

## A's News Clips, Thursday, March 24, 2011

### A's notebook: Opening night starter remains mystery as manager Bob Geren has four possible candidates

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

MESA, Ariz. -- The twists continue regarding the A's opening night starter, with right-hander Trevor Cahill emerging as Wednesday's candidate du jour.

Cahill had his next start pushed back two days from Thursday to Saturday, which could put him in line to start the April 1 opener against Seattle on five days' rest.

Write that in pencil and keep an eraser handy. Brett Anderson, Gio Gonzalez and Dallas Braden also were viewed as possible candidates in recent days based on how the rotation was unfolding, only to have the order switched around to keep the guessing game going.

Manager Bob Geren stayed mum on the subject, and he was annoyed that a schedule listing Cahill as Saturday's starter was even posted for the media to see.

"I don't know what schedule you saw," Geren said. "I'll let you know at the end of the week who's pitching."

The A's have days off immediately before and after the opening three-game series against the Mariners, giving Geren flexibility for how he wants to slot pitchers.

Anderson currently lines up to pitch the opener if he stays on his regular five-day turn, but Geren said all of his starters -- Anderson, Braden, Cahill, Gonzalez and, most likely, Brandon McCarthy -- will get at least one extra day of rest before the regular season begins.

Cahill is not wasting time speculating, a sound strategy at this point.

"I have no idea," he said. "I just come here and pitch when they tell me to pitch."

Cahill enjoyed the best 2010 season of all the A's starters, going 18-8 with a 2.97 ERA, so choosing him for the opener is justified if Geren wants to reward someone for past performance.

Gonzalez settled down after an erratic first inning and was solid in his final Cactus League start during a 3-1 A's loss to the Chicago Cubs. The left-hander allowed two runs, three hits, a walk and a wild pitch in the first, but he was unscored upon for the rest of his 52/3 innings.

Gonzalez was terrific in five spring starts, posting a 2.14 ERA with 25 strikeouts in 21 innings. He allowed just 13 hits and eight walks.

"I feel great," he said. "My arm feels great. I've got to stay healthy and continue from there."

He's slated to pitch one of the three Bay Bridge Series games against the Giants that start Monday, his final tuneup before the regular season.

Grant Balfour relieved Gonzalez with two outs in the sixth and struck out Alfonso Soriano, the only batter he faced. That was Balfour's second good outing since he said he was working on mechanical struggles. He's scheduled to go again Thursday against Arizona, his first time pitching on back-to-back days this spring.

Designated hitter Hideki Matsui returned to the lineup after sitting out Tuesday with a stiff neck and went 0 for 3, dropping his average to .133.

Matsui was wearing large, clear bandages on his nose and forehead Wednesday, which he said was the result of a fall he took Monday night.

"I tripped at home and hit my head pretty hard on the ground," Matsui said through interpreter Roger Kahlon.

The stiff neck was the result of sleeping in an awkward position, Matsui said.

He's slated to see his first action in left field Thursday, since the Diamondbacks didn't grant permission for a DH.

Joey Devine (right biceps) allowed three runs in one inning against minor league hitters.

### **Chin Music: A's opening-day starter issue takes another twist**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 3/23/2011 11:53AM

Here's the lowdown on the the morning's news before the A's take on the Cubs in Mesa ...

The opening night starter mystery continues, and it's reaching the comical stage at this point. Trevor Cahill has been pushed back two days to make his next start Saturday, which makes him the Candidate of the Day to take the ball in the April 1 opener. This gives Cahill six days of rest between spring starts, which is a little unusual at this point in camp. Cahill told me this morning there's no physical issue that makes him require extra rest, so logic says that the A's are lining him up for the regular season opener against the Mariners. He would be making that start on an extra day's rest, as the A's are off March 31, the day before the opener.

A's manager Bob Geren refuses to announce anything to the media, and he was bent out of shape that Cahill's next start was posted on a bulletin board this morning for the media to see. But it's routine for lineups and pitching schedules to be posted in that area — not for the media to see but for the players themselves to know what they're doing — so it doesn't seem like a huge deal.

If it ultimately comes down to Cahill getting the start, it makes a lot of sense based on the terrific season he posted last year. He won 18 games and emerged as the staff ace, at least last season. It's tough to really label anyone as the No. 1 guy on this staff right now. They're all so young, and their credentials are pretty similar. Cahill is the guy I would have picked as opening day starter heading into camp.

