

A's News Clips, Saturday, March 19, 2011

Oakland A's notebook: Bullpen depth might be tested early if closer Andrew Bailey isn't ready for opener

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 3/19/2011

GLENDALE, Ariz. -- Roles will shift in the A's bullpen if closer Andrew Bailey misses the start of the season with a forearm strain.

But Brian Fuentes, the man likely to inherit ninth-inning duties in Bailey's absence, isn't looking that far ahead yet.

"Nothing changes," said Fuentes, a four-time All-Star closer who signed in the winter to set up for Bailey. "I get up when my name is called. Would I like to (close)? Of course. I know I can do it."

Bailey hasn't ruled himself out for opening day. But with 13 days left until the A's opener and no date for him to resume throwing, chances appear slim.

Manager Bob Geren has yet to approach any of his relievers about contingency plans if Bailey misses time.

"It's too early to worry about that," he said.

But if Fuentes were to become the primary closer, then Grant Balfour, Craig Breslow, Michael Wuertz and Brad Ziegler will take on more prominent late-inning roles.

Balfour, along with Fuentes, was signed in the winter to add bullpen depth, but that depth could get tested earlier than the A's planned.

"We'll be fine," Wuertz said. "It's why (general manager) Billy (Beane) went and got the guys he did. You never want to see anybody go down, especially an All-Star closer. But to have another All-Star closer is pretty nice."

Breslow has yet to appear in an exhibition because of a hamstring injury, but he'll pitch in his second minor league intrasquad game Saturday.

Geren said he's confident Breslow will be ready for opening night against Seattle.

Geren also is unconcerned about Balfour, who has a 12.00 ERA and .407 opponents' batting average (11 for 27) in six appearances.

"I'll be all right," Balfour said. "My mechanics are off a bit, but I've got an idea of what's going on."

Fifth-starter candidate Bobby Cramer allowed three homers and eight runs in three innings as the A's were pounded 18-1 by the Chicago White Sox at Camelback Ranch.

He also tweaked his back while executing a first-inning pickoff move, which he said affected him.

Cramer wasn't sugarcoating things afterward.

"I've never had a game like that in my entire career at any level," Cramer said. "It's not like I've been here forever and can compare it to 10 years in the big leagues, but that was embarrassing today."

Cramer appeared to lose ground to Brandon McCarthy and Tyson Ross in the fifth-starter battle.

Josh Outman, who allowed two runs in 3 1/3 innings of relief, didn't exactly jump back into the competition, judging by Geren's comments.

"His fastball was average," Geren said. "They were swinging the bats really well."

Yadel Marti, a nonroster invitee looking to make the bullpen, allowed six earned runs in two-thirds of an inning. Former Stanford star Carlos Quentin went 4 for 4 with four RBIs to lead Chicago.

Center fielder Coco Crisp left the game in the third with what was announced as tightness in his left hamstring.

Crisp had left the stadium by the time reporters were allowed in the clubhouse, but he announced on his Twitter account: "Just a lil tightness in my leg. I'll be good to go (today) if I'm scheduled to play."

According to Geren, Crisp was next scheduled to play Sunday when the A's have split-squad games.

Two memorial services planned for former Oakland A's outfielder Mitchell Page

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 3/19/2011

Two memorial services -- one in Arizona, the other in the Bay Area -- will be held next week for former A's outfielder Mitchell Page, who died March 12.

The first will be Thursday at 5:30 p.m. at Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church, located at 1401 E. Jefferson St. in Phoenix. Page most recently had lived in nearby Glendale.

The second is scheduled for March 27 from noon to 4 p.m. at Rickey's Sports Theater and Grill in San Leandro, located at 15028 Hesperian Blvd.

In lieu of flowers or other gestures, the family has asked for donations to be sent to the Kyle Page Fund, P.O. Box 514, 4096 Piedmont Ave., Oakland, CA 94611.

Chin Music: Random items on an odd day in A's land

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 3/18/2011 1:54 PM

It just ain't right. ... Today's A's-White Sox game starts at 4:05 p.m. local time, and the odd start just throws the daily routine off completely. The A's clubhouse opened at 11 a.m., players stretched at noon and then took batting practice before they make the long drive to Camelback Ranch in Glendale. Everything is pushed back about three hours from what it's been for the past four-plus weeks — not really a day game, not really a night game. It's baseball no-man's land today. But enough with the drama ...

