

A's News Clips, Friday, September 17, 2010

Oakland A's seek answers to ongoing DL-emma

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

It has become the A's sad saga -- perhaps it should be called a DL-lemma -- that their recent baseball seasons have been defined by a crush of injuries. The ongoing health issues then beg the question: What might have been had they kept more players upright?

General manager Billy Beane has asked that question of himself and his club many times.

"I think the biggest factor that's determined our finish more than anything has been our health," Beane said. "I don't think it's been a case of not being able to put together a group of players that could compete, but really a case of putting together a group of players that could compete and stay healthy. The short answer is I do believe we would be in a different situation today had we been healthy."

The A's have used the disabled list 23 times on 19 players this year, second-most in team history (25 in 2008). It has resulted in 1,245 games missed, just 14 short of the club record that will be broken in the next two days.

Over the past four years, Oakland has used the DL 87 times. Texas is the only team over the same period that has used it more (98).

Beane insisted the A's are taking their medical meltdown more seriously than ever, albeit acknowledging that the club has rolled the dice on certain players on a risk-reward basis. He said the front-office staff will hold a summit at season's end to examine once again the high volume of injuries.

But Beane defends the organization for taking a careful and proper course in the training room.

"We've certainly been very, very aggressive this last year and making sure we properly diagnose," he said. "We've also been aggressive with treatment, whether it be surgical or rest -- probably more so than we would have been in the past."

What baffles and frustrates Beane is the lack of any distinct pattern. The A's infield has managed to stay fairly healthy this season, but the outfield has taken some major hits. Last year, the reverse occurred.

The setbacks have run the gamut, too, from stress fractures (infielder Adam Rosales), knee issues (outfielder Ryan Sweeney), elbow problems (starting pitchers Brett Anderson and Dallas Braden) to kidney stones (outfielder Matt Watson).

The other frustration for Beane is the lack of a reserve pool to compensate for the injured players. The A's do have some pitching depth this year but not much among position players.

"In a small market, it's not just about losing the player, but it's also who you're replacing him with," he said. "The bigger the market, probably the more capable replacement you have, and the smaller the market, the bigger drop-off you have. Right now, three of our (position players) are players who were recently released. But that's where we have to go to find replacements."

In Beane's opinion, the three most damaging injuries this year:

Outfielder Coco Crisp's fractured pinkie and subsequent strained rib cage that cost him almost the entire first half.
Anderson's two trips to the DL with left elbow issues that effectively cost him nine weeks and roughly 15 starts.
Sweeney's chronic knee tendinitis that forced a shutdown in July and subsequent season-ending surgery.

Crisp's broken finger? Plain bad luck. Anderson's elbow problems? Until this year, he didn't have any. Sweeney's knees? The outfielder admitted he's had weak knees his entire career. The A's knew that and are hoping that ending his season prematurely will make for a more promising future.

"In Ryan's situation, he might have been able to maybe give us the rest of the year, but it would have infringed upon next year when it became apparent he was going to need surgery," Beane said. "Instead of pushing it and have him rush to get ready for spring, we opted to have it done in August."

As for pitchers Ben Sheets and Justin Duchscherer, two high-risk signings that didn't pan out, Beane offered explanations. Duchscherer, because of recurring hip problems, was a bargain. Sheets, who cost \$10 million, was a third option after the A's couldn't close deals with two other free agents, third baseman Adrian Beltre and shortstop Marco Scutaro.

Finally, there is six-time Gold Glove third baseman Eric Chavez, in the final year of a six-year, \$66 million contract. He played just 33 games this year and hit one home run with 10 RBIs. Over the final four years of his contract, Chavez has appeared in only 154 of the A's 630 games, and he'll miss 17 more before this season concludes.

Beane said Chavez's myriad health issues are a microcosm of what the entire team has suffered in recent years.

"One of the things we see is that these things run in cycles," he said. "We've had years, particularly at the beginning of this decade, where we had the best health record in the league. With Eric, he went from being one of our healthiest players in the first half of the decade to where it all sort of came piling on him. One thing sort of led to another to the point where he is now."

