

A's News Clips, Wednesday, March, 2, 2011

Oakland A's lefty Brett Anderson putting health ahead of results this spring

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

PHOENIX -- When Brett Anderson began thinking of goals for this season, the brainstorming session didn't last long. After an injury-plagued 2010, the left-hander simply wants to remain a regular contributor to the A's starting rotation.

"First and foremost is being healthy," Anderson said of his agenda. "In spring training, results take a back seat to feeling good for the season."

It wasn't surprising that Oakland's talented young starting staff emerged as one of the major leagues' best last season. That the A's did it while receiving just 19 starts from Anderson couldn't have been predicted.

He landed on the disabled list in late April with elbow inflammation and a forearm strain, missing a month. After just two starts upon his return, his elbow flared up again, and he was sidelined for eight more weeks.

The A's pitching thrived despite Anderson's absence. Trevor Cahill developed into an All-Star, Gio Gonzalez won 15 games and Oakland posted the lowest starters' ERA in the majors at 3.47.

But many consider Anderson, 23, to have the highest ceiling of any of the starters. To unseat defending American League West champion Texas, the A's starters need to maintain last year's pace, or at least come close.

Anderson is a big piece to that puzzle.

"He has the potential to match up obviously with anybody's No. 1," fellow starter Dallas Braden said. "It's that 95 to 97 (mph) fastball, that 84 (mph) slider. And it's damn near

unhittable stuff when he's on."

After going 11-11 with a 4.06 ERA as a rookie in 2009, Anderson went 7-6 with a 2.80 ERA last season. The A's signed him to a four-year, \$12.5 million contract last April, with club options that could keep him under control through 2015.

But good health is a requirement for Anderson to be the ace the A's envision.

Last year's problems were centered in his flexor tendon -- located in the inner elbow -- as opposed to his ulnar collateral ligament, which would have been more serious.

"Any time it's (an injury) with your elbow you're a little concerned," Anderson said. "But thank goodness it wasn't too structural, and we're ready to go now."

His offseason workouts were geared toward strengthening his elbow and shoulder. In the process he dropped 10 pounds, which he believes will make him more nimble fielding his position.

Anderson pokes fun at his lack of gracefulness in covering first base, but he was all business in trying to improve in that area.

"I might fall, I might get dirty, I might tackle somebody," he observed. "But as long as I get somebody out, I really don't care what happens."

Anderson gave up home runs to Jonny Gomes and Yonder Alonso in two innings of work in Tuesday's 7-6 Cactus League loss to the Cincinnati Reds. He was experimenting with his changeup, a pitch he's trying to incorporate more.

Throwing more changeups -- as an alternative to his slider -- could help keep Anderson's elbow healthier, according to A's pitching coach Ron Romanick.

"Any breaking ball that has a lot of velocity to it is stressful (on the elbow)," Romanick said. "The changeup is probably the least stressful pitch you can throw because you're not turning your hand late."

Romanick believes Anderson can take advantage of his fastball by using the changeup more. The pitches look the same leaving the hand.

"That's a good thing for a guy that can throw 95 miles per hour," Romanick said. "It's really a good thing because now he doesn't have to overexpose his breaking ball. It adds that extra dimension."

Oakland A's notebook: Gio Gonzalez is perfect in two innings against Reds, striking out five of six batters in Cactus League debut

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

PHOENIX -- Pitchers usually pay little attention to their stats early in spring training, but Gio Gonzalez can only hope his pitching line Tuesday against the Cincinnati Reds is a sign of things to come.

The left-hander, in his first Cactus League start, struck out five of the six hitters he faced in two innings during the A's 7-6 loss at Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

Four of the five strikeouts were looking. The other came on a check-swing by Jay Bruce, on one of many crisp curveballs Gonzalez snapped off.

"That was amazing," manager Bob Geren said. "He was sharp as can be."

Gonzalez threw 17 of his 23 pitches for strikes and touched 95 mph, according to Geren. With the fastball and curveball clicking, Gonzalez didn't even bother throwing his changeup. After exiting the game, he threw 15 pitches in the bullpen to work on that pitch.

A year ago, Gonzalez was battling Trevor Cahill to be the fifth starter. He has a rotation spot cinched this season, so he can fine-tune things without a lot riding on each outing.

"You still have to go out there and try to perform," Gonzalez said. "At the same time, I don't have to kill myself like I did last year."

Last season, No. 2 hitter Daric Barton often bunted to advance runners even without getting a bunt signal.

He wound up with 12 sacrifice bunts, the most by a major league first baseman since Rod Carew had 16 with the California Angels in 1982. Geren said he talked with Barton midway through the season about swinging away in such situations, adding that Barton won't have the voluntary bunt option this season.

"If you're just giving yourself up time after time early in the game, it's probably better if you don't do that," Geren said. "He's too good of a hitter to give himself up."

Rickey Henderson arrived at camp and will work as a special instructor as he did last season, focusing on baserunning and outfield play. "... Closer Andrew Bailey threw a 40-pitch bullpen session. His first exhibition appearance could come in a few days. "... Right fielder David DeJesus (illness) could play Wednesday against Cleveland. "... The A's drew just 1,631 to Tuesday's exhibition home opener.

Chin Music: Random A's notes: Josh Outman's crazy number; Daric Barton and bunting; no outfield for Hideki Matsui in near future

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 3/1/2011 10:06AM

The A's hold their Cactus League home opener against Cincinnati today, but is there such thing as a home opener when the team is 645 miles away from Oakland? (That's the distance between Phoenix and Oakland that I found online anyway, and I'm going with it).

