

A's News Clips, Wednesday, March 16, 2011

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### Oakland A's: Gio Gonzalez turns tables in offseason, becomes teacher instead of pupil

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

PHOENIX -- A's left-hander Gio Gonzalez spent part of his offseason tutoring high school pitchers at his alma mater.

It's hard to tell who benefited most from the experience -- the teenage pupils or Gonzalez.

"It was an addiction," said Gonzalez, who helped lead Hialeah High (Fla.) to state baseball titles in 2001 and 2002. "I didn't want to leave. I was there from like 3 to 6:30 at night with these kids. My dad's been calling me up a lot, telling me how they're doing."

How ironic to hear of Gonzalez dishing out wisdom, since he's often been on the receiving end of such conversations in the A's clubhouse.

It's been a group effort to push the right mental buttons with Gonzalez, 25, an excitable personality who had trouble corralling his emotions on the mound early in his career.

He enjoyed a breakout 2010 season, going 15-9 with a 3.23 ERA in his first full year in the major leagues. Gonzalez was especially tough as the season wore on, as his 2.53 ERA from June 21 until season's end (a span of 19 starts) was third-lowest in the American League.

He went from being a raw product to one of the most dependable starters in an A's rotation considered among the majors' best.

"He knows what he does well, and he knows what he needs to work on," fellow starter Dallas Braden said. "That's huge for a pitcher. Not letting ball one affect you. Not letting the hit you gave up affect you."

One major league scout said Gonzalez enjoyed success last season while relying predominantly on just two pitches -- a mid-90s fastball and an outstanding curveball. If Gonzalez can continue improving his changeup, the scout said, he'll become even tougher.

But Gonzalez must reduce his walks. He issued 92 in 2010, second-most in the AL.

Braden and Gonzalez were often seen chatting before Gonzalez's starts last season. In 2009, it was veteran shortstop Orlando Cabrera who was Gonzalez's main clubhouse counselor.

In turn, Gonzalez stressed the mental side of the game to pitchers at Hialeah High. And he acknowledged that the advice he gave was advice he's just now learning to apply.

"All it was, was trying to build up their confidence," Gonzalez said. "It's going out there and having fun."

Gonzalez is heavily involved in community work in Hialeah, a city of 200,000-plus residents located just outside Miami. This past winter, he organized a charity softball tournament and got several current and past big leaguers to participate, including San Diego Padres outfielder Cameron Maybin and former Marlins and White Sox pitcher Alex Fernandez.

Aside from working with the Hialeah High team, he played in the school's alumni game in January, pumping 92 mph fastballs at some of the players he coached.

"A couple guys got hits off him," Hialeah pitching coach Jonathan Hernandez insisted.

Hernandez, a friend of Gonzalez's since early childhood, was impressed with the time Gonzalez devoted to the team.

"It's phenomenal how someone like that gets to the big leagues and doesn't forget where he came from," he said. "It says a lot about his character, coming back to Hialeah and giving back to his community."

## **A's notebook: Closer Andrew Bailey gets good news on arm injury, can resume throwing when pain-free**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Closer Andrew Bailey was diagnosed with a strained right forearm and can resume throwing when he's pain-free, according to a statement released by the A's on Tuesday.

That's good news for the team and its two-time All-Star closer, as an MRI showed no swelling or structural damage in his elbow, according to the statement.

For now, it seems to indicate no need for surgery.

Bailey left Monday's game against the Cleveland Indians after throwing a pitch and clutching at his elbow. He traveled to Birmingham, Ala., on Tuesday to be examined by Dr. James Andrews.

Bailey declined to comment on the news, saying he thought he first should return to Phoenix and talk with the A's staff.

"Obviously, you hold your breath when a guy leaves the mound," A's general manager Billy Beane said. "The positive thing is that we got concise, quick information and a specific diagnosis. And this diagnosis is strangely welcome, albeit that this will set him back a bit."

Added manager Bob Geren: "After yesterday, that's as good of news as we could expect."

Sixteen days remain until the A's season opener against the Seattle Mariners, and once Bailey resumes throwing, he will require time to rebuild his arm strength. There seems a good chance Bailey begins the season on the 15-day disabled list, with Brian Fuentes acting as closer.

With Bailey and Joey Devine (biceps soreness) not guaranteed to break camp with the team, a "bubble" guy such as left-hander Jerry Blevins and someone unforeseen could snatch one of seven bullpen spots.

Reliever Michael Wuertz (right shoulder) made his Cactus League debut with a scoreless seventh inning in an 8-1 split-squad loss to the Chicago Cubs. He said he's confident he'll squeeze in enough games to be ready by opening night.

Left-hander Brett Anderson went 5 2/3 innings and allowed one run in his best outing of the spring. Pitching coach Ron Romanick noted Anderson is busting right-handers inside with his fastball more instead of relying solely on his slider.

Geren praised fifth-starter candidate Brandon McCarthy, who allowed two runs in 5 2/3 innings in a 4-3 loss to the Kansas City Royals. Switch-hitting shortstop Cliff Pennington (left shoulder) batted right-handed for the first time this spring and lined an RBI single.

