

A's head to Wrigley Field, much to delight of players

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Craig Breslow has a list of ballparks in which he hopes to pitch before his career ends, and the left-handed reliever gets a chance to check off a big one tonight.

The A's begin a three-game series against the Cubs at Wrigley Field, their first visit to the legendary Chicago stadium since 2004. That three-game series, in which the Cubs won two, marks the only time the two franchises have met each other in the regular season. The Philadelphia A's beat the Cubs in five games in both the 1910 and 1929 World Series.

Only one current A's player was on their 2004 roster, but second baseman Mark Ellis missed that entire season with a shoulder injury and didn't make the trip. Several current players spent time in the National League and have played games at Wrigley. But for others, this will be their first game at 96-year-old park.

"Having had a chance to play at Dodger Stadium and the old Yankee Stadium, I feel like it's the one storied park that I haven't played in," Breslow said.

Interleague play has its detractors, but it does provide teams the opportunity to visit stadiums they otherwise wouldn't see during the regular season. And the general feeling among A's players is that the next three games will be a special experience.

"We're lucky, because we get to go to Yankee Stadium and Fenway Park all the time," Ellis said. "But to get to go to Wrigley, I'm looking forward to that. I'm kind of disappointed we have two night games. You think of Wrigley Field, you think of playing day games."

A's first baseman Daric Barton hardly considers himself a baseball history buff, but playing in the majors' landmark stadiums resonates with him. He said one of the highlights of his career, so far, was signing his name on the inside wall of Fenway's Green Monster, a players tradition.

"I found a blank spot (to sign), and that's something I'll remember the rest of my life," Barton said.

Many A's have heard stories of the Wrigley atmosphere — how the party begins when fans file in for batting practice and continues after the game in the many bars surrounding the residential ballpark.

Reliever Michael Wuertz, who played for the Cubs from 2004-08, spent one season living in an apartment on Addison Street, about three blocks from Wrigley.

"Living close to the stadium and walking to the field every morning, you see people out walking around, waiting to get tickets," Wuertz said. "The fans are kind of hard to explain. If you're not doing well, they let you know about it. And if you're doing well, they'll let you know about that, too. That's the difference between playing (in Oakland) and playing in Chicago. You walk anywhere in (Chicago) and you get recognized, even if you are a middle reliever."

Infielder Adam Rosales, who grew up in Park Ridge, Ill., attended his first game at Wrigley when he was 6. He played there in 2008 and 2009 while with the Reds.

"I remember my first at-bat at Wrigley," he said. "I saw the big green scoreboard out there. I saw where I used to sit in the stands. It was unreal."

Although reliever Brad Ziegler looks forward to this series, he said the ballpark experience was more special — at any stadium — before he wore a big league uniform.

"To me, that stuff's cool, but that's kind of the fan side of me," Ziegler said. "I still love the game very much, but I'm not as much a fan of other teams and other ballparks like I was whenever I wasn't affiliated with a team."

Breslow said he'll have to avoid getting swept up in Wrigley's nostalgia once he takes the mound. But he'll relish the experience.

"In 30 or 40 years, it'll be great to explain to my grandchildren that I (played) at Fenway Park and Wrigley Field."

Poole: Giants GM Brian Sabean is winning this year's Bay Area front-office competition

By Monte Poole, Bay Area News Group

With the A's and Giants biannual series of six games being split precisely, all going to the home team, nobody earned the pleasure of boasting.

Not about the results submitted by the field soldiers.

The work of the generals, however, is another matter entirely.

It is becoming apparent as we slide toward summer that the efforts of San Francisco general manager Brian Sabean are paying considerably higher dividends than those of Oakland's Billy Beane.

Though the Giants' 6-2 victory Sunday at AT&T Park completed a three-game sweep of the A's — negating an A's sweep three weekends ago at the Coliseum — the more compelling evidence for and against the work of the GMs in 2010 came from the booming bats of Aubrey Huff and Juan Uribe.

They combined Sunday for three home runs and five RBIs. More to the point, Huff and Uribe are providing the Giants with a makeshift "heart of the order" the likes of which the A's haven't exhibited in four years.

Sabean spent the offseason scouring the free-agent market for offense and bought, in order, Mark DeRosa (two years, \$12 million), Uribe (who re-signed for one year, \$3.25 mil) and Huff (one year, \$3 mil).

With plenty of revenue-sharing cash available, Beane spent the offseason shopping for an ace and an outfielder. His major purchases were Ben Sheets, coming off major surgery, at a salary of \$10 million, and Coco Crisp, also coming off injury, at a salary of \$5 million.

DeRosa and Crisp haven't played much because of injuries. Sheets is 2-6 with a 4.93 ERA; he was the losing pitcher Saturday night. Huff (10 homers, 33 RBIs, .303 average, .395 on-base percentage) and Uribe (10, 41, .290, .356) have given the offensively challenged Giants more than they could have imagined.

"I'd hate to think about where we'd be without 'em," Giants manager Bruce Bochy said. "I don't want to think about it."

Huff launched a two-run shot off Vin Mazzaro in the bottom of the sixth, giving the Giants a 3-1 lead.

Uribe followed with a blast to left, making it 4-1.

When the A's closed it to 4-2 in the eighth, Huff whacked another two-run shot in the bottom of the inning.

