

A's News Clips, Monday, March 28, 2011

A's have the arms to contend in AL West

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

PHOENIX -- The A's are poised for their best season in years, and that outlook revolves around a rotation that is developing into one of the major leagues' best.

How far along are Oakland's starters? How much improvement should be expected this season?

Those answers will drive whether the A's seriously challenge for their first division title since 2006.

The four core members of the young rotation -- right-hander Trevor Cahill (23) and left-handers Brett Anderson (23), Gio Gonzalez (25) and Dallas Braden (27) -- have pitched in parts or all of 11 seasons between them.

But in 2010, they helped the A's post the best starters ERA (3.47) the American League has seen since 1990 when Boston, led by Roger Clemens and Mike Boddicker, posted a 3.32 mark.

Los Angeles Angels right fielder Torii Hunter ranks the A's rotation among the top five in the majors, and Hall of Famer Dennis Eckersley said it is one of the two best in the American League.

"You've got the Red Sox and the A's -- and the A's aren't as expensive as the Red Sox," said Eckersley, a television analyst for the Red Sox.

Such words make A's pitching coach Ron Romanick wince. Romanick is going to great lengths to keep his starters from resting on their laurels.

"I just try to say, 'You guys were really good, but "... you're not there,' " he said. "You never are there."

The A's starters would be wise to take a cue from Cahill's 2010 season.

As a rookie in 2009, Cahill posted a 4.63 ERA and allowed 21 homers to left-handed hitters, tied for most in the American League.

Last season, Cahill began spotting his sinker to both sides of the plate and jamming left-handers inside. He got a better feel for his changeup and replaced his slider with a curve that gave hitters a different look. Left-handers connected for just seven homers, and he went 18-8 with a 2.97 ERA and made the All-Star team. He also became more effective against right-handers.

"He got better, and that tells you he's learning how to pitch more and more," Angels infielder Howie Kendrick said. "He was working the changeup to righties. When you add another pitch to a right-hander like that, it's in the back of your mind so it keeps you off all of his other stuff."

Eckersley said there is another thing that sets apart the A's rotation: "There's three left-handers. Who has three left-handers?"

One of them is Anderson, who some scouts believe has the greatest upside of the bunch. Anderson had a 2.80 ERA last season but was limited to 19 starts because of elbow trouble. He is trying to work a changeup into his repertoire, partly to preserve the elbow that put him on the disabled list twice in 2010.

But something to note about these starters: They're not the most battle-tested bunch.

Gonzalez has been the most susceptible to meltdowns, but he toughened up last year, going 15-9 with a 3.23 ERA in a breakout season.

However, the walks continued piling up. He issued 92 last season and has walked 4.7 per nine innings for his career. Romanick stressed the need for Gonzalez to continue pounding his fastball for strikes, which sets up his outstanding curve.

"Gio probably has the best curveball from a lefty I've seen since back in the day when they had (Barry) Zito," said Hunter, the Angels outfielder entering his 15th season. "I think he might be their best guy with the nastiest stuff."

Braden gained the most fame of any A's starter last season by pitching a perfect game. He has the most pedestrian stuff on the staff, but Cahill cited Braden as an example to the others.

"He doesn't throw 95 and doesn't have a hammer," Cahill said, "but he changes speeds well and does his homework. He knows hitters. ... Just seeing how he prepares and how mentally focused he is helps out a lot."

Although Eckersley praised the A's starters, he sees red flags.

"You've got guys like Anderson, health issues," Eckersley said. "You've got control issues with Gonzalez. The sky's the limit. But you know how it is in today's game. A day later, a guy could be hurt."

Mark Mulder, one of the "Three Aces" -- along with Zito and Tim Hudson -- who pitched the A's to the playoffs four times from 2000-03, is following this group. Mulder, who retired in 2010 and lives in Scottsdale, Ariz., sees the promise and the pitfalls.

"You talk about fastball command, staying healthy," Mulder said. "There are so many things. But when you see guys putting it together, that's exciting."

