

A's News Clips, Tuesday, March 29, 2011

Aubrey Huff hits his sixth homer as San Francisco Giants beat Oakland A's in exhibition game at AT&T Park

By Carl Steward, Contra Costa Times

Aubrey Huff's club-leading sixth home run of the spring powered the Giants to a 4-3 Bay Bridge Series victory over the A's on Monday night in the home team's first appearance at AT&T Park since winning the World Series last fall.

With two out and nobody on in the bottom of the fifth, Huff broke a 3-3 tie with a shot over the right-field wall off A's starter Brett Anderson, who gave up all four San Francisco runs in a seven-inning stint. Anderson allowed six hits and two walks but struck out six.

Pat Burrell drove in two runs in the third inning with an opposite-field double to stake Giants starter Matt Cain to a 3-1 lead. The A's tied it in the fifth on Daric Barton's two-run single.

Cain gave up six hits and three runs over 5 1/3 innings, walking one and striking out six. The Giants received 32/3 innings of scoreless relief from Steve Edlefsen, Santiago Casilla, Jeremy Affeldt and Sergio Romo to preserve Cain's first spring training victory.

It was a rough night for Giants rookie Brandon Belt, who started at first base in his first-ever appearance at AT&T. Belt went 0 for 3, grounding out twice and striking out against the lefty Anderson.

Oakland Athletics notebook: Pitcher Bobby Cramer likes the position he's in

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

There's still some nervousness in the A's clubhouse regarding the last few undecided roster spots. But for left-hander Bobby Cramer, vying with young right-hander Tyson Ross for the last bullpen opening, whatever happens will be a win-win.

Cramer, 31, has never been part of a major league opening day, and he'd very much like to be part of Oakland's on Friday night against Seattle. But considering where he was last year when the MLB season kicked off, any assignment will be an upgrade.

"I remember watching opening day of the Yankees and Red Sox in a casino in Cancun, right on the strip," said Cramer. "So it's an interesting feeling having watched it from Mexico last year and possibly being on an opening day roster."

Cramer was six days into the A's minor league camp when he was loaned to Cancun's Quintana Roo Tigres of the Mexican League last year. He went 13-3 there as a starter with a 2.95 ERA, then made seven starts for Triple-A Sacramento (2-2, 1.94) before making his major league debut Sept. 13. He was 2-1 for Oakland with a 3.04 ERA in four starts.

Cramer lost out in the fifth-starter competition to Brandon McCarthy, but with closer Andrew Bailey scheduled to start the season on the disabled list, there's still a chance for the bullpen. If he doesn't get it, he won't be discouraged.

"I've always been in a position where I was in minor league camp just hoping I didn't get released," Cramer said. "This year, in the worst-case scenario, I'm guaranteed a spot in Triple-A. So it's a hell of a jump from where I was at last year. Obviously I want to make the team, but I've been in worse situations, that's for sure."

Cramer was a reliever at Long Beach State, and almost all of his minor league service was out of the bullpen, so he believes he can help the A's there.

"I don't feel there's anything they could ask me to do that I haven't done before," he said.

Cramer is 0-1 with a 6.32 ERA this spring but threw two innings of one-hit ball Sunday. He faces stiff competition from Oakland native Ross, who is 1-0 with a 0.59 ERA.

The other job still in doubt is backup infielder, where either nonroster free-agent signee Andy LaRoche or Eric Sogard will get the nod. LaRoche hit .333 this spring with a club-leading four homers and played all four infield positions.

"Obviously, it's up in the air right now as far as I'm concerned," LaRoche said. "I feel like I did what I needed to do in spring, but whether I go to Sacramento or I stay here, I'm just really glad I finally got my stroke back. I'm back where I need to be."

Manager Bob Geren said the remaining roster decisions might not be announced until after the Bay Bridge Series.

"A majority of the action that we've seen to make our decision has already taken place," Geren said. "But we don't have to make the decision for a few more days, so we'll just let it play out to the finale."

Geren said the only area that was concerning him heading into the final week of spring training was the bullpen.

"Our relievers the last week were the guys I really wanted to see step up their game because they needed to, and they did," the manager said.

He said veteran left-hander Brian Fuentes is his top choice to close in place of Bailey, but that Grant Balfour, Michael Wuertz and Craig Breslow all could get opportunities.

Left fielder Josh Willingham was back in the lineup a day after taking a fastball off his left foot. Willingham said his foot was sore and that if the season wasn't so close, he might have taken the day off.

Bailey did some light throwing at a distance of 60 feet Monday. He'll take a day off Tuesday and resume his rehab program Wednesday.

