

A's Daily News Clips; Sunday, March 13, 2011

A's notebook: Rich Harden waits to take mound

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune, 3/13/2011

PEORIA, Ariz. -- Oft-injured pitcher Rich Harden probably is off the board as far as beginning the season as the fifth starter for the A's.

Harden has essentially missed a month of spring training since being shut down shortly after camp opened in mid-February because of a side-muscle injury. He is now doing long-toss and has made progress but has yet to throw off a mound. While that might happen as early as next week, it's unlikely Harden will be ready by the start of the season.

"There isn't time for that," manager Bob Geren said. "He hasn't even been on the mound yet, and we leave for San Francisco in a couple of weeks."

Because of his past major league success -- significantly more than any of the other five remaining candidates -- Harden still could become the fifth man. With Harden, there's always the chance for setbacks, but it's likely he will continue in extended spring training after the A's head north.

Even though Geren called it a "real nice competition" that could go down to the final week, the No. 5 starter might be sorting itself out. Guillermo Moscoso, who the manager said had pitched his way into the mix, struggled Saturday in a 10-2 loss to the Mariners. Moscoso started and gave up six hits, three walks and four runs over three innings. Slightly better was Bobby Cramer, who has missed the past couple of days with an illness. Cramer gave up two runs in two innings, including a long homer to center by Justin Smoak. Cramer declared Tyson Ross and Brandon McCarthy as the guys he has to outperform to become the fifth starter. Josh Outman is the sixth candidate.

"I feel like I've increased my odds since the first day of camp," Cramer said. "Some things have happened, and I've been pitching well. I'm not happy with today, but I don't feel like today is going to set me back enough where I'm out of the race."

Geren said those who lose out for the No. 5 spot still might be options for one or possibly two bullpen spots.

Medicals: Reliever Joey Devine had to be shut down after nine pitches of a side session when he experienced tightness. Geren didn't think it was serious, but more will be known today "... First baseman Daric Barton (calf strain) didn't play Saturday, but Geren said Barton is "penciled" for Sunday. "... Reliever Craig Breslow (hamstring) is still not on a set schedule for return.

Reliever Michael Wuertz threw a 20-pitch simulated session, and he is tentatively set for his spring debut in a game Tuesday.

Outfielder Ryan Sweeney had two more hits, including a double, in his second game and is hitting .571. He also made his first start in center field.

Oakland A's prospect Grant Green states his case

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune, 3/13/2011

PHOENIX -- When Mike Gallego goes out to conduct early morning infield work, the same young man is always the first there. He's Grant Green, the A's 2009 first-round draft pick (No. 13 overall) and their consensus top prospect.

In a few days, Green is likely to be dispatched to the A's minor league camp at Papago Park. But while he still can, he's sponging Gallego, the A's third-base and infield coach, for every shred of information he can get in his quest to become Oakland's future starting shortstop.

There's little doubt Green, 23, has the goods to get to the big leagues as a hitter. He hit .318 in his first full season at Class A Stockton last year with 65 extra-base hits, including 20 home runs.

It's with Green's glove where there has been mounting doubt. He committed 37 errors at short in 2010, a California League high, leading to some rather harsh critiques heading into this season.

Not quick enough to the ball. Below average arm. Probably better suited to second base or perhaps the outfield. Fundamentally unsound. Erratic.

Green acknowledges that he had a rough year in the field, but he isn't buying into the notion that he's a hopeless case as a future major league shortstop. He burns a bit about all the whispers.

"Coming up, they're always going to criticize you," Green said. "But once you get there and prove you can do it, all the criticisms will go away. I've learned throughout the draft process and last year, they're always going to say negative things about my fielding. It's the one thing they can really pick on."

Green is on a mission this year to prove his doubters wrong. And Gallego, who has been his intensive defensive guru this spring, believes he will.

"To be honest with you, I had my doubts the first couple times I saw him," Gallego said. "But I'd never had a chance to talk or work with him, and now that I've done that, I have no doubt he's going to be a major league shortstop."

Part of it has been Green's insatiable hunger to learn. The A's retooled his entire approach to playing the position last year, and despite the high error total, he did get better and less error-prone as the season progressed.