Yet Sheets and Uribe and Huff were available to all 30 teams, the last two at clearance prices.

Uribe signed on Jan. 5 and, five days later, Huff reached agreement with the Giants. Neither deal made as much of a splash as Beane's signing of Sheets on Jan. 27.

That's because when a whiny, tightfisted franchise like the A's throws nearly a quarter of its payroll at a pitcher hoping to resuscitate his career, it has a way of raising eyebrows. Few notice, though, when careful spenders like the Giants pay for three solid but rarely spectacular bats.

"It's the only (offer) I had," Huff said. "It was getting late, into mid-January, so I had no choice."

Though he barely blinked at the dimensions at AT&T, which have a way of intimidating power hitters, especially those who swing from the left side, Huff now concedes it took a month or so to get over the effects of the yard.

"First month of the season, I tried to beat it," he said. "I got in some bad habits.

"I just gave up (on trying to pull the ball), said I'm going to try to hit .300 this year."

Uribe, having spent last year in San Francisco, knew what to expect. After becoming one of the team's primary offensive weapons, he opted to become a free agent. Listening for the sound of coins dropping, he heard crickets.

He came back to the Giants.

"This team, this club," he said, "I like it."

Huff batted third Sunday, Uribe fourth. They're tied for the team lead in home runs. Uribe leads in RBIs, Huff in average and slugging (.531). They're on pace for a combined 50 homers and 190 RBIs, giving the Giants the kind of punch the A's simply don't have.

Yet their value doesn't end there. I asked winning pitcher Matt Cain where the Giants would be without Huff and Uribe, and his initial response was completely unrelated to anything either does with a bat.

"Probably not as funny," Cain said. "Those guys bring such a different character in the clubhouse."

Huff and Uribe are the clubhouse clowns. They crack jokes, pull pranks, talk trash. Uribe, 31, does it with a grin; Huff, 33, with a twinkle in his eye.

Fans may not be able to gloat about either team, but we have a clear leader in the front-office competition. It's up to Sabeen to grin or keep it to a twinkle.

A'S

'It's time' - Barton reaching promise

[Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer](#)

Daric Barton is finally fulfilling the potential everyone believed he had when he first came up in the fall of 2007. He's consistent, he's reliable, he truly has become a team player.

At 24, he has grown up.

After two seasons of erratic results and lengthy slumps, how did this transformation take place? Did Barton change his approach at the plate? Tinker with his swing?

No, said Barton. The changes he made were in his life, and, for that, he credits a trip to the golf course during spring training and Casey Chavez, the A's bullpen catcher and Eric Chavez's younger brother.

"We'd started talking about things while we were playing golf one day, and the next week I was out on the golf course again, and I got a text message from Casey when I was on the 13th hole," the A's first baseman said. "He invited me to Bible study and it wasn't even a question in my mind. I was like, 'Yeah, I'll be there.' I didn't even finish the round.

"God showed himself through Casey. I got saved and that was a turning point for me, mentally and physically, knowing there's more to life than baseball."

Barton said he'd done a lot of thinking in the offseason and said he realized that he had forgotten who he was - he felt as if he was trying to be someone else, and he wasn't fulfilling his potential, either as a person or as a player. He knew something was missing, and it was just by sheer chance that Chavez started discussing faith with him that day on the golf course.

"It was so random," Chavez said. "Some coaches and I were just trying to fill out a foursome and Daric and I wound up sharing a cart. We weren't even talking that much, but one of the coaches was saying to me, 'So, you don't do this anymore? You don't do that anymore?' And I could tell Barty was paying attention. I said, 'Yeah, I don't go out anymore, I don't drink anymore, I'm happier than I've ever been.' I knew Barty heard it."

Barton said he found in the Bible study group the answers he was looking for. The others in the group shared stories of searching for more meaning, and finding it in the Bible rather than in nightlife and some of the other temptations of youth and of fame and riches. Barton hadn't ever been an out-of-control partier, but he's a fun-loving guy and he certainly had done his share of hitting the town on occasion. That has come to an end.

"I was probably going down a road I shouldn't," Barton said. "Sometimes I was even playing better when I was going out every night. I was single, I was loving life, I went with the flow.

"I don't regret it at all, I had a lot of fun, but it's time - I'd played parts of three seasons and I hadn't established myself as a player. This has been my most important year. I really think I took what I had for granted - that's something I thought about this offseason. Because it's more than just about ability, it's about preparation and about off-field habits."

Casey Chavez sees the changes that Barton's newfound faith has wrought in his personal life and in his professional life.

"He has such confidence about him," Chavez said. "It's fun to watch someone who really enjoys what they're doing, and getting better at it."

Barton said he was trying so hard to be something he wasn't that he'd lost some of his love for the game. Now he has focused anew on being the player he believes he is - he's not getting himself out early in the count as he was the past two seasons, something that was the result, he said, of being too worried about striking out.

He's also added another element to his game. Barton felt as if he was letting the team down too much the past two seasons by failing to move runners from second to third with nobody out. So this year he's bunting in those situations. He has nine sacrifice bunts already. No A's player had more than five all of last year, and the Oakland record is 22 (Dwayne Murphy, 1980).

None of Barton's bunts have been called. He said he's doing it on his own.

"It's not expected of me, but if there's an important run early in the game, I want to take advantage of it, get the momentum on our side," he said. "It's pretty much ingrained in me, at all costs, get that runner over. And it's worked well."