Chin Music: A's announce Bay Bridge Series games to air on KFRC 1550 AM — drama with KTRB 860 continues

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 3/28/2011 12:09PM

The A's announced that the Bay Bridge Series games against the Giants (Mon-Wed) will air on radio station KFRC 1550-AM, and not on flagship station KTRB 860. The team said a plan for regular-season broadcasts will be unveiled later in the week, and none of this affects games that air on A's affiliates in Sacramento, Modesto and other areas around Northern California. Ken Korach, Vince Cotroneo and Ray Fosse will call the games on KFRC, and Chris Townsend's pregame and postgame call-in show will also air on the station.

But for Bay Area fans, it confirms that the A's season-long radio plans are in limbo as Friday's opener looms. As I've written the past couple of days, the A's have been negotiating to buy KTRB, but talks have taken a sour turn to the point that the A's could completely sever ties to KTRB, their flagship station for the past two years.

This drama all started very recently. KTRB is in receivership, and an informed source indicated to me that the station's receiver is looking to sell the station for a higher purchase price than the A's are willing to offer. As a result, the agreement to air games as negotiations continue has broken down. I was told that the A's weren't willing to budge because they knew they had a fallback plan in KFRC, which is equipped to start airing games on very short notice. KFRC was the A's flagship station before KTRB. I'd say there's a definite chance that Bay area fans will be tuning to KFRC all season for A's games.

This is shaping up as a damaging blow for the A's and their fans, particularly if the team's chance to buy KTRB falls through completely. KTRB is a 50,000-watt station with a far stronger signal than KFRC. Buying KTRB would allow the A's the freedom to tailor programming to more A's-specific content. It would create a higher-profile identity for the team and give fans a permanent spot to look to for everything A's-related on the radio. In short, it would give the A's similar autonomy that the Giants enjoy by owning a stake in KNBR 680.

It's important to note that the A's say a plan for regular-season broadcasts will be announced later this week. Does this mean a season-long deal with KTRB could still happen even as the Bay Bridge games air on KFRC? I don't know ... But things have taken a dramatic turn on this topic, and time is short to hammer out a solution.

Baseball, baseball: Giants and A's 2011 mini-previews

Tim Kawakami, San Jose Mercury News, 3/28/2011

*As is tradition, the Bay Area News Group columnists were asked for our season predictions and none of us declined the invitation.

-A's predicted record: 85-77, 2nd place (me), 83-79, 2nd place (Cam Inman), 84-78, 2nd place (Monte Poole), 83-79, 2nd place (Gary Peterson), 84-78, 2nd place (Mark Purdy).

-Giants predicted record: 94-68, 1st place (TK), 94-68, 1st place (CI), 90-72, 2nd place (Poole), 95-67, 1st place (GP), 92-70, 1st place (Purdy).

-**World Series match-up:** Boston over Atlanta (TK), Giants over Boston (CI), Philadelphia over Boston (Poole), Boston over Philadelphia (GP), Boston over Cincinnati (Purdy).

Our predictions from last year are on this take. Lampoon us freely.

-There were semi-plans to craft out my own full-fledged 2011 previews for the A's and Giants, and then reality interceded.

Why not just leave the official previewing to the pros?

-Here's Andy Baggary's story examining the start of the Giants' World Series title defense. And don't Giants fans just love those words: "*World Series title defense.*"

As a kid who grew up as a passionate Giants fan in the bleak Jack Clark/Rob Andrews/must-guzzle-hot-chocolate-at-night-games Candlestick era, it's remarkable how much those words mean, even though (you might have noticed) I stopped cheering for the Giants long, long ago.

I wrote for a few years that the Giants had no realistic playoff hope as long as they were a bottom-rung offensive team, and even proposed a ridiculous trade or two to remedy this situation.

Last year, they didn't exactly light up the scoreboard (697 runs, 52 fewer than the average NL playoff team), but from mid-May on, when Buster Posey arrived and Pat Burrell started getting hot, they turned into a top-tier offensive team.

And the pitching made every run count—add the extra offense to the Giants' giving up the second-fewest runs in baseball, and they had a +114 run-differential, right at the average for NL playoff teams.

The Giants offense should be better from the get-go this season.

Pablo Sandoval's skinnier, Posey's in there from Opening Day, Brandon Belt will either be an expected May call-up to provide mid-season oomph or he'll be there from Opening Day, too, and even with Cody Ross hurt for a few weeks, the roster is deep with available useful hitters.

I think Miguel Tejada is a big question mark at SS, which, coupled with the Ross absence, might push Belt into the Opening Day line-up.

It's either that or perhaps go into the tough first part of the season with Tejada and Aaron Rowand as possible automatic outs comprising 25% of the non-pitching line-up, and remember, a key part of the run last year was that the Giants had 0 auto-outs (other than the pitcher).

Another thought: I guess the Giants could put DeRosa at first base (or LF) instead of putting Belt in there right away.

Question: Will the Giants' pitchers remain healthy after all that work last year? They've been very durable so far, and the best predictor for future health is past health.

