

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

Oakland A's know this much about David DeJesus: He can hit

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

PHOENIX -- For a guy who appears to have a spot locked down in the A's lineup, David DeJesus' exact role is hard to define.

Is he a rally-starter who best fits near the top of the lineup, or a run producer who will earn his paycheck clearing the bases?

All that's known is DeJesus, obtained via trade from Kansas City in November, is targeted for right field. If the A's wind up showing improvement offensively this season, figure DeJesus will be central to the effort in one way or another.

"He's an all-around hitter who uses the whole field," A's manager Bob Geren said. "There are guys that hit more home runs, but when you put the numbers together, he's one of the best hitters in baseball."

A .289 career hitter over seven-plus major league seasons, DeJesus, 31, has collected as many as 73 RBIs in a year (2008) and scored as many as 101 runs (2007).

One notable stat for fans tired of watching A's hitters make the slow walk back to the dugout: DeJesus led the majors last season with a .287 average in two-strike counts.

There's a strong chance he'll wind up as the No. 3 hitter by default -- sandwiched between table-setters Coco Crisp and Daric Barton and sluggers Josh Willingham and Hideki Matsui.

Therein lies the problem that exists for the A's in the eyes of some.

The No. 3 hitter traditionally is the best (read: most complete) hitter in a lineup. DeJesus doesn't offer much power -- his career high in homers is 13, which he achieved in 2009.

"They've got three two-hole hitters in the lineup -- DeJesus, (Mark) Ellis and Barton," said one major league scout who requested anonymity. "And two play positions where you want power," in reference to Barton at first base and DeJesus in right field.

It's an argument DeJesus is familiar with.

He batted leadoff in 636 of his 843 starts with the Royals, but when he wasn't there, he saw considerable time as the No. 3 hitter.

"I'm going to go out there and do what got me here," DeJesus said. "That's my game, stay up the middle, take the ball the other way and try to drive the ball in the gaps. I'm not a home run hitter, but I'll find the gaps."

Crisp, who played alongside DeJesus during Crisp's injury-shortened season with the Royals in 2009, said DeJesus can handle the No. 3 spot.

"He has the ability, with his good hands, to hit third," Crisp said. "He's a guy that normally doesn't go into long slumps. He doesn't try to drastically change anything."

The A's acquired DeJesus from the Royals for pitchers Vin Mazzaro and Justin Marks, but DeJesus was a hot commodity before last season's trade deadline. That ended when DeJesus tore a tendon in his right thumb in late July, crashing into the outfield wall at Yankee Stadium while trying to haul in a Derek Jeter drive.

DeJesus underwent surgery and missed the rest of the season, but he said his thumb is completely healed.

He's pleased to be with the A's -- whom many view as American League West contenders -- after spending his entire career with the Royals, who spent much of that time in the AL Central cellar.

"It's awesome. I'm tired of losing," he said. "We've got to go out and prove that the expectations are right."

Oakland A's notebook: Hitters set to face woman in batting practice

By Joe Stiglich. Oakland Tribune

PHOENIX -- Justine Siegal will turn a run-of-the-mill spring training workout into an intriguing spectacle Wednesday morning.

Siegal is scheduled to throw a round of batting practice against the A's at Papago Park Baseball Complex. She pitched to Cleveland Indians hitters Monday, becoming the first woman to throw batting practice to a major league team.

Siegal, 36, was an assistant coach for the Springfield (Mass.) College baseball team from 2007-10. A Cleveland native and lifelong Indians fan, Siegal is also the founder of Baseball For All, an organization that aims to expand opportunities for women in baseball.

A's bench coach Joel Skinner, who coordinates the team's spring training schedule, said Siegal likely will face minor league prospects as opposed to established veterans.

Woe to the player who lets Siegal sneak a fastball by him. He'll surely hear some razzing. But center fielder Coco Crisp said he wouldn't shy away from hitting against a woman.

"If she can pitch, she can pitch," Crisp said. "A lot of women out there run track, and most are faster than me."

Indians hitters came away impressed with Siegal's stuff, according to a Cleveland Plain Dealer story.

"I saw a couple of pictures on the Internet," Skinner said. "It looked like she had good arm action."

Reliever Michael Wuertz said the right shoulder soreness that forced him to leave Monday's workout is not serious and typical of the discomfort he gets early in camp. After Wuertz tried throwing through pain last spring -- eventually starting the season on the disabled list with shoulder tendinitis -- he said the plan is to nip the problem in the bud. "I'll take three, four, five days (off), whatever it takes to get it done," he said. "It's nothing like last year."

