

A's Daily News Clips; Sunday, March 7, 2010

Persistence has paid off for Kouzmanoff

By Joe Stiglich/Bay Area News Group. 3/7/10

PHOENIX — To understand Kevin Kouzmanoff's blue-collar approach to baseball, you must understand the unlikely path he blazed to the major leagues.

The A's new third baseman hardly was a can't-miss prospect coming out of Evergreen (Colo.) High School. He held no aspirations of playing after high school until a summer league coach offered a late invitation to join his team.

Then he bounced around three colleges before the Cleveland Indians drafted him in the sixth round in 2003.

"He was never the best player on his team," Kouzmanoff's father, Marc, said. "He was never that stud that anyone looked at and said he's a future major league baseball player. But he was persistent."

Now that Kouzmanoff, 28, has established himself in the big leagues, there's hardly anything "big league" about him. He returns to Evergreen every winter to work with his hitting guru, a friend who's a carpenter by trade and has no formal background in coaching. And, as his name swirled in trade rumors this winter, Kouzmanoff escaped by working in an auto shop surrounded by mechanics who had no idea he was a ballplayer until he told them.

Kouzmanoff has brought that workmanlike manner to the A's since being obtained in a Jan. 16 trade from the San Diego Padres. Kouzmanoff has called on infield coach Mike Gallego frequently because he loves taking extra grounders.

"If it takes staying late or coming in early, I'm all about it because I have to take enough reps to feel like I'm prepared to play the game," Kouzmanoff said.

That dedication was apparent at an early age, Marc Kouzmanoff said. But Kevin didn't generate much buzz as a high school player. While playing on the summer league team after graduation, he caught the attention of the coaching staff at Cochise College, a junior college located in Douglas, Ariz.

He played two years at Cochise and earned a scholarship to Arkansas-Little Rock. Realizing that scouts weren't flocking to games there, Kouzmanoff was granted a release from his scholarship and transferred to Nevada. There, he blossomed into the Western Athletic Conference Player of the Year in 2003.

But even while he starred at Nevada, major league scouts were skeptical.

"There are certain players you see right away that excite you with their tools package," said Indians scout Don Lyle, who signed Kouzmanoff. "Guys like Kouzmanoff are subtle and have to come to you eventually. The more you watch him, the more you see things that you like."

Kouzmanoff's arrival in the major leagues with Cleveland in 2006 wasn't subtle. He hit a grand slam off Texas' Edinson Volquez on the first pitch of his first at-bat — the first player ever to do so.

"Our whole family was on SportsCenter for a week," Marc Kouzmanoff said.

Kouzmanoff was traded to San Diego before the 2007 season and averaged 20 homers and 82 RBI over the past three seasons.

No one knows Kouzmanoff's swing better than Troy Slinkard, his unofficial hitting coach since Kouzmanoff was 19. Slinkard is a carpenter whose hobby is studying baseball swings. Marc Kouzmanoff estimates Slinkard owns video footage of 500-600 major leaguers and has had Kouzmanoff watch film of himself to compare it to some of the game's top hitters.

"We just started hitting baseballs in his driveway," Kouzmanoff said. "It's not rocket science. He's just a coach. We're on the same page and same level. I understand him and he understands me."

Kouzmanoff is expected to provide middle-of-the-order pop for a team that hit the fewest homers (135) in the American League in 2009.

"I was surprised to come over to Oakland just because I didn't hear that they were one of the teams interested," Kouzmanoff said. "They're a West Coast team, a good young team. So I was excited to come here."

Duchscherer's status back in limbo for A's

By Joe Stiglich/Bay Area News Group. 3/7/10

PHOENIX — A's manager Bob Geren said he's doubtful right-hander Justin Duchscherer will have thrown enough pitches to open the season in the rotation.

That's an assessment with which his two-time All-Star pitcher didn't agree.

Duchscherer hasn't thrown off a mound since Feb. 19 following surgery to relieve lower back pain.

He's on a throwing program, and though he's tentatively set to return to the mound Wednesday, it's unknown when he'll appear in his first game.

"He's still optimistic about Opening Day, but I don't think so," Geren said before Saturday's 4-2 win over the Angels. "Getting built up to the 100-pitch mark is difficult to do without six starts (during spring training)."

Told of Geren's feeling that he won't be ready, Duchscherer responded: "That's news to me."

Geren wants his starting pitchers capable of throwing 100 pitches to start the season.

Duchscherer said because he doesn't rely heavily on velocity, he won't need as many outings to build up arm strength. He believes four or five starts could get his pitch count to 75 and be sufficient.

