

A's News Clips, Wednesday, April 7, 2010

A's pick up first victory

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Dallas Braden did not get a well-deserved victory next to his name.

But if he continues pitching as he did Tuesday night, he'll win more than a few games this season.

The A's operated on hibernation mode offensively against the Seattle Mariners. But Mark Ellis lined a two-out game-winning single to right-center in the bottom of the 10th, scoring pinch runner Eric Patterson and giving the A's a 2-1 victory in front of a paltry announced crowd of 10,090 at the Oakland Coliseum.

The A's blew an opportunity to end the game in the ninth, coming up empty in a bases-loaded, one-out situation when Rajai Davis struck out and Daric Barton flied out.

But Kevin Kouzmanoff and Kurt Suzuki notched back-to-back singles with one out off Kanekoa Texeira (0-1) in the 10th. After Patterson entered for Kouzmanoff and Eric Chavez flied out, Ellis lined an 0-2 pitch into the gap and the A's poured out of the dugout to celebrate their first win of 2010.

They managed just five hits in Monday's opener and left 12 runners on base Tuesday.

"We would like to score six or seven times a game," Ellis said, "but if you can't, we've got to find ways to win."

Braden, beginning his second full season in the majors, turned in the best start of his career.

He gave up one run and four hits over seven innings, notching a career-high 10 strikeouts with just one walk.

After surrendering 12 hits in his final spring training tuneup, Braden had the Mariners waving at his changeup all night.

"He was about as good as I've seen him," A's manager Bob Geren said. "A couple of times he threw back-to-back (changeups), and the second one was even slower. Some of the best (changeup pitchers) when I played got you out front, and then had you out front even more with the second one."

Braden called the game "a phenomenal team win," and wasn't sulking about not pocketing a 'W' himself.

He was quick to ask reporters if any starters around the majors cracked double-digit strikeouts Monday.

They didn't, making Braden, a finesse pitcher who never had punched out more than seven in a game, the major leagues' strikeout leader.

"Write that down because it's not going to happen again," he quipped.

The only run Braden allowed came in the fourth.

Franklin Gutierrez doubled with one out and advanced to third when Braden was called for a balk. Then Braden threw a pitch in the dirt that scooted through Suzuki's legs for a wild pitch, allowing Gutierrez to score the game's first run.

Suzuki made it 1-1 in the bottom of the fourth, launching a solo homer off Seattle starter Ian Snell that cleared the out-of-town scoreboard in left-center.

The A's loaded the bases with two outs later in the inning, but Davis tapped a comebacker for the third out.

After Seattle stole three bases Monday, Geren said before Tuesday's game that he felt confident Braden could contain the Mariners' running game. On script, Braden picked Ichiro Suzuki off first with a snap throw after Suzuki led off the game with a single.

Braden had eight pickoffs in 2008 but just one last season.

Not to be overlooked: The A's bullpen has allowed no earned runs in seven innings over the first two games.

Edwar Ramirez, in his A's debut, pitched the 10th and earned Tuesday's victory.

TODAY: Mariners (Ryan Rowland-Smith 5-4 in 2009) at A's (Justin Duchscherer DNP), 7:05 p.m. TV: CSNCA. Radio: 860-AM; 1640-AM

A's update: Justin Duchscherer excited, nervous about return to mound

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Duchscherer's excited, nervous about return

Justin Duchscherer said he feels a mixture of excitement and nervousness for his first start of the season tonight against Seattle.

As he underwent treatment for clinical depression in recent months, much of Duchscherer's therapy centered on finding a healthier outlook on his baseball career.

The right-hander says he's a changed person off the field, and now he's eager to find out how things translate to the pitcher's mound.

"I think it's going to be important for me to get the first one over with," Duchscherer said. "(Pitching) is not an easy environment for me most of the time. It's stressful. And I need to learn, like I did in my personal life, a healthier way of coping within the game."

Duchscherer missed all of last season because of elbow surgery and his personal issues, so tonight marks his first regular-season appearance since Aug. 18, 2008.

Mentally, he's in uncharted territory.

Always one to heap pressure on himself before outings, Duchscherer said he's learned to scale back on the anxiety.

"Before, when things got stressful for me, I would just stop feeling," he said. "I had a way of just cutting off everything. And not only did I cut off the feelings that stressed me, I cut off everything, (including) my ability to be a friend to my teammates.

"Now I'm a more open, feeling person. (But) sometimes it scares me because it's unfamiliar."

Duchscherer made just three exhibition starts because of a lower back injury. But he was very impressive in his final tuneup Thursday against the Giants, throwing six shutout innings.

Reliever Michael Wuertz, on the disabled list with shoulder tendinitis, has been throwing for the past three days, and manager Bob Geren said he may know in the next day or two when the setup man can begin a rehab assignment with Triple-A Sacramento.

"The good thing is he only took five days off," Geren said. "If he bounces back from his long-toss program, he won't be far behind."

But fellow reliever Joey Devine, who has forearm tendinitis, still appears weeks away from returning. Devine stayed in Phoenix to take part in extended spring training as planned but is not yet throwing regularly from the mound.

A's, manager Bob Geren now see value in the running game

By Gary Peterson, Oakland Tribune columnist

It was a subdued scene Tuesday evening at the Oakland Coliseum. The faux festive bunting from Monday's season opener had been mothballed. An intimate crowd, tiny even by Monday's sub-sellout standards, broke the silence with intermittent golf claps. You could say things were back to normal.

Except there was manager Bob Geren in the Oakland dugout before his team's game against Seattle, discussing the terms and conditions under which he might prime the A's running game. As in stolen bases. During real games.

"In general our philosophy (is), if we can get a bag, we'll take it," Geren said.

The philosophy didn't necessarily apply in Tuesday night's game, which spun into extra innings with the A's owning just six hits — one of which left the yard. But it's big news that the A's are attempting stolen bases at all.

