

A's News Clips, Saturday, April 3, 2010

Matt Cain and Brett Anderson are dominant in Giants' 2-1 victory over the A's

By Daniel Brown, San Jose Mercury News

Before Giants starter Matt Cain said a word about his own efficient outing Friday night, he tipped his cap to his A's counterpart.

"(Brett) Anderson was really, really good," Cain said, shaking his head. "The guys were coming back to the dugout talking about how lively his pitches were, how much his ball was moving."

Precision pitching from both sides of the bay set a brisk tone for the Giants' 2-1 victory at AT&T Park. The game sailed by in 2 hours and 5 minutes — a full-out sprint by exhibition game standards.

Giants manager Bruce Bochy said the fast pace allowed him to stick with his regulars a little longer.

For the A's, though, it wasn't quite fast enough: Center fielder Coco Crisp suffered a partially dislocated pinkie finger on his left hand when he was thrown out trying to steal second in the third inning.

A's manager Bob Geren described Crisp's status was day to

day. Crisp exited the game after his headfirst slide, but Geren said Crisp was scheduled to play only three innings anyway.

The Giants tried some daring on the base paths, too, when Juan Uribe tried to score from second on a wild pitch in the seventh. Uribe was out — albeit unscathed — after his collision with A's catcher Landon Powell.

Uribe's exuberance was understandable, considering the Giants' offensive silence since arriving back from Arizona. It's as if their bats were lost luggage.

A night after the A's won 9-0, Anderson breezed through the Giants lineup while barely breaking a sweat. The left-hander threw five scoreless innings, striking out four and walking none.

Anderson threw 42 of his 59 pitches for strikes.

"All my stuff was pretty good," Anderson said, "and with it obviously being the last outing before the season, I wanted to incorporate all my pitches and throw them in counts I'd throw them during the year. I feel pretty confident going into my first start."

Cain, meanwhile, continued to accomplish his goal of more strikes. The right-hander allowed just one run in six innings Friday, and after issuing two walks against the A's, he totaled just three walks in 211/3 innings all spring.

That could be a big step for a pitcher who ranked among the National League's top seven for walks each season from 2006-09.

"He's been consistent all spring," Bochy said. "He came into spring training in great shape, and he was consistent from Day One."

The sharp pitching got help from the defense, highlighted by Cliff Pennington's catch in the sixth. The A's shortstop bolted far to his right to make a diving, backhanded grab of Pablo Sandoval's pop-up.

Offense? That was harder to find.

The A's got a run-scoring double from Kevin Kouzmanoff in the fourth.

The Giants countered when Uribe doubled home pinch-runner Eugenio Velez in the seventh. And Aaron Rowand singled home John Bowker for the go-ahead run in the eighth.

Gio Gonzalez gets first shot at A's fifth starter role

By Chace Bryson, Oakland Tribune

Gonzalez gets final start in battle for rotation spot

As the battle for the final spot in the A's starting rotation goes down to the last day, Gio Gonzalez will get the first shot to impress. The A's announced Friday that the left-hander will start today's 1:05 p.m. exhibition against the Giants at the Coliseum.

Gonzalez isn't reading anything into the starting nod.

"Not at all," he said. "This organization is very quiet with their stuff. They just want to see the talent and get the best out of everybody with great competition."

Gonzalez and Trevor Cahill, who is also scheduled to pitch today, have each put up solid numbers this spring. Gonzalez (1-1) has posted a 2.79 ERA over 191/3 innings while striking out 18 and walking 10. Cahill (1-1) has a 4.08 ERA with 14 strikeouts and four walks over 172/3 innings.

While confirming Friday that Gonzalez was slated to start, A's manager Bob Geren didn't say how many innings Gonzalez and Cahill would get. Cahill is Gonzalez's chief competitor for the remaining spot in the rotation.