"That way, the next one I could go about 90," Duchscherer said. "As efficient as I feel like I can be, I can get at least six innings in 90 pitches."

Geren mentioned Jason Jennings, Gio Gonzalez, Trevor Cahill and Vin Mazzaro as candidates to fill in the rotation if Duchscherer isn't ready.

Jennings, signed last Sunday, is scheduled for his first Cactus League appearance Monday against the Cubs.

Coco Crisp played in his first game, serving as DH and going 2-for-3 with a double from the leadoff spot.

Dallas Braden allowed one run in two innings. His left foot is still "numb and tingly" from nerve damage that ended his 2009 season early, but he said the pain has subsided greatly.

Geren noted the effective relief outing of Tyson Ross, who struck out two in two shutout innings.

Chin Music: Geren says Justin Duchscherer doubtful for season's start

By Joe Stiglich/Bay Area News Group. 3/6/10

Many of the injury updates during spring training are routine and non-newsie. But A's manager Bob Geren dropped a little info on us this morning:

—He gave his strongest statement yet that Justin Duchscherer may not be ready for the start of the season: "It depends on how the next couple of weeks go. He's still optimistic about Opening Day, but I don't think so. Getting built up to the 100-pitch mark is difficult to do without six starts."

Duchscherer had minor surgery Feb. 23 to address lower back pain and he's been working his way back. Haven't talked to him yet today, but he's tried to steer away from forecasting when he might return. He's generally been happy with his progress but hasn't thrown off the mound since his procedure. If he's not ready, Geren mentioned newcomer Jason Jennings, Gio Gonzalez, Trevor Cahill and Vin Mazzaro as possible fill-ins. Those guys were already in contention for the fifth starter's spot, so if Duchscherer isn't ready, two of the four are likely to start the season in the rotation.

Jennings will pitch in relief Monday against the Cubs. Gonzalez starts that game.

—Reliever Joey Devine is coming along well, so there seems a chance he could be ready by Opening Day. Geren said Devine had his best bullpen session of the spring yesterday.

—Coco Crisp makes his first appearance in the lineup today, leading off and serving as DH against the Angels.

A's Teen catching on quickly

Susan Slusser/ Chronicle Staff Writer. 3/7/10

Max Stassi is 18 years old, and he looks barely that. He's also a shade small for a professional athlete, at 5-foot-10 and 205 pounds.

The A's fourth-round pick in the 2009 draft has some obvious role models, though: team broadcaster Ray Fosse was once an 18-year-old catcher in big-league camp, and he became an All-Star. Closer to home, Woodland-born Stassi finds inspiration in diminutive Red Sox second baseman Dustin Pedroia, who is from Woodland and who was the American League MVP in 2008.

"He's definitely the guy I look up to," said Stassi, who is actually several inches taller than Pedroia. "Small stature, plays hard. He's 5-6, 135 pounds soaking wet, but he's fearless."

Onetime Oakland utility player Jermaine Clark, the scout who signed Stassi, thinks the Pedroia comparison is a good one.

"This industry has a thing about size and lack thereof," Clark said, "but what I notice about Stassi is what you'd say about Pedroia: He's got a determined mind and those killer eyes."

"When Max got off the bus, you could tell he was coming out to do some damage to somebody, like 'There's only one winner and it's going to be me.'"

Scouting Stassi was a challenge at times, though, for reasons more Bonds-like than Pedroia-esque. Clark said the first time he saw Stassi at Yuba City High School, Stassi homered in his first at-bat and then was walked his next four times up, and that pattern happened with regularity.

Most teams expected that Stassi would not sign out of high school, because he was committed to UCLA and his family had made it clear that it would take first-round money to change that. Oakland was ecstatic when Stassi fell to them in the fourth round, and the team ponied up \$1.5 million for a signing bonus.

Fosse said that signing straight out of high school, just as he did, is a major advantage for a catcher, and so is coming to major-league camp.

"Max is already way ahead for someone his age, but now he's catching big-league pitchers and he's working alongside big-league catchers," Fosse said. "And instead of going to college, where the coaches call the pitches, he gets to immediately start calling his own game. He'll be really far ahead of the game."

Stassi has drawn praise from the older catchers, including A's starter Kurt Suzuki, for his work ethic and his maturity, which Suzuki reckons is because Stassi is from a baseball family: His dad, Jim, is the longtime coach at Yuba City High School, and he played at Nevada-Reno and in the Giants' system; his grandfather and great-grandfather, both named Sam, also played professional baseball; his brother Brock, 20, is a left-hander at Nevada-Reno; and his brother Jake, 17, is a left-hander at Yuba City.

