

A's News Clips, Thursday, March 17, 2011

Oakland A's Tyson Ross makes strong pitch to become fifth starter

By Joe Stiglichm Oakland Tribune

PHOENIX -- Tyson Ross knows how to wedge his way into a spring training story line.

The right-hander appeared to be on the outside looking in regarding the A's crowded fifth starter competition. But much as he did last spring, when he unexpectedly snatched a roster spot with the major league club, Ross has forced his way into the conversation.

With Rich Harden sidelined by an injury and Josh Outman struggling, Ross' impressive showing has positioned him as a strong candidate to become the No. 5 starter. Right-hander Brandon McCarthy and left-hander Bobby Cramer appear to be his main competitors.

Ross has yet to allow a run through four Cactus League games, with seven strikeouts and two walks in 92/3 innings.

"I hope to be in that rotation in the big leagues at some point during the year, whenever the time is right," said Ross, who turns 24 next month. "I'm just trying to focus on my health and getting my pitches to where they should be. The results and what the team decides to do are out of my control."

Ross, who attended Bishop O'Dowd High and Cal, surprisingly broke camp with Oakland last year as a reliever. He had yet to advance past Double-A and had never thrown regularly out of the bullpen.

He held his own early but was sent to the minors in July after his ERA ballooned to 5.49 in 26 appearances.

Ross is recovered from a sprained right elbow ligament that ended his season in August, and the A's have him pegged as a starter -- the role he prefers.

"I just kind of like the routine of starting," he said. "Last year was my first experience really out of the 'pen ever. I had to learn fast."

Perhaps Ross was too versatile for his own good.

He pitched well enough in relief that the A's tapped him for two spot starts when Justin Duchscherer was lost to a hip injury. Upon returning to the bullpen, Ross lost his command.

In his first 11 appearances, Ross issued six walks in 19 innings. Over his final 13 appearances, immediately after his two starts, he walked 13 in 122/3 innings.

Whether or not the shift in roles contributed to his struggles, Ross learned a lot.

"I didn't do the greatest job of pounding the strike zone," he said. "I'm going to try to make that the key, because we've got an awesome team with great defense. They can't help me out if I'm walking guys."

Ross also said he's working to improve his changeup as a complement to his fastball, sinker and slider.

However, one thing the A's won't do is overhaul Ross' mechanics. The 6-foot-6 right-hander slings the ball from a very upright delivery that some believe could lead to shoulder problems.

"Every elite pitcher has a different symmetry," pitching coach Ron Romanick said. "You just try to take out any bad angles in there. He's going to throw the way he's going to throw. You just try to keep him in good fundamentals for his style."

With the A's off Wednesday, Ross threw five innings in a minor league intrasquad game, giving up one homer.

Reliever Craig Breslow, coming off a hamstring injury, threw one inning in the same game and came out of it well. Manager Bob Geren said Breslow is likely to throw in another such game before making his Cactus League debut.

Left fielder Josh Willingham was hit by a fastball on his left elbow Tuesday against the Chicago Cubs. He stayed in the game but was replaced on defense in the top of the fifth. He said he was hopeful the day off would prevent him from missing any games.

Oakland A's Craig Breslow cuts it close for opener

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

With closer **Andrew Bailey** sidelined probably into the start of the regular season, the A's are trying to make sure the rest of the bullpen will be at full strength for Opening Night on April 1.

Much-used left-handed setup man **Craig Breslow** might be cutting it a little close; he's unlikely to appear in his first spring game until next week, with the A's set to break camp on March 27.

Breslow did take a big step toward his return Wednesday, however, throwing 28 pitches in one inning in a simulated minor-league game at Papago Park.

Breslow, whose spring debut has been pushed back by a hamstring strain, said he threw all fastballs and changeups, his leg and his arm both felt good, and he felt his command and velocity were decent.

"It went well," said manager **Bob Geren**, who said that Breslow's next outing is likely to be in another minor-league simulated game because he would not have to cover first base. Breslow was told not to break for first base Wednesday and wound up with no possibilities to do so.

With the rest of the team off Wednesday, fifth-starter candidate **Tyson Ross** got in his work at Papago, throwing 80 pitches in five innings. Geren said Ross had good movement on his pitches. "Good outing," Geren said.

Bullpen boost: Breslow sees first spring action

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- With closer Andrew Bailey out of the mix indefinitely with a strained right forearm, the A's are embracing every ounce of good news they can get from their other bullpen arms.

That includes the progression of Craig Breslow, who saw game action for the first time this spring when he threw 28 pitches in one inning of work against Minor Leaguers at the club's Papago Park facilities on Wednesday. The A's lefty said via text he "got hit around," but added that he felt healthy.

Breslow has been brought along slowly this spring following a 2010 campaign that saw him tally 74 2/3 innings. He's also been nursing a strained hamstring for more than a week while at the same time undergoing his normal bullpen sessions.

According to manager Bob Geren, who watched Breslow alongside fellow spectator and pitching coach Ron Romanick, the southpaw "threw the ball well, and his leg felt good." Breslow was instructed not to make any plays in which he would have to cover first base so as to not push the hamstring issue.

Breslow is slated to throw next on Saturday, and he said he'll either be thrown into another Minor League game or possibly make his Cactus League debut.

The 30-year-old is coming off the strongest season of his career, one which included a team-leading 75 appearances -- a number that ranked second among all American League relievers. He registered a 3.01 ERA and set an Oakland record for strikeouts by a left-handed reliever with 71.

Breslow believes he'll be ready by Opening Day, and he'll look to join fellow lefty Brian Fuentes, along with right-handers Michael Wuertz, Brad Ziegler and Grant Balfour, in showcasing what is expected to be one of baseball's elite bullpens. Jerry

Blevins and Joey Devine -- if healthy -- could round out the group, though the A's could also turn to a fifth-starter candidate -- think Tyson Ross and Brandon McCarthy -- who doesn't start the season in the rotation. Rehabbing righty Rich Harden is also an option once deemed healthy.

Ross joined Breslow at Papago Park on Wednesday, surrendering a couple of hits while throwing 80 pitches in five innings of work against Minor Leaguers. Geren deemed it "a good outing" and said "the ball was moving well" out of the righty's hand.

Major League: Breslow sees game action; Ross also throws

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 3/16/2011, 12:59PM

Hurlers Craig Breslow and Tyson Ross spent the team's off day throwing in a Minor League game at Papago Park. According to reports from Papago, Breslow threw 28 pitches in one inning of work -- his first time seeing game action this spring. He has been brought along slowly because of his workload last year, and he also recently developed a hamstring strain -- though the injury didn't keep him from getting in his bullpen sessions.

According to manager Bob Geren, who watched Breslow alongside pitching coach Ron Romanick, the lefty "threw the ball well, and his leg felt good." He's still nursing the hamstring a bit, so he was instructed not to make any plays where he would have to cover first base. There weren't any such plays, though, so it wasn't even an issue. Breslow will again throw Saturday, and he says it could either be in another Minor League game or an exhibition game.

Ross, meanwhile, threw 80 pitches in five innings and gave up a couple of hits. Geren said "it was a good outing ... and the ball was moving well."