

A's Daily News Clips; Saturday, March 27, 2010

Another ailment for A's Dallas Braden

By Joe Stiglich/ Bay Area News Group. 3/26/10

SURPRISE, Ariz. — Left-hander Dallas Braden threw six innings against the Chicago Cubs on Friday, even as he added another entry to his list of strange ailments.

Braden visited a doctor and was told he has a possible staph infection on his left shin, though a clearer diagnosis might come today when he's re-evaluated.

"I found out about it, because I woke up with a giant lump on the side of my leg that wasn't there when I went to bed," Braden said by phone after the A's 5-2 split-squad victory over the Cubs in Mesa.

Braden said he felt pain as he pitched, but he lasted six innings and allowed two runs on five hits.

The bigger long-term concern is the nerve damage and numbness in his left foot that ended his 2009 season prematurely. Braden visited a neurologist Wednesday and was told he'll never regain the feeling in two toes on his foot.

"My foot's just gonna be asleep forever," he said with a slight chuckle.

He's pitched all spring with the problem and is slotted to be the A's No. 2 starter behind Ben Sheets. Braden has posted a 3.94 ERA in four exhibition starts, and manager Bob Geren said he has no concerns about Braden being ready.

Braden's nerve problem stems from last season, when he said a nerve was unintentionally severed during a procedure to drain a cyst on his foot.

"To know that I'm not going to be able to feel my toes the rest of my life, and it wasn't something that was my doing, is really hard to swallow." Braden said

Vin Mazzaro allowed two runs over four innings as the A's other split squad defeated the Texas Rangers 6-3 in Surprise.

By all appearances, Mazzaro has fallen behind Trevor Cahill and Gio Gonzalez in the competition for the fifth starter's spot. But Mazzaro said he considered his outing a step in the right direction after entering the day with a 6.97 ERA through his first four appearances.

Jake Fox hit a three-run homer in the ninth to give the A's breathing room against Texas. It was a needed lift for Fox, who entered the day hitting .061 in 17 games as he fights to make the team in a utility role.

Jack Cust had an RBI single in the first, but he's 3-for-18 over his past six games with 11 strikeouts.

Closer Andrew Bailey (tennis elbow) threw from the mound for the first time since March 14, and Geren said Bailey should get into a game Sunday or Monday.

Fellow reliever Craig Breslow (elbow soreness) threw in an intrasquad game and should return to game action soon. Both appear to be on track for Opening Day.

There's still no timetable for Joey Devine (forearm tendinitis) to get back on the mound.

Chin Music: A's split-squad lineups for today; Andrew Bailey likely to pitch Sunday or Monday

By Joe Stiglich/ Bay Area News Group. 3/26/10

A quick update before I head out to Surprise, Ariz., to watch an A's split-squad team play the Rangers. Besides Tucson, this is the longest road trip in the Cactus League. Surprise is way out on the west side of the Phoenix metropolitan area. If I hit the California border, I know I've gone too far ...

Lineup vs. Rangers

Davis CF

Barton 1B

Sweeney RF

Cust DH

Fox 3B
Gross LF
Rosales SS
Recker C
Tolleson 2B

Mazzaro P

Lineup vs. Cubs in Mesa:

Crisp CF
Patterson 2B
Chavez 1B
Kouzmanoff 3B
Buck RF
Taylor LF
Powell C
Pennington SS

Braden P

—As for other news, Andrew Bailey is throwing off the mound today and Bob Geren says he's on track to appear in a game Sunday or Monday. Craig Breslow is pitching in an intrasquad game as I write. No word yet on when Joey Devine might get back on the mound since coming down w/forearm tendinitis. But he's doing well in his throwing program, Geren says.

Time to hit the road ...

Can't keep Braden out of the lineup

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer. 3/27/10

Mesa, Ariz. -- Dallas Braden has joked often that the only thing that would keep him from pitching is if his left foot actually were cut off.

Braden has battled nerve problems in that foot since treatment for a rash went wrong last season and a nerve was accidentally severed during a biopsy. He was told by a neurologist this week that he will not regain the feeling in two toes and the left side of his foot.

Then, Friday, Braden woke up with redness and swelling on his left shin and was sent to the doctor with a possible staph infection. The doctor advised Braden not to pitch, without success.

"They told me I won't pitch, and I said, 'Yeah, you think so? See you in Mesa,' " Braden said after allowing five hits and two runs in six innings against the Cubs. He walked two and struck out one.