I'll say the SFGs get relative good health, again, out of their pitchers, get about the same kind of hitting they produced from mid-May on... and win 94 games, win the West by 3 or 4 games (over Colorado), and get bumped off by Atlanta in the NLCS.

-And here's Joe Stiglich's story previewing the A's, who may not be a ton better than last year (when they finished 81-81), but have a lot more reasons to feel they might be.

The reasons: Josh Willingham, David DeJesus and Hideki Matsui, plus a decently proven young pitching staff.

(Anything's better than Jack Cust, Kurt Suzuki, Kevin Kouzmanoff, Gabe Gross and Ryan Sweeney taking turns as middle-order bats.

(If Willingham, DeJesus and Matsui stay healthy enough to get 400 or more PA's apiece, and if lead-off man Coco Crisp stays healthy enough for 500 or so PA's, that should be a 30-to-40 run improvement, being conservative.

(But I'd say automatically assuming all four of those players will get 400+ PA's is a fairly liberal assumption, given the A's history.)

The reasons for typical A's worry: The A's gave up the fewest runs in the AL last year (626), so there's not much room for improvement there, relatively speaking, even if everybody stays healthy.

And that's already not the case—closer Andrew Bailey will start the season on the DL.

The concern for the A's this year, as it has been since the departures of Jason Giambi and Miguel Tejada, decline of Eric Chavez and disappearance of Bobby Crosby is SCORING RUNS.

Last year, the A's scored the fourth-fewest in the AL (663), which was almost *145 fewer than the average AL playoff team* (807.3 average).

Generally, the A's have to get the run-differential from last year's +34 much closer to the AL playoff average of +132.3.

That means keeping the pitching about the same and pumping the offense up at least 60 runs—and an increase of 80-100 runs would be a lot better and would possibly cover for a potential pitching slip up or two.

But it seems very unlikely that the A's will 80 more runs than last year. They will once again put a huge amount of pressure on their pitching staff, every night, and we will see if the staff can hold up again.

Or, perhaps, do even better than last year. I'm guessing the pitching holds up relatively well (but won't do better than last year), and the hitting tweaks up to the 680-690 run range.

That's enough to get the A's over .500, but not enough to see them passing the Rangers, or possibly getting chased down by the Angels for 2nd place, in my view.

SF Giants edge A's 4-3 before adoring crowd

Rusty Simmons, Chronicle Staff Writer

Fans gave their team a welcome that has been five months in the making, and the Giants rewarded their faithful with a sharp 4-3 victory over the A's in the first of a three-game exhibition series Monday night.

The Giants last played at AT&T Park on Oct. 28. The fans had plenty of cheering in reserve since that 9-0 win over Texas in Game 2 of the World Series, during which the crowd sang and danced in a union of bliss during an impromptu eighth-inning concert from Steve Perry of Journey.

The first standing ovation came at 6:48 p.m. Monday, when Matt Cain and Buster Posey sauntered to the bullpen for warm-ups. Five minutes and thousands of fans later, another standing ovation accompanied the first public-address announcement that used the requisite "World Champion San Francisco Giants" phrasing.

By 7:10 p.m. Lou Seal was dancing around the infield with a championship belt, and the near-full house was erupting at the announcement of each Giants name in the starting lineup. When the Giants took the field five minutes later, the coaches and umpires meeting at home plate couldn't hear over the raucous ovations.

"It just shows the love San Francisco has for us," reliever Sergio Romo said. "The energy was flowing, for sure."

Manager Bruce Bochy expected something like that, especially after seeing the fans' reactions to the Giants during spring training in Scottsdale, Ariz. The Giants had seven sellouts, setting a club spring home attendance record with 160,574.

"You could see their enthusiasm, their energy, their excitement over seeing this team," Bochy said. "They were everywhere: at home in Scottsdale, and on the road. We very much appreciated it, and, at times, we were overwhelmed by their support."

Cain got the win, but he wasn't as dominant as he was in 7 2/3 innings of shutout ball in Game 2 of the Series. He allowed three runs on six hits and a walk in 5 1/3 innings.

"The last time here, walking off the mound in the eighth inning against Texas, it felt good to get that kind of ovation," said Cain, who slightly tipped his cap after leaving the exhibition game in the sixth. "The fans are ready for the regular season to start back up again."

A's left-hander Brett Anderson looked pretty sharp in his final spring tuneup, going seven innings and yielding four runs on six hits, with two walks and a hit batsman. He stretched his pitch count to 92, throwing 55 strikes and striking out six batters.

Andres Torres scored in the first on a Posey groundout, and the A's answered with a bloop RBI single by Cliff Pennington in the second. The Giants went ahead 3-1 with a two-run double to right-center by Pat Burrell in the third inning.

A two-run single by A's first baseman Daric Barton tied it in the fifth inning, and the Giants retook the lead on a solo shot to right field from Aubrey Huff in the bottom of the inning. Coco Crisp and Kevin Kouzmanoff each had a pair of hits for the A's, and the Giants got two singles from Posey.

