

A's News Clips, Thursday, March 4, 2010

A's bullpen was stellar in 2009 and might get better this year if Joey Devine stays healthy

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's felt confident in their bullpen when last season began.

But they couldn't have guessed the names that emerged to anchor one of the major leagues' top relief corps.

Andrew Bailey went from unheralded rookie to All-Star closer. Michael Wuertz became a dominant setup man after struggling to find his niche in previous seasons with the Chicago Cubs.

And left-hander Craig Breslow, claimed off waivers from the Minnesota Twins in May, wound up appearing in 77 games, second most in the American League.

All of Oakland's key relievers return. And with the possible addition of Joey Devine, who missed last season with an elbow injury, the A's feel any lead they take into the late innings is in good hands.

"They're the tourniquet of the team," starting pitcher Dallas Braden said of the bullpen. "They can stop the bleeding. They can prevent the bleeding."

A's relievers led the AL last season in ERA (3.46) and strikeouts (514). They led the majors in strikeout-to-walk ratio (2.65-to-1) and opponents' on-base percentage (.307). They also converted 76 percent of save opportunities, third-best in the AL.

"As a bullpen, we think if we can take a lead into the sixth inning we should be in pretty good shape," Breslow said.

Bailey remains the unquestioned closer after registering 26 saves and a 1.84 ERA in 2009.

But a healthy return from Devine would be big. He was superb in 2008, notching a 0.59 ERA in 42 appearances. He's steadily recovering from last April's elbow ligament replacement surgery but might not be ready by Opening Day.

If and when Devine returns to full strength, A's manager Bob Geren is enthused about the late-inning flexibility he'll have.

Devine, Wuertz and Brad Ziegler — who has 18 saves over the past two seasons — can serve as setup men or close when Bailey needs a rest.

"Having four guys that can pitch the eighth and ninth is outstanding," Geren said.

But there's room for improvement from last season. A's relievers ranked 10th out of 14 AL teams in inherited runners who scored (35.5 percent).

They certainly could benefit from a lighter workload. The bullpen logged 5591/3 innings — most in the AL and second-most in Oakland history.

After last season's AL Rookie of the Year campaign, Bailey will attract attention.

But just as important for the bullpen is whether Wuertz produces numbers similar to 2009. He was solid in five seasons with Chicago but took things to another level last season. He held opponents to a .188 batting average and led AL relievers with 102 strikeouts in 782/3 innings, walking just 23.

The A's acquired Wuertz from the Cubs last February for outfielder Richie Robnett and infielder Justin Sellers.

"Getting traded over here, I knew I had a good opportunity," Wuertz said. "Everything fell into place, and more than anything it was confidence in myself."

The A's will break camp with seven relievers — Bailey, Wuertz, Ziegler, Breslow and Devine (if healthy) should be five of them. Those fighting for the other spots include lefties Jerry Blevins and Brad Kilby and right-handers John Meloan and Bobby Cassevah, a Rule 5 draftee.

"As soon as Opening Day comes it doesn't matter what we did last year," Breslow said. "We have to re-establish ourselves."

A's notebook: First-round draft pick Grant Green getting glimpse of majors in A's camp

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Shortstop Grant Green was still working long after the A's had cleared the field following Wednesday's intrasquad game at Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

Back in August, Green received a \$2.75 million signing bonus from the A's, who chose him 13th overall in the June draft.

Now Green is just a newbie in a major league clubhouse, wearing No. 76 and getting drilled in the basics of his position by infield coach Mike Gallego.

"I have a long way to go," said Green, a two-time All-Pac-10 shortstop while at USC. "I still have a lot of stuff to learn. But I'm getting the feel day by day."

Green is thought to have great potential as a hitter, but some evaluators believe third base might be his best long-term position.

A's assistant general manager David Forst said the A's are intent on giving Green an extended chance to play short.

Gallego, a middle infielder during his 13-year big league career, had Green field grounder after grounder Wednesday, stressing the importance of proper footwork as he fields the ball and unloads to first.

Green said Gallego had him close his eyes and mimic the motion of setting up to throw.

"You feel how it is so you don't have to think about it," Green said.

He played in just five games with Single-A Stockton last season because of his late signing, and he's likely to begin this season with Stockton.

While Green is in major league camp, the A's want him soaking up as much as possible.

"That's exactly why a guy like that is in camp, to get as much instruction as he can get," Forst said.

The A's lineup for today's exhibition opener against the Cubs in Mesa won't feature many marquee names. Eric Chavez, Coco Crisp, Jack Cust, Mark Ellis, Kevin Kouzmanoff and Kurt Suzuki aren't even making the trip.

