

## A's News Clips, Wednesday, February 24, 2010

### A's notebook: Reliever Joey Devine '50-50' to be ready for opener, says he won't rush his return from Tommy John elbow surgery

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 2/24/2010

The A's are encouraged about the bullpen they'll take into the regular season.

It's a group that may not include Joey Devine — at least early on.

Manager Bob Geren listed the chances at "50-50" that Devine would be ready by Opening Day.

"If I make that, I'm ahead of schedule, and if I don't, it's no big deal," Devine said. "The timetable (for a typical recovery) would be the end of April, but my goal is just to continue to progress."

Devine had ligament-replacement surgery in April on his right elbow. The operation, commonly referred to as Tommy John surgery, typically takes a full calendar year to recover from.

Devine at one point was confident he'd be 100 percent by the start of camp, but he felt soreness after throwing some breaking balls two weeks ago and now is behind the other relievers.

Devine threw a 20-pitch bullpen session — all fastballs — Tuesday. He says he'll try to throw his breaking ball again next week.

Even without Devine, the A's have one of the AL's deepest bullpens.

Andrew Bailey, Michael Wuertz, Brad Ziegler and lefty Craig Breslow figure to have spots cemented. Lefties Jerry Blevins and Brad Kilby will get strong consideration, and if Devine isn't ready, it still would leave a spot open.

Geren wants to carry seven relievers.

Geren said backup catcher Landon Powell won't be used at first base this year, as he was at times in 2009.

He shed 10 pounds over the winter and was eager to sharpen his first base skills.

"They want me to spend my time catching and hitting, and that's fine with me."

Justin Duchscherer's procedure to relieve the pain in his sacroiliac joint (lower back) was successful, according to a team spokesperson. He'll return to the team today, but there's no word on when he'll resume throwing.

Ben Sheets is slated to start the A's second exhibition March 5 against the Milwaukee Brewers. That would put Sheets on schedule to start Opening Night against Seattle. Trevor Cahill will start the exhibition opener, March 4 vs. the Chicago Cubs.

### Chin Music: Eric Chavez works at first base, takes BP and addresses media; Duchscherer's procedure goes well

By Joe Stiglich, Contra Costa Times, 2/23/2010

Today's workout ended up having more spice to it than expected, thanks to several everyday players who showed up for batting practice — Eric Chavez, Mark Ellis, Ryan Sweeney and Daric Barton were among those taking hacks in the cage and getting some defensive work.

Chavez was the main attraction, as he always is when he reports to camp. He took throws and fielded lots of grounders at first, getting drilled in some basics by infield coach Mike Gallego. Some highlights from his media chat:

—On learning to play first: "Whatever I do, I wanna do it so well. I just have to remember, I'm just taking ground balls, just with a bigger glove. The more times I get over there, the easier it will be."

-He's not crazy about using a first baseman's mitt. "I'm getting two ready in case one of them fails me."

-Manager Bob Geren said he wants Chavez to work strictly on his hitting and first base work for the time being. Chavez doesn't believe he'll need much time at third to be ready if needed there. He shagged a few balls in the outfield this afternoon, but said he was just getting some running in. "I have no restrictions. They asked me what I thought I needed to do, and I just told them to minimize my throwing."

Although his troublesome back gets the most attention, you have to remember that Chavez's twice-operated on right shoulder is also a big issue. That's why fewer throws is better.

-In other news, Joey Devine threw 20 pitches today, but Geren listed his chances of being ready Opening Day as "50-50".

-An A's spokesperson said Justin Duchscherer's procedure went well to relieve pain in the SI joint in his lower back. He'll return to the team tomorrow, but no word on when he'll resume throwing. The procedure was done at the Arizona Center for Pain Relief.

## **Lifelong friends might be teammates**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Youth baseball players often are told the odds of making it to the pro level are absurdly slim, as small as one in 30,000, according to some estimates.

And yet somehow two best friends from a small town in the Florida panhandle have wound up in the A's clubhouse at Phoenix Municipal Stadium, gleeful at being reunited in a big-league camp.