--David DeJesus (illness) is feeling much better today and he actually has some color in his face. He's not in the lineup, but he did some bunting in the cage this morning. DeJesus could play Wednesday against the Indians.

Today's lineup:

Crisp CF
Barton 1B
Willingham LF
Jackson RF
Carter DH
Powell C
LaRoche 2B

Timmons 3B
Sogard SS

Gonzalez P (followed by Brett Anderson)

—Conor Jackson draws a start in right field, as manager Bob Geren wants him to get innings in left and right field, as well as first base in spring training. Chris Carter is at DH, but he'll continue to get lots of outfield time in the Cactus League despite Monday's adventures in left field, Geren said.

—I see Josh Outman taking the mound wearing No. 88, and I can't help but think he aspires to be an NFL wide receiver. Outman gave up No. 55 to Hideki Matsui when the A's signed the designated hitter, but Outman wasn't married to that number anyway. But he did wear No. 8 in college and in the minor leagues, so you could see how the wheels turned in his head when he needed to choose new digits. "Fifty-five was the number given to me when I was called up in 2008. It was just the number Vuc (A's equipment manager Steve Vucinich) gave to me," he said. "Suzuki's No. 8, and I know it's taboo for a pitcher to wear single digits. I figured nobody's ever going to want 88. I figured if I can play 15 years, I'll be able to keep 88 for 15 years. You get comfortable with a number. You get comfortable with a pair of shoes." A wacky number fits this guy pretty good. I think I've mentioned before that Outman has some under-the-radar nuttiness going in his personality.

—Last season, Daric Barton had 12 sacrifice bunts, the most by any major league first baseman since Rod Carew had 16 in 1982. Being able to bunt a guy over is a useful skill for a No. 2 hitter, but several times last year, Barton decided to bunt on his own as opposed to getting the bunt sign. Most of those came in the first half of the season, and Geren said he talked with Barton midway through last season about being more aggressive and swinging the bat more to try advancing guys. Geren said he'll give Barton the bunt sign when it's warranted, but will take away the voluntary sacrifice bunt option "just because he's too valuable," Geren said. "He's too good of a hitter to give himself up."

Interesting stuff, and I think the A's are a better offensive team if Barton takes a more aggressive approach at the plate.

—Geren has no plans to use Hideki Matsui in the outfield in the near future. "In a perfect season, he would just DH, with the possibility of some outfield in interleague play," Geren said. "His legs feel good and I want for him to feel that way all through the season."

—Sunday is a possibility for shortstop Cliff Pennington to play in his first exhibition, as the A's have split-squad games that day and will need every body available.

That's all for now ...

Gary Peterson: Lew Wolff's constant whine about Oakland, A's not improving with age

By Gary Peterson, Oakland Tribune columnist

It has become a rite of spring, not unlike stinkweed and incapacitating allergies.

Yes, Lew Wolff is bloviating again.

The A's co-owner, in an interview with Bloomberg News published Tuesday, revisited his favorite whining points vis-à-vis his baseball team and what he believes to be its manifest destiny:

He has no use for Oakland. He doesn't understand why baseball commissioner Bud Selig won't force the Giants to relinquish their territorial rights to San Jose. Building and inhabiting a baseball stadium in San Jose would be the greatest thing since the invention of all-weather tarpaulin.

"I'm aghast that, not so much (Giants managing partner) Bill Neukom, but (Giants president) Larry Baer could be so adamant that we will hurt their team by being 50 miles away," Wolff told Bloomberg. "It's so ridiculous to me. This is really a shovel-ready project that is being stopped by a disagreement with the Giants."

This is a recording.

It's the never-ending story. And frankly, it's losing its charm. There are, however, two new elements to this year's version of The Scream.

One, the A's are coming off their most inspiring offseason in years from a pure baseball standpoint.

Their fine young starting pitchers are a year older, 175 innings deeper into the process of turning promise into something real. As the Giants proved the last few seasons, if you have fine young starting pitching, you have something on which to build.

There's a bullpen capable of giving manager Bob Geren a reliable late-game situational guy/setup guy/closer protocol.

There are five serviceable outfielders, and you know what that means -- a full outfield even when "... er "... if two of them go on the DL.

There are reasons for fans to invest in the team that haven't been evident since, well, you tell us.

It's to this buffet of optimism that Wolff delivers a dirt sandwich. Thanks for your interest. Now get the hell off my lawn.

Secondly, the fine people of San Jose are now far enough along in their professional relationship with Wolff that they might be wondering what kind of business partner this fellow is going to be.

As a reminder, Wolff and majority owner John Fisher proclaimed themselves the third-wealthiest ownership group in baseball when they bought the A's in 2005.

"(General manager) Billy (Beane) and (team president) Mike (Crowley) are going to tell us what they need," Wolff said almost six years ago, "and I am confident we can give them everything they need."

Clearly the man has a liberal interpretation of "need." Not to mention "everything."

It is obvious now that Wolff and Fisher are interested in baseball only as a catalyst for development. You know -- stadiums, villages, that sort of thing. As they have sought development opportunities, the product on the field has withered. Off the field? Wolff has declared the Oakland Coliseum's upper deck off limits. And he has complained about meager attendance. Some people might call that being disingenuous -- the people too kind to invoke a more pointed adjective.

You want the perfect metaphor for the Wolff-Fisher ownership? Last season, for a time, the A's sold \$8 beers that fit comfortably into a \$5 cup. Check it out -- YouTube doesn't lie.

Wolff has been, for the time being, outflanked by the Giants. Why do the Giants want to stop the A's from moving to San Jose? Because they can. These are the big leagues, Sparky. People protect their self-interests and they play for keeps. Twenty-five years ago, Bob Lurie was led to believe his Giants could play in the Coliseum while a new ballpark was being built in San Francisco. Shortly after he floated that plan in public, he heard from Oakland Mayor Lionel Wilson and the Coliseum board: "Oh no you won't."