The starting nine and batting order, which is subject to change — Rajai Davis LF, Daric Barton 1B, Ryan Sweeney RF, Jake Fox 3B, Gabe Gross CF, Adam Rosales 2B, Landon Powell C, Cliff Pennington SS, Trevor Cahill P.

There's no designated hitter with the game in a National League park.

Left-hander Gio Gonzalez looked strong in Wednesday's intrasquad game, striking out Davis and Fox in a 1-2-3 inning.

"His breaking ball was in midseason form," A's manager Bob Geren said.

Geren also liked what he saw from Henry Rodriguez, who touched 96 mph with his fastball in a 1-2-3 inning. Rodriguez made his major league debut with three appearances in September, and Geren said he considers the right-hander a contender for a bullpen spot.

"If he gets command of that zone, he could be ready real quick."

Geren said Tuesday that Crisp wouldn't play defense until late in the exhibition season. The manager adjusted that time frame Wednesday, saying his projected starting center fielder may only miss a week's worth of outfield time.

Crisp is rehabbing from surgery on both shoulders, and will get at-bats at DH until he plays in the field.

Kouzmanoff, nursing a bruised shin, didn't play third base in the intrasquad game, but he batted twice. There's a chance he'll play third Friday.

Veteran local talk-show host Chris Townsend is the A's new in-studio postgame radio host on XTRA Sports (860-AM). He takes over for Robert Baun, who remains involved in A's broadcast production.

Chin Music: A's updates on Kevin Kouzmanoff, Coco Crisp; Chris Townsend taking over postgame radio show on 860-AM

By Joe Stiglich, Contra Costa Times, 3/3/2010

It's a sunny but cool morning at Phoenix Muni. Here's the day's news so far in A's land ...

Today's intrasquad game will be three innings (yesterday it was planned as two). Kevin Kouzmanoff isn't playing because of his bruised shin, but Bob Geren was hopeful he'd play in tomorrow's exhibition opener against the Cubs. Eric Chavez gets a planned day off today ...

After saying Coco Crisp might not play center field in games until the end of the Cactus League, Geren said this morning it might only be a week or so before Crisp plays defense.

-The A's issued a press release announcing that Chris Townsend will take over the postgame radio show on 860-AM. Robert Baun still works for the A's, and he tells me he'll still be webcasting games down here in AZ, which is good news for fans.

One last note: With Cactus League games starting tomorrow, I'm happy to report that I can put names with faces for just about every player in the A's clubhouse by now. There are 63 players on the spring roster, and it takes a while.

Somebody who works for the A's brought up an interest topic the other morning — the "clubhouse walk-by." The goal in the clubhouse walk-by is to casually stroll past somebody's locker, steal a quick glance at the name plate above the locker and figure out who that player is standing there. Hey, it's not like I'm the only one who has to do this. Even the A's themselves take a while to get to know their teammates. I've seen two players talking, and one of them mentions a name and the other guy scrunches his eyebrows as if to say, "Who?"

That's spring training for you

A's fireballer impresses with his control

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Henry Rodriguez was one of those September call-ups whose time was brief but whose impression was big. That's what a 100-plus mph fastball will get you.

Rodriguez isn't automatically mentioned in connection with the Opening Night bullpen. But with the kind of talent he has, if the right-hander continues to show the kind of location he did in Wednesday's intrasquad game, he could have a shot.

Rodriguez struck out **Chris Carter** and got **Gabe Gross** and **Travis Buck** to ground out; he hit 95 mph on the radar gun.

"Firm to quite firm," Gross said with a grin about Rodriguez's velocity. "His stuff had life out there, and he threw me a good curveball, good depth."

Manager **Bob Geren** said Rodriguez is a candidate for the bullpen if he is reliably in the strike zone.

"I think he was trying to throw more strikes today," catcher **Kurt Suzuki** said. "And if Henry can do that, he's got more than enough to get big-league hitters out, no matter how hard he throws. He looked great. He made it nice and easy for me."

Fifth-starter candidate **Gio Gonzalez** also had a 1-2-3 inning with two strikeouts, and he drew raves afterward for his curveball (not unusual) and his changeup (less usual).

Kevin Kouzmanoff, out the previous day with a shin bruise, took part in the game (he walked and struck out), and he'll next play in the Cactus League home opener Friday.

Adam Rosales and **Michael Taylor** each had RBI singles for the second day in a row. **Mark Ellis** had two hits and **Ryan Sweeney** a triple.

Opener today: The A's are at Mesa to open the exhibition season versus the Cubs, but many of the regulars - Suzuki, Ellis, Kouzmanoff, **Jack Cust**, **Eric Chavez** - won't play until Friday.