A's season preview

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

PROJECTED 25-MAN ROSTER

STARTING PITCHERS

Name	B/T	Age
Brett Anderson	L/L	23

Surprisingly has allowed .308 average to left-handers and just .246 to right-handers.

Dallas Braden	L/L	27
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Received the fourth-lowest run support in American League in 2010 (3.60 per start).

Trevor Cahill	R/R	23
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2.97 ERA was lowest by AL starter younger than 23 since Kevin Appier in 1990.

Gio Gonzalez	R/L	25
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Posted eight starts of six-plus innings and no runs allowed in breakout 2010 season.

Brandon McCarthy	R/R	27
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Made impression this spring, not issuing a walk through his first five appearances.

RELIEF PITCHERS

Grant Balfour	R/R	33
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Nasty attitude, but what caught A's eyes: 10.29 strikeout rate from 2008-10.

Jerry Blevins	L/L	27
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Gave up four homers to first batters faced last season, which tied for AL lead.

Craig Breslow	L/L	30
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Notched 71 strikeouts in 2010, setting an Oakland record for left-handed relievers.

Brian Fuentes L/L 35

First batters faced are hitting just .202 against him for his career.

Tyson Ross R/R 23

Possesses great stuff but walked 4.6 batters per nine innings last season.

Michael Wuertz R/R 32

He posted an 8.64 ERA in 11 outings with no days' rest in 2010.

Brad Ziegler R/R 31

Left-handers are hitting .312 against the submarine-style pitcher in his career.

CATCHERS

Landon Powell B/R 29

Has appeared in only 87 games the past two seasons as Suzuki's backup.

Kurt Suzuki R/R 27

Only Jason Kendall has made more starts among major league catchers since 2008.

INFIELDERS

Daric Barton L/R 25

Ranked fifth in the American League with a .393 on-base percentage last season.

Mark Ellis R/R 33

Longest-tenured Athletic has committed just 17 errors over the past four seasons.

Kevin Kouzmanoff R/R 29

On a mission to improve his .214 average with runners in scoring position.

Cliff Pennington B/R 26

His flair for the spectacular play was offset by 25 errors in 2010.

Eric Sogard L/R 24

Hit .293 or higher in past three minor league seasons, but play at SS won roster spot.

OUTFIELDERS

Coco Crisp B/R 31

Notched 32 SBs in 75 games in 2010 (imagine if he stays healthy).

David DeJesus L/L 31

His .287 average on two-strike counts led majors last season.

Conor Jackson R/R 28

Various ailments have limited him to 90 games the past two years.

Ryan Sweeney L/L 26

Just 13 career home runs, a reason the A's went outfield shopping over winter.

Josh Willingham R/R 32

Has averaged 20 HRs past five seasons, but will he find AL as comfy?

DESIGNATED HITTER

Hideki Matsui L/R 36

Needs 7 homers to reach 500 combined between Japan and the major leagues.

REASONS FOR OPTIMISM

The A's trot out a starting pitcher that gives them a great shot to win most every game.

Brett Anderson, Dallas Braden, Trevor Cahill and Gio Gonzalez form the core of a rotation that led the majors with a 3.47 ERA in 2010. Those starters will hand the ball to a bullpen that has the depth to be among the majors' best. And with the additions of designated hitter

Hideki Matsui, right, and outfielders David DeJesus and Josh Willingham, below, the A's have the potential for their best offensive team in manager Bob Geren's five seasons.

REASONS FOR CONCERN

This remains a roster riddled with injury risks, and that's already played out with closer Andrew Bailey likely to start the season on the DL with a forearm strain.

Geren talks up his overall depth, but it will only take one or two more key injuries to change the complexion of this season. And for as many hitters as the A's added, there remains the lack of power that has plagued this club for several years now. Players such as DeJesus and Matsui should make the A's better with runners in scoring position, but will this team be able to go deep and score instantly when needed?