Green and the A's hope his improvement in Phase II will be significantly more dramatic. Now in his second big-league camp, he is more familiar and comfortable working with the staff. He's also getting a lot more one-on-one time with Gallego, one of the best infield coaches in the business and a man who spent several years in Colorado working with Rockies shortstop Troy Tulowitzki.

Gallego has spent considerable time devising a strategy for Green, and then he'll turn him over to Double-A Midland manager Steve Scarsone, who had Green last year at Stockton, and Juan Navarette, Oakland's roving fielding instructor.

"There were a few things we had to address with his fundamentals -- his setup, the angles of his glove and his arm, his first step -- as well as his mental approach," Gallego said. "Basically, we just broke it all down and put it back piece by piece."

"We have stressed the importance of exploding to smoothness, being in the proper position as he arrives to the ball and to finish the play," he continued. "He's definitely one of those guys who has to have his feet underneath him, but he's not too slow. It's just a matter of knowing how to read the ball better off the bat, being able to anticipate and understanding the purpose of exploding on your first step."

If Green does that, and also develops consistency on routine plays, Gallego believes Green can cut his error total in half. So does Green.

"I felt I've made huge strides compared with last year at this time," he said. "I didn't get to work with (Gallego) as much last year as I have this spring. But coming into camp knowing exactly what he wants has made it a lot easier transition."

"It's a step-by-step process, and I try to take everything he says and implement it in games. I've felt great so far here, so building on that will be the key."

Chin Music: Harden out of fifth starter competition ... for now

By Carl Stewart, Oakland Tribune, 3/12/2011 12:03 PM

In a disclosure that's hardly surprising, manager Bob Geren admitted that oft-injured Rich Harden is probably off the board as far as beginning the season as the fifth starter for the A's. Harden's essentially missed a month of spring training since being shut down shortly after camp opened in mid-February. He is back at work now doing long-toss and has made progress, but he has not yet thrown off a mound. While that may happen as early as next week, the likelihood of him getting in a game anytime soon — or soon enough — precludes him from being ready by the start of the season.

"There isn't time for that," said manager Bob Geren. "He hasn't even been on the mound yet, and we leave for San Francisco in a couple of weeks."

Because of his past major-league success — significantly more than any of the other five remaining candidates — Harden still could become the fifth man when he becomes ready. It remains to be seen how long it will take him to catch

up, and with Harden there's always the chance for setbacks, but it's likely he will continue in extended spring training after the A's leave and perhaps require some rehab starts once the Triple-A season starts.

The A's might be more distressed about Harden if they didn't have a wealth of candidates competing for the No. 5 spot. At the moment, there are five being acknowledged: Bobby Cramer and Guillermo Moscoso, who are scheduled to pitch today in Peoria against Seattle, along with Tyson Ross, Josh Outman and Brandon McCarthy.

Ross and McCarthy appear to be the frontrunners at the moment, having both pitched quite well since the outset of spring games. Outman had a good first start followed by two rough ones (he gave up seven hits and four runs in three innings Friday). Cramer has pitched OK, but has been set back a few days by illness. So it's a bit of a tossup right now. Geren said Moscoso, who has prior big-league experience with Texas, has pitched his way into the competition, but we'll see how he performs today.

"It's a real nice competition right now," Geren said. "It'll definitely come down to the final week."

The manager added that those pitchers who lose out for the No. 5 spot may still be options for one or possibly two bullpen spots.

Medicals: Daric Barton (calf strain) missed again Saturday, but Geren said he is "penciled" for Sunday. Barton is still getting his workouts in unimpeded. He's just not running. Craig Breslow (hamstring) is still not on a schedule for return. He's throwing on flat ground and doing conditioning work, but it might be awhile. The A's aren't being overly cautious — Geren says he's just injured.

Michael Wuertz was scheduled for a simulated session Saturday and if all goes well, he could make his spring debut Tuesday. Joey Devine is also pitching a simulated session today but basically to work on the mechanical issues he's had in his last two outings. He's healthy, and will take his next scheduled turn on the mound. Geren said he might insert infielder Aaron Sogard (thumb) into the game today to get some defensive action, but he isn't ready to bat yet. Cliff Pennington is on the verge of taking his first at-bats in a game against right-handed pitching. He's very close to being 100 percent.

Here are today's lineups. Familiar faces galore for the Mariners — Milton Bradley, Jack Cust and Adam Kennedy all in the lineup. The game is being broadcast on KRTB-860 today.

