

## **A's Daily News Clips; March 21, 2010**

### **A's outfielder working to buck the odds**

By Joe Stiglich/ Bay Area News Group. 3/20/10

PHOENIX — Travis Buck has no idea where he fits in the A's outfield puzzle, but he's glad to still be one of the pieces.

That ranks as noteworthy to anyone who kept tabs on Buck's offseason.

As the A's signed free agent outfielders Coco Crisp and Gabe Gross this winter, Buck didn't hide his discontent. But spring training has a way of renewing a player's spirit, and Buck said he enters the 2010 season with a clean mental slate.

"The confidence is there and I'm having fun," Buck, 26, said. "I don't really care about results because if I'm having fun and enjoy being at the ballpark, the results are going to happen, like they did in 2007. Looking back, that was basically the last time I had fun playing the game."

Buck broke into the Opening Day lineup in 2007 after just one full season in the minors. But injuries have sidetracked him throughout his brief career.

He hit .288 in 82 games as a rookie but has combined for a .223 average in just 74 games over the past two seasons.

Even before this winter, Buck wondered where he stood with the organization.

During a May series in Texas last year, Buck publicly questioned why he was placed on the disabled list with an oblique injury that he considered minor. Upon being reinstated from the DL, he was immediately optioned to the minors, leaving the perception that maybe Buck was in hot water.

Not so, according to general manager Billy Beane.

"Travis is a great kid. We think very highly of him," Beane said. "I can assure you, of all the things we've got going on, we don't walk in and go, 'How can we keep this really good player off the team?'"

After the signing of Crisp and Gross in the offseason, Buck spoke his mind in an interview with [csnbayarea.com](http://csnbayarea.com). He all but said that a trade from Oakland would be best, and he alluded to "tension" between himself and manager Bob Geren.

Yet Buck reported to camp energized. Through former teammate Nick Swisher, he worked over the winter with Yankees hitting coach Kevin Long. Buck reduced his exaggerated bat waggle while awaiting a pitch, and he's trying to use his lower body more to generate power.

One major league scout, who has yet to watch Buck this spring, thinks cutting down that waggle will help Buck's timing.

"Whenever I've seen him in the big leagues, it seemed like pitchers kept him off balance," the scout said. "He never really got himself in a strong hitting position."

Geren likes Buck's adjustments and stressed his relationship with the outfielder is fine.

"His attitude's great," Geren said. "He's a hard worker, a good guy. Always has been."

Buck was hitting just .200 in 13 games after the A's 7-4 split-squad win over the Cubs on Saturday. But he's homered twice.

To make the team he'd likely have to leapfrog Gross, expected to be the fourth outfielder.

Whatever the odds, Buck thinks he has unfinished business.

"I want (to succeed) with the A's," he said. "I don't want to do it for another team after they trade me away. I think I owe it to them where I need to start having some breakout years, because they believed in me (as a rookie). I think they deserve it."

### **A's notes: Tomko reaches out to family of Chelsea King**

By Joe Stiglich/ Bay Area News Group. 3/20/10

PHOENIX — A's right-hander Brett Tomko, sidelined with an arm injury, made an appearance in the clubhouse Saturday and brought special guests.

Tomko was joined by Brent and Tyler King, the father and brother of Chelsea King, a 17-year-old girl whose body was found March 2 after she went missing while jogging in Poway.

Tomko lives in Poway, which is located in San Diego County, and shared in the community's grief over her death. Murder charges have been brought against John Albert Gardner III in connection with the case.

"I think it hits home when you're that close to it," Tomko said. "You almost feel a little attacked yourself when you're living four miles from that trail."

Tomko was assigned to minor league camp to rehab his injury and hadn't yet reported when news of Chelsea's disappearance broke.

He didn't know the King family beforehand. But he learned through a friend that Brent and Tyler were big baseball fans and had a trip planned to Phoenix for spring training.

Tomko gave them a tour of the clubhouse and introduced them to numerous players before the A's 7-4 split-squad victory over the Chicago Cubs. He said he plans to keep in touch with the family.