"That's Barty," hitting coach Jim Skaalen said. "Team first, a professional in all areas."

Barton said he wants to prove to the A's that they were right to have faith in him. He knows that he got extended time over the past two years to show his worth, even when he might not have deserved it. He said getting sent down to the minors last year was another big step in his maturation process.

"Baseball will humble you real fast," he said. "They sent me down last year, and that was the best thing that ever could happen. The A's have given me every chance, and hopefully now I'm doing everything I can for them."

Barton's stats

Year	AB	HR	RBI	BA	OBP
2007	72	4	8	.347	.429
2008	446	9	47	.226	.327
2009	160	3	24	.269	.372

2010 231 4 23 .281 .394
Career 909 20 102 .257 .360

A's leading off

Susan Slusser. San Francisco Chronicle

Making strides: Coco Crisp (ribcage) will go to Triple-A Sacramento tonight for a rehab assignment; he could return to the A's this week. Right-hander Dan Giese (elbow surgery) joined Sacramento on Monday.

Drumbeat: Coco Crisp update, and Dan Giese heads to Sacramento

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser 6/14/2010 1:05PM

Coco Crisp is over the flu and he'll play in an extended spring game in Arizona today, then he'll go to Triple-A Sacramento tomorrow, according to A's assistant general manager David Forst. Crisp has played in only two games with Oakland this year because of a fractured pinkie and then a ribcage strain. After Rajai Davis' game-ending base-running gaffe yesterday - which earned Davis an earful from manager Bob Geren - it will be interesting to see how playing time breaks down for everyone in the outfield upon Crisp's return, which could be as soon as this weekend in St. Louis.

I just spoke to right-hander Dan Giese, who had Tommy John surgery just over a year ago (June 9, 2009) but who is already heading out on a rehab assignment. He's driving to Triple-A Sacramento right now, and he expects he'll be pitching in relief because he's not stretched out enough to start yet. The A's used him as a long man/spot starter before he was injured last year.

It's been slower going for two other pitchers who have had elbow ligament replacement surgeries; Joey Devine is pitching in simulated games at extended spring training, while Josh Outman has had some flexor tendon discomfort lately, which is what Devine experienced a month and a half ago. Outman had his surgery last June, two months later than Devine did.

Devine had platelet-rich plasma injections after that, and he believes that helped with the soreness. He is hoping he'll go on a rehab assignment before the end of this month.

Brett Tomko, who had a nerve problem in his right arm, is also close to going on a rehab assignment, and I know Travis Buck (oblique) was hopeful he'd be heading out soon, too, when I spoke to him last week.

The A's head to Chicago today to begin a three-game series with the Cubs tomorrow. There are some Oakland players pretty excited about going there, especially infielder Adam Rosales, who is from the North Side and who grew up a Cubs fan. Rosales is planning to spend at least one night at his parents' home, but he's going to keep his pass list a little smaller this year. Last year, when he was with the Reds, he had more than 90 people on his list over the course of three games.

Michael Wuertz also was looking forward to going back to Chicago after five seasons with the Cubs.

"That's where I got my first opportunity in the big leagues," he said. "I have a lot of good friends there. It will be nice to go back there and see it from a different perspective."

The Wrigley fans can be tough, Wuertz said, but he liked that.

"They're passionate," he said. "When things are going well, they love you and when you're struggling, they'll let you know, and there's nothing wrong with that. It makes you want to perform better. ... Playing there helped me as a person and as a player."

HBO's "Real Sports" will include a piece on Dallas Braden next Tuesday, June 22, at 10 p.m. Pacific.

Cubs look to put up runs vs. A's

By Matt Fortuna / MLB.com

Carlos Zambrano will be making his third start Tuesday since his return from the bullpen, but it's the bats behind him that are of bigger concern for the Cubs.

The Cubs entered Sunday's game against the White Sox just 5-for-37 with runners in scoring position in their previous five games. They went 1-for-1 with RISP in Sunday's dramatic 1-0 win against the Sox.

Overall, the Cubs' offense scored just seven total runs in three against their crosstown rivals, and they hope for more success at home against the Athletics.

"It's hard to play perfect games and when you're not scoring runs, and any little thing that happens on the field becomes magnified," manager Lou Piniella said before Sunday's nationally televised contest. "If you had seven or eight runs on the board, well, a guy missed a tag at second base."

Piniella was referring to the Cubs' final run surrendered Saturday. In the seventh inning, Juan Pierre avoided Starlin Castro's tag at second on a steal before Paul Konerko drove him home with a single. It proved costly, as it put the White Sox up 2-0 and the Cubs managed just one run in the ninth.

"We would talk about it tomorrow and get it corrected," Piniella said. "We did that today. The tarp was on the field but we did it out in the outfield and you correct the thing. Boy, when it costs you a ballgame, that's the play that you talk about or a ball falls somewhere or a play isn't made."

"Look, that's the way this game is. That's why I say if you want to put together something consistently winning wise, you have to score runs. I think we talk about this and we talk about that. Yesterday we were 1-for-10 with men in scoring position. Six strikeouts. When you're striking out, you're not advancing runners either."

The Cubs will look to do better against Oakland right-hander Trevor Cahill.