Stuff happens. What hasn't happened where the A's are concerned is a concerted effort to craft the kind of team and stadium experience that might be attractive to paying customers. Now, finally, an agreeable summer seems at hand, assuming we're able to hear the sound of bat meeting ball above Wolff's caterwauling.

Only Selig knows how the wind is blowing on this issue, and when the final verdict might come down. Gov. Jerry Brown's intent to gas cities' redevelopment agencies creates uncertainty regarding the stadium project's shovel-readiness. But the people of San Jose might want to consider a bit of history even as they endeavor to push this effort forward:

Oakland was thrilled to be associated with Charlie Finley. At first.

A's Gio Gonzalez is back in swing of things

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Two of the A's prized left-handed starters were in action Tuesday, and they had very different days.

Gio Gonzalez mowed down the Reds, striking out five of the six men he faced, four of them looking, in the A's 7-6 loss at Phoenix Municipal Stadium. Then Brett Anderson followed with a 1-2-3 third inning - and a bumpy fourth. Anderson allowed two two-run homers, one to Jonny Gomes and the other to Yonder Alonso.

"Yeah, Gio totally screwed me on that one," Anderson said with a grin. "How am I supposed to follow that? ... I wasn't going to try to strike out six."

Anderson consoled himself with one fact. "I did better than Trevor!" he said.

Trevor Cahill, the A's All-Star starter, also gave up four runs in his first spring outing, but he lasted only one-third of an inning. That was some teasing from Anderson, all in jest, but there's no doubt that the A's returning starters do keep tabs on one another.

"As far as spring training, the care factor is low, but once the season starts, there's a friendly rivalry," Anderson said. "That helps us all do well."

Gonzalez upped his offseason training to keep pace with the rest of the rotation. He spent more time working on his legs, his balance, his abs.

"I wanted to get myself ready for Dallas Braden, Brett Anderson, Trevor Cahill," Gonzalez said. "They're always ready. I figured, 'Hey, why not join them?' "

On Tuesday, Gonzalez zipped through his day with such ease, he had to go to the bullpen to throw 15 more pitches. He hadn't thrown any changeups, and he needed to work on the pitch, but he was locating his fastball (clocked at 95 mph) and curve so well that he figured he didn't need any changeups against the Reds. He threw 23 pitches and 17 of them were strikes, including first-pitch strikes to every hitter.

Before the game, catcher Landon Powell had asked Gonzalez, "OK, how many strikeouts do you want me to get you today?," a ritual the two have had dating back to the minor leagues. Last year at Chicago, Gonzalez asked for 11, and got them, and on Tuesday, he said five, even knowing he was going just two innings.

"I said, 'Gio, you know I'm good, but I don't know if I'm *that* good,' " Powell said. "But his stuff is electric. When he spots his fastball and gets ahead in the count, the curveball is unhittable."

Anderson was more intent on working on specific things during his outing, so he threw some pitches he usually wouldn't in a regular-season game - changeups in unusual counts, fastballs away to left-handers.

And at one point, he just got downright obstinate.

"Gomes is known for hitting inside fastballs, and maybe some ego was involved to see if I could beat him in there," Anderson said. "And obviously, 1-0 Jonny Gomes."

Anderson doesn't want to throw too many sliders early - it's a long season, and he missed some time with elbow inflammation last year. He threw two Tuesday, and he'll add more as the spring goes along. Next time, he'll be coming off more rest, three days, as the A's move to a four-man rotation.

A's manager wants Daric Barton bunting less often

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Early last season, **Daric Barton** had some trouble moving runners from second to third, so he decided to start bunting them over on occasion.

As he climbed the ranks of sacrifice-hits leaders, though, manager **Bob Geren** asked Barton to cool it with the bunting.

"He's too good a hitter to bunt all the time," Geren said Tuesday, adding that at some point, "maybe you lose a few more runs if you're giving up an out."

Barton won't get the chance to bunt on his own this year. "I'm taking that option away," Geren said.

He is a confident bunter and doesn't apologize for the tactic. Of the ix-nay on the bunting, Barton said, "They told me in the middle of last year - but they also told me to get the runner over any way possible, and it was working."

Barton doesn't have any issue with the fact that the team would like him to be more aggressive with men in scoring position this year, though, and he said, "I'm just trying to drive it somewhere, preferably up the middle."

He finished with 12 sacrifice hits last year, tied for fourth in the league.

Briefly: Andrew Bailey threw a 40-pitch bullpen session with outfielder **Ryan Sweeney** and shortstop **Cliff Pennington** standing in at the plate but not swinging. He'll throw live batting practice Friday. ... Outfielder **David DeJesus**, who has been out with an illness, is expected to make his Oakland debut today. ... **Michael Wuertz** (shoulder tendinitis) will throw a bullpen Thursday. ... Pennington is likely to get his first spring start around the same time that Sweeney does, either Sunday or Monday. ... The A's move to a four-man spring rotation for the next four days, then they expand to five. Today's starter against Cleveland will be **Bobby Cramer**. **Tyson Ross** and **Josh Outman** also are scheduled. All three are competing for the fifth spot in the rotation.

Drumbeat: Daric Barton won't sac bunt on his own this year

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Phoenix Muni 3/1/2011 9:23AM

I know this is a popular topic on the Drumbeat - Daric Barton's bunting on his own last year to move runners over drove some of you nuts. I asked manager Bob Geren this morning if Barton might be discouraged from doing so this year, with a new lineup, and Geren said that actually he asked Barton to stop it during the second half last year once "the sac bunts started mounting up on him and he was leading the league. ... He's too good a hitter to bunt all the time."