Asked if he'd been given antibiotics, Braden shrugged and said no. "It will be gone tomorrow," he said, "the power of positive thinking."

The A's had another starter lined up, but pitching coach Curt Young wasn't surprised that Braden refused to be scratched.

"Dallas stayed out there and pitched when he took a line drive off his wrist last year," Young said. "When it's his day, he's going to pitch. His shin is a little swollen, but it will subside and he'll make his next start."

Braden's numb foot caused him to lose his balance once, and he uncorked a 45-foot pitch. He also gave up a homer to Marlon Byrd on a cutter that was down and in.

"That was a pitch to block," Braden said. "I don't even know how he hit it. He's a great hitter. ... Can we get him?"

Relievers update: Andrew Bailey threw a bullpen session and said, "It felt normal, finally." The closer, shut down for a week with tennis elbow, will pitch in a game or throw to hitters Sunday or Monday. ... Lefty Craig Breslow threw to hitters and expects to work in a game early next week. ... Joey Devine said he expects to stay at extended spring training when the team leaves for the Bay Area, then go on a minor-league rehab assignment before rejoining the A's in mid-April at the earliest.

Briefly: Travis Buck, who tripled the night before, homered in the A's 5-2 split-squad win over the Cubs. "Baseball is fun for me again," he said. "I'm enjoying myself, and I'd lost that the last couple of years for numerous reasons. This is the best my swing has been since my rookie year." ... Jake Fox, who entered the A's 6-3 win over Texas at Surprise with two hits this spring, hit a three-run homer in the ninth.

The Drumbeat: Braden refuses to be scratched; possible staph infection

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer. 3/26/10

Dallas Braden has said that they'd have to actually cut his left foot off for him not to pitch, and he's happy to keep proving that. A neurologist told him two days ago that he won't regain the feeling lost in his foot last year when treatment for a rash went awry, affecting nerves in the area, and this morning, Braden woke up with a possible staph infection just above that foot, on his left shin.

He was sent to a doctor and the doctor told him not to pitch today; Braden refused to be scratched from the start against the Cubs. "They told me I won't pitch, and I said, 'Yeah, you think so? See you in Mesa,' " Braden said.

He's a tough nut, all right, but a possible staph infection on top of all the other stuff wrong with that leg/foot area is definitely worrisome. He said the area, which was still red after the game when he rolled up his pants leg to show me and an AP reporter, was streaked with red this morning.

I asked if he'd been put on antibiotics and Braden said he didn't need medicine for the problem.

"It will be gone in the morning," he said. "The power of positive thinking."

The loss of feeling in two toes and the left side of his foot seems to cause Braden to lose control of about one pitch per game, including once again on Friday. He says he feels as if he's too far back and can't tell where he is in his delivery, and then he uncorks a 45-foot pitch, as he did today.

He worked six innings today and allowed five hits and two runs, both earned, including a homer by Marlon Byrd, who always hits Braden well. ("Can we get him?" Braden asked.) He walked two and struck out none.

UPDATE: Marlon Byrd is just as big a fan of Braden's, comparing him to John Lackey. Asked about Braden, Byrd told Chicago reporters: "I love the way he pitches. He's a guy who's a bulldog. The way he pitches, you think he'd throw 100 miles an hour. He pounds the zone and never gets rattled. ... He's going to have a great one because he's a guy who battles every single day.

"When you go up there, you can't give in. He's like Lackey from the left side. He just keeps coming at you, keeps coming at you. You think you got him, and all of a sudden it's a 1-2-3 inning and you look up there and you don't have any more runs. He keeps coming at you."

The Drumbeat: Bailey says bullpen went "great," and other tidbits

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer. 3/26/10

Andrew Bailey threw his first bullpen session in nearly two weeks this morning and he told me it felt "great, totally normal." Normal is the best possible news for the A's when it comes to their closer, who was shut down for a week with tennis elbow. Bailey said that he was able to get full extension, something that the elbow discomfort had made difficult.

Manager Bob Geren told us this morning that Bailey will pitch in a game on Sunday or Monday; Bailey said it's possible he'll throw to hitters first before appearing in a game, ala Craig Breslow. Breslow, who had a brief bout of tendinitis last week, threw to hitters today and he said it went very well. He expects to get into a game soon. Joey Devine, working his way back from Tommy John surgery and recent tendinitis, continues to do long toss but he is not scheduled for any game action yet.

It's split-squad games today, with one at Surprise, way on the other side of town - not all that ideal after two night games in a row, but the A's have borrowed most of Triple-A Sacramento and even more for the games, it looks like.

