

A's Daily News Clips; Saturday, March 06, 2010

A's pitcher Ben Sheets sees initial start as 'W'

By Joe Stiglich/Oakland Tribune. 3/5/10

PHOENIX — It was a short day's work, but Ben Sheets considered it a big hurdle cleared.

Sheets threw 12/3 innings in his A's spring debut Friday against the Milwaukee Brewers, allowing four hits and two runs (one earned) in an 8-7 A's victory.

It marked Sheets' first start in 17-plus months after he missed all of last season recovering from right elbow surgery.

His command was off on his fastball and curveball, but Sheets felt fine physically afterward. For that, he considered his day a "W."

"Seventeen months since I last faced a batter," he said. "I ain't gonna lie, it's not like I wasn't nervous out there. Once I got (in the flow), I felt pretty good."

Milwaukee, Sheets' former team, put good wood on him in a two-run first inning, but throwing errors from catcher Kurt Suzuki and third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff didn't help.

Sheets got George Kottaras swinging on a changeup to end the first. After Steffan Wilson singled with two outs in the second, A's manager Bob Geren pulled Sheets after 32 pitches. He was on a 35-pitch limit.

"He just missed with his curve, but the more he threw you could tell he was right there," Geren said. "The most important thing is how he's feeling, and he said he feels great."

Sheets underwent surgery in February 2009 to repair a torn flexor tendon. The A's signed him to a one-year, \$10 million contract this winter.

Sheets' debut commanded a big media turnout, and he fielded several questions regarding his time with the Brewers.

Though his various injuries with Milwaukee were well-documented, Sheets said he pitched with his elbow hurt in 2008. He made his final start of that season on Sept. 27 but missed the postseason.

"I gave what I had at the time. It cost me a whole year giving that, too," Sheets said. —... I wouldn't change a thing. I'd go back out there and be willing to blow my arm out again."

Eric Chavez, learning to play first base, played five innings there Friday and tripled in his first at-bat.

Included in his day was a nice stop of Gregg Zaun's grounder in the first. He was charged with an error when Lenny DiNardo's pickoff throw got by him in the fifth.

"I'm still getting comfortable," Chavez said. "I'm glad this day's over. I got one in the books."

After Ryan Braun walked in the fifth, Chavez caught himself holding Braun on even though there were runners on first and second. Brewers first base coach Ed Sedar had a chuckle and told him he could play back.

"He hooked me up," Chavez said.

Catcher Anthony Recker hit a go-ahead three-run homer in the sixth and the A's evened their Cactus League record at 1-1.

Travis Buck, trying to win an outfield roster spot, also homered in the sixth.

The A's committed four errors in the game, but Rajai Davis stood out in left field for a second straight day. He made a diving catch to rob Alcides Escobar in the second.

Kouzmanoff started at third base after being limited in recent days with a bruised shin. He knocked down a laser off the bat of Braun in the first but threw wildly to first for an error. He batted cleanup and went 0-for-3.

Sunday's game against the Los Angeles Angels at noon will be shown on tape delay on the MLB Network at 4 p.m.

Chin Music: More familiar faces in A's lineup vs. Brewers

By Joe Stiglich/Bay Area News Group. 3/5/10

We've got a few more regulars in the A's lineup today. Here's what it looks like for Cactus League home opener vs. Brewers:

Rajai LF
Ellis 2B
Suzuki C
Kouzmanoff 3B
Chavez 1B
Cust DH
Buck RF
Rosales SS
Patterson CF

Sheets P

It'll be interesting to see how Bob Geren sets the middle of his batting order. I could see Suzuki-Kouzmanoff-Chavez-Cust being a potential combination in the middle, but I'm not sure how much we should glean from today's order. For one thing, I don't expect right-handers to take up the first four spots. Figure switch hitter Coco Crisp will occupy one of the top two spots when he plays.

Chavez gets his first real game experience at first base, so we'll see if he gets any difficult plays over there. Geren said the A's broke out a stop watch yesterday and timed Chavez on how long it took him to cover the bag from where he was playing a hitter. They also compared that to the speeds with which many of the game's fastest left-handed hitters get down the line. That gives him an idea of how much time he has to get to the base and receive a throw. Technical stuff, but still sorta interesting.