## **Chin Music: Bailey diagnosed with strained forearm — news could have been worse for A's**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 3/15/2011 4:53PM

Here's a few updates following the A's 8-1 loss to the Cubs. ...

—The team issued a release saying closer Andrew Bailey was diagnosed with a strained right forearm, and that he can begin throwing again when he's pain-free. Bailey was examined Tuesday in Alabama by Dr. James Andrews. He had no swelling or structural damage, which means surgery isn't in the cards as things stand. That's relatively good news for the A's and Bailey, who looked to be in considerable pain when he left Monday's outing against Cleveland. "While there's no timetable for his return, this is welcome news," A's GM Billy Beane said in the release.

—Fellow reliever Michael Wuertz (right shoulder) made his Cactus League debut with a scoreless seventh inning. He gave up one hit with one walk and one strikeout, mixing in fastballs, sliders and changeups. "It was nice to get out there in a game situation," he said. "I had to battle to get out of that inning. Overall, it was a positive outing for me." He's confident he'll squeeze enough games in to be ready by opening night.

—Left-hander Brett Anderson went 5 2/3 innings and allowed one run and three hits in his best outing of the spring. The only damage came on Brett Jackson's solo homer in the sixth. "I got five or six ground balls on my changeup, which is good," Anderson said. The lefty said earlier in the spring that he's inclined to throw his slider rather than experiment with a changeup he doesn't feel real comfortable with. But pitching coach Ron Romanick is stressing the importance for all A's

starters to utilize their change. "You've gotta have that third dimension to be a front-line starter, especially in the American League," said Romanick. He noted that Anderson is also busting right-handers inside more with his fastball instead of solely relying on his slider.

—The A's dropped their other split-squad game 4-3 to the Kansas City Royals in Surprise. Right-hander Brandon McCarthy was solid in 5 2/3 innings, allowing two runs on five hits. He struck out four and walked none, continuing to make a strong case for the fifth starter's spot along with Tyson Ross and Bobby Cramer. The other No. 5 candidate, Josh Outman, pitches Thursday against the Cubs and needs to turn around his fortunes to remain in the conversation.

Shortstop Cliff Pennington started against the Royals and had two right-handed at-bats, lining an RBI single up the middle in one of them. It's the first time Pennington, a switch hitter, has hit from the right side in a game this spring as he's coming off shoulder surgery.

## **Andrew Bailey's injury diagnosed as a strain**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Andrew Bailey might not be ready to go to start the season, but even so, the A's were feeling good Tuesday about their All-Star closer, who was diagnosed with a forearm muscle strain rather than a more serious ligament injury.

"Obviously, you hold your breath when a guy leaves the mound. We all held our breath," A's general manager Billy Beane said. "The positive thing is that we got concise, quick information and a specific diagnosis, and this diagnosis is strangely welcome, albeit that this will set him back a bit.

"This is good news, given everyone's first impression."

Bailey left the seventh inning of Monday's game holding his elbow after feeling discomfort while throwing a fastball. He had Tommy John surgery (elbow ligament replacement) in 2004 and had an elbow cleanup procedure in September to remove bone chips and spurs.

Bailey traveled to Alabama to see Dr. James Andrews, who conducted the surgery last fall. After reviewing an MRI and examining Bailey, Andrews determined that Bailey may begin throwing again when he is pain-free.

That makes it likely that Bailey will open the season on the disabled list, but it certainly wouldn't indicate anything that's close to season-ending. Brett Anderson, for instance, missed just over a month last season with a forearm strain, but Anderson also had elbow inflammation and he's a starter.

Bailey has appeared in only two games this spring, but he was throwing 94 mph in those appearances, so his arm strength is good, and he needs to get ready to pitch only one or two innings.

The A's have not indicated who might fill in during Bailey's absence, largely because it's unclear how much time he might miss. Although four-time All-Star Brian Fuentes would be the logical top choice, the team has several relievers who have closed, including Michael Wuertz, Craig Breslow and Brad Ziegler, and there is little doubt that Grant Balfour also could pitch in the ninth.

With Bailey potentially out for a while, "Obviously, it's going to be a big factor to stay healthy," said Wuertz, who had some early spring shoulder tendinitis. "That's why we've got guys, we've got to step up. We have a deep bullpen for a reason."

Breslow (hamstring) has yet to appear in a game, but he's scheduled to throw in a simulated game today. Wuertz made his spring debut Tuesday and allowed a hit and a walk in an inning. He was throwing changeups early because he's working on the pitch as an extra weapon, but once two runners got on, he went to his slider and got three outs with it. "He looks good," catcher Kurt Suzuki said.

Wuertz said he has moved his position on the pitching rubber, going all the way over to the first-base side, and he is still getting accustomed to it. But he likes the way his fastball and changeup are working from there.

Bailey said in a text message Tuesday afternoon that he was just about to return to Arizona and that he preferred to wait to speak with reporters until after checking in with the training staff and coaches.

## **Brett Anderson, Brandon McCarthy pitch well**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Oakland lost two games Tuesday, but the team's two starters performed well, and at this point in the spring, that's the main objective: Get the starters ready.

