

## A's Daily News Clips; Saturday, March 5, 2011

### Oakland A's notebook: Manager Bob Geren takes delight in first-inning rally as Kevin Kouzmanoff delivers three-run homer

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 3/4/2011

PHOENIX -- A's manager Bob Geren would love to see a first-inning rally such as Friday's repeat itself come April.

Texas Rangers left-hander C.J. Wilson walked Hideki Matsui to put runners on first and second with two outs. Kevin Kouzmanoff followed with a three-run home run to left field.

That accounted for the A's only runs in a 6-3 loss at Phoenix Municipal Stadium, but the scenario was encouraging for Geren.

It's conceivable opposing pitchers will walk Matsui -- the A's likely No. 5 hitter -- often with a base open, given he poses the kind of threat that was missing from Oakland's lineup last season. Geren is looking for someone to hit behind Matsui who can take advantage of such situations, and he's mentioned Kouzmanoff, Kurt Suzuki and Mark Ellis as options.

"When guys get on base, it's my job to hit them in," Kouzmanoff said.

Kouzmanoff tied for the team lead in RBIs last season with 71 but hit just .214 with runners in scoring position.

"That was a well-struck ball," Geren said. "(Wilson) was trying to keep the ball down, and he kept the barrel underneath the ball."

- Dallas Braden allowed four earned runs in three innings, and that was against a Rangers lineup minus Josh Hamilton, Michael Young, Elvis Andrus and Adrian Beltre (out with a calf injury). None of them made the road trip with the defending American League West champions.

Wilson, the Rangers ace, went three innings and didn't allow any other damage besides Kouzmanoff's homer.

Braden still considered the outing a step forward over his exhibition debut Monday against the Los Angeles Angels.

"The velocity was up, and my arm felt 10 times better than the last time out," he said.

His biggest mistake Friday came when he left an 0-2 fastball over the plate that Taylor Teagarden smacked for a two-run homer. Braden allowed five hits with one strikeout.

- Brandon McCarthy, fighting for the fifth starter spot, allowed one run over three innings with three strikeouts and no walks. He sandwiched two solid innings around a shaky one, as he threw two wild pitches in the fifth, the second of which allowed a run to score.
- Longtime manager Joe Torre, recently hired as Major League Baseball's executive vice president of baseball operations, was in attendance. Before the game, he chatted with Matsui, a member of Torre's New York Yankees teams from 2003-07.

The 2003 season was Matsui's first in the majors after moving from Japan. Torre never won a World Series during Matsui's stint with the Yankees, but Matsui holds Torre in high esteem.

"He had so many stars and he got everybody to focus on the same goal," Matsui said through interpreter Roger Kahlon. "He had a special influence on me coming over from Japan. He's an important part of my life."

- Andrew Bailey and Craig Breslow both threw 20-pitch batting practice sessions. Each will throw one more Monday before possibly appearing in a game later in the week. The A's have been cautious with both by design.

Michael Wuertz felt good after throwing off the mound Thursday for the first time since experiencing shoulder soreness. He will have another bullpen session before facing hitters, so he's a bit behind Bailey and Breslow.

All the pitchers, as well as Geren, have expressed confidence they'll be ready for the April 1 opener against the Seattle Mariners.

### Landon Powell gets push for A's backup catcher job

By Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer, 3/4/2011

**Phoenix** -- One of the surprises of the spring is that a competition has developed for the A's backup catcher spot.

**Landon Powell** has handled the primary backup role for two seasons and has done a solid job, particularly on the defensive side. He has established excellent relationships with the team's pitchers, especially the starters, and he caught **Dallas Braden's** perfect game.

The A's, though, want to give their two Triple-A catchers, **Josh Donaldson** and **Anthony Recker**, at least a shot. Donaldson had two stints with Oakland last year and had five hits in 14 games. Recker, a nonroster player, hit .288 at Triple-A Sacramento last season and is perennially a strong spring performer - he entered Friday's game batting .333. He hit .333 with two homers last spring.

Donaldson also is hitting .333 and Powell .286 so the competition looks good on paper, even if Powell is the clear favorite.

"**Bob (Geren)** told me one morning that I'm definitely competing for a backup position," Donaldson said. "But I'm really not going to change what I try to do. I'm just preparing the way I always do, keeping everything normal."

"I'm coming into my fourth big-league camp, and I feel I have a chance to make a little noise and hopefully make the decision hard on them."

There are no hard feelings between the catchers, despite the competition.

"Landon and I talked about it, and it's really out of our control," Donaldson said. "I know Landon is going to do a great job and he probably has a few advantages over me, but I am going to give it every bit of effort."

Powell had four stints with Oakland last season, so he knows he's not assured of anything.