"You've got to score runs and when you're not scoring runs, you have to play perfect," Piniella said. "It's a tough game to play, I realize that. You've got to be a team that's well above .500 to do that with consistency."

Athletics: Cahill looks for an encore

Cahill is coming off one of the best performances of his young career. The 22-year-old went eight innings and gave up just one run on six hits and one walk while striking out four. He has six straight quality starts, going 2-1 with a 4.45 ERA during that span.

Cubs: Zambrano goes for second win against Oakland

Zambrano has just one career appearance against the A's, on June 20, 2004. He went 6 2/3 innings and gave up just one earned run on five hits while striking out eight in a 5-3 Cubs win.

Worth noting

Expect to see more of Tyler Colvin in the lineup for the Cubs. Chicago manager Lou Piniella has said the rookie outfielder will play more. Colvin went 0-for-3 Sunday. He is hitting .396. ... The Stanley Cup champion Chicago Blackhawks paraded around Wrigley Field on Sunday before the game. ... Oakland's Eric Chavez, who is trying to recover from two bulging disks in his neck, won't be making his scheduled return to Triple-A Sacramento on Monday because he is not ready. ... Oakland outfielder Travis Buck, who has been on the disabled list since April 21 with a strained right oblique muscle, has started to play in simulated games in Arizona and should be playing in Minor League games soon.

A's trio needs backing to make All-Star squad

Suzuki, Sweeney, Barton have ground to gain on AL ballot

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- A trio of A's players could earn a ticket to this year's All-Star Game thanks to their roles as the club's most consistent hitters and overall lineup mainstays.

Catcher Kurt Suzuki, outfielder Ryan Sweeney and first baseman Daric Barton have the opportunity to join skipper Bob Geren -- appointed by manager Joe Girardi on Thursday -- on the American League staff, but they can't get there on their own.

This unassuming and often underrated young batch of talent that has guided the A's to a solid start this season needs your help to take part in one of baseball's most glorified events. All three are in need of votes in order to be included in the top picks among their position.

Fans can cast their votes for starters up to 25 times at MLB.com and all 30 club sites using the 2010 All-Star Game MLB.com Ballot sponsored by Sprint until July 1 at 8:59 p.m. PT.

Starting rosters will be announced during the 2010 All-Star Game Selection Show on TBS on July 4. Baseball fans around the world will then be able to select the final player on each team via the 2010 All-Star Game Final Vote sponsored by Sprint.

And the voting doesn't end there. Fans will have the opportunity to participate in the official voting for the Ted Williams Most Valuable Player Award presented by Chevrolet at the Midsummer Classic via the 2010 All-Star Game MVP Vote sponsored by Sprint.

The All-Star Game, to be played in Anaheim on July 13, will be televised nationally by FOX and around the world by Major League Baseball International. ESPN Radio will provide exclusive national radio play-by-play, while MLB.com will offer extensive online coverage.

Though sidelined for part of the season with an intercostal strain, Suzuki -- deemed by many around the league as one of the game's most underrated catchers -- has given the A's a sturdy middle-of-the-order hitter while also providing several impressive defensive gems. He's batting .274 with a .478 slugging percentage and an .807 OPS (on-base plus slugging percentage).

"As a player, you definitely like to get recognized by other teams and players," Suzuki said. "I don't think any of us go into a season thinking we want to be in the All-Star Game, but it's a great opportunity if it happens. You want to play with the best of the best around the league."

Sweeney, meanwhile, boasts a .308 batting average to go along with a .405 slugging percentage. The 25-year-old, just in his third full big league season, is also part of what manager Bob Geren has called one of the league's best defensive outfielders.

Barton's numbers greatly compare to those posted by Sweeney. In a team-leading 65 games, the A's first baseman is batting .281 and also has a .424 slugging percentage and .394 on-base percentage.

"Sweeney should go because he's basically batting 2,000," Barton said, "and Suzuki should go because he has a million RBIs. Those guys are clutch."

Kouzmanoff uses blue-collar attitude on field

Third baseman works for everything, as taught by dad

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Kevin Kouzmanoff is rather shy. Always has been.

His father, Marc, not so much. He's a salesman. Always has been.

One hits baseballs for a living. The other hits up tax professionals as a sales rep for a software company.

Yet both go about their jobs, and life in general, singing the same tune -- one that emits sounds of patience, dedication, and persistence.

"He works for a company that has a quota every month, and he has to make that quota," Kevin said. "Once you make the quota, you have another quota to make the next month. It's kind of like out here. You hit a home run to win the game, and that's great. But you have to come to the park the next day, and no one cares what you did yesterday."

Yesterdays, particularly bumpy yesterdays, don't mean much to Kevin. This A's third baseman, acquired by Oakland via an offseason trade, very much lives in the present, where -- thanks to dad -- he's got it pretty good.

"If I have a rough day out here, I call him and say, 'Dad, it was a bad day today,'" Kevin says. "And he says, 'I can send you one of my tax guides if you want to read one of my books, and you can do what I do.' And I think, no, that's alright."

"It makes me take a step back and realize a rough day here is still a pretty good day."

"Here" is the ballpark, a place Marc never quite pictured his son working. "Here" is where Kevin pursued his profession, after high school stints with wrestling (in the 103-pound club), golf, and football. "Here" is where Kevin once struggled as a prep athlete at Colorado's Evergreen High School.