During the first 10 years of Billy Beane's reign as general manager, the A's regarded the stolen base attempt as they might a raging case of athlete's foot. It was to be avoided at all costs, given that the reward (a meager 90-foot advance) was hardly worth the potential loss of a precious out.

During that inert decade, the A's averaged 54 stolen bases per season, finishing last or next-to-last in the American League eight times. Last season the A's began to change their stripes, finishing fourth in the AL with 133 steals. Before Tuesday's game, Geren extolled the tactic as borderline fail-safe.

"You look at stolen bases and I think the average catcher only throws out between 26 and 28 percent (of base stealers)," Geren said. "More guys are going to make it than not. And the good (base stealers steal) 70 percent or higher. It's a tough play to execute. The pitcher has to do his job and the catcher has to do his job pretty close to perfectly to throw somebody out."

Why the radical change in organizational philosophy? In part because the rest of baseball adapted to Beane's view of pitch-taking wall-bangers as undervalued assets — to the extent that they're no longer undervalued. This is a problem for Beane, who never met a clearance rack he didn't like. His response? If you want to suggest that Rajai Davis is the new Jack Cust, you'll get no argument here.

Davis, for those of you who tend to lose interest once the A's are 12 games out, is the young outfielder who had a brilliant second half for Oakland last summer. Quick, fast, with a strong arm and a certain flair, Davis hit .325 after the All-Star break, with 46 runs, 42 RBIs and 30 stolen bases, essentially equaling the career totals he had amassed over two and a half seasons to that point.

Naturally, this inspired almost as many questions as answers. Could Davis do it again, over a full season? His start was auspicious — overlooked in the residual carnage of the A's opening night loss was Davis' busy evening. He had two hits, a run and a game-tying single that capped a comeback from a 3-0 deficit. His diving effort at a short fly ball deceived umpires into believing he'd actually made the catch. Which he hadn't.

But his most intriguing contribution was when he stole second base in the sixth inning, with the A's trailing 3-0. Without having the numbers in front of us, it isn't clear how many times this sort of thing happened in Beane's first 10 years of GM-ship. So let's estimate:

Never, ever, ever.

"You've got to take advantage of opportunities," Davis said. "I was able to read the pitcher well. Bottom line, we've got to score runs. It's tough to score from first. Little easier to score from second."

"Raj has obviously the best speed on the team right now," Geren said. "He had a pretty good success rate last year, and I think he's gotten better. I don't think they were expecting it."

Maybe we better start expecting it, especially when Coco Crisp returns from his broken finger. It's a sign of the times, and of a division in which the Mariners and Angels also ran with impunity last season.

"And Texas had more (stolen bases) than (both) of them," Geren said. "The whole division is running more than previous (years), that's for sure."

That goes double for the Go-Go A's. It's been a long time since normal was this ambulatory.

Top Major League Baseball official meets with San Jose mayor, Oakland A's owner to discuss team's possible move

Tracy Seipel, San Jose Mercury News, 4/6/2010

As tea-leaf watchers wait for any sign of whether Major League Baseball will bless the Oakland A's proposed move to San Jose, news that a high-ranking baseball official had stopped by San Jose City Hall Monday to have lunch with the team's owner and Mayor Chuck Reed raised a few eyebrows.

Bob DuPuy, MLB's president and chief operating officer met with Reed, A's owner Lew Wolff and Reed's chief of staff for an hour in the mayor's office.

"We talked about baseball and opening day," said Reed, adding that DuPuy, with whom he has talked on the phone before, "wanted to see San Jose in person."

DuPuy is one of two people to whom a special committee appointed by baseball Commissioner Bud Selig to study the A's stadium options is reporting. The other person is Selig himself, a college fraternity brother of Wolff's.

Reed said baseball officials "like San Jose, and they are doing their due diligence. We just have to be patient." The committee is expected to make a recommendation to Selig in the near future; San Jose officials have said they need a decision by late July in order to schedule a November ballot measure on a proposal to let the team build on city-owned land.

Wolff told the Mercury News the meeting with DuPuy "was really more of a hello —nothing earth-shaking. The process is still the process."

The committee is studying options for an A's ballpark site in Oakland, Fremont and San Jose. Committee member

Corey Busch will not say when the decision will be made and declined to talk about DuPuy's visit.

Paul Rose, spokesman for Oakland Mayor Ron Dellums, said DuPuy also contacted Dellums on Monday, but he would not discuss details.

Calls to Fremont's mayor and city manager were not returned by press time.

The Giants are fighting the A's move to San Jose, saying they own Major League Baseball's territorial rights to Santa Clara County. Those rights could be overturned if 75 percent of baseball's owners agree; such a step would likely entail some sort of financial compensation from the A's to the Giants, who say they rely heavily on the South Bay for fans and sponsors.

DuPuy was in the Bay Area to attend the A's opening home game against the Seattle Mariners, which the A's lost 5 to 3.

Wolff said that every year, MLB executives attend opening games. Selig attended the opening day of the Washington Nationals, who lost to the Philadelphia Phillies.

Pat Courtney, an MLB spokesman, declined to say why DuPuy specifically attended the A's opening game. He also declined to answer any other questions about the visit, saying only: "The committee is hard at work, but we do not comment on their day-to-day work."

Wolff said the visit with DuPuy was quick, adding that the group did not visit the proposed stadium site near the downtown Diridon train station.

"We were in the city hall, so we looked out the window," said Wolff.

A's pull out 2-1 win over Seattle Mariners

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 4/6/2010

I'm toast right about now, so just a quick blog on the A's 2-1 win before I head home:

–Bob Geren said Dallas Braden’s changeup was as good as he’s seen it. In fact, he said it was the best he’s seen Braden, period, and I’d have to agree. Braden’s outing tonight was proof that you don’t have to blow up the radar gun to be dominant. The A’s need this guy to step up, especially w/Ben Sheets still trying to find his form.