"I'm not taking anything for granted," he said. "And nothing should be given to you, anyway. I'll play like I love the game, which I do, and let the chips fall where they may."

Oakland almost never keeps a backup into arbitration, and Powell will be arbitration-eligible after this season. That makes Donaldson, obtained in the **Rich Harden** deal with the Cubs in 2008, the front-runner for 2012.

A's starting catcher **Kurt Suzuki** has made the second most starts at the position in the majors (389) over the past three years.

**One step at a time:** Harden (lat stiffness) threw for the first time since Feb. 15, with 30 throws at a distance of 80 feet. He said everything went well. He'll increase the distance today, and go two days on and one off a few times before throwing off the mound.

He isn't likely to appear in a game until the middle of the month at the earliest, and his chances of getting back into the fifth-starter mix are decreasing.

"I'm not trying to think too far forward," Harden said. "I'd drive myself crazy. We'll just see how it goes."

**Slowly but surely:** **Andrew Bailey** and **Craig Breslow** both threw 20 pitches of live batting practice to **Cliff Pennington**, **Ryan Sweeney** and **Grant Green** on Friday. Both will do the same thing Monday, with Thursday now the likely target date for their spring debuts. The A's are limiting the game action for Bailey, Breslow and **Michael Wuertz** because of their workloads last year.

## **Cactus League recap: Rangers 6, A's 3**

Susan Slusser, 3/4/2011

### **Cactus League recap**

**Friday's score:** Rangers 6, A's 3

**Notable:** Brandon McCarthy, gaining transaction in the race for the fifth-starter spot after making a few adjustments, allowed three hits and a run in three innings, striking out three. ... New relievers Brian Fuentes and Grant Balfour pitched scoreless innings. ... Taylor Teagarden hit a two-run homer on a 2-0 fastball from A's starter Dallas Braden, who joked that he's throwing Teagarden no more strikes.

**Quotable:** "I'm trying to see good pitches, pick 'em out and hit 'em. That one felt good, I have to say."

- *A's third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff, who hit a three-run, first inning homer off C.J. Wilson.*

## **The Drumbeat: Harden, Bailey, Breslow all in action....before the game**

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Phoenix Muni 3/4/2011 11:19AM

I waited a little on the Drumbeat today because there wasn't much happening this morning, and I wanted to see how Rich Harden, Andrew Bailey and Craig Breslow did in their throwing sessions.

Harden threw 30 tosses at 80 feet and he'll increase the distance tomorrow, and he'll throw two days on, one off, a few times, then probably go off the mound. That pushes any spring game appearance to mid-March at very the earliest, and the third week is really more realistic. That will make it tough for him to jump back into the fifth-starter competition, but he said he's not worried about that right now. My guess is that if Harden is healthy and throwing the way he can when he's sound, the A's will find a spot for him somewhere.

Andrew Bailey and Craig Breslow, on a slow progression this spring because of their workloads last year (and Bailey's minor elbow cleanup), both threw 20 pitches of live batting practice. Bailey estimates he gave up singles to Ryan Sweeney and Cliff Pennington, Breslow said he gave up a single to Sweeney. They'll do the same thing again Monday rather than throwing in a game, so their spring debuts appear as if they'll be Thursday, instead.

Here's the lineup vs. Texas: DeJesus RF, Suzuki C, Jackson 1B, Matsui DH, Kouzmanoff 3B, Carson CF, Carter LF, Tolleson SS, Weeks 2B. Dallas Braden is starting, Brandon McCarthy. Brian Fuentes and Grant Balfour all should be in action, too, and if the A's need pitchers late, they've borrowed minor-league Jared Lansford, son of Carney, and it's always nice to see him.

## **A's quiet after Kouzmanoff's long ball**

By Jane Lee, MLB.com, 3/4/2011

PHOENIX -- The Rangers overcame a three-run homer in the first inning to tag lefty Dallas Braden for four runs en route to a 6-3 Cactus League victory over the A's on Friday at Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

Kevin Kouzmanoff's home run -- his first of the spring -- came off Texas' C.J. Wilson, who went three innings and surrendered three runs on five hits with two walks and a strikeout in his second spring start.

The Rangers went down quietly in the first against Braden before narrowing Oakland's lead to one on a two-run long ball from Taylor Teagarden in the second inning. A two-run single by first baseman Mitch Moreland in the third inning put Texas ahead for good.

Braden gave up four runs on five hits while striking out one in three innings, before being relieved by Brandon McCarthy. The A's rightly, facing his former team for the first time, surrendered a triple to Julio Borbon in the fifth and promptly threw a wild pitch to bring Borbon home and extend Texas' lead to two.