"He didn't make all-conference in what was probably the weakest conference in all of Colorado," Marc recalled. "He didn't receive any scholarships."

That's because Kevin was still implementing a swing, created by way of a three-year process -- one that had him, his father, and a carpenter studying baseball swings three hours a day, every day. The carpenter was Troy Slinkard, who made a hobby of learning swings en route to becoming Kevin's unofficial hitting coach -- the same one who still works with the infielder in a warehouse every offseason.

Meanwhile, Kevin's defensive game blossomed, not on the field, but outside of his cul-de-sac home, where brothers Brant and Ky would join him for a nightly round of 100 groundballs hit by their father. In 2009, Kevin set a National League record with a .990 fielding percentage, committing just three errors for the Padres -- much to the astonishment of Marc, who admittedly never imagined his son playing in the big leagues.

"I'm very surprised," he said. "Making it in Major League Baseball is so extremely difficult. I try to figure it out, and think what makes these guys successful. With football, you can toss a guy a football and know within two minutes if he can play football -- same with basketball and hockey. But not with baseball. You have to watch them and watch them.

"I never thought he'd be a Major League Baseball player. Our goal was never to play Major League Baseball. And I always tell kids, never make that your goal because it probably won't happen. Your goal should be one thing: to get the chance to do it, to get drafted. Kevin's goal was to get drafted, not to make it to the Majors. We never discussed that. Although when we talked, I knew it was on his mind."

So what happens after then, after the Draft? After the Indians select you, as they did Kevin, in the sixth round in 2003, following stints at three colleges? What's the goal?

"Move to the next level," Marc said. "You take it one step at a time."

Each level, no matter the rank, has seen Kevin go through his same routine:

Take ground balls -- lots of them. Take batting practice. Play the game. Hit the weight room. Rest. Sleep. Repeat.

"I devote my time and effort into what's important now, and then I relax," Kevin said. "I think I get it from both sets of parents. My dad was always up early on the computer making phone calls, finishing work at 11 at night. I saw his work ethic and thought that, in order to be successful, you have to work hard at it."

Marc and his wife, Kim, weren't necessarily tough on their three boys, all two years apart, and now ranging in age from 26-30 -- Kevin the middle child at 28 years old. Rather, they "just let us know what our priorities were," Kevin said.

Those priorities were met with the knowledge that nothing ever comes easy, at least in the Kouzmanoff household.

"Some kids are born with talent," Kevin said. "My family wasn't like that. We had to work at it. We were born with what God gave us, but we had to work for what we have, and improve upon that."

"When Kevin takes reps and practices, there's never a time when he moves a muscle without intent," Marc said. "So he doesn't just go out and hack the ball. When he goes out and takes batting practice, he's working on something -- things you've never heard of in any of the books. Everything Kevin does, even when he throws a baseball and plays catch, it's with intent."

The relaxing part, then, comes in the form of nature. Kevin's just as much an outdoorsman as he is a baseball player. He camps. He fishes. Much of his offseason is surrounded by trees and wilderness, elements that ultimately influenced his family to make the move to Colorado from San Diego, where Kevin lived until he was 12.

The same people who guided 12-year-old Kevin along are still very much a part of this 28-year-old baseball player's life. That much was evident a couple of years ago in Chicago, where Kouzmanoff -- still with the Indians -- stood on a chair, peering out over the dugout, following the game, looking for one person.

"We went back there, where my mother lives," Marc remembers, "and a bunch of us were there waiting for him. He looks out at my mother, a little old lady at 80 years old, and says, 'Hey gran, how are you?' He made her feel so good because he recognized her.

"He's a good guy. Kevin is one of the finest. He's so genuine."

He's also unconventional in the way he goes about the game, and the route he took to make it to the largest stage. But that's OK, insists Marc.

"Kevin has never been a standout baseball player," his father said. "All these years, even though he was trying to be, and was trained to be, he never was. Kevin trains more than the entire team he's on combined. Kevin gives anyone hope that wants to make it."

Making it is something Marc never achieved for himself. Following his years in Montana, he played with the Chicago Bears during training camp, but didn't pass the final cut. Now, he -- along with Kevin, Brant, and Ky -- are sure to say that his role as a father has turned out to be all the more rewarding.

And baseball, not football, has made it a pretty fun ride.

"Baseball is the greatest sport in the world, because it's the only sport that is family oriented," Marc said. "You can play catch with your mom, your dad, your sister, your grandfather, your cousin. It's the only sport you can do that."

"He's been very supportive, along with my mom and my brothers," Kevin said. "I talk to him a couple times a week. I have a good support network. They sacrificed a lot. When we were younger, there were a lot of vacations we didn't go on because we had baseball tournaments."

Those trips brought the Kouzmanoff family to places such as Oklahoma City, Albuquerque, and eventually, Arlington, where Kevin made his Major League debut when Travis Hafner went down with an injury.

"When he got called up," Marc said, "my reaction was concern and performance. I wanted him to do well, no matter what level. I didn't think, 'Oh, you made it. Great, let's celebrate.' I just thought, 'All right, Kevin, here we go. Now we gotta go to work.'"

Marc is still preaching those words to son Kevin. And Kevin is still taking them to heart.

"His mental foundation is absolutely perfect," Marc says. "I don't know how he got that."

Anyone acquainted with the Kouzmanoff family, however, knows exactly where it came from.