–Rajai Davis had an 0-for-5 night and stranded 7 men on base. But for the second straight night, he came up with a diving catch in center field. If you don’t get it done with the bat, it’s always good to make up for it with the glove.

–Were you surprised to see Mr. Selective, Daric Barton, swing at a 3-1 pitch and fly out in the ninth with the bases loaded? Geren said he gave Barton a take on 2-0 but was OK w/him swinging on 3-1. Geren asked Barton where the pitch was when Barton got to the dugout, and Barton said it was a perfect pitch to hit.

–Solid work by the A’s bullpen so far, which hasn’t given up an earned run in seven innings. ...

A’s reliever updates, other pregame notes

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 4/6/2010

Your much anticipated Mariners lineup:

Ichiro RF
Figgins 2B
Gutierrez CF
Bradley DH
Lopez 3B
Kotchman 1B
Byrnes LF
Moore C
Wilson SS

Snell RHP

It’s another sunny afternoon at the Coliseum as the A’s take BP. After it looked like rain might threaten Monday’s opener, we’ve actually had pretty nice weather out here. The temperature drops quite a bit when the sun goes down, but who’s gonna complain?

–Today’s random observation: The person singing the national anthem is doing a pregame soundcheck as we often see. But this I’ve never seen: The Mariners are out on the field and standing at attention for it. You can never practice your Star Spangled Banner pose enough, I suppose ...

–Updates on a couple of wounded A’s relievers: Michael Wuertz (shoulder tendinitis) is on day 3 of a throwing program that’s getting him closer to returning to the mound. Manager Bob Geren expects he might know in the next day or two when Wuertz could start his minor league rehab assignment.

Joey Devine remained in Phoenix as planned for extended spring training, but he’s not throwing regularly from the mound yet, according to Geren. So I wouldn’t be counting on his return anytime soon ...

–The A’s go with the same lineup as last night against Mariners starter Ian Snell.

Rajai CF
Barton 1B
Sweeney RF
Kouzmanoff 3B
Suzuki C
Chavez DH
Ellis 2B
Buck LF
Pennington SS

Braden LHP

I’ll post Seattle’s lineup when I see it. I better start scribbling it down when I’m in the clubhouse. ...

Ellis' walk-off single lifts A's

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

After the Mariners ran the A's ragged on Opening Night, the team's hope was that left-hander Dallas Braden would keep Seattle more honest with his killer pickoff move.

Braden picked off Seattle's first baserunner, Ichiro Suzuki, and then Braden found a new tactic: keeping the Mariners off the bags altogether by striking them out. In seven innings, Braden recorded 10 strikeouts, eclipsing his previous career high by three in the A's 2-1, 10-inning win at the Coliseum.

Braden was quick to note that he's the major-league leader in strikeouts three days into the season.

"Mark that down because it's not going to happen again," he said with a grin.

Oakland couldn't back him with enough early offense for a win, but in the 10th, Kevin Kouzmanoff and Travis Buck delivered back-to-back singles. With two outs, Mark Ellis poked a game-winning single into right to give the A's the victory.

"I was going to be aggressive in that situation," Ellis said. "I was down 0-2, but that's fine, I don't mind hitting with two strikes. He didn't get it down as much as he wanted to and I was able to drive it into right."

It was Ellis' sixth career hit to win a game in Oakland's final at-bat. The team could not capitalize on a bases-loaded, one-out situation in the ninth against Seattle rookie Kanekoa Texeira, who struck out Rajai Davis and got Daric Barton to pop up a 3-1 pitch; manager Bob Geren said he'd asked Barton if it was a good pitch to swing at and Barton replied, "It was perfect. I should have crushed it."

Davis made a terrific catch in the 10th, racing to his right and diving to grab Jack Wilson's sinking liner just before it hit the turf, ending the inning.

Good as he was, especially with his ever-varying changeup, Braden wound up contributing to Seattle's only run. After Franklin Gutierrez doubled in the fourth, a balk by Braden sent him to third (Braden disagreed with the call), then Gutierrez dashed home when a pitch in the dirt squeaked away from catcher Kurt Suzuki.

Suzuki, the team's top returning home-run hitter following Jack Cust's ouster, smacked the A's first home run of 2010, drilling a 1-1 pitch from Ian Snell to left with one out in the fourth. That was also Oakland's first hit of the game.

This is not new for Braden: In 2009, the A's scored no more than one run in 10 of his 22 starts.

After Suzuki's homer, Chavez, the A's designated hitter with Cust's departure, bounced a base hit up the middle, snapping an 0-for-20 streak that extended to last season.

The previous night, the Mariners stole three bases, and Suzuki made two throwing errors trying to prevent steals. Before Tuesday's game, he said the best way to combat that would be to keep Ichiro and Chone Figgins off the bases, but he said, "Those guys are going to go. It's inevitable."

'Excited, nervous' for return

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

In his last outing, **Justin Duchscherer** had a nice warm-up, working six shutout innings against the Giants on Thursday. Now comes his first regular-season appearance in more than a year and a half.

Duchscherer, a two-time All-Star, missed the final six weeks of 2008 with a hip injury, then all of last year with an elbow injury and then treatment for clinical depression. He is a little apprehensive about his season debut tonight.

"I'm feeling everything: excited, nervous, scared," Duchscherer said Tuesday. "I always have a little anticipatory anxiety. That's something I'm working on. It's lessening, but it's a process. I'm trying to find that fine line between putting too much pressure on myself and not enough. That's a work in progress."

Duchscherer was a bit behind the rest of the starters during the spring after a procedure to alleviate discomfort in the area of the sacroiliac joint, but his outing at AT&T Park convinced manager **Bob Geren** and the rest of the team that he's back to his old form, pinpoint control and baffling changes of speed.

Closer **Andrew Bailey** hadn't seen Duchscherer pitch in person before, and he went and got as close a look as he could when he realized that Duchscherer was dealing.

