

A's News Clips, Tuesday, February 22, 2011

Kevin Kouzmanoff says he's still happy to be with Oakland A's despite team's efforts to replace him

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

PHOENIX -- Kevin Kouzmanoff emphasized Monday that he's happy to still be an Athletic, which is noteworthy after an offseason in which the A's searched aggressively to replace him at third base.

Kouzmanoff said his feelings weren't hurt that the A's made a reported six-year, \$76 million offer to free agent Adrian Beltre. Or that they talked with the Seattle Mariners about trading for Chone Figgins.

"I feel like I'm ready to have a productive year, and I want to help the team make the playoffs and win a championship," he said. "What they're going to do business-wise is what they're going to do. I have no control over that. But I'm confident in my ability to play third base."

Manager Bob Geren knew Kouzmanoff was aware of the buzz surrounding his uncertain status in the winter. That's why Geren chatted with him before the A's took the field for their first full-squad workout Monday.

"There wasn't much that needed to be said," Geren said. "I let him know he's a major league third baseman, and he's ours, and I'm happy he's here. He knows that teams look at other players."

Kouzmanoff's 16 homers led the A's last season -- his first with the team -- and his 71 RBIs tied Kurt Suzuki for the team lead. But those were the lowest totals over his four full seasons in the majors.

His batting average (.247), on-base percentage (.283) and slugging percentage (.396) were also career-lows, and the on-base percentage was the lowest by an everyday player from the A's since third baseman Scott Brosius' .259 mark in 1997.

Kouzmanoff's 12 errors at third were considerably more than his 2009 total of three, when he set a National League record for fielding percentage by a third baseman (.990) as a member of the San Diego Padres. But his defense still is a plus.

It's likely that Kouzmanoff will drop to sixth or seventh in the batting order after the A's upgraded the lineup over the winter. He's excited about the offense's potential.

"I'm looking forward to it," he said. "Just being around the guys, just playing baseball again is fun. It's good to be back."

Reliever Michael Wuertz's day ended early after he experienced tenderness in his right shoulder, Geren said. He won't throw for at least the next couple days, and pitching coach Ron Romanick said Wuertz's status might be clearer today.

It's a potential problem for Oakland, considering Wuertz was troubled by shoulder tendinitis to start last season and never found consistent form. And it underscores a reason the A's spent money in the offseason to add bullpen depth with Brian Fuentes and Grant Balfour.

Fifth-starter candidate Rich Harden -- also a possible reliever -- already is sidelined with a side muscle injury.

Geren addressed the team before the workout, touching on the areas he thinks the team improved in during the offseason and areas in which he wants improvement over last season, notably situational hitting. "... Hideki Matsui took several rounds of batting practice and shagged flies in the outfield. One member of

the Japanese media noted it was the first time since 2007 that Matsui wasn't limited in some fashion -- because of knee problems -- during his team's first workout. "... Geren again raved about left-hander Josh Outman's stuff after watching him throw off the mound. "... Shortstop Cliff Pennington, recovering from left shoulder surgery, took grounders and hit from the left side. The switch hitter's shoulder bothers him more hitting right-handed.

A's Daric Barton now a lean, mean hacking machine

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

- Daric Barton isn't messing around this year.

Barton came into spring camp with a new physique. The A's first baseman believes he has added about 15 pounds of muscle while losing 10 pounds of fat, based on his body fat decrease - he's down 4 percent after strenuous workouts this offseason with Southern California trainer Brad Davidson. Barton cut out carbohydrates for two weeks, and he's trying to stick to a protein-rich diet.

His teammates have noticed the difference. "He was a fatty," A's starter Dallas Braden said. "A little baby polar bear, that's what I called him. It's encouraging to know he's got himself on the right track."

Barton already can tell the extra muscle will help him at the plate.

"I've never felt so good swinging the bat," Barton said. "I knew right away things would be better, taking batting practice. I would say I have more pop."