Catcher Max Stassi is among those back for the day. He caught Michael Ynoa's two innings for Class-A Kane County yesterday and he said Ynoa's stuff is terrific; Stassi was pretty wowed. He also said that there was a high comebacker - "maybe 9 feet," Stassi said - and the 6-foot-6 (or taller now) Ynoa just reached up and casually snared it with no trouble.

Here are the lineups for today's games:

Here at Mesa vs. the Cubs: Crisp CF, Patterson 2B, Chavez 1B, Kouzmanoff 3B, Buck RF, Taylor LF, Powell C, Pennington SS, Braden P. WGN and MLB Net at 1:05 p.m.

At Surprise against the Rangers: Davis CF, Barton 1B, Sweeney RF, Cust DH, Fox 3B, Gross LF, Rosales SS, Recker C, Tolleson 2B, Mazzaro P

Braden told not to pitch, does so anyway

Doctor concerned about possible staph infection in his foot

By Jane Lee / MLB.com. 3/26/10

SURPRISE, Ariz. -- Dallas Braden and his numb left foot received some unwelcomed company Friday morning in the form of a red, streaky bump on the outside front of his left shin.

A brief visit to the doctor led to news that a staph infection may be forming. Don't throw today, the doctor told Braden.

"I pretty much told him I was going to pitch no matter what," said Braden.

So he did, and he tossed six innings against the Cubs in Mesa, Ariz., scattering five hits, two runs and two walks, as the A's won 5-2.

The red streaks were still present on his leg when he left the mound, but the always optimistic Braden was given no treatment and is instead going with the simple wait-and-see type method.

"I'll sleep on it and see how it looks in the morning," Braden told MLB.com by phone Friday evening. "If a different route of action needs to be taken, we'll go from there."

The infection is right above the same foot that, according to a neurologist just two days ago, will likely never regain the feeling lost last year when treatment for a rash resulted in damaged nerves in the area -- a strange series of events that cut Braden's season short following 22 starts.

"I knew in my heart of hearts that I probably wouldn't ever have feeling in it again," he said. "I was cautiously optimistic and have always viewed the whole thing with a glass-half-full mindset, but they pretty much drained my glass."

The news, though not much of a surprise, is still worrisome considering Braden has begun losing control of about one pitch per game. The A's lefty said he often finds himself in an unfamiliar position on the mound and, as a result, feels as if he's standing too far back, which doesn't allow him to place where he is in his delivery.

"I just can't feel how far back I am," he said, "so today I rushed it and threw a 45-foot pitch.

"It's a little disheartening. Hopefully it doesn't become a consistent thing every time I'm out there pitching."

Braden has said before he'll pitch until the day his foot needs to be cut off, and he reiterated that same notion Friday.

"As long as I have a uniform on, I'm going to be out there competing," he said. "I'm going to give 100 percent and do everything in my power to help this ballclub."

That mindset has given the A's pitcher no reason to think he won't be good to go come April.

"This wouldn't be my life if there were no obstacles," Braden said. "It seems to be getting more and more serious, but I'm going to pitch until I can't. You can kick me when I'm down, and it won't matter. Anything short of amputation, I'm fine."

Mazzaro, Blevins combine to limit Texas

Pair outduels former A's pitcher Harden; Recker homers

By T.R. Sullivan / MLB.com. 3/26/10

Rangers at the plate: Nelson Cruz entered the game second in the Cactus League in RBIs and singled home a run in the first inning. He now has 16 RBIs in 17 games. Josh Hamilton had a first-inning single and has reached base in 12 of 13 games played this spring.

Athletics at the plate: Catcher Anthony Recker hit his second home run of the spring in the second inning. He is the sixth Athletics player with two home runs. No player has more than two. Ryan Sweeney had an RBI double in the first and scored on a single by Jack Cust. Sweeney has 14 hits in his past 35 at-bats, a .400 average over his past 12 games. Jake Fox put the game out of reach with a three-run homer in the ninth.

Rangers on the mound: Doug Mathis may have the inside track on a spot in the bullpen and helped his chances with 1 1/3 scoreless innings against the Athletics. He now has a 3.86 ERA for the spring and could end up joining Dustin Nippert as one of the two long relievers in the bullpen. Chris Ray struck out two in a scoreless eighth.

Athletics on the mound: Vin Mazzaro, trying to keep up in the fifth-starter competition, went four innings and allowed two runs on three hits and three walks. He struck out one. One of the runs came home on a balk and he now has a 6.28 ERA for the spring.