Giants relievers Steve Edlefsen, Santiago Casilla, Jeremy Affeldt and Romo retired 11 of the 13 batters they faced and didn't allow a runner past second base. Pablo Sandoval made a sliding over-the-shoulder catch in foul territory to end the game.

Bay Bridge series

Tonight: Giants (Barry Zito) at A's (Gio Gonzalez), 7:05 p.m. **CSNCA**

Wednesday: A's (Dallas Braden) at Giants (Madison Bumgarner), 12:45 p.m. No TV

A's-GIANTS BEAT

Parade in S.F. was motivator for Gonzalez

Rusty Simmons, Scott Ostler, Chronicle Staff Writers

On weekends this offseason, when A's left-hander **Gio Gonzalez** was too physically spent to enjoy the Miami weather or nightlife, he knew right where to look for motivation to recharge for the workweek ahead.

"I was actually inspired by what the Giants did," said Gonzalez, who is scheduled to pitch against the Giants tonight at the Coliseum, "especially with their young staff just going out and dominating in the playoffs."

Gonzalez allowed images of the Giants' World Series celebration to scroll through his head just long enough to rally for his 9 a.m. weekday wake-up calls. He transformed his offseason regimen with tons of cardio and with upper-body workouts Mondays and Thursdays, lower-body workouts Tuesdays and Fridays and massages Wednesdays. The weekends were free.

"They were mine, but I couldn't do anything," Gonzalez said. "I told my parents to make dinner, and I'd stay home and eat it. I literally didn't have the strength to do anything."

The work apparently has had its dividends. Manager **Bob Geren** said Gonzalez was throwing 94 mph from Day 1 of camp and his starts have been like "clockwork."

"I'm all for whatever it takes to find an extra gear to your workouts," Geren said. "Champions are really built when nobody is watching. Whatever he did this winter has carried into the spring. He has looked fantastic."

Gonzalez has a 2.14 ERA this spring and has 25 strikeouts and eight walks in 21 innings. This after a breakout 2010 season during which Gonzalez went 15-9 with a 3.23 ERA and 171 strikeouts.

He expects more. He expects more from himself and from his rotation mates who make up a staff much like the youthful one that led the Giants to the championship.

"I came in with the mind-set of winning a job, because I don't want to be left behind," Gonzalez said. "I know I'm speaking way too early on it, but I have no problem with positive thinking. We want to be thinking about the what-ifs."

"I can see pitching in Oakland in October and I can see the tarps coming off the outfield seats."

The bearded one: Giants manager **Bruce Bochy** said the chances of having closer **Brian Wilson** (oblique) for Opening Day are less than 50-50.

Wilson will throw off the bullpen mound in Scottsdale, Ariz., today. He played light catch off flat ground Monday.

"We're not going to push him if he doesn't feel great," Bochy said. "So far, in throwing sessions on flat ground, he hasn't felt anything (bad) there. So (today) is going to be a pretty good test for him."

A's final roster spots: Geren said the final three roster spots have all but been decided, and then he might have given a hint about which way he's leaning on the last bullpen job. The manager said right-hander **Tyson Ross**, who is in competition with lefty **Bobby Cramer**, has been one of the most pleasant surprises in camp.

Infielders **Eric Sogard** and **Andy LaRoche**, a nonroster invitee, and catchers **Landon Powell** and **Josh Donaldson** are believed to be vying for the other two spots.

Radio waves: The A's announced Monday that their three Bay Bridge Series games against the Giants will be broadcast on KFRC (1550 AM), with information regarding regular-season broadcasting plans to be announced later this week. The team has been trying to purchase KTRB (860 AM).

Briefly: The A's and Giants agreed to use a designated hitter in Wednesday's game at AT&T Park, meaning **Hideki Matsui** will start the final two days of the series, Geren said. ... Bochy said right fielder **Cody Ross** (strained calf) is probably about three weeks away from being ready. Bochy added that when Ross is healthy, he'll probably be sent on a minor-league rehab assignment.

A's radio update

A note from the Chronicle Sports Desk:

The Bay Bridge Series games tonight through Wednesday will be broadcast by the A's on KFRC (1550 AM).

The A's expect to have more radio news later in the week. If you're new to this A's radio discussion, here's [a recent A's Beat](#) that included all the relevant info.

Anderson satisfied with final spring start

By Chris Haft / MLB.com

SAN FRANCISCO -- With a couple of notable interruptions, Brett Anderson pitched the sort of game he'd gladly accept during the regular season.

Anderson worked a personal spring-high seven innings in Monday's exhibition against the San Francisco Giants. He limited them to one hit in five at-bats with runners in scoring position. Anderson and the Oakland A's lost, 4-3, but the left-hander gave every indication that he's ready for the regular season's rigors.