McCarthy fared better in his final two frames, as he exited his second spring appearance with one run, three hits and a strikeout attached to his name.

The A's came up empty against Texas' relief corps and managed just five hits after the first frame. Dave Bush, Arthur Rhodes, Mason Tobin and Brett Tomko combined for six shutout innings.

**Up next for the A's:** Lefty Brett Anderson and the A's will engage in a spring version of the Battle of the Bay, as the Giants visit Phoenix Municipal Stadium for a 12:05 p.m. PT matchup. Regulars Coco Crisp, Daric Barton, Mark Ellis and Josh Willingham are among those who will step up to the plate against Giants youngster Madison Bumgarner.

**Up next for the Rangers:** Colby Lewis pitched two shutout innings in his Cactus League debut, and he will take the hill against the D-backs on Saturday at 2:10 p.m. CT. Michael Kirkman, Darren O'Day, Pedro Strop and Ryan Tucker are also scheduled to pitch for the Rangers. Catcher Yorvit Torrealba, who has been slowed by a stiff lower back, could return to the lineup Saturday. Josh Hamilton, who was given the day off Friday, is also on tap to return to the lineup.

## **McCarthy becoming new pitcher with A's**

By Jane Lee, MLB.com, 3/4/2011

PHOENIX -- Brandon McCarthy could easily carry a multitude of distractions with him to the mound.

Instead, he simply chooses not to.

Thoughts of his place in the fifth-starter competition, as well as concern for his oft-injured shoulder, are all left behind when McCarthy takes to the hill. Focusing on progressively improved mechanics are instead at the forefront of his game.

And it's showing.

Through two spring outings, the most recent of which came Friday against his former Rangers team, McCarthy has quietly impressed, even though the numbers might sing a slightly different tune. In a combined five innings, the A's right-hander has given up two runs and five hits with four strikeouts.

"He knows how to make adjustments," manager Bob Geren said. "Sometimes, he gets away from the mechanics, but he'll get right back to them and toss a really good inning."

Mechanics are seemingly always changing in McCarthy's world. The 27-year-old has tweaked his form several times over the past few years, though he feels he's finally nearing a comfort zone. Much of that mindset comes from recent work with A's pitching coach Ron Romanick, who advised McCarthy to shift his foot placement on the rubber.

"That little change," Geren said, "that's really helped him."

Physically, McCarthy has mastered the new technique. Mentally, it's still a work in progress.

"For the most part, it's comfortable," McCarthy said. "Footing-wise, balance-wise, everything's the same. I'm having a little trouble with it just in terms of my eyesight -- just some of the pitches I'm throwing, I can't quite convince myself that I am where I am, and you see some of those pitches are wild pitches. I lose trust for a second."

One of those wild pitches resulted in a run in Friday's game, when McCarthy surrendered a Julio Borbon triple and allowed him to score on a pitch in the dirt. Better to work out those kinks now, though, than during the season.

"Over the last few years, I've made a bunch of dramatic changes," McCarthy said. "This ties into it -- it's sort of like the last piece."

Shoulder problems have limited the 6-foot-7 McCarthy, once considered a top prospect in the White Sox system, to 22 Major League starts over the last three seasons. Those issues, he says, are behind him, especially following a successful winter ball stint in the offseason.

"I've done so much rehab work on the shoulder that it feels incredibly strong," he said. "Once I get out there in the games, I don't even think about it or am concerned about it."

McCarthy was 4-2 with a 3.36 ERA in 11 appearances for Triple-A Oklahoma City in the Rangers organization last year before signing with the A's as a free agent. The righty is pushing for a rotation spot, but so are Josh Outman, Tyson Ross and Bobby Cramer. Still, McCarthy has his confidence back now that he's pinpointed his pitching style.

"No more four-seams," he said. "I've always been a straight four-seam guy my entire career, but this year and last it's been nothing but sinkers and cutters. I'm trying to maximize pitch efficiency -- more ground balls, more strikes, less effort on my part. Just throw the ball and let them hit the ball. It allows me to focus more and execute."

"I decided that's the change I wanted to make. Strikeouts are nice if I get there, but I'd rather have the at-bat done before that."

McCarthy is also using the often mundane days of spring to refine his changeup and find consistency with it. He's yet to use it in a game, but that will change as he continues to rack up more work on the side with Romanick.

"Everything else is there," he said. "I like working with [Romanick] a lot. I feel comfortable with where I'm at. It's nice when your past isn't so much following you."

## **Braden pleased with command in second outing**

By Jane Lee, MLB.com, 3/4/2011

PHOENIX -- No matter his growing veteran status, A's lefty Dallas Braden never takes his job for granted.