Jake Fox, who has done a capable job catching the first two weeks, will be at third today and Rosales will play second. **Trevor Cahill** will start for Oakland.

Briefly: Geren said **Coco Crisp** will play in the outfield sooner than expected, perhaps in a week or so. ... **Jason Jennings** threw another good bullpen session and could be in games soon. ... **Joey Devine** will face hitters as soon as early next week. ... The A's announced that **Chris Townsend** will be the new host of the postgame show on 860 AM; he'll make his debut following today's game.

Drumbeat: Intrasquad info, day two; Kouzmanoff, Crisp updates

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Phoenix

It's a three-inning intrasquad today, with Matt Wright starting for the "visiting" A's team and Gio Gonzalez for the home A's. Here are the lineups: Visitors: Davis lf, Sogard 2b, Suzuki c, Carter 1b, Cust dh, Buck rf, Wimberly cf, Whitney 3b, Green ss

Home: Ellis 2b, Barton 1b, Sweeney dh, Taylor lf, Fox c, Patterson cf, Rosales ss, Brown rf, Petit 3b

Kevin Kouzmanoff is fine after taking a line off his shin on Monday; he'll play in tomorrow's game against the Cubs in Mesa, according to manager Bob Geren, although Geren does plan to check in with Kouzmanoff again later to make sure he's good to go.

Geren said yesterday that Coco Crisp was a ways away from playing in the outfield because he's coming back from surgeries on both shoulders, but today Geren said that the trainers have told him it might be sooner than he'd thought - maybe just a week or so.

I know there was some head-scratching when the A's signed Crisp, and while I do understand the team's thinking in general (better outfield defense, even more speed, short contract and maybe a little under market value for health reasons), Crisp's shoulder issues are the one thing that give me pause - I wasn't aware when he was signed quite how extensive the surgeries were. The A's have had so many injuries the past three years, and Crisp has 12 pins in his shoulders. I know they check these guys out very thoroughly and they didn't see anything that alarmed them with Crisp, but I still think it's something of a gamble. And \$5.5 million (there was a \$250K signing bonus that was not reported initially) is a lot for the A's. Had they waited, the cost might have come down - or they might have been able to snag Johnny Damon instead.

Those are useless what-ifs, of course, and if Crisp gets back into the outfield soon and looks fine there this spring, that will answer a lot of questions. And if he plays well and the A's decide they want to bring up Michael Taylor at some point this summer, Crisp's track record as a strong defensive player and a good base stealer might make him a nice potential trade piece. But not if the shoulders remain problematic. This is something to keep an eye on.

Jason Jennings is likely to throw live BP in the next day or two and he'd told me he thought he'll get into a game early next week. Joey Devine will throw another bullpen today and he might be slightly ahead of schedule; he's thinking potential live BP maybe early next week. Josh Outman, meanwhile, told me he thinks he might be able to throw in a simulated game or intrasquad game by the end of the spring. Then he'll go to extended spring, and off to a minor-league rehab assignment if all continues to go well. Mid summer remains the target for Outman to return to Oakland, but he also seems a little bit ahead of schedule.

Eric Chavez and Dallas McPherson both get scheduled days off today, maintenance days for their surgically repaired backs.

I wrote about [McPherson's long road back](#) in today's Chronicle, as well as [Adam Rosales' uncanny resemblance to Bobby Crosby](#) - at least from afar.

We're wondering how the Bobby Crosby Shrieker (copyright Ray Ratto) will respond to this - Rosales doesn't look like Crosby facially, but everything else is pretty similar: height, frame, socks, number.

Will she keep yelling, "Bobby, you're hot!" as she did last year when he wasn't in the game? (My favorite was her occasional plaintive, "Bobby, where *are* you?") Will she substitute another player? Or will she just stop showing up? She kept us in stitches in the press box, so I hope she finds someone new. She did seem awfully loyal, though, so maybe we'll have to wait til the Pirates visit Oakland during inter-league play for our favorite refrain.

A's prospect carries baseball bloodlines

Catcher Stassi, 18, has rich history, bright future in game

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Baseball has always been viewed as more than just an American pastime in the Stassi household.

Any of the three Stassi brothers, including A's 2009 fourth-round Draft pick Max, will tell you it's a family pastime.

Has been ever since the 1930s. That's when Myril Hoag, Max's great-great uncle, began a 13-year outfield career in the big leagues, where he called the likes of Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig and Joe DiMaggio teammates during a long stint with the Yankees.