—Today's lineup against the White Sox looks familiar:

Crisp CF; Barton 1B; DeJesus RF; Willingham LF; Matsui DH; Suzuki C; Ellis 2B; Kouzmanoff 3B; Pennington SS; Cramer LHP (with Outman to follow) ...

—Manager Bob Geren says he'll tinker with his lineup, but this is the third time we've seen this look (and second day in a row) when Geren has penciled in an 'A' lineup. So he likes something about it. The top five hitters are no surprise. As for the 6-8 hitters, Geren says they could be interchangeable. I had Kouzmanoff pegged as the possible No. 6 guy, but Geren said there's justification to hit him eighth. "You need power down in the lineup too. I'm not saying he's going to hit there. I fully expect him to rebound in his second year in the league. If the spring is any indication, his swing looks great. He could definitely climb up in the order depending on how he does." Kouzmanoff is hitting .387 with one homer and seven RBIs in 12 games.

—Lefties Bobby Cramer and Josh Outman both take the hill tonight, and it's an important outing for both. Cramer is squarely in the 5th starter discussion and needs to keep up with Brandon McCarthy and Tyson Ross. Outman, who has struggled, really needs to turn things around quickly.

—Keep an eye on the backup infielder situation. Geren said Adam Rosales is recovering as expected from his right foot injury, but from talking to Rosales yesterday, I know he was hoping to be further along by now. Tough to say whether he'll return by May 1 as the A's hope. Andy LaRoche is hitting .324, but he's very unproven as a shortstop. And Steve Tolleson and Eric Sogard have each missed some time and haven't distinguished themselves yet. I wouldn't be surprised to see the A's sign someone with shortstop experience to back up Cliff Pennington.

That's all for now ...

A's 5th-starter candidate Bobby Cramer hit hard

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer, 3/19/2011

(03-19) 04:00 PDT Glendale, Ariz. --

Though manager **Bob Geren** said before Friday's game that he hasn't come to any conclusions about the fifth starter, there is starting to be some separation between the candidates.

Bobby Cramer had stuck fairly close to front-runner **Brandon McCarthy** through the first three weeks of spring training, but Friday the left-hander had a dreadful outing, allowing nine hits, a walk and eight runs in three innings.

"Embarrassing," Cramer said. "I've never had an outing like that at any level. ... I'm not the guy who can afford to have a (bad) day. I have to pitch my (butt) off."

Geren indicated that the team won't place too much emphasis on one outing, saying, "We've got to evaluate the spring as a whole."

Cramer said he tweaked his back slightly while picking off **Alexei Ramirez** and wasn't quite right the next two innings, unable to finish his pitches. He said he doesn't need to have his back checked; it's just something he deals with now and then.

Another fifth-starter candidate, left-hander **Josh Outman**, gave up five hits and two runs in 3 1/3 innings.

"He got through it," Geren said. "His fastball was average. They were swinging the bats really well today. They were on everything everybody threw."

Yadel Marti entered the game unscored upon this spring, but he allowed six runs in two-thirds of an inning.

Crisp exits early: Center fielder **Coco Crisp** left after two at-bats because of tightness in his left hamstring, which he felt while swinging the bat but not running.

Via Twitter, Crisp said he's fine and expects to play today if scheduled. Geren said that he's angling for Sunday.

Rosales update: **Adam Rosales** had his surgically repaired right foot examined by doctors Wednesday, and he still has not been cleared to resume full activity because there is still bone growth ongoing.

Geren said that should not change the timetable for Rosales' return much, considering he is still making progress.

"I don't want to give myself false hope," Rosales said of putting any date on his return. "I hope it's progressing. Right now it's up to nature and my body. I'm doing everything I can."

Memorial: Memorial services for former A's outfielder **Mitchell Page**, who died last week, will be held at 4 p.m. on March 27 at Rickey's Sports Grill in San Leandro.

Cactus League recap

Friday's score: White Sox 18, A's 1

Notable: Daric Barton had the A's only good day, with two hits. He's batting .400. ... Jerry Blevins gave up two runs in one inning and the left-hander's spring ERA is 11.25 as he battles for one of the last spots in the bullpen. ... Josh Willingham drove in the A's run.

Quotable: "I don't want to say it erases a good spring, but statistically, it looks like I had a horrible spring."