Oakland A's report for series at Minnesota Twins

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Site: Target Field, Minneapolis

About the Twins: Minnesota is on the verge of its sixth AL Central title in nine years thanks to a blistering second half. The Twins entered Thursday night's game against the White Sox with a 41-16 mark since the All-Star break, best in the majors. ... The A's were swept in three games during their first visit to Target Field in mid-August. In the series finale, Kevin Slowey held Oakland hitless through seven innings but was pulled by manager Ron Gardenhire over concerns about Slowey's elbow. Slowey landed on the DL shortly after with elbow problems and hasn't pitched more than five innings in three starts since then.

Today: Brett Anderson (5-6, 2.94) vs. Nick Blackburn (9-9, 5.51), 5:10 p.m. CSNCA

Saturday: Dallas Braden (9-12, 3.56) vs. Kevin Slowey (12-6, 4.24), 10:10 a.m. CSNCA

Sunday: Bobby Cramer (1-0, 1.69) vs. TBA, 11:10 a.m. CSNCA

Radio: KTRB (860-AM)

Oakland A's 2010 M*A*S*H log

Oakland Tribune Staff

The following is a list of the A's 23 disabled list assignments in 2010, nature of injury, dates and games missed:

Player Injury DL dates Games missed

Brett Anderson Left elbow inflammation, forearm strain April 25-May 28 30

Brett Anderson Left elbow inflammation June 4-July 29 46

Andrew Bailey Right rib cage strain July 21-Aug. 21 28

Dallas Braden Left elbow stiffness June 23-July 19 20

Travis Buck Strained right side April 21-July 29 86

Trevor Cahill Stress reaction, left scapula April 4-19 14

Eric Chavez Neck spasms May 21-present 103

Coco Crisp Fractured left pinkie April 3-May 20 42

Coco Crisp Right rib cage strain May 23-June 21 28

Joey Devine Right elbow surgery recovery March 26-present 145

Justin Duchscherer Left hip inflammation April 30-May 13 13

Justin Duchscherer Left hip inflammation May 15-present 109

Mark Ellis Strained left hamstring April 21-May 21 28

Conor Jackson Strained right hamstring July 1-Aug. 15 37

Conor Jackson Lower abdominal strain (sports hernia) Aug. 20-present 25

Jon Meloan Right elbow surgery March 29-present 145

Josh Outman Left elbow surgery recovery March 26-present 145

Adam Rosales Right ankle stress fracture Aug. 12-present 32

Ben Sheets Strained right elbow July 20-present 52

Kurt Suzuki Rib cage strain April 24-May 15 19

Ryan Sweeney Right knee patella tendinitis/surgery July 12-present 56

Matt Watson Kidney stones Aug. 8-25 16

Michael Wuertz Right shoulder tendinitis March 26-May 2 26

Note: The list does not include Kevin Kouzmanoff, who has not played since Sept. 5 due to back spasms but was not DL'ed because of the expanded roster, or top pitching prospect Michael Ynoa, who has missed much of the season with elbow problems and had Tommy John surgery in August.

A's leading off

Chronicle staff report

Minnesota miser: In his past three starts, tonight's Twins starter, right-hander Nick Blackburn, is 2-0 with a 0.78 ERA in 23 2/3 innings against Seattle, Texas and Cleveland.

Nice guy Bailey a beast in the bullpen

A's closer doesn't need angry disposition to get job done

By Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

All season long, the A's have called their pitching the backbone of the team.

On good days, all roads lead to closer Andrew Bailey. He doesn't have a scowl, but usually a smile and one of the nicest personalities in the clubhouse.

"Thanks," Bailey said of the compliment. "But I can flip the switch. I'm a bad [guy] when I'm out there."

When relayed Bailey's comment, his good friend and bullpen-mate Craig Breslow laughed and said, "Who's he threatening?"

While Bailey likes to keep things loose early in the game, he usually makes his voyage from the dugout to the bullpen in the fifth inning to start getting mentally ready. By the seventh or eighth inning, he's another beast.

"I don't think it's that different from most closers that you'll find," Breslow said. "He's got a really aggressive mentality. I've found that most closers are pretty nice guys and pretty laid-back."

Bailey's rise through the Oakland organization has been well-documented. After spending four years at small Wagner College in Staten Island, N.Y., Bailey was picked in the sixth round of the 2006 First-Year Player Draft by Oakland.

