

A's News Clips, Tuesday, April 5, 2011

A's upcoming road trip could have lasting consequences

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's embark on their first road trip of 2011 hoping to avoid frostbite and shed some history.

For the past four years, they've been one of the American League's worst road teams.

If they're to contend this season, it's imperative the A's win more games away from the Oakland Coliseum.

They face a stiff challenge with a nine-game trip that begins Tuesday against the Toronto Blue Jays, who led the majors with 257 homers last season.

Next comes three games each against the Minnesota Twins and Chicago White Sox, two AL Central contenders who play in open-air stadiums. Temperatures are expected in the 40s for each series.

With 22 of their next 35 games on the road, the A's must play well or risk falling into an early hole in the AL West.

"I think that's going to be a make-or-break thing for us," reliever Michael Wuertz said. "The teams that play well on the road usually end up in the playoffs."

Since 2007, the A's have gone 137-186 in road games for a .424 winning percentage. In the AL, only the Baltimore Orioles, Seattle Mariners and Kansas City Royals have fared worse over the same period.

Contrast that with the A's .525 home winning percentage since 2007.

Just nine of 30 major league teams posted winning road records last season. But consider that the four AL playoff teams from 2010 averaged a 43-38 mark on the road.

The A's, who finished nine games behind division champ Texas last season, were 47-34 at the Coliseum and 34-47 elsewhere.

"As good as we were at home last year, if we can just play .500 on the road, we can have a really good season," A's second baseman Mark Ellis said.

Ellis is at a loss to explain why the A's have struggled so much in the gray uniforms.

"I have no idea," he said. "Maybe we get out of our comfort zone. But I actually enjoy playing on the road. If you could figure out what it was, you'd fix it."

It's no surprise that A's pitchers are tough at home, since the Coliseum is a pitcher's ballpark. In 2010, Oakland posted the AL's lowest ERA (3.02) at home and allowed a league-low 62 homers.

It's harder to explain why the A's surrendered 91 homers on the road, which tied for second-most in the AL.

Offensively, the A's averaged just 3.81 runs per road game, the team's lowest mark since the 1978 squad scored 3.06.

For starting pitcher Trevor Cahill, the issue boils down to familiarity. At the Coliseum, Cahill said he knows the timing of pregame ceremonies and can adjust his routine accordingly.

He's familiar with the slope of the mound and can predict the weather -- rarely do temperatures get extremely high or low.

"You go somewhere else, maybe it's cold and we're not used to that," Cahill said. "Or you go to Kansas City in the summer when it's really warm, and we're not used to that. I think it's more just comfort."

If forecasts for Minnesota and Chicago are correct, the A's will encounter much chillier weather than they're accustomed to. But regardless of climate, they need to stash away more victories in opposing ballparks.

"I think everybody's home record is going to be better than their road," manager Bob Geren said. "But we need to do a better job on the road, that's for sure."

A's

Northern road trip to present stern test

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

For the A's truly to be a contender this season, they will have to greatly improve their road record. And their first trip away from the Coliseum won't exactly ease them into life on the road: Oakland heads on a three-city trip that includes good opponents and potentially cold, cold weather.

No mild West Coast temperatures on this jaunt, although at least for the next three games, the A's will be playing in a dome in Toronto. Then it could turn chilly, because Oakland plays at Minnesota starting Friday, and early next week, the team is in Chicago.

The Twins, of course, played in a dome for years before moving outside last season to Target Field in downtown Minneapolis. There were no rainouts - or snowouts - last year, but odds are, the Twins will have their first this year.

"There's always one last snowstorm in April or in early May," said A's second baseman Mark Ellis, who grew up in South Dakota, next door to Minnesota.

The A's very much hope that doesn't happen this weekend, because this will be their only trip to Minnesota this season. If, say, Sunday's game were to get rained out (and rain is currently in the forecast), there's a chance they'd have to make it up late in the season. The teams' only shared days off in the second half come in September.