"I'd heard the myth, and it's true," Bailey marveled about Duchscherer's precision. "They should take a tape of that and show it to every 14- and 15-year old pitcher to show them you don't have to throw hard if you have great location and can change speeds."

Briefly: **Joey Devine** said he'll throw a 30-pitch bullpen session today; he hopes to throw simulated batting practice soon. ... Minor-league right-hander **Matt Wright**, expected to start for Triple-A Sacramento, has decided to play in South Korea. ... Thursday's game will air on MLB Network (Comcast Channel 412) at 12:30 p.m.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Age-less: Mark Ellis, 32, is the A's oldest player, and the team's average age is 27.16 years, the lowest figure in the majors and the A's lowest since the Opening Day roster has been available (1992). The previous youngest was 27.40 in 2008, according to Stats, Inc.

A's look to Braden to slow Seattle

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the Coliseum

Chone Figgins' fleet feet helped Seattle score at least three of their runs on Opening Night; he stole two bases and he beat a high throw from Kevin Kouzmanoff in the ninth, keeping alive what turned out to be the winning rally. Ichiro Suzuki also stole a base.

The A's did throw out Suzuki once at third (and he nearly got thrown out stealing second) and also got Milton Bradley, so manager Bob Geren said he feels pretty good about the A's efforts to limit Seattle's running game Monday - he noted that they threw over a lot, they pitched out once, they used slide steps.

"We did a lot to combat it," Geren said.

Tonight, though, Oakland has its top weapon against opposing baserunners: left-hander Dallas Braden, who has a sensational pickoff move and who is quick to the plate. And, catcher Kurt Suzuki said, the best way to keep the Mariners from running is to keep Figgins and Ichiro off the bases altogether.

"But those guys are going to go," Suzuki said. "It's inevitable."

Suzuki made two throwing errors Monday said he rushed one throw to second in an effort to get Figgins; that one wound up in center.

"I felt fine throwing," Suzuki said. "I made one throw to second (when Ichiro stole the base) that was right on the money, but sometimes, there's nothing you can do."

Here's the lineup, the same as last night: Davis CF, Barton 1B, Sweeney RF, Kouzmanoff 3B, Suzuki C, Chavez DH, Ellis 2B, Buck LF, Pennington SS

No pregame news to speak of. Michael Wuertz continues to do his long throwing program, Joey Devine continues to progress in Arizona.

We did see something during batting practice I can't recall seeing before but which the Seattle media says the Mariners do all the time: When the National Anthem singer was practicing while the A's were hitting, the Mariners stopped their on-field stretching and stood at attention until she was finished.

Most teams just continue doing their pregame activities when it's a practice National Anthem, but apparently bullpen coach John Wetteland has encouraged the Mariners to be respectful of the Anthem at all times.

UPDATE: I see there is still confusion about that first inning double play, though I'd mentioned what Geren was told in this morning's A's beat: The umpires told Geren that Barton had been tagged initially, before the throw to first (when clearly the ball was not in Figgins' glove but in his hand) and that Sweeney was out at first. There was no out of the baseline call on Barton, or failure to continue to advance or anything, just a tag (that no one else saw) to start things off. Geren never saw an out call on either of his players, but both umpires said they were made....I never saw an out call on either one, either. Well, first game for those guys, too.

Ellis delivers walk-off win for A's

Two-out single in 10th inning caps victory over Mariners

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Mark Ellis may have recorded his sixth career walk-off hit Tuesday night. And the A's may have recorded their first win of the 2010 season because of it.

But Oakland starter Dallas Braden would first like to make it known that he recorded a career-high 10 strikeouts in the game, which puts him atop the current Major League strikeout standings.

"Mark that down, because it's not going to happen again," Braden said with a smile.

Plenty smiles surfaced around the A's clubhouse following a memorable performance by Braden that was capped off with a 2-1, 10th-inning win over the visiting Mariners.

After the A's were unable to capitalize on a one-out, bases-loaded situation in the bottom of the ninth, Kevin Kouzmanoff and Kurt Suzuki got things going in the next frame with back-to-back base hits with one out against Seattle's Kanekoa Teixeira. Following an Eric Chavez flyout, Ellis lined an 0-2 pitch to right field to bring pinch-runner Eric Patterson home and his other teammates into celebratory mode on the field.

"I got down 0-2, which is fine," Ellis said. "I don't mind hitting with two strikes. He threw the pitch exactly where he wanted to, and I was able to drive it into right field."

The A's may have spoiled Teixeira's Major League debut, but they'll gladly accept the win to knot the four-game series at one game apiece.

"It was exciting," manager Bob Geren said. "We had our chances and we had an easier way to do it, and then we did it the hard way with two outs, two on base and two strikes. There was genuine and real excitement when we won that game. I know it was the second game of the year, but it felt really huge for us."

Said Braden: "As a team, to have one of your leaders out there to push us across the board for that left-hand column, it's a pretty good way to get started."

It was just as big for Braden, who was forced to settle for a no-decision after tossing seven solid innings of four-hit ball that resulted in just one run -- courtesy a balk and wild pitch -- in his first start since July 31, 2009. Aside from his rare strikeout feat, all talk was centered around one pitch.

"He had one of the best changeups I've seen him have," Geren said. "He threw many of them and still kept them out front. A couple times he had them foul it back-to-back and then he threw the third one slower. That's a good sign of a good changeup pitcher."

Also working like clockwork for Braden was his ability to tab first-pitch strikes, which kept an aggressive Mariners lineup off balance most of the night.

"Strike one tonight was the key more than anything," Braden said. "I think anytime you can put the pressure on them and plant the seed that you're going to fill up the strike zone early and often, I think that changes their approach."

He also made use of his well-known pickoff move by nailing Ichiro Suzuki at first base in the opening frame, after the speedy Mariners outfielder got on board with a single.