After pitching almost exclusively as a starter to begin his professional career, the A's moved Bailey to the bullpen in 2008, where he's since flourished. Bailey made the jump from Double-A Midland to Oakland last season, finishing with American League Rookie of the Year honors after posting 26 saves and a 1.84 ERA.

"He comes in, it's almost automatic," Oakland ace Trevor Cahill said, "to where you leave the game with a lead, it's just like, 'Ah, it's a win.' You don't even think about it. It's definitely something I think we're spoiled with."

If anyone should feel comfortable with Bailey, it's Cahill. The pair of impressive young righties were drafted together in 2006, and teammates for two years in the Minor Leagues before reuniting in Oakland last year. The two are now roommates.

"You could always see with his intensity that he was destined for the bullpen," Cahill said.

As good as Bailey was last year, he's even better this season. Bailey sat out a month with a rib cage muscle strain, but has a 1.50 ERA with 24 saves in 27 opportunities. When leading after eight innings this season, the A's are a perfect 64-0.

"People ask me that, 'How are you a closer in the big leagues?'" Bailey said. "It's just a mindset, the way I play the game. Doesn't mean I have to go about my everyday life of having all types of tattoos or whatever, being a jerk to everyone."

Bailey has also turned in some of the most entertaining outs of the season. Like on May 22, when he struck out then-Giants catcher Bengie Molina to preserve a 1-0 win, or on Saturday, when he struck out David Ortiz to cap a nine-pitch at-bat and a 4-3 victory over Boston.

"I love it. It's awesome, it's something I feed off of," Bailey said of the late-inning pressure. "I don't want to lose. I don't want to have that feeling."

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Capra untouchable in Hounds' win

By Alex Raskin / Special to MLB.com

Sometimes you don't necessarily need your best stuff to be at your best.

Midland starter Anthony Capra pitched six hitless innings Thursday, but allowed a run on six walks as the RockHounds defeated the Northwest Arkansas Naturals, 5-2, on Thursday to even the Double-A Texas League Championship Series at one game apiece.

"Nothing was really working," Capra said. "That's what was funny about it. My control was off."

Providing encouragement along the way was the RockHounds' eventual hero, catcher Petey Paramore, who snapped a 2-2 tie with a two-run single in the top of the ninth inning.

"Me and Petey talk between every inning," Capra said. "He just said, 'Keep fighting and don't give in.' And that's always my mind-set, but it's good to have a guy to remind you of that when you're not on your 'A' game."

The Athletics left-handed prospect ran into a jam in the third after walking the Naturals' Derrick Robinson. The Northwest Arkansas center fielder had 50 stolen bases this season, so Midland's southpaw attempted to pick him off of first.

But the ball got by first baseman Shane Peterson and Robinson was able to score from first and push the RockHounds to a 1-0 lead.

"It kind of makes you bear down a little bit," said Capra, who finished with five strikeouts. "If you're fighting yourself, you're going to lose command more. I just tried to rely on Petey back there and trust the defense, which made three or four great plays behind me."

Mickey Storey came on for the RockHounds in the seventh and yielded the tying run on Chris McConnell's RBI single. The game remained tied until the top of the ninth.

Midland's Alex Valdez got the go-ahead rally started with a one-out double to right field. After Naturals reliever Rowdy Hardy intentionally walked Archie Gilbert, Josh Horton hit into what should have been a double play. But second baseman Johnny Giavotella made a bad toss to second, and Midland stayed alive in the inning.

After Matt Sulentic grounded into a fielder's choice, Paramore sent a Hardy pitch to left field to score Gilbert and Horton.

"He's a pretty patient hitter as it is," Capra said. "When he got ahead in the count, personally, I got a good feeling about it because he was going to draw a walk or get a pitch to hit."

J.C. Holt followed with an RBI single to push the lead to 5-2.

Neil Wagner earned the victory with a perfect ninth.

Horton hit an RBI triple in the fourth and Nick Van Stratten had the only other hit for the Naturals -- a team that led the Texas League with 770 runs and a .291 average.

"These guys are probably are one of the best lineups in Minor League Baseball," Capra said. "They hit four home runs last night.

"I didn't have my secondary pitches," he added. "I made pitches when it mattered. I guess that's all I can really say."

This is the second time in Capra's career that he finished an outing with five or more hitless innings. He allowed one walk and fanned seven over five innings while making his 2009 debut for Kane County, but like Thursday, he did not factor in the decision.

