

A's Daily News Clips; Sunday, March 6, 2011

Change of delivery helps Oakland A's reliever Brian Fuentes make right career choice

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 3/6/2011

PHOENIX -- A's reliever Brian Fuentes finds an unconventional way to get hitters out.

That's fitting considering his baseball career has unfolded in unusual fashion, too.

Fuentes, a key newcomer to the A's bullpen, didn't even start pitching until he was a senior at Merced High. From there, he moved on to Merced Junior College, thinking a career in forestry was more likely than one in baseball.

Fuentes was drafted in the 25th round by the Seattle Mariners. But his career didn't take off until he converted to a sidearm delivery, one that A's teammate Brett Anderson describes as "funky."

You can't argue with the results.

Fuentes, 35, made four All-Star teams with the Colorado Rockies and Los Angeles Angels, and his 183 saves since 2005 are the most in the major leagues among left-handed relievers.

"I would have had different mechanics if I was able to," he said. "It was a blessing in disguise, having an unorthodox delivery."

As Fuentes pushes off the mound, his throwing arm lags behind his body before he whips the ball toward home plate. That makes it difficult for hitters to pick up the ball.

Fuentes had 24 saves and a 2.81 ERA during a 2010 season split between the Angels and Minnesota Twins. Perhaps most important to the A's, he didn't allow a run in 15 outings against American League West opponents.

Oakland signed him to a two-year, \$10.5 million deal in January and holds a \$6.5 million option for 2013.

Fuentes will be a setup man, but he'll get save opportunities when closer Andrew Bailey needs rest and possibly when the A's face a string of left-handed hitters in the ninth inning.

Lefties hit just .128 (6 for 47) against Fuentes last season.

"He's got like a slow motion and the ball just pops out of nowhere," A's catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "But at the same time, he throws in the low 90s. You don't pick it up until the ball is pretty much halfway there."

In contrast, Suzuki said adjusting to catching Fuentes has been easy because Fuentes has pinpoint control.

Fuentes grew up in Merced rooting for the A's -- pitcher Dave Stewart was a particular favorite -- but there was little indication he'd have a chance to someday wear the uniform.

He was cut from his junior varsity team as a sophomore but then grew from 5-foot-8 to 6-1 over his final two years of high school. He's now 6-4.

"He had muscle spasms, and his legs ached all the time," Fuentes' mother, Diane, said. "He shot up. The rest of the family is tall, but not that tall."

Fuentes pitched for Merced JC but had an eye toward transferring to Nevada and pursuing a career in forestry.

"I'm just an outdoors type of guy," he said.

But he grabbed scouts' attention, and the Mariners drafted him in 1995.

By 1999, Fuentes was a Double-A starter, utilizing a traditional over-the-top motion but having trouble throwing strikes.

Seattle coaches thought Fuentes could be an effective relief specialist if he converted to a sidearm motion.

"If you saw how he threw, he was kind of a pie-thrower even from up top," said Pat Rice, then Seattle's minor league pitching coordinator. "His stuff was great, just not enough strikes to kind of get over the hump."

Rice remembers Fuentes taking to the change easily and reducing his walks. Rice also saw the makeup of a guy who could eventually handle the ninth inning.

"He was a great competitor and a guy who could shake stuff off," said Rice, now the Giants' Triple-A pitching coach.

Fuentes was traded to Colorado before the 2002 season. By 2005, he took over as the Rockies closer and made the NL All-Star team.

Fuentes was closing for the Angels last season until an August trade sent him to Minnesota, where he took on a setup role.

Now the A's are paying him big money to set up for them. Considering Bailey missed 1½ months with elbow and rib cage injuries last season, Fuentes could provide valuable insurance.

He said he's ready for whatever he's asked to do.

"I go out, get my three outs and move on," Fuentes said. "I've got a one-track mind when I get out there."

Oakland A's notebook: Left-hander Brett Anderson plays crowd, pitches three shutout innings against Giants

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 3/6/2011

PHOENIX -- Brett Anderson said he didn't pay attention to the story lines he was involved in Saturday, but he pitched like a motivated individual.

He allowed just one hit over three shutout innings in the A's 6-0 victory over the Giants before a sellout crowd of 8,330 at Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

Anderson was opposed by Madison Bumgarner in a matchup of two of the game's top young left-handers. The individual duel didn't register much with him, Anderson said, nor did the fact he was facing the defending World Series champions. But he was pleased to improve on his first spring start, when he allowed two homers against Cincinnati on Tuesday.

