

A's News Clips, Tuesday, March 23, 2010

A's notebook: Justin Duchscherer back on mound, throws four shutout innings

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Justin Duchscherer took some nerves to the mound Monday for his first major league game in 19 months.

But the right-hander shook off the butterflies and tossed four shutout innings in the A's 7-2 victory over the Seattle Mariners, a positive step toward being ready for the season-opening rotation.

"I was very anxious in anticipating getting out there for the first time against big league guys," Duchscherer said. "That was my goal, get up and down four times. I'm very pleased with that."

Duchscherer was slated to relieve Brett Anderson but got the start when Anderson woke up with a stiff neck and was scratched. He allowed four hits with one walk and one strikeout in a 48-pitch outing, then threw 10 more pitches in the bullpen.

Duchscherer's last big league appearance came Aug. 18, 2008. He missed all of last season while recovering from elbow surgery and being treated for clinical depression.

He said he's feeling no lingering effects from a lower back injury that required minor surgery in February. Duchscherer is scheduled for two more exhibition starts and has said he thinks he'd be capable of going six innings in his first regular-season start.

"If he progresses with each start he should be fine," A's manager Bob Geren said. "We'll see how he comes out of (Monday)."

Duchscherer's only slip-up was making a wild throw to first after fielding Milton Bradley's bunt to lead off the bottom of the second.

He was aided by three Mariners running into outs on the bases in the first three innings.

Coco Crisp also made a splash, returning from a hamstring injury and crushing a three-run homer in his first game since March 9. Crisp started at DH, but he's scheduled to make his first start in center field Wednesday night against the Los Angeles Dodgers. The A's are off today.

Geren also expects left fielder Rajai Davis to return Wednesday from an abdominal injury.

With the outfield depleted, Eric Patterson has made the most of his chance. Drawing the start in center, he hit a run-scoring triple in the second and made a pretty running catch to rob Chris Woodward in the ninth.

Patterson, who is out of options, is making a strong bid to make the team as a utility man.

Anderson will throw in a minor league game today, provided he's feeling better. Gio Gonzalez will do the same to stay on his regular four days' rest.

Geren said Ben Sheets will make a minor league start Thursday, with Jason Jennings taking his place that night against the Giants. The A's can manipulate conditions in a minor league game to make sure Sheets gets six innings of work.

In bullpen news, Andrew Bailey and Craig Breslow, both nursing sore elbows, could throw from the mound Wednesday. John Meloan, who made six relief appearances for the A's in September, has a torn ulnar collateral ligament and said he will undergo season-ending surgery.

Second baseman Mark Ellis was scratched from the lineup with tightness in both hamstrings, but both he and Geren said the injury is mild.

Chavez redefines back-to-back

By Joe Stiglich, contracostatimes.com

Progress for Eric Chavez won't always be judged by his box score numbers.

This spring, simply pay attention to how often he appears in the box score.

Chavez finished off back-to-back games starting at first base during the A's 4-3 loss Sunday to the Cincinnati Reds. It marks the third time he's played the field in consecutive games this spring and gives an indication that his troublesome back is coming along well.

That's no small development for the A's even though they don't anticipate Chavez being an everyday player. Getting even a sliver of consistent production this season from the oft-injured veteran would be a boost.

"The last 2½ days I was real stiff and sluggish," Chavez said after exiting Sunday's game. "Today I rebounded really good, which was unexpected for me. It was a good sign for me to come back after a day I felt bad."

A six-time Gold Glover at third base, he also turned in a play at first that shows he's getting accustomed to that position.

With runners on first and second in the top of the fourth, the Reds' Todd Frazier hit a sharp grounder to the right side. Chavez, who was holding the runner, made a tough backhanded stop and fired a strike to second base for the force.

The A's would have had an inning-ending double play, but pitcher Dallas Braden dropped the relay throw at first from Adam Rosales.

Braden was kicking himself for the error afterward, but Chavez's work wasn't lost on him.

"Anytime you put gold out on the field, it's going to shine. It doesn't matter what position it's at," Braden said.

