

A's News Clips, Sunday, April 3, 2011

Oakland A's defense, bullpen in disarray after 0-2 start to season

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's have not played a pretty brand of baseball coming out of the gate.

An eighth-inning, game-tying rally went for naught Saturday night as the Seattle Mariners scored three runs off Brian Fuentes in the top of the ninth to send the A's to a 5-2 loss at the Oakland Coliseum.

It's been a group effort that's led to the A's 0-2 start. But the shakiness of the bullpen sticks out among Oakland's early struggles.

Fuentes, the interim closer until Andrew Bailey returns from a forearm strain, allowed three hits and three runs (two earned) in his A's debut.

Craig Breslow, who missed significant time during spring training with a hamstring injury, has allowed four runs (three earned) in two appearances.

Seattle's rally in the ninth included a throwing error from first baseman Daric Barton on Ichiro Suzuki's go-ahead RBI infield single and a wild pitch from Fuentes that scored Miguel Olivo with the second run.

"At some point, pitching and defense will be the key to this team," Breslow said, "just not the first two nights."

Josh Willingham's run-scoring single in the eighth scored Coco Crisp to pull the A's into a 2-2 tie. But Seattle jumped on Fuentes, a Merced native who signed a two-year deal with the A's in January.

Jack Wilson singled and moved to second on Michael Saunders' sacrifice. Olivo's single put runners on the corners, and Suzuki tapped a grounder to the right side. Barton cut the ball off and threw across his body trying to get Wilson at home. His errant throw got past catcher Kurt Suzuki, Seattle led 3-2 and Olivo advanced to third.

Olivo scored on Fuentes' wild pitch, then Ichiro Suzuki stole third and scored on Chone Figgins' sacrifice fly to make it 5-2.

"We tied the game and had our closer in hoping he could put a zero up, and it didn't work out," A's manager Bob Geren said.

Said Fuentes: "I wasn't consistent enough in the strike zone. It's always frustrating to come in and pitch poorly."

Ichiro Suzuki's ninth-inning single was his 2,248th hit as a Mariner, breaking Edgar Martinez's franchise record. He also had an infield single in the third on the 10-year anniversary of his major league debut.

The A's were quiet offensively, as Mariners starter Jason Vargas allowed only one run over 6²/₃ innings. Oakland has just four runs and 13 hits through two games.

But Willingham, who homered Friday, came through for the A's again with his game-tying single in the eighth that scored Crisp, who had stolen third.

That sequence was preceded by a confusing play in which David DeJesus' short-hop liner appeared to be caught by Mariners second baseman Wilson but was ruled a trap.

A's starter Brett Anderson pitched well enough to win, allowing one run over six innings with five strikeouts and one walk.

The score was 1-1 when he gave way to Breslow to start the seventh. Brendan Ryan greeted Breslow with a leadoff double. Ryan eventually scored on Saunders' sacrifice fly for a 2-1 Seattle lead.

Breslow was asked if the time he missed during spring training left him rusty.

"There's probably some element of that," he said.

The A's only other 0-2 start over the previous 12 seasons came in 2007. Gio Gonzalez takes the mound Sunday looking to generate some good vibes for the A's before they embark on a nine-game road trip.

"Gio will come back and get us kick-started before this long road trip," Anderson said.

A's notebook: Catcher Kurt Suzuki is back in lineup despite sprained ankle

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Catcher Kurt Suzuki was back in the A's lineup Saturday night and said he believes he can play through his left ankle sprain.

Suzuki left Friday night's opener shortly after the Seattle Mariners' Miguel Olivo rolled over his ankle on a seventh-inning play at the plate.

Suzuki was put through a set of agility drills Saturday afternoon, took some swings in the batting cage and came out of it well enough that manager Bob Geren penciled him in.

"They said it can't get worse, as long as I can handle the pain," Suzuki said. "Any time of the year, you don't want to get hurt. But especially at the beginning of the year, you want to be out there and help the team get off to a good start."

It initially looked like Suzuki's injury was more serious Friday, with trainers attending to him as he lay on the ground.

"It's great news," Geren said. "Considering how it looked, we're very happy that he's OK."

The A's are holding Japanese Heritage Day on Sunday. The event originally was planned around A's designated hitter Hideki Matsui and Mariners right fielder Ichiro Suzuki -- Japan's most famous major leaguers -- playing against each other at the Oakland Coliseum.

After the massive earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan on March 11, a fundraising component was added for the game. The A's are donating \$1 for every ticket sold to Red Cross relief efforts in Japan.

Matsui and Ichiro Suzuki each autographed jerseys they wore in Friday's opener, which will be sold during a silent auction held before and during Sunday's game. Proceeds will go to the Red Cross.

"I think it's a great idea, and hopefully it will help as many people as possible," Matsui said through translator Roger Kahlon.

Closer Andrew Bailey, on the 15-day disabled list with a right forearm strain, is throwing long toss at a distance of 120 feet. There's no date for him to get on the mound yet.