Third baseman

Kevin Kouzmanoff. He hit just .247 with 16 homers and 71 RBIs in 2010, his first season in the AL. He'll likely drop to the bottom third of the order this season, taking some pressure off his shoulders. And while Matsui, DeJesus and Willingham have gotten most of the attention since they arrived, a 20-homer, 80-RBI season from Kouzmanoff would be a huge boost for the A's offense.

COULD CHALLENGE IN THE A.L. WEST IF ...

The starting pitchers live up to the high standards they set in 2010. Oakland's rotation led the AL in opponents' batting average (.243) and ranked second in on-base percentage (.307).

Anderson, Cahill and Gonzalez are young enough that they should continue their upward climb. That's important, because the A's should score more runs and the bullpen should hold a lot of leads. If the starters show consistency and can carry a lead into the seventh inning, the A's are a tough team to beat.

WILL BE OUT OF CONTENTION EARLY IF ...

Center fielder Coco Crisp spends more time on the disabled list than in the starting lineup. The switch-hitter showed last season what an igniter he can be in the leadoff spot, but he did that in just 75 games because of injuries. He can steal bases, hit for occasional power and play terrific defense. In short, he's a dynamic player who is needed offensively and defensively. But he can't help the A's while sitting in the trainer's room.

AL WEST PREVIEW

Rangers

The defending AL champions should light up the scoreboard with runs. Will that be enough to compensate for a suspect starting rotation that lost Cliff Lee over the winter? Texas signed veteran

Brandon Webb, hoping the former Cy Young winner could provide depth behind C.J. Wilson (15-8, 3.35 ERA last season) and

Colby Lewis (12-13, 3.72). But Webb has continued to experience shoulder problems. Texas experimented with closer

Neftali Feliz -- last year's AL Rookie of the Year -- as a starter this spring, but Feliz is likely to return to the bullpen, strengthening a unit that boasted the fourth-best ERA in the AL last season.

Angels

The Angels finished ninth in the AL in runs scored last season (681), so any ideas of contention begin with an improved offense. That will be tougher with first baseman Kendry Morales starting the season on the DL with a foot injury. Morales, who hit 34 homers in 2009, also missed the final four months of 2010 with a broken left leg. The Angels need a big year from high-priced outfielder

Vernon Wells (.273, 31 HRs, 88 RBIs), obtained from Toronto in a highly scrutinized trade over the winter. Right fielder

Torii Hunter, 35, and outfielder/DH Bobby Abreu, 37, remained steady producers last season, but it's no guarantee they're 20-homer guys at this stage in their careers.

Mariners

Fans have reigning AL Cy Young winner Felix Hernandez to cheer for, but otherwise it figures be another long season under new manager Eric Wedge. The Mariners finished last in the AL in runs last season with 513, and didn't exactly turn heads with any of their offseason moves to address that. They're banking on former Athletic Jack Cust, their new designated hitter, to add power. But Cust hit just 13 homers with Oakland last season, and he's moving from one awful hitter's park (the Coliseum) to another (Safeco Field). Seattle hopes it has a rising young star in switch-hitting first baseman Justin Smoak. Injury-plagued left-hander Erik Bedard could finally provide a lift.

Oakland A's notebook: Andrew Bailey confirms he's headed to the disabled list, and Grant Balfour may be part of the short-term fix as closer

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- A's closer Andrew Bailey confirmed the obvious Sunday, that he'll start the season on the 15-day disabled list because of a forearm strain.

More unexpected was manager Bob Geren mentioning Grant Balfour as a fill-in closer option along with Brian Fuentes.

Fuentes, owner of 187 career saves, was the assumed heir apparent after Bailey hurt his forearm March 14, though Geren had not officially christened Fuentes the closer.

"I could use either one," Geren said. "Fuentes has the most experience. I feel comfortable with him. I also know Grant can do it if it's better to use someone else in a different inning."

Fuentes, 1-1 with a 5.87 ERA in nine spring appearances, didn't allow a run through his first six appearances but was touched for six hits and five earned runs over his next two (11/3 IP). The lefty retired both hitters he faced Friday against the Los Angeles Angels.