Even if Gonzalez fails in his bid to open the season in the rotation, the club may choose to keep him at the big league level because he has pitched in middle relief. Cahill, on the other hand, would likely start the season at Triple-A Sacramento in Gonzalez wins the No. 5 job.

"If it was up to me, we'd be all up here and win the World Series," Gonzalez said. "I'm not trying to outshine anybody. I'm just out here having fun and doing my thing."

One rotation spot that appears no longer in doubt is the one that was slated for Justin Duchscherer. A day after allowing three hits while blanking the Giants for six innings, Duchscherer said he was ready to get back to pitching in games that matter.

The right-hander missed the entire 2009 season after his rehabilitation from arthroscopic elbow surgery was halted after he was diagnosed with clinical depression. He then had a slow start to spring training after undergoing a surgery in February to relieve back pain. Prior to his effort Thursday, the right-hander had tossed just seven innings this spring.

"With as little of time I've had on the mound this spring, to get out there and go six good innings like that definitely gets my confidence up," Duchscherer said.

Also boosting his confidence? He was pain-free on Friday.

"Physically, I feel really good," he said.

Eric Chavez played the entire game at first base. He went 1-for-4 with a single. ... Jake Fox, who is battling for one of the team's final bench spots, started at catcher and finished the game at third. ... Robert Buan, who hosted the A's postgame radio show from 2000-09, said he was informed Friday that his contract with KTRB 860 was terminated. Chris Townsend has taken over host duties for the postgame show, but Buan was still working with the show in a reporting capacity. Buan still holds a job in the A's front office.

A's ace in the hole shows big change

Scott Ostler, San Francisco Chronicle

Brett Anderson mowed down the Giants with ease Friday night, leaving the A's optimistic about what their young lefty will do this coming season once he faces big-league hitters.

Just kidding, Giants fans!

The Giants don't have the most feared lineup in the major leagues, but they tore up the Cactus League, and they were home Friday, seeking to rev it up a notch in preparation for their opener in Houston on Monday.

Instead, Anderson de-revved 'em. Humbled 'em. That's what neighbors are for.

It's really good news for the A's. Anderson is not their ace, because that designation goes to newly acquired Ben Sheets. And Anderson isn't No. 2; that's Justin Duchscherer, in what the team hopes is a big comeback season.

Anderson is No. 3, and Friday he showed why he could be the best No. 3 in baseball.

He was 11-11 last season as a 21-year-old rookie, showed tons of promise.

This year, he's mixing in a changeup, to keep hitters from sitting on his 95-mph-plus heat and low-90s slider. The change, remember, is the pitch Tim Lincecum added to his repertoire just before winning two Cy Young Awards.

It has become Lincecum's most effective pitch, and Anderson's change is showing promise.

In the fourth, against Pablo (.330 last season) Sandoval, Anderson popped him up on a first-pitch change, 85 mph. Sandoval's 0-for-3 against Anderson was significant. The two have faced each other numerous times in recent years in the minors and spring training.

"Pablo's hitting about 1.000 against me going into this spring training," Anderson said.

In the fifth, Anderson got Bengie Molina to roll out softly off a slider, and struck out Andres Torres and Matt Cain on changeups. A changeup to the opposing pitcher? Anderson will pay for that one.

A's manager Bob Geren said the plan was for Anderson to throw between 70 and 100 pitches. He tossed 59, 42 of them strikes. Fifty-nine pitches to muffle the Giants for five innings. They got three hits off Anderson, and zero line drives.

It was such a cruise for Anderson that after his five innings, he went to the bullpen and threw another 20 pitches or so.

In the second, Anderson struck out Molina looking at a changeup and fanned Juan Uribe on a back-door curve. So much for trying to get it done with straight gas and the slider.

"I think he's going to be a superstar," Molina said.

At this time last season, Anderson was an unknown, the seventh-youngest player on an A's Opening Day roster.

The difference between then and now?