Bobby Cassevah, a right-handed reliever, came from the Angels in the Rule-5 draft in December. He has known highly regarded catching prospect Josh Donaldson since they were 5 years old in Pace, Fla., population 7,000.

"The same clubhouse - what are those odds, a million to one?" Donaldson said. "It's pretty unique. There are some brothers who have played on the same team, like the Hairstons, but this is different gene pools."

The two were inseparable as kids. They'd spend one week at Donaldson's house, the next week at Cassevah's.

"We're like brothers, practically," Cassevah said.

They played on all the same teams at every level from pee-wee football and Little League on, at S.S. Dixon Elementary, Avalon Middle School and Pace High School until Donaldson moved to Alabama after his junior year.

Their lifelong goal: to play on the same major-league team.

"I wasn't really thinking it would ever happen," Donaldson said, "but Bobby's obviously got a great chance to make the team, and hopefully, sometime I might get a chance. That would be a dream deal, to have him pitching and me catching."

What positions did they play in football?

"Bobby was the quarterback and I was a receiver," Donaldson said with a laugh. "I guess we've always had that connection. I always knew what he wanted to do."

They're contrasting personality types, which is perhaps why they get along so well. Donaldson is chatty and outgoing, Cassevah describes himself as quiet and shy.

"Bobby never gets rattled, his temperament is real low-key, the opposite of me," Donaldson said. "So we balance each other out. He's more a listener and I'm more of a talker."

The 24-year-olds are rooming together this spring and they've both got bright futures. Cassevah has wowed the coaches with his sinker, and he also throws a good slider and what Donaldson calls a "swing-and-miss" split-finger.

"If he throws strikes, Bobby has a chance to be very successful," Donaldson said.

The two faced each other last year at the Double-A level; Donaldson went 0-for-4 with three strikeouts against Cassevah in a regular-season game, but got a hit off him in the Texas League All-Star Game.

The A's must keep Cassevah on their 25-man roster all year or must offer him back to the Angels for \$50,000; he's vying for one of the final spots in the bullpen, so his performance this spring will decide his fate and whether he sticks in the same organization as his buddy.

Donaldson, acquired in the Rich Harden deal with the Cubs in July 2008, is ranked among Oakland's top-10 prospects and he has been a catcher for only four years after being converted from third base.

"To have made the adjustment to catching as quickly as he has is pretty incredible," said Keith Lieppman, the A's director of player development. "Terry Steinbach is the obvious comparison, and Josh is much more athletic than Steiny. It's a similar story, how well they made that transition, but very different body types."

Double-A Midland pitching coach Scott Emerson called Donaldson "a real student of the game," and said he was instrumental in helping the RockHounds' pitchers improve.

"Josh has fun with the game, he's creative, innovative, he gives us ideas," Emerson said. "He's a good catcher. I've had Landon Powell, I've had Kurt Suzuki - he's going to push those guys."

## **Dodgers dumb down, and in other news...**

Bruce Jenkins, San Francisco Chronicle, 2/24/2010

Some thoughts on spring training, one week shy of the exhibition openers:

-- It took just one day for Manny Ramirez to divide the Dodgers in half. The two sides consist of Manny, all by himself, and everyone else. The way he is approaching the final year of his contract, you wonder if he'll be gone - or essentially worthless - by the trading deadline.

That's an extreme view, in light of Ramirez's wondrous feats since joining the club, but entirely plausible. This is a special player, one of the greatest right-handed hitters of all time, until he isn't. Once he turns against an organization, it's all over. People are laughing heartily in Boston right now, because Man-Ram's tenure ended there after he quit on the team.

Ramirez chose his first spring-training interview to announce that he wouldn't be with the Dodgers next year. Asked why he was so certain he wouldn't get a contract extension, he replied, "I don't know. I just know I'm not going to be here."

The Dodgers don't have to wait for the inevitable, crashing descent of the Ramirez meteor. The process began last season, when he was suspended for 50 games for violating Major League Baseball's drug policy. He returned in an atmosphere of derision, rumors spreading that his performance-enhancer of choice was a woman's fertility drug, but he was welcomed back by the team, manager Joe Torre and, for an extended time, the public.