"I've always alluded to the fact that you have to find outs in other ways when you can't just go out and out-stuff guys," Braden said. "I know that they're an aggressive baserunning team, especially at the top of the order, but I do my homework and saw he was a little too far off, so that's when you take advantage."

Not missing a beat following Braden's outing was the A's bullpen, which combined for three innings of shutout ball. Brad Ziegler, Craig Breslow and Andrew Bailey each got in work before Edwar Ramirez pitched a perfect 10th to garner the win in his first game in green and gold.

"The bullpen seemingly picked off where they left off last year, just getting outs when they need to," Braden said. "Anytime you have the confidence that you can turn to those guys at any point in the game, that's huge."

Apart from the late-inning dramatics, the A's offense kept rather quiet against Seattle starter Ian Snell, who tossed six innings and allowed three hits and a run while walking two and fanning four. All three of the A's hits against the Mariners righty, including Suzuki's first homer of the season, came in the fourth frame.

By the time the A's walked off the field, though, they had collected nine hits -- a far better showing than the five they put up in Monday's loss. Needless to say, Geren and his club were more than pleased with the way game two went down.

"Phenomenal team win," Braden said. "Just an overall great team effort."

A's attempt to contain running Mariners

Seattle stole three bases, caught twice on Opening Night

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Leftover talk of Monday's speed-driven game between the A's and Mariners had Oakland manager Bob Geren answering questions left and right about Seattle's running ways Tuesday afternoon.

Well, mostly about how to stop them.

Cue in Tuesday starter Dallas Braden, who boasts one of baseball's most impressive pickoff moves while also working at a decent pace.

"He's very quick to the plate and also has a good move over to the bag," Geren said before the A's took on the visiting Mariners for the second of a four-game set. "So we'll be throwing over a lot."

Braden put that pickoff move to good use in the first inning Tuesday. After Ichiro Suzuki led off the game with a single, Braden nabbed him at first base.

Seattle second baseman Chone Figgins helped the Mariners score three of their runs on Monday, including the go-ahead run in the ninth that sealed his club's Opening Night victory. He stole two bases and forced three rare A's throwing errors, including two by Kurt Suzuki and one by Kevin Kouzmanoff, who made three total last year.

At the same time, Geren noted that Suzuki did catch two stealing and his team as a whole "did a lot to combat [their speed.]"

"We're going to be playing a lot of aggressive teams," the A's skipper said. "So we have to be just as aggressive."

Injured Wuertz eager to return

OAKLAND -- If Michael Wuertz had his way, he'd already be on the mound.

The A's right-hander, however, knows that his shoulder probably wouldn't agree.

So Wuertz will patiently wait for the green light from bullpen coach Ron Romanick, who has been guiding the pitcher's throwing schedule since he was placed on the 15-day disabled list Saturday with right shoulder tendinitis.

"I've never been on the DL before," Wuertz said Tuesday. "So it's tough just watching when you can't do anything."

Wuertz has thrown twice since joining four other A's pitchers on the DL, and plans on gradually increasing the distance each time out. He was scheduled to throw again Tuesday night. When he'll make his 2010 debut, though, is very much unknown.

"I'm hoping to get on the mound in the next couple days," Wuertz said, "but it's hard to tell when I'll be back in a game. If it was up to me, I'd be out there pitching right now."

Wuertz, sidelined with shoulder soreness all spring, made just one exhibition appearance before being scratched from his next outing due to the same problem -- one that's possibly a result of the work he gave the 2009 club.

Last year, the Oakland righty went 6-1 with four saves and a 2.63 ERA in a team-leading 74 appearances, which tied him for eighth-most in Oakland history. He also led American League relievers and tied for second in the Majors with a career-high 102 strikeouts.

Worth noting

Joey Devine, who underwent Tommy John surgery last April, is taking part in extended Spring Training in Arizona to continue rehabilitation of his right elbow. The A's reliever, who is working his way up to facing hitters, said he hopes to be back on the mound in Oakland by the third week of April at the earliest. ... Daric Barton tied an Oakland Opening Day record with three walks Monday night. The A's first baseman led the Majors with 22 walks this spring, which were the most walks by an Oakland player since spring stats were first available in 1991. ... Among the A's players sporting new numbers this year are Gabe Gross (No. 18) and Cliff Pennington (No. 2).

Ellis comes through for A's with game-winning hit in 10th

AP, 4/7/2010

OAKLAND – Mark Ellis hit a game-ending RBI single with two outs in the 10th inning, lifting the Athletics to a 2-1 victory over the Seattle Mariners on Tuesday night.

Edwar Ramírez pitched the 10th to earn his first win since Sept. 3, 2008, when he was with the New York Yankees.

Kanekoa Texeira took the loss in his major league debut.

A's starter Dallas Braden struck out a career-high 10 in seven innings, giving up a run on four hits and a walk.

Mariners starter Ian Snell lasted six innings, giving up one run and three hits. He walked two and struck out four.

With one out in the fourth, Franklin Gutierrez doubled to left field and advanced to third base on a balk call when Braden attempted a pickoff.

Braden, who earlier picked off Ichiro Suzuki at first base with a similar move, may have been a little rattled by the balk call.

He promptly unleashed a wild pitch that enabled Gutierrez to scamper home with the game's first run.

Kurt Suzuki tied the game in the bottom of the inning with his first home run of the season, hitting a 1-1 pitch into the left-field bleachers.

Snell retired eight of nine batters before Suzuki's home run.

Eric Chavez and Ellis followed with singles and Cliff Pennington walked to load the bases. Snell retired Rajai Davis on a comebacker to end the rally and set down the final seven batters he faced.

Teixeira, a Rule 5 draft pick, had a dramatic ninth inning and pitched out of a bases-loaded jam.

After Chavez flied out to center to lead off, the right-hander gave up a single to Ellis and Travis Buck's double. Pennington was walked intentionally to load the bases.

Teixeira then escaped by striking out Davis and getting Daric Barton to fly out to left field after falling behind in the count.

