

A's News Clips, Monday, March 14, 2011

Oakland A's have few issues to be resolved as Cactus League play winds down

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

PHOENIX -- The spring days have ticked away uneventfully for the A's, with few compelling story lines interrupting the daily camp routine.

That stands to change, as the A's still are seeking answers to a few key roster questions as the final two weeks of Cactus League play unfold.

Sunday's lineup card was proof that the A's are creeping closer to their April 1 regular-season opener. Manager Bob Geren penciled in his projected starting nine in a 9-4 victory over the Colorado Rockies, the first time he's done so this spring.

"I told all the guys, a lot of the regulars haven't gotten to play together, but you'll see a lot more of that in the next two weeks," Geren said.

Along with working the regulars into shape, the A's will use the final two weeks to get some clarity on a few issues:

The bullpen: It's an area of quality talent and depth, but some minor injuries leave uncertainty.

The A's limited left-hander Craig Breslow's throwing early in camp to keep his arm fresh. But a lingering left hamstring strain has kept Breslow from making a single exhibition appearance.

"I'll be fine," he said. "I threw six innings last year in spring training. I'm right on track."

Indeed, Breslow was limited by a sore elbow last spring but wound up appearing in 75 games.

Joey Devine, who's missed the past two seasons after elbow ligament replacement surgery, had a throwing session cut short Saturday because of tightness in his right biceps. Devine said the issue is unrelated to his elbow, but there's no date for him or Breslow to get back on the mound.

The A's can withstand Devine's absence, and his availability isn't taken for granted anyway. But Breslow is a bullpen key, as is Michael Wuertz, slowed by a sore shoulder. He's tentatively set to pitch in his first game Tuesday.

The seven-man bullpen figures to include closer Andrew Bailey, Brian Fuentes, Grant Balfour, Wuertz and Breslow, with Devine, Jerry Blevins and Brad Ziegler among those fighting for the final two spots. But any injury setbacks could open up opportunities for others.

No. 5 starter: Lots of teams still need to identify a fifth starter, and Bobby Cramer, Brandon McCarthy and Tyson Ross are making a strong push for this spot.

Josh Outman, who like Devine is coming off major elbow surgery, appeared to have the inside track, but he's struggling to find his command. It's quite possible he'll need some time in the minors to work out the kinks.

The larger issue regarding the rotation is making sure the top four starters -- Brett Anderson, Dallas Braden, Trevor Cahill and Gio Gonzalez -- round into form. Braden (10.80 ERA in three starts) has yet to impress in any of his outings.

Gonzalez has looked terrific. Cahill, who allowed three runs in four innings Sunday, said he's still working to find the feel for his changeup.

Backup infielder: Andy LaRoche, the former top prospect of the Los Angeles Dodgers, is the most intriguing candidate. He's hit .345 with a team-high three homers in 14 games. But Geren said the ability to handle shortstop is the biggest job requirement, and LaRoche -- with eight professional seasons under his belt -- hasn't played shortstop since college.

"We've got to get him out there more," Geren said. "So far he's done nothing to hurt himself."

Steve Tolleson, hitting .167 in 12 games, and Eric Sogard, who has been slowed by a thumb injury, are other top candidates.

Oakland Athletics notebook: Former A's outfielder Mitchell Page dies at age 59

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Former A's outfielder Mitchell Page, the runner-up in the 1977 American League Rookie of the Year race, died Saturday at age of 59. The cause of death was not disclosed.

Page, who played for Oakland from 1977-83 and finished his career with Pittsburgh in 1984, was a standout on some otherwise dreary A's teams of the late 1970s.

He was one of six players the A's acquired from the Pirates in a March 1977 trade that sent three players, including Phil Garner, to Pittsburgh. Page's first season in Oakland was his best, when he hit .307 with 21 homers, 75 RBIs and 42 stolen bases.

He finished second in Rookie of the Year voting to Baltimore first baseman Eddie Murray.

"He was fast for having the power. And he was a great guy, an awesome guy," said A's equipment manager Steve Vucinich, who has been with the club since 1968. "He did some things for me that I've never forgotten personally. It's a shame to see him die at such a young age."

Former A's manager Billy Martin wanted to shift Page to DH during his Oakland career, and Vucinich fondly recalls nicknaming Page "Radar."

"He needed radar to catch a fly ball," Vucinich said with a smile.

Page coached in the A's organization, serving as hitting coach for Triple-A Tacoma from 1992-94, and later became hitting coach for the St. Louis Cardinals and Washington Nationals.

Lots of A's hitters took part in the offensive party Sunday, but Hideki Matsui's day was probably most needed. Matsui connected for his first homer as an Athletic -- and just his second hit of the spring -- as the A's pounded the Colorado Rockies 9-4 at Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

Matsui launched a third-inning solo blast off former A's closer Huston Street. The ball not only cleared the elevated wall in right-center but the trees behind the wall as well.

And Matsui, the A's new designated hitter, admitted it took a load off his shoulders. He entered the game hitting .048 (1 for 21). His only RBI before Sunday came on a bases-loaded walk in the A's second game Feb. 28.

"It's good to get it out of the way," Matsui said through interpreter Roger Kahlon. "I feel actually a little bit of relief."

Matsui also singled up the middle and walked twice and is batting .130.

Manager Bob Geren unveiled for the first time an opening night-caliber lineup, and the A's jumped all over Rockies starter Juan Nicasio with a three-run first.

Center fielder Coco Crisp continued a scorching spring from the leadoff spot. He went 3 for 4, scored two runs and is batting .519 (14 for 27) in nine games.