A's: SS Pennington, CF Sweeney, RF DeJesus, DH Jackson, 2B Ellis, 3B Kouzmanoff, LF Carter, 1B LaRoche, C Recker

Mariners: RF Suzuki, 3B Figgins, LF Bradley, DH Cust, 1B Smoak, CF Gutierrez, 2B Kennedy, SS Wilson, C Bard.

Sorry for the late post ... traffic to Peoria was murder. Greater metro Phoenix is getting like L.A., only with freeways that aren't as good.

Rich Harden out of A's rotation picture

By Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer, 3/13/2011

Peoria, Ariz. --

No real surprise here, but **Rich Harden** is officially out of the fifth-starter race, at least this spring.

Harden said he expects to start throwing off the mound again Tuesday, but that will make it a full month since he was shut down with lat-muscle stiffness. Though Harden said he doesn't feel he'll be very far behind the others, because he believes his arm strength is good, manager **Bob Geren** said Saturday that Harden won't be ready in time.

"Yeah, there is not time for that," Geren said.

Harden might still be a candidate for the bullpen, or the A's could elect to have him remain at extended spring training to get stretched out to start.

Geren said that two of the fifth-starter candidates who don't win the rotation spot could wind up in the bullpen. **Brandon McCarthy** is probably the front-runner for the job right now, with **Tyson Ross** and **Bobby Cramer** right behind him.

Devine cut short: **Joey Devine** threw only nine pitches in a simulated game Saturday morning because of arm tightness.

Devine, who had Tommy John surgery in 2009, said in a text message that his elbow feels great and that he's just going through a normal spring dead-arm period that affects his location; he believes the issue will be ironed out soon.

Michael Wuertz also threw in the simulated game, and he is now scheduled to pitch in Tuesday's game, which would be his spring debut after a minor case of shoulder tendinitis.

Briefly: Early projection, based on the A's current pitching schedule: **Gio Gonzalez** is in line to start Opening Night against the Mariners. ... Geren said that he has **Daric Barton** penciled in to start at first base today. Barton has missed six days with right leg soreness. ... **Eric Sogard** (thumb) played shortstop in Saturday's game but didn't bat.

Cactus League recap

Saturday's score: Mariners 10, A's 2

Notable: Fifth-starter candidate Bobby Cramer, out sick earlier in the week, pitched two innings and allowed two hits and two runs on a homer by Justin Smoak; Cramer said his location was poor. ... Guillermo Moscoso's hopes for the fifth spot might have taken a hit, as he allowed six hits, three walks and four runs in three innings. ... Ryan Sweeney played center and singled and doubled; he's 4-for-7 this spring. ... Mark Ellis and Kevin Kouzmanoff also had two hits each.

Quotable: "Tyson (Ross) has pitched well, Brandon (McCarthy) has pitched well. I can't afford to get behind them. I have to go out and get my work in."

- Cramer, who worked two innings Saturday despite missing several days with an illness

Today's game: Rockies (Juan Nicasio) at A's (Trevor Cahill), 1:05 p.m. TV: CSNCA. Radio: 860.

The Drumbeat: Harden out of starter mix for now; Barton to play tomorrow

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Peoria Arizona, 3/12/2011 10:46 AM

This is not really breaking news; I think everyone had figured out already that Rich Harden wasn't going to be able to climb back into the fifth-starter battle after missing the first month of spring training, but manager Bob Geren made it official today, saying, "Yeah, there's not time for that."

Harden told me this morning that he'll probably throw off the mound on Tuesday, and he believes that he won't be too far behind because he'd been built up to 40 pitches before he first felt lat stiffness, and he said his arm is strong. He was out at 160 feet yesterday and felt great.

I asked if Harden will be stretched out to start, even if he's not in the fifth-starter race, and it doesn't sound like there's a clear idea yet. Maybe he winds up a bullpen candidate, and if Craig Breslow's hamstring issue lingers, perhaps there will be a need for more relievers. Geren did say one interesting thing this morning about the bullpen - he mentioned that maybe two of the fifth-starter candidates might wind up there, and Tyson Ross would be a possibility if he doesn't get a rotation slot.