More pop is precisely what the A's need, of course, after finishing second to last in the league in home runs. And the one knock on Barton in his young career is that he hasn't provided enough power playing a position that typically features it.

The A's, of course, love what Barton does bring, even without large homer totals. He led the league in walks last year, and his defensive work is outstanding.

"I don't think you can put a value on it," Braden said. "I called him when he didn't get the Gold Glove and I was like, 'Oh, my God, are you serious?' But with Daric, day in and day out, you see him get to balls no one else possibly could get to. It's a crying shame no one has acknowledged that."

"Whenever I hear people talking about our need for an upgrade at first base, I chuckle," A's general manager Billy Beane said. "We're perfectly happy and very pleased - his defense in our opinion is amongst the best at the position in the game, his on-base percentage is good and both are getting better. ... He's a championship-caliber first baseman."

Beane noted that despite some injuries, Barton played in 159 games last year.

Why is Barton working with a trainer for the first time in his life? And why now?

"This has nothing to do with the team," he said. "It's more to do with myself. When I went down to Triple-A in '09, everything hit home. I've started to realize more and more that I need to concentrate on my career."

It's all a part of the maturation process that Barton began discussing last year. He came to the A's at the age of 19, with all kinds of talent, and he was happy to just rely on that ability without putting in a lot of extra work.

"He looks great, awesome - a stark contrast with where he was a few years ago," Braden said. "This shows how concerned he is about health and preparation, and obviously that spills over to every other facet of the game. As a friend, I'm excited for him."

"He was so young when he got here, a kid with a boatload of expectations, and now he's grown up."

Bob Geren stresses the positive in team address

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Oakland's prospects for 2011 are so good that **Bob Geren's** first meeting with the full squad was mostly upbeat.

The A's manager went over some areas in which the team needs to improve, including baserunning and situational hitting, but, he said, "I left on a positive note. We have a good team."

Highlights from the first full workout included All-Star **Trevor Cahill** in action. The likely starter for Sunday's Cactus League opener threw 30 pitches and, though he's not quite in game shape yet, "I feel better than I thought I would," Cahill said.

Most of the A's hitters took few swings off the team's pitchers, mostly standing in the box to watch pitches. The most closely watched hitting session came when the coaches pitched batting practice. That's when **Hideki Matsui** was first on display, taking some cuts, his every move noted by dozens of Japanese journalists.

Matsui's batting practice was unremarkable, but the rest of the day might have been. According to one Japanese writer, Monday was the first time that Matsui has participated in a full first-day workout, including fielding in the outfield and baserunning drills, since his 2007 knee surgery. He appeared to be moving well.

"Practice went well," Matsui said through interpreter **Roger Kahlon**. "I felt good hitting. ... I think it may take a little bit of time; I didn't hit that much before this."

Wuertz out for a while: Reliever **Michael Wuertz** will be shut down the next few days with what is thought to be a shoulder tweak. Geren said he will have more information this morning.

The A's have plenty of bullpen depth after signing **Brian Fuentes** and **Grant Balfour**, moves done in part because of how thin the unit was by the end of last season.

Wuertz missed the start of last season with tendinitis in his right shoulder.

Pujols a Giant? It's worth considering

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle, 2/21/2011

Albert Pujols wants to retire as a Cardinal, and that's fine with the Cardinals. The two sides are on the same page — except for the little matter of dollars and years.

After negotiations for an extension ended last week, Pujols is OK with playing out his contract and filing for free agency next winter, at which time the Cardinals will be one of many pursuers.

Cubs, definitely. Angels, Rangers, Nationals, sure.

The Yankees and Red Sox are set long term with first basemen Mark Teixeira and Adrian Gonzalez. But, hey, they're the Yankees and Red Sox. Other clubs will inquire, too.

Giants? Talk about a mystery team.

