

A's News Clips, Friday, February 26, 2010

Quirky game-day rituals work for A's left-hander Brett Anderson

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 2/26/2010

Call Brett Anderson superstitious or ritualistic or a plain old creature of habit.

Whatever the label, the A's left-hander won't dispute he's one of the major leagues' quirkiest characters.

Consider the pattern of behavior that marks every Anderson outing.

He tosses the ball in his left hand a certain number of times before every pitch. While sitting in the dugout between innings, he drinks water from the same part of the cup with every sip, then makes sure the cup is placed in its proper spot next to him.

When Anderson leaves the clubhouse before a start, the label on the lip balm in his locker has to be facing out. He recently found out that Blistex stopped making the brand he likes, but that's a problem for another day.

"I've been doing this ever since high school," Anderson said. "It's evolved to different things. One thing I think will work, but one thing will go by the wayside. It's been ever-changing. But it's been ever since I started pitching competitively."

Then he smiles, clearly in tune with how amusing it all sounds.

"I'm a weird guy."

But baseball is a game marked by habitual behavior.

Many players avoid touching the baseline as they come on and off the field. Nomar Garciaparra, a teammate of Anderson's last season, rapidly readjusts his batting gloves after every pitch.

Anderson's teammates respect his idiosyncrasies but also find the humor in them.

"Sometimes it takes him a while in between innings to get out there," right-hander Trevor Cahill said. "I think he's got to realize he's making the umpires mad. I'll be sitting next to him on the bench, and I always think they're looking at me. They're trying to get his attention to get out there. But I don't want to interrupt his routine."

Whatever works.

Anderson, who turned 22 this month, led major league rookies last season with 150 strikeouts, an Oakland rookie record. He threw a two-hit shutout in his first start at Fenway Park and took a perfect game into the seventh inning against the Los Angeles Angels.

He said he strayed from his game-day routine for one start last season and promptly gave up seven runs in five innings against the Chicago White Sox. Anderson went back to it for his next outing and threw seven solid innings against the New York Yankees.

"Obviously you've gotta go with what's working," he said.

The apple didn't fall far from the tree in the Anderson family.

Brett's father, Frank, says he had his own habits as a player.

Frank Anderson, the Oklahoma State baseball coach, recalls attending a basketball camp in high school and listening to legendary coach Al McGuire talk about the importance of finding a routine at the free-throw line.

Frank applied the same philosophy to baseball.

"I wanted to get in the batter's box the same way every time," he said. "You don't worry about the crowd, you focus on (yourself)."

The elder Anderson stopped short of calling Brett's behavior superstitious.

"In baseball, you have to repeat an action so many times," Frank Anderson said. "The more times you can do it, the ball is going to come off your hand right, or come off the bat right. We're creatures of habit. Baseball kind of lends itself to that."

But even he concedes his son's behavior might be a little out there.

"He is left-handed, I'll give you that."

A's notebook: New third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff taking nothing for granted

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 2/26/2010

Kevin Kouzmanoff hardly knows any of his A's teammates.

He doesn't know what it will be like playing in a new infield.

But he knows how to work, and that was tops on his agenda Thursday morning after he reported to camp. The A's first official full-squad workout takes place today at Papago Park Baseball Complex, but Kouzmanoff hit the field with several other A's position players Thursday.

The A's acquired Kouzmanoff from the San Diego Padres in January to be their starting third baseman, but he's taking nothing for granted.

"I'm coming into camp thinking I have a job I'm trying to win," Kouzmanoff, 28, said.

Persistent injuries to Eric Chavez spurred the A's trade for Kouzmanoff, who's expected to provide a little pop in the batting order and steady defense.

Defense is where Kouzmanoff has worked the hardest in recent years. He said he was in Triple-A when he read an article that harshly criticized his glove work. It was a wake-up call, in his words.

"A shout-out to whoever wrote that for letting me know," he joked.

Designated hitter Jack Cust also reported Thursday, a bit later than usual. His wife, Jennifer, gave birth to their second daughter, Sophia Lily, on Feb. 17. Cust stayed in Pennsylvania a few extra days to spend more time with her.

The A's didn't offer him arbitration this winter, making Cust a free agent. He said he received interest from other teams but no enticing

offers.

He re-signed with the A's for \$2.65 million, about \$150,000 less than what he made last season.

"Unless you're Matt Holliday or Jason Bay, unless you're one of those big dudes, you've got to take what you can get," Cust said. "There's a lot of (free agents) that don't have jobs. I'm just glad to have a uniform on my back."

The A's will hold four days of full-squad workouts at Papago Park. They'll play intrasquad games Tuesday and Wednesday at Phoenix Municipal Stadium, leading into Thursday's exhibition opener against the Chicago Cubs in Mesa.