Two scouts who were asked about Chavez's adjustment going from third to first said he would make the transition fine. One said the biggest hurdle might be plays on which Chavez has to stretch to take a throw, because that will put strain on his twice-surgically repaired back.

The other said Chavez's skills as a third baseman will translate better to first than an outfielder trying to make the switch.

"You saw the plays he made (Sunday). That's instinct, it's reaction," said the second scout. "At the plate, I just think now it's a matter of timing. What I was a little concerned about was seeing if he would finish his swing. Sometimes guys coming off back injuries don't finish their swing."

"I don't think his bat's as quick as it once was, but he finished off his swing."

Chavez went 0-for-3 and is batting just .192 with two homers and five RBI in nine games. But he was encouraged by how he felt.

"The last two or three days that I was stiff, it was hard to get the bat through the zone," he said. "(Sunday) it felt so free. I didn't get any hits but that's the feeling I'm looking for."

The A's brass, and Chavez himself, won't get too excited over nine games in March. He'll likely sit today against Seattle, which would give him two days of rest since the A's don't play Tuesday.

But his fourth-inning play Sunday was his most challenging at first yet. Chavez said he was glad he made a throw to second in order to test his right shoulder, which also has been operated on twice.

"He just reacted. He made a great play," A's second baseman Mark Ellis said. "That's Chavvy. He's going to be fine."

Justin Duchscherer to start today vs. Seattle; Coco Crisp returns to lineup at DH

By Joe Stiglich, Contra Costa Times, 3/22/2010 10:29AM

****To clarify this post from earlier, Duchscherer is pitching in his first MAJOR LEAGUE game since 2008. He made three rehab starts in the minors last season.

Right-hander Justin Duchscherer will pitch in his first game since 2008 this afternoon in Peoria against the Mariners, and it's a starting assignment. Brett Anderson woke up with a stiff neck, so the A's plan for him to pitch in a minor league game tomorrow at Papago Park, provided Anderson feels better. Gio Gonzalez also is pitching in a minor league game tomorrow to stay on schedule w/four days' rest. The A's don't play tomorrow.

As things are shaking out, the potential season-opening rotation could go Sheets-Braden-Duchscherer-Anderson as the top four, w/the fifth starter TBA. But there's still time for things to shuffle a bit, so I wouldn't write that in stone.

I'd imagine this has to be a pretty big day for Duchscherer just to get back in a game situation. Bob Geren said yesterday he sees Duchscherer going 3-4 innings if all goes well. The A's are more encouraged about Duke possibly being ready to start the season than they were a couple weeks ago. But first he has to come out of today feeling good.

Other tidbits you should know:

–Coco Crisp returns to the lineup, leading off at DH. Geren said both Crisp and Rajai Davis (abdominal injury) could play the outfield Wednesday night against the Dodgers. That would be Crisp's first game in the outfield this spring.

–Andrew Bailey is scheduled to play catch for the first time since being shut down with tennis elbow. Craig Breslow and Joey Devine are both throwing, and both could throw side sessions Wednesday.

–The A's will have Ben Sheets throw in a minor league game Thursday, with Jason Jennings taking his place that night against the Giants. Don't sound the alarms. Sheets wants to pitch in a controlled environment to make sure he gets enough work in. At this point in camp, pitchers like to get accustomed to pitching, sitting on the bench for a while, then repeating the process again. Sheets wants to get "up and down" for six innings regardless of how he's doing in the game. Pitching in a minor league game allows him to do that.

Wow, that seemed like a long explanation for a simple concept 😊

–I talked to reliever John Meloan this morning as he was about to head home to Kansas City. He felt discomfort in his elbow a few days ago and was diagnosed with a torn ulnar collateral ligament. He'll miss the entire season and will undergo Tommy John surgery. "It's unfortunate for him," Geren said. "He's a good pitcher and a good guy." The A's liked what they saw from Meloan last season. He didn't allow a run in six games late in the year.

Here's today's full lineup vs. Seattle. Second baseman Mark Ellis was a late scratch w/tightness in both hamstrings.