"Big difference," Geren said before Friday's game. "His game is improved. Where he used to have strength to one side of the plate, now it's equaled out, and his changeup's better. So big difference."

The change has been Anderson's major offseason project.

"It's just another pitch to throw to right-handers early in the count," Anderson said.

One goal of the changeup is a reduction of his pitch count. Kind of like Friday night.

It was Anderson's dress rehearsal, the first game this spring where the coaching staff let him open his full bag of tricks.

Anderson said this spring has been more relaxing than last spring, when he was trying to win a spot on the big-league roster.

"I don't let the game speed up on me (now)," Anderson said. "If someone gets on base, I take a deep breath."

In the first inning, Anderson said he sneaked a couple of peeks at the radar-gun reading on the auxiliary scoreboard, and liked what he saw: 96 mph, in cold, damp weather.

It looks like he's ready to go.

"He's progressed a lot in one year," Geren said. "He's fun to watch, because he throws hard and he has a late-breaking breaking ball, and when he gets his pitches in the right spot, he can make some real good hitters look bad, and not too many guys can do that."

Catcher Kurt Suzuki likes what he sees, too, but to him it's the same-old, same-old from the young kid.

"(Last year) he pitched like he's been in the league 10, 12 years," Suzuki said, "so that was impressive. ... He's got some of the best stuff I've seen. ... Brett's got everything it takes. He's awesome, he works hard, he's focused out there. His poise for how old he is unbelievable. He's got everything it takes to be a No. 1 guy."

Right now, he's No. 3, but he's an ace in the hole.

3-DOT LOUNGE

After Angels, why not A's?

Bruce Jenkins, San Francisco Chronicle

Let's talk pure craziness. Let's talk blind enthusiasm. Let's talk Oakland finishing second in the American League West.

Sitting in with **Mychael Urban** on a Comcast SportsNet bit the other night, I blurted out that very iffy prediction, and now I'm stuck with it. Pleasantly so. Unlike some, I'm not all that thrilled by the competition.

The Angels are a lock to win it. They've taken some hits (**John Lackey, Chone Figgins, Vlad Guerrero**), but they still have **Torii Hunter, Hideki Matsui, Bobby Abreu, Kendry Morales** and **Howie Kendrick**, plus a solid leadoff man (**Erick Aybar**), a deep rotation and manager **Mike Scioscia**. They're the Angels. They always figure it out.

Seattle is a very trendy pick to go deep into October, and that could well be the case if it all comes together. Figgins and **Ichiro Suzuki** are a lethal combination at the top of the order. They have a truly exceptional defensive team (you hear them compared to the Giants, but the likeness falls apart here). They have **Felix Hernandez** and, with any luck, **Cliff Lee** at the top of the rotation.

Still, their prospects are troublesome. The rest of the rotation could be awful. **David Aardsma**, the ex-Giant, will not be an elite closer. The 3-4 hitters in the order will be **Casey Kotchman** and **Milton Bradley**. Lee is due to become a free agent at season's end, and the way things have gone for him - foot surgery, five-game suspension and now the third serious abdominal strain of his career - you wonder if it might be a season to forget.

Worst of all, after all that nice work in the offseason, the Mariners signed Bradley. Here in Oakland, we have better memories than most. I can't recall too many ballplayers more impressive, on the field and in the clubhouse, than Bradley during the 2006 ALCS in Detroit. But you know the deal with Milton: As one big-league executive put it so well the other day, "Everybody thinks they can be the one to fix this guy. The talent's there, so everybody runs right past all the stop signs. I can't believe so many people are that dumb."

There's a lot to like in Texas - **Elvis Andrus**, **Josh Hamilton**, the prospect of a fully revived Guerrero, the 101-mph heat from **Neftali Feliz** - but there are too many unsettling elements surrounding that team. I doubt if Hamilton will ever be healthy for a full season. The team already has some bothersome injuries, notably to **Ian Kinsler** and **Tommy Hunter**. There is talk that the ever-erratic **Rich Harden** is nowhere close to form. And worst of all, there's that menacing cloud hovering over manager **Ron Washington**, he of the fallen reputation, suggesting that he'll be fired at the first sign of trouble.