"I made two terrible pitches," Anderson said. "Other than that, I had a pretty good outing."

One of Anderson's mistakes was crushed by Pat Burrell for a two-out, two-run double in the third inning that gave the Giants a 3-1 lead. Oakland tied the score in the fifth, but in the bottom of the inning, again with two outs, Aubrey Huff lofted a 1-0 fastball over the right-field barrier to put San Francisco ahead.

"I tried to go away [with the pitch]," Anderson said. "It was middle-up, which was kind of in his swing path."

Otherwise, Anderson muted the Giants' bats. They scored in the first inning, but that run was abetted by left fielder Josh Willingham's apparent misplay on a seemingly catchable drive hit by Freddy Sanchez. The ball fell for a double, moving Andres Torres to third base and setting up Buster Posey's run-scoring groundout.

Anderson needed only 92 pitches to get through his stint. He allowed six hits, walked two and struck out six, another spring-best total.

"They were swinging early [in the count]," Anderson said. "They made some early contact and I gave up some hits, but also got some early outs."

Anderson threw more changeups than usual as he prepared for his initial regular-season start Saturday against Seattle.

"I threw some bad ones, threw some good ones and got some ground balls," he said.

Anderson already knows that avoiding injuries represents his most significant regular-season challenge.

"When I wasn't hurt, I put up pretty good numbers," said the 23-year-old, who's 18-17 with a 3.57 ERA over two seasons with the A's. "If I'm healthy, hopefully I can continue to do what I've been doing the past couple of years."

Anderson extends to seven innings vs. Giants

By Chris Haft / MLB.com

SAN FRANCISCO -- A's starter Brett Anderson rarely faltered Monday night while working a personal spring-high seven innings, but Aubrey Huff drove one of his mistakes over the right-field wall to break a fifth-inning tie and lift the San Francisco Giants to a 4-3 exhibition victory over Oakland.

Huff's two-out drive, his team-high sixth homer of the spring, broke a 3-3 tie against Anderson, who surrendered six hits. The A's threatened to pull even in the eighth after David DeJesus hit a leadoff double, but Giants reliever Jeremy Affeldt retired the next three batters.

Giants starter Matt Cain lasted 5 1/3 innings, nearly doubling his previous spring high of three innings. He allowed three runs and six hits while walking one and striking out six, another personal best for this exhibition season. Giants manager Bruce Bochy removed Cain after the right-hander threw 88 pitches.

Buster Posey lifted his exhibition batting average to .422 with a 2-for-3 evening. He also drove in a run with a first-inning groundout after Andres Torres singled and moved to third on Freddy Sanchez's double, a seemingly catchable drive that eluded left fielder Josh Willingham.

Oakland tied the score in the second inning as Mark Ellis, Kevin Kouzmanoff and Cliff Pennington hit consecutive one-out singles. Kouzmanoff's and Pennington's hits were bloopers to right and left field, respectively, that eluded trios of pursuing Giants.

The Giants surged ahead on Pat Burrell's two-run, two-out double in the third inning. Oakland responded with its own two-out rally in the fifth as Daric Barton singled home Kouzmanoff and Coco Crisp.

Up next for Giants: Barry Zito will conclude his exhibition campaign by facing his former team as the Giants visit Oakland for the second game of the Bay Bridge Series on Tuesday at 7:05 p.m. PT. Zito was San Francisco's only starter to pitch six innings twice in Cactus League competition. He finished 2-1 with a 2.49 ERA in Arizona exhibitions. Once again, close attention will be paid to manager Bruce Bochy's lineup, following his remark that the starting eight he uses in these games could reveal what personnel he'll use in the regular season.

Up next for A's: Daric Barton, who has reached base safely in 14 of his 15 games, will try to remain hot, along with Kevin Kouzmanoff, who has recorded four consecutive multiple-hit games. Left-hander Gio Gonzalez, who posted a 2.14 Cactus League ERA, will try to sustain his excellence. One of the day's biggest attractions will occur off the field, as the A's conduct their Fan Appreciation Tailgate event from 4 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. PT. Oakland's version of FanFest will include autograph availabilities, question-and-answer sessions, photograph opportunities with players, memorabilia sales and other events.

Thalblum's A's story enters fourth decade

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Mike Thalblum vividly remembers riding his bike to Scottsdale Stadium, where the A's used to make their Spring Training home in the 1980s. It was a wooden shack back then, and Thalblum walked into the facilities as a curious 13-year-old and walked out a batboy.

"They haven't been able to get rid of me since," said a smiling Thalblum, now 44.

The longtime A's employee now holds duties as the visiting clubhouse manager, a role that calls for hundreds of food shopping trips and just as many loads of laundry each season. He caters to each visiting player's needs, and he remembers each of their faces. Just ask him about his first day at Scottsdale Stadium, when he recalls Wayne Gross and Mitchell Paige engaging in a fight.