Coco DH
Barton 1B
Suzuki C
Kouzmanoff 3B
Sweeney RF
Patterson CF
Gross LF
Rosales 2B
Pennington SS

Duchscherer P

Justin Duchscherer sharp in return to action

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

After missing all of last year with an elbow injury and then a diagnosis of clinical depression, **Justin Duchscherer** worked in a Cactus League game for the first time this spring.

"I was nervous, very anxious about getting out there against big-league guys," he said. "It's been a while."

Duchscherer worked four scoreless innings, allowing four hits and a walk and striking out one in the A's 7-2 win. As he noted, he got help from the Mariners' baserunning: They had two men thrown out in rundowns, and **Kurt Suzuki** threw out **Milton Bradley** trying to steal. Bradley had reached by bunting, and Duchscherer, who hadn't fielded a ball in more than a year, hit him in the back with the throw; Duchscherer said he bobbled the ball and rushed the throw.

"I was a little mad at Milton," Duchscherer said, smiling. "I didn't expect that because he's got so much power. ... He was a teammate of mine. I get along with him; I'm not badmouthing him. I just thought it was a veteran play."

Duchscherer threw 10 more pitches in the bullpen, putting him at 58, and he expects to be ready for the start of the season.

Manager **Bob Geren** said that **Brett Anderson**, originally scheduled to start Monday, had a stiff neck; the left-hander will throw in a minor-league game today, as will **Gio Gonzalez**. If the rotation stays as is, it would be **Ben Sheets**, **Dallas Braden**, Duchscherer, Anderson and the fifth starter, probably **Trevor Cahill**.

Injury notes: Second baseman **Mark Ellis** was scratched with tightness in both hamstrings, which he called "no big deal." He said he'll be fine for Wednesday. ... Closer **Andrew Bailey** (tennis elbow) made 35 throws at a distance of 120 feet. Geren suggested that Bailey and **Craig Breslow** will throw side sessions Wednesday. ... **Joey Devine** (tendinitis) did more long toss. ... Right-hander **John Meloan** left for his home in Kansas City and will have elbow surgery soon in Birmingham, Ala.

Briefly: **Coco Crisp** (hamstring) was the designated hitter in his first game since March 9; he cracked a three-run homer. Geren said Crisp and **Rajai Davis** (ab strain) will be in the outfield Wednesday. ... Sheets won't start Thursday night against the Giants; he'll pitch in a minor-league game so he can make sure he gets a certain number of innings in. ... **Jason Jennings** will start at Scottsdale.

Drumbeat: Not much MLB Network love

Vlae Kershner, SF Chronicle, 3/23/2010 12:05am

MLB Network's "30 Clubs in 30 Days" took its cameras to the Oakland A's camp last night. Besides the scenic Papago backdrop and the highlights of champions past, there wasn't much cheer, though. Both John Hart and Dan Plesac dismissed Baseball Prospectus' 83-79 forecast and picked the team to finish last in an improved AL West, largely due to lack of power. Fair enough--the team has to prove it can hit.

They also made a few errors: Daric Barton didn't spend all of 2008 in the minors, though it probably would have been better if he had. Gio Gonzalez, not Vin Mazzaro, appears to be the main challenger to Trevor Cahill for the fifth starter job. And Chris Carter isn't left-handed--the confusion, which is common, is apparently because there was a lefty Chris Carter in the Arizona system in 2007, but it's not the same guy who came over in the Dan Haren trade that winter.

Drumbeat: Pitching changes; Bailey throwing; Ellis scratched - updated

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Phoenix 3/22/2010 10:00AM

We were expecting Justin Duchscherer to follow Brett Anderson today, but instead, Duchscherer will start at Peoria against the Mariners. Manager Bob Geren told us that Anderson has a bit of a stiff neck, but when I spoke to Anderson this morning, he said he's fine. At any rate, he'll throw in a minor-league game tomorrow, as will Gio Gonzalez.

The A's had built in an extra day off for every starter this spring, anyway, and Duchscherer always prefers to start, anyway; plus, this slots him into the rotation, potentially. If things stay the same, and with just two weeks left until Opening Day, it

might, the rotation looks like this: Sheets, Braden, Duchscherer, Anderson, fifth starter (Trevor Cahill probably has the edge there still, but Gonzalez and Vin Mazzaro have pitched well this spring, too, for the most part).