Brett Anderson worked into the sixth inning against the Cubs in Phoenix and allowed three hits, one walk and two runs - one earned - and struck out four. He showed what pitching coach Ron Romanick called his unique changeup to good advantage and also used his fastball inside very well. Anderson believes he'll be at about the 100-pitch mark next time out.

Brandon McCarthy continued to make a strong bid for the fifth-starter spot, also pitching into the sixth inning, against the Royals at Surprise, where he allowed five hits and two runs and struck out four.

"He's been very impressive and very consistent," manager Bob Geren said.

Outfielder Josh Willingham came out of the game in Phoenix a half inning after being struck on the left elbow by what he described as a "94 1/2 mph fastball right on the bone."

He didn't require X-rays, and the A's have a day off today for him to recover a bit.

Community outreach: Infielder Adam Rosales hosted 18 children from a local Boys & Girls Club branch. He introduced them to Trystan Magnuson and Tyson Ross and treated them to ice cream sundaes. Last week, Rosales and Magnuson spoke at the same branch and signed autographs.

Briefly: Gio Gonzalez won't pitch in today's minor-league simulated game as planned, getting shifted back to starting Thursday's game. That still puts him in line to start Opening Day if the rotation doesn't change, but it sounds as if the rotation could, in fact, change fairly substantially between now and the start of the season if each of the starters gets plenty of extra rest once the split-squad games are over. ... Ross and Craig Breslow will throw in minor-league camp.

Cactus League recap

Scores: Cubs 8, A's 1; Royals 4, A's 3

Notable: Coco Crisp doubled against the Cubs at Phoenix Municipal Stadium and has reached base in each of his 11 games. He's batting .471. ... Reliever Fernando Cabrera gave up his first runs of the spring, allowing four hits, a walk and two runs in 1 1/3 innings against the Royals. ... Conor Jackson hit a double against the Royals and also walked; the outfielder is batting .091 for the spring. ... Cliff Pennington went 1-for-2 batting right-handed for the first time this spring, collecting an RBI single. He also had a hit batting left-handed.

Quotable: "I'll be ready, no doubt about it. ... I feel great now." - reliever Michael Wuertz, who made his first spring appearance.

Today: off. Thursday's game: Cubs (Ryan Dempster) at A's (Gio Gonzalez), 1:05 p.m.

## **Bailey diagnosed with forearm strain**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- The A's appeared close to envisioning a season without their two-time All-Star closer, but those thoughts quickly dissolved Tuesday when the team announced that Andrew Bailey has been diagnosed with a right forearm strain, thus putting to rest any fears of structural damage or a need for surgery.

Bailey, who exited Monday's contest against the Indians in the seventh inning with discomfort in his right elbow and forearm, traveled to Birmingham, Ala., on Tuesday to pay a visit to James Andrews. The orthopedic surgeon assured Bailey that he "experienced no swelling" and can resume throwing when pain-free, according to a team statement.

A's general manager Billy Beane, who addressed the issue in the release, said there is currently no timetable for Bailey's return. However, it's unlikely he'll be ready by season's start given that Opening Day is less than three weeks away.

"Obviously, you hold your breath when a guy leaves the mound, we all held our breath," Beane said by phone. "The positive thing is that we got concise, quick information and a specific diagnosis, and this diagnosis is strangely welcome, albeit that this will set him back a bit. This is good news, given everyone's first impression."

"After yesterday," manager Bob Geren agreed, "that's about as good of news as you can expect."

That was the general consensus around A's camp on Tuesday, as everyone was aware of Bailey's injury history, which includes a 2005 Tommy John procedure. The 26-year-old righty was brought along slowly this spring after undergoing cleanup surgery, administered by Andrews, on his previously repaired right elbow two weeks before the end of the 2010 campaign.

"That's the best news I've heard all day," catcher Kurt Suzuki said upon learning of his teammate's diagnosis. "You think about the loss of a guy like Bailey and what it possibly could have been, that's huge. He's such a big part of this team, so it's great to know it's not serious."

Monday merely marked Bailey's second spring outing, and his absence throughout the rest of camp and presumably for much of the start of the season means the A's will heavily be relying on a couple of their offseason acquisitions, namely four-time All-Star Brian Fuentes and Grant Balfour.

Fuentes, who has yet to allow a run in five spring outings, is the likely choice for the closer's role. He led the Majors with 48 saves for the Angels in 2009 and limited opponents to a .181 batting average -- fifth-lowest among American League relievers -- in 2010 while finishing 4-1 with a 2.81 ERA and 24 saves for the Angels and Twins.

However, the A's are likely to take a closer-by-committee approach and base the role on matchups and performance rather than naming one man for the job while Bailey is out of commission. Along with Balfour, righties Michael Wuertz and Brad Ziegler, as well as lefty Craig Breslow, can all close. Righty Joey Devine, if healthy, can also get the job done.

Wuertz made his Cactus League debut on Tuesday and displayed strong form and health, which added to the good news surrounding Bailey, who has put together a 1.70 ERA with 51 saves over the past two seasons.

Oakland's ability to move forward with a strong bullpen still intact speaks to the club's offseason efforts in stocking up on depth following a 2010 season that saw the A's use the disabled list 23 times.