Daric Barton, back after missing six games with a calf contusion, hit a mammoth two-run shot to right-center. Switch hitting shortstop Cliff Pennington hit a three-run homer from the left side.

The A's sent 10 players to the minors in their first batch of cuts -- pitchers Joe Bateman, Vinnie Chulk, Gabe DeHoyos, Fautino De Los Santos, Willie Eyre and Pedro Figueroa; catcher Max Stassi; first baseman Sean Doolittle; second baseman Adrian Cardenas and shortstop Josh Horton.

Chin Music: Is A's lineup a preview of opening night?

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 3/13/2011 10:45AM

Back in the saddle after a few days off to refresh, and I returned to find the warm weather you'd expect in Phoenix this time of year. Temperatures will be in the 80s for much of this week, so shorts and T-shirts are in order for anyone planning to visit.

–A's manager Bob Geren penciled in what appears very close to an opening night lineup today against the Colorado Rockies, the first time we've seen such a look this spring. And we'll start to see more of it, Geren said, with the A's entering their final two weeks of Cactus League play ...

A's
Crisp CF
Barton 1B
DeJesus RF
Willingham LF
Matsui DH
Suzuki C
Ellis 2B
Kouzmanoff 3B
Pennington SS

Cahill RHP

And the Rockies' lineup, featuring some names of note in the 3-4 spots:

Young 2B
Taveras CF
C. Gonzalez LF
Giambi DH
Spilborghs RF
Jacobs 1B
Iannetta C
Iribarren SS
Herrera 3B

Nicasio RHP

–That's an interesting bottom third of the order for the A's. Kouzmanoff in the eighth spot? I've had him sixth or seventh in the lineups I've hashed out in my mind, but it's certainly possible he could hit eighth. Geren didn't indicate how much we should read into today's order, top to bottom ...

–Daric Barton (calf bruise) returns to first base after missing the past six games. But with the season opener less than three weeks away, it's worth keeping an eye on a couple injuries in the bullpen. Joey Devine says his throwing session was cut short yesterday due to irritation in his biceps, and not anything having to do with his elbow. He's calling it normal "dead-arm" stuff that he attributes to his prolonged inactivity over the past couple years. "My elbow feels great," Devine said. "It's all in my biceps. The only way to get through this period is to keep throwing. It's been two years, and my body has forgotten how to do this." He'll take today off and throw long toss Monday, and if that goes well, Devine thinks he'll be back on the mound soon. But he did say that the biceps issue has thrown his mechanics off a bit, and you have to think the A's will be cautious in working him back into games considering his injury history. I don't think it's a slam dunk at all that Devine breaks camp with the club, particularly if he misses, say, a week's worth of games or more.

There's still no timetable for fellow reliever Craig Breslow to appear in his first game as he works back from a hamstring injury. He remains confident he'll be ready for the season, noting that he had logged very few innings last spring (when he had elbow problems) and still was OK for the regular season. No reason to sound alarms yet, but if I'm Geren, I'd feel a lot better when I actually see Breslow in a game. Bullpen depth is a strength for the A's, and perhaps they'll be tapping into it sooner than expected ...

That's all for now ...

Gabe DeHoyos, Wes Timmons, Joe Bateman keep trying

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Arizona - One of the nicest stories for the A's last year was the late-season emergence of longtime minor-leaguer Bobby Cramer, who had toiled in the offseason - working for PG&E, checking oil lines and serving as a substitute teacher - before finally, at age 30, realizing his dream of making the big leagues.

This spring, Oakland has three potentially great stories waiting to be written: Infielder Wes Timmons and pitchers Gabe DeHoyos and Joe Bateman are all entering their 10th seasons of pro ball, they've passed their 30th birthdays, and none has gotten the call.

On Sunday, DeHoyos and Bateman were reassigned to minor-league camp - not at all a surprising development for pitchers who have combined to appear in 618 minor-league games - but keep in mind that Cramer wasn't even in big-league camp at all last year.

"Still here," Timmons said cheerfully after avoiding the cut. "Maybe they'll get me next time."

All three have patience, a great love of the game - and a boatload of great minor-league stories. The Chronicle chatted with them, and here's a sampling:

Chronicle: Why are you still doing this?

Gabe DeHoyos: For me, it's my family. I've got a 1-year-old son, and I don't know if I could find a job that pays this well. I've worked so hard to get here, and I get my first comma in my paycheck this year.

Wes Timmons: I have a great family who supports me back home, and there's nothing I enjoy doing more. And finances come into play. I have a college degree, and I can go home and teach for \$32,000 a year, or I can make a little more playing Triple-A baseball, with the idea if the stars aligned right, maybe I get that shot in the big leagues.

Joe Bateman: It's just my nature. I'm a dude who is just a fighter. But I've learned to do it with a peaceful state of mind, and I do it out of love, love of the game. It's fun to see if you can change someone's belief in your abilities. You learn to be humble and to be prepared.

Chronicle: With so many years in the minors, you must have seen some unusual things, on and off the field. What are some highlights?

DeHoyos: At St. Paul, Minn., they have a zoo going on. They have a little pig that brings the ball out to the umpire. They have all these characters coming out of center field, and there's a guy in a suit, but the suit is half torn off and half on. They have the weirdest things going on. My first year in Mexico, I got to see chicken fights on the field.

Timmons: In Mexico, our very first home game, the fans actually lit the center-field wall on fire. We had two fire delays, which was a first for me.

Bateman: I've seen dogs get bats, dogs get balls for the umpire.

Chronicle: Worst bus ride you can remember?