Mark Ellis was just scratched from today's game; he has tightness in both hamstrings. Not a bad day for a rest because the team is off tomorrow and has a night game Wednesday. Adam Rosales is now starting at second base; I'll add the new lineup at the bottom of the Drumbeat. Ellis just now finished up batting practice and he looked a little stiff as he bent over to pick up balls afterward.

UPDATE: Ellis said the hamstring tightness is "no big deal," and he'll play Wednesday night. He woke up a little tight and figured this isn't the time to push it. "There's no reason to go do something stupid," he said.

Closer Andrew Bailey told me he wasn't sure if he was going to throw today when I spoke to him this morning, but Geren said that he will. Bailey had a full week off with tennis elbow.

Joey Devine (tendinitis) will throw at a longer distance today after 30 throws from 80 feet yesterday, and Craig Breslow (tendinitis) is also doing more long toss today. Bailey and Breslow will throw side sessions on Wednesday, and Breslow could be in a game soon.

UPDATE: Bailey made 35 throws at a distance of 120 feet this morning, and he said he's not sure what he's doing next, so the team might have decided to wait and see how he comes out of today's action before sending him out for a side session Wednesday. "Day by day," Bailey.

Geren confirmed this morning what I reported two days ago: right-hander John Meloan will have elbow surgery. Meloan was leaving today to drive home before heading to Birmingham, Ala., where Dr. James Andrews will perform the procedure. Meloan told me he expects to be ready for spring training next year; recovery from Tommy John surgery can take 12-18 months.

Coco Crisp (hamstring) is in the lineup today at DH and Geren said he expects both Crisp and Rajai Davis (ab strain) to be in the outfield for Wednesday evening's game against the Dodgers.

That game, by the way, is on CSN California, which can now be found on Channel 41, next to CSN Bay Area, rather than on Channel 89.

Ben Sheets won't start Thursday night's game against the Giants in Scottsdale; he'll pitch in a minor-league game during the day so he can make sure he gets a certain number of "ups and downs" (innings) in a more controlled environment. He likes to do that once a spring or so.

Jason Jennings, shelled by the Indians his last time out, will start that night game at Scottsdale.

New lineup vs Seattle: Crisp DH, Barton 1B, Suzuki C, Kouzmanoff 3B, Sweeney RF Patterson CF Gross LF, Rosales 2B, Pennington SS

Duchscherer sharp in spring debut

Right-hander tosses four scoreless innings against Mariners

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PEORIA, Ariz. -- Justin Duchscherer's long-awaited return to the mound proved to be rather uneventful -- just as the A's hoped.

The right-handed starter, who hadn't appeared in a Major League game since Aug. 18, 2008, pitched four scoreless innings against the Mariners on Monday, scattering just four hits and a walk while striking out one.

"That was my goal," Duchscherer said, "to get up and down four times. I'm very pleased with that. Command-wise, I thought it was pretty good for my first outing. Not quite where I expect to be when April starts ... but all in all, pretty good for the first time out there in a while."

The two-time All-Star was sidelined the first month of spring after undergoing a nerve ablation procedure to relieve pain in his lower back. The setback followed a year in which he did not pitch due to minor elbow surgery and a bout with clinical depression, the latter having completely refreshed the pitcher's mind and body.

"What I went through last year was just a growing experience," he said. "I'm thankful I went through it. At the time I was going through it, it wasn't much fun, but it's helped change my perspective. Being away from the game last year made me really appreciate how awesome it is to be able to do what I do."

As expected, Duchscherer's brief shutout performance didn't come without nerves. Thanks go to Ichiro Suzuki, though, for quickly taking them away. The speedy Mariners outfielder led off the game with a hit to left field, but found himself in the middle of a rundown between first and second before being tagged out. It marked the first of two baserunning mistakes made by the Mariners -- both of which the A's rightly gladly appreciated.

"I'm really happy they ran out of a couple outs there on the bases to help me do what I needed to do," he said. "Ichiro had me laughing that first at-bat. I don't know what he was doing. That helped me because I was a little amped up, and that made me laugh and kind of relax a little."