"Obviously, it's going to be a big factor to stay healthy and keep doing what I do," Wuertz said. "That's why we got the guys we got. We got a deep bullpen for a reason, and I think you're going to see that play out."

Bailey relayed through a text message Tuesday afternoon that he would be returning to Phoenix immediately but preferred to address the media on Thursday -- the A's have an off-day Wednesday -- after speaking with the team's coaches and medical staff.

## **Wuertz returns to action with scoreless frame**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- A scoreless seventh inning was just what the doctor ordered for A's righty Michael Wuertz, who saw his first Cactus League action on Tuesday following a month-long bout with shoulder soreness.

Wuertz faced five batters in his debut, offering up one hit and one walk while striking out one against the Cubs in a split-squad game at Phoenix Municipal Stadium. His outing, albeit short and sweet, is of big significance for an A's bullpen that will likely be without two-time All-Star closer Andrew Bailey to begin the season.

"Obviously, there was a little bit of rust, but overall, it was a good, positive outing for me just to come away feeling good," he said. "It's been awhile for me, but just getting back out there and making pitches and getting back into the flow of things is nice."

Wuertz uncharacteristically turned to the changeup at the start of his outing -- something he worked on a bit before the start of camp -- before reverting to his go-to slider after placing two runners on base.

"If I'm throwing the changeup well, I know I'm in the right arm slot," he said. "It's another weapon to use against lefties and righties. Who knows how many times I'll throw it, but it's just something to work on out here and see how it carries over into the season."

The slider, meanwhile, still needs work, a notion reiterated by pitching coach Ron Romanick. Both, though, were pleased with Wuertz's ability to ease his way through an inning of game action rather seamlessly. Romanick said the plan is for Wuertz to take two days off before entering another game, and how he continues to respond to the work will dictate his schedule for the duration of camp.

"I feel good, and that's the most important thing, staying healthy," he said. "Every day keeps getting better, and that's a positive sign for me."

Wuertz, 32, was sidelined by a shoulder injury for the entire month of April last year, one which paled in comparison to his dominant 2009 campaign, when he tallied 102 strikeouts, a 0.95 WHIP and a 2.63 ERA through 78 2/3 innings in 74 games. He said Tuesday that his arm feels similar to the way it did before that season, noting he's "progressed a lot compared to last year."

The veteran right-hander slightly struggled upon his return to the mound in 2010, but he bounced back at the midseason mark, pitching to a 3.16 ERA and 1.21 WHIP from the start of July through the end of the year. He feels confident about his chances of remaining ready for Opening Day, as the final two weeks of camp simply afford him the opportunity to build up arm strength and find a consistent rhythm.

"For me, this time is now about getting my work in and staying sharp or, really, getting sharp," he said.

Worth noting

Righty Brandon McCarthy impressed manager Bob Geren through 5 2/3 innings of work on Tuesday. The fifth-starter candidate held the Royals to two runs on five hits with no walks and four strikeouts while tallying close to 75 pitches. "He was outstanding," Geren said. "He was one broken bat away from pitching six innings." When asked about McCarthy's position in the rotation battle, Geren said the righty's been "very efficient, very impressive and very consistent." ... Cliff Pennington, coming off left shoulder surgery, was cleared Tuesday to bat right-handed in game action, and he proceeded to go 1-for-2 from the right side of the plate against the Royals. He was 2-for-4 overall and said he felt comfortable. ... Lefty Craig Breslow will see his first game action of the spring on Wednesday in a Minor League contest. Tyson Ross, another fifth-starter candidate, will also pitch in that game. That sets up lefties Gio Gonzalez and Josh Outman for Thursday's home tilt against the Cubs. ... Rich Harden (lat muscle) will throw off the mound for the first time in more than a month on Thursday. He's out of the rotation mix, but Geren hasn't ruled him out as a bullpen option. ... Adam Rosales hosted 18 children from the Boys & Girls Club of Metropolitan Phoenix before Tuesday's home game against the Royals, treating them to a meet-and-greet session with Ross and Trystan Magnuson. Last week, Rosales and Magnuson visited the same kids and hosted a question-and-answer session and signed autographs.

## **Anderson looks impressive in A's loss to Cubs**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- A pair of eighth-inning homers lifted the Cubs to an 8-1 victory over the host A's in a split-squad tilt at Phoenix Municipal Stadium on Tuesday.

Wellington Castillo and Tyler Colvin launched back-to-back home runs off A's Minor Leaguer Jon Hunton to extend Chicago's one-run lead. The Cubs also got a long ball from Brett Jackson in the sixth against Oakland starter Brett Anderson.

Anderson, making his fourth appearance and third start of the spring, went 5 2/3 innings, giving up two runs -- one earned -- on just three hits and a walk with four strikeouts. Anderson has allowed seven earned runs in 14 innings this spring.

Oakland's offense proved quiet most of the day, its only run coming in the first in the form of an RBI base hit from Daric Barton off Chicago starter Andrew Cashner. The Cubs rightly walked three and struck out two in 3 1/3 frames.