What's *not* to like about the A's? Plenty. Start with no power, no fans, no real drawing card, the ever-looming threat of San Jose (bleak until they actually get there), **Billy Beane's** fascination with manager **Bob Geren**, and the idea that **Ben Sheets** will either (a) pitch well and disappear or (b) become a \$10 million bust.

Still, there's a lot of solid energy around this team, all about its up-the-middle defense, **Justin Duchscherer's** comeback, the charismatic **Dallas Braden**, the ascent of **Brett Anderson**, plenty more arms in the system, the smile on **Eric Chavez's** face, solid hitting from **Kurt Suzuki** and **Kevin Kouzmanoff**, and a ton of good prospects on the way - notably **Michael Taylor** and **Chris Carter**, a couple of big-time hitters with a "can't-miss" look about them.

Teams can go a long way with pitching, defense, belief and a future. If the A's can handle playing in front of about 1,700 people, they could pull a big surprise.

Controlled oblivion

The A's have never understood the concept of Opening Day, as in bright sunshine, but they've outdone themselves this year, opening Monday night against the NCAA title game and the final stages of the Giants' opener in Houston. Do they even stop to *think* about these things? ... Right out of the gate, Boston fans get the Yankees. How is it that the Dodgers don't arrive in San Francisco until the last week of June? ... Our two cents: The plan was to play **Nate Schierholtz** every day in right field. Stick with that, at least for a month. He deserves the chance. ... **Buster Posey** to the minors? No. As the Braves have shown with **Jason Heyward**, sometimes you just have to forget the financial angle (staving off arbitration) and give the kid a big-league uniform. ... Try to fathom this: The Masters is holding ESPN to its 1-4:30 p.m. window when the tournament begins Thursday. That's it: No other live coverage, save a single concession: ESPN can show **Tiger Woods' first tee shot** - and only that - if it falls outside the window. In other words, if he gets a morning tee time, *nothing after his first tee shot will be shown live*. That's not traditional, stately or appropriate. That is absolute lunacy. The most anticipated round in history - at least for the general public - and we could be watching Warriors-Wolves highlights from the night before. Oh, but the Par-3 contest will be televised Wednesday, no problem. So they've got their priorities lined up nicely.

Kouzmanoff tallies RBI against Giants

Anderson allows three hits in five scoreless innings

By John Schlegel / MLB.com

GIANTS 2, A's 1

at San Francisco

Friday, April 2

A's at the plate: Eric Chavez scored from first base on Kevin Kouzmanoff's double to the gap in right-center field to account for Oakland's only run off Giants starter Matt Cain. Rajai Davis, Adam Rosales and Chad Fox singled for the other A's hits.

Giants at the plate: Aaron Rowand had an RBI single to center to drive home John Bowker with the go-ahead run in the eighth inning. Juan Uribe's second hit of the night was a double that scored Eugenio Velez, pinch-running after Bengie Molina's single, in the seventh inning. Uribe was later thrown out at the plate, trying to advance from second on a wild pitch. Other hits came from Aubrey Huff and Andres Torres.

A's on the mound: Putting a rough last outing in Arizona aside, lefty starter Brett Anderson went five strong innings, allowing three hits and no runs while striking out four and walking none. Edwar Ramirez pitched a scoreless inning and Chad Gaudin gave up the tying run in the seventh.

Giants on the mound: Matt Cain's final tuneup before the regular season begins was a success, as he went six innings, throwing 81 pitches. He allowed a run on three hits while striking out four and walking two. The two relievers vying for the final spot in the bullpen -- Denny Bautista and Guillermo Mota -- each pitched a scoreless inning, though Bautista allowed a couple of hits.