Duchscherer, 31, tossed three innings in a Minor League intrasquad game Wednesday and was slated to throw 60 pitches following Brett Anderson on Monday. However, Anderson's start was pushed back in the morning due to what manager Bob Geren deemed a stiff neck, thus giving Duchscherer his first start in 580 days.

"I don't know if [Geren and pitching coach Curt Young] were wondering how I would do or what, but I guess because I performed well in the past, I was confident I could go from three to four," Duchscherer said. "I was happy to have gotten to do that."

The right-hander tossed a total of 48 pitches -- 27 of which were strikes -- before throwing 10 more in the bullpen. He said he threw all his pitches, some of which he said his command could be "a bit better," and hopes to improve results on his curveball the next time on the mound.

"My curveball was decent in the first inning, then I was trying to backdoor to some lefties," he said. "And I think because of the fatigue, I couldn't finish it like I would like to, so hopefully I can get my curveball working a little bit better because that's a big pitch for me."

Duchscherer admitted feeling "typical Spring Training" soreness and fatigue following his start but was especially pleased with the way he exited.

"My anxiety, my anticipation, stress, whatever, was a little high, because it had been a little while since I had that feeling of adrenaline," he said. "When you throw a simulated game, it's not the same. So after the first couple of innings, my pitching released some of that energy."

"By the third, I got a little bit fatigued and I had a little bit of trouble commanding the ball, especially from the stretch with a couple guys on. ... After that, I came in and really focused on looking at the glove, so the fourth inning I came out and felt better than the third inning as far as location, which is, for me, a positive way to end my outing today."

Possibly the only thing leaving Duchscherer shaking his head was a second-inning ground ball from Milton Bradley that he fielded before throwing away. He wasn't charged with an error, but the blunder made him realize he has some pitcher fielding practices -- PFPs -- to make up.

"I haven't been doing a lot of PFPs because of my back issue, so that was the first ground ball I've fielded in a year and a half," he said. "I got a little excited, I bobbed it, I tried to rush the throw and didn't really have a good grip on it."

Still, the mistake couldn't take away a slight bit of giddiness exuding from a satisfied Duchscherer following his performance. And despite being three starts behind his fellow pitchers, he firmly believes he'll be ready for the season "as long as I'm ready to go five or six innings."

Duchscherer has two more starts to prove his health and effectiveness before the arrival of Opening Night, when he's expected to join Ben Sheets, Dallas Braden, Brett Anderson and an unnamed fifth starter in the rotation.

"If he progresses each start, he should be fine," said Geren. "He threw real well. Right now, everything looks positive."

Crisp, Duchscherer carry A's to victory

Outfielder slugs three-run homer; right-hander solid in debut

By Jim Street / MLB.com

ATHLETICS 7, MARINERS 2

Peoria, Ariz.

Monday, March 22

Mariners at the plate: One day after scoring a spring-high 12 runs, the Mariners were held in check by Oakland's hurlers. Shortstop Jack Wilson had his third double, a hustle two-bagger in the fifth inning. Catcher Rob Johnson reached base twice, a single and walk.

Athletics at the plate: A prodigious three-run home run by Coco Crisp capped a five-run second inning for the visiting Athletics. Crisp's towering blast, which landed on the roof of a tent located well beyond the visiting bullpen, produced the final three runs in a five-run uprising. Oakland hit for the cycle in the inning, with Kevin Kouzmanoff starting the rally with a double and scoring on Eric Patterson's triple. Gabe Gross and Cliff Pennington contributed singles. Kouzmanoff had two doubles.

Mariners on the mound: Right-hander Ian Snell, a projected rotation mainstay, had a rough outing against the team he likely will face during the first series of the regular season. After a smooth first inning, Snell surrendered five runs in the second, allowing two singles, a double, a triple and a home run. The good news is he got his pitch count up to 73 and retired the side in order in the first and fourth innings. Right-handed reliever Mark Lowe had a perfect inning of relief, and right-hander David Pauley held Oakland to one run over three innings.