Ben Sheets bounced back from his disastrous outing against Cincinnati on Monday, tossing four innings of one-run ball against the Cubs. He struck out four and walked three, and manager Bob Geren said Sheets' curveball was in great form.

"I made some adjustments and was throwing the ball downhill good," Sheets said.

Jason Jennings started the A's other split-squad game against the Cleveland Indians and allowed eight earned runs in 12/3 innings of a 12-4 loss in Goodyear.

Reliever Michael Wuertz, working back from a sore right shoulder, is scheduled to make his exhibition debut today against the Reds. Coco Crisp (strained hamstring) likely will return to the lineup today or Monday.

## **Chin Music: Oakland A's promo TV commercials: "Hustle meets humor"**

By Joe Stiglich/ Bay Area News Group. 3/20/10

Just got a look at some of the A's commercials for this year's ad campaign, "Green Collar Baseball." They're easily the funniest and most entertaining I've seen over the past few years. The players featured in them (Andrew Bailey, Kurt Suzuki, Rajai Davis among them) ham it up pretty good. Some have already started airing on TV. Most will be posted on the A's Web site by Opening Day, said Jim Leahey, A's VP of Sales and Marketing.

"Hustle meets humor," said DJ O'Neil, the creative director of the A's ad agency, Hub Strategy.

A couple that were my favorites:

—Suzuki blocking the plate while he challenges a bull to charge down the third-base line. The bull (technically it's a steer) was brought into Phoenix Municipal Stadium and supervised very carefully. "He was a really tame bull," O'Neil noted.

—A promo for Joe Rudi Jersey Day, tentatively set for June 26. The A's will wear their gold 1973 uniforms, but in the commercial, Mark Ellis gets confused and shows up in an 1870s uni. Bailey is wearing a handle bar mustache.

Actually, the outtakes they showed to the media were even funnier than the real commercials. Some of those also will be posted online eventually.

Good stuff ...

## **At 32, dean of diamond sets perfect example**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer. 3/21/10

**Phoenix** - -- Mark Ellis is so steady and so unassuming, it might seem easy to overlook him.

He's routinely forgotten when it comes to the Gold Glove voting, though there are years he has deserved the award at second base. He's seldom mentioned when it comes to discussions of the A's top players.

"I think it's safe to say he doesn't get a 10th of the attention he should," A's starter Dallas Braden said. "But E-Dog is definitely appreciated in this clubhouse. He's the benchmark for how to best go about your business, and that rubs off on all the infielders, you can tell."

Ellis is among the team's most respected players, and at a mere 32, he is also the oldest, unless or until Brett Tomko comes over from minor-league camp; his teammates kindly remind him of his advanced age often.

And the old man is on a nice roll this spring, with a .333 average. He walked and doubled Saturday.

"I'm trying to get locked in," Ellis said. "But it's so different here, the ball doesn't sink as much in Arizona, and the quality of the pitching and the defense can be a lot different. So the main thing is to see the ball well, and I feel like I'm doing that."

Longtime teammate and friend Eric Chavez added, "I can tell by the way he's swinging the bat, he's really focused. Mark is going to have a big year."

As always, Ellis is helping the new infielders - guys who one day might take his job, like Jemile Weeks, Adrian Cardenas and Eric Sogard.

"He's definitely one of the best around at his position," Sogard said. "You never see him do anything hasty, or like he's trying too hard or putting pressure on himself. He makes everything seem so easy."

Adam Rosales came to the A's in a Feb. 1 trade with the Reds, and he's so amazed by Ellis' eerie anticipation before the ball is hit that he came up with a new term for it.

"Mark always seems to pre-pitch the situation," Rosales said. "He knows what's going to happen before it happens. He's really knowledgeable."

Some of that is experience, Ellis said, and all the young players can improve in that area by paying attention to everything: What the pitcher is doing, what the hitter's reaction was earlier in the at-bat to a certain pitch or earlier in the game in a similar spot. Some of it is instinct, which Ellis always has had, along with rock-solid fundamentals.

