fuson's return to Oakland as well as anything.