"I was better than the last time," he said. "It was kind of a short and sweet outing. It was a good crowd, a little more adrenaline."

Anderson struck out five, ringing up several Giants on curveballs. The slider typically is Anderson's breaking ball of choice, and he also wants to develop a changeup this spring. But his postgame comments made it sound as if the changeup might stay on the back burner if his curveball works that well.

"It's something I need to work on to get deeper in games and get quicker outs," he said of his changeup. "But when in doubt, I'm going to go with my better pitches."

Anderson said he wasn't watching Bumgarner any more closely than the other Giants pitchers during the World Series. But he did take note of Bumgarner's dominant effort against Texas, the team the A's are looking to unseat in the AL West. Bumgarner went eight shutout innings in a Game 4 win last fall.

"That was a pretty special start," Anderson said.

A's manager Bob Geren can understand why people draw parallels between his team and the 2010 Giants. "We have good pitching, and we added some offense," he said. "They had a good pitching staff and added some offense, and it got them a championship."

Joey Devine pitched a scoreless inning and hasn't allowed a run in three outings.

Rich Harden (side muscle injury) has played catch twice, but there's no word on when he'll get on the mound. It's unlikely he'll be ready for the start of the season.

Chin Music: A's Lineups for Sunday split-squad games

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 3/6/2011, 9:42 AM

Here's both lineups for the A's split-squad games against the Brewers and Padres:

vs. Brewers (home)

Crisp CF
Ellis 2B
Matsui DH
Jackson 1B
Carter LF
Donaldson C
Timmons 3B
Taylor RF
Sogard SS

Gonzalez LHP

vs. Padres (away)

Pennington SS
Barton 1B
DeJesus DH
Willingham LF
Kouzmanoff 3B
Suzuki C
Miller CF
Carson RF
Tolleson 2B

Outman LHP

**Shortstop Cliff Pennington makes his Cactus League debut after sitting out until now while recovering from left shoulder surgery. A switch hitter, Pennington's shoulder still bothers him a bit swinging right-handed. The Padres are throwing a right-handed starter, so Geren is playing him in that game so he can swing left-handed. "He's more ready from the left side than the right."

Pennington is slated for two or three at-bats, and he'll likely play every other day to start out. It's worth watching how he progresses given the lack of depth at shortstop with Adam Rosales also injured. Speaking of Rosales, he's out of his walking

boot and throwing and taking grounders on his knees, but his right foot isn't ready for full activity yet. He'll visit the doctor March 16 to get a timetable for when he can hit the field full-on ...

A's Brett Anderson much better in second outing

Henry Schulman, Gwen Knapp, Chronicle Staff Writers, 3/6/2011

Brett Anderson finished his second spring-training appearance for the A's very efficiently on Saturday against the Giants, especially compared with his debut.

Four days earlier, he had given up four runs on six hits, including two homers, in two innings against Cincinnati. His totals in the 6-0 victory over the Giants: no runs, one hit, one walk, five strikeouts over three innings.

"Threw more breaking balls," he explained. He emphasized the curveball over the slider, he said, and downplayed his changeup, which he is still cultivating.

"I think I threw two today," he said. "I threw a bunch more the other day, which was probably a telltale sign."

Afterward, he did a short throwing session in the bullpen, where he worked on the changeup. He also noted the sellout crowd, more than five times the size of the attendance at Tuesday's debut at the A's spring park. "You get a little more adrenaline, playing in front of so many people," he said.

Anderson had another game on his schedule later in the day. He planned to drive to Tucson, where Oklahoma State was to play an afternoon tournament game. His father, **Frank**, is the head coach.

Beane on Posey: A's general manager **Billy Beane** predicted that this year's Giants would be even better than the 2010 world championship version, mostly because he believes in **Buster Posey's** future.

"One of the reasons they're going to be really good is that Posey's going to be there all year, **(Mark) DeRosa's** back," Beane said. "And even though they weren't necessarily a great offensive team, they've now got a great young offensive player, who you're going to see improve in leaps and bounds."

He also called Posey a "centerpiece, premium young player."

Bumgarner mechanics: Giants pitcher **Madison Bumgarner** reared back against the A's, recognized his mechanics were "out of whack" and corrected it on the next pitch. It sounds simple, but it's not.

Throughout his young baseball life, Bumgarner just climbed the mound and pitched, paying little attention to where his arms, legs and hips were. Last spring, for the first time, they were all over the place, and he had no idea how to fix it. Ultimately he did, and his journey served as a valuable reminder that failure can be the best breeding ground for success. "I'm thankful that happened," Bumgarner said after allowing one unearned run over three innings. "I know I wouldn't be where I'm at now if I didn't go through that."