"You could tell right away that Mark is as fundamentally sound as it gets," said A's manager Bob Geren, who also managed Ellis in the minors. "He just skipped over Double-A because he outplayed everyone. He got a fan club built up within the organization really fast. Everyone in the minor leagues was rooting for him."

On the rare occasion Ellis makes an error - he set a then-AL record with a .997 fielding percentage in 2006 - his teammates are surprised. After he muffed a grounder Monday, A's catcher Kurt Suzuki said, "I don't think I've seen Mark make an error in 3 1/2 years."

There will come a day that the A's won't have their stalwart second baseman any longer. The team has an option on him for next year, but Ellis doesn't believe it's a lock it will be picked up, given the number and the quality of infield prospects the team has.

He's not going to let his uncertain status bother him.

"It did more last time," Ellis said of his free agency in 2008. "Maybe now I'm more at peace with where I'm at. What I'm really trying to do is to help the guys coming up behind me. They're good guys and fun to work with. It's pretty neat. I hope they have great careers, and long ones."

"I don't know what will happen with me, but I do love playing here. I'll do it as long as they'll let me."

## Sheets rebounds well from Monday's shelling

Susan Slusser/ Chronicle Staff Writer. 3/21/10

**Phoenix** - -- Five days after facing 10 men and failing to record an out, **Ben Sheets** bounced back with a nice outing Saturday in the A's 7-4 win over the Cubs.

"Sometimes, it only takes six days to get one out," Sheets said with a grin.

After making an arm-angle adjustment, he was able to throw strikes with his fastball and told manager **Bob Geren** his curve was the best it's been. Sheets went four innings and allowed three hits and one run while walking three and striking out four.

"If I didn't need spring training, I'd just show up on April 5," Sheets said.

In the A's 12-4 split-squad loss to the Indians, **Jason Jennings** gave up eight runs in 12/3 innings.

**Meloan out for season:** **John Meloan** told The Chronicle that an MRI exam done Friday showed a ligament tear in his right elbow, and he expects to have season-ending surgery.

Meloan believes he will go to Dr. **James Andrews**, who has performed ligament replacement surgery for several A's, including **Joey Devine**, **Andrew Bailey** and **Josh Outman**. The recovery time is about a year and Meloan hopes to be ready next spring.

**Other injuries:** **Craig Breslow** (tendinitis) threw at a distance of 120 feet and said all went well; he expects to throw off the mound soon and said he needs only two or three outings to be ready for the season.

Geren said that Bailey (tennis elbow) will throw "soon," and the closer said he feels great after taking five days off. Devine (tendinitis) said he is very close to throwing, maybe Monday.

A chipped tooth that required 3 1/2 hours in the dentist's chair caused **Coco Crisp** to miss drills Friday. He went through those Saturday and conditioning coach **Bob Alejo** would like to see him do more today. **Rajai Davis** (abdominal strain) is a possibility for Monday.

**Briefly:** Rehabbing starter **Brett Tomko** brought the family of slain San Diego teen **Chelsea King** to the A's clubhouse and dugout. "We live two minutes from the Kings, a half-mile from Chelsea's school; my wife goes for walks in that park," Tomko said of the area King was jogging when attacked last month. "Being a new parent, I can't fathom what they're going through." ... Cactus League debuts: **Michael Wuertz** will pitch today; **Justin Duchscherer** goes tomorrow, making 60 pitches in relief of **Brett Anderson**.

## The Drumbeat: Injury updates; also, the A's new TV ad campaign

Susan Slusser/San Francisco Chronicle. 3/20/10

Still no Coco Crisp in the lineup; manager Bob Geren had said tomorrow was the most likely day, and it might even be Monday depending on how Crisp gets through some tests with conditioning coach Bob Alejo today.

Lefty Craig Breslow (elbow soreness) will throw at a distance of 80-120 feet today, which means he should be back working off the mound again next week, and closer Andrew Bailey (tennis elbow) will be throwing again "soon," according to Geren. Bailey said today he's feeling good, so maybe that initial five-to-seven projected days off will be correct.