Up Next for the A's: Hurlers Tyson Ross and Craig Breslow will be thrown into a Minor League game on Wednesday, while the rest of the club enjoys its only off-day of the spring schedule. Cactus League action resumes on Thursday when Gio Gonzalez gets the starting nod against the Cubs at Phoenix Municipal Stadium, beginning at 1:05 p.m. PT. Also scheduled to pitch in the game is lefty Josh Outman, who is looking to bounce back after experiencing a handful of mechanical mishaps in his previous two outings.

Up next for the Cubs: After an off-day Wednesday, Ryan Dempster, the Opening Day starter, will make his fourth start when the Cubs travel to Phoenix to face the Athletics on Thursday. Dempster has given up two runs in 12 innings this spring while striking out 12. The A's will counter with lefty Gio Gonzalez, so the Cubs lineup features Jeff Baker leading off, Geovany Soto hitting fifth, and Kosuke Fukudome batting eighth.

## **McCarthy turns in strong start but A's fall short**

By Dick Kaegel / MLB.com

SURPRISE, Ariz. -- Alex Gordon belted a two-run homer as the Kansas City Royals downed an Oakland Athletics split squad, 4-3, on Tuesday in the Cactus League.

Gordon's homer, his third this spring, came in the seventh inning after Melky Cabrera singled against A's right-hander Fernando Cabrera. The blast to right field snapped a 2-2 tie.

Right-hander Brandon McCarthy, bidding for the A's fifth rotation spot, went 5 2/3 innings and gave up two runs on five hits in his first start of the spring. He also struck out four and, in 13 2/3 innings, he's fanned 10 and walked none.

"He was outstanding," said A's manager Bob Geren. "That's one of our best starts this spring from any of our guys. He almost went six innings and did a nice job. He was efficient with his pitches.

"He's still fighting for that fifth starter's spot," Geren continued, adding that this latest effort will help McCarthy's cause. "Without a doubt. It was a very good outing."

Two errors helped the Royals in the first inning. In the fourth, Kila Ka'aihue doubled for one of his three hits, stole third and scored on Melky Cabrera's sacrifice fly. The RBI was Cabrera's 11th.

Rule 5 Draft pick Nate Adcock made his first start for the Royals and notched three scoreless innings, giving up three hits. Adcock, trying to win a bullpen role, has not allowed a run in eight innings so far.

"It was the first time I'd thrown three innings in a while and the last inning, I started leaving the ball up sometimes but I'll take it, I'm happy with it," Adcock said.

Tim Collins, Louis Coleman and Aaron Crow each followed with a scoreless inning. The A's finally broke through in the seventh with two runs against Blaine Hardy as Landon Powell and Cliff Pennington stroked RBI singles.

Andy LaRoche singled home a run in the A's eighth against Minor Leaguer Buddy Baumann but Kanekoa Texeira relieved and ended the inning on a double play grounder.

Up next for the Royals: The parade of young pitchers will continue as the Royals go to Goodyear Stadium for a 9:05 p.m. CT game against the Cincinnati Reds on Wednesday. Left-hander Mike Montgomery will start, followed by fellow lefties Danny Duffy and Robert Fish and right-handers Jeremy Jeffress and Greg Holland. All are considered candidates for the bullpen as the Royals shake through their options. Fish is the newest entry, a Rule 5 Draft pick claimed on waivers from the Yankees.

Up next for the A's: Hurlers Tyson Ross and Craig Breslow will be thrown into a Minor League game on Wednesday, while the rest of the club enjoys its only off day of the spring schedule. Cactus League action resumes Thursday when Gio Gonzalez gets the starting nod against the Cubs at Phoenix Municipal Stadium beginning at 1:05 p.m. PT. Also scheduled to pitch in the game is lefty Josh Outman, who is looking to bounce back after experiencing a handful of mechanical mishaps in his previous two outings.

## **Major League: Split-squad action: Pregame notes**

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 3/15/2011 11:22AM

We're still awaiting word on Andrew Bailey, who is in Birmingham today for a visit with Dr. James Andrews. Until the results are in, there's not much to report on the situation, and Bob Geren made it rather clear he'd prefer not to discuss the state of the bullpen until there are more answers. However, it's worth speculating who could be in there come April should Bailey be out of the mix, especially since there are few guarantees around him - Michael Wuertz is making his first spring start today, Craig Breslow has yet to appear in a game and Joey Devine has been battling tightness in his biceps. That means a few under-the-radar guys like Cuban defector Yadel Marti and journeyman Fernando Cabrera may be getting closer looks now.

Breslow will throw in a Minor League game tomorrow, as will Tyson Ross. That means Gio Gonzalez and Josh Outman will throw Thursday. Also on that day, Rich Harden is slated to throw off the mound for the first time in more than a month. He visited the doctor yesterday and was told he'd be good to get going after a couple of days off. He's obviously out of the rotation mix, but Geren said "we don't rule anything out" when asked if Harden, if ready for the season, could still be a bullpen option. I think the team is first concerned about just getting him on the mound again.