Bumgarner spent much of the 2010 season, at Triple-A Fresno and in the majors, repairing his delivery, then working to repeat the correct one with consistency. He said it did not "click" until his Aug. 20 win at St. Louis, shortly after his 21st birthday. He got hammered against Cincinnati in his next start then finished with a 1.18 ERA over his final six regular-season games.

"I never knew anything about mechanics until last year when I had to start figuring things out," he said. "It made a big difference. I never knew I could know as much as I do now. I'd hear guys talk about mechanics. I just went out and threw. That's going to help me be more consistent with it."

Kid closer: Right-hander **Jason Stoffel** made an impression in Friday night's win against the Dodgers. He was summoned with the bases loaded and two outs in the eighth inning, with the Giants leading 5-3, and struck out **Juan Castro** with a slider. The Giants thought a lot of the Arizona State closer in the 2009 draft, selecting him one round ahead of **Brandon Belt**. He saved 25 games for Class A San Jose last season.

Briefly: **Andres Torres** said he felt no pain in his left side the day after returning to the lineup after six days off. He singled in three at-bats against the Dodgers. ... **Eli Whiteside** (elbow inflammation) started as the designated hitter but has not yet caught. ... **Matt Cain** (elbow inflammation) played catch for the first time since he pitched a week ago. His next step will be determined by how he feels.

Cactus League recap: A's 6, Giants 0

Henry Schulman, Chronicle Staff Writer, 3/6/2011

Cactus League recap

Score: A's 6, Giants 0

Notable: Oakland starter Brett Anderson was vastly improved in his second spring appearance. He held the Giants to a Brandon Belt single over three innings and struck out five of his 10 batters. ... The Giants played their sloppiest game, committing four errors (Mark DeRosa, Miguel Tejada, Thomas Neal, Charlie Culberson) and other fundamental gaffes. ... Outfielder Michael Choice, the A's first-round draft pick last year, was the only hitter on either team with two hits, both singles.

Quotable: "Miggy's going to be fine. He's on the back field working every day. The guys are getting in shape. It doesn't matter what kind of conditioning you show up in, you've got to go out and play the games."

- *Manager Bruce Bochy on Tejada, whose range and arm have been lacking.*

Today's games: Mariners (Nate Robertson) vs. Giants (Tim Lincecum), 12:05 p.m. Radio: 680; Brewers (Chris Narveson) vs. A's (Gio Gonzalez), 12:05 p.m. Radio: 860; A's (Josh Outman) vs. Padres (Mat Latos), 12:05 p.m. Radio: None.

A's hope to follow in Giants' footsteps

Gwen Knapp, San Francisco Chronicle, 3/6/2011

PHOENIX — The other Bay Area baseball team might be more intriguing than the reigning world champions. After four fallow years, the A's decided to build a roster that resembles a contender, and they ended up looking an awful lot like the Giants.

"I could see the parallels, sure," manager Bob Geren said Saturday, before the A's hosted the 2010 champs in a Cactus League game.

The Giants have a great pitching staff, which had the best earned run average in the majors last year; the A's have an excellent pitching staff, which led the American League in ERA. The Giants upgraded their offense over the final months of last season.

The A's added three new hitters, including a slugger with a resume similar to Pat Burrell's: former player for a World Series champ, apparently past his peak, brought in to add desperately needed power.

But Hideki Matsui is already more than just a bat for a young A's team accustomed to being ignored. With a large Japanese press contingent following his every twitch, Matsui evokes some of the rock-star aura that clung to the A's in their Bash Brothers incarnation.

"There's a little extra energy with Hideki coming and all of the people who follow him regularly, the press being around more," Geren said. "A few players have said it feels like a playoff atmosphere, and they like it. It's kind of a big market feel." Billy Beane went further.

"It's like David Beckham," the general manager said. "When you see David Beckham, you think: 'That's a guy who knows how to be a star.'" Matsui will turn 37 in June, and he missed large swaths of the 2006 and '08 seasons with the Yankees. Keeping him healthy could be a challenge.

Over the past few years, the A's have found it difficult to keep many of their players healthy.

Changing their disabled-list culture became as much of a priority as finding a heart-of-the-lineup hitter.

Beane said the front office did extensive research, contacting other baseball teams known for limiting injuries and managing recovery, as well as teams from other sports (mostly the NBA), agents and former A's who could discuss their experiences with other teams.