Fresh off a World Series title, the Giants will make a bundle in 2011. They'll sell more tickets (and merchandise) at higher prices while showcasing their brand on Showtime, making it more feasible to afford Pujols, who'd improve the team and increase its value — at least for the first part of the contract.

But would such an investment be considered?

Here are three reasons the Giants would pursue Pujols: 1. The offense: He's the best hitter in the game, period. The Giants' lineup would go from marginal to marvelous.

2. The marketing: We know how much the Giants like to market themselves. Otherwise, Showtime wouldn't have gotten through the front door. And the World Series trophy wouldn't have gotten beyond Third and King. After playing in the shadow of the Dodgers for most of five decades, on the field and at the gate, the Giants are ready to be the new Dodgers and don't want to stop flexing their corporate muscles.

3. The Dodgers: What if the divorcing McCourts sell their team to a group that wants to make one of the biggest splashes in Dodgers history?

Three reasons the Giants wouldn't pursue Pujols: 1. The payroll. Eventually, they'll need to sign Tim Lincecum, Matt Cain and Buster Posey to huge, long-term deals, and that might be difficult with one man making \$30 million, which happens to be Barry Zito's and Aaron Rowand's combined average annual salaries.

2. The defense: Without the designated-hitter rule, Pujols would need to stick at first base. A 10-year deal keeps him on the payroll through age 41, and 41-year-olds just don't play in the majors as they did before steroid testing got serious.

3. The prospect: If Brandon Belt is all that management says he is, the Giants are set at first base for the next decade.

Lend a hand: Asked to clarify the players' union's role in the Pujols negotiations, A's player rep Brad Ziegler said the union wouldn't tell him where to sign. Or for how much. It would, however, project his value and market along with which teams will need a first baseman and how much money is coming off teams' books.

"The union's job is to be informative," Ziegler said.

For example, the Cubs signed Carlos Peña to a one-year deal and will need a first baseman for 2012. Certainly, Pujols would be a tremendous fit on Chicago's North Side, and his refusal to accept St. Louis' offer suggests he believes he'll get more elsewhere, including from the Cubs.

Pondering Michael Young: The A's missed again on Adrian Beltre, who signed with Texas.

Oakland's consolation prize is that the Rangers lost Cliff Lee and Vladimir Guerrero. The Triple Crown would be a Michael Young trade, which hasn't been ruled out.

Odd that the Rangers would let the six-time All-Star go? Absolutely.

"From a player's standpoint, it seems strange. He's been with that team for so long," A's second baseman Mark Ellis said. "Michael Young's killed us. If they trade him to the National League, that's good for us.

"I admire him as a player, all that he went through when the Rangers were down, then to play in the World Series.

He's been the face of that team since Alex (Rodriguez) left. He's someone you can count on."

Maybe not anymore.

For years, Young was a trouper, moving from second to short (when Alfonso Soriano arrived) and from short to third (when Elvis Andrus arrived). With Beltre aboard, Young lost his position and was asked to be a DH/super-utility man. Enough is enough, and now he's seeking a trade.

He's owed \$48 million the next three seasons.

"He seems a perfect leader for any team," A's catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "I don't know what's going on in Texas. All I know is he's a great hitter who wants to help his team win."

Whichever that is.

Around the majors:

How classy is Carl Crawford? First day in Red Sox camp, he apologized for not mentioning his old team, the Rays, in his introductory news conference in Boston in December. The outfielder reiterated he enjoyed his time in St. Petersburg. ... Teixeira, who has a no-trade contract with the Yankees, pooh-poohed any talk of being moved to St. Louis in a trade for Pujols. "I'm going to be buried in these pinstripes," Teixeira said. ... Though Andy Pettitte said he won't pitch in 2011, Jorge Posada said he wouldn't be surprised if the lefty returned to the Yanks at some point in the season. ... For DH types, it was a buyer's market. Guerrero, anticipating a two-year deal upward of \$16 million, received a one-year, \$8 million deal from Baltimore. Hideki Matsui got \$4.25 million from the A's, Jim Thome \$3 million from the Twins, and Johnny Damon and Manny Ramirez \$5 million and \$2 million, respectively, from the Rays.