Eventually, the celebrities put down their wigs. Ramirez hit .255 in the final 68 games of the season, heard some booing, and drove in only two runs during the Dodgers' NLCS loss to the Phillies. You'd think, with all this negativity surrounding him, he'd arrive in Arizona in the spirit of renewal, that "fresh start" so cherished by players around the game. Now he has everyone wondering if he's either finished as a player or, mentally, heading straight into the tank.

-- The Dodgers are taking a flyer on Eric Gagne, one of the most unhittable relievers in history during his heyday in the Steroid Era, and it was refreshing to hear Gagne admit using HGH in an interview with the Los Angeles Times. Still, this is a senseless move by the Dodgers. He hasn't been the old Gagne since 2004. Why even go there?

-- It was a wake-up call for all sports Monday when the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency announced a positive test for HGH. The lack of reliable testing had always put MLB in the dark regarding HGH, believed to be used extensively (to this day) by players around the game. Count on the players' union and Bud Selig's crew to take way too long - perhaps a year - to determine that the new testing is actually foolproof. Then we'll see a dramatic new era - right about the time a new, beat-the-tests drug comes off the designer market.

-- I'd like to see Barry Bonds show up at the Giants' camp and do a long, thoughtful, unplanned interview with the beat writers. Considering the legal ramifications, it's unlikely he'd speak a word about steroids. But in a relaxed mood - as opposed to any given day when he was playing - he's as interesting as anyone in the game.

-- Dream exhibition game: A's-Atlanta, with heralded Michael Taylor in the Oakland lineup and 20-year-old Jason Heyward, perhaps the best prospect in the game, playing right field for the Braves. "I've never seen a kid this good," Atlanta catcher Brian McCann said. "His talent is something special. He's hitting the ball out 400 feet to left-center," his opposite field.

-- Smart move by Mark McGwire: On his first day inside the Cardinals' spring facility, he welcomed interviews and answered questions until the last reporter had left. He didn't change his tune - he still believes that steroids didn't bolster his power - but he did say that using performance-enhancing drugs was "the most regrettable thing I've ever done in my life." Many will consider him a fool, but if he remains accommodating, saying exactly the same thing, the media eventually will disappear.

-- Johnny Damon can spin this thing any way he likes, all about the glory of joining the Detroit Tigers as a free agent. The fact is, Damon should still be with the Yankees - and it was the arrogance of his agent, Scott Boras, that led him astray.

-- One of baseball's great sights (sorry, second-hand-smoke police) is that of manager Jim Leyland stealing a drag during a Detroit game. Now, in one of those preposterous overreactions, the Tigers have banned smoking everywhere at Comerica Park, including public outdoor areas. "Then I've got a problem," Leyland said. "I'm not going to say I won't cheat once in a while." Please, arrest anyone who stands in his way.

## Drumbeat: Cahill to start spring opener, more on Chavez, Duchscherer

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Phoenix

As I wrote in this morning's Drumbeat, Ben Sheets will start the second spring game against his longtime Brewers team; starting the day before in the Cactus League opener will be Trevor Cahill, according to pitching coach Curt Young. Clayton Mortensen also will pitch in that first game against the Cubs on March 4.

Don't assume because Cahill is starting the day before Opening Day starter Sheets that it means he's the fifth starter. There's little doubt that he is the front-runner, but the schedule won't be any indication: That first week of March, teams usually have starters work every four days rather than every five, meaning that there will be a maximum of four "starters" the first week or two. The other starters will be worked in after the men who open the games finish their two or three innings.

One of the A's projected starters isn't likely to be throwing in a game the first week or two, anyway. Justin Duchscherer is out with a irritated sacroiliac joint, and he had a nerve ablation procedure today to eradicate the discomfort. (Nerves in the area are burned by the heat from radio frequency.) Duchscherer is expected to be back in the clubhouse tomorrow but he's unlikely to throw for a few more days.