"We were reaching out to anyone and anybody we could," Beane said.

In the end, the A's overhauled the medical staff and the training staff, adding a third trainer. He will be a "rehab coordinator" for anyone who is injured, according to Beane, staying with sidelined players in Oakland when the team travels.

The GM took some of the responsibility for the extensive injury problems, saying the front office underwent an attitude adjustment. The temptation to push players, or even allow them to push themselves, had to go, he said.

"In the past, we'd be more likely to say: 'Let's get this guy out there, because we don't have that many good players,'" Beane said. That's "an unfair burden on the medical staff and players. So we said, 'OK, that way's not working, so we're going to start from scratch. If (players) think they're going to be ready in two days, we're going to hold them back four days.'" "The Giants' top five starters, it should be noted, did not make a trip to the disabled list last year. One injury could have halted their pursuit of the Padres, keeping them out of the playoffs and handing the commissioner's trophy to someone else. Would a healthier Brett Anderson or Dallas Braden have erased the nine losses that separated Oakland from Texas and the postseason? Probably not. The lineup had too many gaps. Reaching .500 was a real accomplishment.

This offseason brought more financial freedom, though not enough to stock the A's with an array of patient sluggers like the Oakland teams of five to 10 years ago. The A's bullpen is now their Murderers' Row, at least in terms of depth. Beane said he took the best available talent he could afford, and he hasn't abandoned critical "Moneyball" principles.

"Listen, my first choice is to get a bunch of guys who get on base, hit .400 and a lot of home runs, but they're expensive," he said. "It's just hard to go into Yankee Stadium, when you're facing all that firepower they have, and string together runs. The ability to hit a three run homer always has to be there."

So now he has a team that mirrors the Giants, a team with limited power that won the World Series on Edgar Renteria's three-run homer.

A's envisioning Giant-like success

By Jane Lee, MLB.com, 03/05/11 6:55 PM

PHOENIX -- The A's are no strangers to the method with which the Giants claimed a World Series championship last year.

Pitch, and score just enough runs.

That was essentially Oakland's own mantra in 2010. The pitching part came to fruition, as evidenced by an American League-leading 3.56 ERA; the scoring part, not so much.

Oakland scored the fourth-fewest runs (663) in the American League and posted the second-fewest home runs with 109. Their .378 slugging percentage and .241 average with runners in scoring position both ranked second lowest en route to a second-place finish in the AL West.

The Giants' offense fared better -- barely -- in an effort to match a pitching staff that combined for a 3.36 team ERA. Their 697 runs ranked ninth in the National League, and they averaged 4.3 runs per game, which also ranked just ninth.

But it was enough, much thanks to a handful of late-season acquisitions that pushed San Francisco ahead in the second half, where a .605 winning percentage trumped the .534 mark that came out of the first half. In the postseason, they were simply playing good ball at a good time.

"They added a couple of pieces that helped their offense, and they had a great pitching staff and good defense," A's manager Bob Geren said. "The extra pieces that drove their runs up are what pushed them to where they got."

Since then, the A's have seemingly tried to exercise the same approach by adding the likes of Hideki Matsui, Josh Willingham and David DeJesus. It's a process, though, that really started years ago with the development of one of baseball's best staffs.

Whether mirrored results -- Bay Area team rides playoff journey on pitching and the perfect dose of offense -- are delivered has yet to be seen, but the possibility of such a scenario has the A's pondering the same question being circulated around the baseball community: Can they be this year's version of the 2010 Giants?

Some shrug at the suggestion, which surfaced yet again Saturday when the Giants visited Oakland's Phoenix Municipal Stadium. Others embrace it.

"You hear the hype, and you hear the comparisons of who's better, and a lot of it is focused on pitching, whether this staff or that staff is better," A's starter Dallas Braden said. "It's weird to hear you're part of such a conversation that actually has some substance to it."

"We do have pretty comparable stats as far as age and successes are concerned. It's not just apples and oranges because we're two Bay Area teams. That's really awesome, considering you're comparing a staff to a World Series champion staff. We have that locked in right here across the Bay."

The young A's quartet of Braden, Gio Gonzalez, Brett Anderson and 2010 All-Star Trevor Cahill have not yet escalated onto the same stage where San Francisco's Tim Lincecum, Matt Cain, Jonathan Sanchez and Madison Bumgarner stand. But the overall talent level, many argue, is nearly equal.