Joey Devine said he is very close to 100 percent after being shut down with tendinitis; he'll get one extra day of rest whenever it's determined the tendinitis is completely knocked out, so he might be looking at Monday or Tuesday (the A's off day) to resuming throwing.

Rajai Davis (ab strain) could be back in the next day or two; Geren suggested Monday might be a possibility, and he'd then get an automatic day off the following day with the A's offday. (And the next day, Wednesday, is a night game, so a tad bit more rest, too.)

The A's showed their small media contingent the new TV ad campaign this morning. The theme is "Green Collar Baseball," which is where "hustle meets humor," according to DJ O'Neil of Hub Strategy advertising agency.

"Fast" is already airing - it shows Davis blazing through his normal everyday activities, shaving, changing, speed walking past some pedestrians on the sidewalk. The next to be unveiled, "Tiny Plate," features Andrew Bailey using an unusual training method.

Some future highlights include Ryan Sweeney shagging golf balls on a driving range, Kurt Suzuki challenging a steer to run him over at the plate and Dave Stewart trying to teach Trevor Cahill his famous staredown. Another features the brainy Breslow debating a complicated equation with Stomper.

My favorite is the one that will air before the A's June 26 Turn Back the Clock Day; Bailey's wearing an Afro and a handlebar mustache ala Rollie Fingers, and, surrounded by 70s era A's uniform, Mark Ellis is wearing an oly-timey baseball uniform.

"I misread the memo," Ellis says. "I thought it was 1870s."

(Ellis really looks the part in an old-time uniform, by the way. He'd fit in nicely in that era.)

Hub and Jim Leahey, the A's vice president of sales and marketing, also thoughtfully included a behind-the-scenes and blooper segment during the viewing, and that might have been the best bit. It was particularly funny to hear Bailey asking the director, "You want me to say 'nipple clipper' as a question?"

Leahey said the bloopers will be included on the team's official website at some point; several of the TV spots will be up on the site by Opening Day.

## **Better curveball equals better Sheets**

### ***Outs come much faster for right-hander in latest start***

By Jane Lee / MLB.com. 3/20/10

PHOENIX -- After watching 10 runs cross the plate without retiring a batter in his previous start, Ben Sheets wasted no time Saturday in doing what he was unable to do five days earlier.

He got an out.

Then he got another one.

And he did the same thing less than a minute later for a quick 1-2-3 inning in the A's 7-4 split-squad win over the visiting Cubs.

"I'm good at getting that first out, right?" Sheets quipped with a smile. "Sometimes it only takes six days to get one out."

The right-hander's humor, always along for the ride, is what calmed all the concern surrounding Monday's debacle, when he announced, "I know people have bad springs, but this is taking it to a whole new level."

On Saturday, though, Sheets put the joking aside for a couple of minutes to acknowledge a noticeable change in arm slot while recording 12 outs against Chicago. In four innings of work, Sheets allowed just one run on three hits while walking three and fanning four.

"I made some adjustments and threw the curveball downhill good," said Sheets, who missed all of last season due to elbow surgery. "I liked the fact I was seeing a lot of foul balls early in the count and people were swinging and check-swinging at the breaking ball."

Sheets' velocity, which has reached the low 90s, has yet to be an issue this spring. Movement, though, is what has been missing. So when the righty told manager Bob Geren his curveball was the best it's been in awhile, both parties felt relieved.

"He felt great about his curveball," Geren said. "We wanted him to get all his pitches in and also feel good about his outing. Both of those things are the goal, obviously, so he was very pumped up today. He had that Opening Day-type mentality, which is good to see."

After the first inning, Sheets managed to pitch out of a couple of jams, including a two-out strikeout to Koyie Hill with runners at first and third in the second. Sheets also stranded a runner at third in the next frame but, considering his previous three spring performances, didn't consider it as any sort of trouble.