Geren is in Surprise today to watch some split-squad action against the Royals. I'm here in Phoenix, where the Cubs should be arriving shortly. Here are both lineups:

HOME: Crisp CF, Barton 1B, Willingham LF, Matsui DH, Suzuki C, Sweeney RF, Kouzmanoff 3B, Timmons 2B, Sogard SS, Anderson P

ROAD: Pennington SS, Ellis 2B, DeJesus RF, Jackson 1B, Carter LF, LaRoche 3B, Powell DH, Donaldson C, Choice CF, McCarthy P

## **Ground rules changed at the Trop for 2011**

By Bill Chastain / MLB.com 3/15/2011

PORT CHARLOTTE, Fla. -- At the request of Major League Baseball, for 2011, the regular-season ground rules pertaining to the catwalks at Tropicana Field will revert to those used during the 2010 regular season.

The rules were changed prior to the 2010 American League Division Series in the aftermath of an Aug. 5 loss to the Twins in which Minnesota's Jason Kubel hit a popup that struck a catwalk and dropped uncaught behind the pitcher's mound as the winning run scored.

Following are the new rules regarding catwalks, lights and suspended objects.



If a batted ball is not judged a home run and remains on a catwalk, light or suspended object, two bases are awarded.

A batted ball that is not judged a home run and strikes a catwalk, light or suspended object in fair territory shall be judged fair or foul in relation to where it strikes the ground or is touched by a fielder. If the ball is caught by a fielder, the batter is out, and runners advance at their own risk.

Unchanged are rules governing batted balls that hit the lower catwalks in fair territory (which are deemed home runs) and balls that strike any catwalk in foul territory (dead balls).

Rules regarding the bullpen area remain the same from 2010 as well.

## **Urban: A's can afford patience with Bailey**

Mychael Urban, CSNBayArea.com

PHOENIX -- The previously giddy Oakland A's fan base had every right to be nervous as it awaited word from Alabama on the results of closer Andrew Bailey's visit to noted surgeon Dr. James Andrews. Let's face it, such consultations never end with the good doctor slapping his patient on the rear and saying, "False alarm, big boy. Sorry you had to come all the way out here, but it's all good. Go get 'em!"

What went down with Dr. Andrews, though, was as close to that as possible. Strained right forearm, he told Bailey. Shut it down for a bit and test it again when the pain goes away.

We can't possibly tell what that means long-term; general manager Billy Beane said there is no timetable for Bailey's return. But he added, "This is welcome news."

Of course it is. And so is this: Although Bailey will almost certainly open the season on the disabled list, the damage that the loss of his services for any length of time will do to the Elephants' high hopes for a return to the postseason after four years of mid-October tee times is very little.

That's not to discount Bailey's value. He's a two-time All-Star who throws peas at the knees and possesses preternatural poise under pressure, a lethal weapon in any fight for baseball glory.

But thanks to Oakland's recent emphasis on depth, the product of an inordinate number of Bailey-like circumstances over the past few years, the A's aren't going to roll over and die when any one of their players -- pitcher, catcher, anyone -- makes a trip to the dreaded DL.

Bailey is a stud, no question about it. He's obviously option 1A in the ninth inning. But not only is there a perfectly comfortable option 1B, there's a 2A, a 2B, 3A, 3B and even a 3C.

Lefty Brian Fuentes, of course, is option 1B. A four-time All-Star, he led the American League with 48 saves for the Angels in 2009, the year Bailey won the Rookie of the Year with 26 saves for the A's.

Fuentes doesn't throw nearly as hard as Bailey, and at 35 years old he is nine years Bailey's senior, but he saved 24 games last season to Bailey's 25, and Beane thought highly enough of Fuentes' durability and skill level to give him a two-year, \$10 million deal (with a \$6.5 million option for 2013) this past offseason.

Fuentes thought highly enough of Beane's other offseason efforts -- adding impact bats to better support a gifted young starting staff and an already solid bullpen, in particular -- to sign up as a setup man for Bailey, but Fuentes is a closer, too. His 187 career saves tell you all you need to know about his potential to dull the pain of Bailey's current elbow issues.

As for the other options, it's not quite clear which label manager Bob Geren would affix to the other relievers at his disposal, but virtually all of them have at least a little experience getting the final out of the game, and all have performed well in the role.

Joey Devine, for instance, was expected to at least share the closer's job going into Spring Training 2009. A hard-throwing, poised young righty like Bailey, he was coming off a record-setting season, having posted a 0.59 ERA in 42 games for the 2008 A's.

He suffered an elbow injury of his own that spring -- Dr. Andrews performed the Tommy John surgery -- and hasn't pitched in a regular-season game since, but he's shown flashes of his old brilliance in camp this year, and though he's currently experiencing "dead arm," the elbow is sound, and it's not a stretch to see him back to his dominant former self with another

month or two of strengthening his wing and fine-tuning the mechanics and muscle memory that dissipate over such a long layoff.

Brad Ziegler was the man with whom Devine was expected to share the closer's role in 2009, having set the baseball world on fire himself in 2008 by starting his career with an American League-record 39 consecutive scoreless innings. A submariner, he's better suited for situational work, and that's what he's been doing for the past couple of seasons, but if the ninth inning rolls around and there's a tough right-handed hitter leading off ahead of two lefties, don't think Geren won't consider having Ziegler handle that righty before turning to Fuentes.