The A's five errors Friday set an Oakland record for opening day. The last time they committed five errors in an opener was in 1927, when the Philadelphia A's did so in an 8-3 loss to the New York Yankees.

Chin Music: Kurt Suzuki back in A's lineup despite sprained ankle

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 4/2/2011 4:42PM

If A's fans want a silver lining from Friday's opening night debacle, here it is: Catcher Kurt Suzuki is back in the lineup despite his sprained left ankle. Suzuki tested the ankle by doing agility drills and taking some swings this afternoon, and the training staff cleared him to play. He said the pain was manageable, so he's back in there hitting sixth. "They said it can't get worse," Suzuki said. "Once they said it can't get worse, as long as I can handle the pain ..."

—Same lineup as last night for the A's:

Crisp CF, Barton 1B, DeJesus RF, Willingham LF, Matsui DH, Suzuki C, Ellis 2B, Kouzmanoff 3B, Pennington SS; Anderson LHP.

Mariners: Ichiro RF, Figgins 3B, Bradley LF, Cust DH, Smoak 1B, Ryan SS, Wilson 2B, Saunders CF, Moore C; Vargas LHP.

—The A's five errors last night set an Oakland record for opening day. They committed four in last year's opener, also a loss to Seattle at home. Coincidence? First-game jitters? I don't expect the defense to be nearly that bad throughout the season. But the A's need reliever Craig Breslow to be better than he was last night (3 hits, 2 earned runs, 1 walk in 2/3 IP). Breslow was limited in spring training because of a hamstring injury. And remember, as good as Breslow was last season, he got off to a rocky start in April after being limited last spring because of an elbow injury.

—Brett Anderson, tonight's starting pitcher, made five starts against the Mariners last season and allowed just three earned runs in 33 2/3 innings.

Sunday Playground: A's are a little bit country

By Gary Peterson, Bay Area News Group

More than 24 hours before the first pitch of the new season, the A's recorded their first save. On the brink of radio homelessness, they announced a four-year contract with KBWF-FM, known to its country music-loving friends as 95.7 The Wolf.

For one thing, if there's anything more American than baseball, it's country music.

For another, The Wolf comes equipped with a whole genre of potential walk-up tunes. We hear rumors that closer Andrew Bailey is considering "I Don't Care if it Rains or Freezes as Long as I Have My Plastic Jesus Sittin' on the Dashboard of my Car."

And if he isn't, he should be.

A's drop second in a row to Seattle Mariners

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

After two nights of less than stirring relief pitching and defense, the A's are certain that their best attributes won't remain hidden.

"This is not characteristic of the way we usually play," reliever Craig Breslow said after Oakland's 5-2 loss to Seattle.

"Eventually, we'll become the guys we are."

Breslow, Friday night's losing pitcher, surrendered the lead in the seventh inning Saturday night, and in his Oakland debut, Brian Fuentes entered with the game tied in the ninth and gave up three runs, helped along by an error by first baseman Daric Barton. Fuentes is filling in as closer while Andrew Bailey is out with a forearm strain.

"I don't think it was any more difficult than I made it," Fuentes said of his inning. "I just wasn't commanding the zone before well. ... It's always frustrating when you come in and pitch poorly, regardless of the score."

Jack Wilson singled to start the ninth, went to second on a sacrifice bunt, then to third on a pinch-hit single on an 0-2 pitch by Miguel Olivo. Ichiro Suzuki knocked an infield hit to first to send in Wilson, and Barton's throw to the plate was wild, allowing Olivo to go to third. He scored on a wild pitch by Fuentes, and Ichiro stole third and came in on a sacrifice fly by Chone Figgins.

Manager Bob Geren had no problem with Barton's throw, saying it was a "heck of a try," but overall, he felt the bullpen wasn't sharp again and that the A's didn't swing the bats well enough. Geren said he believes that third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff, who had another shaky night in the field, "will smooth it out."

Oakland tied it up in the eighth, an inning Coco Crisp opened with a drag bunt single. He eventually scored when Josh Willingham rolled a hit into right.

Breslow took over from Brett Anderson at the start of the seventh after Anderson allowed five hits, a walk and one run in six innings and compiled 108 pitches. Brendan Ryan doubled to left, Wilson singled to right and Michael Saunders hit a sacrifice fly to shallow center.

Breslow, who missed much of the spring with a hamstring strain, gave up three runs, two earned, on Opening Night, but he said he's encouraged because he feels fine physically and his velocity is good. "I'm just not getting outs," he said. "I'd like to think that will turn around as I make pitches."

The Mariners' lone run off Anderson came courtesy of ex-A's players. Milton Bradley singled to left with two outs in the sixth and stole second, then Jack Cust singled to center on a 3-0 pitch from Anderson.

The A's are 0-2 to start the season for only the second time in the past 13 years.