Oakland A's Front Office Q&A: Farhan Zaidi P3

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Jun 14, 2010

In the final portion of our chat with Oakland A's Director of Baseball Operations Farhan Zaidi, we discuss Dallas Braden's perfect game, the roles for Landon Powell and Henry Rodriguez and the eventual place for Tyson Ross on the A's pitching staff.

**Note: this conversation took place on Thursday morning, June 10*

OaklandClubhouse: I know you were at the Coliseum when [Dallas Braden](#) threw his perfect game. What was that experience like?

Farhan Zaidi: It was great. I was down in the weight room with Billy [Beane, A's General Manager] kind of watching. He has made the comment a couple of times that he asked me in the ninth inning with two outs if Braden had gotten a base-runner on and I said no. It was funny because we were in there for the last four or five innings and it was almost one of those situations where I figured that we both knew what was going on but no one wanted to say anything. And then when he asked me and it was like, okay, that explains why nobody said anything.

But it was great. There was a great level of excitement. The atmosphere was great and being in the clubhouse after the game was terrific. It is a unique experience -- well, until [Roy Halladay](#) threw one two weeks later [laughs] -- but you don't see that kind of thing very often. I thought it was really a team thing. It's interesting. I think that people have made the comment that there were no spectacular plays that saved the perfect game, like you see in a lot of other instances. But if you go back and watch all 27 outs, there were a lot of really solid or even good plays that were made in that game that I think in the seventh, eighth and ninth innings got overlooked a little bit.

I do think it was really a team accomplishment. Dallas gets obviously the huge amount of credit for the game that he pitched, but I do think it was a team accomplishment and a credit to the guys playing defense behind him. And I think it was good that everybody played a part in it.

OC: Speaking of guys playing a part in it defensively, [Landon Powell](#) was the catcher in that game and he has sort of been on a yo-yo this year between Triple-A and the big leagues. Why is it that he hasn't gotten more of a role in the big leagues? It seems like when he plays, he plays well.

[Note: this question was asked Thursday morning, before Powell was brought up on Friday and before Jake Fox was designated for assignment on Sunday.]

FZ: We all really like Landon. In the front office, we like Landon. The coaching staff obviously really likes Landon and what he brings to the table. He is a great compliment to Kurt [Suzuki] as the back-up catcher. He is a guy that you can play a couple of times a week and not feel like your line-up is missing a beat, even though Kurt is one of our best players.

Unfortunately, it is just a function of the roster crunch that we have at the major league level. Landon Powell is a quality major league back-up catcher. I think that given his health problems, he kind of views that as his role and we see it as his role and we think that he has a lot of value in that role. Unfortunately right now it is just a function of roster crunch. When we've needed an extra bullpen arm, we've managed to do that and managing the bench and the other players on the team. I do think that in the long-run, we do view him as a guy that we plan to pair with Suzuki as our catching combination down the road.

I don't think anyone is down on him. It has been a bunch of different factors. He is a guy with options and we've had to use them in order to protect our depth a little bit. With the injuries that we have, I think that we do need to protect the depth that we have.

OC: [Henry Rodriguez](#) is another guy who has been shuttled back-and-forth between Triple-A and the big leagues lately. I was wondering why, especially since now that [Tyson Ross](#) has hit a bit of a speed bump, Henry wouldn't be that guy to move into the bullpen while Ross goes back to Triple-A to do some starting?

FZ: That's a fair question. Tyson definitely impressed everybody in big league camp [this spring]. He threw strikes, which was a really big factor in choosing him because you have a lot of young relievers who have good stuff and if they can't come in the game and throw strikes then that takes its toll on everybody and it isn't really a sustainable type of performance.

Tyson won a job out of spring training on merit to be a reliever in the staff and for the first month or so, he was one of our better guys. He has hit a speed bump, but I think he's gotten over that now.

None of that is a detriment to Henry, who if you compare what he did last year to this year, he's made huge strides at the Triple-A level. But he was a guy who had a ton of strike-outs last year, but whose overall line suggested a guy who needed a little more time. This year he has done a lot better. This is actually Henry's last option year himself, so over the course of this year, we do want to give him as many looks as we can. Hopefully we can go into 2011 with him penciled in as a guy in our big league bullpen. But he does currently have options and he hasn't always shown the best control up at this level, although his opportunities have been a little bit limited. His last outing was terrific, the two innings that he threw against the Angels. If he builds on that, I think that he is going to get chances in the second half of the season, and, like I said, hopefully be in our big league bullpen in 2011.

OC: Do you see Tyson as a starter down-the-road?

FZ: I think so. A lot of the conversation that we had in spring training was 'maybe we just keep him in the big leagues until some of our guys, like [Michael] Wuertz and [Joey] Devine get back and once we have added depth at the big league level in terms of the bullpen, we can maybe send him down.' We thought that might be another way to moderate his innings a little bit, as well. That maybe something that we still do in the future, especially with some of the injuries that we've had to the big league rotation. Having him as an option to fill in, there are definitely advantages to that.

At the same time, if he is one of our best options in the bullpen, which until some of his recent struggles he certainly was, if he can fill an important role and be one of the few guys out of the bullpen who can come in and overpower hitters, if he continues to do well in that role, then like we talked about a little earlier, it's a close division and it's competitive. If he can be part of a team that is challenging for a division title and filling an important role, then I think that is what we are going to look at.