Geren is confident that Balfour, 1-0 with a 7.71 ERA in 10 games, has worked out some mechanical issues.

The right-hander has just eight saves in 261 major league appearances, but he's averaged 10.29 strikeouts per nine innings over the last three seasons.

Bailey played catch Sunday morning, the first time he's thrown since his injury.

"It's safe to say I'll miss a little time," Bailey said. "But better now than a month or two or three down the road."

Once Bailey starts throwing off the mound, he'll likely require a minor league rehab stint. With no setbacks, his return figures to come in mid-to-late April.

Reliever Joey Devine, slow to round into form after missing two seasons because of elbow surgery, was optioned to Triple-A Sacramento.

That means Tyson Ross or lefty Bobby Cramer will claim a bullpen spot, at least until Bailey returns. Give Ross the edge, as Geren is unlikely to want four lefties among his seven relievers.

The A's dropped their Cactus League finale 5-2 to the Colorado Rockies, leaving them with a 12-18-1 mark. The .387 winning percentage is their lowest in Arizona since a .375 mark in 1990, when they went 6-10. They finish the preseason with the three-game Bay Bridge Series against the Giants, starting Monday night at AT&T Park.

A key hitter who enjoyed the best camp: Third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff, who hit .426 in 19 games with two homers and 12 RBIs.

A key hitter who endured the worst spring: New designated hitter Hideki Matsui, who batted .125 (7 for 56) and notched just one extra-base hit -- a homer on March 13.

Chin Music: Andrew Bailey confirms he's DL-bound; Joey Devine optioned to Triple-A

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 3/27/2011 12:05PM

We have a little bullpen news this morning, as the A's get ready to play the Colorado Rockies in their final Cactus League game before flying north for the Bay Bridge Series.

—Joey Devine was optioned to Triple-A Sacramento and closer Andrew Bailey acknowledged he'll be starting the season on the disabled list. I'm sure you'll find neither surprising. The good news for Devine is his elbow is feeling good, but he hasn't been sharp enough to claim one of the seven bullpen spots. Bailey played catch this morning for the first time since being diagnosed with a forearm strain, and he's hopeful he won't miss much time. "It's better to miss a little time now than a month or two or three down the road."

Significantly, Geren mentioned Grant Balfour as a closer option along with Brian Fuentes until Bailey returns. Fuentes has looked shaky recently and Balfour seems to have put things together after struggling with some mechanical issues earlier in camp. It's worth mentioning that Geren never had singled out Fuentes as the fill-in closer, but based on Fuentes' experience, it was assumed he'd be the guy. I can't blame Geren for leaving his options open. "Breslow has been good in that role too," Geren said. "I was encouraged with Michael Wuertz (Saturday night)."

Something tells me we'll see the closer-by-committee approach until Bailey gets back ...

Here's the lineup vs the Rockies:

Sweeney CF, Barton 1B, DeJesus RF, Kouzmanoff 3B, Ellis 2B, Jackson LF, Powell C, Pennington SS, Cramer P

Oakland A's radio situation remains up in the air

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's claim their broadcast of Monday's Bay Bridge Series opener with the Giants will be on the radio, but it's not certain whether it will air on flagship KTRB 860-AM or another station.

The A's are attempting to purchase KTRB, but the sides are at odds over the purchase price, which has put broadcasting plans in limbo and kept the A's exhibition games on Saturday and Sunday vs. Colorado from airing on the station.

It's possible the A's and KTRB strike a compromise to continue airing games while negotiations continue. A's games will air on non-KTRB affiliates on the A's radio network, which includes stations in Sacramento, Modesto and Auburn.

Check the A's blog at www.ibabuzz.com/athletics on Monday for any updates on the situation.

David DeJesus, Josh Willingham are similar

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

"Zeus" and "Hammer."

No, not characters in the latest "300"-style movie, not ancient immortals. The nicknames for the newest A's outfielders, David DeJesus and Josh Willingham, come from the last syllables of their last names, not from any godlike powers.