—The A's lineup: Crisp CF, Sweeney RF, Willingham LF, Matsui DH, Suzuki C, Ellis 2B, Jackson 1B, Pennington SS, Sogard 3B, Gonzalez LHP

### **A's Brandon McCarthy has altered pitching style**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Pop singers reinvent themselves, and politicians do, too, but it's not all that easy to do in professional baseball, Rick Ankiel aside.

The A's have a chameleon in their rotation, though. Presumptive fifth-starter Brandon McCarthy has changed his style of pitching in the past year, going from a power pitcher to more of a crafty type. He relies on movement now, rather than trying to throw pitches past hitters.

"I was a four-seam guy without a plus fastball," McCarthy said. "I had a big curveball and a four-seam fastball, not a great combo in the major leagues. I kind of had to adjust."

Sinkers and cutters turn out to be a good fit for McCarthy, who is hoping for better health and improved performance.

"There's nothing straight," A's catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "That's helped him a lot. Even his curveball has more angle to it. He's got the experience to be able to make the adjustments that will make him successful."

McCarthy, 27, signed with Oakland as a free agent in December after losing parts of each of the past four seasons to injuries, including three stress fractures in his right shoulder. His new style takes some pressure off the shoulder because he is no longer throwing straight over the top; McCarthy considers himself more of a sidearm-style pitcher.

He's not, really, though - his arm slot hasn't moved all that much, but, McCarthy said, his shoulder position has. Instead of rotating his shoulder straight over the top, he keeps the shoulder far more level in his delivery, which relieves stress on the joint.

Not trying to blow away hitters helps the wear-and-tear on the shoulder, and by picking up a sinker and a cutter, McCarthy has added two nice options to his repertoire. They go with the four-seam fastball, curveball and a changeup that pitching coach Ron Romanick says he likes a lot and would like McCarthy to use more often.

Romanick has moved McCarthy on the rubber, toward the first-base side, and that, Romanick said, "has really opened up the plate for him, and his stuff is crisper and he's throwing harder."

McCarthy is a lanky 6-foot-7, which is one reason he thought he simply could throw high fastballs and get away with that as a young pitcher. To hitters, he said, it looks like the ball is coming out of the lights when a pitcher is that tall.

McCarthy's height is an advantage. "Everything is downward," Suzuki said. "He'll get a lot of groundballs."

Adding a sinker and cutter wasn't all that difficult for McCarthy, who said, "I never thought about it; I'm dumb that way. There aren't things I think are outside the realm of possibility."

He quizzed teammates and coaches about grips and techniques and found the right mix through trial and error. Now that he has it all down, he can work on getting ready for the season, which is a nice feeling after missing so much time. He's 1-0 with a 3.05 ERA and has 14 strikeouts and no walks in 20 2/3 innings.

"I just like being able to focus on pitching," he said. "If I feel like this in six months, I'll be happy."

McCarthy also has a new shoulder regimen, and he has upped his workout routine overall. He's often in the weight room, stretching or riding the exercise bike.

"Whatever happens, I want to have done my best, I don't want to be known for just sitting around," he said. "My first couple of years, I didn't have the work-ethic thing figured out, and it caught up to me. I was leaving way too much to chance.

"Now, I'll enjoy myself when I'm done, but when I'm here, I'm working."

### **Career stats**

Year	Tm	G	GS	W	L	ERA
2005	CHW	12	10	3	2	4.03
2006	CHW	53	2	4	7	4.68
2007	TEX	23	22	5	10	4.87
2008	TEX	5	5	1	1	4.09
2009	TEX	17	17	7	4	4.62
2010	DNP					
Totals		110	56	20	24	4.56

## **Oakland A's news, March 23**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Manager **Bob Geren** wouldn't confirm it, but a pitching schedule posted in the clubhouse Wednesday morning had **Dallas Braden** and **Trevor Cahill** flipped in the rotation, with Braden going Friday and Cahill on Saturday, and the A's are listing Braden as the Friday starter in their press notes.

That means that Cahill would start on six days' rest against Colorado, and the All-Star returns to being a viable candidate for the Opening Night-starter spot, which Geren will not announce for another day or two.