Both teams will journey to Midland for Friday night's Game 3. The first pitch is scheduled for 8 p.m. ET.

'Hounds even Texas League Championship Series

Midland Reporter-Telegram

SPRINGDALE, Ark. -- Advantage Midland.

The RockHounds got six innings of no-hit baseball from starter Anthony Capra and a two-run single from Petey Paramore keyed a three-run ninth inning as Midland evened the Texas League Championship Series at 1-1 with a 5-2 victory over Northwest Arkansas on Thursday before 3,465 fans in Arvest Ballpark.

The series now shifts to CitiBank Ballpark where the RockHounds have a decided advantage. Midland has won the last five regular-season series against the Naturals and the two teams split a pair of games in the Championship Series a year ago. Game 3 of the best-of-5 series will be set for 7 p.m. today.

Over the past two seasons, Midland has won 10 of 14 games against the Naturals but RockHounds manager Darren Bush said past results have no bearing at playoff time.

"On the road, you want to split," Bush said. "(Northwest Arkansas) is a quality club. Every game we play with them comes down to the wire. Now, we have to go home and win."

Paramore broke a 2-2 tie with a two-out, two-RBI bases loaded single and leadoff batter J.C. Holt followed with an RBI single for a 5-2 lead. All three runs were unearned as a critical error by Naturals infielder Johnny Giavotella kept the Midland ninth going.

Northwest Arkansas ended the Midland fifth and seventh innings with double plays but Giavotella's throw to second on an apparent double play ball in the ninth was high as the RockHounds loaded the bases. After a force out at the plate, Paramore ripped a 3-1 pitch from reliever Rowdy Hardy into left field for a 4-2 lead. Holt then plated an insurance run with his second single of the game.

"Petey is patient, didn't expand the zone and he waited for a good pitch to hit," Bush said.

Capra didn't figure in the decision after striking out five and walking six in six innings of no-hit baseball. The Naturals' first run scored after a walk and two Midland errors. The Naturals finished with two hits, a pair seventh inning singles.

"Midland's (starting) pitcher did a great job against us tonight," said Naturals manager Brian Poldberg. "Midland is a tough place to play. If you are going to win (the championship), you are going to have to win there anyway. Offensively, we just have to do a little better job. We didn't have too many opportunities."

Naturals starter Everett Teaford had won nine straight games since his last loss on June 20 but didn't figure in the decision after giving up seven hits and two runs in 6 1/3 innings. He struckout three and didn't walk a batter.

Northwest Arkansas took a 1-0 lead in the third on two Midland errors on the same play. Leadoff batter Derrick Robinson walked and then raced to third when Capra's pickoff attempt sailed past first baseman Shane Peterson. Peterson's throw to third then got away as Robinson scored.

But Midland used a a leadoff double by Shane Peterson and a triple by Josh Horton to score two runs in the top of the fourth. Peterson scored on a fielder's choice by Alex Valdez while Peterson's triple off the wall in right field plated Archie Gilbert for a 2-1 lead.

The Naturals tied the game at 2-2 in the seventh on a two-out, RBI single by No. 9 hitter Chris McConnell.

Northwest Arkansas will send left-hander John Lamb to the mound tonight for Game 3. Lamb, the No. 7 prospect in the Royals' organization according to Baseball America, was 2-1 with a 5.45 ERA in seven regular season starts with the Naturals.

Lamb started the season with Class A Burlington (2-3, 1.58 ERA) and then had 13 starts (6-3, 1.45 ERA) with Class A-Advanced Wilmington before being promoted to Double-A.

Midland will start lefty Ryan Edell tonight. Edell was 10-4 with a 3.17 ERA and was 7-1 in his last 10 regular season starts.

A's 2010 Year In Review: Farhan Zaidi, P. 1

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Sep 14, 2010

OAKLAND - The 2010 minor league regular season has come to a close, so it is time to reflect on the year that was in the Oakland A's system. We sat down with Oakland A's Director of Baseball Operations Farhan Zaidi on Saturday to discuss his assessment of the 2010 season from a player-development standpoint. In part one of this Q&A, we discuss Sean Doolittle, Grant Green, Stephen Parker and more.

Note: This interview took place on the afternoon of Saturday, September 11, before the conclusion of the playoff runs for Sacramento and Kane County.