Pitcher Justin Duchscherer played catch at 80 feet and will throw one more time before getting on the mound, A's manager Bob Geren said.

Chin Music: Jack Cust, Kevin Kouzmanoff arrive; just about everybody present at A's camp

By Joe Stiglich, Contra Costa Times, 2/25/2010

Things were a little louder in the A's clubhouse this morning, which of course meant that Jack Cust has reported to camp. On a team that's pretty mild-mannered and subdued in general, Cust stands out as a rambunctious exception. And to think, over the winter it looked like Cust might not even be back in green and gold. The A's didn't tender him a contract, turning him loose to free agency. He said he received some interest, but the offers didn't come pouring in. So he re-signed with the A's for \$2.65 million, or \$150,000 less than he made last year. But he's happy to be back. And he thinks the addition of Coco Crisp will bring more speed to the top of the lineup, lead to more base runners and perhaps discourage teams from playing the shift on him.

He and his wife, Jennifer, welcomed their second daughter, Sophia Lily, who was born last Wednesday. Cust usually shows up earlier to camp, but wanted to spend time with his new baby.

Kevin Kouzmanoff, the A's new third baseman, also showed up and said he's looking forward to his fresh start. He talked about the work he's put in to improve his defense over the years, and is eager to get started with his new teammates.

I'll have more on Kouzmanoff and Cust in tomorrow's paper ...

–Justin Duchscherer played catch to test out his lower back — 35 throws from 80 feet and he came out of it OK.

–Infielder Gregorio Petit and catcher Joel Galarraga are the only two players who have yet to show ...

Jack Cust is back in his comfort zone with A's

[Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer](#)

When the A's full squad arrived last spring, the team shaped up to have all kinds of power after adding Jason Giambi and Matt Holliday.

By midseason of 2009, Holliday was gone, and weeks later Giambi was, too. Jack Cust just kept doing his usual thing, leading the team in homers for the third year a row.

"Jack's a homer guy, one of our few," A's infielder Eric Chavez said. "He can hit the ball out of the park, and we need some guys to do that."

Cust almost wasn't back this year. The A's chose not to tender him a contract after the season, and he became a free agent. He explored the market, found that salaries were steadily sliding and there were no real opportunities for him near his New Jersey home, and he came back to Oakland.

The A's saved probably a good \$1 million or more compared with what Cust might have made in arbitration, but he isn't bitter.

"I looked around. The market wasn't very good. What could I do?" Cust said. "I would have liked to go closer to home, but there wasn't anything out there. I talked to some other teams, but I'm comfortable here. I know everyone. I'm glad to be back here and excited to be back here, and from the beginning, the A's said they'd like to have me back.

"By the moves they were making, I think they were just assuming I would be, and it ended up working out."

Those moves didn't include adding a big major-league bat other than third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff, whose 18 homers last year would have put him second on the team behind Cust's 25.

Where the A's did spend some free-agent money was on more speed, adding center fielder Coco Crisp. With Rajai Davis and Crisp at the top of the lineup, Cust might benefit if and when he's in the middle of the order, because if there's a good runner on base, opponents might be less likely to go into an exaggerated shift when the left-handed pull hitter is up.

Cust, however, might be around the sixth spot in the order if Chavez is healthy. But even if he's not up when the speedsters are on, he thinks he can contribute to the A's running campaign in 2010. He was 4-for-5 in stolen-base attempts last year, and Cust said, "If they let me go, I could get 10. No one is paying attention to me."

A multidimensional Cust would surprise people, no doubt, because many see him as just a high-strikeout guy with some power. But Cust's strikeout totals (he set a league record two years ago) don't bother the A's too much because of his correspondingly high walk totals.

Critics also take shots at Cust's defensive shortcomings, but after the A's signed Crisp and Gabe Gross and acquired Michael Taylor in a trade, it's unlikely Cust will spend much time in the outfield.

"I don't know," he said. "I'm never supposed to play in the field, but I eventually seem to end up there. So we'll see what happens. We do have a lot of outfielders, though."

Cust is using new bats, Marucci maple bats, which he said are the hardest he's used. He made the switch late last year, and, he said, "I love 'em."

There's another addition, too. Cust, wife Jennifer and daughter Ava welcomed newborn Sophia this winter.

"I'm so glad for him," Chavez said. "It was a weird winter, but he got a job and got some cash and a new baby girl, so everything played his way in the end."

DiNardo works to add sidearm delivery pitch

[Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer](#)

Lenny DiNardo has kicked around the fringes of the major leagues for the past six years, his seasons often including more minor-league time than big-league service.

So this spring, DiNardo is expanding his repertoire. The left-hander is working with **Ron Romanick** on dropping down and using a sidearm delivery on occasion.