Worth noting: A's shortstop Cliff Pennington made a spectacular catch to end the sixth inning, sprinting into shallow left field and laying out for a diving catch of a sinking liner off the bat of Pablo Sandoval.

Up next: Gio Gonzalez will make the start and Trevor Cahill will follow for the A's as the No. 5 starter decision goes down to the wire in Saturday's 1:05 p.m. PT rematch against the Giants. Left-hander Jonathan Sanchez will be on the mound for the Giants, making his final start with the No. 4 slot already clinched.

Crisp possibly dislocates finger

A's outfielder hurts hand sliding into second

By John Schlegel / MLB.com

SAN FRANCISCO -- A's outfielder Coco Crisp suffered an injured left pinkie finger sliding into second base in the third inning of Friday's exhibition game at AT&T Park. Manager Bob Geren said the center fielder's status is "day to day" and indicated the finger may have been dislocated.

Crisp, who was attempting to steal second on the play, was replaced in the lineup by Jack Cust, who played left field the rest of the game. Geren said he was going to send Cust in for Crisp at that point anyway.

"I was going to just give him a couple at-bats and get Cust in there, but he did injure his finger sliding," Geren said afterward.

Crisp was wearing a black gauze dressing on his left hand after the game, but he wasn't immediately available for postgame comment. His status will be evaluated Saturday, when the A's host the Giants for the Bay Bridge Series finale.

Change of scenery does Anderson good

SAN FRANCISCO -- Brett Anderson didn't want to make any excuses about his last spring outing in Arizona, but he said he preferred pitching Friday night in a Major League park. And it showed.

After giving up six earned runs in five innings in his Sunday start against Colorado in Phoenix, the left-hander took to the AT&T Park mound and delivered five shutout innings against the Giants in an outing that was as good as the results.

"Tale of two games compared to my last start," Anderson said. "With Spring Training winding down, sometimes it's hard to get in the right mindset a little bit, not trying to make excuses."

"My adrenaline was up today, my velocity was back where I wanted it to be. Big league atmosphere helps."

While Anderson spent much of Spring Training fine-tuning his changeup to complement an already strong slider and fastball in the mid-90s range, being ready to pitch in the Majors for a strong second season was the main goal. And his outing Friday showed he's in good position to do that.

A's manager Bob Geren had to agree that the venue was part of the difference.

"I think the environment changes things," Geren said. "When you get to the end of Spring Training, it can be a bit redundant pitching in games that don't matter."

Anderson, slated as the No. 4 starter for the A's, finished the spring with a 4.42 ERA in five starts.

Strong starts for Cain, Anderson

Rowand wins it for SF with RBI single in eighth inning

ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN FRANCISCO — Matt Cain pitched six innings, giving up one run and striking out four, and Aaron Rowand singled in the winning run in the eighth inning in the San Francisco Giants' 2-1 exhibition victory over the Oakland Athletics on Friday night.

The Giants tied it at 1 in the seventh when pinch-runner Eugenio Velez stole second and scored on Juan Uribe's double.

Oakland starter Brett Anderson threw five shutout innings. Chad Gaudin gave up the tying run and Brad Kilby gave up the winning run.

The Athletics opened the scoring in the fourth when Kevin Kouzmanoff drilled a double to the deepest part of right-center, driving home Eric Chavez from first.

Anderson, who will be Oakland's fourth starter, allowed just three singles and struck out four in his final appearance of the exhibition season.

He will make his first start of the regular season against the Seattle Mariners on Thursday.

It was the Giants' 22nd win of the spring.

"I felt like I was throwing most of my stuff for strikes," Cain said. "I got a little goofy in a couple spots. I started not throwing the ball through the plate, but I felt good."

Cain wanted to throw strikes this spring and did so, finishing spring training with just three walks.

"The biggest thing for me is always for me is to start throwing strikes," Cain said. "I need to throw lots of strikes and keep the walks down."