"They had more name value than we did last year," Brad Ziegler said. "Our guys caught everybody by surprise by how well they pitched as a unit. We're kind of the unknown, small-market team. They're in a big market, and they get a lot more publicity even when they're not in the playoffs. When they get to the playoffs, it magnifies it, and we're still sitting over here and feel like we're just as good."

They arguably are when healthy and not using the disabled list 23 times, as they did last season. A weak A's offense was derailed by injuries to Coco Crisp, Mark Ellis, Ryan Sweeney, Kurt Suzuki, Kevin Kouzmanoff and midseason acquisition Conor Jackson. All of the above are back and healthy, giving the A's an extra helping of optimism as they make their way through spring.

"If we can stay healthy, that's going to be key," Braden said. "Multiple things have to go right, like they did for the Giants last year, especially in the playoffs. If we can stay healthy, we're going to be a force."

In a small but talented division, the A's don't have much room for error. They're gearing to stay near or at the top of the standings from start to finish this season, and they believe they have the necessary tools -- exceptional pitching, above-average defense and respectable offense -- to do so.

"The thing is, the Giants took everyone by storm in the second half of the season," Ziegler said. "I feel this is a team that could really be near the front from the beginning. It's a fun group of guys that's ready to win. We're sick of being the pushover in the division, and I think the last two or three years have really gotten guys fired up. The front office went out and made some moves to hopefully make us better. If we can stay healthy, we should definitely be better."

"The players know that we've improved, how we finished, how hard we played, how hard we had to fight just to get to the .500 mark," Geren said. "With the guys that are returning, plus the additions, on paper it should make us better. It's up to them to make that come true."

Oakland pitching strong in downing Giants

By Jane Lee, MLB.com, 3/5/2011 5:40 PM

PHOENIX -- A's lefty Brett Anderson and Co. handcuffed the visiting Giants in their first spring meeting Saturday, when a strong effort on the mound, a handful of timely hits and a shaky San Francisco defense paved the way for a 6-0 Oakland victory in front of a sold-out crowd at Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

Anderson, making his second Cactus League start, breezed through three innings of work, tallying five strikeouts and just one hit and one walk while shutting out the Giants.

The A's proved far noisier at the plate, jumping out to a quick 1-0 lead in the first against San Francisco lefty Madison Bumgarner with help from Giants third baseman Mark DeRosa, who committed a throwing error on a leadoff ground ball from Coco Crisp. The miscue was followed by back-to-back singles from Daric Barton and Mark Ellis, the latter of which resulted in an unearned run.

Bumgarner pushed aside a messy first inning and posted 1-2-3 frames in the second and third, exiting with two hits, one walk and one strikeout attached to his name.

"My delivery was a lot more consistent today," the young Giants southpaw said. "I kept the ball down as well as I have this spring."

Ramon Ramirez relieved Bumgarner in the fourth and surrendered three runs in 1 2/3 innings of work -- two of which came courtesy of a two-run single off the bat of Crisp, who is batting .417 with seven RBIs this spring.

Fielding errors by San Francisco's Thomas Neal and Charlie Culberson led to Oakland's final two runs in the seventh. The Giants committed a total of four errors while picking up their third loss of the spring. The A's, meanwhile, improved to 3-4.

Up next for Giants: Right-hander Tim Lincecum will confront his hometown team Sunday when the Giants entertain the Seattle Mariners at Scottsdale Stadium. Lincecum never has faced the Mariners in the regular season but has opposed them several times in Spring Training action. Closer Brian Wilson, whose progress has been delayed by a stiff back, is expected to make his first exhibition appearance. Buster Posey, Lincecum's likely batterymate who rested Sunday, entered Saturday leading the Cactus League with 16 total bases and was tied for first with five runs scored, two homers and eight hits.

Up next for A's: The A's will engage in their first split-squad action of the spring Sunday, with lefty Gio Gonzalez taking the mound against the Brewers at Phoenix Municipal Stadium and fifth-starter candidate Josh Outman making the trip to Peoria for a visit with the Padres. Both contests are scheduled to begin at 12:05 p.m. PT. Many eyes will be on the road game, where shortstop Cliff Pennington is slated to make his first start of the spring at shortstop. The A's infielder is coming off left shoulder surgery.

Anderson pleased with work on breaking pitches

By Jane Lee, MLB.com, 03/05/2011 8:12 PM

PHOENIX -- Places to go, people to see.

Brett Anderson's Saturday-night plans included a lengthy drive to Tucson, Ariz., to watch his father's Oklahoma State baseball team take part in the Dairy Queen Classic. So excuse the A's lefty for making quick work of the Giants during his second spring outing Saturday.