"I'm 30 years old," DiNardo said. "I've got to do something to stay in the game. I've evolved as a pitcher over the years and I'll keep what I have, and if this works, it gives me something different against left-handed hitters."

DiNardo has played alongside numerous sidearmers, and Romanick has tutored several, including A's reliever **Brad Ziegler**. Romanick has worked with DiNardo in both Oakland and at Triple-A Sacramento.

"Lenny is really strong, mentally and physically, and he's a grinder," Romanick said. "Who knows?"

Briefly: Manager **Bob Geren** said **Chris Carter** will concentrate on first base this spring, as expected. ... **Justin Duchscherer** doesn't feel any soreness after a procedure to burn the nerve endings in the area of his sacroiliac joint, and he was able to play catch without pain Thursday.

Kouzmanoff is A's new power source

Ray Ratto, Chronicle Staff Writer

Kevin Kouzmanoff, the A's third baseman, was so new that when he reported to camp Thursday, he had to ask a TV reporter what his new manager looked like.

That's not to say he didn't know that his manager is Bob Geren, or that he needed to introduce himself before beginning the first page of the next chapter in his career. All it says is he doesn't mind thinking outside the box to get help when he needs it.

For instance, when he needed to improve and tighten his stroke, he went to an expert. "The best batting coach I ever had was this guy I know who's a carpenter," Kouzmanoff said. "He builds wine barrels. This guy, Troy, he just knows a lot about baseball, and the whole swing."

And when he was in the Indians' system, at Triple-A Buffalo, someone told him he was a bad fielder. Well, he wasn't told, exactly.

"I read an article that said how poor my defense was," he said. "I sort of took that to heart. My footwork wasn't good, and I had stiff hands."

His solution to both problems? "Reps."

"I just started working on it, and I kept at it until I got better," he said. "I don't remember the guy's name, but a shout out to whomever wrote that."

The more interesting notion, though, is that a carpenter was his hitting guru, and a sportswriter inspired him to become a better-than-merely-useful defender. Maybe if he wants to become a base stealer, he can consult a spot welder.

Point is, Kouzmanoff has become the center of the Oakland lineup by seeking help wherever it presented itself, and if that isn't the purists'/elitists' approach, it works well enough.

And he will need to hit in Oakland, where the home runs will have to come mostly from three people - him, Jack Cust (who also reported Thursday) and Kurt Suzuki. Indeed, he may have to hit more than the entire projected Oakland outfield to justify his acquisition.

He could, of course; he has averaged nearly 20 per year in three years in the homer-crushing atmosphere of Petco Park in San Diego, and one would presume that with health and even slightly less than average lineup protection, he could do 25 in the nominally more friendly Oakland air. In the meantime, Ryan Sweeney, Rajai Davis and Coco Crisp combined last year for 12.

That number (the 25, not the 12) would require that he become a more selective hitter (he has walked 87 times in more than 1,800 career plate appearances) and be able to lift the ball more than his history suggests. He is not yet a fully made product, and he comes to Oakland in search of that better model of Kouzmanoff.

And he comes to a team with a fighting chance of being considerably better than the one he left. The Padres stripped down their roster to make it one full of young and inexpensive talents, plus Adrian Gonzalez, and while the A's have done much the same thing over the past several years, Kouzmanoff's acquisition is an exception to the rule.

"Last year, there were a lot of changes in San Diego, and now I'm here and that's another change," he said. "Every year, there are going to be differences. Right now, I don't know (much about the A's). I'm just here to play baseball."

Well, that's comforting.

Still, whatever aspirations the A's have in 2010 to be something more than the standard 75-87 team revolve in considerable part around him. Yes, they are using pitching and defense to define themselves, and Kouzmanoff fields a nice ground ball.

But he is also supposed to hit, and that makes him perhaps an even more important acquisition than Ben Sheets. For one, at least you get the sense that Kouzmanoff might survive the trade deadline.

But for two, Sheets improves the A's pitching profile, but his absence for whatever reason would not despoil it. Kouzmanoff not hitting would blow the Oakland attack to a level of smithereens that would hearken back to the '07 or '83 teams, both of which were largely bad at the plate.

Kouzmanoff looks as though he'll have that covered, though. At least the A's certainly hope so. And if he needs any help with his stance, he can always find a dentist. After all, once you've taken a sportswriter's wisdom about playing third base, you've essentially said you'll take help in whatever form it appears.

And you know what they say about an open mind - it may let in a bad idea now and then, but a closed mind admits no ideas at all.