Cain praised Anderson for his outing.

"Anderson looked really, really good," Cain said. "The guys (were) coming back to the dugout and saying, 'He's throwing the ball very lively.' And his breaking ball was very good."

Guillermo Mota earned the win, and Kilby was the loser.

"In my last outing of the spring, I wanted to incorporate all my pitches," Anderson said. "I wanted to throw them in counts that I would throw them in the year. I wanted to throw 3-2 breaking balls.

"I feel pretty confident going into the season and my first start of the season."

NOTES

* Left-hander Gio Gonzalez will start today's game for the A's, and left-hander Jonathan Sanchez will start for the Giants in the final game of the Bay Bridge Series.

* Before the game, the Giants optioned their top prospect, catcher Buster Posey, to Triple-A Fresno and optioned or reassigned eight others to Fresno or their minor league camp.

* A's first baseman Daric Barton leads the majors with 21 walks this spring.

Sharks join chorus of groups concerned about plans for ballpark in downtown San Jose

By Tracy Seipel, San Jose Mercury News 4/2/2010

Foes of a plan to build a major league baseball stadium in downtown San Jose got a powerful new ally this week after the San Jose Sharks accused the city of preparing a misleading report the team says downplays the impacts a stadium would have on the area surrounding HP Pavilion.

Silicon Valley Sports & Entertainment, which owns the Sharks and manages the arena where the hockey team plays, filed a 39-page letter Monday asking the city to "fully disclose" what it believes will be significant impacts on traffic and parking — particularly on days when simultaneous events occur at the HP Pavilion and the baseball stadium.

"All we're asking for is a plan," said Greg Jamison, chief executive of SVSE. "We've had meetings and discussions and we are still waiting for the layout and overall strategy as to what is going to happen" with traffic and parking.

Don Gralnek, Sharks executive vice president and general counsel, added that the team also worries about the impacts of other future projects in the Diridon Station area, including plans to add BART and high-speed rail.

"It's not a comment on the A's proposal," Gralnek said. "This is about trying to protect our customers' experience at the HP Pavilion."

But Paul Krutko, the city's chief development officer, said the city has no intention of planning a ballpark or other infrastructure around the arena that would harm its earlier investment. The city opened the hockey arena in 1993.

"This is one of the city's singular assets. We invested significant resources into the Pavilion," Krutko said, noting that San Jose just spent more than \$30 million to update the building, including a brand new scoreboard system.

Krutko's office said the HP Pavilion provides an annual economic impact of \$254 million and generates about 5,000 full-time jobs.

Krutko urges the Sharks to be patient, noting none of the three projects the team cites has an exact timeline.

The earliest project to break ground might be the stadium, but only if Major League Baseball decides to override the San Francisco Giants' claim to Santa Clara County. And San Jose voters would have to approve any proposal for a new sports facility that involves the use of public resources. A decision would have to be made by summer in order to place a measure on the November ballot.

Such a vote could come during a growing fiscal crisis at City Hall that could lead to widespread service cuts. But a recent poll by San Jose State University's Survey and Policy Research Institute on behalf of the Mercury News found that 62 percent of 532 registered voters would be willing to give the A's a parcel of city-owned land downtown for a baseball stadium, as long as the A's paid the costs of building and operating the ballpark and that no taxes would be increased to fund the project.

Krutko also defended the content of the draft environmental report that Jamison assails, saying the city's staff has "done an adequate job in defining the impacts" a stadium would bring. "We would not have put the document out if we didn't think the work was done," Krutko added.

SVSE was not the only entity to raise objections to the environmental report Monday, the deadline for the public to respond. Among about a dozen responses from neighborhood groups and other residents was a letter filed by the attorney representing Stand For San Jose, the coalition of San Jose Giants fans opposed to any public subsidy that would fund an A's stadium here. The group is partly funded by the San Francisco Giants.