- *Fifth-starter candidate Bobby Cramer, who gave up eight runs in three innings Friday. He had a 3.00 ERA entering the game; now it stands at 8.25.*

Today's game: A's (Trevor Cahill) at White Sox (Jake Peavy), 1:05 p.m. Radio: 860.

A's Andrew Bailey reassured his elbow is healthy

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer, 3/18/2011

Andrew Bailey described his visit to Dr. **James Andrews** this week as "nerve-racking," but the outcome was welcome: The A's closer believes he'll resume throwing in a matter of days, rather than weeks.

Bailey said Thursday he felt a "ripping" feeling in his right elbow before he exited Monday's game, but it turns out to have been scar tissue tearing, not uncommon several months after surgery. Andrews did an elbow cleanup in September.

Bailey also has a forearm strain, which is why he'll take at least several days off. He will not throw until he is pain-free and there is no tightness. It might be difficult for him to be ready by Opening Night, but a return in early- to mid-April isn't out of the question.

Bailey said that Andrews, who also did his elbow ligament transplant six years ago, told him the ligament is sound. "Dr. Andrews is very optimistic about me this year, and my future," Bailey said.

Briefly: Craig Breslow (hamstring) will throw in a minor-league simulated game Saturday. ... **Rich Harden** (lat) will resume throwing long toss today. ... **Joey Devine** made 10 throws on flat ground and 10 from the front of the mound. If he recovers well, he might throw a bullpen session Saturday. ... **Trevor Cahill** will get an extra day of rest before starting Saturday's game. ... The A's will donate \$1 of every ticket sold to the April 3 game against Seattle to the Red Cross for relief efforts in Japan.

Cactus League recap

Score: A's 6, Cubs 5

Notable: Gio Gonzalez worked six-plus innings and allowed two runs. ... Ryan Sweeney had two hits and is batting .545. ... Hideki Matsui also had two hits. ... Brad Ziegler allowed his first run of the spring on a homer to Alfonso Soriano. ... Grant Balfour gave up a two-run homer and his ERA for the spring is 12.00. ... Coco Crisp did not reach base for the first time this spring.

Quotable: "I love you, Doc, but I don't want to see you anymore." - Closer Andrew Bailey's words to Dr. James Andrews, who did both of Bailey's elbow surgeries and, this week, diagnosed his forearm strain.

Today: A's (Bobby Cramer) at White Sox (John Danks), 4:05 p.m. Radio: 860 AM.

The Drumbeat: Rosales still on same general timetable, Geren says

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Glendale, Ariz., 3/18/2011 2:46 PM

Bob Geren said this morning that infielder Adam Rosales continues to progress in his recovery from foot surgery, so he should still be on the same basic timetable for his return to the A's in early May.

Rosales had his foot checked by doctors on Wednesday, and he said that new bone is continuing to be laid down, so it's simply a matter of waiting for bone growth and healing. He has not been cleared to full activity, which is what raised the questions about the timetable today, but he is running in a swimming pool, he's doing some hitting - basically anything he can do without needing to lift himself on the balls of his feet (like fielding).

The A's are still thinking that Rosales' fill in is among the group they are considering in camp, with Eric Sogard potentially the best combination of ability to play some shortstop (he's been OK there, though his arm strength isn't ideal) as well as second and third, plus hit. I still would not be surprised at all if the A's pluck someone from the waiver wire before the season starts, especially if defensive ability at short really is the top requirement. It should be: Cliff Pennington is coming off left shoulder surgery and it's unlikely the team wants him playing every day the first several weeks of the season. A day off here and there would be the likely approach with him.

Here's the lineup for today's game, which has an odd start time of 4 p.m. (TV, we're told - prime time for MLB Network - UPDATE, my friend Mark Gonzales of the Chicago Tribune says that's because of a function to follow here at the stadium):

Crisp CF, Barton 1B, DeJesus RF, Willingham LF, Matsui DH, Suzuki C, Ellis 2B, Kouzmanoff 3B, Pennington SS. Bobby Cramer starts, Josh Outman is second.

Geren says that Outman is still in the fifth-starter mix, but then he says that all of the candidates are still in the running and he's not ruling anything out until he actually names a fifth starter. It's fairly obvious that were the season to start now, Brandon McCarthy would have the job, but things could always change in two weeks, I guess. Outman is probably fourth on the list at this point, behind McCarthy, Tyson Ross and Cramer, and it might not be a bad idea to let him get sharp at Triple-A Sacramento, but if he comes on strong here, I suppose there's a slim chance it could all change.