Wuertz exits early with shoulder issue

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- The first day of full-squad workouts was a short one for A's righty Michael Wuertz, who left the team's Papago Park Sports Complex early Monday due to a shoulder issue.

He was not scheduled to throw during the day, and manager Bob Geren did not know the extent of Wuertz's injury, but deemed it to be nothing of the serious sort.

Wuertz, 32, was sidelined by a shoulder injury for the entire month of April last year, one which paled in comparison to his dominant 2009 campaign, when he tallied 102 strikeouts, a 0.95 WHIP and a 2.63 ERA through 78 2/3 innings in 74 games.

The veteran right-hander slightly struggled upon his return to the mound in 2010, but he bounced back at the midseason mark, pitching to a 3.16 ERA and 1.21 WHIP from the start of July through the end of the year.

Wuertz is expected to represent a strong right-handed setup option to closer Andrew Bailey this year. He'll be part of an exceptional A's bullpen that is slated to boast fellow righties Grant Balfour and Brad Ziegler, along with lefties Brian Fuentes and Craig Breslow, plus another reliever -- likely Joey Devine or Jerry Blevins -- to be named later.

Matsui gets some outfield work in

PHOENIX -- Japanese media members rivaled fans in attendance numbers at the A's workout facilities on Monday, when Hideki Matsui joined his teammates for the club's first day of full-squad workouts.

Matsui's every move was charted, from the moment he strolled on to the field until the time he took his final swing in the batting cage and made his way back into the clubhouse.

Before exiting the complex, though, he addressed American reporters via translator Roger Kahlon, saying he "felt pretty good" on the initial day of practice.

"I'm happy to be wearing this uniform," Matsui said. "Overall, everything went pretty good here today."

The 36-year-old veteran slugger noted that his time with a bat is rather limited in the offseason, so he expects to slowly but surely -- and literally -- get back into the swing of things at the plate.

Matsui also worked with the outfield group, taking part in fly-ball exercises alongside his new teammates, like Coco Crisp, who embraced Matsui with a hug. By working in the outfield, he was able to test out his knees, which have been the source of injury in recent years.

"So far, so good," he said. "I'm not pushing it 100 percent. I'd like to maintain a constant range of motion."

Manager Bob Geren said Matsui could potentially see a small dose of time in the outfield this spring but will primarily be used in the designated hitter's slot, where he's expected to lend Oakland a healthy helping of power this year.

Worth noting

Infielders Daric Barton and Jemile Weeks have been battling illness in recent days, but both were on the field Monday and taking part in all activities. ... Geren said right-hander Josh Outman, a strong candidate for the fifth spot in the rotation, "threw the ball really well" during live batting practice. ... The A's skipper was also impressed with hurlers Tyson Ross and non-roster invitee Danny Farquhar, who came to Oakland in the Rajai Davis trade. "I really liked what I saw from him," Geren said. The 24-year-old Farquhar, a 5-foot-11 righty, recorded a 4-3 record with a 3.52 ERA and 17 saves for Toronto's Double-A team last year.

Geren shares optimism in addressing his club

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Nearly 60 players crowded a buzzing A's clubhouse Monday morning, when manager Bob Geren addressed his 2011 club in preparation for the team's first full-squad workout.

"I left them with a positive outlook on the year, because we feel like it's going to be one," Geren said while speaking to media shortly after.

The A's skipper, embarking on his fifth year at the helm in Oakland, is looking to capture his first winning season following a 2010 campaign that left his club in second place behind the American League champion Rangers with an 81-81 record.

A slew of injuries -- along with a soft offense lacking any sort of power -- prevented the A's from clinching their first postseason berth since 2006, Geren believes. Health is returning, though, and the A's made a conscious effort to solve their offensively challenged ways this winter with the additions of Hideki Matsui, Josh Willingham and David DeJesus.