Drumbeat: Odds and ends from A's camp

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Phoenix

The news of the day here at the stadium was the arrival of the last two regulars, third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff and DH Jack Cust. My colleague Ray Ratto will be writing about Kouzmanoff in tomorrow's paper (I hope it's not one of those ones that gets embargoed from the internet!) and I'll be writing about Cust, so I'll stay away from them now except to say that Kouzmanoff seems as if he'll fit in very nicely and Cust, as always, has put on about 15 pounds, especially in the pectoral area. He loses a lot of weight during the season, so he tries to put on the muscle when he can, and since he and his family have a big baseball facility in New Jersey, he has plenty of opportunity to work out and hit all winter, even a rough one like this winter in the Northeast.

Justin Duchscherer was beaming again today, but it wasn't from the effects of sedation, as it was yesterday. He was thrilled to wake up and start moving around and to find that he has no pain or discomfort whatsoever in the sacroiliac joint area. Burning those nerve endings solved the problem, and he went out and played catch, making 35 tosses. He felt completely fine, he'll be reassessed today and he'll probably play catch once more before getting on the mound next week. That puts him maybe one week behind the rest of the starters, so the second week of spring games, perhaps, looks good for his first Cactus League appearance.

Lenny DiNardo also did some throwing - dropping down to the side. The left-hander is working on a sidearm motion with bullpen Ron Romanick to give him another look, especially against left-handed hitters. DiNardo has played alongside several sidearmers, including Mike Myers, Javier Lopez, Chad Bradford, Jay Marshall and Brad Ziegler; Romanick believes DiNardo's a good candidate to pick up the technique and give himself another potential weapon. DiNardo, as he said the other day, only had one day of trouble with an arch strain, so it might have really just been a cramp of some kind.

Action tomorrow is at the Papago Park minor-league complex, where the players will stretch at 9:45 a.m. That will be followed by numerous drills; fielding, running, bunt plays and the like. And finally, there will be pitchers throwing to hitters, probably sometime around 11:30 or noon would be my guess. (Brett Anderson will be among those in action.) I'll try to tweet a more accurate time in the morning, and again, my Twitter account is @susanslusser.

Cust excited to be back in A's camp

Slugger tested free-agent market before re-signing

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Not even a week's worth of constantly interrupted sleep could hide the excitement exuberating from Jack Cust as he entered the A's clubhouse Thursday.

Oakland's 31-year-old slugger, decked out in black Nike Livestrong gear, made a grand entrance in the early morning hours of reporting day for position players. Teammates pounced on him left and right while he shared news of the recent birth of his second daughter.

It was a sight many in the A's community -- including Cust -- were uncertain they'd see following an offseason that watched him test the free-agent market when Oakland decided to non-tender his contract.

"I didn't really know how it was going to be," Cust said. "But when it came down to it, it just wasn't a very good market unless you're Matt Holliday or Jason Bay. Even for those guys, I don't think the interest level was as high as they may have thought it to be. Unless you're one of those big dudes, you take what you can get."

Cust said he always kept Oakland as an option while testing the waters elsewhere, including places that would keep him near his family in New Jersey. In the end, though, comfort and familiarity reigned over other thoughts.

"Every day seemed like there was a different team interested, but you don't ever know how interested they are or what they're looking to do with their roster," Cust explained. "But I knew the way this roster was shaping up, ultimately this is a place where I knew from the beginning they'd like me back. Knowing that was comforting to me."

"It would have been nice getting a little closer to home, but when it came down to it, it was just about the familiarity of being here and the relationships I have here with some of the guys. To me, it wasn't worth the hassle of waiting any longer or seeing what might happen. I just figured I want to stay where I'm comfortable."

His decision ultimately came down to a \$2.65 million contract that could eclipse the \$2.8 million he made in 2009 if he has 600 plate appearances this season. Last year, Cust hit .240 with 25 home runs and 70 RBIs to go along with a .356 on-base percentage in 513 at-bats through 149 games. He has led the A's in home runs in each of the last three seasons, with 33 in 2008 and 26 in 2007, and expects to do the same this year.

For now, though, Cust is simply anxious to take the field with a reconstructed A's team that now boasts the likes of Ben Sheets, Kevin Kouzmanoff and Coco Crisp.

"There are a lot of good players who don't have a job right now, so I'm just excited to have a uniform on my back and be able to go out and show everybody what I can do," Cust said. "I like that we got Ben Sheets, a proven winner, an All-Star who is going to pitch real well in our ballpark. I like the speed of the lineup and the guys we have to get on base. For me it will help a lot, so I'm excited to have guys like that at the top of the lineup."

Cust said he was able to gain the 15 pounds he lost during the 2009 season and now weighs in at about 240. A gym frequenter during the offseason, he had to slow down his workouts this past week after his wife, Jennifer, gave birth to the couple's second daughter, Sophia Lily -- who joins 3 1/2-year-old Ava Rose -- on Feb. 17. Cust's wife had to induce labor in order to allow her husband some moments with their newborn before shipping off to camp.

