

A's News Clips, Wednesday, January 5, 2011

Braden among A's still facing arbitration

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- A's hurlers Dallas Braden and Craig Breslow are slated to receive substantial raises before they throw their first pitches of the 2011 season, as the pair of southpaws prepare for their first go at the arbitration process.

Newly acquired outfielder Josh Willingham, outfielder Conor Jackson, third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff and right-handed reliever Brad Ziegler are also eligible for arbitration. The six A's players were tendered contracts for the 2011 season in advance of the Dec. 2 deadline, but they have yet to agree on deals.

Outfielder Ryan Sweeney and righty Joey Devine were among that group as well, but both quickly came to terms on a contract by mid-December to avoid arbitration. Sweeney, pegged as the club's fourth or fifth outfielder for 2011, received a one-year, \$1.4 million contract. Devine, meanwhile, agreed on a one-year deal worth approximately \$560,000 as he looks to return to a big league mound for the first time since 2008 after enduring a long Tommy John rehab process.

Beginning Wednesday, Braden, Breslow, Willingham, Jackson, Kouzmanoff and Ziegler have 10 days to file for arbitration, a time span which gives the players and the club time to strike a deal. Each player and the club then exchange offers on Jan. 18. If the sides can't reach an agreement on a contract, a three-person panel will conduct a hearing and assign the player either the club's offer or his offer -- nothing in between -- as his salary for 2011.

However, filing for salary arbitration is merely procedural in most cases. All six remaining arbitration-eligible A's players are expected to come to agreements with Oakland before their hearings, which would be scheduled sometime between Feb. 1-21.

Breslow, who made \$425,000 in 2010, is coming off the strongest campaign of his career. The 30-year-old lefty made a team-leading 75 appearances for the A's, which also ranked second among all American League relievers. Through 74 2/3 innings, which ranked fourth in the AL, Breslow registered a 3.01 ERA and set an Oakland record for strikeouts by a left-handed reliever with 71.

His presence was key down the stretch, as the A's battled multiple injury woes in the bullpen, most notably in the form of closer Andrew Bailey (right elbow) and Jerry Blevins (left hip/shoulder) and Michael Wuertz (left thumb).

Braden, who handed baseball an unforgettable day in 2010 by way of a Mother's Day perfect game, will be seeking to up his previously garnered \$420,000 paycheck. He finished the season with an 11-14 record despite a 3.50 ERA, as he had the fourth-lowest run support in the AL (3.60). The 27-year-old southpaw ranked fifth in the league in fewest walks per nine innings (2.01) and tied for the league lead with two shutouts while also ranking fourth in complete games (5).

Fellow hurler Ziegler, who took home \$410,000 last year, is tackling his first arbitration eligibility after earning Super Two status. The 31-year-old sidearmer endured a shaky season, pitching to a 3-7 record with a 3.26 ERA in 64 appearances. The losses were a career-high and tied for most among AL relievers. Ziegler, who did not save a game for the first time in three seasons, also yielded four homers in 60 2/3 innings after allowing just four over his previous 133 innings.

Away from the mound, outfielders Willingham and Jackson spent parts of the 2010 season on the disabled list but will still be looking toward a pay hike. Willingham, who will turn 32 in February, earned \$4.6 million last year and is now geared for his third and final season of arbitration eligibility. He'll become a free agent prior to the 2012 season, though general manager Billy Beane said after Willingham's Dec. 16 signing that he'd talk to his agent about whether a contract extension might make sense for both parties.

Willingham hit .268 with 16 home runs and 56 RBIs in 114 games for the Nationals in 2010, before missing most of the last month and a half with a left knee problem. Jackson, unfortunately, managed to miss even more time, as he played in just 60 games -- 42 with Arizona and 18 with Oakland -- due to various injuries. The 28-year-old outfielder, who will likely join Sweeney on the bench as one of the club's extra outfielders this year, earned \$3.1 million in 2010.

Kouzmanoff, Oakland's other arbitration-eligible player, also made \$3.1 million but, like Jackson, shouldn't expect too hefty of a raise. The 29-year-old third baseman put together the worst offensive performance of his career in 2010, compiling career lows in batting average (.247), on-base percentage (.283), slugging percentage (.396) and OPS (.679). However, he still managed to lead the club in home runs with 16 and tie Kurt Suzuki in RBIs with 71.

The A's have had much success with avoiding arbitration hearings, so it's likely they'll come to contract terms with Breslow, Braden, Ziegler, Willingham, Jackson, Kouzmanoff and Jackson before a trial is necessary.