Trevor Cahill will start Sunday's Cactus League opener against the Chicago Cubs, manager Bob Geren confirmed. Based on the current three-day throwing cycles, Dallas Braden would pitch Monday against the Los Angeles Angels and Brett Anderson and Gio Gonzalez would go Tuesday against the Cincinnati Reds. "... Geren said fifth-starter candidate Brandon McCarthy had better command Tuesday after adjusting his positioning on the mound. "... Sunday's game will air on KTRB (860-AM). All exhibitions not on radio will be broadcast online at mlb.com.

Chin Music: Trevor Cahill to start Sunday vs. Cubs in exhibition opener

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 2/22/2011 9:35AM

It's day 2 of a three-day stretch of workouts for the A's at Papago Park, which is just a five-minute drive from Phoenix Municipal Stadium. The logistics are a little wacky for players these three days. They show up at Muni, dress and gather up their belongings, carpool over to Papago and then return to Muni after the workout to finish whatever treatment they might need. But at least the sunshine is back after a couple days of cold weather and rain.

Bob Geren confirmed that Trevor Cahill will start Sunday's exhibition opener against the Chicago Cubs in Mesa. Going by the current schedule, others who could throw that day are Josh Outman, Bobby Cramer, Tyson Ross and Joey Devine. But there's nothing confirmed after Cahill. It's still tough to decipher who might get the Opening Night start because all pitchers are throwing once every three days right now. A natural every-fifth-day routine has yet to be established. Geren told reporters earlier he had a good idea of who he'd give that first start too. And I've got to think Cahill is at the forefront in his thoughts. Why not? He had the best season last year and his demeanor is perfect to take the ball in big games -- he's low-key and not easily excitable.

Michael Wuertz is not too concerned about the shoulder soreness that cut short his workout Monday. He said his arm speed was a little slow in Sunday's throwing session, and he's working through a normal kind of soreness he gets during most springs. Now, Wuertz said similar things last spring, and he wound up having tendinitis that sent him to the DL. But he told me this morning that this feeling is nothing like last year's. The A's are taking extra precaution with their front-line guys

early in camp if there's even a hint of physical problems. Geren said Wuertz could throw as soon as Thursday. Wuertz said he could take "three, four or five days."

Remember, you can get updates on anything noteworthy that happens during daily workouts at twitter.com/joestiglich. I try to throw pictures up there when I can and I'm hoping to start posting some live video clips soon. Stay tuned ...

A'S BEAT

Different approach to Wuertz injury

By **Susan Slusser**, San Francisco Chronicle

PHOENIX — Last spring, **Michael Wuertz** had tendinitis in his right shoulder, but he pitched through it and wasn't shut down until mid-March.

This week, Wuertz felt a similar twinge, as he said he always does during the spring. But this time, Wuertz said, new head trainer **Nick Paparesta** came to him to suggest that a few days off might be a good idea.

That's a new approach — last year, Wuertz didn't even get a cortisone shot for the problem until the end of March, and he opened the season on the disabled list.

"We're going in a different direction this year," said Wuertz, who said he could miss a couple of days to a week. "I'm glad we're on the same page, looking at the same things."

Manager **Bob Geren** said that Wuertz might throw as soon as Thursday and that the injury is not a concern. First, the A's already had planned to take it easy with Wuertz, **Craig Breslow**

and **Andrew Bailey**.

Second, it's early. And third, Wuertz already had built up to 40 pitches in his bullpen sessions, and he doesn't need more than that to start the season.

Cahill to go Sunday: As expected, **Trevor Cahill** will start Sunday's Cactus League opener against the Cubs in Mesa.

Carlos Zambrano and

Matt Garza will pitch for Chicago, and it's unlikely any of them would go more than two innings.

The game will be broadcast on KTRB (860).

Oakland's other pitchers slated to go Sunday, though they might not all get in: **Bobby Cramer**, **Tyson Ross**, **Josh Outman**, **Danny Farquhar**, **Brad Ziegler** and **Joey Devine**.

Geren was complimentary of Outman and Farquhar after Monday's throwing session. Geren said that Farquhar, acquired from Toronto in the **Rajai Davis** deal, was throwing hard.

Twice in a row, Outman has been among the team's most impressive pitchers, as he tries to return from Tommy John surgery to win the fifthstarter spot.