There are many things that link the two, along with their heroic-sounding handles. Both describe themselves as laid-back, and teammates say that is accurate.

"I just try to keep everything in perspective," Willingham said. "I try to be carefree. I try to have fun."

"I'm relaxed, take things lightly, and I'm always smiling," DeJesus said, "but that doesn't mean I don't want to win. I do."

The A's acquired Willingham, a 32-year-old left fielder, from the Nationals in exchange for pitcher Henry Rodriguez and outfielder Corey Brown, and they got DeJesus, a 31-year-old right fielder, from the Royals for pitchers Vin Mazzaro and Justin Marks.

Both are coming to Oakland, a team with high expectations, from last-place clubs.

Neither has played for a team with designs on a division title, and each is thoroughly enjoying a spring that came with good clubhouse vibes.

"It's really refreshing," Willingham said. "Obviously, it's something I've never had before. I'm excited to go out and reach our goals as a team."

Another similarity: DeJesus and Willingham, who are projected to hit back-to-back (DeJesus third, Willingham cleanup), both got hot just as the Cactus League was coming to a close. DeJesus is 6-for-15 over his past five games after going 2 for his previous 19 at-bats, and Willingham is 7-for-22 after a 1-for-19 stretch. Willingham missed Sunday's game after being hit in the foot by a pitch Saturday, but is likely to play tonight.

Both have clear first memories of playing baseball. In fact, DeJesus is amazed how perfectly he can recall the first time he picked up a bat, even a plastic one, as a small child.

"I was in a park in Staten Island, and I had a Wiffle Ball bat, and my dad (Heryk) was setting up the tee. I can still see myself doing that, and I don't remember much else from that time," DeJesus. "I knew it was something memorable."

Willingham's initiation into T-ball involved some literal interpretation of instructions.

"I remember the first time I played, I remember hitting the ball and stopping at first, and my dad (David) said, 'Next time, go to second,' " Willingham said. "So the next time I hit the ball, and I ran right over the mound to second."

New A's teammate Dallas Braden might frown at such a tactic ("There'd have been fisticuffs if we were in the same Little League," Braden joked), but Willingham quickly learned to play the game correctly watching one of the game's greats: Hall of Famer Cal Ripken Jr. was Willingham's favorite player, because Willingham played shortstop until pro ball.

Willingham is most often compared to another former Oriole, though: He often hears Jeff Conine mentioned as a similar-style player, as recently as last season.

DeJesus said he hasn't heard any comparisons of himself with other players, but his favorite to watch as a kid was center fielder Kenny Lofton.

Which pitchers give the newest A's the most fits? Well, Willingham is happy Oakland doesn't face Atlanta, because he's 1-for-20 lifetime with seven strikeouts against ex-A's starter Tim Hudson. "It's an uncomfortable at-bat," he said.

DeJesus, meantime, used to face then-Twins left-hander Johan Santana in the Central Division and hated it. He hit .167 against him.

Willingham, who is from Florence, Ala., is an avid hunter and fisher, and DeJesus, who grew up in New Jersey, is a video-game player and action-movie fan ("300" is, in fact, his favorite), but now they find themselves spending much of their down time with young sons: Rhett and Ryder Willingham, ages 4 and 1; and David Kingston DeJesus Jr., 10 months and already nicknamed "Spidey" for his crawling abilities.

"Most of the time, I'm catching up on my sleep," DeJesus said with a laugh. "First and foremost, I'm a dad. I love it."

Here's one difference between the two: DeJesus has a celebrity look-alike ("Oscar de la Hoya," he said. "I get that a lot. And John Leguizamo"), and Willingham does not, no matter how much his teammates try to come up with one. "Nope. He just looks like a normal guy," one A's pitcher said.

There is one final thing that connects the corner outfielders, who would be free agents after the season. Both have said they'd have interest in long-term deals with the team.

"They're blending in perfectly," A's catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "It's like they've been here forever."