Anderson breezed through three quick shutout frames, striking out five while walking one and surrendering just one hit in an eventual 6-0 A's win -- marking a notable improvement from a Cactus League debut that resulted in four runs in two frames.

"Better than last time," he said. "I threw more breaking balls just to get a feel for it and strike some guys out. For some reason I had a good feel for it today. I threw some curveballs and not as many sliders. I mixed some fastballs in and out. Short but sweet outing."

Anderson also credited a "good crowd" -- 8,330 were in attendance -- for boosting his adrenaline after coming out of the first inning feeling slightly rusty. The A's southpaw, who watched his curveball get knocked around in his last start, threw just two Saturday but proceeded to throw nearly 15 more while finishing up work in the bullpen.

"I wanted to get a good feel for it on the side," he said. "The changeup is always a conscious effort every Spring Training for me. Today, I had a good feel for both my breaking balls."

Anderson admitted to a "love-hate relationship" with the changeup, noting that it's something that requires attention if he wants to ensure lengthier starts and quicker outs.

"But when in doubt," he said, "I'm going to go with my better pitches. If I can get a handful of outs with it during the game I'll be happy, but it's never going to be where I'll be able to throw it on a 3-2 count in the seventh inning. It's just always going to be that way for me."

The Oakland hurler has been fine-tuning the pitch with help from pitching coach Ron Romanick, who is using Rich Harden's changeup as an example. The hard-throwing Harden makes use of it as a power changeup, and Anderson hopes to eventually do the same.

"I'm working on what he does, where I can just grab it and go rather than finesse it and feel for it, just be able to pitch without having to think about it too much," he said. "When I throw it slow and try to make it move, I end up throwing it belt-high down the middle and it gets crushed. If I can take the intellect out of it, I can have better results."

Unlike teammates Dallas Braden and Trevor Cahill, Anderson doesn't have a natural feel for the changeup. Rather, he can take hold of his slider and have a general idea of what it's going to do, much like his breaking ball, for which he has a good ability to force a spin. The changeup, however, hasn't come to form as quickly.

"It's getting progressively better and better," he said, "but it's never going to be a go-to pitch."

Devine gains confidence, control in third outing

PHOENIX -- Right-hander Joey Devine is throwing the cautious approach out the window -- sort of.

The A's reliever, on the comeback trail from a 2009 Tommy John procedure, is still making a conscious effort to stay healthy this spring. At the same time, he's not going to let worry of yet another setback restrain him. Not when he's "100 percent, absolutely" past the point of thinking of his elbow every time he takes to the mound.

Devine admittedly felt himself holding back while warming up for his second spring outing three days ago and, subsequently, felt frustration. It was at that point he made a decision.

"I'm going to throw it as hard as I can and see what happens," he said. "As soon as I started doing that, I started hitting my spots and started feeling better."

On Saturday, in a one-inning stint against the visiting Giants, that effort showed by way of a clean, hitless fourth frame.

"That's the best he's looked," manager Bob Geren said. "He gets better each time out, which is encouraging."

The right-handed Devine entered the day with one goal in mind after offering two free passes to a pair of Cleveland lefties -- no walks.

"That was the focus, just to get ahead and throw strikes and let the defense make the plays," he said. "I'm still developing arm speed, and I'm still not throwing as hard as I can, so therefore I'm not going to strike a lot of guys out. I just want to get the ball in play and get outs as quick as possible."

Devine is also noticing continued improvement with his velocity, which reached 93 in his last outing. On Saturday, he was almost convinced he reached 94 on the gun but, even if wrong, felt OK knowing that it's something that comes with time. The majority of his pitches were sinkers, while a couple of sliders mixed their way in.

The latter pitch proved promising, as it was the first time all spring Devine has shown trust in it. His lagging arm speed was previously leaving it flat and, ultimately, hanging in front of the plate. The improvement marked one of many Saturday.

"I'm starting to feel, with each outing, location is getting a whole lot better," he said. "Everything's getting better."

Worth noting

Infielder Adam Rosales (right foot) is out of his walking boot and will see his doctor again on March 16. He'll do no baseball activity before then -- only strengthening exercises -- and is still looking at a May 1 return date. ... Rich Harden (back muscle) threw long toss for a second day in a row Saturday and had "a really good day," according to pitching coach Ron Romanick. Harden will take Sunday off before resuming his throwing schedule Monday as he works his way back to the mound. ... Daric Barton and Coco Crisp, who each garnered a hit Saturday, have both reached base safely in each of their four games this spring. Crisp leads the team with seven RBIs. ... 2010 first-round Draft pick Michael Choice made his

starting debut in left field Saturday. He made a fielding error but went 2-for-4 at the plate and is now 5-for-12 (.417) this spring. ... Righty Brad Ziegler has not allowed a run in his first three spring outings, spanning 3 1/3 innings.