Pitching coach **Ron Romanick** said that the extra days off for starters this spring aren't really rest, per se - the time is used for additional work on the side, in order to refine pitches and iron out any mechanical issues.

Like Geren, Romanick stressed that the A's top four starters are all legitimate Opening Night-starter options. "Each of them is just as good as the others," he said.

**No advance:** The A's have parted ways with advance scout **Joe Sparks** and they did not fill the position. Instead, for the first time, all of the team's advance scouting reports will be provided by a service, Inside Edge, which prepares specifically tailored information for many major-league teams and players.

Some teams supplement their own advance reports with Inside Edge and others have done away with advance scouts entirely in recent years.

**Matsui update: Hideki Matsui** was back in the lineup after missing one game with neck stiffness. He was wearing a gray plastic bandage on the bridge of his nose and his forehead after tripping and falling Tuesday morning but he said that fall had nothing to do with the neck stiffness, which he had when he awoke Monday. Matsui went 0-for-3 and is 6-for-45 (.133) this spring. He'll play half of today's game in the outfield.

### **Cactus League recap**

**Wednesday's score:** Cubs 3,

A's 1

**Notable:** Gio Gonzalez's strong spring continued as he allowed two runs and four hits in 5 2/3 innings. He has a 2.14 ERA and he has 25 strikeouts in 21 innings. ... Grant Balfour replaced Gonzalez and ended the sixth by striking out Alfonso Soriano. Balfour had allowed runs in four of his previous seven outings. ... Josh Willingham, who doubled in a run, is 6 for his past 17.

**Quotable:** "I face them every start. They know me pretty well. It's a back-and-forth party right now."

- *A's starter Gio Gonzalez on his second consecutive two-run outing against the Cubs.*

**Today:** A's (Bobby Cramer) at Diamondbacks (Joe Saunders), 1:10 p.m.

### **Drumbeat: Full circle back to Cahill as potential Opening Night starter**

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Phoenix Muni 3/23/2011 10:11AM

I might have to take up Grant Balfour on his offer to be my next guess for Opening Night starter, since I've been completely through the top four guys and now I'm back to my original projected Opening Night starter, Trevor Cahill.

It wasn't looking as if Cahill would be in line to work on April 1, because of his pitching schedule. But based on the new pitching schedule posted this morning, Cahill's next start will come on Saturday - on a full six days' rest. That means he could then go on Opening Night on five days' rest.

That's significant extra rest, but pitching coach Ron Romanick said that the idea is that the starters are working even harder on the things they're trying to refine during the days between starts. Those are fairly significant work days. So six days' rest really isn't rest, it's a lot of honing and drills and repetition. Makes it tough for the beat writers to count out every five days and work out an Opening Night starter, but then again, it's given me a lot to write about - every time the schedule changes, it's a new story. Not necessarily an accurate one, but as you all know, I've always been clear that this is speculation only, based on the schedule as we know it.

Manager Bob Geren wouldn't confirm that Dallas Braden and Cahill have been switched this morning, though Braden is listed on the board for Friday and Cahill for Saturday. Geren doesn't want to be locked into anything at this point because there is always the possibility that one starter will need an extra day of rest here or there and everything could change again.

Fifth starter Brandon McCarthy also is listed for Friday, and Geren said he doesn't necessarily need to split up two right-handers (such as Cahill and McCarthy) in the rotation. Plus, that's always an easy adjustment during the season with offdays. So right now (emphasis right now, obviously they're happy to be flexible), it looks like: Cahill, Brett Anderson, Gio Gonzalez, Braden and McCarthy. No announcement and all subject to change. And should the team want to split up the righties, McCarthy could go fourth and Braden fifth.

Geren said yesterday when I asked that he doesn't have a plan right now to skip the fifth starter the first time through the rotation during the regular season; the A's have an offday on April 4, so they could go with four starters for the first week.

Hideki Matsui came in yesterday with a bump on his nose and bandage on his forehead, and when I asked, he said he'd done it on the carpet. I asked how that had happened and he said it was an accident, he wasn't paying attention, but it had nothing to do with his neck stiffness. He then told Japanese reporters he tripped and fell yesterday morning, which is how he'd incurred the facial injuries, and today, Matsui is sporting what I'm told are the latest high-tech bandages - sort of a gray plastic film is now covering the bridge of his nose and his forehead. It is definitely a "Phantom of the Opera" kind of look.