In his 35-page letter, Todd W. Smith contends the environmental report is inadequate for a variety of reasons, including traffic and parking problems. He also said a stadium in the Diridon/arena area was not consistent with San Jose's land use policies. Smith also believes the report, which was published in mid-February, is being rushed through to meet the August deadline to place a stadium vote on the fall ballot.

The city will now review the comments received, decide whether it needs to address any of the issues and respond to all those who made comments. The report will then move to the city's planning commission, which will decide whether to certify the report.

Beane recognises a kindred business spirit at the Arsenal

By Simon Kuper, Financial Times, 4/3/2010

When I think of Arsène Wenger," says Billy Beane, general manager of the Oakland A's baseball team, "I think of Warren Buffett. Wenger runs his football club like he is going to own the club for 100 years."

Beane may be the world's most influential sports executive. Using previously ignored statistics, he found new ways of valuing baseball players. This data revolution – documented in Michael Lewis's book *Moneyball* – is now reaching other sports, even hidebound soccer. Brad Pitt is about to play Beane in *Moneyball*, the movie.

However, Billy Beane's own Billy Beane works in another sport across the globe. Arsenal's manager Wenger is "the sports executive I admire most", he says. "Does that sound like an American, to be both a Spurs fan and a Wenger fan?" Where others see Wenger's stubbornness, Beane sees business sense.

For background: Beane is a soccer nut. On his cell phone from the A's spring training camp in Arizona, he says: "Though I can't watch all Arsenal's matches live because of my day-job, I'll go back and watch them. As we're speaking I'm updating my pod with new soccer podcasts."

Beane tries to learn from Wenger. "When he does things, I understand them," he says. "As much as anything I enjoy watching Wenger's demeanour on the sidelines. He's viewed by some as an 'academic', but what you see on TV is this incredible will to win combined with superior intellect ... a winning combination in any business."

He considers Wenger a rare sports coach who husbands his club's money for the long term. He says: "When you think of the structure of most sports teams, there is little benefit to the person running the team on the field to think years ahead. The person who has access to the greatest expenditure ... has no risk in the decision-making." Beane means that a coach is typically judged on winning games now, not on keeping the club solvent over time, and spends accordingly.

Wenger, however, usually signs cheap youngsters. "Nothing strangulates a sports club more than having older players on long contracts," explains Beane, "because once they stop performing, they become immovable. And as they become older, the risk of injury becomes exponential. It's less costly to bring [on] a young player. If it doesn't work, you can go and find the next guy, and the next guy. The downside risk is lower, and the upside much higher. It's almost like he is managing a mutual fund."

Like Beane at Oakland, Wenger knows he must pursue a different strategy from richer rivals. Beane explains: "If Arsenal and Man U and Chelsea want a striker, well, Arsenal will get the third-best striker. So they will probably develop a striker."

In trading for players, Beane explains, "you're basically paying for past performance. I think what Wenger tries to do is pay for future performance ... it's an inexact science, so you're not going to get it right every time."

But then Beane says, "I love watching Arshavin play." Hang on: Andrei Arshavin is an established star, Wenger's most expensive signing at about £15m. Beane retorts: "Yeah. That's the biggest misconception of what we're about in Oakland: it's not just about paying the least amount ... If you buy a player for £20m, you might have significant information that he's worth £30m. When [Wayne] Rooney went from Everton to Manchester United [for about £27m], I'd say he was worth every penny and more."

Beane suspects that, like the A's, Wenger evaluates players using innovative statistics. He is not sure, he adds, because Wenger probably uses proprietary stats and models. Still, "the way he makes decisions leads you to believe he's using objective data to resist the noise that surrounds those decisions".

One day Beane hopes to meet Wenger. "For now," he says, "I'll just be an admirer from afar." So his hero works in a distant universe? "No longer. That's the beauty of the world today. It makes it a far more interesting place."