"Usually I try to get out here earlier, but I figured I'd spend a little time with my family while I can," Cust said. "I'll miss them, but it's time to get to work."

Kouzmanoff meets new A's teammates

Third baseman playing like he's trying to win spot

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Kevin Kouzmanoff made a phone call to his new manager Wednesday night for no other reason than to touch base and chat.

By Thursday morning, when the A's new third baseman reported to camp, skipper Bob Geren said it felt like the two were "old friends."

However, don't expect to hear too much off the field this season from Kouzmanoff, who appears to be of the quiet type. He'd rather make his share of noise on the field.

"He doesn't say much," Geren said, "but he leads by example. He's a hard worker and very intense on the field -- all important things."

Kouzmanoff wandered around like the new kid at school Thursday, simply trying to match names to faces and acclimate himself to his new green and gold surroundings before addressing the media for the first time since being traded to the club in January.

"It's just change," Kouzmanoff said. "New organization, new teammates. You just start the process all over again of meeting guys and getting to know everybody. I'm excited for the new opportunity and the change."

The 28-year-old Kouzmanoff, originally from Southern California, enters his fifth big league season after batting .255 with 18 homers and a career-high 88 RBIs in 141 games for the Padres -- who swapped him north with Minor Leaguer Eric Sogard for outfielders Scott Hairston and Aaron Cunningham.

Kouzmanoff was a sixth-round Draft pick by the Indians in 2003 and enjoyed a 16-game stint in Cleveland three years later before being shipped off to San Diego that offseason. But it was in the Indians' Minor League system where Kouzmanoff said he believes he began the process of becoming one of the premier defensive players in the Majors.

And for that, he'd like to give a special shoutout to the author of an article he came across at Triple-A.

"I read an article saying how poor my defense was," Kouzmanoff recalled, "and I kind of took that to heart. I realized that was a weakness of my game and an aspect I needed to work on, so I started working on it."

Kouzmanoff's dedication has significantly showed in the past three years, as he has increased his fielding percentage every season, the most recent ending with an impressive .990 mark. In his first full season with San Diego, he committed 22 errors. Last year, he tallied just three.

"I think in years past, I didn't take enough ground balls," Kouzmanoff said. "I just got loose and then went out there and played the game. Now I go out there and field ground balls to the point where I feel good and am able to perform well."

Kouzmanoff is big on reps, which have helped him consistently work on what he calls "heavy feet" and "stiff hands."

"I like to take a lot of ground balls because every ground ball is different," Kouzmanoff said. "I always felt like I was pretty accurate with my throws, but just have always had to work more on the fielding part."

Don't think for a second Kouzmanoff is done improving, though. That part, he believes, never stops -- whether on the field or at the plate, where he hit .263 while averaging 20 home runs, 82 RBIs and 147 games each season with the Padres.

"I think it's important to always get better," Kouzmanoff said. "There's always room for improvement. I feel like I'm never satisfied with my game. I worked on my swing a little bit, and I feel like I'm quicker with the ball. I trained, I feel strong, I feel healthy, I'm ready to go."

The club is more than ready to once again have a stable and able body at the hot corner, where the injury-prone Eric Chavez -- expected to fill a utility role if healthy this season -- can no longer play on a full-time basis. Kouzmanoff, though, is still well aware of the six-time Gold Glover's abilities.

"I'm coming into camp thinking that I have a job that I'm trying to win," Kouzmanoff said. "I don't think that I'm coming in here to be given the position. I'm coming in here battling for the job.

"Eric's a great player, so I should talk to him about defense with his Gold Gloves. I'm just looking to get out on the field to get reps wherever I can."

Kouzmanoff also has experience at shortstop, where he played two years in college, as well as at first base, but third-base duties are likely to keep him plenty busy when he's not providing some pop to the middle of a power-challenged A's lineup.

The newly acquired third baseman is likely looking to take one thing at a time, though. After all, he hadn't even said more than a hello to Chavez upon taking the field for the first time, let alone met new infield partner Mark Ellis. In fact, the only guy he's familiar with is Jack Cust, who played alongside him in 2007 at the Padres' Spring Training camp.

"This is a young team," Kouzmanoff observed. "I checked out the roster, and I think we're looking pretty good. Good ballclub -- I'm looking forward to it."

Lee's Leftovers: Jack's back, Kouzmanoff arrives

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 2/25/2010

Jack Cust was welcomed back to Oakland with open arms-- literally -- upon his return to the A's clubhouse on reporting day at Phoenix Muni. Within seconds of his arrival, he was flanked by teammates, hugs and plenty shouts. Not to be forgotten, though, was newcomer **Kevin Kouzmanoff**, who quietly entered his first day with the A's. He spoke to media within an hour upon his arrival and talked about his excitement in joining a new team, as well as how he's transformed into one of the game's most respected defensive third basemen. More on both Cust and Kouzmanoff can be found at the A's site.