A's Anderson strikes out 5 Giants in 3 scoreless innings

ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHOENIX — Brett Anderson showed the Athletics what he can do as a starter.

In his first spring start, Anderson struck out five and allowed a hit and a walk in three scoreless innings Saturday, and Oakland beat the San Francisco Giants, 6-0.

Also, the changeup Anderson has been working on got a good review.

"He was real good, very crisp, efficient," Oakland manager Bob Geren said. "It will help to get that on a par with his other pitches. I'd say he had a decent one before."

Anderson calls the pitch "a love-hate change. If you get an out, you love it. If you don't, you hate it."

Anderson, who had a shaky relief outing earlier in the spring, was 7-6 in 2010 but was limited to 19 starts due to elbow difficulties. He appears to be healthy now.

Madison Bumgarner also made his first start, after two relief outings. He gave up an unearned run on two hits while walking one and striking out one in three innings.

"My delivery was a lot more consistent. I kept the ball down as well as I have all spring, Bumgarner said.

The Athletics fared better against the San Francisco bullpen, scoring three in the fifth and two in the seventh.

Oakland appears to be developing a strong force at the top of the lineup with leadoff man Coco Crisp, No. 2 hitter Daric Barton and No. 3 Mark Ellis, all of whom had a hit on Saturday. Ellis drove in Crisp, who had walked, in the first inning, and Crisp had a two-run single in the fifth.

Geren said the top four (including outfielder-DH Josh Willingham) "appear to have good approaches, are getting good swings. They have the right pace."

NOTES

Oakland RHP Joey Devine had his third relief appearance after coming back from Tommy John elbow-ligament surgery. He pitched a scoreless fourth inning and has allowed just one hit in his three innings.

Brad Ziegler got the Athletics out of a jam in the eighth by getting a bases-loaded strikeout, and he ended the game on a double play.

Giants RHP Tim Lincecum makes his third start of the spring today against Seattle.

Ratto: Personality paramount for Bay Area baseball

Ray Ratto, CSNBayArea.com, 3/5/2011

It was an unusually festive afternoon at Municipal Stadium, and we didn't even need a good bench-emptying brawl between the A's and Giants to get it.

Two fans had certified Hideki Matsui as the new face of the Athletics by making T-shirts and a 30-foot sign that read "MATSUILAND" in old English script, which of course caused the movable feast of Japanese reporters and photographers to pose him in front of the sign.

Manager Bob Geren waxed eloquent (yeah, yeah, I know) on how the A's went from being the worst base-running team in creation to one of the best. A sun and a gentle wind conspired to make a downright pleasant day, and the smoke from the grills worked the kind of magic one normally finds from a roulette table at Gamblers Anonymous.

But we still could have used the brawl anyway. It would have given a little dusting of salt to the A's 6-0 win over the error-saturated Giants before a sellout crowd of 8,330 sun-baked and temporarily indolent.

All the comparisons between the 2010 Giants and 2011 Elephants have been made over and over again, to the point where they form a thin unappetizing gruel. They're not that similar unless you can squint and make Javier Lopez look like David DeJesus and Pat Burrell like Josh Willingham.

But these are two teams that have never really engaged as much as lived on separate dorm floors. Even now, their closest connection will be the moment when Bow Tie Billy Neukom and Suitcase Lew Wolff olive oil wrestle over the San Jose territorial rights/miscellaneous bribes debate.

The two franchises have never really argued over the same space in any other context, save the 1989 World Series, and even then the earthquake made owning the area less valuable than it might otherwise have been. Put another way, the A's did not plant their flag in the Marina even after the firemen left.

The worm has turned in the ensuing 22 years, and now the Giants are walking the walk, and the A's are finally just now re-latching on to an identity that isn't a Michael Lewis footnote or a reminder of the highly muscled '80s and early '90s.

And that identity is apparently being supplied by a guy who has been on campus for only 81 days and willingly speaks almost no English.

It is painfully, aggressively, immutably clear that the Bay Area has not only been a palace for front-runners and label-shoppers but for quirky/bigger-than-life personalities. The two tams have gone through spurts with them, and without them, and frankly, with is way better.