As a result, Spring Training always represents something of a tryout for him. Imagine the confusion, then, when Braden's given the OK to work on certain facets of his game during contests rather than just focus on making the final cut.

"One thing I really tapped into last year was [Ben] Sheets and his mindset and approach," Braden said. "I don't think I ever thought or I'll ever think I'll have a position locked up, but when your coaches are giving you that vote of confidence to go out and work on things, it's different."

"I don't have [Sheets] to lean on this year, so I'm thinking, now what? It's weird for me to sift through and find out how I need to approach Spring Training."

On Friday, making his second start of the spring against the visiting Rangers, Braden took advantage of his opportunity to work on things and, subsequently, found better command of both sides of the plate with use of a different arm slot.

"I was probably more over the top last time, just because the arm speed wasn't there," Braden said. "I was tight. ... The problem last time out was I was up in the zone. I was up in the zone again today, but trying to command both sides of the plate. I felt totally different. I was pitching from a different arm slot. Today, I felt totally comfortable."

Braden said he reached 91 mph on the radar gun, three miles per hour faster than the average velocity from his last start. Aside from one breaking ball and three changeups, the lefty threw all fastballs in his three-inning stint, which resulted in four runs on five hits with a strikeout.

Two of the runs came courtesy of Taylor Teagarden, who launched a two-run shot to left field off Braden in the top of the second inning. Teagarden has tallied just 16 home runs in his career, four of which have come off Oakland pitchers.

"He's definitely had some success against us, that's for sure," Braden said. "I don't want to throw the guy a strike from here on out."

Overall, Braden insisted he felt "10 times better than the way I felt the other day," when he was forced to throw 32 pitches in a two-run first inning against the Angels.

"My arm's feeling better, I'm bouncing back in between innings better," he said. "Progress is definitely being made."

### **Bailey on track for spring debut next week**

PHOENIX -- Right-hander Andrew Bailey remains on track to make his Cactus League debut next week following a successful 20-pitch bullpen session against live hitters on Friday.

The A's closer, coming off minor elbow surgery, threw all of his pitches and "felt great" while facing teammates Ryan Sweeney, Cliff Pennington, Sean Doolittle and Grant Green -- the last of whom he offered up a free pass.

"He was just scared of me," Green said, smiling.

Bailey's final step before getting into an exhibition game will come Monday, when he's scheduled to throw 20 to 30 pitches in a live bullpen session again. If all goes well, he'll pitch in a game Thursday or Friday.

"I'm feeling good," Bailey said. "I was effectively wild, but that's to be expected around this time of year."

Once in Cactus League play, the A's reliever will likely make an appearance every three days and compile between five and six outings by the end of camp -- plenty, manager Bob Geren said, to have him ready for Opening Day.

Lefty Craig Breslow, whom the A's are also bringing along slowly because of his workload last season, is on the same schedule as Bailey.

### **Harden passes test with pain-free session**

PHOENIX -- The exact date of Rich Harden's return to the mound is currently unknown, but the A's righty took one step closer Friday by throwing pain-free from a distance of 80 feet.

"It went really well," manager Bob Geren said. "It was a 'test it out and see how it feels' kind of day."

Harden has been sidelined since Feb. 15, when he experienced stiffness in the lat area under his pitching arm during a 40-pitch bullpen session. According to Geren, the hurler is scheduled to throw "harder and farther" on Saturday, and will take Sunday off.

From there, Harden will most likely remain on a two-on, one-off schedule as the team determines when he's best suited to pitch off the bump again. At this point, there is no way to determine when he'll make his Cactus League debut, though his

chances in the fifth-starter race appear to be thinning as fellow candidates Josh Outman, Brandon McCarthy, Tyson Ross and Bobby Cramer continue to progress.

### **Worth noting**

Michael Wuertz threw a 30-pitch bullpen session Thursday and "felt great," Geren said. He'll throw a minimum of one more bullpen, possibly two, before facing hitters and making his Cactus League debut. Geren said he feels confident Wuertz will be able to pitch in five or six games and be ready for the regular season. ... David DeJesus made his first appearance in the leadoff spot Friday, and Geren said the A's outfielder is a good candidate for that role this season when Coco Crisp is in need of a day off. Mark Ellis and Cliff Pennington, who also have experience in the No. 1 hole, are also possibilities. ... Several players will endure their first taste of starting consecutive games this spring because of Sunday's split-squad schedule. Most position players, Geren said, will play either Saturday and Sunday or Sunday and Monday. Those who started Friday's game fall under the latter category. ... Relievers Brian Fuentes and Grant Balfour combined for two shutout innings in Friday's game. "Both obviously looked very good," Geren said. ... The A's drew a rather large crowd at Phoenix Municipal Stadium on Friday, bringing in 4,448 fans.