Stassi fits in so well, no one has even given him grief for his tender years, although he was teased for somehow losing his keys in the washing machine one morning.

"Normally, other players take a young kid like that and shred him," said Keith Lieppman, the A's director of player development. "But they seem to understand that he is a cut above."

Lieppman was particularly amazed by something grown-up that Stassi did this winter. He decided, all on his own, to put together a home-run-hitting contest to benefit food banks in the Yuba City area, an event Stassi called "Homers for the Homeless and Hungry."

"When you do something like that before you're rich and famous, just because you know your community needs help, that's very impressive," Lieppman said. "You don't often see people thinking about other people at that young an age."

This year, Stassi is likely to play at Class-A Kane County (Ill.), but the A's expect him to move through the system quickly.

"Max has got presence and confidence about him and a long lineage of baseball," A's super-scout Billy Owens said. "He's got soft hands, a low center of gravity, a quick short swing, and he's a real leader."

Duchscherer says he will be good to go

John Shea/Chronicle Staff Writer. 3/7/10

Justin Duchscherer wants to meet with manager Bob Geren to "get on the same page" about expectations for the start of the season.

Geren said he didn't think Duchscherer would be ready to open the season because he's two to three weeks behind other starters and would need to elevate his pitch count to 100.

"He's still optimistic about Opening Day, but I don't think so," Geren said. "Getting him built up to 100 pitches makes it difficult to do without six starts."

Duchscherer is returning from a procedure that burned the nerve endings around his sacroiliac joint. He was surprised to hear Geren's comments, saying, "That's what Bob said? That's news to me."

Duchscherer said he "felt great" after throwing Saturday and expects to throw off a mound for the first time Monday or Tuesday. He hinted of a miscommunication because of an earlier chat with Geren about a goal of making 34 starts. As Duchscherer said, "If I don't start the season healthy, I can't do that."

He said he doesn't need to work up to 100 pitches. Just 75.

"The way I feel about my ability to compete, if I can throw 75 pitches in a game here, when it's time to turn the lights on for the season to start, I can go 100," Duchscherer said.

Trevor Cahill, Vin Mazzaro, Gio Gonzalez and Jason Jennings are vying for the No. 5 spot. Without Duchscherer, two of those four could be in the rotation.

Briefly: Dallas Braden, in his first appearance since July 31, surrendered one run and two hits in two innings in a 4-2 victory over the Angels. He said two toes (middle, pinkie) on his left foot remain numb and tingling after last year's injury (nerve damage). "It's always going to be there, in my opinion," he said. ... Tyson Ross, out of Oakland's Bishop O'Dowd High School and Cal, tossed two scoreless innings. ... Eric Patterson, playing second base, took a grounder off the top of his left eye and was taken for stitches. DH Jack Cust started 50 games in right field last year, but Geren said left field is the position of choice in 2010.

The Drumbeat: Don't count on Duchscherer to open season

John Shea/SF Chronicle. 3/6/10

Justin Duchscherer, who hasn't pitched in the majors since 2008, doesn't appear destined for the season-opening rotation.

"He's still optimistic about Opening Day, but I don't think so," manager Bob Geren said. "Getting him built up to 100 pitches makes it difficult to do without six starts. Four of our starters are getting six starts, and one is getting seven. . . . He's two to three weeks behind."

The right-hander is returning from a procedure that burned the nerve endings around his sacroiliac joint.

The A's have options. Even if Duchscherer -- who's slated to throw on the side today but is without a timetable for throwing in a Cactus League game -- were to be ready to open the season, multiple candidates would be vying for the No. 5 spot: Trevor Cahill, Vin Mazzaro, Gio Gonzalez and Jason Jennings.

Without Duchscherer, two of those four could be in the rotation. "We have a lot more to choose from," Geren said. "The good news is, this early in spring, there's still time for auditions."

On the other hand, Geren liked the way Ben Sheets, who also hasn't been seen in the majors since '08, pitched on Friday. The best news, Geren said, is that "he felt fantastic."

Today's lineup for the Angels exhibition: DH Crisp, 1B Barton, CF Gross, RF Sweeney, LF Taylor, C Powell, 3B McPherson, SS Pennington, 2B Patterson. LHP Braden on the mound.