"It's not our preferred time to go from a weather standpoint," Oakland general manager Billy Beane said of his team's visit to Minnesota. "That's probably the best way to say it."

Otherwise, many A's don't mind the idea of playing in potentially cold weather.

"It will be cold, but it will be cold for everyone - and hitters dislike that more than the pitchers do," said left-hander Craig Breslow, a former Twins pitcher. "We're a team based on pitching and defense, so that should help us."

"It definitely makes pitching easier," said reliever Michael Wuertz, who is from Minnesota. "Hitters aren't quite as aggressive."

Nearly everyone would prefer to see cold-weather teams playing at warm-weather sites early, or division opponents playing at the areas most likely to get rain or snow because they more easily can make up postponed games.

"It's going to stink, period," A's first baseman Daric Barton said. "But it's good to get a long road trip out of the way early."

Oakland has four three-city trips this season after only one true three-city trip last year (the other included San Francisco).

Last year, the A's went a combined 4-9 at Toronto, Minnesota and Chicago. Overall, the team was 34-47 on the road, compared with 47-34 at home.

"A little experience will help there," A's manager Bob Geren said. "In general, it's more difficult in our sport to play on the road, but we need to improve our road record."

Oakland's ERA was more than a run higher away from the Coliseum, 4.13 compared with 3.02, and some of that was, not surprisingly, because of allowing more homers away from the spacious home field - A's pitchers gave up 62 homers at home, 91 on the road. On the offensive side, the A's hit nine points lower on the road, at .252.

Home vs. road

The A's record at home and on the road the past four years:

Year	Home	Road
2010	47-34	34-47
2009	40-41	35-46
2008	43-38	32-48
2007	40-41	36-45

A'S LEADING OFF

Tuesday, April 5, 2011

Starter switch: The A's flipped Dallas Braden and Brandon McCarthy in the rotation without explanation Monday. The move splits up right-handers McCarthy, who starts today in Toronto, and Trevor Cahill, who pitches Thursday. It also gives Braden six days off.

Inbox: Which player is the key to success?

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

It seems like there are a lot of expectations for the A's this year. It's a nice change, as opposed to everyone writing them off before the season even began. Which player do you think will be the key to their success? -- Jonathan C., Concord, Calif.

If you were to ask manager Bob Geren this very question, he wouldn't be able to name just one guy. He'd point to the young studs in the rotation, then he'd turn to the equally talented bullpen and, before you could ask again, he'd go up and down the lineup, noting how each of his players is going to contribute greatly this season. He'd exploit the depth that has this A's team sporting a different look than the squads he's managed in years past. Needless to say, Geren could make a case for almost all of his guys and, in turn, make this question a tough one.

But if you're really talking about an impact player, someone who can ignite this team day in and day out, I think you can find your answer pretty quickly without looking further than the No. 1 spot in the lineup. Coco Crisp is a sure catalyst, and he's already proven that in the club's first three games. Picking up right where he left off in a torrid spring, he's tallied five hits in 12 at-bats. On Sunday, he was a home run away from completing the cycle, and I don't think he'll slow down anytime soon so long as he's healthy.

A broken left pinkie sidelined Crisp at the start and end of last season, and he also spent time on the disabled list with an intercostal strain. As a result, he played in just 75 games but still managed to post a .279 average with eight home runs, 38 RBIs and a career-high 32 stolen bases. The A's went 40-35 when he was in the lineup during an 81-81 season. Expect this sparkplug to do more of the same this year.

Please explain to me why Andrew Bailey's strained forearm was considered good news. The bullpen just wasn't the same when he was injured last year, and they already aren't looking too good this year. When do we get Bailey back?

-- Tom G., Castro Valley, Calif.

Injuries never equate to good news, but in this situation the A's are looking at the best-case scenario, considering what could have been. Bailey looked to be in considerable pain when he left his second spring outing against Cleveland, and a trip to noted surgeon Dr. James Andrews only confirmed that the pain was no minor thing. Given Bailey's injury history, I think several people feared the worst -- structural damage, which would have meant surgery and another lengthy rehab process that would have kept him out for most, if not all, of the season.

