

A's News Clips, Friday, January 7, 2011

Bailey staying focused during rehab

A's closer remains patient in return from elbow surgery

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Andrew Bailey's ascension into the big leagues is no ordinary tale.

That's why his story -- struggling Double-A starter turned Arizona Fall League phenom turned Spring Training sensation turned American League Rookie of the Year and two-time All-Star closer -- has been told time and time again.

Bailey relishes and appreciates his good fortune, no doubt. But he's ready to illustrate a new chapter, one that builds on those that came before.

And so, the first step in jump-starting that process is getting healthy. The A's right-hander was shut down two weeks before the end of the 2010 campaign to undergo cleanup surgery on his previously repaired right elbow, and he was recently cleared to begin throwing again.

Such progression has Bailey on track to regain the club's closer role by Opening Day. Before then, though, he has to clear multiple hurdles, including throwing from 120 feet pain-free so that his doctors can essentially release him into Oakland's care again. Thursday marked his final day at 60 feet, and Bailey's intent on reaching the 120-foot mark at or around the time pitchers and catchers are scheduled to report to camp Feb. 12 in Phoenix.

"I'm actually surprised about how good I feel, in terms of my extension," Bailey said by phone Thursday while driving home from a workout with teammate Craig Breslow in Connecticut. "I was at a negative-25 degree extension before surgery, and I was pitching like that for three years, and now I'm below 10 degrees. I've never seen my arm go that straight, which is a good thing."

With rehab comes patience, both with which Bailey is familiar. The 26-year-old righty underwent Tommy John surgery while in college, a time during which he spent a year away from game action. He's hoping to begin throwing off the mound and taking part in long toss not too long after his Arizona arrival, but at the same time realizes he can't create his own timetable for such things.

"You pick up a baseball and think, 'I don't even know what to do with this. How am I ever going to pitch again?'" he said. "Going through Tommy John and knowing what it took to overcome that, with a year of rehab, a couple months this time around weren't really anything. Knowing that a lot of guys have had the procedure I've had done, you can't be paranoid about it because it will ruin your experience and give you a bad mindset going into everyday rehab and the throwing program. I was always open-minded through the process and want to push the limits but not overdo it."

The 24-year-old version of Bailey would've already surpassed the limit. That's because he would have been fighting for a job. This time around, he's got the security, as well as the support from the A's organization -- particularly Ron Romanick, former bullpen coach and current pitching coach.

"I spoke to Romanick today," Bailey said, "and he told me, 'You don't have to come into camp like you did a couple years ago where you had to impress and come full bore and game-ready. Once you get to Spring Training, you still have a month and a half to be game-ready. You don't have to come throwing your hardest. Just do what you need to do to come ready for Spring Training.'"

"We'll be working together over the next couple of weeks as I get out to greater distances. We'll be in contact weekly. He is a true student of the game, a student of the throwing programs. He's always modifying rehab programs and making it comfortable for each and every person. It's great. It's comforting to know you have someone working hard on the other side of things to make sure that you're healthy enough to be on the field and play the game."

Bailey's late-season elbow injury marked his second time being sidelined in 2010, as he missed nearly a month while stationed on the disabled list with a right intercostal strain beginning in late July. Both setbacks meant he was not afforded the chance to match or surpass his save total of 26 garnered in his rookie season. Yet, Bailey still managed to compile a 1.47 ERA, 25 saves and a 0.96 WHIP in 47 appearances.

Personal accolades and numbers are all well and good, but Bailey is ready to prioritize his dreams. He made it to the big leagues, glided through his rookie year and avoided the sophomore slump with a second straight All-Star appearance.

"It's about winning the division and everything that comes after that," he said. "That becomes the dream and hopefully the reality.

"I'm at a point where I'm not over the awe of being in the big leagues, because I don't think that will ever go away, but I think I've come to terms with this being my job and understanding that this is going to be my livelihood, I want it to be my livelihood, and the work and dedication that I put into that is important.

"Instead of just thinking I made it to the big leagues and it's a dream come true -- the dream is still there, of course -- you realize it's a job, but making it to the playoffs and winning the World Series, those are the dreams you start to think about instead of just getting to the big leagues."

Slated to join Bailey in the bullpen on that mission this year are fellow right-handers Michael Wuertz, Brad Ziegler and, if healthy, Joey Devine, along with lefties Breslow and Jerry Blevins. Newcomers Rich Harden and Brandon McCarthy are among candidates who could adhere to that crowd.