Braden upbeat in return to mound

Lety pitcher happy with first spring outing

By Jane Lee / MLB.com 3/7/10

PHOENIX -- Dallas Braden felt the tingles in more ways than one Saturday.

Making his Cactus League debut against the Angels -- not to mention his first start since last August -- the A's lefty felt his normal giddy self as he took to the mound.

"I get nervous every fifth day," Braden said. "I figure the day that goes away is the day I saddle up behind the 7-Eleven desk."

Then there's his infamous left foot, the one that sidelined him last season and left question marks surrounding his ability to rejoin the rotation.

"For the record, the foot is numb and the foot is tingling," he said. "And that's always going to be there in my opinion because it hasn't changed since day one."

No need to worry, though, folks. Neither form of the tingles presented any cause for concern Saturday, as Braden went the expected two innings, giving up one run on two hits and a walk while fanning one. The 26-year-old southpaw threw 31 pitches, 20 of which were strikes, in the A's 4-2 win over the visiting Angels at Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

"Overall I felt pretty good," he said. "That's the first time I've faced a hitter since August, so overall, mechanically, I felt good. The fastball command can always be better, whether or not you throw nine out of 10 strikes -- 10 is obviously better."

Not much weight, if any, can be placed on results from the opening week of games. So the lone fact that Braden entered and exited the mound healthy was cause enough for relieving sighs. Anything extra was just that.

"I was on the mound," Braden said. "I was throwing a baseball. That's all I care about."

Said manager Bob Geren: "That was an excellent first outing. He pitched well on both sides of the plate."

Following his start, Braden greeted media with his normal gregarious personality but kept the overdone foot talk to a minimum, simply wanting to focus on what he likes to call "0-10" -- pronounced oh-ten -- baseball.

"The amount of pain is nowhere near what it was when I was sidelined after the procedure, so as far as that is concerned, that is in the past," he said. "That's '09 baseball. We're in 0-10 baseball. That's right -- 0-10, not 2010. I'm making a hard push for that."

Eccentric talk aside, Braden hopes his body is anything but that in the coming weeks. He can take the tingles. And the two numb toes. But not when they combine to create any sort of discomfort.

"The approach I'm taking is I'm going to see how human I can be," he said. "And by that, I mean show up, do what I need to do as a baseball player, and if I feel anything or feel it's going to be cause for concern, I'll take necessary action. Until then, I'm a normal dude with a little less feeling than some other guys."

And until then, he's penciled into the middle of the rotation. Don't expect any erasers to come out, though.

"It's going to take you cutting my foot off for me to not be able to play," he said.

A's use small ball against Angels

Pitcher Braden returns to mound after 2009 injury

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

OAKLAND 4, LOS ANGELES 2

at Phoenix

Saturday, March 6

Angels at the plate: Michael Ryan collected his third RBI of the spring while going 1-for-1 at the plate with a sacrifice fly. Erick Aybar brought in Los Angeles' only other run of the day on a run-scoring groundout to second base. The Angels combined for seven hits, including doubles off the bats of Terry Evans and Hank Conger, and also left six on base while going 0-for-4 with runners in scoring position.

Athletics at the plate: The A's relied on a little small ball action to get things going in the first, as both Gabe Gross and Landon Powell collected RBIs with sacrifice flies. In the sixth, Steve Tolleson hit an RBI bases-loaded ground ball to shortstop that was flipped to second but thrown away by Ryan Mount in an attempt to complete the double play, leading to another run. Coco Crisp enjoyed a 2-for-3 day with a double while leading off in the DH spot.

Angels on the mound: Right-hander Jered Weaver, the early favorite to emerge as the ace of the staff, tossed 36 pitches -- 20 for strikes -- through 1 2/3 innings in his Cactus League debut before giving way to righty Rafael Rodriguez. Weaver gave up two runs on three hits and a walk and struck out one. Rodriguez followed with a perfect 1 1/3 innings. After right-handers Michael Kohn and Ryan Brasier combined for two scoreless innings, southpaw Travis Chick was tagged with two runs (one earned) on three hits in two frames.

Athletics on the mound: Dallas Braden, plagued in recent seasons by what he's deemed "malfunctions" (including last year's foot injury), went two innings, giving up one run on two hits and a walk while fanning one. The A's lefty threw 31 pitches, 20 of which were strikes. Right-hander Tyson Ross, making his Cactus League debut, emerged in a big way -- giving up just one hit while striking out two in a pair of scoreless innings. The Angels' only other run came off righty Henry Rodriguez, who gave one up in the fifth inning.