"We're built to win games," Anderson said. "And Gio (Gonzalez) will come back tomorrow and get us kick-started for this long road trip coming up."

A's beat: Kurt Suzuki straps on the gear

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Mariners catcher **Miguel Olivo**, who outweighs A's catcher **Kurt Suzuki** by 30 pounds, bounced off Suzuki's leg and into home plate on Friday night, leaving Suzuki with a sprained left ankle.

Suzuki shook off what appeared to be a significant injury and was back in the lineup Saturday evening.

"It took a roll of tape, and I can't move my ankle, but they said it can't get worse, so if I can handle the pain, I can play," he said.

Handing pain comes with a catcher's job description, and after Suzuki went out to the field and ran and hit, he was deemed good to go.

"That's great news, considering how it looked," manager **Bob Geren** said.

Milestone awaits: Once again, designated hitter **Hideki Matsui** did not record his first hit with Oakland - leaving him at 2,499 for his professional career in Japan and the major leagues.

Matsui's teammates are impressed with the pending achievement.

"To record that many hits, the first thing that crosses your mind is that he's been a great hitter his whole life," first baseman **Daric Barton** said. "It's crazy to think he has that many hits. That is a major achievement. And it's good that we'll all be a part of something like that."

"That just shows what a really good player Matsui is," center fielder **Coco Crisp** said. "Getting to 2,000 is a huge mark. To be one hit shy of 2,500 is pretty amazing, actually."

Fellow Japanese star **Ichiro Suzuki** became the Mariners' all-time hits leader Friday night with his 2,248th, passing **Edgar Martinez**.

Briefly: **Mark Ellis** extended his career-high hitting streak to 15 games, dating back to last season, with a single in the second. ... Reliever **Grant Balfour** made his Oakland debut; the Australian worked 1 2/3 scoreless innings. ... **Andrew Bailey** (forearm strain) threw long toss at 120 feet again and said, "That's the best I've felt." Bailey expects to throw again

Monday and Tuesday. ... The A's will donate \$1 of every ticket sold to today's game to the Red Cross for Japanese relief efforts, and there will be numerous other fund-raising efforts at the Coliseum.

A's leading off

Rosy riveted: Infielder Adam Rosales gets his surgically repaired foot checked April 14, and meantime, he's watching closely. "I want to stay mentally in the game," Rosales said. "I feel like I'm learning a lot just observing."

Drumbeat: Kurt Suzuki back in A's lineup; items on Bailey, Breslow

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the Coliseum 4/2/2011 5:13PM

Trevor Cahill was right - he'd said last night that knowing Kurt Suzuki, an ankle sprain wouldn't keep him out of a game, and Suzuki is indeed in tonight's lineup.

Suzuki said that it took a whole roll of tape, but his left ankle isn't moving anywhere and he can't injure it further. He went out early in the afternoon and ran and hit, and he was deemed fine for activity. Manager Bob Geren said, "That's great news, considering how it looked."

It did look bad - many people who saw Miguel Olivo slide over the back of Suzuki's legs thought Suzuki had twisted his left knee; Suzuki said everyone has been telling him that, and several scouts said they'd been convinced his knee was injured. Suzuki said his knee never hurt in the slightest, and the ankle isn't even very swollen.

Here's the lineup, it's the same as last night's: Crisp CF, Barton 1B, DeJesus RF, Willingham LF, Matsui DH, Suzuki C, Ellis 2B, Kouzmanoff 3B, Pennington SS.

Andrew Bailey had his best day of throwing long toss yet, he confirmed, and he'll have back-to-back days of throwing Monday and Tuesday and then, based on the A's usual throwing program, he might be close to flat-ground work or throwing off the front of the mound on Thursday or Friday. Mid- to late April still makes sense as a potential return date, though the A's have not announced any sort of timetable. Bailey and Rich Harden will both go on the A's next trip to continue to work with pitching coach Ron Romanick, a sign both are getting closer to full health. I wouldn't be surprised if Harden is sent out on a rehab assignment sometime around the A's next homestand.

I asked Geren about using Craig Breslow, a lefty, after Jerry Blevins, a lefty, last night; the A's have four left-handers in the bullpen, and Breslow is probably the best of them in terms of his ability to get out both right-handers and left-handers. He came in to face Ichiro Suzuki, and Geren said his reasoning was this: He needed all his best relievers to work the rest of the way, with what was at that point a one-run game.

Breslow was one of the team's best relievers last year, and he planned to have Breslow face the top of the Mariners' order, then have Brad Ziegler available to face all the right-handers lower down in the lineup. Then Grant Balfour for the eighth, Brian Fuentes for the ninth.

Of course it didn't play out that way, because Breslow's location was off (his velocity was good, though, scouts said) and Breslow told me some of his pitch selections probably weren't great - the pitch he threw Chone Figgins, for instance, that Figgins homered on.

The A's have followed five of their seven consecutive Opening Day losses with victories, and the only time they've started the season 0-2 in the past 12 years was in 2007.