Years passed, but it wasn't long before both Max's grandfather, Bob, and father, Jim, made it to Triple-A as catchers.

"I'm a third-generation catcher, you could say," Max said. "Hopefully, I'll be the first one to make it to the big leagues."

This wide-eyed 18-year-old A's prospect has a ways to go, but the fact that he is already in Major League camp says enough about the possibility of a successful future in The Show.

Then again, the possibility became a reality long before Max even put on a big league uniform.

"I remember when he was in T-ball, he hit about every ball off the tee over the fence," said his 20-year-old brother, Brock Stassi. "Everyone batted in those three-inning games, and every at-bat he hit a home run, so he hit about three home runs every game."

Luckily for Brock, he never had to play against Max. In fact, the two were teammates from the start of Little League -- when younger brother Max played up a level -- all the way through high school, where baby brother Jake eventually joined them on the varsity team.

The family ties at Yuba City (Calif.) High School don't stop there, though. Their father, Jim, has been the baseball coach at the high school for years and, with the help of all three sons in 2007, brought home the school's first Sac-Joaquin Section Division III title.

"We've always been really close," Brock said. "We're all best friends, so growing up we probably terrorized our mom."

Their mother, Racquelle, would probably say she wouldn't trade a moment of it, though. After all, each of her boys has carried on the family's baseball tradition in both a successful and respectful way. While Max has been busy learning from the big leaguers in Arizona, Jake is gearing up to play at Long Beach State in the fall and Brock is in his junior year as a left-handed pitcher for the University of Nevada-Reno.

"For as long as I can remember, I threw to Max," Brock said. "He was the short and pudgy catcher, and I was the tall and skinny pitcher. We always played on the same team growing up. We push each other to get better but never try to one-up each other."

Stassi believes that time spent with the big boys has helped ease him into his own comfort zone with his new Oakland team. As the youngest player in camp, he has displayed a maturity level that manager Bob Geren deems "well beyond his years."

"Having a big brother helps in knowing how to act around older guys," Stassi said. "I was always around his friends, and if I were to act a certain way, he would set me straight."

A's catcher Kurt Suzuki believes he can play that big brother role for Stassi if need be in camp but so far has only been impressed with what he sees from his potential heir apparent.

"He moves real well back there and works hard every day," Suzuki said. "He's also been strong during BP. It seems like he fits right in, and it's nice to have him around."

Exactly how long Stassi is around before the club decides to send him back to Minor League camp is unknown, but the fresh-faced catcher plans on soaking up every bit of this Spring Training experience.

"I love doing all the early work and all the working out because that's my job now," he said. "It still hasn't really set in that this is officially my job, it's what I do for a living. It's pretty awesome."

Needless to say, Stassi is completely content with his decision to report to camp rather than class, which would have been the case had he fulfilled his commitment to UCLA.

"It was a tough choice," he said. "I committed to UCLA and getting an education there. And the college experience seems great, but what I want to be is a professional baseball player. During the summer I realized I wanted to be here rather than school.

"I don't mind the grind. Everything's a grind if you think about it. I might as well grind it out doing something I love to do. This is the highest level. You go out and work every day, and it's awesome."

Even being in the big league atmosphere has allowed Stassi to enjoy some aspects of a college experience, including having a roommate. He and shortstop Grant Green, another of the A's 2009 top Draft picks, became fast friends in the fall instructional league and are sharing a room in camp.

Green, 22, is a product of USC and has been rather forgiving in the fact Stassi almost attended a rival school. The two keep things quiet and, according to Stassi, "just hang out at the hotel and probably spend way too many hours on Facebook."

Stassi does, however, also get to spend too many hours at the field -- something he believes should be relished. And he doesn't mind any of the rigors that come with either the game or being the youngest in uniform.

"It's still the same game, so I'm just keeping that in mind," he said. "The game's a little quicker, a little different up here, but I'm still enjoying it. I love this game and go out and play hard every day."

A's add new postgame radio host

Nationally syndicated voice Townsend debuts Thursday

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- The A's on Wednesday morning announced another change to their radio broadcasting schedule by welcoming Chris Townsend as the club's new in-studio host of Oakland's one-hour postgame show on XTRA Sports 860 AM (KTRB).

The news comes just a month after longtime A's pregame radio host Marty Lurie revealed his plans to head across the Bay to join the Giants broadcast team at KNBR.

Townsend, a nationally syndicated radio broadcaster with more than 13 years of media experience in the Bay Area, will make his program debut Thursday. "A's Talk with Chris Townsend" is scheduled to air immediately following the team's Cactus League opener against the Chicago Cubs. Meanwhile, Ken Korach, Ray Fosse and Vince Cotroneo will handle the game broadcast, with the pregame show slated to begin at 11:30 a.m. PT.