I assumed they'd want Ross to keep starting after his surprise addition to the bullpen on Opening Day last year and then his return to starting at Triple-A Sacramento later in the summer. But I know Ross is happy to make the team any way possible, so if it's in relief, he'd be OK with that. He threw three more scoreless innings yesterday, but a scout who was there is here today and he told me that Ross was all over the place and he wasn't entirely impressed with the outing.

Brandon McCarthy is probably the front-runner at this point for the fifth spot, with Ross and Bobby Cramer still factors, followed by Josh Outman and today's starter, Guillermo Moscoso. I'd think that Outman potentially might be looking at starting the season at Sacramento to get his stuff sharpened up, but when he's back to his regular form, he's definitely a rotation possibility. He just doesn't look quite ready yet, after missing more than a year and a half. And of course there are two weeks left before the A's return to the Bay Area, so things can change before then. Today's fifth-starter front-runner can quickly turn into tomorrow's candidate for Sacramento's rotation.

Daric Barton is getting another day to get all the stiffness out of his right leg; treatment spread the soreness from his calf contusion up to his knee and even hip, leaving his whole leg stiff and nobody wants him favoring the knee or hip and hurting something else.

Michael Wuertz and Joey Devine are throwing to hitters today. Devine said he wanted to work on some things without the pressure of a game situation; like Outman, he's struggled with some command issues and just getting back into a normal rhythm. So he'll work out the kinks on the side, which is just a one-time thing, according to Geren.

Eric Sogard (thumb) might play defense only in today's game.

Sorry the Drumbeat is late today; I came straight to Peoria to visit with the many ex-A's with the Mariners: Jack Cust, Adam Kennedy, Milton Bradley, Gabe Gross, and of course, Ryan Langerhans. We all remember his three days with Oakland fondly.

Cust is loving Seattle's camp and he said he's never played for a manager who gets more respect from his players than Eric Wedge. Cust is playing the outfield a few days a week, and it sounds as if Bradley might win the left field job. Both are in the lineup today, Bradley in left, Cust at DH, and Kennedy is at second base. He's trying to win a roster spot as a backup.

I know Cust is a lightning rod topic for the Drumbeat, and I'll be disappointed if his name doesn't set off some good discussion.

I also got sidetracked talking to former A's hitting coach Jim Skaalen, who is here scouting for Toronto. He's liking the new gig a lot, which is great - he's a very nice guy and was well liked by the A's players.

Top Denver lawyer paid by Oakland to keep A's

Matier and Ross, San Francisco Chronicle, 3/13/2011

Oakland officials are quietly paying a prominent Denver attorney about \$450 an hour to help in their bid to save the A's.

Attorney **Paul Jacobs** was a major player when Denver secured the Rockies baseball expansion team in the early 1990s. He was also the lead negotiator for San Diego in the talks that led to Petco Park being built for the Padres a few years back.

He has been working on cash-strapped Oakland's behalf since November, having been brought in by the City Council, which is largely keeping mum on the subject.

"I'm not getting into what anyone is doing or not doing," Councilwoman **Jane Brunner** said Friday. "We have been answering questions from Major League Baseball for two years, and we haven't been doing this in the media."

City Attorney **John Russo** said Jacobs' salary was being covered by his office's budget, but that he wouldn't be able to say exactly how much Jacobs was charging until one of his staff attorneys returned to work this week and put the finishing touches on the contract.

One City Hall source, however, confirmed that Jacobs was being paid roughly the same \$455 an hour that he charged Fremont a couple of years back to try to negotiate a deal with Major League Baseball to move the A's there.

Those plans fell through. The City Council voted 6-2 in closed session last fall — with **Ignacio De La Fuente** and **Nancy Nadel** dissenting — to hire Jacobs to represent the city in talks with Major League Baseball about building a ballpark for the A's just south of Jack London Square. The council had earlier voted to spend \$650,000 on an environmental study of the proposal.

Incidentally, rival San Jose missed the deadline Friday to get its longpromised A's stadium measure on a June ballot.

That's the ballot on which voters may be asked to extend higher state income and sales taxes and vehicle-registration fees. A's managing partner **Lew Wolff** told us, "I'm not sure that's a great one to be on. We can pay for our own special election."

Conflict call: San Francisco District Attorney and former Police Chief **George Gascón's** decision to give the feds first crack at prosecuting cops who may have broken the law on searches not only made sense legally — it made political sense as well.