Timmons: That was in Macon, Ga. Coming out of college, you think pro ball is so illustrious. Then I got an immediate realization what it's all about: We had an eight-hour bus ride, and the bus broke down in the first hour and a half. I remember it being so hot that our manager gave us permission to take our shirts off and sit on the side of the road. I'm two weeks into pro ball, and it was awful.

DeHoyos: Chicago to Winnipeg, which was 18 hours, but at least we could drink beer; that was independent ball. The worst was Wichita to Corpus Christi - it was supposed to be a sleeper bus, but it wasn't really a sleeper, it just had bigger chairs, and one of them collapsed under somebody. We couldn't drink on that one. That made it really long.

Chronicle: Best teammate you've had who never made it?

Timmons: A guy who is still playing, actually, in the Braves organization, Matt Young. He's smaller in stature, but if you look at his numbers and if you watch him play, I'm baffled he still hasn't had a chance.

DeHoyos: I've got to say (former A's farmhand) Jon Weber. He's played longer than I have. I played with him, played against him and, man, I've never seen him hit under .300. He plays the game hard, he's respected by everyone, and he's never had a chance.

Chronicle: How much longer do you think you might do this?

Timmons: I think this is it for me. I have two little girls, and I've missed a lot of time with them. If I made enough to bring them with me, I'd play this game forever, but the reality is, they're in Florida and I signed with Oakland and the Triple-A team is in Sacramento. My wife and I have talked about becoming missionaries, and if I'm released tomorrow, I think that's the next chapter. For sure, the travel shouldn't be an issue.

DeHoyos: I work in the offseason, so I'm not afraid of doing that. You name it, I operate heavy machinery, I drive semis, I dig ditches. This year, I put in septic tanks. I've worked on oil rigs, I do tile, I remodel bathrooms. My son just turned 1. It's hard to leave him. We've looked into missionary work, too.

Bateman: I could play in my 40s if I get a chance to. I'd play until my body goes out.

Mitchell Page, 1951-2011: The ex-outfielder known for his strong rookie performance with the A's in 1977 has died.

Hideki Matsui hits first spring homer for A's

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

The A's rolled out what looked very much like their Opening Night lineup, and the result was nine runs, including **Hideki Matsui's** first homer of the spring. **Daric Barton** hit a two-run shot, and **Cliff Pennington** a three-run home run.

"Pretty sick," catcher **Kurt Suzuki** said of the offense. "Pretty cool, the possibility of all of us playing together all year."

Matsui, the A's new designated hitter, entered the day with just one hit in Cactus League play, but he had two hits, including the solo homer off Colorado's **Huston Street** in the third, and he walked twice.

"It felt good to get it out of the way," Matsui said of the homer, through translator **Roger Kahlon**. "All my at-bats today were good quality, but I feel actually a little bit of relief."

Matsui said he usually warms up as the spring goes along, and none of his teammates were worried about the slow start.

"You ask us, we knew it was just a matter of time," Suzuki said. "That ball went really far, and it was off their closer."

Manager **Bob Geren** was especially happy with Pennington's homer, considering he's coming off left shoulder surgery. Geren said that Pennington should start hitting right-handed his next game, if he faces a lefty.

Briefly: The A's are likely to move **Gio Gonzalez's** next outing to a minor-league game on Wednesday, Oakland's off day, and **Trevor Cahill** would start Thursday against the Cubs. That would put All-Star Cahill in line to start on Opening Night against Seattle. ... **Joey Devine**, who's experiencing some normal mid-spring dead-arm, will resume throwing today. ... **Craig Breslow** (hamstring strain) says he's getting closer to appearing in a game. ... The A's made their first cuts: pitchers **Fautino De Los Santos**, **Pedro Figueroa**, **Willie Eyre**, **Joe Bateman**, **Gabe DeHoyos** and **Vinnie Chulk**, and infielders **Adrian Cardenas** and **Sean Doolittle**.

Cactus League recap

Score: A's 9, Rockies 2

Notable: Coco Crisp had three hits, including a double, and he's batting .519 for the spring. ... Trevor Cahill allowed six hits, two walks and three runs in four innings, and he struck out six. He said he started to tire toward the end. ... First baseman Daric Barton, in his first game after missing six games with a sore leg, made a nice running play in the first inning and also homered.

Quotable: "I was struck emotionally. That's not something a human being does."

- DH Hideki Matsui, deadpan, after watching team chaplain Donnie Moore's annual "feats of strength," which include ripping up phone books and rolling frying pans up into tubes, plus a new one: Moore stacked blocks on manager Bob Geren's chest and smashed them with a sledgehammer.

Today's game: A's (Dallas Braden) at Indians (Justin Masterson), 1:05 p.m.

Drumbeat: Opening Day type lineup; thoughts on Mitchell Page

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Phoenix Muni 3/13/2011 1:13PM

The A's are sporting a very Opening Day-looking lineup today for a TV game against Carlos Gonzalez and the Rockies: Crisp CF, Barton 1B, DeJesus RF, Willingham LF, Matsui DH, Suzuki C, Ellis 2B, Kouz 3B, Pennington SS, Cahill P

It's a lot of right-handed hitters in a row there after Matsui, all four at the bottom. I'd be tempted to move Barton down to break up the right-handed hitters, and maybe we'll see that some during the regular season. It'll be interesting to see how it works this spring.

Sad news in baseball today: Former A's outfielder Mitchell Page, who had such a great rookie season in 1977 and really was the star of those late 70's teams, has died at the age of 59. He was one of my favorites when I was a kid, and it was great to get to know him a little in recent years, when he was serving as a hitting coach for various clubs.