"For myself, I'd like to stay healthy the whole year and build on what we did last year," Bailey said. "With the bullpen guys we had last year, I think we can come back and do the same, if not better, with everyone healthy."

While overcoming a slew of injuries, the A's bullpen still performed admirably in 2010. Oakland's relief corps ranked third in the AL in save percentage (74.5 percent) and fourth in inherited runners to score (27.1 percent). Bailey was around plenty to aide in those numbers, but not enough for his liking.

"Hopefully all my injuries are behind me," he said. "I've done a lot this offseason to get myself into good shape. It always stinks when you have to have an arm injury, but going into this year with a clean bill of health, I'm excited about all of the possibilities."

Cheering him on will be his biggest fan, college sweetheart and, now, newest family member, Amanda, whom Bailey married surrounded by family and friends -- including A's pitchers Breslow and Trevor Cahill -- in a November ceremony in Connecticut.

The wedding, not to mention a honeymoon in Tahiti and Bora Bora, was quite a success.

"She showed up," Bailey said with a laugh, "so that was a plus."

Chavez, radio station, Hall of Fame vote

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle, 1/6/2011 10:06AM

As I wrote in today's paper, Eric Chavez will work out for the Dodgers later this month, as well as two AL teams. The A's aren't one, and neither are the Angels, but I wouldn't be surprised if Seattle takes a look at Chavez. I exchanged texts with Chavez after hearing elsewhere that L.A. had a tryout planned for him; I'd also heard his workouts were going well in Arizona and wanted to check on his throwing, which he hadn't done much of the last time I'd spoken to him, and he told me "the throwing has been unreal."

I know you Drumbeat regulars are aware how much I think of Chavez personally, and I'm delighted he's doing so well. How would all of you feel if he goes to another team and has a good season? It might be a little bittersweet for some A's fans, downright frustrating for others.

I'd be very happy for him. He played in pain for more than a year, and then spent the past three years doing everything he could to try to get back on the field. On numerous occasions, he discussed how upsetting it was for him that he couldn't honor his contract; he really felt he was letting the team and fanbase down.

That's why he decided to rule the A's out this coming year, which I think has been a little misunderstood. He loved his time in Oakland, he loves the fans, and he just couldn't bear to let everyone down again, and he feels like new surroundings might provide different results. I hope he gets them, and that A's fans don't hold a grudge if that happens.

Also in today's paper, I had a little snippet about the A's quest to buy KTRB. I'm told that some progress has been made, and personally, I think it's likely to happen, although it sounds as if the process of purchasing a radio station that is in receivership is an odd one. In fact, it sounds a lot like the Japanese posting process: from what I understand, bidders don't

know who they're bidding against or what the other bids might be. We could know within a week. Let's hope this goes better than the Hisashi Iwakuma business.

I'm getting a lot of e-mail today about my comments to AP's Ben Walker about the Hall of Fame. Here's what I said:

"I will not vote for any player connected with steroid use, because I believe cheaters shouldn't be rewarded with the sport's highest honor. We are asked to consider character when casting Hall of Fame votes and I don't believe those who used performance-enhancing substances meet that standard. They cheated to get ahead, plain and simple, creating an imbalance in the game and a mess for the voters. They can enjoy the big contracts they earned as a result, but they won't get my vote."

I think there was an implication that I did not vote for Jeff Bagwell because of performance-enhancing substances. And it's true, I did not vote for Bagwell, but I didn't vote for him for baseball reasons. I think he's borderline - very, very close, but still borderline - and I vote only for slam-dunk candidates. I think the Hall of Fame is for players who don't need someone to argue their case to me to get my vote. No-brainers, best of their generation.

Now, my opinion on Bagwell - and many other voters' - might change as the steroid-era players become eligible. Bagwell's numbers might jump out among the players not connected to steroids. And there are so many voters who won't cast a ballot for a player on his first year, which I think is silly, but you can often just cast out that first year tally. We'll see what voters really think of Bagwell next year.

My e-mail has been interesting. Very polite, for the most part, and it's running about even between people who agree with me and those who very much don't. A lot of people bring up the cheating-within-the-game, your Gaylord Perry argument, basically. First of all, I didn't vote for Perry, and second, I think on-field cheating is in a different category. It is far more easy to catch, and immediately public, and the ramifications are usually fairly minor. Steroids, first and foremost, are illegal for uses other than legitimate, prescribed medical conditions, and you need a drug test or a subpoena to detect that kind of cheating, not an umpire saying, "What's this sandpaper doing on your glove?" It's far more sinister as far as I'm concerned - deals with shady people, syringes in dark corners - there are health ramifications, and it's a chemical enhancement, an actual change in body composition. That, to me is worse than a spitball.