He's back in the lineup today, so the neck stiffness is gone, and if you happen to see him with the gray plastic film on his face, that's why. Looks unusual, but he's fine.

Here's the lineup behind Gonzalez: Crisp cf, Sweeney rf, Willingham lf, Matsui dh, Suzuki c, Ellis 2b, Jackson 1b, Pennington ss, Sogard 3b

## **Teams' value increases by 7 percent**

Associated Press

Forbes' annual report finds the average value of Major League Baseball teams has increased 7 percent from last year to an all-time high of \$523 million.

The Yankees, worth \$1.7 billion, lead the way for the 14th straight year since Forbes began valuing franchises in 1998. The Giants, coming off their first World Series title in San Francisco, are seventh at \$563 million. The A's rank 29th at \$307 million.

Only three teams' values didn't increase: the Mets', Padres' and Indians'.

The Texas Rangers' value increased 25 percent as new ownership took over the franchise and it reached its first World Series.

The Red Sox were second at \$912 million in the report. The Dodgers, Cubs and Mets round out the top five.

**Nothing serious:** Phillies pitcher Roy Oswalt was hit behind the right ear by Manny Ramirez's line drive during a 4-1 loss to Tampa Bay on Wednesday.

X-rays were negative and Oswalt was diagnosed with a neck bruise. The Phillies said he did not lose consciousness.

**Briefly:** Blue Jays right-hander Brandon Morrow, who went to Cal, will start the regular season on the disabled list because of right forearm inflammation. ... Hunter Pence homered for the first time this spring but left the game with a cut that required four stitches on his left shin. ... Opening Day in the Japanese professional leagues has been pushed back until next week because of the effects of the recent earthquake and tsunami. ... Braves minor-league manager Luis Salazar returned to camp, two weeks after being struck in the face by a foul ball and losing his left eye. ... The Mariners' Adam Kennedy has been charged with a misdemeanor following his January drunken-driving arrest.

### **Sogard positions himself to make A's roster**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

MESA, Ariz. -- Eric Sogard has quietly positioned himself at the forefront of the backup infield battle, his offensive skills already proven and his defensive presence steadily progressing thanks to a healthy dose of work.

Upon learning that ultra utility man Adam Rosales was likely starting the season on the disabled list, the 24-year-old Sogard took his offseason routine to a new level with help from A's infield coach Mike Gallego, who has emphasized improved footwork to make up for Sogard's lack of a Cliff Pennington-esque arm.

"I knew there was an opportunity for me to step up, and I took that and worked really hard this winter," Sogard said. "Gags and I began working about a month before camp started, especially at shortstop. I did everything I could to prepare myself, and then came here and have put together a pretty good spring to show them that I can do it."

Sogard, a career .295 hitter with a .380 OBP in the Minors, played in his 15th Cactus League contest on Wednesday. He's batting .229 with four RBIs and has made 13 appearances at shortstop, three at second base and two at third base. He's played second base more than any other position as a professional, but his versatility across the infield has given the club reason to keep him around along with non-roster invitees Andy LaRoche and Wes Timmons. Steve Tolleson, initially included in that group, was sent to Triple-A Sacramento on Sunday.

Manager Bob Geren made it rather clear at the start of camp that his decision on a backup infielder would largely stem from defensive performance, especially at a shortstop position where Pennington is coming back from left shoulder surgery. Sogard already entered with the advantage of being on the 40-man roster, and the strides he's made in the middle of the infield have Gallego feeling rather confident in his student's ability to be a big league mainstay.

"Obviously, playing short, it's a much bigger demand than positions he's used to, like second and third base," Gallego said. "You have to be more precise, you have to be more aggressive with your footwork, you have to be more alert with the reads off the bat. Basically, what we worked on with him is seeing the ball better off the bat and using his feet. I pretty much saw him three times a week before Spring Training, and I think he's made huge improvements."

While Pennington can get away with sitting back on balls thanks to his arm, Sogard has to consciously keep his eyes and feet in motion at all times.