I wrote in [this morning's paper](#) about Eric Chavez's bumpy road ahead in learning to play first base, and Chavez put his fledgling skills on display today at Phoenix Muni during an informal workout with many of the team's position players.

He doesn't look entirely comfortable at first, and his footwork is clearly not perfect, but everyone believes the six-time Gold Glove winner will pick up the position easily.

"He's a great athlete," second baseman Mark Ellis said. "He can play everywhere."

Ellis paused, then laughingly added, "Not second base, though. He's not that good an athlete."

Chavez said he doesn't like using the oversized first baseman's glove much, so he's trying to wear it as much as possible, especially since he's breaking in two of them. He thinks as long as he gets his feet going quickly, he can handle anything in the field.

He's not going to take grounders at third much, if at all, and that probably will be the case throughout the season. He is trying to limit his throwing to games to save his surgically repaired shoulder extra wear and tear. He will play third and probably a little shortstop in games this spring, and he has an outfielder's glove just in case. His main focus, though, is first base. He knows he can play third and short; first will provide another option for him as the team's utility man.

The A's aren't going to want to push Chavez and his twice-repaired back to play every day during the season, anyway. Four games a week, maybe, might be about the limit, so he could, say, fill in at third one day, DH another, play first and then short if needed.

That was the plan with Nomar Garciaparra last year, too, though, and he was almost immediately playing third every day, which clearly wore him down and led to a recurrence of his chronic calf problems. If Chavez is healthy and swinging the bat well, the A's are going to have to avoid the temptation to use him every day. He's got too many problem spots and potential health issues to risk aggravating anything.

I know many Drumbeat regulars are skeptical about Chavez, and as I've mentioned, he and the team aren't taking anything for granted, either. I can say, though, that I have covered Chavez his entire big-league career, and he looks and sounds as good as he ever has. He took batting practice today and he is swinging the bat well and with no pain. He's moving freely.

He also has a great attitude about his new role. He's more than embracing it - he's crazy about it. He said today that leaving the everyday third-base job behind is "freeing" mentally, and he's enthusiastic about playing other positions. The main thing, he said, is that he can produce offensively, and if he can do that, they'll find a spot - hopefully with reasonable rest - for him to play.

Joey Devine threw a 20-pitch bullpen today and he said it was "free and easy;" manager Bob Geren estimated Devine as 50-50 for Opening Day, but he pointed out that because Devine is a reliever that even if he doesn't get into spring games the first week or two, he'd still have time to get ready for the regular season. Considering how good Devine said he's feeling, I wouldn't be surprised at all if he's on the Opening Day roster.

Brett Anderson threw a bullpen session today, and catcher Kurt Suzuki said it was great. Anderson said it went better than his first one, and Cahill, overhearing, said, "And I heard your first one was perfect." Anderson just shrugged. Yep, he looks like he's on already.

Tomorrow's stretch time is 9:30 a.m. at Phoenix Muni; Cahill and Sheets are among those scheduled to throw bullpen sessions. As a reminder, I'm Twittering about the daily schedule and providing some notes and news as things happen at my Twitter account, @susanslusser.

## **Duchscherer has successful procedure**

### **A's right-hander can resume throwing in a few days**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- An A's spokesperson on Tuesday confirmed that Justin Duchscherer's scheduled nerve ablation procedure "went well."

The A's right-hander will rejoin teammates at Phoenix Municipal Stadium on Wednesday but is not expected to begin throwing again for a few days.

Duchscherer, 31, underwent the procedure at the Arizona Center for Pain Relief to calm an irritated sacroiliac joint, which connects the base of the spine to the pelvic bone. He was bothered by the same problem last year while rehabbing from minor elbow surgery and received three cortisone shots for the joint, which stopped responding to the treatment.

Thus, the ablation process, as described by Duchscherer on Sunday, burns off the nerve ends of the SI joint using radio waves to produce heat that destroy the nerve and relieve the pain. The burnt nerve eventually grows back, so it's possible he will have to undergo the operation again if the discomfort resurfaces.

The two-time All-Star, though slightly nervous about the procedure, insisted that it's a minor setback and recovery time usually varies from one day to one week.