Briefly: Thursday's intrasquad game should start at about noon at Phoenix Municipal Stadium, and it will go 3½ innings. ... Geren said he considers the backup catching spot a competition; that means that **Josh Donaldson** is being considered along with incumbent **Landon Powell**. The A's often don't keep backup catchers (or infielders) once they hit arbitration, and Powell will be eligible for arbitration after this season. ... With Cahill starting Sunday, **Dallas Braden** is slated for Monday, against the Angels in Tempe, and **Brett Anderson** and

Gio Gonzalez both will pitch Tuesday against the Reds at Phoenix Municipal Stadium. ... **Justine Siegal**, who became the first woman to throw batting practice to a bigleague team when she did so at the Indians' camp Monday, will throw batting practice at the A's camp today.

Drumbeat: Wuertz will miss a few days; Cahill to start Cactus opener

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Phoenix, 2/22/2011, 9:41AM

Michael Wuertz said he has the usual shoulder twinge he gets every spring, but this time, the A's are being proactive about it: Wuertz won't throw for several days (Thursday is possible, manager Bob Geren said; Wuertz said it might be a couple of days to a week).

Last spring, Wuertz tried to throw through the same problem, and he wasn't shut down until mid-March and he got a cortisone shot later that month. He started the season on the DL.

The A's had said they were going to take it easy with Wuertz, Craig Breslow and Andrew Bailey this spring, and missing a bit of time will not be an issue at all. This is a different approach for the A's, and I'm wondering if it has anything to do with new trainer Nick Paparesta. Wuertz told me that Paparesta came to him and suggested holding off for a bit, and that seems like an encouraging development for a team that has had so many injuries the past three years. If something hurts, don't push it - makes sense to me, especially early on. Wuertz told me he's already thrown 40-pitch bullpens, so he's got a good base to work off.

It was fairly obvious from the A's pitching schedule that Trevor Cahill would start Sunday's Cactus League opener against the Cubs. Geren confirmed that this morning. That means Dallas Braden will go in the second game of the spring, and Brett Anderson and Gio Gonzalez in game three.

I ducked out after Geren's morning interview session because I'm still under the weather, so I might not have details from the rest of the day's action; my apologies if there is some major development that I miss.

Romanick's task: Keep A's staff on track

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

PHOENIX — A pitching coach can be the fall guy for a lousy staff, dismissed because pitchers got crushed too often. The successor often arrives to assist in the rebuilding process, which can be slow and painful. Sometimes he doesn't last long, either.

The A's have a different situation, which is nothing unusual. They let the leader of their staff go out on top, and Curt Young is richer for it, literally, now that he's the Red Sox's pitching coach.

The A's staff, best in the American League last season if ERA is any indication, was inherited by Ron Romanick, who paid his dues in the organization and now oversees four dependable starters and a bullpen that went from deep to deeper with a couple of Billy Beane phone calls.

Going in, Romanick has one advantage over Young, who's working with Boston manager Terry Francona for the first time since both were on Oakland's 2003 staff.

"I talked to Curt and said how nice it'll be that he can play golf at Brookline," said Romanick, referring to the celebrated golf course outside of Boston, "and he said he had to spend his time learning about all his guys." It's different for Romanick. He knows all his guys, having been in the organization since 1999, mostly as a roving pitching coordinator. He was the bullpen coach the past three years, basically assisting Young, so at one time or another, he had a hand in developing most of Oakland's pitchers.

Young handed over a staff that, until further notice, might be the league's best overall. At the very least, it's in the top three with the Red Sox and Angels.

Trevor Cahill, Brett Anderson, Dallas Braden, Gio Gonzalez, Josh Outman, Rich Harden, Andrew Bailey, Brad Ziegler and Jerry Blevins were all either homegrown or acquired before reaching the majors.

They're complemented by others who had bigleague experience before getting to Oakland: Brian Fuentes, Grant Balfour, Michael Wuertz, Craig Breslow, Joey Devine and Brandon McCarthy.

Little postseason experience, however. Fuentes, a teenager in the Mariners' system when Romanick was their minorleague coordinator, and Balfour have the most, and Romanick said, "I'm going to call them out on that. They need to explain to these other guys how much fun it is to play in the postseason."