"This morning I just kinda touched on what I felt was a very productive offseason," Geren said. "The entire front office, I thought, did a tremendous job of adding offense without sacrificing defense, and by bolstering an already impressive pitching staff.

"The offseason was fun because every time we acquired someone via trade, like a DeJesus, or via free agency, like a Matsui, it felt like every building block kept getting stronger and stronger. I've been looking forward to this date since the last game of [2010]."

Nothing is certain on paper, though. That's why Geren, who kept his speech "short and sweet," also stressed the importance of the many mundane activities that come along with Spring Training, including the likes of baserunning, pitchers' fielding practice, and situational hitting.

"We touched on each phase of the game," he said. "I let them know what I was satisfied with and what I was happy with last year, and where we need to improve, and how we're going to do it."

The A's wasted no time in getting to work, as they raced over to the team's Minor League facilities at Papago Park, where they'll be stationed for the next two days. Beginning Thursday, the team will face three days of intrasquad games at Phoenix Municipal Stadium, before christening the Spring Training season with an away game in Mesa, Ariz., against the Cubs, on Sunday afternoon.

Among those in tow will be 17 new players, many of whom are expected to keep the A's near the top of the division this year.

"I think we've been bona fide contenders every year I've been the manager," Geren said. "I think we've been sidelined by injuries each of the years, and that's pushed us back. This year, the biggest difference is not necessarily the talent level of the nine starting players, but the depth that we have if we do have any injuries."

Hideki Matsui gets to work on first day with A's

By JANIE McCAULEY

The Associated Press

4:52 p.m. Monday, February 21, 2011

PHOENIX — Coco Crisp approached Hideki Matsui while they warmed up Monday and pulled his new teammate into a hug. They shook hands, too — a little more the Japanese style.

Crisp was far from the only one thrilled to see Oakland's new designated hitter in uniform and on the field. Pitcher Dallas Braden greeted the slugger in the clubhouse on reporting day with a life-size blowup Godzilla representing Matsui's nickname, even dressing it in his No. 55 jersey.

"I felt it. All over the place," catcher Kurt Suzuki said of Matsui fever. "Very cool."

Matsui tipped his cap to the large contingent monitoring his every move after a session in the covered cage at Papago Park, then smiled as he went through sprint work on a welcome sunny day in the desert following a weekend of heavy rain and cold. He even pulled out his glove to play catch and later did defensive drills with the outfielders.

"It's like the first day of school. It's great," second baseman Mark Ellis said of the hype. "There are a lot of people all over the place. Getting people to talk about the A's, that's good. It will be different."

The Athletics have high hopes that Matsui and fellow newcomers David DeJesus and Josh Willingham will boost the middle of the order and make them a contender in the AL West. Oakland managed only 109 homers and 663 runs last season, the team's second fewest in the last 28 non-shortened seasons.

"Practice went pretty well," Matsui said through his interpreter, Roger Kahlon. "I'm happy to be wearing this uniform."

While the A's got their first look at their upgraded roster all together, there's not ever much to take from Day 1. Hitters typically stand in the batter's box and spend more time tracking pitches than taking actual swings.

"They're all standing upright. That's good," A's assistant general manager David Forst said with a smile. His club used the disabled list 23 times last season, two shy of the franchise record set in 2008.

Manager Bob Geren said he spent a little more time addressing his team Monday morning and welcoming all the new faces.

With added depth throughout the roster, a talented starting rotation and bullpen, and a lineup that looks to produce more offense, the A's could make a push for their first AL West title since reaching the AL championship series in 2006 and getting swept by Detroit.

Oakland finished second last year to the eventual AL champion Texas Rangers, staying in the race until late despite all the injuries.

Matsui's tender knees feel good and he looks strong. Geren is counting on it.

The attention in Japan is an added bonus for the small-market franchise.