"The second half of the spring, I think he's gathered quite a bit of that information and has now applied it to his game," Gallego said. "I like what I see, that's for sure. What's important is that he likes what he's doing out there and feels comfortable. I just tell him to quit proving that he can play short and just play like you can play short. Relax, see the ball and explode to it."

"I know he can do well there, and I think he's starting to persuade the rest of the staff, as well."

Sogard, along with LaRoche and Timmons, is slated to join the team in the Bay Area beginning Monday for three exhibition meetings with the Giants. It's in San Francisco, less than a week from now, when Geren is expected to make his final roster choices. And Sogard, who went 3-for-7 as one of the A's September callups last year, is hoping to pick up where he left off in Oakland.

"I'm just trying to finish up strong," he said. "I feel like if I just keep doing what I'm doing, I'll have a good shot of making the team. It's exciting."

### **A's bats silent in Cactus League loss to Cubs**

By Carrie Muskat / MLB.com

MESA, Ariz. -- Carlos Silva gave the Cubs something to think about.

Silva, battling for the fifth spot in the rotation, had his best outing this spring Wednesday in the Cubs' 3-1 victory over the Athletics.

The right-hander, making his fifth spring appearance, gave up three hits, did not walk a batter, and struck out three over six innings. He threw 78 pitches, 51 for strikes. The Cubs are expected to make a decision between Silva, Andrew Cashner and Braden Loper for the final rotation spot before Sunday.

Oakland starter Gio Gonzalez, making his fifth spring start, served up two runs on four hits and two walks over 5 2/3 innings. He was lifted in the sixth after turning a nifty 1-6-3 double play.

Coco Crisp singled to lead off for the Athletics and scored one out later on Josh Willingham's double.

Reed Johnson singled and Starlin Castro walked to open the Chicago first. Two outs later, Geovany Soto and Alfonso Soriano each hit RBI singles to put Chicago ahead, 2-1.

**Up next for Athletics:** Lefty Bobby Cramer will continue his bid for the fifth-starter spot on Thursday when he takes to the mound against the host D-backs at Salt River Fields at Talking Stick in Scottsdale, Ariz., beginning at 1:05 p.m. PT. Right-hander Tyson Ross, who is making his own case for a rotation spot, is scheduled to pitch as well. Also in the game, Hideki Matsui is slated to make his spring debut in the outfield, where he'll play for a couple of innings.

**Up next for Cubs:** The Cubs and White Sox will meet one more time this spring on Thursday at HoHoKam Park. Matt Garza will make his fifth spring start and sixth appearance for the Cubs. The right-hander struggled with the mound in his last outing in Peoria. This will be his third start at HoHoKam. The White Sox won the first meeting, 4-3, in Glendale. While the White Sox will use a designated hitter, Cubs manager Mike Quade plans on having Garza hit.

### **Major Lee-ague: OD starter speculation continues**

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 3/23/2011 10:14AM

The plot has thickened surrounding the A's Opening Day starter decision. Just yesterday it seemed as though Brett Anderson or Dallas Braden could seemingly be the only ones considered for the nod, given the fact that the rotation schedule for the rest of camp would prevent Trevor Cahill or Gio Gonzalez from making the esteemed start because of too little or too many days of rest. Alas, the schedule was changed this morning, and Braden -- originally scheduled for Saturday -- will work Friday, and Cahill will go Saturday on six days of rest. That means he's back in line for consideration for the OD start. Cahill, at the start of camp, was initially the unanimous pick by a few of us writers when we were considering the candidates. Geren, staying mum on the topic per usual, only said, "Yes, we're making adjustments for the start of the season at this time." He's likely to make the official announcement either Friday or Saturday -- if it is Cahill, I wouldn't be surprised if he announces it after Saturday's game.

It's an otherwise slow news day around camp -- just the way it should be as spring dwindles down. Joey Devine is throwing in a Minor League game today, and there's still nothing to report on Andrew Bailey, who hasn't started throwing again. Bailey initially said it would be a matter of days, not weeks, before he picked up a ball again. But it's already been a week,

so it's likely he'll take some more time and start the season on the DL so as not to rush anything.

Here's the A's lineup against the Cubs: Crisp CF, Sweeney RF, Willingham LF, Matsui DH, Suzuki C, Ellis 2B, Jackson 1B, Pennington SS, Sogard 3B, Gonzalez P