But it's kind of an ongoing process of evaluation with him. He was a starter coming into this year. I think that we still think he has the potential to be a big league starter, but it goes back to the whole Earl Weaver philosophy. Sometimes it is good for these guys to break in as relievers and learn how to get big league hitters out once and then once they have that level of confidence, come back as a starter and attack a line-up two or three times. We haven't always had the luxury of breaking in our starters that way and a lot of them have struggled as a result because the absolutely hardest way to break into the big leagues is as a starting pitcher. So it might also be a way for him to transition into that role in a way that gives him more confidence once that is his final landing spot.

OC: I guess breaking in as a starter is hard unless you are [Stephen Strasburg](#). Then everything is easy. [laughs]

FZ: Exactly. It's a fair question. I do think that [Ross] has struggled a little bit recently but when he was going good, I don't think that there was as much clamoring for [him to switch roles]. He went through a stretch where he was having trouble

throwing strikes. I think when you are a young reliever it kind of snowballs because you don't throw strikes then you don't get used as much and then when you get into a game, you aren't in the rhythm of having pitched every other day or every third day and you are pressing a little bit. Those things can snowball. I think that we want to see if we can get him going back on the right track because his stuff is fairly unique as far as the make-up of our bullpen.

A's want new stadium, but is that the best move for Bay Area?

Ann Killion, Sports Illustrated.com 6/15/2010

Actual construction may be down in the United States, but it's boom time for mythical stadium construction in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Last week about 11,000 Santa Clara citizens (an amount that would fill just a corner of Candlestick Park) voted to award the San Francisco 49ers \$114 million in public money and give the team the right to come up with another \$800-plus million for a football stadium that may or may not get built by 2014, or ever.

So now the Oakland A's would like to get into the dream house business. A's owner **Lew Wolff** told the *San Jose Mercury News* that the 49ers success at the ballot box showed that the time is right to ask voters in San Jose for a new stadium.

"It bodes very well," Wolff said. There is a working proposal for a \$461 million stadium that would be privately financed, but would require at least a \$74 million public investment in land and infrastructure costs. According to the *Mercury News*, San Jose officials would need to have a measure finalized by Aug. 3 for inclusion in a November ballot.

But there are some major issues that don't bode so well for the A's. Big differences between what the 49ers accomplished and what the A's are seeking to do.

Baseball commissioner **Bud Selig** convened a "blue-ribbon" panel to investigate the A's housing options. That was 15 months ago and still no word on its report. Once the report is issued, Selig will have to study its findings before issuing a ruling.

Selig's usual snail's pace of action doesn't bode well for a brisk resolution to this, instant replay or any other issue that baseball faces. It seems implausible that Selig -- despite being a former fraternity brother of Wolff's -- will have ruled on anything concrete by Aug. 3.

Then there is the thorny problem of the San Francisco Giants, who were awarded territorial rights to San Jose in 1990 when they were seeking to move their team there. Though most experts think the Giants would accept a large payment to cede those rights, the Giants public posture remains that they're not willing to deal. And the commissioner's position, in the past, has always been to back those territorial rights.

Giants managing general partner **William Neukom** spent almost a quarter century honing his reputation as a powerful antitrust lawyer for Microsoft. His ascension to the top seat in the Giants structure in an era when the team is asserting its territorial dominance is not viewed as accidental. The A's and Major League Baseball could find themselves in a turf war, one that most doubt Selig would embrace or enjoy

But the biggest obstacle for the Oakland A's is themselves. Even skeptics of the 49ers plan, including myself, have to applaud young owner **Jed York** for diligently and professionally courting the needed votes. The 49ers, after years of seeming not to care, have worked on improving their public image and appearing to listen to their fans.

The A's, in contrast, have run off most of their fans. As usual, the A's are right near the bottom in Major League attendance. Though the team remains in the hunt in the AL West and has an intriguing roster of young talent, their product is overlooked by most of the Bay Area.

Wolff's marketing strategy has been to not so subtly let potential ticket buyers know that they would be foolish to go to games at the rundown Oakland Coliseum. And the fans are listening. The A's aren't just losing their existing fan base and tradition, they've lost an entire Bay Area generation, who think that fun-plus-baseball means going to a Giants game.

The other part of the low attendance equation is the A's strategy of shipping players out as soon as they show promise. The *Moneyball* movie is back in production, starring **Brad Pitt**. But *Moneyball*, the reality, has no stars. It's not allowed in the ongoing flea market in Oakland.

The A's fans that have left have learned not to get attached. **Dallas Braden** pitches a perfect game? Cool, but where will he be playing next year?

Under Wolff's ownership, the A's have become virtually invisible in Oakland. Wolff would like to leave the town, but in many ways the team has already left.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Clay-mation: Mortensen gets PCL-leading 9th win

By Abbie Ellis / Sacramento River Cats

Sacramento opened its crucial eight-game homestand Monday night with a 5-3 win over the Reno Aces. Sacramento has now won seven of nine games against Reno, including a series sweep while on the road May 28-31.

Clay Mortensen collected his Pacific Coast League-leading ninth victory of the season. Mortensen (9-2, 3.96), who has a 3-0 record and 2.45 ERA in three June starts, allowed three runs and four hits over 7.0 innings Monday, striking out nine and walking two. His only mistake was a three-run home run to Doug Deeds in the sixth inning. Reliever Henry Rodriguez got his ninth save of the season, pitching 1.1 hitless innings with two strikeouts.