Barton finished with 12 last year, tied for fourth most in the league. This year, Barton will only bunt when the sign is given, not on his own. "I'm taking that option away," Geren said.

Barton explained to me in May last year that he wanted to make sure he moved runners over from second after failing in some attempts early in the season. He's a confident bunter, and he wanted to get the job done. Geren said though that at some point, you wind up losing more runs by giving up the outs. And he pointed out to Barton that he doesn't just have to try to hit to the right side to move men over (that was what was giving him trouble). A deep fly ball to left can do the trick. A hit, even better. And, Geren told him, even if Barton didn't get the job done last year, Coco Crisp and Rajai Davis both had the speed to then steal a base if necessary.

Bunting was a topic today because Rickey Henderson is here working with baserunners and outfielders, and bunting is an area he's helped before.

Some other news: David DeJesus is getting another day to recover from illness, and he'll likely play tomorrow against the Indians. Michael Wuertz will throw a bullpen session tomorrow. Andrew Bailey is in action today - it's either a bullpen session or throwing to hitters.

Cliff Pennington is likely to make his first start of the spring at shortstop right around when Ryan Sweeney makes his spring debut, early next week.

Here's today lineup: Crisp cf, Barton 1b, Willingham lf, Jackson rf, Carter dh, Powell c, LaRoche 2b, Timmons 3b, Sogard ss. Gonzalez p. Brett Anderson also will get two innings today.

Gio dominates in debut as A's fall to Reds

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- A pair of two-run homers from Jonny Gomes and Yonder Alonso fueled the Reds to a 7-6 victory over the host A's on Tuesday at Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

Oakland lefty Gio Gonzalez silenced the Reds over the first two innings, striking out five (four looking) of six batters faced, before Cincinnati tagged Brett Anderson for four runs in the fourth frame. An Edgar Renteria double was followed by Gomes' two-run shot, and Jay Bruce later singled and scored on Alonso's long ball.

Cincinnati, fielding a split-squad team, added to its lead in the sixth via a two-run single off the bat of Devin Mesoraco and a run-scoring base hit from Felix Perez against A's righty Grant Balfour, who surrendered a total of three runs on five hits in his spring debut.

Oakland's first run of the game came against Reds starter Mike Leake, who offered up an RBI single to Wes Timmons in the second. Eric Sogard handed the A's their second run of the day courtesy of a run-scoring base hit in the seventh off righty Matt Klinker.

Free-agent acquisition Brian Fuentes also made his debut for Oakland. The left-hander pitched a perfect fifth inning with one strikeout.

Reds up next: The Reds return to Goodyear Ballpark for a 3:05 p.m. ET game Wednesday against the White Sox. It will mark the spring debut of starter Homer Bailey, who is trying to lock down one of the final two spots in the rotation. Bailey is out of options as he competes with Mike Leake and Travis Wood. Also expected to pitch after Bailey are Daniel Ray Herrera, Jared Burton and Daryl Thompson.

A's up next: Offseason acquisition David DeJesus, who has been recovering from an illness, is slated to make his A's debut Wednesday when Oakland hosts the Indians beginning at 12:05 p.m. PT at Phoenix Municipal Stadium. Left-hander Bobby Cramer, vying for the fifth starter spot, gets the nod for the A's.

Carson working to join crowded A's outfield

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Matt Carson's professional career has taken him through nearly 3,500 at-bats.

Only 100 of them have come in the big leagues, and Carson is ready to take on thousands more Minor League plate appearances if it means he gets just one more in The Show.

"That's why we're all here," Carson said. "That's where you want to be."

The 29-year-old A's outfielder, a former Yankees fifth-round Draft pick who is entering his 10th professional season, will first have to find his way on to the 40-man roster. Carson's in camp as a non-roster player following two seasons that have resulted in a combined 46 games with Oakland, where he's not so much a central part of future plans, but rather one of several backup options.

David DeJesus, Coco Crisp, Josh Willingham, Ryan Sweeney and Conor Jackson make for a crowded outfield, and Chris Carter's looming presence makes it all the more crunched. As a result, Carson has come to terms with his role in the organization.

"It seems I'm always kinda teetering back and forth," Carson said. "Last year it was a similar situation where there were a lot of outfielders. Basically, I can only do what I can and let the rest fall where it may. The guys that they have, they're all great guys, great players, and they deserve to be where they're at. I've had some opportunities in the past. Last year, I was given a good amount of at-bats, and I didn't capitalize on them."

Carson hit .177 with four home runs and nine RBIs in 36 games over four stints with the A's in 2010 -- numbers that paled in comparison to his .303 average and 13 home runs through 64 games with Triple-A Sacramento. Much of those struggles came as a result of adjusting to an inconsistent playing schedule, something former teammate Gabe Gross knew all about.

"I'd talk to him, and he'd always tell me to look at pitchers who are coming up in future series," Carson said. "Me, being a righty, I'd look to see how the lefties attack guys. Sometimes, you prepare so much in advance, that you're so pumped up and you almost try to do too much and put everything into that one day. It's just a matter of almost backing off and finding that happy medium of that comfort zone."

Carson's long journey has been eased by the support of his wife, high school sweetheart Lisa, who has been with him through it all. In 2008, the couple welcomed daughter Mackenzie and most recently added to the family with the birth of another daughter, Addison, this past offseason. The trio of girls, Carson said, keeps his often-trying days in perspective.