"It's nice with Hideki joining our team, having a little green and gold contingent over there is going to be fun," the skipper said.

Matsui batted .274 with 21 homers and 84 RBIs last season with the Los Angeles Angels, Oakland's division rival. He spent his first seven major league seasons with the New York Yankees and was MVP of the 2009 World Series.

Matsui joined the A's in December on a \$4.25 million, one-year contract that includes an additional \$100,000 in possible performance bonuses.

His father, Masao, for one, is expecting big things from his son this season: as in 30 homers and a .300 average.

"It's crazy," shortstop Cliff Pennington said of the buzz. "Everybody's excited about the new guys we have. Expectations are high. He's a big-time player and it will bring some attention to the team. It will be interesting to learn about the culture, too."

NOTES: Reliever Michael Wuertz left the complex early and is nursing a minor shoulder issue that will keep him out for a couple of days. ... Geren said Pennington, coming off left shoulder surgery that is expected to keep him out of the first week of exhibition games, could get some defensive work in before he gets any at-bats. ... 1B Daric Barton has been sick in recent days and was limited.

Expectations, Optimism High in A's Camp

Jeff Fletcher, fanhouse.com, 2/21/2011

PHOENIX - Mark Ellis is the senior member of the A's, going so far back with the organization that he shared an infield with a healthy Eric Chavez and Miguel Tejada, playing behind the Big Three of Tim Hudson, Mark Mulder and Barry Zito.

Ellis arrived midway through the A's eight-year streak of winning baseball, and he has endured the subsequent four-year playoff drought.

That makes Ellis an authority when it comes to judging the spring training vibe around the A's.

"This year is different, absolutely," Ellis said Monday, the day of the club's first full-squad workout of the spring. "This is as optimistic as I've been in spring training the past couple years. It's exciting. If you look around, we are as good as anyone in our division, and that's something we maybe haven't been able to say the past couple years."

Oh, any team can say that in February. Convincing others is something else.

Before a single pitch of the Cactus League season, let alone the real season, the A's have already convinced many around baseball that they are on the way back to contention. Like the retooled Brewers in the NL, the A's are a chic pick to reach the playoffs.

"I think we finished on a high note last year, and because of that there is a sense that we can improve on that and narrow the gap between us and Texas," said general manager Billy Beane, diplomatically adding that the Rangers are still "the team to beat."

The Rangers won the division with 90 victories last season, while the A's finished 81-81, snapping a three-year streak of finishing under .500. The Rangers lost Cliff Lee and Vladimir Guerrero and they may also trade Michael Young, while they've added Adrian Beltre and highly questionable Brandon Webb. On balance, it seems tough to make the case that the Rangers are better than they were in 2010.

The A's are definitely better. The only question is how much.

They replaced one-third of their lineup, and it just happens to be the most important one-third. Their likely Opening Day lineup will have newcomers David DeJesus, Josh Willingham and Hideki Matsui batting in the 3-4-5 spots.

That's not exactly Carl Crawford-Adrian Gonzalez-Kevin Youkilis, but it's a dramatic improvement nonetheless.

As we pointed out back in December, if DeJesus, Willingham and Matsui simply repeated their 2010 seasons, they'd improve the A's OPS at their three positions by an average of 141 points. The OPS gap from top to bottom among all major league regulars last season, from Josh Hamilton to Cesar Izturis, was 499 points last year, so anything that moves you up one-third through that range is pretty significant.

But the A's are also hoping that the addition of new middle-of-the-order hitters will improve the players around them.

Take Kurt Suzuki. He's a very nice catcher to have around. He's athletic (can you do this?) and knows how to handle a pitching staff. He's got a little bit of pop (15 and 13 homers each of the past two years). Suzuki is a nice enough piece that the A's signed him to a three-year, \$15.65 million deal.

Suzuki is not, however, a middle-of-the-order hitter.