## **Chavez getting work at first base**

### **Veteran wants to give A's options to keep bat in lineup**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Eric Chavez took the field with his teammates Tuesday for the first time this spring, not only sporting a different look but a new glove as well.

The A's six-time Gold Glove third baseman, who enters camp with a surgically repaired back and shoulder, took batting practice before making his way over to first base -- where, if healthy, he'll spell expected starter Daric Barton this year.

"It's just going to get better there every day," said the long-haired and scruffy Chavez. "I have to get comfortable, and it's not really anything physical but more of a mental thing.

"[Infield coach Mike Gallego] is telling me to just relax. Whatever I do I just want to do it so well, so I just have to remember I'm just taking ground balls. The more times I get over there, the easier it will be."

The 32-year-old Chavez made it clear during the offseason that this spring will be his last on the field if he's unable to stay away from the trainer's room, a place that has allowed him to play in just 121 games during the past three seasons.

Now entering the final season of his six-year, \$66 million contract, the A's veteran knows third base is no longer his only home. He's expected to see time at first, in the designated hitter's spot and, when desperate measures call, in the outfield.

"My biggest concern is offense," he said. "I just want them to have options of where to put me. I'm not just stuck at third, which for me is almost like my mind is so free. It's refreshing.

"It just feels so much easier taking ground balls at first. I'm not in that hurry to get to it and throw it to first. I can just walk it over to first. It's helped out my mind and my body."

Chavez, though a natural athlete and proven corner infielder, is far from game-ready. Thus, he'll look to a longtime friendly face in Mark Ellis just feet away when in doubt at the bag.

"Obviously Mark and I communicate real well," Chavez said. "He's going to help me out a lot. There have already been times where I've asked him about depth, so I'm sure the communication will be constant. If there are certain hitters that he knows, I'm sure he'll let me know and we'll communicate to get that stuff out of the way early."

Chavez will also take some balls at shortstop -- his position in high school -- and in the outfield, for which he has a "just in case" glove.

"I doubt they'll put me in a game situation out in the outfield," he said, "but I will take my outfield glove out there and really just give them options."

For now, though, Chavez will stay busy in the cages -- where he deems himself 100 percent comfortable -- and on his feet at first.

"If my feet are ready, I can really play any position in the infield," he said.

When position players officially report Thursday and begin their first team workouts the following day, Chavez said he'll have no restrictions. At the same time, he's already told coaches he needs to keep throwing to a minimum.

"The least possible throws I can make the better for me, but everything else is full-go," he said. "I know I can make some throws from over at third. I've done it my whole career. If I need to bounce it, I'll bounce it. It's more of all the extra throwing in practice that I need to avoid. Obviously I have to get ready to play third and first and make some throws, but I need to minimize it."

Whatever works for him, said manager Bob Geren, who is confident in Chavez's potential at a different corner infield position.

"It seems like he's gained a lot of knowledge in a very quick amount of time," the A's skipper said. "For a guy who has a closet full of Gold Gloves, I figured he would pick it up pretty fast."

However, that doesn't mean Chavez has quite succeeded at making friends with a glove that could jump-start his career again.

"I don't like it, to be honest with you," he said of the first-base mitt. "But I have to get used to it. I try to put it on as much as possible, and I'm getting two of them ready in case one of them fails me."

Chavez will see plenty action this spring, but don't expect the new look to stick around much longer. The hair -- on his head and face -- is neither intentional nor permanent, he insisted.

"Nothing is intentional with me," Chavez said. "I'm just lazy."

Based on his offseason efforts, the A's community would disagree.

## **Lee's Leftovers: Tuesday tidbits**

Jane Lee, mlb.com 2/23/2010

Evening update: Some leftovers from today:

**Joey Devine** threw 20 pitches today and told me he's feeling more comfortable every time out there. Geren didn't get a chance to see him throw but said Devine is "50-50" for Opening Day. It's safe to assume the right-hander won't be appearing in any spring games during the first week, but Geren noted that even if he doesn't see action the first week or two, he can still stay on schedule to be ready by season's start.