That's all for now ...

Sheets returns to mound, Chavez tries first

Susan Slusser./Chronicle Staff Writer. 3/6/10

Ben Sheets made his first start in an A's uniform Friday in the team's Cactus League home opener, and **Eric Chavez** made his first-ever start at first base, with an assist from Brewers first-base coach **Ed Sedar**.

Sheets got knocked around a bit in the A's 8-7 victory over his former club, the Brewers. He allowed four hits and two runs, one earned, in 12/3 innings, but said he felt good overall in his first appearance in a game since Sept. 27, 2008. Sheets spent 2009 recovering from elbow surgery.

"I felt great, I really did," said Sheets, who threw 34 pitches and was hitting 92 mph on the radar gun. "I was a little nervous - it had been 17 months since I last faced a batter. But the batter eases your mind. You've got to get back into it."

"He's in the same boat I am," Chavez said of Sheets. "We're not out here to impress everyone today. Health is the big thing for us."

Chavez, working his way back from two back surgeries and multiple shoulder surgeries, tripled in his first at-bat of the spring, and he played well in the field. The six-time Gold Glove third baseman will be Oakland's utility player, if healthy, and he's still learning to play first.

"I was covering first at times I didn't need to," Chavez said. "Their first-base coach was like, 'Hey, you don't need to be here.' He hooked me up."

Chavez was manning the bag with men at first and second, chatting with runner **Ryan Braun**, when Sedar told him it wasn't a situation to hold Braun. Chavez imitated doing a nonchalant wave and said with a grin, "I was like, 'OK, I just wanted to say hi.'"

Chavez had to make a sliding stop to his right for a grounder by **Gregg Zaun** in the first, and he raced to the bag ahead of Zaun. He handled throws to the bag well, including a few that were offline, although the first that came his way was a wild overthrow by third baseman **Kevin Kouzmanoff**.

"The first one, I thought he was going to dive into the runner," Sheets said of Chavez. "That was a tough play for the first one. As good as he was at third, I don't think he'll have any problems playing first base."

Briefly: **Travis Buck** hit a solo homer for the A's and minor-league catcher **Anthony Recker** a three-run shot. ... **Jason Jennings** threw a 24-pitch simulated game and will pitch in Monday's game. ... The A's game against Anaheim on Sunday will be aired on the MLB Network, tape-delayed at 4 p.m., with blackout restrictions lifted in the Bay Area.

Ben Sheets' tenacity is no joking matter

Bruce Jenkins/Chronicle Staff Writer. 3/6/10

The A's have a treasure in Ben Sheets, perhaps in more ways than they realize. They're going to need some humor, insight and old-fashioned courage as the season goes on, and Sheets loads all of that into a package that also includes four invitations to the All-Star Game.

As Sheets made his spring debut in Friday's exhibition against the Milwaukee Brewers, it wasn't so hard to flash-forward to the regular season at the Coliseum: just a few thousand fans, strident voices heard loud and clear, a lineup devoid of star power, costly mistakes putting runs on the scoreboard. But there also was Sheets, taking the mound against big-league competition for the first time in 17 months in the wake of major elbow surgery.

At times, in the A's company, it seemed he was all alone out there. He probably felt a bit forlorn as the Brewers took a 2-0 lead during his 30-pitch assignment, few of his storied curveballs finding the strike zone. ("None of them," he confirmed, "went over the plate.")

It's just that all of Sheets' postgame comments came with a smirk, a little something extra. He's a pretty good-natured guy to begin with, endearing with his southern-Louisiana accent and perhaps the baggiest uniform pants worn by any pitcher in baseball. At a time when interviews with professional athletes have become increasingly monotonous, Sheets knows the value of a lively exchange.

Someone asked if it was "normal" for him to struggle the first time out.

"Yeah, I normally give up two, three, seven runs," he said with a smile.

Does he expect to gain strength as the year goes on?

"No, I expect to lose a lot of strength and be weak," he said, laughing.