"It's not necessarily frustrating because I know the situation and I know what my role has to be, but it's frustrating to not produce when I get the opportunity," Carson said. "As far as the opportunities I get, I'm happy for them, but it's just a matter of me figuring out how to make good on them.

"Being a father, I think it's been a big part of me developing as a player and being able to get away from the field on a daily basis. When I'm playing with my kids or changing a diaper, I'm not thinking, 'How did I miss that slider?'"

In the meantime, Carson will accept each at-bat in stride. He's 2-for-8 with two doubles this spring and ready to prove he's more than just an afterthought on the depth chart.

Anderson upstaged by Gio's 'second coming'

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- A's lefty Gio Gonzalez, fresh off his Cactus League debut on Tuesday, stood by his locker and rambled off a list of goals he has for the 2011 campaign -- minimize walks, locate first-pitch strikes, get the first out of every inning.

So far, so good.

Gonzalez dazzled in his first spring performance, striking out five of six Reds batters faced (four looking) en route to tallying 17 strikes during his 23-pitch outing. He threw first-pitch strikes to every opponent and was clocked as high as 95 mph in an eventual 7-6 A's loss.

"That was amazing," manager Bob Geren said. "That's as sharp as you can be."

Gonzalez proved so effective that he wasn't even afforded the chance to throw in a couple changeups until he finished his work -- an additional 15 pitches -- in the bullpen.

"I was throwing so many first-pitch strikes and attacking the zone quickly, I didn't think I needed to go to the changeup and automatically show that pitch," Gonzalez said. "I figured I'd stick with my two pitches."

His fastball and curveball were plenty, as they combined to show off a very different Gonzalez than the one who spent last spring trying to prove his worth as a starter. The 25-year-old southpaw spent the winter training harder and preparing the way he knew his teammates were doing.

"These guys always come ready when the season starts," he said, "and I figured, why not join them?"

Gonzalez's exceptional outing was followed by another 1-2-3 inning from fellow lefty Brett Anderson, who fared just as well -- until the fourth inning. Anderson was tagged for a pair of two-run homers off the bats of Jonny Gomes and Yonder Alonso and ultimately finished his two-frame outing with four runs, six hits and two strikeouts attached to his name.

"Jonny Gomes is kinda known for hitting inside fastballs and, maybe ego-involved, I was trying to beat him there by throwing one," he said. "Obviously, 1-0, Jonny Gomes."

Still, Anderson was pleased with his efforts in working in a handful of changeups, as well as fastballs on the outside part of the plate. Never mind that he was overmatched by Gonzalez.

"How am I supposed to follow that up?" he said. "You've got the second coming out there, striking out five out of six. Can't really do much better than he did. He looked tremendous. I wasn't going to go out there and try to strike out six. I went out there, worked on the stuff I wanted to and can carry that into my next start."

Geren reins in Barton's bunting

PHOENIX -- An early morning bunting session sparked an interesting conversation with A's manager Bob Geren, who said Tuesday that Daric Barton's bunting opportunities will be limited this season following a year in which the first baseman perhaps could have made different use of his at-bats.

"At one point he was leading the league in sacrifice bunts," Geren said. "He's too good a hitter to give himself up all the time."

Barton, in a prime bunting spot at the No. 2 hole, compiled 12 sacrifice bunts (tied for fourth in the American League) last season -- many of which were prompted by his own doing in an effort to advance a runner. Geren said he spoke to Barton in June about not bunting unless told to do so, and they'll take the same approach this year, especially given the new and improved lineup.

"I'm taking that option away," Geren said. "He'll bunt when I tell him to."

Rather, Barton will be relied upon to be more aggressive in situations with runners on base. He'll be awarded the bunt sign when necessary, but will otherwise be counted on to swing the bat rather than give up outs.

Barton, 25, hit .273 with 10 home runs and 57 RBIs in a team-leading 159 games in 2010, and has added nearly 15 pounds of muscle in an effort to build on those numbers.

Worth noting

Andrew Bailey threw a 40-pitch bullpen session Tuesday with hitters Cliff Pennington and Ryan Sweeney standing in, but not swinging. Bailey is expected to make his Cactus League debut sometime next week. ... Lefty Brian Fuentes tossed a perfect fifth inning in Tuesday's contest, striking out one. "He had pinpoint control," manager Bob Geren said. ... Fellow reliever Grant Balfour, feeling under the weather with a head cold, didn't fare as well. The righty gave up three runs on five hits with one strikeout in his lone inning of work. ... The A's on Tuesday announced that Neil Kraetsch has been named general counsel. He'll be responsible for all legal and human resource matters concerning the organization.

Major League: Indians vs. A's: Pregame notes

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 3/2/2011, 9:23AM

The A's are taking part in their annual security meeting behind closed doors this morning, so updates and notes will come later. But here's today's starting lineup against Cleveland:

Ellis, 2B

Suzuki, C

DeJesus, RF

Matsui, DH

Kouzmanoff, 3B

Carter, 1B

Taylor, LF

Miller, CF

Tolleson, SS

Cramer, P

Also scheduled to pitch: Tyson Ross, Josh Outman, Joe Bateman, Joey Devine, Yadel Marti, Brad Ziegler, Gabe DeHoyos, Danny Farquhar

Gomes homers as Reds beat A's

Ex-Casa star hits 2-run shot off Anderson; Gonzalez strikes out 5

By ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHOENIX — Former Casa Grande High star Jonny Gomes and Yonder Alonso hit two-run homers in the fourth inning off Brett Anderson to lead a Cincinnati Reds split-squad to a 7-6 victory over the Oakland Athletics on Tuesday.

The Reds did not have a baserunner over the first three innings against Gio Gonzalez and Anderson, before the Gomes and Alonso homers punctuated a six-hit inning against Anderson in the fourth.