Derailed by Depression, Justin Duchscherer Set to Return to Mound

Jeff Fletcher, aol.com, 4/7/2010

OAKLAND -- This ought to be one of the big moments of Justin Duchscherer's life. Just don't try and tell him that.

Duchscherer will take the ball as the starting pitcher for the Oakland A's on Wednesday night against the Seattle Mariners, his first appearance in a big-league game since August 2008. In the 19 months since, Duchscherer overcame an elbow injury, which isn't that unusual. He's also overcome a publicized bout with depression, which is rare in the tough-guy world of professional sports.

Part of Duchscherer's recovery is to keep baseball in perspective, which is why he has tried not to put too much significance into one game, one start, no matter how long it took him to get here.

"If I make it a bigger deal than it really is, all that's going to do is add pressure to me," Duchscherer told FanHouse. "I experienced over the last few years that adding pressure to myself is not useful."

While Duchscherer insists that he feels no different than he did before any of his other 219 appearances in the majors, he can't run from the fact that this will be a significant milestone.

Eight months ago, Duchscherer was almost ready to return to the mound after rehabilitating from elbow surgery, when he was overcome by emotions that essentially paralyzed him. He was too shaken to board a flight from Phoenix to Sacramento, where he was to make one minor-league appearance before returning to the majors. Instead, right there at the airport, Duchscherer called a psychologist and asked for help.

What followed was a public admission that he was suffering from clinical depression. After months of treatment and introspection about what caused those emotions, Duchscherer is ready to return to baseball.

"Unless you are in my circumstances, you can't understand the process that's taken me to this point," Duchscherer said. "It's hard to explain. The biggest thing I feel is pride, for me to get through the injuries and the emotional stuff, to be able to stay strong enough to get back into this position."

The 32-year-old grew up in dusty West Texas and ascended to the top level of his sport despite the fact that he couldn't throw as hard as most major league pitchers. His ability to put the ball precisely where he wanted it and to make it dance was what made him successful. He made the All-Star team in 2006, as a relief pitcher, and again in 2008, as a starter. His career earned run average of 3.14 ranks him among baseball's best pitchers. The only knock on him was that he'd spent too much time on the disabled list.

That's just where Duchscherer was 12 months ago. He'd had elbow problems at the end of 2008 and a setback in his recovery in spring training of 2009. He had to have surgery. When the rest of the A's left Arizona to begin the season,

Duchscherer stayed back to rehab his elbow.

It was in those weeks that Duchscherer's life caught up to him. Without the daily demands of a Major League Baseball season and the company of 24 teammates, he was left in a hotel room, alone, to think.

About his divorce. About his son, who lived on the other side of the country with the boy's mother. About issues from his parents divorce that he'd buried since he was a little boy.

By August, just when Duchscherer was about ready to rejoin his team, it got to be too much. He was at the airport when he called Dr. Ray Karesky, a psychologist who works with the A's Employee Assistance Program.

"I was just overwhelmed," Duchscherer said. "It stemmed from when I was five years old. There were a lot of things I was taught, and dysfunction in my family. I was operating with a lot of things that were unhealthy for me. For example, putting up walls and not really being me. That moment I said 'Something is not right. I need to address this.'"

Duchscherer doesn't want you feel sorry for him, as if he had some rare disease. Just the opposite. Duchscherer dealt with a condition that is fairly common. Millions of Americans suffer from depression, often undiagnosed because people are too embarrassed to seek help.

After Duchscherer came forward, he had all sorts of people -- family members, fellow players, total strangers -- approach him to tell him that they had some of the same issues.

"I've had people come up to me who said 'I had such and such, a brother or a husband, and he was going through depression and we didn't realize what it was until we read the story about you,'" Duchscherer said. "'We realized he was going through the same thing. He got help and now he's doing much better.'"

There are medications for depression, but Duchscherer didn't take those because he didn't like how they made him feel. Instead, he kept up a dialogue with Karesky. To this day, Duchscherer still talks to him. Treatment is an ongoing issue.

A big part of Duchscherer's recovery has simply been the support he's gotten from teammates, who were largely oblivious to Duchscherer's emotional problems before he went public last August.

"A lot of times you don't see what people are going through," said second baseman [Mark Ellis](#), his teammate since 2003. "I was glad the organization stuck by him. It's something he had internally. I think it's good for him to let it out, and let people know what he's going through."

[Eric Chavez](#), also a teammate since 2003, said that Duchscherer's admission helped pull back "the blanket over sports figures." Fans and the public view athletes as young rich men who lead perfect lives, Chavez said.

"It was good to bring that awareness," Chavez said. "That was a hurdle that we needed to get over. It speaks volumes for people to see that we have the same problems as they do. ... They can't relate to a guy who has no problems. If they see us for who we really are, they can relate to us."

Duchscherer's main issues were related to his personal life, his failed marriage and infrequent time with his six-year-old son, but the pressures of the major leagues were affecting him on the field too. Even though he was a successful pitcher, he focused on what he did wrong, rather than what he did right. He was frustrated by his injuries and angry at people who suggested that they represented a flaw, that he was injury-prone or not tough enough to pitch with pain.

"This is not an easy environment," he said. "There are reporters and cameras and when you fail, everybody knows it. I just had to learn to accept myself. If I fail, I fail. I can't judge myself and criticize myself because I've gotten pretty far and done pretty well. The difference is realizing that and accepting and cherishing that I am in a big-league locker room with an opportunity, instead of 'God I have to be perfect.'"

Off the field, Duchscherer has surrounded himself with positive people, including his fiancée, Mandy, who he will marry in November. She helped him get through his lows last year, and she now reminds him of what's important, beyond how many games he wins or loses.

"If I keep the personal and emotional stuff in a healthy perspective, that will help me [perform better]," he said. "Ultimately, I'm more concerned with my life, being a good father and a good person and those kind of things. The baseball stuff will take care of itself."