"You look like you're really enjoying being back in the game," a reporter said.

"If you lived in my house, you would, too! No, I'm only kiddin'."

During all that time off, did he ever think he'd be playing for the Oakland A's?

"Yeah. Don't everybody think about playin' for the Oakland A's?"

How about the Brewers giving Sheets' old number, 15, to Jim Edmonds, who tagged him for an RBI single in the first inning?

"Fifteen's still rakin' in a Brewer uniform. All it does is hit. Cecil Cooper, Ben Sheets, now Jim Edmonds."

When a Milwaukee writer reminded Sheets that some Brewers executives were skeptical about his injury, as if he hurt himself away from the field, Sheets just scoffed. "Well, it could have been my bull ridin' in the offseason."

But there were some bad feelings, right?

"Y'all created a big story that there was bad blood, and I don't know where you dreamed that up. Maybe at nighttime."

Behind all the levity, such an integral part of Sheets' personality, lies a fierce work ethic and considerable patience. A lot of pitchers find themselves out of work, or needing some serious adjustments, after the type of surgery (torn flexor tendon) he endured. To me, Sheets' most telling comment Friday concerned his willingness to pitch through the 2008 stretch drive despite knowing that his arm, as they say, was falling off.

Asked if he thought the Brewers would have handled him differently in retrospect, he said, "They *couldn't* have handled me differently. I was on the bump (mound) - I wasn't taking myself out of there. If I could go back, I wouldn't change a thing. I'd go out there and be willing to blow my arm out again."

This is something too few people understand. Every time a pitcher gets hurt - at least in modern times, in the paranoia over pitch counts - it's the manager's fault. The pitching coach's fault. Has to be *somebody's* fault. Dusty Baker, as sensitive to a player's plight as any manager in the game, still hears from horribly unenlightened critics who believe he carelessly blew out arms on the Giants, Cubs and now the Reds.

It's competition, folks. It's a strong-willed athlete who would do anything to take the mound. It's a manager with faith, and the good sense to ride the hot hand. It's Robb Nen, Kerry Wood, Ben Sheets. The injuries come, or maybe they don't, but the operative phrase is "Let's go," not "Jeez, I'm pretty worried."

A's fans have a number of concerns about Sheets - ranging from an early-season breakdown to a midseason trade - but they needn't be worried. He can handle whatever comes his way.

The Drumbeat: Sheets vs. Brewers later today

Susan Slusser/Chronicle Staff Writer. 3/5/10

Here's the A's lineup for the Cactus League opener; it's a sunny day at Phoenix Muni but there's a chilly breeze. The A's expect a crowd of about 3,500.

Lineup: Davis lf, Ellis 2b, Suzuki c, Kouzmanoff 3b, Chavez 1b, Cust dh, Buck rf, Rosales ss, Patterson cf. Ben Sheets is starting, his first game appearance for Oakland, and it comes against his longtime former team, the Brewers.

Patterson is one of those out-of-options guys, like Jake Fox, and I'm not sure he has a strong shot at a roster spot. It will be interesting to see if the A's try to move Patterson before the end of the spring or if they just hope he clears waivers.

Keep an eye on Adam Rosales, who has looked very good in a small sample size so far. Yes, he has options remaining, but I'm starting to think that, if needed, he might be a possibility for more than just a utility position. If he outplays Cliff Pennington this spring, might the A's consider him for the shortstop spot? I'm not convinced that the team is entirely sold on Pennington as the everyday shortstop. Though he was better than expected in his extended look last year, Pennington is one of the few starters among the position players who has some question marks; Daric Barton is the other, largely because of Chris Carter, who looks more than ready for a big-league spot.

The A's are still likely to hold off on Carter and outfielder Michael Taylor until late May or early June for service reasons (no one wants to see their top guys be super-twos after seeing the Tim Lincecum situation; an extra year of arbitration might be expensive for players as promising as Carter and Taylor). Huge springs by one or both could change minds on that, of course, and judging by Carter's monster blast yesterday, he's perfectly capable of an impressive spring. And we all know the A's lack much power.