But with the diagnosis of a forearm strain, Bailey is already playing catch from progressively extended distances, and he's hoping to throw off the mound again in a week or so. If all goes well, he'll then make a couple of Minor League rehab appearances -- keep in mind he didn't have much of a Spring Training -- before being reinstated from the DL. That puts him on pace to potentially return near the end of April, meaning Bailey will still be a major factor for this team for most of the year. Most is better than none, and anyone in the A's clubhouse would agree.

The bullpen appeared shaky in the club's first two games, and while Bailey's absence does force the other relievers to slide into slightly different roles, I think they'll start adjusting just fine. Brian Fuentes and Craig Breslow, both of whom struggled in their first appearances, are both proven and are expected to bounce back in their next outings.

What's with all of the errors already? I don't want to hear the front office preaching about the defense when these players can't even make routine plays.

-- Jaime G., Richmond, Calif.

Despite their embarrassing five-error performance on Friday, followed by an error in each of the last two games, the A's defense is capable of making both the routine plays and the not-so-routine plays, and it's not fair to question their ability based on a small sample size. Each of the infielders from 2010 returned this season, and I think we all know that each has proven to boast above-average skills. Kevin Kouzmanoff seems to be experiencing the most trouble over at third, but he made a nice play in Sunday's series finale and Geren said he's not too worried about the guy he deems to be "one of the best in the league."

The A's skipper also mentioned that he noticed his players appeared to be a little "tight" during those first two games, and following Sunday's game he eagerly relayed his thoughts on how much more relaxed they looked on the field. So maybe the mistakes were brought along by a few jitters but, either way, I can tell you they won't come nearly as frequently the rest of the way.

When will we see Tyson Ross again? He really deserved to make the team. I don't think he could have pitched better this spring, and I think it would be fun to see him in the A's rotation next to the other young guys.

-- Pat D., Berkeley, Calif.

Rest assured that Ross will receive the first call if one of the current starters goes down to injury, or if Brandon McCarthy isn't getting the job done in the fifth spot. McCarthy came into camp boasting the most starting experience out of the rotation competitors, a group that also included Bobby Cramer and Josh Outman, and he managed to walk just one while fanning 20 in his appearances.

Ross threw the ball well, too, and continually impressed Geren with his improved fastball command. The A's are obviously high on this guy, but they want him to be a starter. They made that rather clear last year when they put him in the big league bullpen to start the year before optioning him to Triple-A in July. They could have just as easily plugged him in the bullpen as a long-relief option again this season, but they know that if they want him to be a rotation mainstay over the next couple of years, it's best that he gets the innings he needs and deserves in the Minors.

Barring injury, Ross will start a Major League game this year. It's just too soon to tell when.

OK, Jane, give us your predictions. What will the A's record be this year and where will they finish in the division standings?

-- Mark H., Pleasant Hill, Calif.

For what it's worth, I think this club is good for 87 wins and a division crown. Texas will hang tight, but pitching will likely separate the two teams down the stretch, and the Angels and Mariners will finish third and fourth, respectively.

Feel free to ask me again in two months.

How Major League Baseball teams got their nicknames

By JEFF EDELSTEIN, Delaware County Daily Times, 4/4/2011

Did you ever wonder where Major League Baseball teams got their nicknames from? So did we, so after checking out various sources, from Wikipedia to **MLB.com**, we've come up with something resembling an unofficial guide to team names.

Read on ... or play ball!

AMERICAN LEAGUE

Baltimore Orioles: Originally the St. Louis Browns, team owners changed the name for the 1954 season. The name "Orioles" had been used for decades by Baltimore minor league and club teams.

Boston Red Sox: Because they wore red socks, referred to as "stockings" during the late 19th century and early 20th. "Sox" was chosen so headline writers could fit it on a newspaper page in large print.

Chicago White Sox: See Red Sox and headline writers. Took the name "White Stockings" after the National League's Cubs gave up the nickname.