OaklandClubhouse: Now that the minor league regular season is over, how would you assess the season from a player-

development standpoint? Obviously the injuries were rough.

Farhan Zaidi: It was definitely a year where some guys took a step forward and some guys took a step back, unfortunately. We started the year losing Grant Desme – losing isn't really the right word for it – but from an organizational-depth standpoint, that was a loss. And then we had a couple of guys like Sean Doolittle who we had high hopes for this year who never got on track physically.

OC: What's Doolittle's status right now?

FZ: He's doing well. He may get into a game in Instructs, but I'm not sure they are going to want to push it that much. The goal is to have him ready for spring training next year.

OC: Did he end up having surgery a second time?

FZ: No, not a second one. He's kind of rehabbed the first one. I think he is doing pretty well, but until he's playing games again, you can't say for certain. But there's definitely optimism there.

Then we had a couple of guys like Corey Brown and Adrian Cardenas who started the year in Triple-A and then had a bit of a hiccup there and had to go back [to Double-A], but they ended the season strong, which is what you like to see. They both went back and did really well for Midland and they are both up and contributing for Sacramento in the playoffs. They are both candidates to start next year in Triple-A and be knocking on the door.

I think every year you are going to have guys who step-up and guys who step down. You just hope that you have built enough positive momentum behind your key guys. Not everyone is going to have the kind of season that you would hope for, but overall, the fact that we had a bunch of teams make the playoffs and there was some upward mobility in our system with guys getting promoted and we have an exciting contingent going to the Fall League, so all of those things are positives.

OC: Speaking of the AFL contingency, you are sending the left-side of the Stockton infield in Grant Green and Stephen Parker. I don't know if you can ever expect someone to have the kind numbers that Green did, but I think he had some of those expectations coming in, but Parker put up a season on the same level. What is your assessment of those two guys?

FZ: They are both very advanced hitters. Like you said, Grant being a first-round pick with the kind of pedigree that he had – being a three-year starter at a Pac-10 school and being one of the top hitters in the Cape the one year he spent there – you almost expected it. You don't want to take away from the accomplishment of what he did this year, but, you're right, we almost expected him to do what he did this year.

And Parker actually had a similar year and was really more consistent than Grant, who got off to kind of a slow start and then really heated up at the end of the year and started hitting for power in the second half. Stephen, I think, was just very consistent from day one with his power and batting average. A lot of his numbers are pretty steady over the year, which is obviously an impressive feat for a guy who didn't have the same pedigree as Grant. But nonetheless, the college position players that you take in the first five or six rounds, you hope that they can go to Stockton and be productive. Both of those guys did that, which is great.

OC: Defensively, I know there have been some questions about Grant's throwing arm. Are you guys still confident that he can stay at that position, or is there a position change in the offing?

FZ: I think you've mentioned it before that a shortstop with his kind of offensive profile is one of the most valuable players in baseball probably, so there is every intention of giving him every opportunity possible to stick there because of the value that he brings to that position. But part of that is going to be a question of organizational depth also, and Cliff Pennington has had a really nice year for us at the shortstop position and has established himself as a big league starter. We will have to look at Grant's position moving forward both as a function of how we evaluate his defensive ability and what is the best way to keep him moving up the ladder and get him to the big leagues. No determination has been made, but those are sort of the factors.

OC: How about Parker? I've heard good things about the defense despite the high error totals. Are you confident that he is ultimately a third baseman?

FZ: He's definitely got the athleticism to play there. He's a relatively young player for his class also both in terms of age and experience. I think he just needs more reps there. A lot of infielders, especially in the lower levels of the minors, make a lot of errors and that is not necessarily the best judge of their ability or potential, more importantly. He's going to the Fall League as a third baseman and I anticipate him starting next year at third base. It's going to be a continual evaluation process. He's not a finished project at third base, but very few guys in their first full pro year are, but we have hopes for him

sticking there.

OC: [Ian Krol](#) finished the year with Green and Parker in Stockton. I have heard rave reviews about his competitiveness, but what about his stuff?