Josh Willingham

Spring stats

H-AB	HR	RBI	K	AVG
13-54	1	9	15	.241

David DeJesus

Spring stats

H-AB	HR	RBI	K	AVG
12-47	1	4	11	.255

Andrew Bailey to DL, Joey Devine to minors

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Ariz. - Oakland's bullpen had some good developments on the team's last day in Arizona, though it might look like the opposite, because the news was that closer **Andrew Bailey** will open the season on the disabled list and that **Joey Devine** was optioned to Triple-A Sacramento.

Bailey played catch Sunday for the first time since tearing scar tissue in his right elbow two weeks ago, making 25 throws at a distance of 65 feet after warming up with 20 light throws. He said everything went well.

As for the Opening Night roster, Bailey said, "It's safe to say it's probably too late. But I shouldn't miss too much time."

Devine was sent to minor-league camp, usually a bad thing, but nearly two years removed from Tommy John surgery, he wanted to work out the last kinks in his delivery in an environment with less pressure, so he welcomed the move.

"I'm in a good place," he said. "I just need to get consistency."

Manager **Bob Geren** believes Devine is close to his old form, and he noted that Devine was the A's best reliever in 2008.

Meanwhile, **Craig Breslow**, **Brad Ziegler** and **Jerry Blevins** each pitched a scoreless inning against Colorado.

Champs next: The A's realize that tonight's game is the Giants' first at AT&T Park since winning the World Series.

"Obviously, it will be a little different feel with them being the champions," reliever **Michael Wuertz** said. "They have a good ballclub, but we have a heck of a good team, too. I think we're both going to bring a lot of excitement to the Bay Area with the expectations they have and the expectations we have."

"I think there's going to be a buzz in San Francisco and Oakland all year long," Bailey said.

Matsui afield: If the A's don't get designated-hitter approval tonight, **Hideki Matsui** might get some time in the outfield.

Drumbeat: A's send out Joey Devine - and news on Andrew Bailey, Josh Willingham

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Salt River Fields 3/28/2011, 12:09PM

Joey Devine was supposed to pitch in today's game, but instead he's been sent to minor-league camp. The A's expect this will be a fairly short-term thing, because Devine has made some good strides recently in his return from Tommy John surgery. He told me the other day that he felt as if something had finally clicked - mentally, mechanically - and he's back close to his old form. He just needs to get in more work now, lock that all in, and he said he'd be fine with doing that at the minor-league level, where it's easier to work on things.

Manager Bob Geren said, "He just needs a few games to sharpen up his delivery and his pitches. It's not encouraging, usually, when you send someone down, but in this case, we're happy - he's throwing the ball well, he feels minor-league work is exactly what he needs."

Geren noted that in 2008, Devine was the A's best reliever, and, he said, "It's a long road, but we feel he's close to getting back to his top form. We're all excited about that."

Also exciting news for the A's today, though it always sounds like so little: Andrew Bailey played catch. That's the first real step, though, for a pitcher coming off an arm issue, and Bailey said he made 25 firm throws and it felt good; he warmed up with 20 softer tosses.

He's not going to be on the Opening Night roster at this point - "It's safe to say it's probably too late," Bailey told me - but he said he shouldn't miss too much time. As I've speculated before, he's probably looking at mid- to late April for his return to the A's.

Geren acknowledged what was fairly evident when Bailey got hurt: Brian Fuentes, the most experienced closer on the staff, will be the primary closer in Bailey's absence, but Geren said that Grant Balfour will get the call occasionally depending on the circumstances. (Fuentes is left-handed, Balfour is right-handed.) Geren mentioned that Craig Breslow and Michael Wuertz also could pitch the ninth. Wuertz looked like he's shaken off the rust with a scoreless inning last night.

Josh Willingham feels a lot better today than he'd expected after being hit on the right foot by a pitch last night, and Geren believes Willingham will be in the lineup tomorrow night in San Francisco.