Jason Jennings will throw a simulated game at noon today on the backfield.

I'll try to tweet (@susanslusser) some highlights from Sheets vs. the Brewers, and there will be more info in the A's beat, which is usually posted on sfgate.com in the evening and is, of course, in the morning paper.

I'll be away for a break the next several days, but John Shea will be covering the team and posting Drumbeat blogs while I'm gone, and he'll also do some A's tweeting; he's @johnsheahey. I don't think he's got the Twitteritis I seem to have come down with, though, so it might be a more reasonable flow of information.

Sheets not fazed by facing former team

A's rightly ready to move on after first outing against Brewers

By Adam McCalvy and Jane Lee / MLB.com. 3/5/10

PHOENIX -- Ben Sheets didn't exactly dominate in his first appearance wearing green, but he walked away from his A's debut wearing the same big old smile he used to sport for the Milwaukee Brewers.

"It's been 17 months since I've been on a mound," Sheets said after facing his former team at Phoenix Municipal Stadium on Friday. "So I thought it went great."

Never mind that the Brewers touched him for four hits -- three of them well-struck, including back-to-back RBI singles by Ryan Braun and Jim Edmonds in the top of the first inning -- before Sheets used up his allotment of pitches (32) with two outs in the second. This was a serious step in the right direction for a guy who glumly complained of a "broke arm" the last time he walked off a Major League mound.

That was Sept. 27, 2008, when Sheets and his aching right elbow tried to make one last start for the franchise that made him a first-round Draft pick nearly a decade earlier. He lasted only 2 1/3 innings against the Cubs that night before his elbow, which had already been barking for a month, finally gave out.

Sheets was forced to watch from the sidelines while the Brewers made their first postseason appearance in a generation, and he stayed on the sidelines throughout all of 2009 while recovering from flexor tendon surgery. He signed a \$10 million deal with the A's in January to launch a comeback that began on Friday with the Brewers in the opposing dugout.

"It really didn't seem strange," Sheets said. "I just saw another team out there, which was weird. I knew a couple of the guys ... but I guess you don't just stare at the batter. They've had a lot of turnover over there, so it ain't like it's all the same guys."

The guys he's come to call teammates, along with new manager Bob Geren, have been anticipating his Oakland debut just as much as anybody -- no matter the opponent. And based on clubhouse reaction following Sheets' brief outing, it's clear they're already ready to see more.

"For the first time out, it was a good outing," Geren said. "You could see he was just missing his curveball, but the important thing is how he was feeling, and he said he feels great."

Eric Chavez, attempting his own comeback after playing in just eight games due to back surgery in 2009, especially understands the patience required of the wait-and-see type of recovery process Sheets is enduring. The A's infielder, making his game debut at first base Friday, got a close-up of the right-handed pitcher's performance.

"He's in the same boat," Chavez said. "He's not out here to impress everybody. He's getting ready for April 5, and health is the big key for him, as it is for me. We're trying to be smart about things. Take it slow, enjoy ourselves and get ready for Opening Day."

"There are some guys you can just look at their Spring Trainings and it doesn't mean anything. He's one of those guys that falls into that category. April 5 he'll be ready to go."

After getting a small sampling of his newly constructed arm, Sheets' former teammates would have to agree.

"I've never faced him, and I feel like his ball was moving more than I anticipated," said Braun, who was credited with an RBI infield single when his rocket to third base was bobbled by Kevin Kouzmanoff. "His curveball was signature Sheets, a sharp 12-to-6. You could tell he wasn't where he wants to be yet, but it's been 17 months. Considering the circumstances, I thought he looked great."

That Sheets is feeling great in his new green jersey is clear. Less clear is how he really feels about his departure from Milwaukee, where he pitched from 2001-08 and racked up more strikeouts than any pitcher in franchise history.

Speaking to Milwaukee reporters Friday for the first time since he left, Sheets on one hand insisted that he felt no ill will toward the Brewers for letting him walk, while at the same time making it clear he felt plenty of ill will about the way the Brewers handled his surgery.

To Sheets, those are two very separate issues.