Worth noting: A's infielder Eric Patterson left the game in the fifth inning with a cut above his left eye after Michael Ryan's ground ball to second base took a bad hop. He was replaced by Tolleson.

Cactus League records: Athletics 2-1; Angels 0-2-1

Up next: Weather permitting, Joe Saunders makes his first Cactus League start on Sunday against A's lefty Brett Anderson at Tempe Diablo Stadium at 12:05 p.m. PT. Right-handers Matt Palmer, Kevin Nabors and Rich Thompson and lefty Will Smith are scheduled to follow Saunders to the mound, while Matt Wright, Fautino De Los Santos, John Meloan, Cedrick Bowers and Brad Kilby are expected to follow Anderson. The Angels punished southpaws last season, going 36-17 against them, but Anderson pitched one of the season's best games against them in Oakland when he engaged John Lackey in a scoreless duel through nine innings on July 19 before Bobby Abreu's homer won it against reliever Andrew Bailey. Anderson retired the first 20 hitters before Abreu singled with two outs in the seventh. Hideki Matsui is close to being ready to make his spring debut as a DH, manager Mike Scioscia said.

Tomko eyeing May return to mound

Veteran pitcher continues to rehab pinched nerve

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

PHOENIX -- Brett Tomko was greeted by plenty familiar faces when he entered the A's clubhouse Saturday, among them former Padres teammate Kevin Kouzmanoff.

Kouzmanoff, after welcoming him with a bear hug, proceeded to make thumb prints in Tomko's rehabbing arm -- much of which Tomko couldn't feel.

"There's some feeling," the right-handed pitcher said.

Not enough, though, to get Tomko back on the mound anytime soon. Signed Feb. 28 to a Minor League contract worth \$750,000, the 36-year-old Tomko is not projected to be game-ready until mid-May due to the irritated nerve in his right arm. He'll continue his rehab schedule in Minor League camp throughout the spring before getting the chance to regain his big league role as a starter or reliever.

Tomko is no stranger to the A's, though, as he initially signed a Minor League contract with Oakland on Aug. 5 last year after being released by the Yankees. However, his season was cut short after experiencing pain in his pitching arm on Sept. 14 -- the same day he earned his 100th career victory in a five-hit shutout against Texas.

"I thought I had torn my bicep tendon at the time," he said. "I threw 10 more pitches and felt a little sore that night, but it wasn't until the next day when I really felt it. That was probably the worst day ever."

The pain stayed with him, as did unanswered questions surrounding it. Tomko endured an MRI on his neck, which began what he called a "barrage of tests" to check for aneurisms, tumors, blood clots and the like.

"I really wanted them to do all these tests just to make sure it wasn't anything serious," Tomko said.

Finally, doctors told him a swelled muscle likely was causing a pinched nerve that ran from his biceps down to his thumb -- the same injury from which right-handed starter Brad Penny once suffered.

"I called Brad up and realized it was the exact same thing," Tomko said. "Same symptoms, same pain -- everything. I never thought I wouldn't pitch again, and after talking to him I knew I'd be back on the mound."

With which, team, though, was an entirely different question. He garnered interested from four clubs, among them Minnesota, which was the team "I was leaning toward," said Tomko, who owns a career 100-102 record and 4.65 ERA in 309 games (266 starts) over 13 Major League seasons.

"But Oakland offered up the same type of offer," he continued, "and we had kept in contact, and I had wanted to come back from the get-go."

Mission accomplished. For now, though, Tomko will continue to undergo therapy on his arm while also making strides as a new father to five-month-old twins, Jack and Ty.

"There were grim moments," he said, "but things could have been much worse. Having them around has definitely helped."

Lee's Leftovers: Duke news, plus postgame notes and more

All the postgame talk Saturday was preceded by an interesting pregame session with manager Bob Geren, who, when asked about the likelihood of Justin Duchscherer being ready for Opening Day, responded: *"He's still optimistic about Opening Day, but I don't think so. Getting him built up to 100 pitches makes it difficult to do without six starts. Four of our starters are getting six starts, and [Trevor Cahill] is getting seven. He's two or three weeks behind."*

Duchscherer, in fact, IS still optimistic about being on the 25-man roster Opening Day. When approached by other reporters, he made it clear he still believes he'll be good to go. He's been throwing from the front of the mound and did so again Saturday, so I should have another update on that session tomorrow morning.

And now, some postgame dribblers for y'all... (Sheets' Southern drawl must be wearing off on me):

Immediately after the game ended, Eric Patterson was en route to get stitches for the cut he got above his left eye when trying to grab a groundball that took a bad hop in the fifth inning. I'm told there was plenty blood, although I guess you really didn't need to know that...