"I've always liked and respected Chris," said Ken Pries, A's vice president of broadcasting and communications. "He has followed the A's pretty closely over the years, and I felt like he had some really good insight into the team. I think he'll be a strong host."

Townsend currently hosts "Sports Overnight America with Chris Townsend," a syndicated show on the Sports Byline Network, which is carried on more than 500 stations in 177 countries. He also hosts "The Chris Townsend Show" on a Sacramento-based radio station.

The new A's broadcaster, who also boasts TV experience with Giants, 49ers and Warriors coverage, brings with him an impressive baseball background. He was captain of the San Jose State baseball team in the early 1990s and is also the grandson of seven-time All-Star Bob Elliot, who was the first third baseman in the game's history to win the National League MVP -- accomplished with the Boston Braves in 1947.

With Townsend officially on board, former postgame host Robert Buan will continue to contribute to the club's show by providing on-site insights and interviews while still acting as the club's broadcasting manager.

"The station did an extensive search to find a host," Pries said, "and they knew they wanted to make a change and do something different. But they still wanted to have Robert involved in some way because he has a great relationship and rapport with players and obviously has a good following.

"The station decided they wanted a different look, a different feel -- but keeping Robert involved is important to keep that continuity going."

Another big change debuting Thursday is what Pries calls "an incredible signal." KTRB recently added a daytime transmitter in Hayward, Calif., which will now provide quality day game coverage for A's fans in all local counties, as well as some outside of the Bay Area.

"They're going to notice a big difference in the strength of the signal," Pries said. "It's extremely strong."

A's Anderson ready for his sophomore season

ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHOENIX — Katelyn Anderson thinks it's pretty cool having an older brother pitching in the major leagues. For the rest of the Anderson clan, though, it's business as usual.

Oakland left-hander Brett Anderson, who led all rookies with 150 strikeouts last year, has pitched in a Futures all-star game, the Olympics and in major league ballparks.

His demeanor contradicts his experience.

He wears his hat off-kilter at times and looks more like the neighborhood kid who mows lawns than the A's staff leader in wins from last year.

Anderson maintains his even temperament thanks in large part to growing up in a sports family.

His father, Frank, is the head baseball coach at Oklahoma State and a former pitching coach at Texas — the Longhorns won the 2002 national title during his tenure — and Texas Tech.

His mother, Sandra, was an All-American softball player at Kearney State. His 11-year-old sister is a budding star in soccer and once scored 20 points in a basketball game.

"My mom is probably the toughest on me," Anderson said. "She'll want to know why I threw a certain pitch that got hit for a home run. My dad keeps an eye on me and is always interested in how I'm throwing.

"I think my sister is just happy to go on road trips to places like Florida, Boston and Los Angeles. She even got a passport to go to Toronto."

Spring training is out of the question as a destination for a family vacation. There's school for his sister and a demanding schedule for the Cowboys.

"After school lets out and my dad's season winds down, they find time to see me," Anderson said Wednesday. "Sometimes my dad will make a recruiting trip to wherever we're playing and we can get together. It all works out."

Anderson led the A's in strikeouts and wins (11-11) and pitched one of the five shutouts by an AL rookie last season. With Trevor Cahill's 10 wins last year, the duo were the 13th since 1900 to have two pitchers under the age of 22 win 10 or more games, and the first since the 1984 Kansas City Royals' Mark Gubicza and Bret Saberhagen.

Anderson, who started using his changeup more after the All-Star break, was 8-4 with a 2.96 ERA, and .237 opponents batting average over his final 17 starts, dating to June 29. He considers that a starting point for this year.

With access to the Cowboys' indoor facilities, Anderson grabbed any catcher available to maintain his throwing program.

"I worked on my changeup as a fourth weapon," he said. "I'd like to duplicate what I did in the second half. I'd like to start the season how I ended the last one."

He's slotted into the No. 3 spot behind Ben Sheets and Dallas Braden for now and will make his spring training debut Sunday in Tempe against the Los Angeles Angels.

"This spring training is more relaxed," Anderson said. "Trevor and I were trying to impress everybody and make the team last year by getting people out. Now we're able to work on different things. The adjustment period is shorter and the overall atmosphere is better."

In Beijing, Anderson was the winning pitcher in the bronze medal game. He once found himself eating lunch next to swimming superstar Michael Phelps.

These days he thinks the A's could have their share of superstars.

"We have the chance to be one of the best staffs in the big leagues," he said. "The bullpen is unbelievable and we've added guys who know what it takes."