Romanick pitched three years in the majors, making 82 starts for the Angels in the mid-'80s, and met Bob Geren when traded to the Yankees' system in 1987. They reunited in '99, when both worked in the A's farm system. Romanick is a details guy, computer guy and trusted guy, making him an easy hire. Young coached A's pitchers for seven years — they had the league's lowest opponents' batting average during that stretch — and spent 23 years in the organization, including as a pitcher and minor-league coach. He wouldn't accept a one-year deal (with nearly a 40 percent raise), which is all the A's offered because Geren was signed through only 2011.

So Young took a multiyear deal in Boston, and Romanick was handed the keys and told to drive straight ahead.

"My goal is to get everyone out of camp healthy and motivated," Romanick said. "We can't sit back after the year we had last year.

The hardest thing to do is repeat it."

Romanick is a big reason that Harden, who considers Romanick a mentor, wanted to return to the A's, though his arm injury is a cruel reminder of past woes.

Ziegler can thank Romanick for converting him to a sidearm pitcher. On Tuesday, McCarthy looked extra sharp throwing off the mound, and Geren credited Romanick for making a couple of adjustments.

"They know how I am," Romanick said of his pitchers, especially those who have been around for several years.

"I'm different from Curt in lot of ways and similar in a lot of ways. Most of our guys came out of the program we put together in the system. We kind of grew up with these kids.

Curt and I didn't agree on stuff all the time, but the bottom line was making guys better."

The start of this conga line was the retirement of Toronto manager Cito Gaston, who was replaced by Boston pitching coach John Farrell, who was replaced by Young, who was replaced by Romanick, who was replaced by Triple-A manager Rick Rodriguez, who was replaced by ... We could go on. The important thing is that Oakland's pitching appears stacked, and Romanick is in charge of keeping it that way.

Healthy Jackson ready to tackle backup role

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Like clockwork, Spring Training brings out a familiar tune around every camp each year.

Players insist they're in the best shape of their lives, that they've never felt better -- or something like that.

Conor Jackson would like to believe in such adages, but he's learned to keep a healthy perspective on the game that's handed him his fair share of ups and downs.

"I don't want to say any of that," Jackson said. "It seems like it's a curse to people. There are a lot of variables to that statement. All I know right now is that I feel healthy, and I'm going to try to stay healthy."

Easier said than done for a guy who's been limited to 90 games over the past two seasons. The 28-year-old Jackson, restricted to 30 contests with the D-backs in 2009 because of a long battle with Valley Fever, looked to put any remnant of the disease behind him in '10 only to play in just 60 games -- 42 with Arizona and 18 with Oakland -- because of a rash of injuries.

Much of those woes, he found out, developed as a result of a sports hernia, for which he underwent a procedure in September. A successful surgery lent Jackson hope, but it didn't assure him of a tendered contract thereafter.

"I didn't know what was going to happen," he said. "Of course it was in the back of my mind, but it was something I couldn't control."

Ultimately, the A's handed Jackson a \$3.2 million contract, but not to be their starting left fielder. They told him up front, he said, that he'd be relied upon in a backup role behind starters David DeJesus, Coco Crisp and Josh Willingham. Ryan Sweeney is seemingly in the same position, and both likely share a mirrored mindset.

"I'm going to make it as difficult as I can for Bob to not put me in the lineup," Jackson said. "That's the only thing I can do. I'm not going to sit here and worry about at-bats. I'm going to be ready when my opportunity comes. I believe Billy [Beane] has put together a team that is ready to win now. It's exciting. I think they've done a good job of letting me know what my role is."

In preparation for that role, Jackson spent every day of his offseason undergoing rehab at API in Southern California, tacking on 20 pounds.

"I don't think, after Valley Fever, I ever put all my weight back on," he said, adding that he's now at what he deems his normal weight.

Jackson's strength is also back, and his core muscles are constantly active thanks to a variety of exercises, including Pilates and yoga.

"I've tried everything," he said. "I feel like my core and my hips were weak, and I think that may have contributed to injury. That's one area I've really changed and turned my focus [toward] this year."

Jackson would like to see such focus transform into success similar to that which was garnered early in his career. In three full seasons with Arizona from 2006-08, he averaged 14 home runs and 71 RBIs with a .292 mark. Those are the numbers that proved attractive to an A's organization looking for lineup stability last June, ones that could resurface given the opportunity.

"If he keeps his health up, keeps his strength up, the rest will come," manager Bob Geren said. "I'm happy he's healthy because he's a good outfielder. There are lots of at-bats to go around this spring, and we'll be mixing plenty guys in and out. Conor will get his at-bats just like everyone else."