Messy finish costs A's in loss to Mariners

By Jane Lee / MLB.com | 4/3/2011

OAKLAND -- When the A's lost closer Andrew Bailey to a forearm strain a couple of weeks ago, they refrained from hitting the panic button and instead pointed around to the abundance of healthy faces still in tow.

When some of those same faces squandered their second game in as many days in a 5-2 loss to the Mariners on Saturday, when Seattle posted a three-spot in the ninth against Brian Fuentes, the panic button remained untouched.

That's because the A's know they have quality depth in an exceptionally talented bullpen. They just don't know when that talent will be on full display, as they continue to adjust pitchers to different roles in Bailey's absence.

Lefty Craig Breslow, who was brought along slowly this spring and made just five appearances as a precaution following a 75-game 2010 campaign, showed signs Saturday that he still may be compiling the necessary number of innings to be fully prepared for the season.

The A's southpaw, taking over the seventh after starter Brett Anderson left behind a 1-1 game, quickly gave up back-to-back hits before offering up a sacrifice fly to Michael Saunders to hand the Mariners a one-run lead.

The forgettable frame came just one day after Breslow was tagged with a blown save when he allowed three runs -- two earned -- in just 2/3 of an inning in Friday's 6-2 loss.

"He struggled a little bit with his command," manager Bob Geren said. "He's a guy that did a heckuva job for us last year, and we know he's going to give you everything he has right there. He just didn't look as sharp as he normally does, two nights in a row.

"He's healthy, and his arm feels good and the velocity is there but the command is not. Sharpness usually comes with innings and getting pitches under his belt. He'll get it."

Breslow said he felt just fine; in fact, even better than the previous night in terms of pounding the strike zone. He threw 11 pitches, eight of which were strikes, after tallying 11 strikes in 20 total throws on Friday.

"I'm just not getting outs," he said. "I'd like to think, at some point, things will turn if I keep making pitches."

The A's attempted to make up for Breslow's shaky outing by tying the game in the eighth courtesy of an RBI single off the bat of Josh Willingham, who awarded fellow outfielder and leadoff hitter Coco Crisp's efforts. Crisp kicked things off with a bunt single and advanced to second on a Daric Barton base hit before stealing third and riding home on Willingham's knock through the hole.

The momentum lasted all of a few minutes, as Seattle came out swinging early and often in the ninth against Fuentes, who was making his A's debut. Fuentes, owner of nearly 200 career saves, quickly surrendered a leadoff single to Jack Wilson, who advanced to second courtesy of a sacrifice bunt from Michael Saunders.

"I faced Fuentes a lot when he was with Colorado in the National League and a couple of times when he was in Anaheim," Wilson said. "So I just went up there with the approach to see some pitches and do anything I could to get on base. I took some good swings, saw the ball well and was able to get one through.

"Then Saunders did a great job getting the bunt down to put us in position to score a run. That was kind of our missing key last year, using our speed up top and bunting guys over and doing the little things."

Miguel Olivo followed with a base hit on a changeup to move Saunders to third, and A's first baseman Daric Barton then made a wide throw home on an RBI infield single from Ichiro Suzuki. The error -- the club's sixth miscue this season --

allowed Olivo to advance to third base, and the Mariners catcher ultimately scored on a sacrifice fly from Chone Figgins, but not before Suzuki stole third and scored on a wild pitch.

"In that situation," Geren said of Barton's decision, "it's a tough ball to turn two on and I thought that he made a heckuva try going home. It was probably an attempt of a play that's not going to be made too often. Had it been a perfect throw it would have worked, but it was a tough play."

The veteran Fuentes, who is maintaining closer's duties while Bailey is out of the mix, didn't mind entering a tied game in the ninth. After all, he's "pitched in that situation lots of times before," he noted.

"I don't think it was any more difficult than I made it," Fuentes said. "I just wasn't commanding the strike zone very well. The pitches I was making, I'd get ahead of guys and then fall back behind. I just wasn't consistent enough in the strike zone."

The bullpen's shortcomings followed a rather solid season debut from Anderson, who gave up just one run on five hits while walking one and striking out five in six innings of work. The A's lefty, looking to put together a healthy season after starting just 19 games last year because of elbow trouble, put together five scoreless frames before giving up an RBI single to former teammate Jack Cust in the sixth and closing the frame having racked up 108 pitches.

"They got my pitch count up pretty quick," Anderson said. "I tried to get ahead of them in the count and make them put balls in play, but they're going to try to get into hitters' counts because they know that if we get ahead, odds are, we're going to do pretty good."

Seattle starter Jason Vargas went 6 2/3 innings, giving up just one run on five hits while walking one and striking out six. The lone run came in the third, when Cliff Pennington garnered a leadoff base hit, moved to third on a Daric Barton double and came home on an RBI groundout from David DeJesus.