Alum of the Month - 01/11

Tyson Ross '05 Living a Dream

Bishop O'Dowd High School

Like many young boys, Tyson Ross '05 dreamed of playing major league baseball. For Ross, though, that dream became a reality when he was chosen in the second round of the 2008 Draft by the Oakland A's.

The tale got even better last April, when Ross, 23, made his major league debut against the Seattle Mariners and struck out one of his childhood heroes, Ken Griffey, Jr.

"It was hard to believe that my dream had actually become a reality"

"It was hard to believe that my dream had actually become a reality, as I took the mound for the first time in the major leagues, and yet I had to somehow keep my emotions in check and do my job, pitch," recalled Ross. "Striking him out was very cool, but I was more excited that I had a good outing and we ended up winning the game. I had family and friends at the game that night and it only made it that much more special for me."

Ross says he never gave another career serious consideration. "Both of my parents are in medicine, so I thought about going into sports therapy," he said. "But I quickly realized I enjoyed playing much more than treating athletes."

Born in Berkeley and raised in Oakland, Ross attended Northern Lights School (K-6) and Zion Lutheran (7-8), before enrolling at Bishop O'Dowd High School.

One of his fondest O'Dowd memories is participating in Spirit Week activities. "Senior year my friends and I dressed up as characters from the movie 'Dodgeball' and had a battle royal in the parking lot after school," he said.

An accomplished high school baseball player, who was named the 2005 North Coast Section Player of the Year, the Hayward Area Athletic League Pitcher of the Year in 2004 and 2005, was and a three-time first-team all-league selection, Ross earned a baseball scholarship to Cal, where he was pursuing a degree in American Studies when drafted.

"I was thrilled when the A's picked me. I knew that I had no control over what team I would be drafted by, but in the back of my mind I was definitely hoping that I would end up with Oakland," he said.

A 6-foot, 6-inch right-handed pitcher, Ross played baseball year round throughout his teen years, and traveled all over the world for tournaments while playing on the USA National and Junior National teams.

"When I was younger my dad would always take me out to the park to practice whenever he had a

"I like to throw the sinker because it gets a lot of ground balls and the slider because it is my strikeout pitch"

little free time. In high school I would practice with my friends after school, and then go to Pleasanton for pitching lessons a few times a week at night," Ross said. "I have had many coaches and played on a ton of different teams, and I am very thankful to those coaches for giving their time and effort to coach me, and to my parents (Willie and Jean Ross), for giving me the opportunity to chase my dreams."

After Ross signed with the A's in 2008 he was sent to the Low A Kane County Cougars in the Midwest league. That same year, he moved up to High A, playing with the Stockton Ports in the California league.

"I joined the Ports in their playoff run and made two starts as we won the California league championship," he said. "In 2009, I played with the Ports for about four months before I was moved up to AA with the Midland Rockhounds in the Texas league. I finished the season in Midland and ended up winning another ring, as we won the Texas league championship."

It was in 2010 that Ross made the opening day roster, as a relief pitcher, with Oakland out of spring training. He was in the big leagues for the first 3 ½ months of the season before

"I really think with his combination of intellect, size and athleticism, Tyson's best days are ahead of him" being optioned to AAA Sacramento to become a starting pitcher again.

Reflecting on the 2010 season, Ross says he "had a good taste of the majors, learned a lot, and is looking forward to the upcoming season."

Whether he is used as a starter or a reliever, look for Ross to throw a lot of sinkers and sliders. "I like to throw the sinker because it gets a lot of ground balls and the slider because it is my strikeout pitch," he says.

While he is still adjusting to the pressure of being a professional athlete, Ross says he utterly enjoys seeing the smiles on kids' faces at the games. "It's amazing how you can make a kid's day by throwing them a ball, or even taking a picture with them," he said.

Though current O'Dowd varsity baseball coach Chris Kyriacou came to O'Dowd after Ross graduated, he worked with the player at a local camp several years ago. "He was 12-years-old, and only 5-foot, 10-inches," he said. "He didn't stand out so much in size, but in maturity."

Ross was extremely coachable, said Kyriacou. "He played like a big time player, but he didn't act like a big time player," the coach said.

"I really think with his combination of intellect, size and athleticism, Tyson's best days are ahead of him," Kyriacou added.

Meanwhile, Ross isn't the only Dragon in his family. His sister, "Frankie," graduated in 2007, and his brother, Joe, is currently a senior at O'Dowd.

Now a senior at Portland State, Frankie played soccer for the Vikings. Joe recently signed a National Letter of Intent to play baseball at UCLA. Rounding out the family is Maverick, a dog Ross rescued two years ago.

In his free time, Ross enjoys watching movies, playing video games, attending Warriors games and traveling.