Just how many is unknown, but Jackson, who also has experience at first base and in the designated-hitter's role, isn't too concerned with worrying about such things -- especially after enduring "a bad string of injuries and luck the past few years," he noted.

"My job is to contribute off the bench, and that's what's going to happen," he said. "It's been a couple years since I've played consistently, but I don't think my game's diminished. Hopefully things will turn. Just keep me healthy for 162 -- no DL trips."

Wuertz working to remain healthy this spring

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Michael Wuertz isn't looking to repeat last year's lengthy shoulder woes.

The A's righty thinks he has a good chance of avoiding them given the different treatment he's receiving this time around with the help of new trainer Nick Paparesta. In fact, the injured hurler said he could be back on a mound in three to four days and feels he can remain healthy the rest of the way.

Wuertz left the A's workout facilities early Monday with what he described as the typical shoulder soreness he experiences most springs. He tried to pitch through the discomfort last spring, which ultimately forced him to miss the first month of the season.

"We're taking a different course of action this year," Wuertz said. "We're acting on it early so that it doesn't become a problem later on."

The 32-year-old Wuertz, who lives in Arizona during the offseason, has been working with pitching coach Ron Romanick since January. He was already up to 45-pitch bullpen sessions, putting him far ahead of a normal schedule.

"I may have increased my workload a bit too much, too soon," he said. "That extra torque early on probably flared it up."

Nevertheless, the A's have plans to take it easy with Wuertz, Andrew Bailey and Craig Breslow this spring after the workload they received last year, so missing a few days isn't of concern at this point.

Cahill set to start Cactus League opener

PHOENIX -- Coming off an All-Star season that put him on the national map, A's righty Trevor Cahill will look to pick up right where he left off when he gets the first crack at game action this spring.

The 22-year-old Cahill is slated to start Sunday's Cactus League opener against the Cubs at Hohokam Stadium in Mesa, Ariz., at 1:05 p.m. MT. Bobby Cramer, Tyson Ross and Josh Outman -- all considered candidates for the fifth starter spot -- will follow Cahill in the afternoon contest.

Also slated to throw Sunday are relievers Brad Ziegler, Joey Devine and non-roster invitee Danny Farquhar.

The A's will hit the road once again Monday when they make the short trip to Tempe, Ariz., where the Angels will face scheduled Oakland starter Dallas Braden. Tuesday's home opener against Cincinnati will see lefties Brett Anderson and Gio Gonzalez on the mound.

Major Lee-ague: Tuesday morning quick hits

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 2/22/2011 9:06AM

It's a warm Tuesday morning here at Papago Park, where the second day of full-squad workouts is underway. Here's a few brief notes to start your day:

- Geren confirmed the pitching schedule has **Trevor Cahill** lined up to start Sunday's Cactus League opener against the Cubs in Mesa. **Bobby Cramer, Tyson Ross, Josh Outman, Brad Ziegler, Joey Devine** and **Danny Farquhar** are among those who could follow, though one or two might get their work in on the side if need be.
- **Michael Wuertz**, who left the complex early with shoulder soreness on Monday, could return to the mound as soon as Thursday, Geren said. Wuertz described it as the typical shoulder soreness he experiences most springs and noted that it's not nearly as bad as last year's bout with tendinitis. The righty said he's been working with pitching coach Ron Romanick since January, and he was already up to 45-pitch bullpen sessions. "I may have increased my workload a bit too much, too soon," he said. "That extra torque early on probably flared it up." Wuertz tried to pitch through the discomfort last spring, but he ultimately missed the first month of the season. "We're taking a different course of action this year," he said. "We're acting on it early so that it doesn't become a problem later on."
- Among those scheduled to throw live batting practice today are **Dallas Braden, Brandon McCarthy** and **Guillermo Moscoso**. Moscoso, acquired from Texas this winter, is being stretched out as a starter and could be someone to keep an eye on in the next couple of weeks.
- Geren spent a lengthy time this morning talking about how impressed he's been by **Josh Willingham**. "He has one of the better right-handed approaches I've ever seen," he said. "He has that kind of style that leads to the most consistency. If you're going to teach a right-handed style, you'd look to his to do so."

I'll check back in after workouts have been concluded for the day...

A's Insider notebook: Ross' rockets turning heads

Mychael Urban, CSNBayArea.com

PHOENIX -- Injuries are an unwelcome reality of spring training, but when they come they're frequently shrugged off with reminders that "it's early," and that a camp injury is far superior to one suffered in the regular season.