Oakland A's trade in bats for speed on the bases

By: Kyle Szymanski, Spartan Daily 4/7/2010

If you like watching home runs fly out of stadiums, you would be wise to stay away from the Oakland-Alameda Coliseum during baseball season this year.

The Oakland A's have traded in the big bats and will attempt to win the American League West, using a finesse style of baseball.

If the A's can generate enough offense with a limited amount of power hitters in their lineup and their young pitching rotation develops and veterans hold up, the A's could have a shot at getting out of the cellar of the American League West.

Pitching:

The success of the A's pitching staff could rest on the shoulders of newly acquired starting pitcher Ben Sheets. The \$10 acquisition Sheets and Justin Duchscherer will anchor an otherwise young pitching staff that includes second-year players Brett Anderson, Trevor Cahill and Dallas Braden.

Anderson, who went 11-11 last year, and Cahill, who went 10-13, along with Braden and possible fifth starter Gio González have a good chance of improving when considering the organization's reputation for developing young pitching.

Sheets is a proven ace at the top of a rotation with a devastating curveball and above-average fastball, but is also coming off elbow surgery that kept him out of the '09 campaign.

He was terrible in spring training with an 11.20 ERA in five appearances, which doesn't bode well for the hopes of A's fans.

Duchscherer is a two-time all-star, but comes into 2010 having not pitched in 2009 because of an elbow injury and treatment of clinical depression.

The A's have one of the best young closers in the game in Andrew Bailey. Bailey was the A's only all-star in 2009 and finished last season with a 1.84 ERA in 68 appearances.

Brad Ziegler, who finished 2009 with a 3.07 ERA, is a suitable late-inning option, despite only converting seven saves in 10 opportunities in 2009.

Prospects:

Vin Mazzaro and Josh Outman will be waiting in the wings if any of the starters struggle or become injured during the season.

Mazzaro had a 6.28 ERA in 14 innings of work in spring training, but has been inconsistent his entire career and should see time on the big-league roster at some point this season.

Hitting:

The surprising release of Jack Cust over the weekend proves the A's devotion to speed players, such as outfielder Rajai Davis and newly acquired Coco Crisp.

Don't expect the A's to produce many home runs, but what they lack in power they will make up with speed. Davis, Crisp, outfielder Ryan Sweeney, second baseman Mark Ellis and shortstop Cliff Pennington are all threats to steal bases.

Most of the A's power offense will come via newly acquired third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff and catcher Kurt Suzuki, but don't expect either of them to surpass 20 home runs. The duo will drive in at least 80 RBI's a piece.

The return of Eric Chavez after two injury-riddled seasons may provide the A's a lift offensively, but don't count on it.

Prospects:

First baseman Chris Carter was the MLB Minor League Hitter of the Year in 2009 and figures to spend considerable time with the Athletics throughout the season. He finished the season with a .329 average, 28 homers and 115 RBIs.

Infielder Adrian Cardenas, the National High School Player of the Year in 2006, who was acquired from the Phillies in the Joe Blanton trade, could be worth watching as he is one good year away from being called up to the big leagues.

Verdict:

Only time will tell whether the big offseason transactions of Sheets and Kouzmanoff will pay dividends for the A's.

Despite having a wealth of speed to work with and a lineup composed of selective hitters, the A's will struggle to generate offense this season.

This weakness, combined with the uncertainty of Duchscherer and Sheets, leaves too many questions marks for A's to be serious contenders in the West.

Ross Makes Oakland Homecoming

Ryan Gorcey, BearTerritory.net, 4/5/2010

OAKLAND, Calif.-The last time that I saw Tyson Ross, he and the rest of the Cal baseball team were still reeling from being eliminated from the 2008 NCAA Baseball Tournament. Ross knew that that would be the last time he ever put on a Bears uniform.

We said our goodbyes, with me thanking Ross and several other members of that team for the time I had covering them for three seasons, and Ross saying that he hoped that, one day, I'd be able to interview him again. I told him, "I hope it's before a major league game."

And today, there he was, striding into the home locker room at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum, a bounce in his step and a smile on his face that could span the entire Golden Gate. I was expecting a handshake. What I got was a hug.

"Well, here you are," smiles Ross, remembering that day over a year and a half ago, as he sits down at a table in the center of the Oakland Athletics' locker room. In about three hours, he'll take the field as a Major League player.

"I had no clue how long it would take," says Ross. "I believed it would happen, I just didn't know how long."

As it turned out, it took exactly 675 days from the last time Ross put on the blue and gold, to today, when he pulls on the green and gold for the first time in a big league game.

When Ross got the news on Saturday that he would make the A's Opening Day roster, he called every family member he could think of, and just couldn't wipe the smile off his face. As tall as Ross is-a towering 6-foot-6-he got a little extra altitude from all those clouds he was walking on. Good thing the clubhouse has high clearance.

Before finding out that he would begin this season in The Show, Ross found out that his former teammate, Allen Craig, would also be making his first big league roster with the St. Louis Cardinals.

"I texted (Allen) the other day," he said. "When I found out that he made the team, I texted him like a day or two before I found out I made the team," said Ross. "That's pretty special."

But while Craig had a good feeling that he'd be breaking camp with the Cardinals, Ross was thought by many to just be in camp to get some more experience before being sent out to Triple-A Sacramento.

"Honestly, even in the Bay Bridge Series, I wasn't really thinking too much about it," said Ross about the possibility of making the A's. When he came north with the team, he just thought that he'd be in the Bay for two, maybe three days. "I just thought, hey, if they like me, maybe I'll hang around and get more experience working with the coaching staff and the catchers and get a feel for them all, but it wasn't until they told me that I was even really thinking about making the team or not."

Ross will fill Oakland's need for a long righty out of the bullpen, at least at first. His repertoire is just as impressive as it was in college, which should lead to some starting nods on the bump as the season wears on.