Righty Michael Wuertz and lefty Craig Breslow have been Oakland's top setup men for the past couple of years, but they too have some ninth-inning skins on their locker walls, having combined for 11 saves just last season.

And while Grant Balfour, whom Beane gave about \$8 million to help set up Bailey for the next couple of years (with a reported \$4.5 million option for 2013), has all of eight saves over his seven-year career in the bigs, nobody doubts for a second that he doesn't have the stuff and temperament to shut a game down. He's simply been on teams that haven't needed him in that role.

So breathe easy, A's fans. For one thing, Bailey got pretty good news Tuesday. He might be back saving games by the end of April if everything breaks right.

If he isn't, though, the ninth inning is covered because Beane, in adding Fuentes and Balfour to ensure that Geren has the luxury of bullpen depth, smartly covered himself.

## **Royals, Cubs tee off on A's**

Bee News Services

SURPRISE, Ariz. — If spring training is any indicator, Alex Gordon may be headed for that breakout season Kansas City has been waiting on since drafting him second overall in 2005.

Gordon hit a two-run homer in the seventh to lift the Royals to a 4-3 victory over an Oakland Athletics split squad Tuesday.

Gordon went 2 for 3 to hike his average to .367. He also has drawn a Cactus League-leading 11 walks and has a .558 on-base percentage.

Gordon moved from third base to left field last season and had more at-bats with Triple-A Omaha than Kansas City. He floundered in the majors, hitting .215 with 20 RBIs and 18 extra-base hits in 74 games.

After beginning spring training 1 for 13 — the lone hit a broken-bat single — Gordon is 10 for 17 (.588) and leads the Royals with three home runs and 12 RBIs.

"Alex has got it pretty dialed in," manager Ned Yost said. "It's hard to predict when exactly it's going to click for somebody. Alex has really worked his tail off this winter with Seitz (hitting coach Kevin Seitzer). I mean, everyday in the cage, revamping his swing.

"When he got here, the timing was off. I always had the feeling if the timing got right, look out. We're seeing a little bit of that right now. He needed to see some consistent at-bats."

Right-hander Brandon McCarthy, who signed with the A's as a free agent in December, gave up two runs on five hits in 5 2/3 innings, striking out four and walking none. He threw 55 of his 75 pitches for strikes.

"He was very outstanding," A's manager Bob Geren said. "That's one of our best starts this spring from any of our guys. He almost went six innings and did a nice job. He was efficient with his pitches. He's still fighting for that fifth starter's spot."

Geren said "without a doubt" this has to help McCarthy's chances.

- CUBS (SS) 8, A'S (SS) 1, at Phoenix — Brett Jackson, Tyler Colvin and Wellington Castillo each homered to lead the Cubs' rout.

Cubs right-hander Andrew Cashner, making his second start of the spring and fourth appearance, struggled a bit in the first inning, giving up a leadoff double to Coco Crisp and an RBI single to Daric Barton. Those were the only hits he gave up in 3 1/3 innings, although he did walk two and hit a batter.

- GIANTS XX, DIAMONDBACKS XX, at

- SHORT HOPS — Tests revealed that Oakland closer Andrew Bailey has a strained forearm, news that came as a relief to the Athletics after they feared he had a serious elbow injury. There is no timetable for his return, but Bailey will resume throwing once the discomfort subsides. ... The Yankees' low level of concern about Joba Chamberlain's injured oblique just got a little higher. Manager Joe Girardi said team doctors in New York were looking over an MRI Chamberlain had on Monday and is on hold until further notice. ... Cardinals ace Chris Carpenter is scheduled to make his second spring start today against the Tigers in Lakeland, Fla. ... Phillies third baseman Placido Polanco re-injured his surgically repaired left elbow in the first inning against the Blue Jays. ... Ian Snell decided to retire at age 29 after the Cardinals optioned him to the minors.

## **A's Bailey has strained forearm — not serious**

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Tests reveal that Oakland closer Andrew Bailey has a strained forearm, news that comes as a relief to the Athletics after they feared he had a serious elbow injury.

Bailey will resume throwing once the discomfort subsides.

The A's were concerned when Bailey left Monday's game in the seventh inning against Cleveland in Goodyear, Ariz., grabbing his elbow after throwing a pitch to Ezequiel Carrera.

Bailey flew to Birmingham, Ala., and was examined by Dr. James Andrews, who had performed surgery on Bailey to clean out the elbow area Sept. 24.

Oakland vice president and general manager Billy Beane said: "Any time a pitcher comes out of a game like Andrew did, you hold your breath. While there is no timetable on his return, this is welcome news."

In other A's news:

Alex Gordon hit a two-run homer to lift the Kansas City Royals to a 4-3 victory over an Oakland Athletics split-squad on Wednesday at Surprise, Ariz.

Gordon, who started spring training 0 for 11, went 2 for 3 to hike his average to .367 with three home runs and 12 RBIs.

Right-hander Nate Adcock, a Rule 5 pick from the Pittsburgh Pirates, threw three scoreless innings and has not allowed a run in five appearances, covering eight innings.