"When I got there, we were losing 106 [games, in 2002], and when I left there, we were a playoff team, so I don't know what was disappointing," Sheets said. "[Pitching in the playoffs] would have been nice, but I gave what I had at the time and it cost me a whole year.

"They couldn't have handled me differently. We were in a playoff hunt and I wasn't taking myself out of it. If I was capable of going, I went. I always ask myself, 'Would I change it?' And I wouldn't change a thing. I would be willing to go out there and blow my arm out again."

Asked whether he wished the Brewers would have made more of an effort to re-sign him, his voice rises.

"Y'all made a story that there was bad blood and all, and I don't know where y'all dreamed that up. Maybe at nighttime," Sheets said. "There was zero bad blood. [Brewers general manager] Doug Melvin was in a no-win situation. If he signed me and I got hurt, what happens? He looks like an idiot. If he didn't sign me and I came out last year and pitched great ... what did you want him to do? There were never any hard feelings. We worked together for eight years and they were eight great years."

The Brewers declined to offer Sheets arbitration and he hit the free-agent market. He had a contract in place with the Texas Rangers before a failed physical scuttled the deal, and shortly thereafter, in February 2009, a decision was made that Sheets would undergo surgery. Because Sheets was injured in the Brewers' employ, his representation argued that the Brewers were on the hook for surgical costs.

But the Brewers wanted assurances that this was the same injury Sheets suffered back in September, so they asked him to come to Milwaukee for a check-up before undergoing surgery. The request rubbed him the wrong way.

"That was handled bad for me," Sheets said. "To be there 10 years and, on a personal level, to do that, that bothered me. And it's not like I hold any one guy responsible; that whole situation was not handled as good as can be."

So he's moved on, and so have the two young sons who all but grew up in the home clubhouse at Miller Park. Sheets was asked whether his oldest son, Seaver, found it strange to see Daddy wearing green.

"As long as he saw 15 on the back, he's fine," Sheets said.

Buck, Recker power A's to comeback win

Duo slugs homers as club puts up seven runs in sixth inning

By Jane Lee / MLB.com. 3/6/10

ATHLETICS 8, BREWERS 7

at Phoenix

Friday, March 5

Brewers at the plate: Steffan Wilson led the team with three hits, including a double, and notched an RBI in four at-bats. Gregg Zaun and Alcides Escobar each drove in two runs, and Ryan Braun and Jim Edmonds also collected run-scoring base hits as the Brewers combined for 10 knocks overall.

Athletics at the plate: Travis Buck and Anthony Recker each collected their first home run of the spring. Mark Ellis, Jemile Weeks and Chris Carter all drove in runs, and the A's also got hits from the likes of Eric Chavez, Kurt Suzuki, Jack Cust, Rajai Davis, Chris Carter and Michael Taylor. After putting up just three hits in their Cactus League debut against the Cubs on Thursday, Oakland notched 13 on Friday.

Brewers on the mound: Yovani Gallardo, out to claim his stake as Milwaukee's new ace, tossed two scoreless innings of one-hit ball to start the game. He walked one and struck out two. Carlos Villanueva also received two innings of work, giving up one run on three hits while fanning two. Mitch Stetter and Tim Dillard struggled in the sixth, combining to allow seven earned runs on seven hits.

Athletics on the mound: Ben Sheets, making his first start in green and gold -- and first since 2008 -- gave up two runs (one earned) in 1 2/3 innings against his former Brewers club. The right-hander threw a total of 32 pitches -- 19 strikes -- while giving up four hits and striking out one. Fifth-starter candidate Vin Mazzaro tossed two innings, surrendering two runs on two hits and a walk while striking out one. Another two runs came off Lenny DiNardo, who gave up two hits and a walk through one frame.

Worth noting: Brewers outfielder Trent Oeltjen left the game in the sixth inning with a left wrist contusion after being hit by a pitch from Oakland's Andrew Bailey. The Brewers announced Oeltjen will see a specialist on Saturday for further evaluation.