Worth noting: Rangers first baseman Chris Davis left the game after three innings feeling fatigued. The Rangers reported no physical issues with him, just general fatigue. He was 0-for-2 in the game.

Cactus League records: Rangers 6-14; Athletics 11-11-2

Up next: Right-handed starter Justin Duchscherer and the A's make the trek to Surprise on Saturday to take on the host Royals beginning at 1 p.m. PT. Duchscherer, slated to make just his second spring start since recovering from a nerve ablation procedure, is expected to throw around 75 pitches -- 15 more than he tossed in his first start against the Mariners on Monday, when he posted four scoreless innings while scattering four hits and a walk.

C.J. Wilson pitches and hits for the Rangers when they play the Brewers at 3:05 p.m. CT on Saturday in the Phoenix neighborhood of Maryvale. The designated hitter will not be used so Wilson will get to swing the bat for the second straight start. He was 1-for-2 with a double in his last start against the Giants in Scottsdale. The game will be broadcast by KRLD 1080 AM.

Braden matches Big Z pitch for pitch

Lefty allows two runs over six innings; Buck homers late

By Carrie Muskat / MLB.com 03/26/10

ATHLETICS (ss) 5, CUBS 2

at Mesa, Ariz.

Friday, March 26

Athletics at the plate: Kevin Kouzmanoff hit a sacrifice fly in the first and reached second on a fielding error by shortstop Ryan Theriot in the fourth. Kouzmanoff eventually scored on Travis Buck's single. Buck hit a solo go-ahead homer in the ninth.

Cubs at the plate: Marlon Byrd belted his third spring homer leading off the second. Alfonso Soriano and Jeff Baker followed with back-to-back doubles.

Athletics on the mound: Dallas Braden, who was the A's Opening Day starter last year, gave up two runs on five hits over six innings in his fourth start. He had walked one in 10 innings before Friday, when he walked two.

Cubs on the mound: Carlos Zambrano, who will make his sixth Opening Day start, tuned up by striking out six over six-plus innings, the longest outing this spring by a Cubs pitcher. Big Z started the seventh but hit the first batter he faced and was lifted. He gave up two runs (one earned) on three hits. James Russell, who appears to have clinched the last spot in the bullpen, retired the side in the seventh. Carlos Marmol gave up the go-ahead homer in the ninth inning. Marmol now has given up home runs in each of his past two outings.

Worth noting: Derrek Lee was back in the Cubs lineup after injuring his back in a freak accident in Surprise. Lee went to sit down in one of the clubhouse chairs and surprise, surprise, it broke. He landed on his tailbone. Lee didn't want to comment on the incident, denying it was another "Cubby occurrence." But it did have a positive effect. "They did change the chairs at Surprise," Lee said.

Cactus League records: Cubs 13-9-2; Athletics 10-11-2

Up next: Right-handed starter Justin Duchscherer and the A's make the trek to Surprise on Saturday to take on the host Royals beginning at 1 p.m. PT. Duchscherer, slated to make just his second spring start since recovering from a nerve ablation procedure, is expected to throw around 75 pitches -- 15 more than he tossed in his first start against the Mariners on Monday, when he posted four scoreless innings while scattering four hits and a walk.

Carlos Silva, named to one of the two openings in the rotation, will make his fifth start on Saturday when the Cubs play host to the Padres. First pitch will be 3:05 p.m. CT and the game will be broadcast on WGN Radio and WGN TV. Silva came out of his last start against the Reds because of a

tight right quad but also because he will face Cincinnati in his first start. Lou Piniella didn't want the Reds to get too good a look at Silva this spring. Xavier Nady, who has been getting at-bats in the Minor League camp, was expected to make his first Cactus League start in the outfield.

Lee's Leftovers: Friday postgame notes

By Jane Lee / MLB.com. 3/26/10

With the A's playing split-squad games in Mesa and Surprise today, I decided to take the longer drive to Surprise not only because manager **Bob Geren** was headed to that game but because I hadn't really seen **Vin Mazzaro** pitch this spring. At this point, it appears the fifth starter battle is going strong between **Trevor Cahill** and **Gio Gonzalez**. I can't say Mazzaro's running in the same race, though. Today he was average and never really found a great rhythm, but he did face a pretty good Rangers lineup. Here's what Mazzaro had to say following his start:

"I thought it went pretty well. There were some times when I lost the strike zone a little bit with the fastball but other than that I felt I threw the ball pretty well. Today was a good day and something I really needed to build the confidence going into the season.