Cleveland Indians: Formerly the "Naps," after manager Nap Lojoe, the Indians name was chosen by new owners in 1914, and probably a nod to the then-Boston Braves.

Detroit Tigers: Unclear, though best bet appears to be they were named after the Detroit Light Guard Military Unit, who were nicknamed the "Tigers."

Kansas City Royals: Probably from the "American Royal," a rodeo and horse show held in Kansas City.

Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim: They were born in Los Angeles, Spanish for "the angels." You can figure it out from there.

Minnesota Twins: Minneapolis. St. Paul. Twin Cities. Twins. 'Nuff said.

Oakland A's: Officially the Athletics, named after the 19th century "Athletic clubs," and probably a direct result of the "Philadelphia Athletic Club," where the A's got their start.

New York Yankees: Originally the Highlanders, as they played in the aptly named Hilltop Park. The name was changed to Yankees officially in 1913, thanks in no small part to the the New York Press, who referred to the team as the Yankees.

Seattle Mariners: Marine culture is apparently pretty big in the Pacific Northwest; hence, the Mariners.

Tampa Bay Rays: Formerly the Devil Rays, the name was changed in 2007, and means, according to owner Stuart Sternberg, "a beacon that radiates throughout Tampa Bay and across the entire state of Florida." In other words, "Ray" as in "light," and not marine life.

Texas Rangers: Named after the famous lawmen.

Toronto Blue Jays: Locals were asked for input, "Blue Jays" were mentioned, and the team owners — Labatt Breweries — chose the name to coincide with their best-selling beer, Labatt's Blue. It's believed they hoped the team would be referred to as the "Blues," but that backfired, as the "Jays" are the preferred shortened name for the franchise.

NATIONAL LEAGUE

Arizona Diamondbacks: Chosen by ownership after a newspaper contest, the name references the Western diamondback rattlesnake.

Atlanta Braves: When purchased by James Gaffney in 1912, name went from Doves to Braves. Gaffney was from Tammany Hall, and the political organization used an Indian as its symbol.

Chicago Cubs: Formerly the "White Stockings," name changed with new ownership in 1905, and possibly references a bunch of new, young players on the team that year.

Cincinnati Reds: Originally "Red Stockings," and used the name "Redlegs" in the 1950s to distance themselves from any Communist overtones.

Colorado Rockies: The team is named after the ... Colorado Rockies.

Florida Marlins: Florida. Ocean. Fish. Marlin. Done and done.

Houston Astros: Originally the Houston Colt .45s, name changed when they moved into the Astrodome in 1965 and references the space age.

Los Angeles Dodgers: Known as the Grays, Grooms, Bridegrooms, Superbas and Robins, "Dodgers" officially stuck in 1933 after being used unofficially for years. The name comes from "trolley dodger," which was a phrase used by New Yorkers for anyone from Brooklyn (then different cities), who spent a majority of their time literally dodging trolleys as they walked the

streets.

Milwaukee Brewers: Named for the city's close ties with the brewing industry.

New York Mets: Took name from the original 19th century team, the Metropolitan.

Philadelphia Phillies: Originally the "Quakers," name changed to "Philadelphias," shortened to "Phillies." Name actually officially changed to "Blue Jays" in 1943, but never caught on and disappeared.

Pittsburgh Pirates: Known as the "Alleghenys," were called "Pirates" by the rival American Association for raiding the roster of the Philadelphia Athletics. The name stuck, and became official in 1912.

San Diego Padres: The Padres took the name of the Pacific Coast League team, who took their name to honor the Spanish Franciscan friars who founded San Diego in 1769.

San Francisco Giants: Originally the Gothams, named the Giants because manager referred to his charges as his "giants."

St. Louis Cardinals: First called the Perfectos, it's said a sportswriter overheard a woman in the stands say the uniforms were a "lovely shade of Cardinal" in 1899. The scribe took it and ran, and within a year, the name was made official.

Washington Nationals: The former Montreal Expos took the name "Nationals" after the old Washington Senators, a franchise that used the nickname "Nationals" interchangeably with Senators.