Here's the lineup: Sweeney CF, Barton 1B, DeJesus RF, Kouzmanoff 3B, Ellis 2B, Jackson LF, Powell C, Pennington SS, Cramer P. No DH today and possibly none tomorrow and Wednesday at San Francisco; Hideki Matsui is getting today off, but he'll see action at San Francisco no matter what, even if it's back in the outfield a bit.

No more news on the A's radio issues, but everyone in the know seems to feel as if things will be resolved soon. Fingers crossed.

Equipment manager Steve Vucinich has a tongue-in-cheek proposal in the event that the radio situation isn't worked out: He suggests the A's go back on Cal's student station, KALX, as they did during one of Charlie Finley's years as owner, and Vucinich suggests that one of those KALX student announcers of yesteryear reprise his role. That would be Larry Baer, now one of the Giants owners.

Sweeney's hot spring continues in loss to Rox

By Thomas Harding / MLB.com

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- Rockies Opening Day starter Ubaldo Jimenez held the Athletics scoreless for six innings, and Willy Taveras had three hits in a 5-2 victory over the Athletics on Sunday afternoon in front of 12,177, the ninth straight sellout at Salt River Fields at Talking Stick.

Jimenez struck out three against one walk and gave up four hits. He was in trouble once, when David De Jesus and Kevin Kouzmanoff singled to put runners at the corners to open the inning. But Jimenez retired Mark Ellis on a fly ball to shallow center, and worked Conor Jackson into a grounder to the mound to begin a double play.

Jimenez will start Friday afternoon's opener against the D-backs at Coors Field.

"I think I'm 100 percent ready for the season to start," Jimenez said. "Hopefully, I'll do well the first game I pitch.

"Today, the first part of the game I wasn't able to get ahead of the hitters, but then I finished strong. The last two innings, I was able to locate my fastball and attack the strike zone."

Athletics starter Bobby Cramer, competing with Tyson Ross for a bullpen spot, started the game, pitched two scoreless innings and gave up a hit.

The A's finished 12-18-1 in Cactus League play and are now headed for the Bay Area for an exhibition series against the Giants.

"We're ready to go," Oakland manager Bob Geren said. "I think our starting pitching has been great, our relief has come around [as of] late. Cramer, [Craig] Breslow, [Brad] Ziegler and [Jerry] Blevins all threw well. It's a good note for these guys to leave on."

The Rockies scored the game's first run when Taveras doubled with two out in the sixth, and scored on Alfredo Amezaga's double. The Rockies also scored on a seventh-inning wild pitch.

Rockies lefty reliever Franklin Morales, who has made the team but is vying with Matt Reynolds for the primary lefty-setup role, walked Josh Donaldson to open the eighth, and gave up two runs on three hits, including RBI singles by Ryan Sweeney and Shane Peterson.

Taveras' leadoff single in the eighth against Travis Banwart led to a three-run inning, that included Matt Macri's RBI single and Warren Schaeffer's run-scoring triple.

Up next for the Athletics: It's rivalry time. The A's head home for three Bay Series games against the Giants, starting on Monday at 7:15 p.m. PT. Brett Anderson will step on the hill to take on Matt Cain and the Giants in San Francisco in the first game of the series, followed by Gio Gonzalez against Barry Zito on Tuesday at The Coliseum in Oakland. Dallas Braden will pitch for the A's against Madison Bumgarner in the series finale at AT&T Park on Wednesday.

Up next for the Rockies: Left-handed No. 2 starter Jorge De La Rosa will make his final Cactus League appearance against the Mariners at Peoria, Ariz on Monday at 2:05 p.m. MT. Backup catcher hopefuls Jose Morales and Matt Pagnozzi will split the duty.

Bailey to start season on disabled list

By / MLB.com

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- Oakland closer Andrew Bailey continues to make progress in his recovery from a strained right forearm, but according to Bay Area news reports, he'll start the season on the disabled list.

"It's safe to say I'll miss a little time," Bailey said. "But better now than a month or two or three down the road."

On Sunday, Bailey played catch for the first time since tearing scar tissue in his surgically-repaired right elbow two weeks ago. Oakland manager Bob Geren said the throwing session went well, but it's unclear when Bailey will return to the mound for a big league game. Bailey pitched just 1 1/3 Cactus League innings this spring.