The River Cats had been held to one hit relief pitcher Saul Rivera entered in the fifth inning. Chris Carter, Dallas McPherson and Mike Taylor all singled. Adam Heether and Corey Wimberly both doubled, and Sacramento ended the inning with a 4-0 lead.

A three-run Doug Deed's homer in the sixth tightened the score to 4-3. John Hester was called out on strikes for the final Aces out. A double ejection of Hester and Reno manager Brett Butler followed the call after a yelling match with the home plate umpire.

Chris Carter showed off his speed when he scored from second off a McPherson single, and gave the Cats a 5-3 lead in the seventh. With this, Carter finished the night 2-for-4 with a double and two runs scored.

Left-hander Travis Blackley starts for Sacramento on Tuesday night as the River Cats take on Reno in Game 2 of the series at 7:05 p.m.

'Hounds Fall Back In Standings With Loss

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

RockHounds center fielder Corey Brown made two outstanding plays Sunday evening, each saving at least one run. His full-out, horizontal diving catch of a line drive to left-center off the bat of Marcus Lemon in the third inning was truly worthy of ESPN's Web Gems.

The irony? He was also charged with a (very tough) error on the swing of the bat which would change the course of the game. With the 'Hounds leading, 1-0, in the fourth, Frisco had the bases loaded and two out. Renny Osuna hit a ball to fairly

deep center, with Brown reaching for the ball and, on the move, deflecting it. The play was ruled an error and, with two outs and the runners going, three runs scoring. The RoughRiders took the lead, added another run on a James Tomlin double and departed the inning with a 4-1 advantage.

Combined with San Antonio's win at Corpus Christi, the South Division first half race is now, for all intents and purposes, a two-team race. The RoughRiders lead San Antonio by 3.5 games ... the Hooks by 5.5 and the 'Hounds by 6.5 with just nine to go. Frisco and San Antonio do not meet again in the first half.

The game was the first of an 8-game road swing for the RockHounds ...with three more at Frisco and four at San Antonio.

Blaze Snap Losing Skid, Hand Ports 6-4 Loss

BAKERSFIELD, Calif. - The Stockton Ports and Bakersfield Blaze entered play on Monday night coming off completely different weeks. While the Ports were going 5-2 on a seven-game homestand, the Blaze were mired in a losing skid that ended at 10 games on Monday night, which matched a season-long streak. Bakersfield received a 4-for-4 performance from All-Star Jose Felix and hung on to beat the Ports by a final of 6-4.

Bakersfield scored the game's first run almost immediately in the bottom of the first. Davis Stoneburner led the game off with a triple and came home on an ensuing sac-fly from Jared Bolden.

The Blaze added a run in the third while taking advantage of Stockton's only error of the night, a fielding blunder on first baseman Mike Spina that allowed Andres James to score to make it 2-0.

Bakersfield's biggest inning of the night came in the fourth. After Chris Gradoville was hit by a pitch to start the inning, Felix doubled to right followed by back-to-back RBI singles from Erik Morrison and Tommy Mendonca to make it a 4-0 ballgame.

Johnny Whittleman blasted a solo home run to lead off the fifth inning and put the Blaze up by a handful at 5-0. The first five Blaze runs came off Ports starter Mike Madsen (1-2), who took the loss after 4.2 innings of work while allowing seven hits and striking out five.

Stockton's only inning of sustained offense came in the sixth as they took advantage of two Blaze errors. After back-to-back singles from Gernaldo Castillo and Jermaine Mitchell to start the inning, Grant Green hit into a 5-4-3 double-play to leave Castillo as the lone baserunner at third with two down. Stephen Parker would then reach on a throwing error made by Mendonca at third to keep the inning alive and score Castillo to make it 5-1. Mendonca's error would prove costly as Jeremy Barfield drove in Parker with a single to left to make it 5-2 and Spina followed with an RBI double to bring the tally to 5-3.

Blaze starter Michael Main (3-3), because of the error, would not make it out of the sixth inning. Main, however, would still earn the win, going 5.2 innings and allowing three runs (all unearned) on six hits while striking out three.

The Blaze added a run in the last of the seventh. With Whittleman at third and two down, reliever Kenny Smalley allowed a triple to left-center to Felix to put the Blaze lead at three. Felix would be thrown out trying to stretch the triple to an inside-the-park home run. It would be the only run allowed by Smalley in 3.1 innings of relief work.

Mark Hamburger (SV, 6) would hang on to record the save in the ninth despite a last-minute Stockton surge. With one out, Todd Johnson homered to right-center to make it a 6-4 game. Two batters later with two down, Jermaine Mitchell tripled to the left-field corner. Mitchell tried to stretch his triple to an inside-the-park home run and was tagged out at home on a relay play to end the ballgame with Green on-deck representing the possible tying run.

Stockton and Bakersfield will play the second game of their three-game series on Tuesday night at Sam Lynn Ballpark. Justin Murray (5-3, 3.61 ERA) will head to the mound for the Ports, opposed by right-hander Carlos Pimentel (5-2, 3.80 ERA) for the Blaze. First pitch is set for approximately 7:35 p.m. PDT.