I spoke to some of the A's personnel who knew him well today, including Billy Beane and clubhouse manager Steve Vucinich, and both agreed that no one has ever said anything bad about Page - he was well-liked, well-respected and really valued both as a player and as a coach.

Joey Devine (dead-arm period) is off today but he'll be back throwing tomorrow, and in this morning's news, Fautino De Los Santos and Pedro Figueroa were reassigned to minor-league camp. More cuts will come after the game.

It's always nice to see the Rockies and catch up with some former A's, all very good guys with the media, especially Jason Giambi (sporting a beard that has quite a bit of gray in it) and Huston Street. Street is enjoying life as a new dad, and he said son Ripken (his wife, Lacey, actually named him) is a great sleeper.

You've got to think it smarts the A's to see Carlos Gonzalez turn into a superstar. That trade remains as baffling to me today as it was at the time - I always thought he was the kind of guy the team was trying to get, not deal, and it was a steal getting him from Arizona along with Brett Anderson, Chris Carter, etc. Perhaps Michael Taylor (the one remaining asset from the deal, several turns down the line) will turn into a big-leaguer, but the odds that he'll be a batting champ or MVP-type player are slim at this point.

Today was one of my favorite days in camp: Donnie Moore, the team chaplain, and his team of strong men presented their "Feats of Strength," which includes breaking stacks of bricks, tearing phone books in half, and, the one I always find amazing, rolling up frying pans.

There was a new one today that was downright frightening: Moore stacked blocks on Bob Geren's chest and smashed them with a sledgehammer. I was standing next to Joel Skinner and wondering if he was going to have to manage today, but all is well: Moore didn't miss. Blocks smashed, Geren intact. I can't believe he agreed to do it. There is no one I'd trust with a sledgehammer anywhere near me, no matter how strong or accurate.

Mitchell Page, former A's outfielder, dies

Chronicle Staff Report

Mitchell Page, an outfielder for the Oakland A's in the late '70s and early '80s, died Saturday night of unknown causes. He was 59 years old.

Nicknamed "The Swingin' Rage" by then-A's broadcaster Monte Moore, Mr. Page was a revelation when he broke into the big leagues in 1977, with people commenting that he had the deepest voice they'd ever heard.

He was part of an eclectic roster in his rookie season, featuring Manny Sanguillen, Dock Ellis, Bob Lacey, Earl Williams and Dick Allen, among others. It was Allen, playing his last big-league season, who pegged Mr. Page as "a future star with a ton of talent" after he hit .307 with 21 homers and 75 RBIs and won the Sporting News AL Rookie of the Year award.

A fearsome left-handed hitter out of Los Angeles' Centennial High School, Mr. Page had prodigious power and exceptional speed for a big man (42 stolen bases in '77), but he never quite fulfilled his potential.

All told, Mr. Page's major-league playing career spanned eight seasons with Oakland (1977-83) and Pittsburgh (1984).

"He worked for us for a number of years and was very well liked, a good baseball guy and a great hitting instructor," said A's general manager Billy Beane. "No one ever had anything but great things to say about Mitchell Page."

Mr. Page always regretted missing out on some of the A's best years. The three-time world champions (1972-74) were still a force in the American League in 1976, having finished second in their division under manager Chuck Tanner, but Page's rookie season (1977) coincided with a colossal demise.

The A's were nowhere near contention in his first three seasons, twice finishing last. Although Mr. Page was part of the 1980 resurrection under Billy Martin, injuries limited him to 34 games in '81, when the team reached the postseason, and he was not on the playoff roster.

Through it all, he remained a keen student of hitting, and some of his most satisfying years were spent as the Cardinals' hitting coach from 2001 to 2004.

Mr. Page also served as a minor-league hitting instructor with the Nationals, and as recently as last spring, he worked with the Cardinals' minor-league hitters.

Matsui blasts first homer in green and gold

Barton, Pennington go yard as A's barrage Rockies with power

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Coco Crisp's torrid spring ways continued with a three-hit performance Sunday as the A's, parading out each of their expected starting nine for the first time, tallied three home runs on their way to a 9-4 victory over the Rockies at Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

Hideki Matsui collected his first home run in green and gold with a monster shot to right field off former A's hurler Huston Street in the third. Matsui, who entered the contest in a spring funk, got another hit in the fourth and finished 2-for-2 with a pair of walks.

Daric Barton added to Oakland's lead in the fourth by way of a two-run home run to right-center -- his first long ball of the spring, and Cliff Pennington notched his first homer with a three-run shot in the fifth. Both blasts came off young Colorado hurler Cory Riordan.

Crisp, batting .519 in Cactus League play, led off the bottom of the first against Colorado starter Juan Nicasio with a single and scored on an RBI single from Barton, who made his first start in a week after nursing a right calf contusion. Barton scored on a wild pitch, and Mark Ellis later made it 3-0 with an RBI single.

Crisp's presence at the top of a revamped lineup has everyone singing his praises.

"Coco is Coco," said David DeJesus, who also tallied a hit in the game. "He's a great leadoff hitter. He knows how to play the game the right way. He puts his determination out there every day. He likes to get on base, and it makes my life, and everyone else's behind him, a lot easier. You feed off guys like that."

Nicasio, who received the nod because scheduled starter Jorge De La Rosa is battling tightness in his left lat muscle, went two innings, giving up three runs on five hits with one walk and four strikeouts. De La Rosa is slated to return to the mound Friday for a start against the Brewers.