Joey Devine is throwing a side session tomorrow, Geren says.

For space reasons, I couldn't include in today's paper all the information about the A's efforts to raise funds for relief efforts in Japan, so here's more:

As I did mention, the A's will donate \$1 for every ticket sold to the April 3 game to the Red Cross. In addition, the A's have established a new web site, www.oaklandathletics.com/japan, which allows fans to make tax-deductible donations to the A's Community Fund, with 100 percent of proceeds going to the Red Cross.

Corporate sponsors for that April 3 Japanese Heritage Day, including title sponsor Capcom and presenting sponsors NetSuite and Fujitsu, will also contribute thousands of dollars to the cause of Japanese earthquake relief.

Before and during the April 3 game, the A's will conduct a silent auction of signed and game-used baseball equipment by Oakland players, with all proceeds going to the relief efforts. Among the items: personally-signed game jerseys worn by Japanese baseball icons Hideki Matsui and Ichiro Suzuki on 2011 Opening Night. A limited supply of personally-signed 8x10 color photos of Hideki Matsui will also be sold for \$50 each.

As part of Japanese Heritage Day, 10,000 fans will be given complimentary Hideki Matsui T-shirts.

For more information, see www.oaklandathletics.com/japan.

Ziegler hopes to avoid June swoon

By Jane Lee, MLB.com, 03/18/2011

GLENDAL, Ariz. -- Brad Ziegler can essentially break his 2010 campaign into two parts -- June, and months not named June.

The A's righty opened the season with a combined 2.19 ERA and .200 opponents' batting average in 24 games in April and May. Similar numbers -- a 2.66 ERA and .217 opponents' average in 25 games -- came out of July, August and September.

June, though, was a different monster. Ziegler entered the month with a 2.19 ERA. A total of 15 appearances later, he was looking at a 3.65 mark -- the result of a 6.57 ERA and .339 opponents' average garnered in the 30-day span.

"It was terrible," Ziegler said. "I honestly felt like it was a really bad month of June, and if you take out that month, I had a pretty good year."

It was -- on the mound. Off, not so much. June, it turns out, mirrored the personal struggles Ziegler faced all year. A mysterious virus drained him physically, and a divorce from his wife of eight years depleted him mentally. Combined, both made his previous baseball struggles -- his 2004 release from the Phillies and a pair of skull fractures -- seem minute.

No year among his eight in professional baseball proved worse than 2010.

"If you put everything together, there's no doubt," he said. "What I was going through off the field was the toughest thing I've had to ever deal with. It made everything else in my life more challenging, just from the standpoint of gaining emotional strength. I've been through difficult things on the field before, but It took me emotionally as far away as I've ever been at times last year."

There were days during the season when Ziegler spent nearly six or eight hours of his morning on the phone before heading to the field, his personal life consumed by divorce settlement papers and a legal push for balanced custody of his 3-year-old daughter, Kaylin. Then there were other days when he spent those six or eight hours in bed, following eight or 10 hours of sleep the night before, as he battled with his body for any dose of energy.

"All that time spent on the phone, and then trying to perform at the top level hours later, I didn't feel like it affected me while I was on the mound, but looking back on it, I'm not sure how it couldn't have," he said. "I didn't feel like myself on the mound last year. All the stress off the field may have led to some of the struggles I endured in the middle of the season and the severe weakness and fatigue I had."

The 31-year-old Ziegler went to doctors, underwent multiple blood tests and never really found answers for his worn-down state. He showed symptoms of mononucleosis, but the viral disease was ultimately ruled out.

"I gave it everything I had when I was out pitching," he said, "but I feel like there was so much going on that I couldn't be 100 percent."

It wasn't so much noticeable to the average eye, though, and Ziegler -- after offering up a home run to Ty Wigginton in Baltimore on the last day of that miserable June -- promised himself to turn the page come July. He rested up during the All-Star break and "felt really good after that."

It showed in the improved numbers, though Ziegler's woes against lefties were continually on display. The year saw him yield four home runs -- three to left-handed hitters -- in 60 2/3 innings after allowing just four in 133 frames over the first two seasons of his career. Lefties hit .317 off him; righties managed a .213 mark.