Some leftover tidbits from the day:

Justin Duchscherer looked just as happy as he did yesterday when he was still under the influence of some drugs from his nerve ablation procedure Tuesday. This time, though, he was simply excited to wake up and realize the pain in his sacroiliac joint area is no more. Duke threw 35 tosses at 80 feet and afterward said he felt fine.

Bob Geren said left-hander **Lenny DiNardo** did some throwing today and is now working on a sidearm motion with bullpen coach **Ron Romanick** to expand his look.

Full-squad workouts are officially underway tomorrow at Papago Park starting at 9:45. **Brett Anderson**, **Vin Mazzaro** and **Brad Ziegler** among pitchers scheduled to throw live BP. Updates from there to come tomorrow...

Kouzmanoff ready for anywhere

Third baseman set fielding record with San Diego last year, but knows Chavez is in picture

ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHOENIX — The Oakland Athletics acquired Kevin Kouzmanoff to be their full-time third baseman. The oft-injured Eric Chavez, a six-time Gold Glove winner at third, still figures in the team's plans — as a utility player.

Kouzmanoff came into A's camp Thursday brimming with confidence and excited about the change of scenery. He's also not going to take anything for granted, especially with an apparently healthy Chavez in camp.

He's going to continue to work like he has something to prove.

"My thinking is there is a job I'm trying to win," Kouzmanoff said. "Eric is a great player. You want to talk to him about defense. I'll play where I can help this team, whether it's third, first or in the outfield."

After setting an NL fielding percentage record (.990) for third basemen with the San Diego Padres last year, it's unlikely Kouzmanoff will see much time anywhere else. That's why Chavez, who still has a tender throwing shoulder, also has a first baseman's mitt and outfielder's glove in tow.

There's nothing fancy about the way Kouzmanoff made himself into one of the top defensive third basemen in the major leagues. He worked at it.

"Just give me a fungo hitter who will hit me groundball after groundball," Kouzmanoff said. "It's important to always get better. I'm never satisfied with my game."

No fancy video replays or computer simulations for this former Western Athletic Conference Player of the Year; give him a glove and some dirt and he'll play until it becomes counterproductive.

Kouzmanoff has a Buffalo sportswriter to credit for his defensive improvement — his fielding percentage shot up in each of his three years with the Padres.

"I honestly don't remember his name, but it was in AAA," Kouzmanoff said. "I read his article about how poor a defensive player I was and I took it to heart. If that was a weakness, I needed to work on it. The biggest thing has been with my footwork. I had heavy feet. I'm still working on that."

NOTES

* RHP Justin Duchscherer was in camp and scheduled to play catch as he recovers from a medical procedure.

* LHP Lenny DiNardo is slated for a side session on Saturday as he comes back from a strained left Achilles' tendon.

* RHP Clayton Mortensen was the only scheduled pitcher to throw Thursday as position players officially reported.

* RHP Ben Sheets threw a simulated game with C Kurt Suzuki behind the plate on Wednesday, and will throw batting practice on Sunday.

A's will return to north state radio

By Aaron Williams, Record Searchlight, 2/25/2010

Redding is back in the Bigs, completely.

Redding Radio announced today that it will air Oakland A's baseball games on FoxSports Radio 1670 AM this summer, and will bring back the Sacramento Kings to north state airwaves beginning March 16 with a game against the Lakers.

The move gives Redding listeners the option between the A's and Giants this summer, as Results Radio announced last week that it will switch 96.1 FM to ESPN Radio on March 1 as well as broadcast the San Francisco games this summer.

"As a sports fans, it's the best thing that's happened to this area in some time," FoxSports programming director Duane Davis said Thursday. "When is the last time you had A's and Giants on the radio in this market?"

Davis said Redding Radio bringing the A's to town isn't the next volley in a radio war, but part of his company's strategy to bring professional sports back to the north state airwaves.

"We were always going to bring big three (MLB, NBA and NFL) into the market," he said. "That's always been our goal, to bring regional professional teams back into the market like we had."

Redding Radio used to carry ESPN Radio on 1670 AM, along with the Giants, the Kings and the San Francisco 49ers before Mapleton Communications pulled the plug on the station in April 2008. The company put KPIG Radio on in its spot, then abandoned that in March 2009 in favor of simulcasting its news talk station, KQMS 1400 AM.

Redding Radio returned sports talk to the north state in September, when it flipped the switch on FoxSports Radio.

"I'm excited we've got the A's in town," said Davis, who also announced the news on Twitter. "I've got calls and e-mails from A's fans excited they can listen to the games here in Redding clearly."