The A's, with no one any better, put Suzuki third, fourth or fifth regularly last year. The single entry on the lineup card -- 4. Suzuki, C - screamed that this was a team with offensive problems. Now, Suzuki can be what he ought to be, which is a good defensive catcher who hits pretty well for a No. 6 or No. 7 hitter.

The same could be said of third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff, and Ellis.

"Most of the guys we had in those (middle-of-the-order) spots were probably not the guys who should be hitting there, and they would tell you the same thing,"

Beane said.

Ellis, who hit third, fifth or sixth in half of his games last year, agreed.

"There are good players here," he said, "That's never been a question, but when you ask guys to do something they can't do, they aren't going to be as good. Just let everybody do what they are capable of doing, and they will be fine, but you have to have someone in the middle of the lineup who can hit home runs and drive in runs."

DeJesus isn't much of a power threat, but he's a career .289 hitter. Willingham and Matsui have each hit more than 20 homers at least three times in the past five years. By contrast, the A's have produced exactly two 20-homer seasons over the past three years, both by Jack Cust. No one hit more than 16 last year. That's part of the reason that they ranked 11th in the AL in runs.

The A's still managed to finish at .500 only because of a talented, deep, young pitching staff that led the league in ERA. Everyone returns from that staff except for No. 5 starter Vin Mazzaro, and the bullpen, led by two-time All-Star Andrew Bailey, has been bolstered by the additions of Grant Balfour and Brian Fuentes.

Take an 81-win team and improve one-third of the lineup, add to key bullpen pieces and return the top four of the starting rotation and you get something they haven't had much recently at A's spring training.

"Expectations are good," Ellis said. "It's never bad to have expectations. We like our team. There is no doubt about it."

Advocate for Women in Baseball Finally Gets to Be One

By GLENN SWAIN, New York Times, 2/21/2011

GOODYEAR, Ariz. — Justine Siegal felt a chill of excitement when she saw her dark blue [Cleveland Indians](#) jersey. She changed in the umpires' locker room and emerged with a confident gait, her blond pigtails shining in the Arizona morning sun. Siegal, 36, smiled as she prepared for her debut Monday, her 13-year-old daughter, Jasmine, following close by her side.

A longtime advocate for girls playing baseball, Siegal explained her fantasy campaign. "I had a dream and felt like giving it a go," she said. "I see this as more of a mental exercise than a physical one."

A few minutes later, she walked on Practice Field No. 2 and became what was believed to be the first woman to throw batting practice to a major league team. First, she threw to a group of minor leaguers, whose wide eyes suggested that they had never quite seen a changeup like hers. In preparation for this week, Siegal, a former high school and amateur player, threw batting practice for a number of college teams and strengthened her arm with the help of a personal trainer.

"I'm a bit of an old lady now, but in my early 20s, I threw in the 70s," Siegal said of her fastball.

"What's the scouting report on her?" one minor league hitter joked before stepping into the batter's box.

Indians Manager Manny Acta described her work as "pretty impressive."

"It was wonderful to have her pitch for us because she's from Cleveland," Acta said. "I believe her dad and grandfather still have season tickets. It's multigenerational. For her to do this with our ball club was very special."

Raised in Cleveland, where she began playing baseball at 5, a young Siegal would lie in bed at night dreaming of a career in professional baseball, and of one day taking the field as a member of the Indians.

"It wasn't until I was 15 when I knew it wasn't going to happen," she said.

Her quest to throw batting practice began last November when she sent written requests to general managers of major league clubs. Only one bothered to answer.

"It was a lovely letter supporting me, but also saying no," Siegal said.

She didn't stop there. In December, Siegal traveled to the winter meetings in Florida and tracked down general managers to make her pitch in person. Oakland's Billy Beane was the first to say yes — Siegal will pitch to the Athletics on Wednesday in Phoenix — and Cleveland's Chris Antonetti warmed to the idea.