The A's committed four errors on the day, half of which came from the hot corner. Third basemen Kevin Kouzmanoff and Steve Tolleson both made throwing errors, as did catcher Kurt Suzuki and DiNardo. In just two games, Oakland has already compiled five errors.

Cactus League records: Athletics 1-1; Brewers 0-2.

Up next: Dallas Braden, hoping to bounce back from a foot injury that cut his 2009 season short, makes his first Cactus League start on Saturday when the A's play host to the Angels at Phoenix Municipal Stadium. Highly touted prospects Tyson Ross and Henry Rodriguez are also expected to see action on the mound.

The Brewers have a pair of split-squad games on Saturday, but most of the regulars will be on hand for the team's spring home opener at Maryvale Baseball Park, where free-agent pickup Randy Wolf is set for his unofficial Milwaukee debut. For now, Wolf is slotted into the second spot in the Brewers' rotation behind likely Opening Day pitcher Gallardo. Meanwhile, in Tucson, left-hander Chris Narveson will begin his bid for one of the rotation slots still up for grabs. Narveson will lead a squad that includes infielder Craig Counsell and outfielder Jody Gerut against the Rockies.

Lee's Leftovers: Chavez: "I'm glad this day's over"

Jane Lee/MLB.com. 3/5/10

Eric Chavez made his game debut at first base today, playing five innings while going 1-for-2 with a triple in his first at-bat at the plate. After exiting the game, he spoke to reporters about a sense of relief he felt in putting the day behind him.

"I'm glad this day's over," Chavez said. "That one's in the books. For me it's about using that cliché, it's one day at a time. I'm really enjoying myself while I'm out there."

He's also getting help from several people, the most recent being Brewers first base coach Ed Sedar.

"I was actually over at first base when I didn't need to be today," Chavez said with a laugh. "The first base coach said, 'Hey, you don't need to be here right now.' He hooked me up."

Manager Bob Geren said, aside from some footwork that can be improved, he liked what he saw from his six-time Gold Glove third baseman. Chavez made a couple impressive fielding plays and also had to deal with what he called "wild throws," including overthrown tosses from Kevin Kouzmanoff and Lenny DiNardo -- both of which resulted in errors.

"I'm still getting comfortable," he said. "I don't know if I'll ever be completely comfortable. There are times I go out to third and am still not completely comfortable."

At the same time, Chavez insists he still feels healthy -- which is of bigger concern right now than how many outs he collects at first.

"I feel fine," he said. "Only time can tell my situation. To be honest, I just need to get familiar with everything. The first pick-off throw was different for me, and then there were a couple wild throws today. I just have to take it all in."

As for his offensive game, Chavez looked like his old self right away when he collected the triple. All spring, he's been saying that he's most concerned about being productive offensively so as to give the team multiple options of where to use him on the field.

"I think as spring goes on, it will be the way I'm making contact," he said of trying to gauge his comfort level with the bat. "I know when I hit the ball whether I've got the hand speed there and making good contact. It's something I'll be able to know as I get in there making some outs and taking pitches."

Sheets returns to mound

Associated Press/ 3/6/10

Ben Sheets acknowledged being a little nervous but insisted it had nothing to do with facing his former team. It was more about facing hitters for the first time in 17 months after elbow surgery.

The right-hander threw 12/3 innings for the Oakland Athletics to start Friday's 8-7 win over the Milwaukee Brewers in Phoenix.

"I thought it went great," he said after his 32-pitch outing.

Sheets Brings New Mind-Set to A's Team in Need of Change

By TYLER KEPNER/New York Times. 3/5/10

PHOENIX — Every day he reports to work at Phoenix Municipal Stadium, Ben Sheets greets his fellow Oakland Athletics this way: "Good morning, champions!" His teammates, who are coming off a last-place finish in the American League West, love him for it.

"That's the mind-set we need around here, and he reinforces it every day," said Dallas Braden, a pitcher with one full season in the majors. "Whether it's with a smile on his face or a scowl — which we haven't seen yet — every day it's upbeat and it's all positive. That's something we kind of missed."

The A's have missed the playoffs the last three seasons, and Sheets has never been. Before Friday, when he threw 32 pitches in an 8-7 victory over his old team, the Milwaukee Brewers, Sheets had not pitched in a game since Sept. 27, 2008.