Unlike his problems off the field, his work against left-handers was something Ziegler could consciously attempt to control, or at least make better. And it's exactly what the reliever has deemed his focus this spring in an effort to make himself more versatile. He's even returned to a pitch he hasn't thrown since before his sidearm days -- the two-seam fastball.

"It's just a different look," Ziegler said. "Hitters might see a different spin on it. I'm trying to find something to create more movement and get the ball to sink more."

Much of that mindset comes from watching his opponents, particularly left-handers, hit the ball in the air. Ziegler in no way considers himself to be or is viewed as a strikeout pitcher. He knows his balls are going to be in play -- he'd just prefer it be via the ground ball unless fly balls are being hit the other way. Ziegler has been fairly successful this spring in that regard. But in turning his attention to lefties, he's somehow lost sight of the basics when facing right-handers.

"The last two righties I've faced have gotten an RBI single and a homer off me," he said. "That has to be something I focus on. I know what I need to do, but I'm working on what I would want to do to a lefty, even when I'm facing a righty.

"Throwing first-pitch sliders, it's not something I can't do, just something I haven't done in the past and I want to be able to do. There's times where I've faced a hitter this spring and it's not a good pitch to throw, but I want to throw it anyways just to work on it. I've given up a couple hits in the process or gotten behind hitters who I should just be attacking. I want to work on this now, so that when the season rolls around I'm confident with every pitch I'm throwing no matter the situation or the game or the count. I feel like I'm getting to that point."

In 6 2/3 innings spanning seven Cactus League games, Ziegler has offered up seven hits and two walks while tallying six strikeouts and a .269 opponents' batting average. He's quietly handed the team a consistent bullpen presence and is in line to join Brian Fuentes, Grant Balfour, Michael Wuertz and Craig Breslow as roster certainties come Opening Day.

"What's made him real good against righties, he's using that to alter his approach against lefties," manager Bob Geren said. "He's throwing the ball well."

"Moving forward, I'm really excited about what this year holds," Ziegler said. "There's a lot of reason to be optimistic. This year my goal is to start out in April, pitching like I was at the end of the year, and not have that bad month or even a bad week or two. I realize there's going to be outings when I give up runs, but as long as they don't string together and it becomes a habit, then I can go out and pitch with confidence."

Aiding in the positive approach is a new romantic relationship -- "it's keeping things peaceful and happy off the field," he says -- as well as large amounts of time with his daughter. The adversity faced in 2010 has, of course, lent him a welcomed perspective and a reminder of his old identity.

"One way or another, I'm glad that that's past me and I'm able to move forward and just kind of be myself," he said. "I feel like I have my personality back and my energy back, and hopefully that translates into better results on the field."

Crisp exits early with tight hamstring

By Jane Lee, MLB.com, 3/18/2011

GLENDALE, Ariz. -- Coco Crisp left Friday's game against the host White Sox in the bottom of the third inning after experiencing tightness in his left hamstring while swinging the bat.

The A's outfielder went 0-for-2 in his pair of plate appearances and was replaced by David DeJesus in center field. Conor Jackson was brought in to take DeJesus' spot in right field.

"He felt OK running down the line, but we felt it best we get him checked out before it becomes a problem," manager Bob Geren said after the game.

The A's skipper noted Crisp will likely not be in Saturday's lineup against the White Sox because he's giving the majority of his regular position players the day off before the club takes part in split-squad action on Sunday.

Crisp entered the game batting .432 with a team-leading 10 RBIs in 12 contests this spring. He's coming off an injury-plagued campaign that saw him play in just 75 games.

Cramer weighs in on spring setback

GLENDALE, Ariz. -- A's lefty Bobby Cramer didn't shy away from addressing what he deemed not only his worst outing of the spring but the worst of his career -- an "embarrassing" eight-run performance spanning just three innings against the White Sox on Friday.

"I don't want to say it erases a good spring but, statistically, it makes it look like I've had a horrible spring because of one bad outing," Cramer said. "It's [disappointing] because, when I was throwing in the 'pen, I thought it was going to be a really good day. I felt like I had everything today that I needed to go out and dominate the game, and then to have the results I had makes it more frustrating."