A's reliever Michael Wuertz, held out of workouts because of his sore right shoulder, was singing that very tune Tuesday -- but he'd re-arrange the notes.

Icing his ailing wing as his teammates poured out of the Phoenix Municipal Stadium, Wuertz spoke excitedly -- well, for Wuertz, "excited" means with discernible facial expressions -- about the new course of action the A's are taking in their treatment of what he said is an annual issue.

Last year, Wuertz explained, he tried to push through the pain, which typically dissipates late in the spring. That approach didn't work so well; the shoulder issue lingered, and Wuertz was never quite the same shutdown setup man he'd been the previous season.

This year, Wuertz has been told by new head athletic trainer Nick Paparesta to simply shut it down for a spell.

Duh, right? Seems more like a dose of common sense than expert medical advice.

Wuertz conceded as much, adding with a smile that one might be surprised by some of the training theories he's seen and heard over seven seasons in The Show.

Pararesta, however, has quickly earned the respect of Oakland's players, many of whom have been hammered by injuries over the past four years.

"The guys know how to keep guys on the field," closer Andrew Bailey offered. "He's proactive. He's organized. He's always got a plan, a clear plan that you understand. He's been awesome."

ROCKET ROSS

Although Josh Outman's recent bullpen sessions have created quite a buzz, one of Outman's fellow candidates for the No. 5 spot in the starting rotation has been opening some eyes, too.

Tyson Ross, a former Cal and Team USA star who opened last season in the A's bullpen, command the attention of anyone within earshot during his side session Monday.

"I wasn't even there, but I heard about it," said catcher Kurt Suzuki. "He was blowing, like, 97-98 mph."

Ross, whose upright delivery has prompted more than a few scouts to suggest arm trouble might be in his future, appears to be making slightly better use of his lower half this spring, and the results have been impressive.

"He's got a huge arm," Suzuki said. "He's going to be a big leaguer for a long time once he gets up here for good."

CAHILL GETS THE NOD

To the surprise of nobody, A's manager Bob Geren on Tuesday announced that his Opening Day starter will be Trevor Cahill.

Opening Day for Cactus League play, that is. The A's travel to nearby Mesa to take on the Cubs on Sunday, and Cahill will get the ball first at venerable HoHoKam Park.

It keeps him on his one-on, two-off throwing schedule, and it keeps him in line to be Oakland's starter on Opening Day of the regular season.

Geren isn't likely to announce his starting rotation for a while, but as former pitching coach Curt Young used to say at the start of every spring, anyone with handle on basic math should be able to figure it out pretty quick.

The numbers point to Cahill, with lefty Dallas Braden in the No. 2 spot. Brett Anderson and Gio Gonzalez are throwing on the same day thus far.

SHARING TIME

A common sight during the team's workout at their minor-league complex at Papago Park was that of hitters talking with pitchers and amongst each other, offering feedback and other information during live batting practice.

Daric Barton, for instance, gave newcomer David DeJesus a quick mental cheat sheet before DeJesus stepped into the box against Braden. Later, Barton explained to Braden exactly how his ball was moving and when.

"That's actually one of the neater things about this environment," Geren said of spring training. "You see everyone just talking baseball, and really getting into it. It's a great thing to see as a manager, because players a lot of times see things that maybe the coaches don't or can't."

Battle for fifth spot in A's rotation features many contenders, good and bad

Sam McPherson, examiner.com, 2/22/2011

One of the few position battles in the 2011 Oakland Athletics spring training session features the fifth spot in the starting rotation. With Trevor Cahill, Brett Anderson, Gio Gonzalez and Dallas Braden firmly entrenched in the first four slots, that final position is up for grabs right now.

At least five players are possible candidates, including three right-handers and two lefties. Offseason acquisitions Brandon McCarthy and Rich Harden join returning players Tyson Ross, Bobby Cramer and Josh Outman in the competition.