"I never felt like I was in a jam," Sheets said. "I've been pitching out of jams all spring. I'm tired of pitching from the stretch. I'd like some innings where I just pitch from the windup."

Sheets will take what he can get, though. And on Saturday, that meant outs -- not just the first one.

"One out's not going to get you anywhere," he said. "I needed to get in there and gets ups and downs, and I got up and down there four times. That's a big step in the right direction.

"If I had had the same results in the last outing, I still would have felt I made the same adjustments I made and did what I needed to do. The more you repeat them, the more they become second nature."

Sheets' progress -- which included his ERA dropping from 31.15 to 17.28 -- didn't suddenly turn him into a fan of Spring Training, where he has a well-known history of struggles. But he understands the significance of these six weeks.

"If I came in and didn't need Spring Training, I wouldn't be coming here, he said. "I'd just start April 5, so that's what we come here for. For me to think I don't need starts in Spring Training, that'd be silly. I'm going to need every one, whether I like it or not. The more I get on the mound, the better I'm going to get."

## **A's unveil unique ad campaign**

### ***Entertaining spots showcase team's young stars***

By Jane Lee / MLB.com. 3/20/10

PHOENIX -- Hustle, please meet humor -- all in a span of 30 seconds.

A's fans, please meet the 2010 advertising campaign.

The result: Kurt Suzuki faces a steer. Rajai Davis races fireworks. Craig Breslow talks equations with Stomper. Andrew Bailey launches flying darts. And Ryan Sweeney takes to the greens to shag some golf balls.

All in good -- and entertaining -- nature in support of the A's ad efforts.

The club and its advertising agency, Hub Strategy, officially announced Saturday the launch of "Green Collar Baseball," a humorous integrated marketing campaign featuring television, radio, print, outdoor and digital ads.

Jim Leahey, the A's vice president of sales and marketing, was joined by Hub's creative director and founder, DJ O'Neil, at Phoenix Municipal Stadium to introduce a concept that highlights the enthusiasm and aggressiveness surrounding a rather young Oakland team.

"The Green Collar Baseball campaign communicates that we do things unconventionally and that our young team works exceptionally hard to succeed," Leahey said in a release. "In communicating that message, the campaign highlights the personality of our team, connecting our fans to our players in a fun and irreverent way."

A total of 10 commercials -- some also feature Mark Ellis, Trevor Cahill and A's great Dave Stewart -- will gradually make their way to both the A's Web site and local television screens. All -- plus bonus blooper scenes, assured Leahey -- are slated to be online by Opening Night on April 5.

The lone ad already receiving air time, entitled "Fast," features Davis and his ability to not only run at a quick speed but also accomplish other activities like shaving in a fast manner. Joining "Fast" on the small screen soon is "Tiny Plate," which makes its television debut Saturday and showcases pitching coach Curt Young's unique training techniques.

"The A's have a long history of doing really fun creative," O'Neil said. "We're psyched to continue the tradition with this year's campaign and be a part of the A's legacy."

## **Petit and Co. back sharper Sheets**

### ***Right-hander turns in four solid innings against Cubs***

By Jane Lee / MLB.com. 3/20/10

#### **ATHLETICS 7, CUBS 4**

*at Phoenix*

*Saturday, March 20*

**Cubs at the plate:** Chicago's first run of the day came on an RBI grounder off the bat of Koyie Hill that scored Micah Hoffpauir, who led off the fourth with a double for his first of two hits.

**Athletics at the plate:** Gregorio Petit went 2-for-3 at the plate with a run-scoring triple, a double and a walk. Eric Patterson, Jake Fox, Daric Barton, Eric Sogard and Josh Donaldson each collected RBIs as well -- Barton's coming courtesy of one of his four walks. The A's earned nine walks but also tallied 11 strikeouts.

**Cubs on the mound:** Left-handed starter Tom Gorzelanny watched two runs -- none earned -- cross home plate in his 3 2/3 innings of work. He didn't give up a hit but walked five and struck out five. Jay Jackson followed with 1 1/3 innings, scattering three runs on two hits and a walk while fanning two. John Gaub and Mitch Atkins each pitched an inning, with Atkins surrendering Oakland's final two runs.