The 31-year-old hurler entered Friday's contest as one of the club's most consistent performers. He had quietly compiled nine solid innings of work, giving up a combined three runs and six hits with three walks -- numbers that have kept him in the bid for the fifth-starter spot.

But the damage began early for Cramer, as Chicago tallied three runs in the first before he ended the inning by picking off Alexei Ramirez at first base. The A's hurler tweaked his back on the play and was admittedly affected thereafter, though he didn't immediately inform the team of his pain.

"It's just something I fight here and there during the season every year," he said. "It's nothing that ever keeps me from pitching. It just makes it tough sometimes.

"I'm not going to take myself out after one inning. I'm going to try to finish and get my work in. You never foresee it making that drastic of a difference, but it did. I didn't feel good the rest of the way, and I pitched like crap."

Cramer uncharacteristically surrendered three home runs in his final two innings. The southpaw has made his disdain for the long ball well known since coming to Oakland -- he gave up just 26 in 508 Minor League frames -- and was visibly frustrated when discussing the balls that disappeared on Friday.

"Cutters and a curveball," he said. "Nothing was sharp. I had nothing behind the ball. I didn't feel like I had anything behind the ball. I felt like I was just throwing batting practice out there."

Cramer is hoping "one terrible outing" doesn't take away from the good ones he's produced otherwise this spring. If not bound for the rotation, he could potentially still be considered as a long-man option for an elite A's bullpen. With that in mind, he's already gearing for his next appearance.

"I've never in my life had a game like today, and I don't expect to again, and I never have bad games back to back," he said. "I know next time I go out I'll be fine and get back on track."

A's manager Bob Geren didn't go so far as saying how Friday's results would affect Cramer's roster chances, but he made it clear they wouldn't take him out of any competition.

"He's been throwing the ball real well," he said. "We're not going to look at one good outing or one bad outing. We'll evaluate them all as a whole."

Rosales unsure if he'll be ready by May 1

GLENDALE, Ariz. -- A's infielder Adam Rosales is pleased with the gradual progress he's made with his surgically repaired right foot, but he is growing impatient by the day and can't necessarily promise to be back in action by the May 1 return date that the team initially put in place.

Rosales still can't run at full speed or extend to his tiptoes on his right foot, which is preventing him from hitting while standing up. Rather, he's been taking swings from his knees and has also played catch while undergoing minor baseball activity.

Rosales, 27, underwent right foot surgery at the beginning of December and will continue to adhere to regular doctor visits -- one of which hopefully has him in the clear to resume his backup duties. Before the onset of his injury in August, he was batting .271 with seven home runs and 31 RBIs in 80 games and was the first A's player since 1995 to start at least one game at six positions.

With Rosales out of the Opening Day mix, Geren will continue to monitor a handful of infielders that can fulfill his utility role come season's start. Eric Sogard, Steve Tolleson and Andy LaRoche are all being considered.

Worth noting

A's fifth-starter candidate Josh Outman received 3 1/3 innings of work on Friday. The A's lefty, who in recent outings had struggled with his mechanics, gave up two runs on five hits with no walks and two strikeouts. "He got through it," Geren said. "His fastball was average. [The White Sox] just swung the ball really well."... Right-hander Joey Devine will throw a bullpen on Saturday and if all goes well he'll return to game action next week following a bout with biceps tightness. ... Lefty Jerry Blevins, who gave up two runs in one inning of work Friday, has allowed at least one run in five of his seven spring outings. Opponents are 14-for-38 (.368) against him. ... Fellow reliever Michael Wuertz is scheduled to appear in his second Cactus League contest on Saturday, while Craig Breslow will go in a Minor League game as one final tuneup for his spring debut.

Cramer, Crisp banged up against White Sox

By Barry M. Bloom, MLB.com, 03/18/2011

GLENDALE, Ariz. -- Gordon Beckham hit a three-run homer and Paul Konerko and Carlos Quentin added solo shots as the White Sox walloped the A's, 18-1, on Friday in Cactus League action at Camelback Ranch.

Bobby Cramer, a left-hander who is vying this spring for the fifth spot in the Oakland rotation, was pelted for eight runs -- all of them earned -- on nine hits in just three innings of work. He walked one, whiffed two and allowed three homers.

After his outing, Cramer said he tweaked his back on a pickoff attempt in the first inning, which piled on the fact that center fielder Coco Crisp was forced to an early exit because of a tight left hamstring.