Athletics on the mound: Right-hander Justin Duchscherer, informed early in the morning that he was starting in place of Brett Anderson, made the most of the short notice, holding the Mariners to four singles over four shutout innings. Minor League left-hander Ben Hornbeck made his Cactus League debut with a solid 2 2/3-inning relief stint, surrendering two runs, one earned.

Cactus League records: Mariners 7-11, Athletics 9-10.

Worth noting: Ichiro Suzuki started the bottom of the first inning with what appeared to be a double down the third-base line. But Athletics left fielder Gabe Gross, playing close to the line, reached the ball quickly and fired it back to the infield. Suzuki was halfway to second when he realized that he probably wouldn't make it, put on the brakes and lost his footing. By the time he got back on his feet, he was headed into a rundown and was eventually tagged out.

Up next: The Mariners' starting rotation still hasn't been determined, but one of the projected starters all along, left-hander Ryan Rowland-Smith, makes his fourth Cactus League start in Tuesday's 1 p.m. PT game against the Angels at Peoria Stadium. Rowland-Smith is 0-1 with a 8.01 ERA after his first 6 2/3 innings.

The Athletics have a scheduled off-day on Tuesday, but Brett Anderson and Gio Gonzalez will still be getting their work in to stay on schedule. Anderson, scratched from his Monday start with a stiff neck, will join Gonzalez at Papago Park on Tuesday to throw in a Minor League game. Anderson will start a Double-A game while the left-handed Gonzalez gets the nod in a Triple-A contest. The A's return to Phoenix Municipal Stadium on Wednesday for a night game against the Dodgers starting at 7:35 p.m. PT. Trevor Cahill, making his bid for the fifth spot in the rotation, gets the starting nod.

Lee's Leftovers: Duke starts, Crisp back in lineup

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 3/22/10

Lots of tidbits to share this morning, but first your starting lineup vs. the Mariners in Peoria:

Crisp DH, Barton 1B, Suzuki C, Kouz 3B, Sweeney RF, Patterson CF, Gross LF, Rosales 2B, Pennington SS, Duchscherer SP

- **Mark Ellis** was scratched from today's lineup due to tightness in both hamstrings. **Adam Rosales** is now in there playing second base. If there was ever such a thing as a good time for this kind of injury, it's now - the A's have tomorrow and most of Wednesday morning off before playing the Giants that night.

- **Brett Anderson** was scheduled to make his fourth spring start Monday, but he woke up with neck stiffness so he'll pitch in a Minor League game tomorrow. Therefore, **Justin Duchscherer** will not only make his first pitching appearance today, but he'll make his first start since 2008. As a result, it appears the pitching rotation is taking form and could look something like this come Opening Day: **Ben Sheets, Dallas Braden, Duchscherer, Anderson, [insert fifth starter]**. That's a nice R-L-R-L in the first four slots, and assuming **Trevor Cahill** grabs that last spot, another righty could fill the rotation. **Anderson** will pitch in the Double-A game tomorrow while **Gio Gonzalez** will get his work in at the Triple-A game over at Papago Park on the team's scheduled off day.

- As you can see, **Coco Crisp** is back in the lineup today after having been sidelined with a strained left hamstring March 10. Manager **Bob Geren** said both he and **Rajai Davis** will start Wednesday's night game against the visiting Dodgers in the outfield, marking the first time all spring we could potentially be seeing the same outfield slated to start Opening Night.

- The A's have another night game Thursday at the Giants' stadium in Scottsdale, where **Jason Jennings** will make his second start. Earlier in the day, **Sheets** will toss six innings in a Minor League game to "make sure he gets his six ups and downs in a controlled environment," Geren said.

- **Joey Devine, Craig Breslow** and **Andrew Bailey** are all throwing today. **Devine** threw yesterday at 80 feet and said he's going to attempt 100 feet this morning. The right-hander will then take Tuesday off and resume flat ground throwing Wednesday. He's hoping to throw off the mound by the end of the week and could potentially see game action by next week. Meanwhile, **Breslow** and **Bailey** are slated to throw sides on Wednesday, which is good news for the recently injury-prone bullpen.