Gascón decided to defer to the feds Friday, the day after **Michael Rains**, the attorney representing the cops, met with the executive board of the San Francisco Police Officers Association.

"He's in the wrong place at the wrong time," Rains said of Gascón. "He needs to step away and not be involved."

The problem, of course, is that Gascón was police chief when the cops may have been breaking the law. Even those close to Gascón had been telling him that his insistence on pursuing the case as district attorney was putting him in a loselose situation, especially considering that he is up for election in November.

Plus, he would be under constant attack from Public Defender **Jeff Adachi** on one side and the lawyers for the Police Officers Association on the other.

This way, the case goes to the feds and Gascón gets out of the line of fire.

Reilly factor: It was a packed house the other night at Credo restaurant, where owners **Clint** and **Janet Reilly**

tossed a belated thankyou get together for supporters of Janet's failed race for District 2 supervisor.

Those in the crowd included City Attorney **Dennis Herrera** (whom the Reillys are supporting for mayor), former **Mayor Art Agnos,**

Judges **Quentin Kopp**

and **Bill Newsom,** former Board of Supervisors President **Aaron Peskin** and Sen. **Dianne Feinstein's** local rep **Jim Molinari.**

"With all the people here, you would think she would have gotten elected," one longtime pol cracked.

Sign of the times:

BART recently posted a job opening for a "parttime" car cleaner — and had to stop taking applications after 500 people applied.

There's no shortage of work for part-timers, because absenteeism for car cleaners soared to a staggering 46 percent last year — more than twice the level of 2008.

A's fifth-starter race remains wide open

By John Schlegel, MLB.com, 03/12/2011

PEORIA, Ariz. -- The search for the A's fifth starter continues to include multiple candidates, plenty of moving parts in terms of how things might shake out and no set answer on the horizon.

And A's manager Bob Geren wouldn't have it any other way, considering the also-rans in that derby could step in to help the club in long relief.

"You could use one of them as a good option for the bullpen, if not two of them," Geren said. "So having a guy stretched out, and if he goes down to a two- or three-inning guy, that won't hurt you at all."

Two of the candidates for the fifth spot had a chance to show their wares Saturday at Peoria Stadium against the Mariners, including lefty Bobby Cramer -- the last man standing in the No. 5 spot at the end of 2010.

Outside shot Guillermo Moscosco started the game and gutted out a third inning after the Mariners batted around on him in the second, racking up four runs. Cramer stepped back into the fray after a couple of sick days, allowing a two-run homer to Justin Smoak in the second of his two innings as the A's went down to defeat, 10-2.

Suffice to say neither pitched himself into the spot Saturday, but that wasn't going to happen anyway.

While right-hander Brandon McCarthy appears to have the upper hand based on track record and what he's accomplished thus far this spring with a 3.38 ERA in three outings, there remains plenty of competition for the spot. Young right-hander Tyson Ross -- who made the roster a year ago as a reliever and made a couple of starts -- has pitched well

enough for strong consideration also, and the club hopes to see lefty Josh Outman make his comeback complete after being out since June 2009 due to Tommy John surgery.

Ross pitched three scoreless innings Friday and has yet to allow a run in 9 2/3 innings this spring; Outman allowed four runs on seven hits in three innings in that same game.

"It's real nice competition right now. ... It'll definitely come down to the last week," Geren said.

About the only thing that's known at this point is that Rich Harden won't be starting the season in the rotation, Geren confirmed Saturday, based on the amount of time left and the fact that Harden has yet to pitch off a mound this spring. Harden hopes to do so early next week, but that doesn't add up to enough time to prepare for starting duty.

Moscoco, acquired in a waiver trade with Texas in January, had been delivering the goods heading into this start and got out of the first inning after hitting leadoff man Ichiro Suzuki with a pitch. But he wound up allowing four runs on six hits and three walks.

"It was the first time he got hit around a little bit," Geren said. "It wasn't one of his better outings."

Cramer wasn't feeling well for a couple of days, so the A's gave him time to get back on his feet, and he left Saturday's outing wishing for a little more mound time and knowing he didn't exactly put his best foot forward.

"Even if [Smoak] hadn't hit the home run, I wouldn't have been happy with it. I was missing spots," he said.

Still, for a guy who began the 2010 season on loan to Quintana Roo of the Mexican League, yet another stop on a winding journey that finally hit the big leagues at age 30 in September, just being in the mix this spring is a plus.