You'd have to imagine it being slightly difficult going just two days after both Cahill and Gonzalez pitched well in the same game, but I think Mazzaro knew his situation heading into camp and really needed to step it up a notch this spring. He doesn't have time to mess around with the strike zone, and unfortunately I think he'll be fine tuning his command in Sacramento once the season starts. Scouts were so high on Mazzaro last year, and I'd be interested in hearing what they've seen from him since that time. He'll be given one more start this spring...

Then there's **Dallas Braden**. The dude deserves a break. While I was watching Mazzaro in Surprise, I was told Braden pitched six innings in Mesa after being told by a doctor this morning not to throw because he might have a staph infection. So I gave Braden a call, and he described a red, streaky bump on his calf that is right above his numb left foot. He's always said he'd pitch until his foot was cut off, so he ignored the doc's recommendation and pitched as planned. From the times I've talked with Braden, it seems he truly understands and appreciates the opportunity he's been given in the big leagues, so he's not about to let foot numbness or red bumps prevent him from doing what he loves and helping out his teammates. You can read the full story on Braden here at the A's site.

It's **Justin Duchscherer** on the mound tomorrow against the Royals in Surprise. He'll attempt to throw around 75 pitches in just his second start this spring...

Marmol blows second save, A's prevail in split-squad game

Associated Press. 3/26/10

MESA, Ariz. -- It was a wonderful day of pitching for both the [Chicago Cubs](#) and [Oakland Athletics](#) -- until [Carlos Marmol](#) took the mound.

"You can't have a perfect day in spring training," Cubs manager Lou Piniella said Friday after a ninth-inning meltdown by his closer helped an Oakland Athletics split squad to a 5-2 victory.

Oakland starter [Dallas Braden](#) was outstanding, Chicago's [Carlos Zambrano](#) was even better and several relievers excelled, too. Then Marmol, anointed the Cubs' bullpen ace after spending most of three seasons as the primary setup man, served up [Travis Buck](#)'s tiebreaking homer on his third pitch.

He followed that by hitting Michael Taylor with a pitch and giving up [Landon Powell](#)'s single. After [Cliff Pennington](#)'s run-scoring grounder, Marmol yielded pinch-hitter Shane Peterson's RBI single.

In his previous game, Marmol blew a save by allowing a two-run homer. He has hit a batter in three straight outings.

"His mechanics are off," Piniella said. "He was really flat with his pitches and we were wondering why. I think we found something on the tape. He's coming almost sidearm ... and you lose that good snap. It's something to work on. That's why it's called spring training."

Before Marmol came in, Zambrano allowed three hits and one earned run in six innings. That was followed by one hitless inning each by James Russell and Jeff Samardzija.

"We'd have had the superfecta but just didn't get there," Piniella said.

Braden, meanwhile, gave up five hits and two runs in six innings. Relievers Brad Ziegler, Brad Kilby and Fernando Hernandez then worked a scoreless inning apiece.

It was the longest and best outing of the spring for Braden. He went 8-9 with a 3.89 ERA in 22 starts last year before nerve damage in his left foot ended his season in August.

The condition left him with a tingling sensation in his entire foot -- and no feeling at all in about half of it. Earlier this week, a neurologist told him the numbness never would subside.

"So physically, I'm way over it," Braden said. "But mentally ... I'll circle my foot or I'll stomp my foot thinking, it's just asleep and I'll stomp it and it'll be back in 30 seconds. When it's not back is when I have to climb that mental hill and say, 'It's not coming back. Get over it. Throw a pitch.'"

Braden loses his balance on the mound every so often. But because of the numbness, at least he doesn't feel the kind of excruciating pain he did in August. And he is relieved that he's been able to take his regular turn this spring.

"It's never fun to go six to eight months and wonder if you're going to be a baseball player next year," Braden said. "It's very encouraging to know that I can still go out and throw baseballs."

Game notes

Seven of Buck's nine hits this spring have gone for extra bases. The outfielder, who is not expected to make Oakland's 25-man roster, leads the team with three homers. ... Cubs OF Xavier Nady, recovering from Tommy John surgery, is expected to get his first action in the outfield Saturday after having been used exclusively at DH. "We plan on using Nady a couple times a week in the outfield early in the season," Piniella said. "He's a force. He can swing it." ... Cubs 3B Aramis Ramirez (sore right triceps) played for the first time since March 13. He went 2 for 3. ... A's 1B Eric Chavez is 2 for 25 in his last eight games. ... Marlon Byrd homered for the Cubs.