FZ: His fastball velocity is interesting. It kind of fluctuates. He will be 86-90 in some games and in other games he will be 88-92, even touching 93. But what he really brings to the table is one) his command, and two) is his secondary pitches. He has a really good breaking ball and change-up. This might be an over-simplification, but when I think about a prospect, particularly a starting pitching prospect, there are really three criteria and any pitcher has to meet two of them: there's fastball velocity, fastball command and secondary pitches. And even if he is a guy who is ultimately an 88-91 guy from the left-side, the fact that he has good command and that he has really good secondary pitches, he has plenty of stuff to succeed in that role.

You are right that the competitiveness and the moxie – being as young as he is and competing against much older players – it takes a special kind of guy to do that. He's obviously done it very well. He's a guy who could move pretty quickly. A guy's first full professional season, you don't want to put too much on his plate. He was pitching at home [with Kane County], so we wanted to keep him in Kane County for most of the year, but when we had a need and we felt that he was really ready, it was nice to be able to let him finish up at the next level.

OC: What about [Matt Thomson](#)? He had one great start in Stockton and his numbers were really out-of-this-world in Vancouver?

FZ: He's a guy that we were thrilled to get where we did in the draft because we knew he had good stuff. He had kind of been a starter and a reliever in college and had performed better in the reliever role, but we had seen him with good starter stuff. He's a big, physical guy. He's a guy who can sit in solid-average and touch-plus velocity and he was really a man-among-boys in the Northwest League. Even though that is a park that plays well for pitchers, his walk and strike-out rates were outstanding and those things are really independent of the park. If you look at his statistical performance, which we do, and we continually rate [players drafted this year] even as they come out of the draft, he had one of the top-five pitching lines of anyone drafted this year. That's obviously really exciting.

Being an older, physically mature guy, he is definitely somebody who can move quickly.

OC: How about the three high school players taken in rounds two through four? Do you expect [Yordy Cabrera](#), [Aaron Shipman](#) and [Chad Lewis](#) to be full-season players next year, or is it too early to tell?

FZ: It's a wait-and-see. I think it is going to be a function of the kind of camps they have next year. One of the drawbacks of the late signing deadline is that these guys only got out and played in a handful of games in Rookie Ball and that's not really a good gauge of their readiness level. If they signed earlier and got up to Vancouver, maybe you could make a determination on them – particularly the question of whether they could start next year in full-season ball. But at this point it is just too early to tell.

Even when they came in, it was nice to get them in and they will be in Instructional League, which will be another chance to see those guys, but they weren't necessarily in baseball shape and hadn't faced live pitching in awhile, so it is really tough to make a determination based on a handful of at-bats. That's going to be something that we evaluate in Instructs and in camp next year.

Stay tuned throughout this week for parts two and three of this interview and throughout the next several weeks for more "Year in Review" coverage.

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Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Sep 16, 2010

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For part one of this interview, please click [here](#).

OaklandClubhouse: How would you assess Max Stassi's season? His defense was a bit of a disaster early in the season, perhaps surprisingly, but he was throwing out a lot more guys by the end of the year, but offensively, his strike-outs really jumped as the season went on.

Farhan Zaidi: I relate it back to what a difficult hitting environment [the Midwest League] is. We've had so many countless guys who have struggled a little bit offensively at that level and then they get up to Stockton and it's a completely different thing. So much so, that we have almost come to expect it, which is a little bit unfair because hitting well in Stockton shouldn't be considered an afterthought. It still takes a good hitter to do well at that level. I think with Max, some of it was the rigors of his first full season and playing a physically demanding position. I think his offense was affected a little bit just by wearing down physically by the end of the season. But the defense is great now and that pitching staff was one of the best in the Midwest League, which is a testament to his work behind the plate.

I think we still feel very positively about his offense, his power and his ability to be productive in more hitter-friendly environments further up the ladder.

OC: Would repeating at that level be considered not much of a set-back for someone of his age?

FZ: Yeah. We had talks about him splitting the season between Kane County and Stockton earlier in the year, and that wound-up not happening. It was good for him to spend that whole year with that group of guys, with Rashun Dixon, Ian Krol and those guys. Keith Lieppman has talked a lot about keeping core groups of players together and that's a group that I think it would be nice to see move up the ladder together. That was one of the factors in keeping those guys in Kane County for the full season. Based on his progression defensively and the fact that he had some nice stretches offensively, he is definitely going to be considered for Stockton next season.

OC: Dixon really turned it around this season.