I finally asked **Ben Sheets** how he managed to get Ryan Sweeney's No. 15 -- the number Sheets has worn for as long as he can remember. "I know people," Sheets said with a big smile. He didn't even have to talk to Sweeney before the outfielder handed it over, but Sheets said he still owes something to his new teammate for the number. "My kids saw me at the press conference on TV and were crying, saying, 'Daddy, you said you'd be wearing No. 15! That's No. 21...'" The A's roster now has Sweeney as No. 21.

As discussed extensively in this article, **Eric Chavez** took some grounders at first with infield coach **Mike Gallego** looking

on. I watched him from the dugout and noticed some footwork trouble, but Chavez brought up the matter after while talking to media and recognizes the fact that improved footwork, like he learned from **Ron Washington**, can boost his defense skills. That said, he's 100 percent committed to helping the team this season. In the two short years I've known Eric, he's always been completely honest, and I can truly say he's really excited -- giddy even -- about the possibilities ahead of him. Chavez obviously had great years at third base, but he knows those days are behind him, so he's ready to embrace the utility role. He said he'll spend some time taking balls at shortstop this spring, but Geren noted he'd like Chavez to focus on hitting and first base for the time being. And if you're wondering about how his body is responding at the plate, Chavez said he's ready to face live pitchers.

Among the other position players (who officially report Thursday) at the park today: **Mark Ellis, Ryan Sweeney, Travis Buck, Daric Barton**, newcomer **Adam Rosales, Chris Carter, Mychael Taylor, Coco Crisp and Cliff Pennington**. Also met infielder **Steven Tolleson**, who the A's claimed off waivers from Minnesota this offseason. He played with **Landon Powell** at South Carolina and also competed against Pennington in college. Tolleson said he's just excited about a change of scenery...

**10:30 a.m.:** From a cold Tuesday morning chat with manager **Bob Geren** here at Phoenix Muni:

Non-roster lefty **Lenny DiNardo** has been sidelined with a strained arch in his left foot. He's day-to-day and Geren noted that the injury is nothing serious.

If all goes according to plan, newcomer **Ben Sheets'** first start will come against his former team, Milwaukee, on March 5. Sheets, along with **Trevor Cahill**, was scheduled to throw a bullpen today, but both have been pushed to tomorrow for no other reason than to have them lined up for their starts. The Brewers matchup will feature quite a few recognizable faces: former Oakland manager **Ken Macha**, pitching coach **Rick Peterson** and third base coach **Brad Fischer**.

**Joey Devine**, as noted before, told me this morning that everything's still going great with his rehab schedule. The current plan for him is to throw 30 pitches on Tuesdays and Fridays.

**Justin Duchscherer's** procedure should get going in about 45 minutes, so hopefully I'll have an update on him this afternoon...

## **Chavez starting the transition to first base**

AP, 2/24/2010

PHOENIX – Eric Chavez is trying to get comfortable at a new position for the A's.

Chavez got his first workout Tuesday at first base during Oakland's practice at Phoenix Muni.

Chavez won six Gold Gloves at third base for the A's. He's been limited by injuries during the past three seasons, but Oakland wants to try to keep his bat in the lineup this year.

"He needs to hit," A's manager Bob Geren said. "He needs to prove he's healthy and swinging the bat well."

Chavez has been hitting against a pitching machine the past month or so at his home in nearby Paradise Valley, and faced live pitching for the first time.

"My biggest concern is my offense," Chavez said. "I want to be productive offensively. I'm ready to see live pitching."

He might get his chance to hit against A's Opening Day starter Ben Sheets, who will either throw a simulated-type game or batting practice in the next couple of days.

Chavez worked with A's infield coach Mike Gallego, who told him to relax.

"It's just taking ground balls with a bigger glove," Chavez said. "It's getting better."

The bigger glove is a little annoying, but Chavez figures he'll get used to it.

"It's going to get comfortable," Chavez said. "I'm getting two gloves ready in case one of them fails me."

**Report: HGH tests for minor leaguers** – The New York Times is reporting that Major League Baseball plans to test minor league players for human growth hormone.