Reds starter Mike Leake, vying for Cincinnati's No. 5 starter job, gave up one run in two innings in his first start of the spring.

Gonzalez struck out five of the six batters he faced for the A's. Anderson gave up four runs in two innings.

Oakland's two new free-agent relievers, Brian Fuentes and Grant Balfour, each made their debuts. Fuentes pitched a scoreless inning and Balfour gave up three runs.

"He was sitting on the pitch middle-in, and he got his pitch and turned on it," Reds bench coach Chris Speier said of Alonso. "That's a great thing to see."

Alonso, 23, a first baseman by trade, has been working out with Reds outfield coach Billy Hatcher to learn the new position. A former No. 1 pick, Alonso hasn't played the outfield in a game, but he is expected to do so later this spring.

The Reds did not have a batter reach base in the first three innings, striking out five times in the first two innings against A's lefty Gio Gonzalez.

"He was amazing," Oakland manager Bob Geren said of Gonzalez. "He threw 95 and was hitting his spots. He had a great curve ball. Very impressive. A very nice first game."

Gonzalez threw first-pitch strikes to all six batters he faced. He said that was a point of emphasis for him this spring.

Last year, even though he had a 15-victory season, he still issued 4.1 walks per nine innings, highest among A's starters.

"That's a good hitting lineup," Gonzalez said. "You don't want to fall behind. You want to get ahead and put them away quickly before they start a rally."

Oakland's two new free-agent relievers, Brian Fuentes and Grant Balfour, each made their debuts. Fuentes pitched a scoreless inning and Balfour gave up three runs.

A's designated hitter Chris Carter, one of the club's top hitting prospects, had two hits and an RBI.

Trailing 7-1, Oakland scored five runs in the final three innings to get within a run. The final two runs scored after the Reds made two errors, a bad throw by third baseman Junior Arias and a dropped fly ball by center fielder Felix Perez.

NOTES

A's OF David DeJesus (illness) is expected to return to the lineup on Wednesday. ... RHP Andrew Bailey, who is recovering from elbow surgery, threw a 40-pitch bullpen session with hitters standing in. Bailey is expected to make his spring debut next week. ... Hall of Famer Rickey Henderson will be in A's camp for a week, working with the players on baserunning, bunting and outfield play.

A's Braden teaching Gio how to 'Own It' on the mound

Mychael Urban, CSNBayArea.com

PHOENIX -- A's manager Bob Geren is so used to giving injury updates, he ticks them off as though there's a checklist in his head.

He'd far prefer talking about more positive subjects, of course, and he certainly got one Tuesday. So after talking about Andrew Bailey's 40-pitch mound session, the progress of ailing hurlers Michael Wuertz and Rich Harden, and shortstop Cliff Pennington's anticipated Cactus League debut Sunday, he lit up while discussing left-hander Gio Gonzalez's outing against the Reds.

"Hard to beat that for a first outing," Geren said, shaking his head as if amazed by Gonzalez's two perfect innings that featured five strikeouts.

Gonzalez wasn't nearly as impressed. Following his dominant outing, he spoke extensively with CSNCalifornia.com regarding his progress as a pitcher -- and Dallas Braden's massive role in said development.

"Dallas has been huge for me," Gonzalez said. "Dude, I mean *huge*."

Braden, Gonzalez said, has mastered the art of 'Owning It'. That is, when he takes the mound, he's utterly convinced that he's the baddest man on the planet, and nobody can beat him.

"It's not easy to just start doing that," Gonzalez told me, "but once you kind of get it, it's incredible what your mind can do. And thanks to Dallas, who, before every start I make, is reminding me, reminding me, reminding me how good I am, I'm starting to get it."

He certainly was 'Owning It' on Tuesday. Gonzalez said his goal was to simply throw strike one, try to get quick outs, try to keep his pitch count down. That's his focus this spring, and because he had a breakout 2010 and doesn't have to worry about earning a roster spot anymore, he has the luxury of working on things without sweating results.

Alas, his pure stuff is so nasty, the Reds couldn't hit it.

"Trust me, I wasn't trying to strike guys out," Gonzalez said. "Sometimes it just happens that way."

Another area in which Braden has helped Gonzalez is in game preparation. But not in the way you might think. Braden hasn't taught Gonzalez how to prepare for an opponent. He does the work *for* Gonzalez.

"He spends the whole week before his start studying, breaking everything down, how he's going to approach different guys," Gonzalez said. "He's a student. And because our styles are similar, he basically does all the work I'd be doing, so I don't have to do it. And then, last year he'd pitch in front of me [in the rotation], and I'd watch and just be, 'Oh, OK. That's how you get that guy, that's how you get this guy.'"

"Dallas is incredible. He's the best leader and teacher I've had."

Brevard's Dorfman was a giant in sports psychology field

Written by Bob Berghaus, Asheville Citizen Times

The phrase 'tough love' was created for people like Harvey Dorfman.

He made a name for himself as a sports psychologist, especially doing wonders with those who threw a baseball for a living.

Darren Holmes, the longtime Arden resident and former Roberson High standout who spent 13 seasons as a major league relief pitcher, got to know Dorfman when he moved to WNC in the late 1990s.

Dorfman died at his home in Brevard on Monday. He was 75.

When asked about Dorfman on Tuesday, Holmes chuckled and referred to the insurance commercial where the drill sergeant-turned-psychologist throws a box of tissues at a crying patient.

"That's Harvey Dorfman," Holmes said. "He was a very brash man. Todd Stottlemire (former major league pitcher) is one of my friends, and he called him up and said, 'Harvey. I need some help.' He asked (Stottlemire) if he was healthy.