Oakland starter Trevor Cahill, meanwhile, tossed two scoreless frames before giving up two runs in the third in the form of RBI hits from Eric Young and Ryan Spilborghs, who finished with three hits and made a nice running grab to prevent a run from scoring in the third. Cahill, making his fourth start of the spring, offered up a Jonathan Herrera triple in the fourth inning and allowed him to score on a wild pitch.

Cahill went four frames, throwing 75 pitches (44 strikes) and surrendering three runs on six hits with two walks and five strikeouts.

Up Next for A's: Lefty Dallas Braden is scheduled to make his fourth start of the spring on Monday, when the A's hit the road for a meeting with the Indians at 1:05 p.m. PT in Glendale, Ariz. Right-handed reliever Andrew Bailey, who struck out two Thursday in his Cactus League debut, is also slated to take the mound. The game will be broadcast live on MLB.TV and Gameday Audio.

Up Next for Rockies: The Rockies start right-hander Jhoulys Chacin on Monday against the Reds at Salt River Fields at Talking Stick at 2:10 p.m. MT. Almost as much attention will go to a "B" game against the Angels in Tempe, where John Maine, a former Mets standout who is coming off surgery on his pitching shoulder, is scheduled for three innings.

Oakland trims roster by 10 in first round of cuts

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- The A's made their first round of cuts on Sunday, trimming the spring roster by 10 players.

Infielders Adrian Cardenas and Sean Doolittle were optioned to Triple-A Sacramento, while hurlers Joe Bateman, Vinnie Chulk, Gabe DeHoyos, Willie Eyre, Fautino De Los Santos and Pedro Figueroa, along with catcher Max Stassi and infielder Josh Horton, were reassigned to Minor League camp.

Several pitchers, including Chulk and Eyre, will see plenty more time with the big league club when the A's have to field two teams for split-squad action, including Tuesday's meetings with the Cubs at home and Royals on the road.

The A's now have 48 players remaining in camp, including 36 on the 40-man roster.

Cahill still trying to smooth out changeup

PHOENIX -- Trevor Cahill isn't about to let strikeout totals fool him. He still has work left to do this spring.

The A's righty, who fanned five over four innings in a 9-4 win over the Rockies on Sunday, said he felt strong over his first two innings but struggled in the latter two, mainly because his changeup hasn't been too friendly with him.

"Especially to righties, it's something I can't throw away to them right now," Cahill said. "That's a pitch I like to have. It just hasn't been there. I couldn't get it down, and even when I threw it for strikes, it was on the inside corner when I was trying to go away."

Cahill surrendered three runs on six hits and walked two in his fourth spring outing, climbing to 75 pitches on a rather warm day in Phoenix. The Opening Day candidate isn't hitting the panic button just yet, but he'd like to see his overall mechanics smooth out before April.

"I don't have all my pitches to throw at any time right now," Cahill said. "My arm's feeling good, it's just about feeling comfortable with my pitches. I'm also still trying to get back into a game rhythm. No matter how good of shape you're in, baseball shape is just completely different."

Matsui relieved to snap out of spring funk

PHOENIX -- Hideki Matsui doesn't put much stock into spring numbers, but he also can't remember the last time he tallied so many empty at-bats to start off his Cactus League season.

So when he launched his first homer with Oakland, a monster shot to right field off Colorado's Huston Street in the third inning of Sunday's 9-4 win, he admitted he felt "a little relief."

"It's good to get the first one out of the way," Matsui said through his translator, Roger Kahlon.

It was a good day all around for the A's, who greeted the Rockies with each of their expected starting nine for the first time this spring. Along with Matsui's long ball, the club received homers from Daric Barton -- playing in his first game in a week -- and Cliff Pennington, who is quickly adjusting to the plate again following five months of shoulder rehab.

"I love it," said manager Bob Geren said. "I like the way we came right out of the chute and put together some great at-bats. Great showing all the way around."

Worth noting

Michael Wuertz (shoulder) is scheduled to make his Cactus League debut Tuesday. ... Rich Harden (lat muscle) is slated to pitch off a mound on Tuesday. ... Craig Breslow (hamstring) said he's not sure when he'll see game action, but he's not too worried because he's still been able to get through his bullpen sessions without issue. He plans to be ready by Opening Day.

Taylor rounds out list of A's Top 10 Prospects

By Jonathan Mayo / MLB.com

The future success of every Major League team lies largely in its Minor League pipeline. With that in mind, MLB.com is looking at the Top 10 prospects from each farm system, with only those who still maintain rookie status entering 2011 being eligible.

Michael Taylor has seen the enemy ... and it is him.

When the big, strong outfield prospect came to the A's organization in December 2009, he brought a strong resume with him. With the Phillies, who had drafted him out of Stanford in the fifth round of the 2007 Draft, Taylor had hit .303 and slugged .507. His first year with Oakland, however, he hit just .272 with a .392 slugging percentage.

"Last year was such a struggle, I was so focused on trying to take the perfect swing," Taylor said. "It takes away my natural ability for me. I don't play the game well when I play like that. Now I'm up there, I put my work in, but once the game starts, I'm just looking for an area and I'm hitting. It's good to have that mentality."

It's something Taylor, 25, has long struggled with. A cerebral man by nature, he's the first to admit that his head has gotten in the way of his significant natural ability.

"I said this in college all the time: If I was stupid, I'd be a millionaire," Taylor joked. "You want to be able to play the game and have knowledge of the game, but you don't want to be evaluating everything. I'm a problem-solver by nature and it's one of the things I like most about myself. But sometimes you don't have to reinvent the wheel.