"I'm pretty much still throwing five or six right now, but it's all about throwing strikes and keeping the hitters off-balance," says Ross. "I don't throw the curve anymore. It's just pretty much slider, cutter for my breaking stuff, and my sinker's got a whole lot better since I was in college. I'm working on a change-up too."

Ross has also worked a bit on his motion during his time in the minors, extending his abbreviated stride in order to stave off potential injury. The switch has brought some unexpected boons, as well.

"They've worked on it a little bit and it's really helped my control and added a little bit of velocity, too," says Ross, who has shown a 93-95 mph fastball over his last several outings.

Sitting at his locker, with a No. 66 jersey hanging just below an engraved placard that bears his name, the 22-year-old Ross is perfectly calm. No rookie jitters, no butterflies. At least, not yet.

"I think, as soon as I get out there, under those lights, it'll hit me. First pitch, it'll kind of sink in a little bit. I'm looking forward to it," says Ross. "It's a new challenge and a great opportunity."

But before he gets his first pitch in, there's the Opening Day ritual of team introductions, where Ross will stand on the third base line in front of his hometown crowd.

"It's going to be a special moment," said Ross, who took the field three hours later at 6:55 p.m. "I'm just going to be so happy that my parents and my brother are going to be there to see. It's going to be something else."

Ross's younger brother Joe, who will be in attendance, is quite a talent himself, playing both third base and pitcher for his brother's alma mater-Bishop O'Dowd.

"He's good, man, he's really good," beams Tyson. "He's a junior right now, so he's still got a year, but he's trying to decide between Cal and UCLA right now. He'll be around the Pac-10 most likely."

As it stands, the two still live under the same roof, as Tyson bunks at his parents' house until he can find a place of his own. At least the commute will be easy.

"Obviously, once the season gets going, I'll be spending a lot of time here (at the stadium) and on the road, so it's pretty much just a bed at my parents'," Ross said.

And even though today, he woke up in that bed a major leaguer, he's still the same quiet and humble kid he was when I first craned my neck up to find out just how far up he kept going.

"It was nothing special, just the same as every morning. Got up, ate some breakfast, played with my dog," said Ross. "But there was something different about it."

Yeah. Wonder what it was.

Poor fundamentals cost A's in season opener

By Giovanni Albanese Jr., Tri City Voice, 4/5/2010

Seattle made a slew of off season acquisitions, including picking up ace pitcher Cliff Lee, versatile Chone Figgins and Milton Bradley, but it was newcomer Casey Kotchman who made an Opening Day splash for the Mariners in their 5-3 win over the Oakland Athletics at the Coliseum.

With two outs and the bases loaded, Kotchman slapped a 3-2 Andrew Bailey pitch into left-center to drive in Rob Johnson and Ichiro Suzuki, giving the M's the go-ahead and insurance runs in the top of the ninth.

Kotchman had a 2-4 night, driving in a team-high four runs in his first game with the club. Meanwhile, Figgins and Bradley went hitless in six at bats.

"It's a good night for us. We got a 'W' and that's what you want to do," said Kotchman about the team's opening-night victory. "Especially when you get a good performance from Felix (Hernandez), you don't want it to go to waste."

Kotchman's game-winning hit would have never been possible if it weren't for a throwing error by Kevin Kouzmanoff. What seemed to be the final out of the Mariners' ninth inning on a groundout by Chone Figgins turned into a bases loaded situation for Kotchman when Kouzmanoff sailed the throw to first.

Kotchman was able to capitalize on his opportunity. Bailey struckout Bradley to end the inning but then David Aardsma pitched a one-two-three bottom half of the ninth to notch his first save and secure the victory for Seattle.

Brandon League was credited with the victory for Seattle in his one-inning relief stint in the eighth; Brad Ziegler was responsible for the runners who plated for the Mariners in the ninth, and picked up the loss for the A's.

Felix Hernandez started for Seattle and pitched strong, despite getting the no decision. Hernandez went six and two-thirds, allowing three runs on three hits while striking out four and walking six. Hernandez did, however, blow a 3-0 lead.

While Hernandez tired as he went deeper into the game, Oakland starter Ben Sheets seemed to pick up his play as he went deeper. Sheets was pitching his first game since 2008.

"He's not his best (right now)," said A's manager Bob Geren. "His fastball is there; his curveball is there. He's really close."

Seattle got to Sheets early, scoring single runs in each of the first three innings. In the top of the first, Casey Kotchman smacked a double to right-center, scoring M's newcomer Chone Figgins from second to make it 1-0; Rob Johnson smashed a two-out solo homerun to double the Mariners' lead to 2-0; and in the third, Kotchman plated Figgins again, this time on a sacrifice fly to left.

Oakland finally scratched its way onto the scoreboard in the sixth. Rajai Davis reached base on a fielder's choice and proceeded to steal second and reach third on a Hernandez wild pitch. Ryan Sweeney drove in Davis on a sharp single to centerfield, cutting the M's lead to 3-1. But Kevin Kouzmanoff grounded into an inning-ending double play, putting a halt to the rally.

Hernandez tired quickly, letting the A's back into the game in the seventh. After retiring the first two batters of the inning on groundouts, Hernandez got wild, walking Mark Ellis and Travis Buck before getting the hook.

Sean White relieved Hernandez and gave up an RBI singles to Cliff Pennington and Davis, which tied the game up at 3-3. Pennington was thrown out at third, but not before Buck crossed the plate to tie the game.

"That's probably the ballgame," said Pennington. "I needed to stop (going around second), but I didn't."

Game notes: Prior to the game, A's closer Andrew Bailey was honored with his 2009 Rookie of the Year award; and St. Mary's College men's basketball team was honored for its run into the Sweet 16 of the NCAA DI Tournament. Attendance: 30,686. Time of game: 2 hours, 47 minutes. Umpires: Tim Tschida, home plate; Bob Davidson, first base; Alfonso Marquez, second base; and Mike Muchlinski, third base.