The loss dropped the A's to 0-2, just the second time in 12 years that they've lost their first two games.

"We're kinda frustrated a little bit, but it is only the second game of the season," Anderson said. "We've got 160 more, and I think we're built to win ball games."

Said Breslow: "At some point, pitching and defense will be the key to this team -- just not the first two nights. I think the way we've been playing isn't characteristic of the way we can play and what will eventually take shape."

'Slightly sore' Suzuki returns to lineup

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- A's catcher Kurt Suzuki returned to the lineup on Saturday after exiting Friday's season-opening contest in the eighth inning with a mild left ankle sprain. The 27-year-old backstop, who went 0-for-2 in his season debut against the Mariners, said his ankle is still slightly sore and tight but that he's "good to go" after testing it out while taking part in baseball activities a few hours before game time on Saturday.

"That was the first time I had ever sprained my ankle, so I didn't know how it was going to react today," Suzuki said. "I was able to get in here early and get treatment and get loose. They said it can't get worse, so if this is the worst it's going to get, I can handle the pain."

Seattle's Miguel Olivo rolled over Suzuki's ankle on a play at the plate in the top of the seventh inning on Friday. The A's catcher stayed in the game after a trainer's visit, but he was replaced by Landon Powell in the top of the eighth.

"He's already been checked out," A's manager Bob Geren said before Saturday's contest. "It's great news, considering how it looked. We're very happy he's OK."

Suzuki's durability is well known. He was one of the most reliable catchers in the league last season, tying for second among American League backstops with 121 starts despite missing 19 games while on the disabled list with an intercostal strain and missing three games while on the bereavement list.

Worth noting

Andrew Bailey (forearm) threw from a distance of 120 feet for the second straight day on Saturday, and manager Bob Geren deemed it his "best day yet." Bailey and Rich Harden (lat muscle) will continue their rehab with the team when it hits the road Monday for a nine-game swing through Toronto, Minnesota and Chicago. ... David DeJesus has a 243-game errorless streak, which is the longest active streak among Major League outfielders.

Mariners look to sweep A's behind Fister

By Doug Miller / MLB.com | 4/3/2011 3:01 AM ET

Seattle righty Doug Fister watched his teammate, last year's American League Cy Young Award winner Felix Hernandez, handcuff the A's for an Opening Day complete-game gem. Jason Vargas followed suit with a quality start on Saturday. Now, Fister knows what he has to do in Sunday's getaway game against Oakland.

A's lefty Gio Gonzalez, however, had such a breakout year in 2010 that some pundits have said he'll make noise in this season's Cy Young race. If he's heard those projections, then Gonzalez, too, understands the meaning of pressure.

When the two young pitchers go at each other in Sunday's rubber match of the three-game, season-opening set at the Oakland Coliseum, it will be a contrast in styles on the mound, but not in desire to get off to a good start by winning a key series in the AL West.

For Fister, who pounds the strike zone and relies on a good two-seam fastball to get groundouts and limit his pitch count, it won't be anything unfamiliar. He had a strong first few months last year before struggling down the stretch, but he has a good history against the A's (4-2, 2.90 ERA in seven starts). He said he will try to do the same on Sunday.

"I try to take mindset of coming in and saying it's not who or what team, it's just a matter of going out and throwing strikes. I know how to throw and using the defense I know that we have," Fister said.

Gonzalez, meanwhile, is not ready to buy into any of the hype that his stellar 2010 campaign (15-9, 3.23 ERA, 171 strikeouts in 200 2/3 innings) has caused. He knows there's room to improve, as some of his interior numbers from last year prove. Gonzalez gave up 92 walks, which led to a 1.311 WHIP (walks + hits/innings pitched) despite the fact that he gave up only 171 hits.

Last year, he was a last-minute addition to the starting rotation out of Spring Training. This season, he's the No. 3 starter carrying enlarged expectations. But he said it won't affect the job he's looking to do in the first start of a new year.

"I'm just focused on pounding the strike zone," Gonzalez said. "That's been the goal all spring. Attack hitters and stay calm. I want to get to guys early and stay away from any trouble. I've got a great defense behind me, so it's just about putting the ball in play and letting them do what they do best."

Mariners: Smoak near the water

Justin Smoak has hit in a career-high 12 straight games (10 straight to end 2010). He is one of just three Major Leaguers with current double-digit hitting streaks (Mark Ellis of the A's is at 15 and Florida's Mike Stanton is at 12). Smoak's skein marks the 11th time a Mariners player has entered a season with a double-digit hitting streak. ... Ichiro Suzuki had two singles, including what proved to be the game-winning RBI in the ninth, in Saturday's game to break the Mariners all-time hits record with 2,248, previously held by Edgar Martinez. Coincidentally, Martinez became the Mariners' all-time hits leader 10 years ago on Sunday, April 3, 2001, vs. Oakland. Martinez went 2-for-3 that day to surpass Ken Griffey Jr.'s mark of 1,742. Ichiro, fresh in from Japan as an MLB rookie, was 0-for-4 that day and remained "stuck" on two career hits.