FZ: Yeah, he did. I think he really did it sort of quietly. There just aren't a lot of huge offensive lines put up in the Midwest League, but I think his on-base percentage was about .360-.370 [it was .371] and he drew a lot of walks. The strike-outs were a little high but not prohibitively high and I think he wound-up hitting about eight or nine homers [eight homers in the regular season and two in the playoffs]. If you had told me at the beginning of the season that he would put up that line in Kane County at that age, I would have said that was a pretty impressive accomplishment. I think we are really happy with his performance and with the fact that he was able to handle the rigors of full-season ball as well as he did. He's definitely another candidate to move up next year.

OC: We've talked about two guys whose strike-out totals were high this year, but there are a number of prospects in the A's system, including Michael Choice, whose strike-out totals are high. Do you think that is a product of those players learning to see a lot of pitches and getting into a lot of two-strike counts, or is it just one of those things?

FZ: I think we try to present and teach a balanced hitting philosophy. There's some concern that we train our hitters to be too patient and to take too many pitches and that's really not the philosophy that we're teaching. Maybe it was at one point many years ago, but I think what we try to teach guys is to get into hitters' counts, so you can take an aggressive hack and do some damage to the baseball. Really, ultimately all throughout the organization that is what we are looking for. We are looking for guys who damage the baseball and hit for power and the best way to do that is to get into favorable counts to do that. You take a guy like Jose Bautista who is leading the league in homers this year. He is also second or third in the league in walks, which is a little bit of the untold story there.

We are not adverse to guys who swing and miss and take their share of swings and misses. The best way for guys to hit homeruns and hit for power is to get into counts where you can take a big hack and be up there trying to get an extra-base hit. When you are behind in the count, it's a lot harder to do that. The entire organization is in tune with that. We focused in the draft on guys who hit for power and most guys who hit for power are guys who do work the count and do draw walks and both Choice and [A.J.] Kirby-Jones are those kind of guys. With Dixon it is the same way. One of the things we liked about him [leading up to the 2008 draft] was that he was raw but we liked the approach. We thought that there was a chance for him to not be a guy who chased a lot of pitches out of the 'zone and that is a skill-set [chasing pitches out of the 'zone] that doesn't play well at the higher levels.

OC: This is a crude comparison, but is A.J. Kirby-Jones' approach to hitting like Jack Cust's?

FZ: He is a guy who walked in college, although I was a little bit surprised about how much he walked in the Northwest League. Some of that actually was him getting pitched around. Particularly before Choice got there, he was viewed as such a dangerous hitter. At least the reports we got from that staff [in Vancouver] was that he wasn't getting a lot to hit and a lot of those walks were him clearly being pitched around as opposed to him working the count. He hit for an extremely high average in college, but then again, Jack hit for an extremely high average in the minors, too. Overall, I still think of Kirby-Jones as more of a contact-oriented hitter than Jack. I don't think he is going to be quite at the same extreme three-true

outcomes player as Jack, but there are some comparisons.

OC: There were a number of arm injuries this season in the minors, and four high-profile Tommy John surgeries with Michael Ynoa, Pedro Figueroa, Julio Ramos and Arnold Leon. Are you concerned about the frequency of these types of injuries, especially in light of the fact that the organization was able to avoid them, for the most part, in the early 2000s, late 1990s, or are they really unavoidable?

FZ: It would be a little negligent to just throw up your arms and say 'these things happen' every time a guy goes down, so we are constantly evaluating everything that we do with our pitchers. Their throwing programs and pitch counts and things like that. We are in constant contact with our player development people and our minor league staff. We are going to continue to look for ways to lessen the risk, if, in fact, we are putting our players at risk.

It's a very inexact science right now. There are a lot of people who have opinions about how to lower pitchers' injury risk, but there isn't a lot of evidence out there to support those claims. And that's everything from throwing programs to pitching mechanics. There are a lot of pitching guru-types out there who are looking to be hired as consultants who claim to be able to teach certain mechanics that lower the risk of injuries, but, again, it's a question of whether those are tried-and-true methods or just someone's opinion because everyone has an opinion on this stuff.

We feel good about the communication that we have and that we are constantly evaluating the [pitcher development] process. We aren't happy with the level of injuries that we have had and, to the extent that we continue to have injuries, it won't be for a lack of trying to find a reason about why it is happening or a lack of effort exploring alternatives.