The newspaper, citing an unidentified baseball official with direct knowledge of the matter, reported on its Web site that MLB will implement blood tests that can reveal HGH use.



On Monday, a British rugby league player became the first athlete to be suspended for using human growth hormone.

Commissioner Bud Selig has used the minor leagues to introduce new steps against the use of performance-enhancing drugs before.

Baseball has not tested for HGH because there is not a validated urine test.

**Royals** – Fans who sit six rows behind the third-base dugout at Kansas City's Kauffman Stadium know they might have to duck a few foul balls.

But a Kansas man says it was a flying hot dog, not a baseball, that almost put his eye out last year.

John Coomer has filed a lawsuit against the Royals seeking more than \$25,000 for injuries he sustained Sept. 8 when he was smacked in the eye with a hot dog chucked by the team's mascot, Sluggerrr.

Coomer said the wayward wiener caused a detached retina and the development of cataracts in his left eye.

The Royals declined to comment. The team is looking for someone new to wear the mascot's large lion costume, but spokesman Toby Cook says there's "no connection" with the hot dog affair.

**ESPN hires Boone** – Aaron Boone ended his 12-year major league career and will become a baseball analyst for ESPN.

He announced his retirement, saying it was "a privilege and honor" to have played for six different clubs in the majors.

## **Best all-time A's pitching staff**

by Old School, Robert Rubino, Santa Rosa Press Democrat 2/23/2010

Spring-training stories are already calling this year's Oakland A's pitching staff perhaps the best in the AL. Which staff would you call the Athletics' best ever since moving to Oakland 42 years ago? Here are my picks:

1971-73. These staffs were anchored by Vida Blue and Catfish Hunter. Ken Holtzman was a major contributor in 1972-73. Rollie Fingers was the closer but several other relievers got plenty of save opportunities. A remarkable run of pitching excellence.

1988-90: Another sensational three-year run of outstanding pitching, this time led by Dave Stewart, Bob Welch and Mike Moore, with the incomparable Dennis Eckersley as the closer.

2002: Big Three of Barry Zito, Mark Mulder and Tim Hudson combined for a record of 57-21. Closer Billy Koch had 44 saves and 11 wins.

1980: majors-best 94 complete games, AL-leading 3.46 ERA. Starters included Rick Langford, Mike Norris, Matt Keough and Steve McCatty.

## **Chavez taking grounders, but to what end?**

By Rob Neyer, ESPN.com 2/23/2010

Did you hear the news? The A's might have a new first baseman!

Eric Chavez is trying to get comfortable at a new position for the Oakland Athletics. Chavez got his first workout Tuesday at first base during Oakland's practice at Phoenix Muni. Chavez won six Gold Gloves at third base for the A's. He's been limited by injuries during the past three seasons, but Oakland wants to try to keep his bat in the lineup this year.

His *bat*?

If I'd been drinking milk when I read that, it would have come out my nose.

The A's don't actually need any more first basemen. They've got Daric Barton. Plus Jake Fox and Dallas McPherson could play first base in a pinch, and also their A-No. 1 prospect is a Triple-A first baseman named Chris Carter. They've got *plenty* of guys who can play first base.

What they don't have is plenty of guys who can hit. There's little reason to think Chavez will hit. Over the past three seasons, in which he's managed to play only 121 games, Chavez has a .233/.293/.415 line. Sure, maybe he can do better if

he's "healthy" ... but he's less likely to be healthy if he's fooling around at first base. One might at least imagine some sort of platoon ... except Chavez, like both Barton and Jack Cust, bats left-handed.

There's really nowhere for Chavez in Oakland's lineup. This continuing charade -- *we have to find a place for his **bat!*** -- is merely in the service of two old baseball traditions: 1) if you're hurt, you get to play again when you're healthy, and 2) if we're paying you \$12 million, we won't flat-out release you unless we have to.

Like Joaquin Andujar said, youneverknow. But friends, this story just doesn't have a happy ending. And the A's will be better off when they get to stop pretending that it might.