A's: Breslow starting off slow

Oakland lefty reliever Craig Breslow, who was very effective last year, has struggled out of the gate in 2011. He gave up a run in one-third of an inning in Saturday's loss to Seattle a night after taking the Opening Day loss by surrendering three runs (two earned) in two-thirds of an inning on Friday. Breslow pitched to a 3.01 ERA in a team-leading 75 appearances last year. He set an Oakland record for strikeouts by a lefty reliever with 71. ... Ellis' 15-game hitting streak, stretched out over two seasons, is a career-high. The A's second baseman is batting .390 (23-for-59) over the course of the streak, and he also has a current 10-game hitting streak against Seattle.

Worth noting

Mariners manager Eric Wedge said catcher Miguel Olivo will be back in the lineup on Sunday after not starting Saturday's game, although Olivo pinch-hit in the ninth. Olivo is coming back from a strained left groin muscle and will be rotated with Adam Moore in the early going. ... Gonzalez is 4-1 with a 3.40 ERA in nine appearances against Seattle. He currently has a four-game winning streak (2.78 ERA) and was 3-0 with a 2.84 ERA in four starts against Seattle last year.

A's lose to Mariners, 5-2

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Brian Fuentes would have preferred a different outcome. He wanted to make a good first impression on his new teammates.

Instead, he watched Ichiro Suzuki set a Seattle franchise record for hits.

Fuentes allowed three runs and three hits in the ninth inning of the Athletics' 5-2 loss to the Mariners on Saturday night.

"It wasn't any more difficult than I made it," Fuentes said. "I wasn't consistent enough in the strike zone. It's always frustrating to come out and pitch poorly."

Fuentes (0-1) gave up Suzuki's record-breaking hit, an infield dribbler that drove in the go-ahead run. First baseman Daric Barton tracked it down but couldn't nail Jack Wilson at the plate.

Suzuki has 2,248 hits, one better than Edgar Martinez. The milestone came on the 10th anniversary of Suzuki's major league debut.

A's starter Brett Anderson allowed one run and five hits in six innings. He struck out five and walked one while throwing 108 pitches.

"I got my pitch count up fairly quick," Anderson said. "They wanted to get into hitter's counts and then try and take advantage of that. It's frustrating but there are 160 games left."

Chris Ray (1-0) earned the win despite giving up the tying run, and Brandon League pitched a scoreless ninth for his first save.

Barton had three hits for the A's, who are off to an 0-2 start for just the second time in the last 13 years.

The Mariners nearly wasted a solid effort by starter Jason Vargas, who pitched five-hit ball into the seventh inning. But Jack Wilson and Milton Bradley had two hits apiece and Suzuki came up with another clutch play.

Chone Figgins added a sacrifice fly as Seattle broke it open with three runs.

The Mariners scored in the sixth and seventh to take a 2-1 lead. Jack Cust drove in fellow former Oakland slugger Bradley with an RBI single and Michael Saunders had a tiebreaking sacrifice fly.

One day after 2010 AL Cy Young Award winner Felix Hernandez handcuffed the A's with a five-hitter, Vargas departed with two outs in the seventh and a 2-1 lead. The left-hander struck out six and walked one.

David DeJesus had a run-scoring grounder in the third, but Vargas responded by retiring 12 of the next 14 hitters.

Oakland tied it at 2 in the eighth. Coco Crisp reached on an infield single off Ray and moved to second on Barton's third hit of the night. He then stole third before scoring on Josh Willingham's single.

NOTES

A's closer Andrew Bailey (strained forearm) had another pain-free throwing session from 120 feet but the team isn't certain when he'll return from the disabled list. "All the news has been very, very encouraging," Geren said. "Everything has been either right on or even above our expectations."

Bailey and RHP Rich Harden (strained lat muscle), who is also on the DL, will accompany the team on its road trip beginning Tuesday at Toronto.

Oakland C Kurt Suzuki was back in the lineup after leaving Friday's game with a sprained left ankle following a mild collision with Seattle's Miguel Olivo. Suzuki went 1 for 4.

Dreaming of a Bay Bridge World Series

By ROBERT RUBINO, THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

It almost happened for the first time in 1971. It did happen in 1989, but was rudely interrupted. It also had the potential to happen in 2000, 2002 and 2003.

What is it? A Bay Bridge World Series, of course.

Will we ever have another? Will this be the year?

In 1971, the first time the teams from Oakland and San Francisco earned playoff berths in the same season, the Giants were knocked off by the Pittsburgh Pirates, and the A's were swept by the Baltimore Orioles. That would have been a grand Bay Bridge Series, '71 being the great Willie Mays' last full season as a Giant and Vida Blue's fabulous breakout year in which he won the Cy Young and the American League's Most Valuable Player awards.