A quick look at each candidate reveals a lot of insight:

- McCarthy is 27 years old, and he's thrown 372 2/3 innings in the major leagues over five seasons -- and none in 2010. His career ERA (4.56) and WHIP (1.36) don't inspire confidence, nor does the fact he's already with his third MLB team. At 6-foot-7, he screams "potential", however, if he can ever harness it all;
- Harden had a rough year with Texas in 2010, posting a career-worst 5.58 ERA as he walked 62 batters in only 92 innings. As recently as 2009, however, he struck out 171 batters in only 141 innings (with the Chicago Cubs). He has battled health problems his whole career, and Harden is still only 29 years old;
- Ross made his MLB debut last year with the A's and turns 24 in April this season. He didn't do much to impress, though, posting a 5.49 ERA and a 1.50 WHIP in his 39 2/3 innings -- mostly out of the bullpen. He did start two games, however: opposing hitters knocked him around for a .313 batting average in those two appearances, versus the .259 they hit against him as a reliever;
- Outman missed all of 2010, recovering from Tommy John surgery. He's only 26, and his career ERA (3.77) and WHIP (1.29) show he's got some good potential. But he's only thrown 93 MLB innings in 20 appearances (16 starts). Outman was 4-1 with a 3.48 ERA and a 1.16 WHIP in 2009 when he was injured;
- Cramer made his MLB debut in 2010 at age 30, and he was solid in four starts. He posted a 3.04 ERA in 20 2/3 innings, winning two of three decisions for the A's.

Of all these candidates, perhaps Harden and Outman are the best long-term possibilities, while the others seem like more short-term fixes. Harden clearly has the most dynamic stuff of the bunch, as his previous seasons with the A's have shown everyone in the organization. And lefty Outman has a lot of upside as well.

So no doubt the A's would like to see Harden and Outman get over their injury bugs. Harden is already hurt this spring, however, while Outman has impressed manager Bob Geren already this spring.

Meanwhile, McCarthy and Ross haven't shown they have the ability to deliver consistency in the majors, and Cramer is the definition of a journeyman southpaw, perhaps just happy to be there.

Quite possibly, this issue won't be solved until the A's actually need a fifth starter -- which could be as early as April 6 or as late as April 10, depending on how the first four games unfold.

Major League Baseball's study of A's appears endless

Eric Young, San Francisco Business Times, 2/22/2011

The Warren Commission took 300 days to turn in its probe of the Kennedy shooting.

It took the 9/11 Commission 603 days to publish a report after the Twin Towers attack.

It has been 695 days -- and counting -- since baseball commissioner **Bud Selig** appointed a three-person group to study whether the Oakland A's can relocate in the East Bay.

What MLB is studying, of course, is nowhere near as weighty as the topics of the Warren Commission and 9/11 Commission. And so, since the topic is really not that thorny, why is it taking so long for baseball to figure out where the A's should play?

No one seems to have an answer.

When I asked one of MLB's press relations officials when the group will turn in its findings, he responded, "When their work is completed."

OK. When will that be, I asked.

"I do not know a date," he said.

A spokesman for the A's said the club does not know when that report is coming.

Now while the commission takes its time, other forces are at work.

San Jose is trying to woo the A's but might face a battle with the San Francisco Giants who vow to impose their marketing rights to the area. Oakland's mayor said she wants the team to stay but owner **Lew Wolff** has said he's done trying to stay in the city.

Even if the team is not standing still, MLB should finish what it started. After all, if baseball said it is going to come up with a report on the situation, shouldn't MLB come up with a report on the situation?

The committee's foot dragging can be viewed various ways, I suppose. Perhaps Selig is stalling until a deal can be cut with the Giants to allow the A's to move to San Jose. Or maybe this snail's pace progress is baseball's way of telegraphing its desire -- however obliquely -- that it doesn't really want the A's to move from Oakland.

Who knows?

But this much is clear: Major League Baseball should finish the study it supposedly started. The City of Oakland and the A's deserve that much.

Demographics may doom the Philadelphia Athletics Historical Society

By Frank Fitzpatrick

Inquirer Staff Writer

Not long ago, the Philadelphia Athletics Historical Society had to cancel its annual fund-raising breakfasts, because most of the players who used to attend had died.

More recently, the passing of 1953 all-star Gus Zernial left the number of surviving ex-A's at either 36 or 37. No one was certain, because Max Silberman, the member tasked with keeping the count, died two years ago.

Like the last vestiges of a deep and memorable snow, those who played and rooted for Connie Mack's A's are gradually melting away. Soon, members of the historical society fear, the franchise which departed for Kansas City in 1954 after 53 years in Philadelphia and five world championships will be an increasingly obscure local memory, like Horn & Hardart's, Woodside Park, or Frank's Black Cherry Wishniak.

"And that would be a shame," Ernie Montella, the society's executive director, said Monday, "because the A's were the most successful sports franchise ever in Philadelphia."