Brandon McCarthy, who is competing for an A's rotation slot, gave up two runs on five hits, walked none and struck out four in 5 2-3 innings.

At Phoenix, Brett Jackson, Tyler Colvin and Welington Castillo each homered to lead the split-squad Chicago Cubs to a 8-1 win over an A's split squad on Tuesday.

Cubs right-hander Andrew Cashner, making his second start of the spring and fourth appearance, struggled a bit in the first inning, giving up a leadoff double to Coco Crisp and an RBI single to Daric Barton. Those were the only hits he gave up in 3 1-3 innings, although he did walk two and hit a batter.

The Cubs rallied to take a 2-1 lead in the sixth on a leadoff homer by Jackson, who served as the DH, and a run-scoring single by catcher Max Ramirez.

Colvin, the right fielder, and Castillo, who replaced Ramirez, hit back-to-back homers in the eighth. Chicago put the game out of reach with four runs in the ninth.

## **A's have more players with fantasy baseball value than they have in years**

Sam McPherson, examiner.com, 3/15/2011

Heading into last season, the Oakland Athletics didn't have a lot of players you would want on your fantasy baseball team.

This year, however, things have changed.

During 2010 spring training, maybe the astute stat head would have looked at three A's players as guys worth having (remember, this was before Coco Crisp was signed and before Jack Cust was designated for assignment).

But in 2011, that number could grow to about ten players, depending the format and scoring rules for your league: the offense is improved, the pitching staff is solid, and the bullpen will be amongst the American League's deepest.

The A's hitters have a lot to offer fantasy gamers this year, and they also provide a variety of options for different scoring categories:

- Returning centerfielder Crisp, if healthy, has tremendous ability to hit for power while also stealing bases. Projecting his numbers from 2010 over a full season are enough to make anyone salivate: 16 HRs and 64 SBs. If Crisp plays in 140 games like he did in 2004, 2005 and 2007, he's capable of a lot;
- New leftfielder Josh Willingham has a lot of power, and with a full season, he can hit 25 HRs and drive in 85 runs. If yours is a league that counts walks or on-base percentage, Willingham's value is even higher;
- Shortstop Cliff Pennington is good for a lot of steals, and at position where he has most value in leagues with an "2B/SS" or "MIF" slot, Pennington can help a team out. His batting average should come up this year, and he could steal 40 bases while driving in 50 runs in the new, improved offense;
- Catchers are hard to come by in most fantasy leagues, but Kurt Suzuki plays a lot -- and that can mean good numbers in the HR and RBI categories. If you don't want to be looking at the waiver wire all season, grab Suzuki in the middle rounds of your draft;
- Designated hitter Hideki Matsui is on the decline, and he really should only play against right-handed pitching in 2011. But even as the high side of a platoon for the A's, he should hit well. But the lack of at-bats make him a risky pick in the very late rounds if you're desperate for power.

Infielders like Mark Ellis and Kevin Kouzmanoff can be picked up in a pinch (Ellis for that MIF slot, and Kouz at third base), and if your league values walks, definitely grab Daric Barton. But remember his lack of power and how it will hurt you in other categories.

Oakland starting pitchers were pretty good in 2010, if you hadn't heard, and that will mean some expectation in 2011. Others in your league will be ready to pounce on these guys, so be warned:

- Brett Anderson remains the best fantasy option amongst A's starting positions due to his consistency. He was hurt a lot in 2010, but he still posted a 2.80 ERA on the year in 112+ innings. He has the most ability to get batters out on the Oakland starting staff;
- Gio Gonzalez finally stepped up in 2010, and he should continue to improve in 2011. He needs to drop his walks, but he misses bats. If he avoid the big innings, he's the second-best A's starter in the fantasy world. With a 15-9 record, a 3.23 ERA and 171 strikeouts last year, he put together the most complete season by an A's pitcher since Dan Haren was traded away.

In truth, smart fantasy owners will avoid Trevor Cahill and Dallas Braden in 2011. Cahill was very lucky in 2010 with his rate of "batting average on balls put in play" (BABIP), and a return to normal levels there will hurt his overall numbers. Braden's perfect game last year was also amazing, but he is an innings-eater in the fantasy baseball world. Avoid both of them.

The bullpen offers some interesting possibilities, especially if incumbent closer Andrew Bailey's elbow troubles from last season persist. But the A's went out and signed two big-name relievers to bolster the corps, so there are options here:

- Bailey is the closer if he's healthy, but he's had some trouble there. With 51 saves and a 1.70 ERA in his career, he's clearly got the stuff. But he hurt his elbow today in spring training, and that could impact his value in upcoming drafts. You may want to get some insurance if you draft Bailey;
- Perhaps that insurance can come in the form of new acquisition Brian Fuentes. With 181 careers saves for Colorado, Los Angeles and Minnesota, the veteran lefty can close. If Bailey goes down, he's the next guy up in the 'pen to take the role.

Other relievers like Grant Balfour and Michael Wuertz can provide some fantasy value, but generally, those types of pitchers only have value in leagues that feature holds as a category. So know your rules before you draft.