"I'm as healthy as I can be," the player replied. "Harvey said, 'Well you big wimp, get out there and compete.'"

Dorfman was tough, but he understood the fragile mental makeup of the professional baseball player better than most people. He listened to them and was honest with them. In turn, the players trusted him. When word got out about Dorfman, many players called him, even when he was employed by other clubs.

"What I heard from other people about Harve was that he wasn't there to baby you or caress you. You're a man, let's figure this out," Holmes said. "If you have fear, let's figure out where it's coming from. If you have a mental block, let's figure out how to get out of it."

Dorfman worked for the Oakland A's during the late 1980s and early '90s, when they played in three straight World Series. He later was employed by the Florida Marlins and Tampa Bay Rays. Superagent Scott Boras hired him in 2001 to work with his clients.

Many players have credited Dorfman with turning around their careers. Among those is two-time Cy Young Award winner Roy Halladay of the Philadelphia Phillies.

Dorfman wrote several books, including "The Mental Game of Baseball: A Guide to Peak Performance," which he co-authored with Karl Kuehl, the farm director for the A's in the 1980s who convinced his bosses to hire Dorfman.

"Spotlight on a 'Forgotten Superstar" **Ted Taylor's new book on A's hero, Al Simmons**

By Patrick Franklin, Montgomery Newspapers

Quick, I want you to name the most successful sports franchise in the history of Philadelphia and the player who propelled the team into multiple championship runs.

No, the answer is not the Phillies and Chase Utley. It's not the Sixers and Julius Erving. It's not the Flyers and Bobby Clarke. It's definitely not the Eagles and Donovan McNabb.

The correct answer would be the Philadelphia Athletics and Al Simmons, perhaps the most overlooked Hall of Famer in this great sports town of ours. And if you are one of the many not privy to his incredible talents, then you're in luck; you can read all about them in Ted Taylor's new book, "The Duke of Milwaukee: The Life and Times of Al Simmons, Baseball's Forgotten Superstar."

This is Taylor's third Philadelphia Athletics-related book, and actually the first book ever on the Hall of Famer with nearly 3,000 hits. As Taylor is the founding president of the Philadelphia Athletics Historical Society, there isn't anyone more qualified to enlighten baseball fans today of this town's long overlooked superstar.

But why should we care about a franchise that left town way back in 1954?

"That's simple," said Taylor, "The A's are still the most successful pro [and sport] franchise in Philadelphia history. Five world's championships, nine American League pennants."

Fair enough. But why is Simmons' name so unrecognizable to so many people? Most baseball fans will recognize Jimmie Foxx, the Hall of Famer who spent 10 years with the A's, but probably never even heard Simmons' name.

"His arc of fame was comparatively short — his best years were with the A's (1924-32) and then he moved around a lot. Simmons was really the catalyst for the A's as they moved toward their great run of 1928-1932, which included three pennants and two World Championships ... yet he was clearly overlooked in favor of the more colorful A's players like Jimmie Foxx, Lefty Grove, and Mickey Cochrane."

The book may only be 90 pages long, but it is packed with anecdotes, quotes, stats and plenty of classic pictures any baseball fan will love — even one of an actual scorecard from the 1929 World Series program.

But where did it all come from?

"I interviewed his grandson-in-law, a former A's player [Bill Hockenbury], spoke with sports historians and researched newspapers of his day, other books [though there was never one about him] and even the backs of baseball cards," Taylor explains.

Simmons was part of baseball at its finest. There were no \$ 250-million-dollar contracts. There were no steroid allegations. And yet, he was still able to swing his 38-inch bat and come up just short of 3,000 hits. He was part of three pennants and two World Championships between 1928-1932.

And most of us never even heard of him.

Thankfully, Taylor is remedying that, and doing so in a quick, easy, highly informative way.

"I loved writing about Al Simmons, and learning things I never knew about him — and the A's. Once I started, it was 'full speed ahead.'

"Author Rebecca West once said, 'I write books to find out about things.' Edward Albee said, 'I write to find out what I am talking about.' Both fit me. The book has been selling well and, likely, this summer will be on sale at the Phillies ballpark. A June 26 signing [when the A's are in town] is in the works."

Can the year of the pitcher possibly be repeated?

Joe Kay and Jon Krawczynski, AP, 3/1/2011

PHOENIX – [Dallas Braden](#) is never one to be bashful: The Oakland lefty is certain the Year of the Pitcher can carry on through 2011 and beyond.

And he's not the only one.

From a pair of perfect games only 20 days apart to four other no-hitters and one gem that should have been, all the spectacular performances in the Year of the Pitcher last season hardly could have been expected.

Can **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** fans possibly expect to witness yet another season of extraordinary outings from pitchers across the league? Oh yes, say many players and managers. Make it years, plural, if you ask Braden.

"I think it's the era of the pitcher," said Braden, who threw one of the two perfect games with a Mother's Day masterpiece against the Rays on May 9. "The era of the asterisk is beyond us. Now, the playing field is equal on both sides. It's a lot more about talent than it is about raw tools anymore."

With steroids and performance-enhancing drugs no longer in the forefront, Braden insists pitchers can take the mound without the worry of juiced-up sluggers stepping into the batter's box.

[Dusty Baker](#) notices a difference.

"There was a while during expansion when they were saying it was diluted, and then — I don't know if there was a conscientious effort by parents or whatever it was — it seemed like everybody started pitching," the Cincinnati manager said. "And now there's good pitching in quite a few places. Plus, in the post-steroid era here, it's gone back to pitching and speed and defense and fundamental play."