Now, the grim demographic realities have financially stressed the society, which is down to about 700 mostly aging members. As a result, its 14,000-square-foot museum, library and gift shop on North York Road in Hatboro may soon close its doors.

Unless society officials can devise a way to raise \$70,000 annually, it's possible the 13-year-old, artifacts-rich facility will either disappear or be condensed and incorporated into an existing institution, most likely at a refurbished Atwater Kent Museum in Center City.

"Obviously, we'd love to stay right here in Hatboro," Montella, 79, said Monday. "I'd hate to think about dismantling all of this."

Montella admitted some type of agreement with Atwater Kent, the South Seventh Street museum devoted to Philadelphia's history, was being considered.

That facility, closed now during a \$5.3 million renovation, has hosted exhibitions of A's memorabilia in the past. And in October, Atwater Kent officials, who said Monday there had been no decision on any possible move, visited the Hatboro site.

"It would be a great fit," said Montella. "Center City would be a great location. They were a Philadelphia team, after all. But nothing's been finalized, and we'd still prefer to stay in this building."

Still, the museum - laden with books, research papers, arcane memorabilia and historical treasures related to one of baseball's earliest dynasties - won't vanish without a fight.

Recently, one of its younger members, 32-year-old Andrew Dixon, created a Facebook page, "Save the Philadelphia Athletics Historical Society," for that purpose.

"I think there's been an explosion of baseball interest in this area," said Dixon, a doctoral candidate at Temple. "And I think there's a thriving desire for all things baseball. You'd like to think there's enough interest in a team as historically significant as the A's to sustain a stand-alone museum."

He's also hoping to tap into the interest generated by another related Facebook page. "Bring Your A's Game," which has about 1,000 followers, espouses the far-fetched goal of bringing the Oakland A's back to Philadelphia.

"Even though it's not something that's likely to ever happen, they've got a lot of followers, which is just another indication that there are more people aware of the A's out there than you might think," Dixon said.

For decades after the team's 1954 move, fans of the original member of the American League lamented the A's departure. Finally, in 1996, a small group of Athletics' devotees founded the society. A sizable number of area residents who remembered growing up in a two-baseball-team city quickly coalesced around it.

At its height, there were nearly 1,000 members. Interest was so great that in 1998, the society leased a storefront at 6 N. York Road and opened the museum.

While the museum rarely publicized itself and has never been swamped with visitors, there were occasions - immediately after its opening, when the Oakland A's visited Philadelphia in 2003, or whenever Mack's descendants or former stars would participate in events - when interest and attendance sparked.

"We've had visitors from 44 states and a few foreign countries," Montella said. "Just recently, a man from Cambridge, England, got off the train mistakenly in Hatboro, walked into our museum and was so impressed he became a member."

But as more A's and A's fans pass on, the buzz has waned. The once-vibrant sale - online and in-store - of Philadelphia sports books and merchandise ranging from bobbleheads to autographed bats, balls and photos began to decline.

Last year, said Montella, gift-shop revenue was at an all-time low.

Until recently, the \$30 annual dues paid by members, various fund-raisers and gift-shop proceeds were enough to support the facility, publish a newsletter and provide some financial help for needy ex-A's.

In recent years, in an effort to broaden its appeal, the museum has added considerable Phillies flavor and even hosted events for former Eagles such as Steve Van Buren and Chuck Bednarik.

Because a 2000 society exhibit at the Chester County Historical Society was successful, said Montella, there was talk of a move to a minor-league stadium that West Chester businessmen and baseball enthusiasts hoped would be built there.

But those dreams faded when the borough council recently rejected a stadium proposal.

"We're trying to hold our own," Montella said. "But let's face it - there are a lot of younger people out there who never even heard of the Philadelphia A's."

Philadelphia Athletics

History: 1901-1954

Titles: Five world championships - 1910, 1911, 1914, 1929, 1930. Eight American League pennants - 1905, 1910, 1911, 1913, 1914, 1929, 1930, 1931.

Hall of Famers: Frank "Home Run" Baker; Chief Bender; Mickey Cochrane; Eddie Collins; Jimmie Foxx; Lefty Grove; Connie Mack; Eddie Plank; Al Simmons; Rube Waddell.

Managers: Mack (1901-50); Jimmy Dykes (1951-53); Eddie Joost (1954).

Ballparks: Columbia Park (1901-08); Shibe Park/Connie Mack Stadium (1909-54).

Mascot: White elephant.