"It doesn't make it any better. You just end up more miserable. The game is so hard as it is. Why make it harder? It makes for a really long year. Last year was a really long year precisely for that reason. I'm just not going to do that."

This spring, then, has been all about simplification for the outfielder. He was told from the outset that he didn't have an opportunity to make the 25-man roster right out of camp. While he'd obviously rather have such an opportunity, it did afford him the ability to get himself right physically and mentally to show the A's he's the guy they thought they were trading for in the first place.

"Honestly, I think I've accomplished more this spring than any other I've been in. I've reestablished a lot of my own personal confidence in myself. One goal I had was to get comfortable and have fun, to get to a position where I'm not searching for anything. I feel that way.

"One of the things that's very unique about baseball, really any industry with a limited amount of positions, is that windows open and close very quickly. Part of me wishes I had this mentality last year because the window was much wider open and they were much higher on me. But all you can do is go out and play and hopefully reopen some eyes, show somebody who has the ability to give you that chance that you can still make a big impact."

A's Top 10 Prospects

1. Grant Green, SS: The 2009 first-round pick had a very solid first full season, making the California League All-Star team, going to the Futures Game and hitting .318/.363/.520 with 20 homers and 87 RBIs. He hits the ball hard to all fields and should have at least average power moving forward, though he could benefit from improving his plate discipline some. The questions come with his defense. He'll stay at short in Double-A for now, but could end up being a solid offensive-minded second baseman when all is said and done.

2. Chris Carter, 1B/OF: Putting aside the 0-for-33 start to his big league career, Carter did pretty much what he's done for much of his professional career, hit for power. After a slow start in Triple-A, he recovered by slugging .637 in the second half and finishing with 31 homers and 94 RBIs. He can play first and left, but there are roadblocks at both spots and at DH now. Despite that, he should hit his way somehow into the lineup for good this season.

3. Michael Choice, OF: Considered to be the best impact bat coming from the Division I college ranks, the A's were thrilled that Choice made it to them at No. 10 in last year's Draft. He's got plus raw power that he showed he's ready to use during his pro debut (.627 slugging in 102 at-bats). He's going to strike out a bunch, but he's also going to draw plenty of walks, so there's no cause for alarm. He could head right to the California League to make his full-season debut.

4. Ian Krol, LHP: Though a high schooler taken in the 2009 Draft, Krol pitches more like a college lefty, with advanced ability. A Midwest League All-Star in 2010, he led the circuit with his 2.65 ERA. His 2.80 combined ERA for the year was top in the A's system, and he was MLB.com's choice for the organization's Pitcher of the Year as a result. He walked only 28 in 138 1/3 total innings, locating all three of his pitches extremely well. He won't turn 20 until May, but he'll be in the California League to start the season.

WHEN WILL THEY ARRIVE?

Rank	Player	ETA
1.	Grant Green	2012
2.	Chris Carter	2011
3.	Michael Choice	2013
4.	Ian Krol	2013
5.	Jemile Weeks	2012
6.	Yordy Cabrera	2014
7.	Max Stassi	2013
8.	Aaron Shipman	2014
9.	Renato Nunez	2015

Rank	Player	ETA
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10. [Michael Taylor](#) 2011

5. Jemile Weeks, 2B: The No. 8 second-base prospect on MLB.com's list for that position, Weeks has shown good tools when he's been on the field. Injuries have made that more difficult, and the 2008 first-rounder didn't play more than 80 games in either of his first two pro seasons. He's got speed on the basepaths and can swing the bat from both sides of the plate. Despite the injuries, he's not far from being ready to contribute in Oakland.

6. Yordy Cabrera, SS: Thought to be one of the better prep position players in last year's Draft, the A's were able to get him in the second round. He may seem too big to play shortstop, but he's got solid actions and will at least begin his career there. If he has to move to third, his plus arm will play there as well. So will his bat, which should provide enough power and production for the position. It will be interesting to see how he handles the full-season Midwest League in 2011.

7. Max Stassi, C: It's hard not to like a backstop who can catch, throw, block and handle a staff, all while still a teenager. His bat is better than his first full season (.229/.310/.380) looks, with decent bat speed and what should be decent power. He'll need to cut down on his strikeouts, though he's not afraid to go deep into counts. A move to the hitter-friendly California League should help those numbers out a bit in 2011.

8. Aaron Shipman, OF: The A's went after more high-upside high school hitters in the 2010 Draft, and Shipman might have the most upside of any of them. The third-round pick has a ton of tools, highlighted by plus speed that should help make him a basestealing threat and an outstanding defensive center fielder. More of a leadoff type than a middle-of-the-order guy, it might take time for Shipman to be big league ready, but he also might be worth the wait.

9. Renato Nunez, 3B: Over the past couple of years, the A's have been much busier on the international front. Last summer, they signed Nunez out of Venezuela for \$2.2 million. He'll be just 17 come April, so there's no need for anyone to buy tickets in Oakland to see him for a long while, but the reports on Nunez are that he should hit for plenty of power and average. Whether he's a third baseman long-term remains to be seen, but if the offense develops as hoped, his defensive home won't matter.

10. Michael Taylor, OF: It was a bit of a lost season for Taylor in 2010, his first in the A's organization. He had done nothing but hit for average and power with the Phillies, but it never came together last season. With no room in Oakland anyway, he'll get a chance to prove himself again with Sacramento. He still has a good chance to establish himself as a prototypical toolsy right fielder.

Under the Radar

Adrian Cardenas, 2B: Even after struggling initially in Triple-A, Cardenas rebounded and hit .304 in 2010, good for second in the organization. He'll get on base and hit doubles, but that's about the extent of his power. The A's have had him play second and third, so maybe an offensive-minded utility career is in his future, especially with a second baseman like Weeks in the system.