**Athletics on the mound:** Righty Ben Sheets, who in his last outing allowed 10 runs without retiring a single batter, bounced back nicely with four innings of one-run ball. He gave up three hits and walked three while striking out four before Jerry Blevins and Brad Kilby each tossed two shutout innings.

**Worth noting:** The Cubs committed two errors, the first by Adduci in the second inning that allowed Travis Buck to reach second base, and the other committed by Hoffpauir in the seventh frame.

**Cactus League records:** Athletics 8-8-1; Cubs 10-7-0

**Up next:** Left-hander Dallas Braden, who has quietly put together a string of impressive spring starts, gets the nod Sunday against the visiting Reds at Phoenix Municipal Stadium beginning at 1:05 p.m. PT. All eyes, however, will be on right-handed reliever Michael Wuertz, who is slated to make his Cactus League debut. Wuertz has been sidelined with shoulder soreness but will look to start building up his pitches to ready himself for Opening Night. Fans may also potentially see Coco Crisp (hamstring/shoulder) back in action in the DH spot.

On Sunday, Carlos Silva will make his fourth spring start when the Cubs travel to Goodyear, Ariz., to face the Reds at 3:05 p.m. CT. The right-hander has not given up a run in his last seven innings over two starts and says he's feeling much more comfortable with his sinker. Expect Kevin Millar to start in left field. The Cubs are trying to determine their bench and need to see where else he can play besides first.

## **Tomko reaches out in time of tragedy**

### ***Righty, other A's visit with family of slain teenager***

By Jane Lee / MLB.com. 3/20/10

PHOENIX -- A's pitcher Brett Tomko can't even fathom the tragedy surrounding Brent King's family.

Tomko knows that good days have been few and far in between for them ever since Brent and his wife, Kelly, lost their teenage daughter Chelsea last month.

So on Saturday, he gave them one.

Tomko, rehabbing his arm at Minor League camp, showed up at Phoenix Municipal Stadium along with Brent and Brent's son, Tyler, before the A's took on the visiting Cubs in a split-squad game.

The Oakland right-hander welcomed them as his guests of honor, offering a tour of the A's clubhouse and meet-and-greet sessions with several teammates, including Andrew Bailey, Craig Breslow and Michael Wuertz.

Tomko had never met Brent or 13-year-old Tyler before Saturday, but the three were introduced thanks to a mutual friend before finding out they live just a mile from each other in the city of Poway, located in the middle of San Diego County.

It was the same place Chelsea, a 17-year-old student at Poway High School, went for a jog Feb. 25 and subsequently disappeared for five days before her body was found near Lake Hodges.

"It really hits home when you're that close to it," Tomko said. "You almost feel a little bit attacked yourself, living four miles from that trail.

"I was home when it was all going on since I hadn't left for Spring Training, and I remember it being all over the local and national news. People were going door to door asking if we knew anything."

Witnessing the Poway community come together, though, offered Tomko a sense of hope throughout it all, as did reassurance of Chelsea's attacker being found.

"They lined four miles of light blue ribbons, I think for the color of her eyes," he said. "To see what the community did was amazing. So many people came together to help out."

Tyler, who brought some friends from Chicago, and his father have been making the Spring Training trip for the past three years. Tomko hopes this one stands out as not only being the most memorable but as a beginning of a new friendship.

"They seem like a great family," he said. "I'm sure we'll stay in contact, and hopefully they can come out to a game when we're playing down south."

## **Jennings gets hit hard for first time in loss**

### ***Righty allows eight runs in 1 2/3 frames in split-squad game***

By Tom Singer / MLB.com. 3/20/10

#### **INDIANS 12, ATHLETICS 4**

*at Goodyear, Ariz.*

*Saturday, March 20*

**A's at the plate:** Ex-Indians player Kevin Kouzmanoff said hello to his former Cleveland teammates with a two-run home run in the sixth, his second of the spring. Matt Carson added a solo blow the next inning. Kouzmanoff and Ryan Sweeney -- now batting .355 -- had two hits each.