KCWH 102.3 FM in Mount Shasta was the closest A's affiliate.

Beth Tappan, market manager for Results Radio, said Thursday that choice in the sports talk market is a good thing for the listener.

"I think there are Giants fans and A's fans and having the choice is good," she said. "ESPN Radio also will have local features. We know that people who listen to sports talk will have the choice now."

Davis said 1670 will broadcast the Kings for the remainder of the season and then air all the Kings' games beginning next season.

The team's television deal with Comcast prevents most Kings' games from being shown in Redding, unless on satellite, which made the radio one way for fans to stay connected to the team.

"That's one of the major reasons we picked them up a couple of years ago," Davis said. "(The TV deal) shut the door on Shasta County residents and we picked them up to fill that void.

"It's nice to have that relationship back."

Davis said 1670 also will continue to carry Westwood One's coverage of NFL during the football season.

"Now you can listen to all the major sports and that's the beauty, we all realized the value in sports talk," he said.

Oakland pitcher Bailey remains a Philly fan

By PAUL HAGEN, Philadelphia Daily News 2/25/2010

PHOENIX - Bill and Lori Bailey, of Cherry Hill, developed an odd sleeping pattern last summer. They'd often come home from work and take a nap. They'd awaken a few hours later, stay up until 1 or 2 in the morning, then go back to sleep until it was time get up and go back to work.

The explanation: They're huge Phillies fans. So is their son, Andrew, who broke into the big leagues with the Oakland A's last year. So this was a way to follow the Phils, picking up the game around the fifth inning, and then watching the baseball package to see if Andrew would get a chance to pitch that night.

It's not easy for people in the Eastern time zone to follow West Coast teams. For the Baileys, it was well worth it. In a matter of months, their son went from obscurity to the big leagues to becoming the closer to winning the American League Rookie of the Year Award.

This is how far he has come: Last year he was consigned to a short bio of the team's media guide in the section of nonroster players, listed as "Drew" Bailey and wearing No. 71.

This year, he's on the cover.

"It's definitely a change," the effervescent 2002 graduate of Paul VI High School said yesterday morning at Phoenix Municipal Stadium. "You go around and people kind of notice you and you try to get used to that. There are certain things

you can and can't do. I wouldn't trade it for the world. It's an awesome experience. It's definitely humbling. Just to be in consideration for that award is something I'll never forget. And to win it is just insane. So this whole last year has just been a whirlwind for me. It's crazy."

Joey Devine was supposed to be Oakland's closer in 2009 but had arm problems in spring training and missed the entire season.

"He'd had a real good [Arizona] Fall League the year before and he was invited to camp just to get a look and a little bit of experience," said manager Bob Geren. "He just kept getting hitters out. He didn't give up a run all spring. So as spring got deeper and when we started talking about sending guys down, we just kept sticking with him, sticking with him. And he ended up making the team."

By the end of May, he had become the closer. And by the end of the year he had 26 saves (in 30 opportunities) and a 1.84 earned run average. He allowed a ridiculous 49 hits in 83 1/3 innings while striking out 91. And that was good enough to beat out more ballyhooed names like Elvis Andrus of Texas, Rick Porcello of Detroit, and Gordon Beckham of the White Sox as the league's Rookie of the Year.

Making the story even more improbable is the fact that, at the Double A All-Star break in Midland in 2008, Bailey was 1-8, 6.18 as a starter. Converted to the bullpen in the second half he had great success (4-1, 0.92 in 22 appearances). But he still had never pitched above Double A before last season.

"He throws hard," Geren said. "Good velocity, good cutter, good breaking ball. And he has a real good reliever's mentality where he's very aggressive."

Bailey, 25, still hasn't quite grasped what he's accomplished. When he was honored at the Philadelphia Sports Writers dinner, he felt like a fan who was thrilled just to be in the same room with Ruben Amaro Jr., Charlie Manuel, Andy Reid and Brent Celek.

"It was like heaven. I felt like I was back in high school," he said. "You have to kind of pinch yourself, act professional and not ask for an autograph or anything."

"I think I'm still kind of living in a dream. You just kind of go out and do your job. You take one game at a time, one appearance at a time and it just happened that I put a bunch of them together. It just kind of blossomed."

The biggest difference is that, in previous years, he worked with his mother at UBS during the offseason. This year he didn't. He moved to Connecticut to be with his fiancée, Amanda Scalzo, and focused on preparing for the upcoming season.

His favorite team was the 1993 Phillies. Lenny Dykstra. Curt Schilling. Darren Daulton. He said he was heartbroken when Toronto's Joe Carter homered off Mitch Williams in Game 6 of the World Series, giving the Blue Jays the championship.