The Brewers clinched their first playoff spot in 26 years the day after that, but Sheets was too hurt to continue. He had surgery to repair a torn flexor tendon last February, sitting out 2009 and leaving a legacy of pain and pride in Milwaukee.

“When I got there, we were losing 106 games,” Sheets said. “When I left there, we were a playoff team. So I don’t know what would be disappointing. I gave what I had at the time. It cost me a whole year giving that, too. I’m fine with where I was at and I’m fine where I’m at right now.”

That Sheets is in Oakland is somewhat unlikely, considering his guaranteed salary of \$10 million. Teams like the Mets were willing to offer an incentive-based contract, but the A’s overwhelmed him.

“There’s no reward without some risk, right?” said Lewis Wolff, the Athletics’ owner. “If he’s feeling well, we’ve captured something terrific. And we know he wants to play. We reached a little further, and we need to, because we don’t necessarily have the best facilities and things, and we wanted to make sure we eliminated the competition. You’ve got to reach. Billy and his people did just a great job.”

General Manager Billy Beane had offered contracts to several position players — Adrian Beltre, Jamey Carroll, Marco Scutaro — before turning to Sheets. The A’s needed a veteran on a staff that had 116 games started by rookies last season, the most in the majors in 11 years.

A four-time All-Star, Sheets could help the Athletics contend, or he could become a valuable trading chip. Either way, Oakland figures to benefit as long as he stays healthy. That is the pivotal question for a pitcher who has not thrown 200 innings in a season since 2004.

“Nobody knows on any of these guys,” Beane said, referring to Sheets’s health. “But if he’s not a rehab guy, we probably can’t get him on a one-year deal. It’s a risk worth taking, given that a guy with Ben’s track record would normally command a significant contract for a number of years.”

Sheets worked one and two-thirds innings on Friday, allowing four hits and two runs (one earned), with no walks and a strikeout. He fell behind in counts and struggled with his curveball in the second inning.

But he was pitching competitively, and for now, that is enough. He said the outing could not have gone better, and he continues to build strength. His outgoing personality is already in form.

The longest-tenured Athletics are infielders Mark Ellis and Eric Chavez, who are quieter than Sheets. Ellis said Sheets was reviving a clubhouse that used to be boisterous.

“We don’t have a ton of personality on this team,” said Ellis, who joined the A’s in 2002. “But he has that personality we’ve been lacking.”

Of course, the continued development of starters Braden, Brett Anderson and Trevor Cahill will matter more than a lively clubhouse. Helping the younger pitchers is part of Sheets’s new job description, and he is taking to it.

For 20 minutes during batting practice Friday, Braden sat on an upside-down plastic bucket and listened to Sheets talk about his approach to exhibition games. Sheets is only 31, but he said he could benefit from his role as a mentor.

“It’s kind of cool,” Sheets said. “When you talk about pitching, sometimes the teacher learns as much as the student. To hear myself speak on some things, you go, whoa, I kind of got away from that myself. I think it’s going to help me.”

Sheets said it did not feel strange to face the Brewers because the team has changed since he left. He said he held no grudges against the Brewers for failing to re-sign him after 2008, although he admitted he was hurt by their initial reluctance to pay for his operation.

“I think they agreed to it after,” he said. “But I know I’ve got paperwork that’s about 15 feet high.”

Sheets said he did not regret his decision to keep pitching in 2008, and to his former teammates, there is no doubting his sacrifice. Sheets pitched as long as he could, ultimately costing himself a year's salary. The A's, of all teams, have rewarded him.

"I'm excited he's back out there," the Brewers' Ryan Braun said. "And I'm glad he got paid."

Ben Sheets Smooth in A's Spring Debut

3/05/2010 4:31 PM ET By [Jeff Fletcher](#), Fan House.com

PHOENIX -- For all the brave talk about how good [Ben Sheets](#) felt and how he looked in January, there was still some anxiety over what might happen on Friday.