In 2000, the Giants were the winningest team in the majors — in the regular season — with 97 victories. And the A's won 91 games. It looked like a match made in Northern California heaven. But the Mets knocked off the suddenly impotent Giants, and the A's succumbed to the overachieving Yankees, who had won only 87 games.

In 2002, the Giants did their part, getting to the World Series. But the A's, who won 103 games that year, were undone by another small-payroll team, the Minnesota Twins.

In 2003, the Giants were in first place from the first day of the regular season through the last, but for the second time in seven years were derailed in the playoffs by the Florida Marlins. The A's, again putting the lie to the theory that small-payroll teams can't compete with the big boys, won 96 games — but then lost yet another heartbreaking, nailbiting (add your own cliché description if you like) postseason series, this time to the Boston Red Sox.

In 1989, as you know, both the Giants and A's hurdled the playoff obstacles and met in the first — and so far the only — Bay Bridge World Series. But an earthquake minutes before the start of Game 3 delayed the resumption of the Series for 10 days, making Oakland's eventual sweep seem anticlimactic.

Now I'm not saying another Bay Bridge World Series will happen in 2011. This is no prediction. But I do think a Bay Bridge World Series has a solid, decent chance of occurring in 2011. Here's why: Pitching. Both teams have it, in spades.

Tim Lincecum and Matt Cain are as good a 1-2 punch the Giants have had since Juan Marichal and Gaylord Perry. But the Giants also have Jonathan Sanchez and Madison Bumgarner in the starting rotation, and that pair could easily be a 1-2 punch of their own for at least a dozen other teams. That's four young but World Series-experienced, top-of-the-line starting pitchers. Throw in the Z factor, Barry Zito, who if nothing else has to be motivated after pitching himself into the role of highest-paid cheerleader of all-time during last year's postseason, and the Giants are in the playoffs again, where — as 2010 demonstrated — grand things can happen when you've got studly pitching.

But here's the thing. The A's have standout pitching, too. Trevor Cahill? He could be as good as any other American League ace. Yes, even Seattle's King Felix. The A's also have Gio Gonzalez and Dallas Braden and Brett Anderson and Brandon McCarthy. Gonzalez already broke through last year, Braden has thrown a perfect game, and Brett Anderson and Brandon McCarthy look like real deals. Oakland pitching had the lowest ERA in the American League and most shutouts in 2010 and is now poised to do what Giants pitching did last year — become nationally known.

Sure, an injury here or an off-year there and this whole notion of a Bay Bridge World Series could vanish in the fog. And it would be nice if someone on each team stepped up huge in the hitting department; (I hear Barry Bonds is looking for employment).

Still, on April 3, with six months of the season luxuriously stretched out before us, the idea of a Bay Bridge World Series sounds more doable than dreamy, fateful rather than merely fanciful.

Besides, it's been 22 years. We're due.

Meet Oakland's Other Billy: Six Questions for Exec Billy Owens

Andrew Pentis, rotoinfo.com, 4/2/2011

Director of Player Personnel [Billy Owens](#) has been with the A's organization for 13 seasons. He played seven seasons of Minor League Baseball in the Orioles' and Astros' systems before joining Oakland's scouting department. Billy O, as he's called by colleagues, was kind enough to grant an interview with rotoinfo.com. Among other things, he described working for the more famous Billy, Mr. Beane, and cautioned against giving up on the potential of prospects Chris Carter and Michael Taylor.

Rotoinfo: Having a hand in both Major League decisions and Minor League evaluations, could you take us through your typical in-season workday?

Billy O: Planes, trains, and automobiles when the season begins. A typical day for me could be digesting what happened in the prior nights Major/Minor League action, doing scouting reports on present amateur/international free agents. Reading reports from our scouts domestically/internationally. Driving or flying to the next venue. Checking in with our scouting and coaching personnel. Having some kind of communication with the best GM in the game, Billy Beane. Checking in with future GM David Forst. Possibly having a conversation with the most dedicated and respected Farm Director in the game in Keith Lieppman and discussing strategies with our outstanding Scouting Director in Eric Kubota. Then I have my coffee before the carousel of the season starts for the day. I call it the Thrill of Victory and the Agony of defeat. Constantly evaluating what you have on your Major League team. In your current farm system. What's possibly available. Who did you recommended in prior situations. How they are doing. Whether or not we acquired that particular player and having an honest self evaluation about everything that has transpired to that date on every avenue. It might sound arduous but, if you're a baseball junkie, it is an exhilarating way to start the day.

Rotoinfo: Many people inside and out of the Bay Area associate "Billy Ball" with former A's manager Billy Martin (1980-1982) or, more likely, current G.M. Billy Beane. Tell us about "Billy (Owens) Ball," your philosophy on how a club should be managed.