When Wild Thing later returned to Philadelphia and began appearing on local radio shows, Bailey often thought about calling in. He never got up the nerve.

"You grow up in that area and you can't help but be a fan of any Philadelphia sports team. Eagles, Sixers, Flyers," he said. "I still root for the Phillies now. They're in the other league. It's a different kind of fan now for me. You try to learn a little bit from them each and every day, even watching on TV in the playoffs and stuff. You see the game differently. But definitely still a fan. It's just one of those things you can't give up."

Which is one reason his parents have had to give up normal sleeping patterns. Not that they're complaining, of course.

Hitting the road: How I'll spend my spring training

Stan McNeal, The Sporting News, 2/26/2010

Pitchers and catchers reported last week, but my spring [training](#) begins today. A seven-day stint in Phoenix followed by a long stretch in Florida. In addition to sunshine, easy deadlines and guzzling Publix sweet tea straight from the jug, there's plenty I can't wait to see:

Torii Hunter. I want to ask him if the Angels still should be favorites in the AL West. Yes, I already know his answer, too. I also know this: He will be smiling. Any time you talk to Hunter, you walk away feeling better about the [game](#).

Stephen Strasburg pitch. His [Grapefruit League](#) debut is set for March 9 against the Tigers in Viera, Fla. A Tuesday game in early March typically does not draw a big crowd unless it involves the Yankees and/or Red Sox. Not much with Strasburg, however, is typical.

Aroldis Chapman has wowed the Reds so far.

Aroldis Chapman pitch. He wowed the Reds during his first session of live batting practice. Too bad there is no chance that Strasburg and Chapman will pitch in the same exhibition now that the Reds have moved to Arizona. Also, too bad for the Nationals that the Reds swooped in and landed the young lefthander. Otherwise, word out of Nationals camp is that Chapman could have been in the same rotation with Strasburg.

A Tigers game at Joker Marchant Stadium in Lakeland. An area outside the clubhouses down the right-field line is ideal for hanging out and snagging interviews. On a good day, you can sit at a table with Al Kaline. Last year, Yogi Berra was there, too, when the Yankees visited. First impression: How could someone that small have become so big?

Ken Griffey Jr. hold court in the Mariners' clubhouse. Last year, Junior brought Ichiro out of a thaw. This year, he will work with Milton Bradley. No wonder the Mariners don't care if Griffey doesn't hit .300 anymore.

Braves prospect Jason Heyward take batting practice. Dale Murphy told me that unlike most young players, Heyward doesn't use batting practice to see how far he can hit the ball. Oh, well. Should be fun, anyway.

Charlie Manuel watch batting practice behind the batting cage. Watch for just a little while and it is obvious that this is what Manuel was meant to do. Vin Scully behind a microphone could not be any more comfortable.

C.J. Wilson try to make the Rangers' rotation. Not satisfied with being the club's steadiest reliever, the lefthander has convinced Nolan Ryan and Co. to give him a chance to start. All he has to do is be one of the two best starters in camp to have a chance. If you don't follow Wilson, you should -- as much for his Tweets ([str8edgeracer](#)) as his twirling.

Neftali Feliz try to make the Rangers' rotation. If the 21-year-old isn't their best pitcher today, he will be this time next year. If Wilson and Feliz have big springs, the Texas brain trust will have some interesting discussions in Surprise, Ariz.

Bobby Cox kick back in the dugout at Disney. In his spikes, as always.

Mark McGwire talk hitting. He has been in Cardinals' camp only a week and perception already is changing. Maybe he can coach, after all. We should have figured. Tony La Russa would not set up McGwire to fail.

Jose Reyes at 100 percent. [Baseball](#) needs his smile. The Mets need his game.

Joe Maddon always has something interesting to say.

All the weight changes. Nowadays, more guys show up lighter than heavier. Russell Martin, however, has added 25 pounds, according to the Los Angeles Times. All muscle, of course. Among the reported losers: Andruw Jones (25 pounds), Aaron Cook (20), Anibal Sanchez (15), Aaron Rowand (10), Geovany Soto (a lot). Maybe the losers will inspire me.

A Joe Maddon session with reporters. You usually learn something, and not just about the Rays.

CC Sabathia shoot 3-pointers at an Orlando Magic game. Hey, it happened last year. Joba Chamberlain and Chien-Ming Wang took the court, too. I don't remember if it was before or after the game, but I do remember they looked like big kids at the playground. I also remember thinking the backboard might need replacing after being hit by so many bricks.

The A's work out at Papago Park. Talk about the way it should be. Nowhere can fans get closer to the action, [plus](#) an area between the fields and the clubhouses makes it easy for fans to walk right up to players. That doesn't happen in Tampa.

The media lunch spread at a Braves game. You knew a baseball writer couldn't do one of these columns without mentioning food.