Shawn Haviland, RHP: A 33rd-round pick as a senior out of Harvard isn't expected to do too much as a pro. Keep in mind that Haviland is now 25, but it's hard not to note that the 2008 draftee had a 3.65 ERA in the California League, good for fifth in the circuit (he was third in the organization). His 169 strikeouts also led the A's system (He's got a career 8.8 K/9 rate). Who knows what the A's have on their hands here, but suffice to say Haviland has already exceeded expectations.

Predictions

Hitter of the Year -- Green

It might be the obvious choice, but that's OK. Green will again hit for average and power as he gets close to knocking on the door, walking away with his second straight Hitter of the Year Award.

Pitcher of the Year -- Krol

This isn't only because he's the lone pitcher in the Top 10. Krol will prove the California League isn't a big deal and will top the system once again in ERA, all while earning a promotion to Double-A at age 20.

Major Lee-ague: Cardenas among first round of cuts

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 3/13/2011 4:15PM

The A's made their first round of cuts today, sending 10 players to the Minors. Here's who is heading out of camp: Pedro Figueroa, Fautino De Los Santos, Adrian Cardenas, Sean Doolittle, Joe Bateman, Vinnie Chulk, Gabe DeHoyos, Willie Eyre, Max Stassi, Josh Horton

Matsui busts his slump

Slugger breaks out of 1-for-21 skid, goes deep against Street

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Hideki Matsui needed this one.

The Japanese slugger snapped out of a spring training slump with two hits, including a solo homer, and the Oakland Athletics beat the Colorado Rockies 9-4 at Phoenix on Sunday.

Matsui, who was stuck in a 1-for-21 slide, connected against former Oakland pitcher Huston Street in the third inning.

"I feel actually a little bit of relief," Matsui said through an interpreter. "It's probably good that it's happening now as opposed to during the season. ... Usually as opening day comes close, hitting-wise, things get better and better."

Cliff Pennington and Daric Barton also homered for the A's. Pennington's three-run shot in the fifth was his first hit in 13 spring at-bats.

Oakland's Coco Crisp had three hits and is 14 for 27 this spring.

"Just going out there trying my best," Crisp said. "I'm preparing myself before these games with practicing just seeing the ball. I did a good job of not trying to get ahead of myself this spring training and go out there just swinging."

Ryan Spilborghs had three hits for Colorado, and Jonathan Herrera doubled, tripled and scored twice. Carlos Gonzalez stole two bases.

Trevor Cahill, who led Oakland with 18 wins last season, struggled for the third time in four spring starts, allowing three runs and six hits in four innings. He struck out five, all looking, walked two and threw a wild pitch that let Herrera score with two out in the fourth.

MITCHELL PAGE DEAD AT 59

Mitchell Page, who had a fantastic rookie season and played eight years in the major leagues before becoming a hitting coach for the St. Louis Cardinals, has died. He was 59.

The Cardinals say Page died Saturday. Team spokesman Brian Bartow said Sunday that the team was informed of Page's death by his agent. The cause of death was not known.

Page broke into the big leagues in 1977 and was an immediate hit with the Oakland Athletics, batting .307 with 21 homers and 75 RBIs. He also stole 42 bases and finished runner-up to Hall of Famer Eddie Murray in AL Rookie of the Year voting.

Page's numbers at the plate dropped off after his first season. The left fielder and designated hitter spent seven years with the A's and then played 16 games for the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1984, finishing his career with a .266 average, 72 homers and 259 RBIs.

He was the Cardinals' hitting coach from 2001-04, counting star slugger Albert Pujols among his pupils. Most recently, Page served as a minor league hitting instructor for the Cardinals in spring training last year, but did not have a role with the team this year, Bartow said.

A's Insider notebook: Projected lineup delivers

Mychael Urban, CSNBayArea.com

PHOENIX -- The A's have quite happily gotten used to all the extra attention that's coming their way in the wake of general manager Billy Beane's offseason makeover, and even more happy buzz blossomed when manager Bob Geren posted his lineup for Sunday's game against the visiting Rockies at Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

It featured all nine of the hitters expected to start on Opening Day: Center fielder Coco Crisp led off, followed by first baseman Daric Barton, right fielder David DeJesus, left fielder Josh Willingham, designated hitter Hideki Matsui, catcher Kurt Suzuki, second baseman Mark Ellis, third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff and shortstop Cliff Pennington.

Geren conceded that his batting order for the real opener might not mirror Sunday's; he's fairly big on alternating right- and left-handed hitters as much as possible, and Suzuki, Ellis and Kouzmanoff all hit from the right side (Pennington is a switch hitter). But that will work itself out in due time. Clearly, being able to pencil in all of his regulars on the same day struck a giddy chord with the skipper.

"It's nice to get everyone out there together," Geren said. "It's been difficult with split squads and guys getting healthy, guys playing every other day for the most part here early. But you're going to see a lot more of that in these last couple weeks. A lot of them are going to start playing two or three days in a row, so we'll have everyone out there at the same time quite a bit.

"It's pretty exciting, for sure."

Adding to the air of excitement, the game was Oakland's first of the spring televised by Comcast SportsNet California, and several national media outlets, including MLB Network, were on hand.

Living legend Peter Gammons was patrolling the grounds under the gorgeous desert skies before ducking into Geren's office for a closed-door chat before the morning workout, the venerable sportswriter's mere presence an indication of the club's status as a legitimate playoff contender.