Flamethrower Henry Rodriguez threw the ball 98mph at least six or seven times in his one-inning stint today against the Angels, according to Geren. Equally impressive, Geren said, was Tyson Ross -- who struck out two in two shutout innings of work. "He has a bright future, for sure," the A's skipper said. "And since he was in there early in the game, he faced a lot of Angels regulars. That was a good test for him."

Coco Crisp enjoyed a successful Cactus League debut, leading off in the DH spot and going 2-for-3 with a double. He'll continue to battle Jack Cust, Jake Fox and Eric Chavez for time in the DH role as he rehabs the surgically repaired shoulder that forced him to miss the majority of last season. "He had a real nice game," Geren said. "Lots of power off the bat there."

Leftover notes: Righty Jason Jennings, who -- along with Brett Tomko -- signed with the A's on Feb. 28, threw a simulated game Saturday and is slated to throw after Gio Gonzalez in Monday's home game against the Cubs. Meanwhile, Tomko showed up in the A's clubhouse before today's game and spoke about the irritated nerve in his right throwing arm. He also boasted about his five-month-old twins, Jack and Ty, and said there was no special reason for choosing those particular names other than the want to give them "manly" names. "You want them to have names that sound good as a kid," he explained, "but also sound like good names when they're older."

Brett Anderson is on the bump tomorrow -- weather permitting -- and is scheduled to throw ahead of Matt Wright, Fautino De Los Santos, Cedrick Bowers, John Meloan and Brad Kilby.

See y'all at the Angels' Tempe Diablo Stadium in the morning...

Crisp gets two hits in A's win

Mar 6, 7:39 pm EST

PHOENIX (AP)—[Coco Crisp's\(notes\)](#) debut with Oakland gave manager Bob Geren an interesting dilemma at the top of the batting order.

Crisp doubled and singled, Steve Tolleson drove in the go-ahead run and the Athletics beat the [Los Angeles Angels](#) 4-2 on Saturday.

"That was a real nice first game," Geren said of Crisp. "He showed power off the bat and he ran well. He's going to be an exciting player for us."

Crisp, whos signed as a free agent, and [Rajai Davis\(notes\)](#) are both being considered for the top spot. Davis will be used in left field while Crisp, who may not be ready to play outfield when the season starts, takes over in center.

Greg Gross and [Landon Powell\(notes\)](#) also drove in runs for the A's, who won their second straight.

[Erick Aybar\(notes\)](#) and Michael Ryan drove in runs for the Angels, who remain winless in three games.

Angels' starter [Jered Weaver\(notes\)](#) allowed two runs on three hits in his 1 2-3 innings.

"I came out healthy and that's all that really matters right now," Weaver said. "Everything felt good, felt strong and everything else will come along after that. I was just trying to go out there and feel the rhythm of the game again, get back in tune with runners getting on base and having an umpire back there and all that kind of stuff."

A's starter [Dallas Braden\(notes\)](#) allowed a run on two hits in two innings.

"This is the first time I've faced hitters since last August," Braden said. "All in all, mechanically it felt pretty good. My fastball command can always be better."

Braden enters the season with part of his left foot numb, the result of an infection that cost him the rest of last season. He dealt with a stuffed nose last year and he figures he can deal with a numb foot.

“It’s always going to be that way in my opinion and the amount of pain is nowhere near what it was after the procedure,” Braden said. “I’m going to see how I can be, show up and do the work. If there is any cause for concern, I will take some action. Until then I’m a normal human being with a little less feeling.”

Tolleson’s bases-loaded grounder was fielded by Gary Patchett, who tossed to Ryan Mount for the out. The relay throw got away, allowing two runs to score and breaking a 2-2 tie.

NOTES: Angels OF [Hideki Matsui\(notes\)](#) could play Sunday unless the field is drenched from an expected morning storm. “I’m going to be excited to see him swinging the bat,” Angels’ manager Mike Scioscia said. “If he feels good, he’ll be the DH.” ... A’s INF [Eric Patterson\(notes\)](#) left the game with a cut above his left eye after getting hit by a bad-hop grounder. ... A’s RHP [Brett Tomko\(notes\)](#) visited the clubhouse for the first time since signing a minor league deal last weekend. He continues to rehab an irritated nerve in his right arm. ... A’s RHP [Jason Jennings\(notes\)](#) is scheduled to make his first appearance of the spring on Monday.