Left-hander John Danks started for the White Sox and earned the win, holding the A's to four hits and a run in six innings. He struck out four and walked none. Danks is 2-0 with a 1.65 ERA in 17 2/3 innings over the course of four starts.

Beckham's homer followed singles by Brent Morel and Lastings Milledge as the White Sox took a 6-1 lead after two innings. Konerko and Quentin hit back-to-back homers to left to open the third. It was Konerko's first homer of the spring and Quentin's second.

Beckham also had a double, a walk and a stolen base in the game. Quentin was 4-for-4, adding two doubles and a single to his homer. He scored three runs and drove in four.

Both Beckham and Quentin doubled in Chicago's six-run fourth.

The A's had taken a 1-0 lead in the top of the first on Daric Barton's double and Josh Willingham's single. But the White Sox came back with a three-spot in the bottom of the inning on a pair of stolen bases and consecutive singles by Konerko, Quentin and Alexei Ramirez.

Up next: Righty Trevor Cahill is scheduled to make his fifth start on Saturday when the A's host the White Sox at Phoenix Municipal Stadium beginning at 1:05 p.m. PT in a Cactus League matchup available live on Gameday Audio.

Jake Peavy, despite suffering from symptoms of a bad bout with the flu the last few days, is still listed to make his fourth start of the spring in the back end of the home-and-home series. Peavy is continuing his comeback from July 14 shoulder surgery.

A's lose to White Sox, 18-1

ASSOCIATED PRESS

GLENDALE, Ariz. — All of a sudden, the Chicago White Sox lineup broke loose.

Carlos Quentin had four hits, including a homer, and drove in four runs Friday to power Chicago to an 18-1 rout of the Oakland Athletics.

Quentin singled and doubled twice, but he wasn't the only White Sox hitter who had a big day. Paul Konerko homered and drove in three runs, and Gordon Beckham had three hits, three RBIs and scored four runs. Tyler Flowers added a two-run homer in the eighth.

Konerko and Quentin hit consecutive homers to start the third. Chicago sent 11 batters to the plate in the fourth to open a 14-1 cushion.

"Yesterday I had people all over me because we only had three hits," manager Ozzie Guillen said. "Then today we score (18) so all of a sudden they say, 'Save it for the season.'"

The White Sox jumped out to a 3-1 lead in the first on two-out RBI singles by Konerko, Quentin and Alexei Ramirez. A three-run homer by Beckham in the second extended it to 6-1.

John Danks pitched six solid innings for Chicago, yielding four hits and a run while striking out four. But the most important statistic was the number in the walk column: zero.

"This is the biggest step toward being ready, results-wise," he said. "I threw all four pitches for strikes."

The left-hander had walked eight batters through his first 10 1-3 innings in Cactus League play.

"Hopefully, the pitching we've been throwing out there carries over and the offense carries over," Danks said.

Oakland starter Bobby Cramer gave up eight runs and nine hits (including three homers) over three innings. Josh Willingham had an RBI single in the first for the A's.

Cramer tweaked his back in the first inning as he picked off Ramirez at first base for the third out. Cramer said it wasn't anything serious, but the injury still took its toll.

"I felt like I had a chance on every pitch in the first inning," he said. "First pitch of the second inning on, I didn't feel right. I couldn't finish, didn't have my legs under me. I felt like I was fighting myself."

Cramer said it's a recurring problem that he battles through from time to time.

Vying for a spot in the starting rotation, he was having a great spring with a 3.00 ERA through four appearances.

"I'm not that guy who can afford to have a (bad) outing like I had today. I have to pitch my (rear end) off every time," he said. "I've never had a game like that at any level. That was embarrassing."

Phil Humber pitched three hitless innings for a save.

NOTES: Oakland CF Coco Crisp left the game due to tightness in his left hamstring, but immediately tweeted that he isn't concerned and expects to play Saturday. Crisp leads the team with 16 hits this spring. ... White Sox RHP Jake Peavy was in the clubhouse after being absent the previous two days with flu symptoms. Peavy still expects to make his scheduled start Saturday, but Guillen said the team would monitor him very closely.

Urban: Carter's future an A's mystery

Mychael Urban, CSNBayArea.com, 3/18/2011

PHOENIX -- It's spring training 2009, superstar slugger [Matt Holliday](#)'s first day of batting practice in an [Oakland A's](#) uniform, and a steady stream of towering drives are clearing the wall in left field.