"The best part about this job is the people," he said. "I can understand when players hang on and play as long as they can, even though they have all the money they're ever gonna need for them and their family and their kids, because it's a very special atmosphere in the clubhouses. It's one like no other.

"I've always been kind of star struck on these guys, so I like to hang out with them when they come into my clubhouse. It's special, and it's a privilege to be in the clubhouse with some of the best athletes in the world."

During the season, Thalblum works every home game and even sleeps in the clubhouse on those nights after racking up long work days. Evening contests have him up early and on the stationary bike before a trip to Costco -- "Food is all they care about," he says -- unofficially begins his shift at 9 a.m. Working until past midnight is rather normal, and a day game calls for even earlier hours -- 5:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. He's also in the clubhouse every day of the offseason.

They're long hours, no doubt, but road games give Thalblum the chance to spend plenty time with his family. He met his wife, Janine, at the ballpark when she stopped by to help him open a car-insurance account, and the couple named their first child, 8-year-old Stewart Robert, after famed A's pitchers Dave Stewart and Bob Welch. They also have a 7-year-old son, Jonathon David.

Stewie, as he's known around family and friends, has found his way to his father's side at the stadium despite an ongoing battle with autism, a developmental disorder that affects the brain's normal development of social and communication skills.

"When the doctors said, 'You guys are having a boy, all these dreams go through your head, thinking you have a batboy someday, working the clubhouses,' Thalblum said. "When Stewie was diagnosed with the autism, that all changed for a little bit. But it's wonderful because the ballpark has actually helped with his social problems that he had, and it's nice both my sons can come to work, come right down the stairs and hang out with Daddy.

"That first day he was a batboy, I was bawling my head off. It's special. The whole job has been special."

Entering his 18th season as the visiting clubhouse manager, which followed stints as a batboy and clubhouse assistant, Thalblum couldn't be more grateful for the life he leads and the people that have made it worthwhile. His first paycheck -- a Charlie Finley check -- has yet to be cashed, and he fondly recalls receiving his very first tip from Billy Martin.

"There's something from every year that you never forget," he said. "My whole life, my family's whole life, everything we got, everything's been about the ballpark. I remind myself every day that there's only 30 of these jobs out there. That's it. The A's have treated me with nothing but the best. They've always been as nice as can be to me, and I can't be more appreciative."

Giants return home to AT&T Park, beat A's 4-3

By JANIE McCAULEY, AP Baseball Writer

Aubrey Huff showed off the power stroke that made him San Francisco's home run leader last year. Matt Cain, well, he was just his usual solid self.

Cain walked off the mound to a standing ovation from an adoring crowd that hasn't seen the [San Francisco Giants](#) play at home since their improbable World Series run last fall. The others generated their fair share of cheers, too.

Cain looked strong over 5 1-3 innings Monday night in his final tuneup for the regular season, striking out six and walking one in a 4-3 victory over the Oakland Athletics in the annual preseason edition of the Bay Bridge Series.

"The last time here, walking off in the eighth against Texas, that felt good just to get that big ovation," Cain said of the World Series. "The fans are ready for the regular season to start back up again."

Huff hit a go-ahead homer in the fifth for San Francisco, his team-leading sixth of the spring. Pat Burrell, one of those "castoffs and misfits" who helped lead the Giants to their first championship since moving West in 1958, hit a two-run double in the third.

The Giants and [A's](#) returned home from spring training in the Arizona desert to welcome blue skies in the Bay Area after close to two weeks of heavy rain. The teams play three times before the Giants open defense of their title Thursday against the rival Dodgers in Los Angeles. Oakland kicks off 2011 a day later at home against the Seattle Mariners.

San Francisco was greeted by 38,320 enthusiastic fans in its first game at its cozy waterfront ballpark since beating the AL champion Rangers in Game 5 at Texas to secure the title.

"It was definitely good to be back. The last week of spring training in Arizona was starting to be pretty monotonous, we were starting to play pretty bad," Huff said. "We were beating people the first few weeks. We started to get a little lackadaisical there toward the end. We're ready to go."

Cain, the Giants' No. 3 starter and 13-game winner last season, threw 88 pitches and recorded 1-2-3 innings in the first, third and fourth. Sergio Romo pitched the ninth for the save.

"Great job by Matty," manager Bruce Bochy said. "He got some good work in and got deep in the game. He had good stuff."

Oakland's Daric Barton hit a two-out, two-run single in the top of the fifth to tie it at 3. Huff answered in the bottom half with a drive over the right-field arcade to the pathway below.

New A's slugger Hideki Matsui sat most of this one out on a cool, breezy night, before popping up foul to a hustling, slimmed-down third baseman Pablo Sandoval in front of the Giants' bullpen mound for the final out. Manager Bob Geren said Matsui is scheduled to start at designated hitter the next two games after the Giants agreed to using the DH.