"I couldn't ask for more," Cramer said. "I'm happy. I feel like I've increased my odds since the first day of camp. ... I don't feel like it's my spot to lose. I feel like it's my spot to win, and I'm going to have to pitch well to do that. But I have confidence in myself that I can make that happen."

Cramer is well aware there are consolation prizes involved here. If he's not the No. 5 starter, he could make the roster as a long reliever. And even if he doesn't make the roster, he could go to Triple-A Sacramento and become the first option if the A's need a starter.

But Cramer, like the rest, is reaching for the brass ring -- No. 5 starter in a rotation that led the Majors with a 3.47 ERA in 2010.

So what will be the determining factor in who will be the fifth starter among the mix of pitchers available for the role?

That's the easy part, Geren said.

"The first [factor] would be, who do I want to start every fifth day, right here and right now, to try and win the AL West?" he said. "Who gives us the best chance to win?"

A's rotation hopefuls hit hard in loss

By Greg Johns, MLB.com, 3/12/2011

PEORIA, Ariz. -- Justin Smoak launched his first home run of the spring and Dustin Ackley ripped a triple as the Mariners got some offense from their top young prospects en route to a 10-2 victory over the A's on Saturday in Cactus League play.

Smoak, who had been struggling this spring as he takes over the Mariners' first-base duties, went 2-for-2 with four RBIs and two walks in raising his average to .200 (4-for-20). Ackley, trying to make a roster bid as the Mariners' top position prospect, continued his impressive play of late with a ringing triple to center in the seventh inning.

Guillermo Moscoso, making his second start of the spring for the A's, gave up six hits and four runs over three innings. Moscoso, competing for the fifth spot in the rotation, surrendered four runs in the second inning as the Mariners batted around with five hits and two walks.

Another candidate for the fifth spot, Bobby Cramer, allowed two runs in two innings. The left-hander served up Smoak's home run.

Oakland center fielder Ryan Sweeney, playing his second game since returning from knee surgery, went 2-for-4 with a double and an RBI. Mark Ellis and Kevin Kouzmanoff also had two hits apiece. Kouzmanoff also doubled and is now hitting .550 in Cactus League play.

Milton Bradley continued his hot spring for the Mariners with a 2-for-2 day that raised his Cactus League average to .389. Bradley, starting in left field, also walked and scored a run.

Ichiro Suzuki took a Moscoso fastball just below the knee on his first at-bat, but stayed in the game and went for 1-for-2 to raise his spring average to .375.

Blake Beavan, a 6-foot-7 right-hander acquired in the Cliff Lee deal last July, made his first start for Seattle and went three innings while giving up one run on three hits. Luke French replaced Beavan and threw three shutout innings with four hits and four strikeouts. French has allowed just one run in eight innings in three appearances.

The Mariners have not lost in their last six Cactus League games, going 5-0-1 over that span to raise their record to 8-4-2. The A's are 6-9-1.

Up next for Mariners: Left-hander Jason Vargas makes his second Cactus League start Sunday as the Mariners travel to Tempe to face the Angels' Ervin Santana in a 1:05 p.m. PT game on 710 ESPN Seattle. Vargas threw three shutout innings with just two hits in his debut, and is expected to go four innings this time out. Knuckleballer Charlie Haeger, bothered by a sore back since early in camp, will make his first appearance for Seattle in relief. Young bullpen prospects Dan Cortes and Josh Lueke are also expected to throw an inning.

Up next for A's: Trevor Cahill, coming off four shutout innings against the Padres in his previous outing, will make his fourth start of the spring Sunday, when the A's host Colorado. Right-hander Juan Nicasio will be on the mound for the Rockies in the first of three Cactus League meetings between the clubs. The A's are hoping to see first baseman Daric Barton, out since last Sunday with a right calf contusion, back in action. Game time is 1:05 p.m. PT, and the game will be televised on MLB Network.

Harden will not open season in A's rotation

By John Schlegel, MLB.com, 03/12/2011

PEORIA, Ariz. -- With less than three weeks before the start of the regular season, the chances of Rich Harden being ready to assume a spot in the A's rotation for Opening Day have gone from slim to none.

Harden, who suffered a lat strain in his back early in camp and has been working his way back to pitching on a mound, simply doesn't have enough time to get stretched out to be in the mix for a starting spot, A's manager Bob Geren said Saturday.