Onlookers watch and marvel at the ease with which the right-handed hitter in the cage launches moon shot after moon shot. There's a palpable excitement in the air.

The shots aren't coming off the bat of Holliday, though. They're being produced by 22-year-old prospect [Chris Carter](#), who appears engaged in a game of "top this" with the veteran All-Star, looking very much like the All-Star-in-the-making he'd established himself as with a monster 2008 season in the minors leagues.

A's manager Bob Geren watches Carter, a 6-foot-5 specimen acquired in the blockbuster trade that sent [Dan Haren](#) to the [Diamondbacks](#) two offseasons prior and speaks with a trace of a smile.

"Makes it look easy, doesn't he?"

Carter, who'd blasted 39 homers with 104 RBIs for Single-A Stockton the previous season, continued to make the game look easy in 2009, batting .328 with 28 homers and 115 RBIs while splitting the 2009 season at Double-A Midland and Triple-A Sacramento on the way to claiming Oakland's organizational Player of the Year award.

Since then, however, it's been anything but easy. With less than two weeks remaining in spring training 2011, Carter's future is as up in the air as the rockets he was launching into the desert air two years ago.

The A's sent him back to Sacramento to start the 2010 season, and the hope was that he'd crush his way onto the big-league team within a couple of months to provide the type of power their Opening Day roster in Oakland so clearly lacked. It didn't quite work out that way. At all.

Carter looked nothing like an All-Star in the making for the first few months of the season in Sacramento, but he bounced back with enough production -- the A's remained in desperate need for some pop in the lineup -- to finally earn a promotion to the big leagues on Aug. 9. Nineteen hitless at-bats and 12 strikeouts later, he was sent back to Sac, having frequently looked feeble at the plate, particularly against quality sliders that slid off the outer half of the plate.

Recalled when Sacramento's season ended, Carter started his second chance with 14 more hitless at-bats but eventually started looking more comfortable. After snapping the ugly 0-for-33 skid, he hit a couple homers, drove in a handful of runs and averted an unmitigated disaster.

He's been much better this spring, taking a respectable .263 batting average (10-for-38) with a team-high 10 walks, a .417 on-base percentage, seven RBIs and two homers -- in the same game -- into Friday's game against the White Sox. Yet it remains far from a lock that he'll break camp with the big boys, in large part because he's a mystery defensively.

Is he an outfielder? A first baseman? A designated hitter? Nobody seems to know, and no matter what he is, there doesn't appear to be room.

If he's an outfielder, the offseason additions of David DeJesus and Josh Willingham represent roadblocks.

If he's a first baseman, Daric Barton's solid 2010 and even-better showing this spring make his chances of catching on slim.

Hideki Matsui was brought in to handle the DH role.

"I just don't see it," said a National League scout based in Arizona this spring. "He's too young to be a backup to anybody, and I still can't figure out where he's going to end up."

Several scouts asked to assess Carter are skeptical that he'll end up in the outfield; not athletic enough.

First base? Needs quite a bit of work, they say.

So DH? The A's are loathe to lock such a young player into a one-dimensional role, but several scouts nodded vigorously at the notion.

Carter, they all agreed, can hit. He's going to hit for power in the big leagues, and once he learns to lay off the teasers off the plate that haunted him during his first callup last summer, the plate discipline he showed in the minors will translate to high OBPs at the highest level.

So why not, when Matsui likely leaves after his one-year deal expires at the end of the season, pencil in Carter as the DH?

"We have confidence in our coaches," Geren said earlier this spring. "Chris is a hard worker, our coaches are hard workers. We don't need him to be a Gold Glover, but we all think he's capable of developing into someone we can use in the field. You don't want to limit a guy."

You don't want to waste his obvious strengths, either, and struggling defensively can affect a youngster at the plate.

Thus, a proposal: Start Carter at Triple-A again. Give him work in the outfield and at first base before games; you never know. Maybe something clicks.

But when game-time comes, let him do what he does best, and only that. So he's a 24-year-old DH? Is that so bad?

Not if he rips it up. Not if he forces his way into a left-right platoon with Matsui should the Japanese rock star struggle against lefties.

And certainly not if Carter takes over the role full-time next season and turns back the clock to spring training 2009.