Bochy went almost with what he expects to use for an opening-day lineup, though top prospect Brandon Belt started at first and batted seventh. He is likely to start at Triple-A Fresno.

Reigning NL Rookie of the Year Buster Posey received a rousing ovation when he stepped in to hit in the first inning.

New San Francisco shortstop Miguel Tejada, the 2002 AL MVP with the A's, loved the atmosphere.

"That's great, man," he said. "That's what happens when you win it."

Brett Anderson struck out six and walked two over seven innings in taking the loss. He threw 92 pitches.

The A's, considered a potential contender in the AL West this year, lost their fourth straight exhibition game and fifth in six. Oakland had won the previous two spring meetings this year, both played in Arizona.

"I got what I needed to out of (spring)," Anderson said. "I was calm and collected. I know what I have to do to put up the numbers."

NOTES: Injured Giants closer Brian Wilson, the majors' saves leader last year with 48, stayed behind in Arizona to rehabilitate a strained left side muscle that could keep him from being ready by Thursday's opener at Dodger Stadium. Wilson is scheduled to throw a short bullpen session Tuesday but Bochy said it's "less than 50-50" that Wilson will be available. ... A's closer Andrew Bailey, the 2009 AL Rookie of the Year who is nursing a strained forearm, made about 25 throws Sunday from as far out as 60 feet. He is slated to play catch again Wednesday and extend his distance and output as long as he feels fine to do so. ... The Giants are in a stretch with 12 straight games before Monday's off day in San Diego. ... A's LF Josh Willingham, who bruised his right foot fouling off a pitch Saturday, was fine after an 0-for-2 outing.

A look at 'the other' spring training

HARRELL MILLER, Napa Valley Register, 3/29/2011

PHOENIX — Here's a little end-of-March baseball test. What do the following have in common?

The Bees, the Flying Squirrels, the Green Jackets, the Grizzlies, the Lake Monsters, the Ports, the River Cats, the Rock Hounds and the Volcanoes.

Believe it or not, they are the professional baseball teams that make up the pyramids on top of which sit the San Francisco Giants and Oakland Athletics.

They are the farm teams, the arrays of baseball talent which both teams currently have under contract.

They represent the pools of players on which the big teams can call on a moment's notice.

Of course, the talent isn't spread out evenly among all the teams. There is a descending order of player ability that begins with the big teams and works its way down. In the case of San Francisco, the best players in the pool can be found playing for the Grizzlies in Fresno.

If a Giant goes down, a Grizzly will be headed to San Francisco in minutes.

Fresno is San Francisco's Triple-A affiliate. Across the Bay, Oakland's Triple-A players are just up the road in Sacramento playing for the River Cats. They, too, have bags packed just in case they are needed.

One step below Fresno and Sacramento are the big teams' Double-A affiliates. For the Athletics it is the Rock Hounds in Midland, Texas.

The Giant Double-A players are all the way across the country playing for the Richmond, Va., Flying Squirrels.

Class A teams are back in California.

The San Jose Giants are, obviously, in the San Francisco system. The Stockton Ports represent Oakland. Technically these are called High-A teams.

Low-A teams are back in mid-America.

The Giants' Low-A team is the Green Jackets of Augusta, Ga. The A's are represented at this level by the Bees who play in Burlington, Iowa.

Finally, on the bottom of the pyramid are what are called short season teams. As their designation implies, these are Class A teams that don't play a full schedule.

Oakland's short season team is the Lake Monsters of Burlington, Vt.

For San Francisco it's the Volcanoes of Salem-Keizer, Ore.

A couple of weeks ago, players from all these teams — except the short season Class A's — came to Arizona for what is called minor league spring training.

Currently, they are playing games with one another and other Arizona teams every afternoon but Sunday in the big teams' training complexes.

These games will continue into April after the parent teams leave Arizona to begin the season back in the big ballparks.

One of the facts of professional baseball life is that many players begin spring training on the expanded rosters of a major league team.

These players have the opportunity to be seen by the powers that be in the rarefied atmosphere of big league games. For a few, it is the break they need.

For most, it is a special March experience before they head back to a minor league city or town where they'll spend yet another summer waiting for the call. Major league teams will have trimmed their rosters to the authorized 25 players by opening day.

After that, everyone else will be in minor league spring training.

Last week I spent some time at Papago Park, the Athletics training facility.

Minor league spring training was in full swing. Many players had just reported in. A number of others had been reassigned from the big team to minor league camp.

Jemile Weeks was having a great spring with the Athletics when he was called in and told he was being reassigned.

At the time, he was hitting over .400, having played in 17 spring games where he collected nine hits in 22 trips to the plate.

I talked with him at the A's Papago training complex where he would play later that afternoon in a game between the Giants' and Athletics' Triple-A affiliates.

He had been sent down a couple of days before we talked.