- Not so good news came in the form of **John Meloan's** elbow, which will require season-ending surgery. The 25-year-old righty pitched in just two games this spring for a total of 1 2/3 innings, in which he allowed four hits and two earned runs. He'll soon visit with **Dr. James Andrews**, who has performed Tommy John surgery on a few current A's players, including **Bailey, Devine** and **Josh Outman**.

Duchscherer's spring debut: 4 scoreless innings

By GREGG BELL, AP Sports Writer

Justin Duchscherer put up a string of zeros while facing another team for the first time in 19 months. He then declared himself ready for the start of the season — and past all of his troubles in 2009.

A comical run by Ichiro Suzuki helped pave the way for the encouraging outing.

Duchscherer allowed four hits over four innings to help the Oakland Athletics beat the Seattle Mariners 7-2 on Monday.

"I was nervous, very anxious anticipating getting out there for the first time against big league guys," he said. "It's been a while."

Duchscherer missed all of last season because of elbow surgery and depression. The 32-year-old right-hander last pitched in a big league game Aug. 18, 2008.

His anxiety dissipated after his fourth pitch.

Suzuki singled to left on the offering, then fell on a wide turn past first base. The superstar then stopped in the baseline. A brief rundown ensued before Suzuki ran inside of second base and trailed off the field behind the shortstop for the out.

"Ichiro had me laughing that first at-bat. I don't know what he was doing," Duchscherer said, smiling. "That helped me, because I was a little amped up and that made me laugh and kind of relax a little. I appreciate that by him."

Brett Anderson was scratched from his scheduled start because of a stiff neck, moving Duchscherer up from a planned relief outing. Anderson is scheduled to pitch in a minor league game Tuesday.

Even though he only threw about 50 pitches — he went to the bullpen for 10 pitches after he was finished — Duchscherer said he expects to be in Oakland's rotation at the beginning of the season.

"As long as I'm ready to go five or six innings, I think that's kind of the plan," he said. "As the season goes, my second, third, fourth start I can progress back up to the 100, 100-pitch count range and hopefully get in seven, eight, nine innings like I feel like I'm supposed to."

Manager Bob Geren said Duchscherer should be ready to start the season in the rotation if he progresses with each spring outing.

Duchscherer was an All-Star in 2005 and '08 before the problems with his back, elbow and depression. He's still on an amended training schedule designed to preserve his back.

Though it was just a spring outing, Duchscherer said the start allowed him to put 2009 behind him.

"Definitely," Duchscherer said. "What I went through last year was just a growing experience, maturity, (with the) things that I've gone through facing what I had to face. I'm thankful I went through it. At the time I was going through it, it wasn't much fun but it's helped me change my perspective.

"Being away from the game last year made me really appreciate how awesome it is to be able to do what I do."

Ian Snell allowed six runs and seven hits in four innings for the Mariners, hiking his spring ERA to 6.92. The right-hander is one of the few healthy, experienced starters remaining behind Felix Hernandez with the beginning of the season coming up in two weeks.

Coco Crisp, who had been sidelined since March 9 with a strained hamstring, hit a three-run homer in Oakland's five-run second.

Snell thought he was down on most of his pitches, with a few mistakes as exceptions.

His manager disagreed.

"He was up with most of his pitches, and most of them were not real sharp," Don Wakamatsu said.

Asked if he felt he had a place in Seattle's rotation locked given injuries to Cliff Lee and Erik Bedard — not to mention his \$4.4 million salary this year — Snell chuckled.

"We'll see what happens come opening day," said Snell, acquired last summer from Pittsburgh. "Whatever they decide, I can't argue with that."

NOTES: Lee will play catch Tuesday, then have his lower right abdominal strain re-evaluated. ... Bedard had a flat-ground throwing session scheduled for Tuesday postponed because of tightness in his surgically repaired left shoulder. ... Oakland closer Andrew Bailey, the 2009 AL Rookie of the Year who has been bothered by a sore elbow, did some light throwing. He will do the same on Wednesday. ... Oakland RHP Ben Sheets will make his next start in the minors so he can pitch a full six innings, according to Geren.