Siegal is used to doing what most other women have not. A first-base coach for the Brockton Rox of the Can-Am League in 2009, she claims to have been the first woman to serve on the coaching staff of a men's professional team. She was a coach on the men's team at Springfield College in Massachusetts from 2007 to 2010 and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in sport and exercise psychology at the college.

Last summer, Eri Yoshida, a female knuckleball pitcher from Japan, pitched for the Chico Outlaws of the Golden Baseball League, becoming the first woman to pitch in a professional game in the United States in a decade. Yoshida finished the season 0-4 with a 12.28 earned run average.

On Monday, watching her mother throw four-seam fastballs to the hitters, Jasmine Siegal said: "This is so cool. She's showing that no matter what, you can achieve your goals."

On the sleeve of Justine Siegal's Indians jersey was a memorial patch in tribute to 9-year-old Christina Taylor Green, the youngest person killed in the Jan. 8 mass shooting in Tucson. Green, a granddaughter of the longtime baseball executive Dallas Green, had been the only girl on her Little League team.

"This is a small way to honor her memory," Siegal said. "She represents why I'm doing this. Christina is a symbol of all those girls who want to play baseball."

About 13 years ago, Siegal started what is now called Baseball for All, an organization that promotes baseball globally, with the focus on female participation. The organization started as a four-team all-women's baseball league in Cleveland.

"I grew up with a chip on my shoulder," Siegal said. "I had to learn to look for support. I got tired of waiting for opportunities, so I made my own."

After throwing 30 minutes to the minor leaguers, Siegal moved to another field to throw to a group of starters and backups for another 20 minutes.

As Siegal warmed up with a game of catch with Acta, one of her throws sailed high over the manager's glove, scattering reporters and onlookers behind the batting cage.

"I'm not trying to hit you," Siegal yelled. "That's no warning pitch to hitters. I'm really nervous and my heart's beating fast."

Wincing at two throws that bounced in the dirt around home plate, Siegal settled in and held her own with the power hitters.

"She did great," the backup catcher Paul Phillips said. "She would have fit right in if you had not seen her ponytails."

At the end of batting practice, Siegal helped other players retrieve balls and toss them into a bucket.

"I've thrown better," she said, "but I think I threw like the other coaches."

She stood by the dugout wearing a wide smile, hands on her hips, a dream realized.

"This is my biggest day in baseball so far," she said. "This is the greatest game on earth."

Siegal becomes first woman to throw major league BP

Cleveland native makes history with Indians in spring training

Nick Camino, WTAM.com. 2/21/2011

(GOODYEAR, Ariz.) -- History was made on Monday afternoon at the Cleveland Indians spring training complex. Justine Siegal became the first woman to pitch batting practice to a major league baseball team.

What was once a far-fetched idea for the Cleveland Heights native became a reality when Siegal pitched batting practice to Indians minor league prospects and major league players on Monday. Siegal will also throw batting practice for the Oakland Athletics later this week.

Siegal, 36, threw right-handed and wore an Indians uniform and hat provided by the club.

A longtime fan of the Cleveland Indians, Siegal is hoping her appearance on a major league baseball diamond will help raise awareness for women's baseball. She wants people to know that women want to play baseball too.

Along with helping spread the word about women's baseball, Siegal wore a patch on her uniform honoring Christina Taylor Green, the nine-year old girl killed in last month's shootings in Tucson, Ariz. Green was the granddaughter of former Philadelphia Phillies manager Dallas Green.

As for Siegal, she continues to make history. Not only is she now the first woman to throw batting practice to a major league team, she was the first woman to coach first base in a professional men's independent league in Massachusetts and she was an assistant coach at Springfield College in Massachusetts, where for three years she was the only female baseball coach in the country.

Siegal attended Major League Baseball's Winter Meetings in Florida where she pitched the idea to different managers and general managers, and after talking with Indians general manager Chris Antonetti, it was agreed that she could come to camp to throw batting practice to major league players.