Billy O: Thankfully, I grew up in the Bay Area and experienced Billy Martin manage the Oakland Athletics. I remember him as pedal to the medal, gregarious personality, fierce, tough, and a winner. My parents took me to the game where Reggie [Jackson] came back to Oakland facing Billy Martin and the A's in the early 1980s. One of those experiences as a kid that you can still feel the euphoria in the stadium when two dynamic personalities graced the Coliseum. Those Oakland A's led by Rickey Henderson, Tony Armas, Dwayne Murphy and the vaunted pitching staff of Rick Langford, Matt Keough, Mike Norris, Steve McCatty, and Brian Kingman are plastered throughout memories of my childhood. Luckily when I washed out as a Minor League player I got a chance to work for the best GM in the game in Billy Beane. Starting out as an area scout and working my way up to my current role. Doing various things inside and throughout the organization has given me a lot of perspective. First and foremost working for Billy Beane is an unbelievably positive experience. He's not the person depicted in the novel from a personal standpoint. He's a loyal, passionate, driven, studious, dynamic leader, and has a captivating personality. Being around him in everyday circles is a pleasure and a lifelong learning

experience. Hopefully I will be able to meld the lessons he's bestowed upon me if that opportunity ever presented itself. First and foremost you have to make sure you are surrounded by quality people that share the same passion and love for the game of baseball that I exude. A leader should be able to preach certain philosophies that are critical to every organization succeeding on a consistent basis. But, everything starts with the right people and making sure they have the necessary ingredients to succeed in a good working environment. Personally, I'm a total baseball junkie. I've read every piece of literature on the subject available. Experienced it traveling the world seeing every level of baseball amateur and professionally and really can't get enough of it on a daily basis. I don't expect people around me to be that devoted and want people to have a full life away from work. However it's nice to have people surrounding you that truly care about what they are doing and in a small way share that same passion for the game. I've never considered baseball a job any day I've worked in it and, learning from Billy Beane, I'll always make sure people will have the freedom to share that same experience.

Rotoinfo: Did one or more A's players impress you during Spring Training? If so, who and why?

Billy O: It's always hard to answer broad-based questions on players within our system in the Major or Minor leagues. I will say that I feel that our system is very healthy and carries a ton of potential. Not only do we have an opportunity to compete this year at the major league level. We also have players littered throughout our farm system that are accomplished or have the ingredients to break out if they have an injury-free full season. We've made a conscience effort to have a very diverse system in terms of tools and types of players. Hopefully we hit on the makeup of these players and they are able to blossom under the fine tutelage of our Farm Director Keith Lieppman. We're constantly attempting to improve our Major League team and replenish our minor league system. Trying to be successful at both is a constant evolution of trial and error. I believe our direction and energy level trying to accomplish these goals is second to none. So hopefully we'll be able to get some players recognized this year as they flourish and move up through the organization.

Rotoinfo: Tenth overall 2010 Draft choice Michael Choice seemed to generate quite a bit of buzz while in Arizona. What did you glean from his spring campaign?

Billy O: Michael Choice is an outstanding young man that displays tremendous makeup. He's smart and a hard working kid. He definitely wasn't awed by being around the Major League atmosphere during Spring Training. But he was also very respectful of the veteran players. He fit in very well. His bat speed and power potential is prodigious. He's strong and fast. Plus he plays the game with zest and energy. As an organization, we can't wait to put his name in the lineup card and watch him develop in 2011.

Rotoinfo: What is your personal opinion, as a talent evaluator and as an executive, about the futures of often-lumped-together prospects Chris Carter and Michael Taylor? Do you expect them to turn into everyday players at the Major League level?

Billy O: Chris Carter and Michael Taylor are definitely two separate people. Both hard working kids and are great to work with. It's not fair that some publications meld their names together because they played in Sacramento simultaneously. Honestly I'm happy with their development and very curious to see what transpires in 2011. In the era of Blackberries, Internet, immediate access, computers and prospectdom, people are too quick to make assessments positively and negatively. I guarantee I can Google Buster Posey and not all evaluations are positive before the 2010 season. I vividly remember some questions about his catching ability. Obviously those questions were erased as the season evolved. Not putting these two players in that conversation but illustrating that we should let things evolve before we rush to judgment.

Rotoinfo: The A's, according to media reports quoting Beane, enjoyed (or endured, depending on one's point of view) perhaps its busiest offseason in the time he has been with the club, adding three veteran batsmen and two veteran relief pitchers, among others. Could you break down for those of us who are outside of the day-to-day, behind-the-scenes business side of the game how a Major League trade happens, how a conversation between folks from two or more front offices eventually turns into paperwork where Ts need to be crossed and Is need to be dotted?

Billy O: Lastly, it was a crazy and exhilarating offseason. Hopefully productive, but we won't know the answer to that until October. We're happy with what we accomplished and willing to play it out. As far as what goes on between making deals, that's just a constant evolution of creating relationships, dialogue and conversations. There are no absolutes to making a deal. However, certain matches as far as personnel and relationships make things easier or more difficult to operate.