I asked him how he was feeling.

"I did what I came to do," he said, obviously a little disappointed. "I knew when I arrived that (Mark) Ellis was the guy with the job. All I could do was just go out there and do my best."

I asked if he knew what was going to be happening to him next.

"I have no idea," he answered. "I'm here (with the Sacramento team) right now, but I don't know where I'll be going.

"It depends on the organization. This could be where I'll be or it may not. Whenever they choose to tell you or whenever it's time to leave — whatever team you're with, that's where you'll start the season."

Actually, the Triple-A River Cats would be the next logical move for Jemile. He began and ended the 2010 season with the Double-A Rock Hounds.

A mid-season injury and rehabilitation assignment interrupted what would have been a full year in Texas.

I stayed for a bit of the Triple-A game. It was like watching the A's and the Giants two or three or four years from now.

Of course, both big teams still have several minor league players up with them until opening day.

Nevertheless, the future was definitely on the field. Interestingly, Napa's own Matt Yourkin pitched for Fresno. I did not get a chance to do any more than say hello — starting pitchers do have their unbreakable routines.

The game was generally very low key.

The big stuff was going on over in Scottsdale and Phoenix. There was just a handful of people there; however, the price of admission couldn't be better — there was none.

It was an interesting and comprehensive look at minor league baseball.

While I was watching the Triple-A game, the Double-A Rock Hounds and Flying Squirrels were playing on the diamond next door.

Meanwhile, on the other side of Scottsdale at the Giants' complex, the Class A teams were going at it in High-A and Low-A games.

Actually, it was a beautiful day in a dramatic setting among the red rocks of Papago.

However, I had the feeling that many if not most of the players on the field were thinking about being somewhere else.

Jemile Weeks was probably speaking for everyone when, in the course of our earlier conversation, he said, "The big leagues is where you want to be. If you're playing this game and have aspirations of trying to be the best, then you're trying to get to the big leagues."

A's Bailey begins throwing program

[Mychael Urban](http://Mychael.Urban.CSNBayArea.com), CSNBayArea.com

A's closer Andrew Bailey, who will start the season on the DL while recovering from scar tissue and a strained forearm tendon, took the first step on the road to returning to the mound Sunday by playing catch at 60 feet for about 25 throws.

It was the first time Bailey had thrown a baseball since coming off the mound in obvious pain in a Cactus League game on March 14.

A subsequent visit to Dr. James Andrews, who performed a clean-up surgery on Bailey's right elbow in the offseason, ended with Bailey being told not to throw again until he was completely pain free.

"Everything felt great," Bailey told CSNBayArea.com in the dugout Monday at AT&T Park. "I'm still a ways from being able to throw off a mound but I definitely feel like I'm ahead of where I thought I'd be when I first came out of that game."

Bailey, who did not throw on Monday, said he will throw Tuesday and Wednesday, take Thursday off, then continue working two days on, one day off until he starts throwing off a mound.

Bailey, who underwent Tommy John surgery on the same elbow in 2005, expressed confidence that the rest of the A's relievers will be able to pick up the slack left by his absence in the early going and said he hopes to be back in action within 2-3 weeks.

A's hosting Fan Appreciation Tailgate prior to Tuesday's game at Coliseum

Sam McPherson, examiner.com, 3/29/2011

While the Oakland Athletics no longer put on their popular Fan Fest before the season begins, they will be hosting a Fan Appreciation Tailgate on Tuesday afternoon -- prior to the team's first home appearance of the spring.

The A's host the 2010 World Series champion San Francisco Giants in the traditional preseason exhibition series on Tuesday night at 7:05 p.m., but for the three hours or so before the first pitch, Oakland fans have a unique opportunity to mingle with the players and get autographs.

The event, sponsored by Comcast SportsNet California, will be from 4 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., prior to the A's/Giants game in Parking Lot A. Entry to the Fan Appreciation Tailgate free to everyone. Parking is also free as a part of the A's Free Parking Tuesday promotion, sponsored by Chevrolet.

The parking gates will open at 12:00 p.m.

The 2011 A's Fan Appreciation Tailgate features:

- **Free player autograph sessions**
- **Q&A sessions** with Manager Bob Geren, players and coaches
- **A special edition of Chronicle Live on Comcast SportsNet Bay Area**, featuring current and former A's players, broadcasting live on location at 5:00 p.m.
- **Free photos with the team's four World Series Trophies** and former A's players Joe Rudi and Tony Phillips
- **Game used memorabilia tent sale**, featuring game used jerseys, hats, batting helmets and bats from years past, with all proceeds to benefit the A's Community Fund
- **SportsNet Central Sportscaster Experience Booth**
- **A's "Mathletics" Program Signup Booth**
- **A's Kids Club Signup Booth**

In addition, tickets for the A's/Giants exhibition game at the Coliseum are priced starting at just \$5.