"I'm sure that we would love to have them out there when he is ready," Geren said. "The delicate part is to get him ready as soon as possible, but yet making sure that he's passing each test along the road. But, so far so good."

In Bailey's absence, Geren said he will use Brian Fuentes and Grant Balfour in save situations. Craig Breslow is also an option.

"Fuentes has the most experience and I definitely feel comfortable with him," Geren said.

A's option Devine to Triple-A Sacramento

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- The A's optioned right-handed pitcher Joey Devine to Triple-A Sacramento on Sunday.

Devine, who was slowed earlier this month because of bicep tightness, struggled with his command and mechanics at times this spring. He missed the last two seasons because of Tommy John surgery.

Devine was charged with three runs in 4 1/3 Cactus League innings this spring.

"Obviously, we'll go with other relievers to start the season. But I'm encouraged with his last two outings, and he feels positive with where he is at, right now, physically," manager Bob Geren said. "It's not usually encouraging when you send somebody down, but in this particular case, we are very happy. He's healthy, good velocity. He feels like the Minor Leagues is exactly what he needs."

With the move, the A's have 33 players remaining in camp, which includes 30 players on the 40-man roster and three non-roster invitees.

A's heading back to Bay Area for start of season with some questions

Sam McPherson, examiner.com, 3/27/2011

As 2011 Spring Training wraps up this week, the Oakland Athletics head into Friday's Opening Night against the Seattle Mariners with some questions addressed -- and some still unresolved.

Free-agent acquisition Brandon McCarthy will open the season as the No. 5 starter, solving the one riddle about the starting pitching staff that faced the team heading into spring training. With a strong 20:1 strikeout-to-walk ratio in 26 spring innings, McCarthy demonstrated the kind of back-end rotation quality Oakland wanted to support last season's best group of American League starters.

Of course, the 27-year old McCarthy was only available on the market so cheaply in the first place because a long injury history, so it will be interesting to see how long he lasts in the rotation in 2011.

Although less of a concern, the A's also named Trevor Cahill as their Opening Night starter this week. Cahill turned in a surprising 18-8, 2.97 effort in 2010 -- definitely enough to earn him this honor for 2011. Of course, last year Cahill didn't make the rotation out of camp and didn't join the team until late April, so this is a big turnaround for him from last season.

Oakland hasn't announced their rotational order yet for the games following Cahill's Friday night start, and with three lefties in the rotation, it is now a challenge to split up Brett Anderson, Gio Gonzalez and Dallas Braden. McCarthy and Cahill are right-handed pitchers, and ideally, alternating sides (L-R-L-R-L) would be the best option -- but that can't really happen with Cahill being the first guy in the order.

While Cahill certainly deserves the honor of being the No. 1 starter after 2010, it's still probably not the best idea considering some of the flukier peripheral statistics (AL-low .238 opponents' average on balls put in play, for example) he posted last year. He's probably the team's third-best starter, behind Anderson and Gonzalez, in terms of pure stuff, so the ceremonial honor here could have been overlooked in favor of what might be better for the team long-term.

Another possible mistake the A's made coming out of camp was demoting Chris Carter to Sacramento. Carter has the potential to be a great hitter, but if he doesn't get time in Oakland, he's just spinning his wheels in Triple A right. Since free-agent signee Hideki Matsui cannot hit lefties anymore (.691 OPS last year against them), the A's need a bat to face left-handed pitching.

Yes, they have enough outfield depth to cover that, but giving Carter the opportunity would have been the smarter move in terms of the team's future. Easing him into eventual full-time duty, sooner rather than later, is the right thing to do, instead of letting him stew for another period of time in Sacramento.

All that being said, the A's roster is vastly improved from last year, and hopefully, they can break the trend of injuries that have crippled the team over the past four seasons.

If they can do that, Oakland has just as good a chance as anyone else in the AL West in 2011.