**Indians at the plate:** Jhonny Peralta, who went 3-for-3, and Travis Hafner, who capped the eight-run second with a three-run homer, paced the Indians' biggest offensive day of the spring. Michael Brantley and Brian Buscher drove in two runs apiece.

**A's on the mound:** Jason Jennings' mission to make the staff took a major hit -- actually, seven of them, all in the second inning as the Indians jumped on him for eight runs. Lefty Cedrick Bowers and right-hander Alex Leon, a pair of Minor Leaguers added to the game roster, blanked the Indians for 1 1/3 innings and two innings, respectively

**Indians on the mound:** The battle for the fifth starter's job is warming up with the weather as Mitch Talbot followed up Aaron Laffey's four scoreless innings on Friday with 3 1/3 scoreless innings of his own, allowing four hits with one walk and strikeout apiece. Another contender, lefty David Huff, added a zero in the fifth before allowing Kouzmanoff's home run, and allowed a total of three runs in four innings.

**Worth noting:** A's third baseman Kouzmanoff threw wide of first on Anderson Hernandez's fourth-inning grounder for his third error of the spring in 10 games -- matching his total miscues in 139 games with the Padres last season.



**Cactus League records:** A's 7-9-1; Indians 10-5-2

**Up next:** Oakland left-hander Dallas Braden, who has quietly put together a string of impressive spring starts, gets the nod on Sunday against the visiting Reds at Phoenix Municipal Stadium beginning at 1:05 p.m. PT. All eyes, however, will be on right-handed reliever Michael Wuertz, who is slated to make his Cactus League debut. Wuertz has been sidelined with shoulder soreness but will look to start building up his pitches to ready himself for Opening Night. Fans may also potentially see Coco Crisp (hamstring/shoulder) back in action in the DH spot.

The Indians get their first look of the spring at the Dodgers on Sunday, visiting Camelback Ranch for the 4:05 p.m. ET exhibition. Jake Westbrook will make his fourth start, after allowing six earned runs in eight innings in the first three, with the Tribe out to improve on its 7-4 record against NL teams, including 4-0 against the Ohio-and Goodyear-neighbor Reds. The game will be broadcast on Gameday Audio and WTAM 1100 AM.

## Lee's Leftovers: Talking ads, brackets ... and some baseball

Jane Lee/MLB.com. 3/20/10

There was a lot going on today, and as I mentioned in my previous blog, it all started with the unveiling of the A's new ad campaign. I ran into **Andrew Bailey** right before the A's game against the Cubs and he mentioned he had heard all of us media folk got a sneak peak at the commercials. When I asked him how many times he had to say "nipple clipper," he laughed and shook his head before replying, "A lot." He's quite the trooper. "That's what they wanted me to say!" he insisted. From what I hear, a few clips of the ads will join the story that's already posted on the A's site by the end of the day, so make sure you check on that tonight.

I'm pretty sure the A's clubhouse was just as stunned as the rest of the nation by St. Mary's upset of Villanova this afternoon. Only infield coach **Mike Gallego** picked the Gaels to beat up on the No. 2 seed, and things only got worse for the A's clubhouse pool when Kansas was stunned by Northern Iowa later in the day. Out of the 57 entries, 30 have Kansas winning it all. I hate to say it, but that 30 includes me. I usually like to pick anyone but the early favorite, but for some reason I did this year, and look where it got me. At the same time, I believe that watching the underdog upset the top seed is well worth the complete trashing of my bracket.