Phillies ace [Roy Halladay](#) pitched a perfect game May 29 at Florida only 20 days after Braden did so, then threw a no-no against Baker's Reds in the first round of the playoffs.

And [Armando Galarraga](#), now with Arizona, would have tossed a perfect game for the Tigers against Cleveland last June had umpire Jim Joyce not blown a call at **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**

Braden's perfect was the first for his franchise since Hall of Famer Catfish Hunter threw one for the Athletics in 1968, the last "Year of the Pitcher." There were five individual no-hitters that season, when the Cardinals' Bob Gibson led the majors with a 1.12 ERA, Detroit's Denny McLain became a 31-game winner, and Don Drysdale threw six straight shutouts for the Dodgers.

These days, many relievers throw heat.

"I remember saying throughout the season, 'Where is the guy who throws 87 with a sinker who used to come out of the pen?' Even long guys are throwing 97," Colorado Rockies star [Todd Helton](#) said.

"The game's kind of gone back to the way it was in the '80s — pitching and defense," new Diamondbacks general manager Kevin Towers said. "Teams now are focusing more on their bullpen and the importance of a bullpen in having a successful franchise. To me, you can't win without (pitching). It's paramount. If you don't have it you're going to have a very difficult time."

After that spectacular '68 season by pitchers, **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** Baseball's Rules Committee lowered the mound from 15 inches to 10 inches and shrunk the strike zone to its pre-1963 level — from the batter's armpits to the top of his knees.

And pitchers followed that up with a strong showing in the expansion season of 1969 as well. There were six more no-nos that year.

Could that be a telling sign? Do the pitchers have a true advantage again in the days minus the monster power hitters such as **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** king [Barry Bonds](#), Mark McGwire, [Sammy Sosa](#), all of whom cleared the fences at a remarkable rate?

"The Year of the Pitcher will continue," said A's manager Bob Geren, whose talented young staff led the AL in ERA last season at 3.56 and in shutouts with 17 while holding opponents to a .245 batting average. "The pitching seems to keep getting better, not worse."

"Some of the veteran guys, Roy Halladay and guys like that, they haven't shown any signs of letting up. And the younger guys like ours are going to keep getting better."

Braden went 0-5 in nine starts and dealt with an elbow injury after his perfect game before finally winning again July 25. He isn't ready to predict a repeat performance of his improbable perfect game.

But start drafting those arms anyway, fantasy gurus.

With former AL Cy Young Award winner [Zack Greinke](#) moving to the NL with Milwaukee, improvements in "Tommy John" reconstructive elbow surgery helping pitchers like [Francisco Liriano](#), [Josh Johnson](#) and [Tim Hudson](#) come back better than ever, and all those aces in Philly, it's a tough time to be a hitter for a living.

"I don't see why not," Helton said of another season of dominant pitching. "All the pitchers we're referring to, most of them haven't even hit their prime yet."

Like Helton's teammate, [Ubaldo Jimenez](#).

The 27-year-old Jimenez threw a no-hitter in his third start last season and was 15-1 by the All-Star break. He wound up at 19-8, just missing becoming the first 20-game winner in the Rockies' 18-year history.

"I think we're going to have a lot of Year of the Pitchers," Jimenez said. "As the years go by, I think we're going to get better every year. It seems like everything is working. There are better pitchers."

Two-time NL Cy Young winner [Tim Lincecum](#) agrees.

He sees pitchers accomplishing so much at a younger age because they are doing more to prepare early. He, for one, has worked harder on his conditioning regimen between starts after a career-worst five-start losing streak last August — a rare funk by The Freak.

The 26-year-old Lincecum broke into the majors in May 2007, less than a year after the Giants picked him 10th overall in the amateur draft out of Washington. He won 18 games and the first of his Cy Youngs a year later in his first full big league season. He's been an All-Star each of the past three years, too.

"Pitchers are evolving a little bit more. They've got four pitches they can throw for strikes nowadays and they're coming up younger and learning more quickly," said the San Francisco ace, already picked the opening day starter for the reigning [World Series](#) champions.

Braden and [Brian Wilson](#), San Francisco's closer who led the majors with 48 saves last season, talk pitching nearly every day. They traveled the world together this winter.

These cycles in baseball aren't always easily explained, though they make for interesting conversation.

"For some reason in the game, in this little short window of time, it's become an age of the pitcher. And we've seen how powerful it can be in our case," Giants general manager Brian Sabean said.

San Francisco skipper Bruce Bochy picked his next **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** winner on Day 1 of spring training this year — based on pitching. His call: Philadelphia, behind its stellar rotation of [Cliff Lee](#), [Halladay](#), [Roy Oswalt](#), [Cole Hamels](#) and [Joe Blanton](#).

"I think everybody in the National League would tell you the road to the World Series has to go through Philadelphia, with the quality of their staff," Bochy said. "Because of track record I think you would have to look at their staff as the best in baseball."

San Francisco beat those favored Phillies — minus Lee — in the NL championship series last season. Then the Giants took out Lee and the [Texas Rangers](#) for the franchise's first title since moving West in 1958 and first overall since '54.

So, everybody realizes anything can happen.

"That's the crazy thing about baseball," said Giants catcher and reigning NL Rookie of the Year [Buster Posey](#). "It very well could be the Year of the Pitcher, or it could be the Year of the Hitter. You never know. It's constantly changing."

[Jason Giambi](#) has watched enough things turn during 16 seasons in the majors he is convinced hitters will come around in due time.

"It's exciting when the game is cycled to see all these young pitchers come up. It's a lot of fun," the veteran Rockies slugger said. "There are a lot in the minor leagues. It's going to turn back around, too."