"People are pretty pumped around here, and they have been since Day One," said A's lefty Dallas Braden. "This is the first time most of us have experienced anything like this, and we're going to do whatever it takes to keep all these people coming back."

That won't be difficult if the new-look lineup produces the way it did Sunday. Crisp, Barton and DeJesus singled to open the bottom of the first inning, and a wild pitch and a two-out single from Ellis gave Oakland a 3-0 lead. Barton and Matsui later homered, Matsui's being his first in green and gold, Crisp tacked on another couple of knocks to jack his Cactus League batting average to a slow-pitch softballish .519, and by the end of the fifth inning the regulars had nine runs on the board.

That was a week's worth of runs at times in 2010, prompting Beane to add DeJesus, Willingham and Matsui to the middle of the order.

"Dangerous," is how Braden described the improved offensive potential. "You pick up three guys like that, you know you're going to start doing some damage."

RAMPING UP

As the end of camp draws closer, Geren plans to start managing games a bit more the way he'll manage during the regular season.

"We haven't done a lot of hit-and-running, stealing bases, things like that," he said. "We'll be ramping that up with [the regulars] playing deeper into games. We might even do a little more of it than we'd do [during the season], just because you need to work on things, and this is a good time to do that, when the games don't really mean anything."

Another facet of the game that might get greater emphasis is one not easy to work on during camp: dealing with "sun balls," which can be a bear at the Oakland Coliseum.

The A's work out every morning before their Cactus League games, the majority of which start at about 1 p.m., but as Geren noted, it's not like the outfielders can work on battling the 3 p.m. sun at 10 a.m.

Thus, Geren said, outfield/first-base coach Tye Waller might occasionally be relieved of his game duties in the middle innings so he can take some of his charges to the back diamond at Phoenix Muni.

MORNING MOVES

The A's announced a couple of roster moves early Sunday, sending right-hander Fautino De Los Santos and lefty Pedro Figueroa to minor-league camp.

De Los Santos, part of the trade that sent [Nick Swisher](#) to the White Sox in exchange for a package that included [Gio Gonzalez](#), appeared in four Cactus League games and gave up three earned runs (four total) on eight hits and two walks over 3 2/3 innings. A 25-year-old from the Dominican Republic who consistently touches the upper 90's with his fastball but needs work on his command, he entered camp as a darkhorse bullpen candidate.

Expected to open the season at Triple-A Sacramento, De Los Santos will be closely watched by Oakland's brass and could merit a call to the big leagues if he can resolve the control issues.

"When guys throw that hard," Geren said, "they can come quick."

Figueroa was optioned to Double-A Midland.

FOR STARTERS

Based on the current throwing schedule mapped out by new pitching coach Ron Romanick, Gonzalez, who has a 0.96 ERA in three spring starts, is in line to start on Opening Day. Last year's top starter, All-Star righty [Trevor Cahill](#), worked Sunday and gave up three runs on six hits and two walks while striking out five over four innings, pushing his spring ERA to 7.59.

Geren hasn't announced his rotation, and he insisted Sunday that Cahill's struggles and the recent thumping of Braden by the Texas Rangers have done nothing to dampen his enthusiasm about his gifted young starting staff.

"Everyone's right where they need to be, health-wise and pitch-count-wise," he said.

The competition for the No. 5 job remains open, but righty [Brandon McCarthy](#) appears to have a slight edge based on his big-league experience. Also pitching well is [Bobby Cramer](#), who made a good impression during a late-season callup in 2010. Lefty [Josh Outman](#), working his way back from Tommy John surgery in 2009, was the early frontrunner but has struggled with his mechanics of late.

Geren thrilled with Athletics' injury-free spring

[Mychael Urban](#), CSNBayArea.com

PHOENIX -- Much of Bob Geren's time with the media since taking over as manager of the A's in 2007 has been spent discussing the various and myriad injuries that have decimated his club year after year.

Big injuries. Big names. Big trouble.

By that measure, this spring has been a treat for Geren. The primary topic of conversation for him Sunday, for instance, was being able to put all of his projected regulars on the field for an eventual 9-4 win over the visiting Rockies at Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

"It's nice," he said of his team's relatively healthy camp. "Nobody wants to talk -- or hear about -- guys rehabbing or getting surgery all the time. So far we've had a nice, quiet spring as far as injuries [are concerned]. You're always going to have a few guys dinged up here and there, but nothing major's happened, and the guys who we knew needed to work their way back from something while we're here have made really nice progress."

[Shortstop Cliff Pennington](#) (shoulder) and [Andrew Bailey](#) (elbow), for example, are rounding into form nicely after offseason surgeries; Pennington, a switch hitter, might bat from the right side for the first time in Cactus League action the next time the A's face a lefty starter, and Bailey is scheduled to make his second appearance of the spring Monday.

Among the handful of players dinged up at the moment are reliever [Michael Wuertz](#) (shoulder tendinitis), who will make his spring debut Tuesday; backup infield candidate Eric Sogard (thumb), who is close to resuming full activity; reliever [Joey Devine](#) (dead arm), who is pitching in games for the first time in two years since his Tommy John (elbow) surgery; reliever [Craig Breslow](#) (hamstring), who is day-to-day; and infield hopefuls Steve Tolleson and Andy LaRoche, who were held out Sunday with a touch of the flu.

The most significant setback of the spring, in terms of star power, has been the lat-muscle tightness that's kept [Rich Harden](#) off the mound since the first days of camp. Officially out of the running for the No. 5 spot in the rotation, Harden has been playing catch and is tentatively slated for a brief bullpen session Tuesday.