ANALYSIS

A McCourt settlement could put ball in Commissioner Bud Selig's court

The divorce of Frank and Jamie McCourt may be resolved soon. But a settlement could hinge on a new agreement with Fox for Dodgers TV rights; if Selig rejects that deal, Frank McCourt might sue.

By Bill Shaikin, Los Angeles Times, 4/5/2011

Bud Selig backs down, or Frank McCourt backs down, or we could have another courtroom showdown.

That, ladies and gentlemen and fans of all ages, is your Dodgers season preview.

Not on the field, where the Dodgers celebrated the new season by taking three of four games from the defending World Series champion San Francisco Giants over the weekend.

Off the field, however, as McCourt's struggle to maintain sole ownership of the Dodgers enters its 18th month, his legal antagonist might soon become the commissioner of baseball rather than his ex-wife.

The protracted divorce proceedings could be over soon, with an asterisk. As lawyers for Frank and Jamie McCourt work to craft a settlement, the Dodgers have revived negotiations with Fox on a television rights deal that could get each of the McCourts to shake hands and move on with their lives.

The asterisk is this: The television deal would be subject to Selig's approval.

The settlement negotiations are delicate, the parties are not talking publicly, and talks could fall apart at any time, so it is impossible to say what all the terms might be. However, when Fox agreed to lend Frank McCourt about \$200 million, with the Dodgers' future television rights used as collateral at a discount rate, Selig rejected the proposal.

Under this new deal, McCourt would abandon — or at least defer for many years — his dream of a Dodgers cable channel, in exchange for a fair-market payment from Fox.

Better than fair, perhaps — in the neighborhood of \$3 billion over 20 years, which would more than triple the Dodgers' annual television revenue. Fox is agnostic about McCourt, but the Dodgers became a must-keep team the second the Lakers fled to Time Warner.

McCourt would ask Selig for his blessing, arguing that the deal would provide plenty of money to settle the divorce, manage the Dodgers' debt and improve the team and the stadium.

And then we would find out just how badly Selig wants McCourt out.

The New York Mets are Team Madoff. The Tampa Bay Rays' stadium quest is getting ugly. The Oakland Athletics have been virtually entombed inside their ballpark because Selig cannot persuade the Giants not to sue if the A's move to San Jose.

Selig could pick his battles and say yes to McCourt. If Selig says no, the expectation in baseball circles is that McCourt would sue.

McCourt made one of his rare public appearances Saturday, as the Dodgers dedicated a youth baseball field at Martin Luther King Jr. Recreation Center in Los Angeles. After the ceremony, McCourt was asked whether he believed Selig would have any legitimate reason to reject a fair-market deal with Fox.

"I'm not going to comment on that at all," McCourt said.

Would he be prepared to sue if Selig were to reject the deal?

"That's a silly question," McCourt said, without answering.

McCourt engaged in "numerous protracted litigation matters . . . spanning more than nine years" to secure the Boston property he later used as collateral in buying the Dodgers, according to papers filed by Jamie McCourt in the divorce case.

Selig has made no substantive comment on the McCourts in the year and a half since they filed for divorce, frustrating Dodgers fans but preventing his words from being used against him in a possible lawsuit.

When Frank McCourt bought the Dodgers, he signed an agreement not to sue the commissioner, an agreement required of every incoming owner.

Michael McCann, a professor of sports law at the University of Vermont Law School, said the danger for baseball might be less that McCourt would succeed in a lawsuit than that confidential financial data from all clubs might be revealed along the way.

Selig has indicated he might reject a deal in which money that could be funneled into the team would instead pay off a divorce settlement. To win at trial, McCourt would have to show the commissioner acted arbitrarily and capriciously.

"I think he would be unlikely to prevail," McCann said. "But, just by bringing a claim, that would start a litigation process that could be threatening to baseball."

Think about that for a moment. Frank McCourt could settle his divorce — and, as the professor said, start a litigation process.

It's up to McCourt, and to Selig.