Sheets pitched competitively for the first time since 2008. Coincidentally, the new A's right-hander did so against the only team he had ever known in his big-league career -- the [Brewers](#).

"I was a little nervous," Sheets said after his outing. "Seventeen months since I last faced a batter. I ain't gonna lie. I was nervous out there. Once I got in I felt pretty good. The batter kind of eases your mind and makes you realize you've got to go after it."

Sheets, who is recovering from surgery to repair a torn flexor tendon, threw 32 pitches in 1 2/3 innings. He allowed two runs on three hits -- one of which could have been ruled an error. He struck out one and did not walk a batter.

His analysis: "I felt great. I really did."

The A's have already penciled in Sheets to start for them on Opening Day, April 5, against the [Mariners](#). His first unofficial outing in an A's uniform had a little extra spice because he was facing Milwaukee.

Sheets said he had no hard feelings toward the Brewers for failing to re-sign him following the 2008 season, when he hurt his elbow.

"Y'all created the story that there was bad blood," he said. "There was zero bad blood."

Sheets did concede that he wasn't happy that there was an issue over whether the Brewers should pay for his surgery after his contract expired. Sheets said the situation was eventually resolved, but he has "15 feet" of paperwork regarding the matter.

"That whole situation was not handled as good as it could be," Sheets said.

Former top pick has two shutout innings

By Tom Haudricourt of the Journal Sentinel

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Phoenix — It might have been just another exhibition game for most players but not right-hander **Mark Rogers**.

The Brewers' 2004 first-round draft pick pitched in a Milwaukee uniform for the first time Friday, holding Oakland scoreless on one hit over the last two innings of an 8-7 loss.

"This might sound ridiculous to some people because they play in spring training games a lot, but I was up a little bit last night, tossing and turning. I was really looking forward to today, getting back on track," said Rogers, who returned to action last season at the Class A level after missing two years with shoulder woes.

"It was exciting. It's been a long time. To be able to get out there and go game speed and feel 100%, my arm feels great now. I can solely focus on executing my pitch instead of how my arm feels."

Rogers was so efficient with his pitches, he needed only 21 to record six outs. To finish off his allotted 40 pitches, he retreated to the bullpen after the game.

Rogers said he has benefited from working with new pitching coach **Rick Peterson**, in terms of repeating his delivery.

"It's a blessing to have him here," Rogers said. "He's very good at getting his point across.

"We talk about being natural and getting in that natural arm slot. That's the easiest to repeat. My recovery time has been significantly better. I feel like I can throw every day.

"We do a lot of 'shadow boxing,' a lot of dry runs with my mechanics, just to get that fluidity in my throwing motion. It's been a good two weeks. I look forward to how much more I can do."

No hard feelings: Right-hander **Ben Sheets** dismissed speculation that his departure from Milwaukee came with any ill will.

"Y'all created the big story that there was bad blood," Sheets told reporters after facing the Brewers in his first exhibition outing for Oakland. "There was zero bad blood.

"We worked together for eight years and they were eight great years."

Sheets' tenure in Milwaukee ended in disappointment in 2008, when he was sidelined for the Brewers' first playoff appearance in 26 years with an elbow injury later diagnosed as a torn flexor tendon. But he said he didn't regret pitching until he couldn't pitch any longer.

"I gave what I had at the time. It cost me a whole year of giving that, too. I'm fine with where I was at, and I'm fine where I'm at now," said Sheets, who pitched 2/3 innings against the Brewers, allowing four hits and two runs (one earned) in 1.0.

There might have been no hard feelings in leaving the club but Sheets was not pleased about the debate over who should pay for his surgery in February 2009. The Brewers eventually footed the bill.

"Well, that was handled bad, for me," he said. "Not the contract; just that.

"It's just the fact that that whole situation was not handled, I thought, as good as it can be. I think they agreed to (pay) after, but I know I got a lot of paperwork that's about 15 feet high."

After sitting out the 2009 season, Sheets signed a one-year free-agent deal with Oakland for \$10 million. As for facing his former club, Sheets said, "It really didn't seem strange. I didn't know a lot of the guys. They've had a lot of turnover."