It's hard not to get caught up in all the glory that is March Madness, but aside from my frequent peeks at scores today, most of my focus was on the A's and Cubs split-squad game here in Phoenix -- mainly **Ben Sheets**, who, if you all recall, gave up 10 runs without retiring a batter in his last outing. On Saturday, though, Sheets looked like a different pitcher. Not only was his velocity there again, but his movement finally decided to show up this time. He was quite pleased with his curveball -- and rightfully so -- and the ways in which his mechanics improved in just five days' time. While Sheets was tossing his most impressive spring performance thus far, **Jason Jennings** wasn't having as much luck with the Indians over in Goodyear. The new A's right-hander, vying for a bullpen spot, gave up eight runs, seven hits and two walks in just 1 2/3 innings as the A's dropped that one 12-4. **Vin Mazzaro** also pitched in the game but didn't post great numbers either. His line: 2 IP, 5 H, 4 R (3 ER), 3 BB, 2 K. He's going to need to step it up if he wants to be a serious contender for the fifth starter spot, especially when **Trevor Cahill** and **Gio Gonzalez** are throwing as well as they are.

Joining Jennings and Mazzaro in Goodyear was **Ryan Sweeney**, who notched two hits in the DH spot, and **Kevin Kouzmanoff**, who went 2-for-3 with a two-run homer. Outfielder **Matt Carson** also hit a home run and went 2-for-3, and **Adrian Cardenas** tallied two hits as well. **Eric Chavez** was hitless in three at-bats, but the fact he made the rather long trip says something about the effort he's putting in this spring to assure himself of a successful year. From what I was told, Chavez volunteered to make the trip so as to guarantee a start at first base since **Daric Barton** was already slated to start at the home game. The team, of course, didn't have the veteran Chavez making the trip at first, but the A's infielder insisted so that he could get in his at-bats.

That should do it for today. **Dallas Braden** is on the mound for the A's against the visiting Reds tomorrow, but I'm sure all eyes will be on **Michael Wuertz**, who is supposed to make his first game appearance of the spring.

## Sheets Shuts Down Cubs to Lead A's to 7-4 Win

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS. 3/20/10

PHOENIX (AP) -- All eyes were on Ben Sheets Saturday, and he thrived on the attention.

Sheets pitched four solid innings, allowing one earned run on three hits and three walks to lead the Oakland Athletics to a 7-4 victory over the Chicago Cubs in a split-squad game for both teams.

Sheets, who had struck out one batter in three prior starts, whiffed four and walked three.

"It was good," said Sheets. "I was throwing the ball downhill, getting check swings on the breaking ball. I made some adjustments ... to everything. If I didn't need spring training, I'd just start April 5."

The right-hander was signed to a \$10 million contract, plus incentives, by Oakland in the offseason after missing all of 2009 recuperating from right elbow surgery.

Sheets was anointed the Opening Day starter Jan. 26, the day Oakland signed him. That decision looked a bit debatable after Sheets posted a 31.15 ERA in his first three spring starts. He allowed nine earned runs and did not record an out in his prior start against the Chicago White Sox.

"Sometimes," Sheets said with a rueful smile, "it takes six days to get one out."

Oakland scored a pair of unearned runs off Chicago starter Tom Gorzelanny in the second inning when leftfielder Jim Adduci dropped a routine fly ball to allow Daric Barton to score with two outs. Gregorio Petit followed with an RBI triple to right.

Barton finished the day with four walks.

The Cubs threatened Sheets in the third, but a diving catch of Xavier Nady's line drive by leftfielder Gabe Gross shut down the rally.

"I'm tired of pitching from the stretch," Sheets said. "I'd like some innings where I just pitch from the windup."

Micah Hoffpauir scored a run and had two hits for the Cubs.

Athletics manager Bob Geren was pleased with Sheets.

"We want him to get all of his pitches in, and also have him feel good about his outing. Both of those things are obviously the goal, so he was very pumped up about his performance today."

Gorzelanny, one of four pitchers competing for two rotation spots, made his third appearance and second start of the spring. He threw 3 2-3 innings, allowing the two unearned runs on four hits. He walked five and struck out five.

"There were quite a few times out there when I could have ended an at-bat and instead I extended it," Gorzelanny said. "I threw a lot of good sliders that you would expect them to bite on, but they were extremely patient out there today."

Eric Patterson and Cliff Pennington each had two hits for Oakland.