"There's not going to be enough time for that," Geren said. "He hasn't even been off the mound yet, and we're leaving for San Francisco in a couple of weeks. It's just the timeframe."

Harden, who pitched for the A's from 2003-08, signed back with the organization as a free agent in the offseason after two and a half seasons with the Cubs and Rangers. Ever since he was shut down on Feb. 17 for a couple of weeks, it has been generally assumed that Harden would not be in the Opening Day rotation, but Geren made that more clear Saturday.

Geren also made it apparent it's too early to consider exactly what course Harden's road to his 2011 big league debut will take, be it a Minor League rehab assignment or work in extended Spring Training.

"We just go one step at a time," Geren said. "We'll get him on the mound, we'll get him into BP, then get him into a game and finally get him an inning, and we'll see how everything reacts. We try not to look too far ahead."

Sweeney seeing time at all three outfield spots

PEORIA, Ariz. -- Now that Ryan Sweeney's back on the field, A's manager Bob Geren intends to ensure he's comfortable in all three outfield spots and gets enough at-bats to step into any of them as soon as the season begins.

With Sweeney working his way back from knee surgery and only making his Cactus League debut earlier this week, Geren had him in center field Saturday against the Mariners.

"It's just important to get him out there tracking balls and getting his swings, so it doesn't matter which place he plays," Geren said. "He's going to be an outfielder who's going to have to play all three [spots] to utilize him."

Geren liked what he saw in the field and at the plate on Saturday out of Sweeney, who had a double and a single in four plate appearances.

Sweeney has played all three outfield positions in the big leagues, primarily in right and center the last three years with Oakland since being traded from the White Sox. He played 80 games in right and one in center last year before being put on the shelf in July with right patella tendinitis that required surgery, and he enters the 2011 season still riding a 117-game errorless streak.

Barton slated to return to lineup Sunday

PEORIA, Ariz. -- First baseman Daric Barton was tentatively slated to get back on the field in Cactus League action on Saturday, but the A's decided to give him one more day to recover from a right leg contusion suffered last weekend. He's penciled in for Sunday's game against the Rockies.

Meanwhile, there was mixed news on the recovery front from a simulated game held back at the team's complex in which relievers Michael Wuertz (right shoulder) and Joey Devine (back from Tommy John surgery) pitched.

While Wuertz's velocity looked good and he's slated to debut in Cactus League competition Tuesday after two days' rest, Devine was shut down after just nine pitches because he felt "a little tight," Geren said. He'll be re-evaluated Sunday.

Young pitcher Moscoso struggles for A's

Starter gives up 4 runs, 6 hits 10-2 loss to Mariners

ASSOCIATED PRESS

PEORIA, Ariz. — A's starting pitcher Guillermo Moscoso struggled through three innings Saturday, yielding four runs and six hits in a 10-2 loss to the Seattle Mariners.

"First time he got hit around a little bit," manager Bob Geren said of Moscoso, who is in contention for the fifth starter slot. "They had a pretty good lineup in there and hit some balls we didn't run down really well. It wasn't one of his better outings."

Mark Ellis, Ryan Sweeney and Kevin Kouzmanoff had two hits apiece for Oakland.

Justin Smoak led the Mariners with a two-run homer and four RBIs. Former A's players Milton Bradley, with two hits, and Jack Cust, with an RBI, contributed for the Mariners.

NOTES

Oakland RHPs Michael Wuertz and Joey Devine threw simulated games.

Wuertz made 20 pitches and is expected to pitch again Tuesday. Devine ended his session after nine pitches because he felt "tightness," according to Geren.

A's fall to Mariners, 10-2

ASSOCIATED PRESS

PEORIA, Ariz. -- Justin Smoak hit a two-run homer and finished with four RBIs, leading the Seattle Mariners to an 10-2 win over the Oakland Athletics on Saturday.

Milton Bradley collected two more hits for Seattle and is 7 for 18 with a team-high three doubles this spring. Chone Figgins, Josh Bard and Jack Cust also drove in runs for the Mariners.

Mark Ellis, Ryan Sweeney and Kevin Kouzmanoff had two hits apiece for Oakland. Guillermo Moscoso pitched three innings for the A's, yielding four runs and six hits.