I don't buy that "everyone was doing it." There are plenty of players who didn't want to risk all the above, such as dealing with criminals and syringes and potential health side effects. And I'm sure - well, I hope - there were some just plain honest players, too. Were I a clean player from the steroid era, I'd be screaming and hollering about the dirty ones.

And let's not kid ourselves. There are still PEDs in baseball. Until the players union and MLB approve a test for HGH, that will be an issue, and I'm sure that there are, or will be, a new class of steroids that beat the current tests.

It would be a lot easier if we knew how to sort out the clean players from those who are not, but I am going to try my best to vote for only those I believe who have not cheated the game - and themselves.

I do welcome all arguments on the issue, and I'm keeping an open mind about everything. I appreciate all the e-mails, and I like that people care about the Hall of Fame and how voters go about their decision-making. I'm always happy to discuss it.

Urban: Rootin' for Chavvy -- unless he's a Dodger

Mychael Urban, CSNBayArea.com

In an ideal world, Eric Chavez falls back in love with his romantic goal of playing his entire career with the same team.

The scenario:

He signs a minor-league deal with the A's, for whom he debuted as a 20-year-old back when now-seemingly-ancient guys such as Matt Stairs held big-time clubhouse sway in the East Bay.

He proves to be healthy -- truly healthy, as in a return to his once-sturdy-and-oddly-acrobatic form -- while wearing the leadership hat that's occasionally appeared askew atop his head during the past few lost-to-injury seasons, and he makes the team out of spring training.

He pops a surprising 15 homers or so despite a limited regular-season role, earning a spot on the active roster for Oakland's first playoff team since 2006.

And yes, I just dropped a "playoffs" in reference to the 2011 Elephants, and a "healthy Eric Chavez" playing a fairly key role.

I told you it was an ideal world, right?

Well, we all know the ideal world is something known only to folks such as a young George Harrison, who didn't have to deal with the pressure and headaches that came with being Paul or John, but he had such strong musical chops that he never had to sweat being lumped in with Ringo. He was Cole Hamels to the Phillies' Doc Halladay and Cliff Lee. Ringo was Joe Blanton-esque.

A's fans, who live merely in the real world (if that), know that the playoffs aren't a pipe dream. A number of scenarios would have to break their way, but the A's could very well win the American League West this season.

They won't be doing it with any help from Chavez, though. The reality is that Chavez tired of the scene in Oakland, perhaps feeling a bit self-conscious about cashing monster checks -- roughly \$913,000 (before taxes) every two weeks during the six-month regular season -- while being a virtual non-factor for the past two years, and decided that only a change of scenery might change his physical fortunes. Thus, he'll play elsewhere this season if his oft-broken body will allow it.

Latest word is that "elsewhere" for Chavez, a San Diego native, could be Los Angeles.

If that ends up being the case, especially if Chavez thrives with Dodgers, for whom he'll reportedly soon work out, it'll be one really strange set of circumstances for A's fans.

A's fans don't have any inherent hatred for the Dodgers, who, after all, are the archenemies of Oakland's cross-bay nemeses in Orange & Black. The classic "Got Titles?" T-shirts, worn so proudly for so long by A's fans as a reminder of San Francisco's lack of World Series hardware, have been rendered obsolete, so it's root-root-root for the Dodgers come Opening Day.

But let's face it: The Bay Area as a whole can't stand L.A. as a whole, and it *was* the Dodgers who slapped the A's with that colossal embarrassment in the 1988 World Series.

So if Chavez comes back to life with the Dodgers, one of Oakland's biggest "homegrown" stars, who has never worn anything but white spikes as a big-league baller, might as well wear a black hat.

Look, it's hard for any rational A's fan not to pull for a guy like Chavez, who played through as much pain as possible for as long as possible, and who was supremely productive for the best A's team in recent memory.

He worked his tail off to win six Gold Gloves after arriving on Oakland with huge defensive question marks. He was great with fans and in the community, active among various charities. He was a reliable and honest -- almost to a fault -- voice of the team.

But the Dodgers? Chavez at Chavez Ravine?

That's gonna make it tough for a lot of folks who wanted to forever call him their own.