Not just for media purposes, either. The Giants not only won, they won by flogging the "misfits" label like it was a rented mule pulling a wagon through a mud bog. The clubhouse is thick with quirk, some of it even genuine and spontaneous. Even Bruce Bochy, who has historically worked every bit as hard as Geren at tarping his personality, has finally caved in and become something of a charmer.

The A's? Well, there's Dallas Braden, and the solid and essentially honest Mark Ellis and Kurt Suzuki. The rest is about young pitching, a school bus full of relievers, some new hitters to make the old ones better, Geren waxing euphoric about the base runners, when they're not getting thrown out on steal attempts as Andy LaRoche did Saturday.

And the apparent icon that is Matsui.

Often, characters are built through winning. It may turn out that Daric Barton is only 20 homers away from turning into Sammy The Bull Gravano at the Congressional hearings on the Mafia, or that Brett Anderson is secretly Louis C.K. with a slider. Not sure that Oakland is yet ready for free-range lingerie a la Aubrey Huff, but wins buy leeway, and always have.

On the other hand, personality is not so prized on a third-place team. Carlos Silva had lots of personality the other day for the Cubs, and ended up having to apologize when his personality tried to get into a fight with Aramis Ramirez' personality.

In short, the A's have to do with grassroots ideas like winning, as they did Saturday, and Matsui land, although the old english thing seems a bit disingenuous, graphically speaking. At least when he posed for those pictures in front of the sign, he looked . . . well, bemused.

And hardly the sort of guy who would make a cartoon character out of an article of women's underwear. Yet.

Bud Selig holds court, but not on Frank McCourt

Bill Shaikin, LA Times, 3/5/2011

Commissioner **Bud Selig** met with reporters Saturday, touching on a variety of subjects -- except the Dodgers ownership situation, that is.

Selig has not commented publicly on that situation in the 17 months since **Frank** and **Jamie McCourt** filed for divorce, putting ownership of the Dodgers into legal limbo. Selig, reminded that he said last week he had "great affection and great respect" for embattled Mets owner Fred Wilpon, was asked whether he would say anything similar about Dodgers ownership.

"I'm not going to discuss the L.A. situation," Selig said. "Thank you for asking."

On other subjects:

Selig said he expected a second negotiating session between owners and players next week in Arizona, following an initial meeting last week in Florida. Baseball's collective bargaining agreement expires in December, but a new deal is expected to be reached without threat of a strike or lockout, extending the labor peace the sport has enjoyed since the 1994-95 strike.

The NFL is on the verge of locking out its players, although the two sides continue to negotiate.

"I have been through that," Selig said. "It brings back a lot of memories of the '90s. Those were tough years. The seven work stoppages that led to that, you could almost see it coming. So much anger. So much hostility. Those things are gone."

Selig reiterated that contraction is not under consideration, even with the Oakland Athletics and Tampa Bay Rays plagued by poor attendance and looking for new ballparks. Selig told the Los Angeles Times last year that he would not consider folding the A's or Rays -- "I think we have moved past that," he said then -- and repeated Saturday that contraction is off the table.

"It hasn't been on the table," he said.

Selig appeared to shrug off the recent comments of several large-market owners frustrated by pouring millions of their profits into the pockets of small-market teams. That dynamic -- large-market owners versus small-market owners -- has complicated previous labor negotiations, since baseball depends on revenue sharing rather than on a salary cap for relative parity.

"At some point, if you don't want to worry about teams in minor markets, don't put teams in minor markets, or don't leave teams in minor markets if they're truly minor," New York Yankees co-chairman **Hank Steinbrenner** told reporters last month. "Socialism, communism, whatever you want to call it, is never the answer."

Selig said he believed the owners would remain united at the bargaining table.

"I don't have any reason to think that's going to change," Selig said. "Every club views it from their own perspective. I understand it. In the '90s, I used to hear it a lot more."

With the Chicago Cubs soon to vacate HoHoKam Stadium for a new ballpark in their spring home of Mesa, Ariz., and with two Tucson facilities now vacant, the Cactus League could accommodate as many as four more teams without additional construction. However, Selig said he believed the balance of 15 teams training in Arizona and 15 in Florida would be maintained.

"I don't know of anybody in Florida that is looking at Arizona," Selig said.

Selig also said he is concerned that Chicago Cubs outfielder **Marlon Byrd** works out with **Victor Conte**, the trainer at the heart of the BALCO steroids scandal.

"It's not a situation that makes me very happy," Selig said.