

## A's News Clips, Wednesday, April 6, 2011

### Oakland A's fall to Toronto Blue Jays in 10 innings

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

TORONTO -- Yunel Escobar's game-ending homer in the 10th inning off Grant Balfour officially sealed the A's fate Tuesday at the Rogers Center.

But Escobar's celebration never should have had a chance to materialize.

Another unraveling by the A's defense got the bad vibes rolling in a 7-6 loss to the Toronto Blue Jays. Just like that, a game that began with promise for the A's wound up delivering a punch in the gut as they began a nine-game trip.

The Blue Jays erased a 5-1 deficit with a four-run sixth inning, helped by errors by A's third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff and starting pitcher Brandon McCarthy.

Solid defense is supposed to be a cornerstone for the A's, but they have committed a major-league-leading nine errors through four games.

They are 1-3 as a result.

"Errors cost us," manager Bob Geren said. "You look at the walkoff homer, but it was that four-run inning there when we didn't catch the ball."

Despite the circus act defensively, the A's were primed for a victory after Josh Willingham's homer in the top of the 10th put them ahead 6-5.

With interim closer Brian Fuentes unavailable because of a blister on his left middle finger, Geren called on Balfour to close it out in the bottom half.

Balfour allowed a leadoff single to former A's outfielder Rajai Davis. Then he left a first-pitch fastball up in the strike zone, and Escobar ended it with an opposite-field, two-run homer to right.

"It couldn't have worked out any better for them, right?" Balfour said. "Hit, bomb, walk off. I'm just mad at myself for not executing a pitch."

Geren said Fuentes hadn't been available since he gave up three runs Saturday. Fuentes played catch Tuesday, and Geren was hopeful the left-hander would be available Wednesday.

The absence of closer Andrew Bailey -- not likely to return from a forearm strain until the end of April -- is being felt by a bullpen that has allowed eight earned runs in 101/3 innings.

The A's came out firing offensively with a reworked lineup against Toronto left-hander Jo-Jo Reyes. Right-handed hitters Conor Jackson and Andy LaRoche drew starts at left field and shortstop, respectively, and Willingham shifted from left field to designated hitter as Hideki Matsui sat.

The A's had six doubles, and Jackson and LaRoche each had two hits and an RBI.

But a 5-1 lead vanished in the sixth. Kouzmanoff ranged to his left but failed to come up with Escobar's grounder -- the play was changed to a hit after the game but appeared to be an error -- to put two runners aboard with none out.

After that, Kouzmanoff made a difficult catch of Adam Lind's foul popup near the third-base seats. Davis tagged up from third and scored, and as Kouzmanoff tried pump-faking a throw, the ball slipped and he wound up spiking it like a wide receiver.

That moved Escobar into scoring position, and he scored on Aaron Hill's single.

Kouzmanoff later bounced a routine throw to first for an error on Juan Rivera's grounder, and McCarthy aided Toronto's rally with an errant pickoff throw.

Kouzmanoff has three errors in four games.

"I have to make the routine plays, and I didn't make those tonight," Kouzmanoff said.

McCarthy, who battled shoulder problems last season, made his first major league appearance since Oct. 2, 2009, with Texas. He was charged with four earned runs in eight innings, but his line didn't indicate how well he pitched.

## **A's update: Rajai Davis excited to face old Oakland teammates**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 4/6/2011

TORONTO -- Rajai Davis couldn't conceal his smile when asked about facing his former A's teammates Tuesday.

"It's exciting facing friends," said Davis, now the Toronto Blue Jays' center fielder. "It's like backyard baseball again. I know them, and they know me. They know my weaknesses. I know some of theirs."

The A's are quite familiar with Davis, who racked up 116 stolen bases for Oakland from 2008-10. He was traded to Toronto in November for minor league pitchers Trystan Magnuson and Danny Farquhar.

Davis enjoyed a terrific spring -- hitting .333 with four homers -- and the talk in Toronto is that he's given the Jays their first true leadoff hitter in years.

Davis ignited Toronto's four-run, game-tying rally Tuesday in the Jays' 7-6 win. He led off the sixth with a double, then tagged up and scored on Adam Lind's foul pop near the third-base seats. Davis also singled to start the 10th and scored ahead of Yunel Escobar's game-winning homer.

"Keeping him off the bases is the first goal," A's manager Bob Geren said before the game. "He'll run at conventional times, and he'll run at unconventional times. Hopefully we'll pick him off a time or two."

Davis' power this spring opened eyes, and Jays hitting coach Dwayne Murphy -- who, like Davis, once patrolled center field for the A's -- looks at Davis as more than a speed demon.

"He's got a lot of pop, probably pop that he didn't know he had," Murphy said.

Murphy said Davis' power reminds him of a former teammate -- Rickey Henderson, generally considered the greatest leadoff man of all time.

"Rickey was capable of getting the first pitch and driving it, and (Davis) can do the same," Murphy said.

Geren didn't delay Dallas Braden's start from Tuesday to Wednesday because of an injury. He wanted to give Braden an extra bullpen session to sharpen his stuff, particularly his slider.

Braden was 0-3 with a 5.24 ERA in six spring starts, though he got better as camp wore on. When given the option of delaying his start until Wednesday, Braden was all for it.

"I wanted to do more work on the side just to throw another bullpen, to make sure I was where I wanted to be," Braden said.

Brandon McCarthy had his start moved up a day and went eight innings Tuesday.

## **Chin Music: Tyson Ross appears set to join A's**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 4/6/2011 9:23AM

Some morning A's news for you ...

The indications I'm getting are that right-hander Tyson Ross will be joining the A's for tonight's game in Toronto, as other outlets have been reporting this morning. I can't tell you in what capacity Ross will pitch — starting or relieving. But I've gotten no indications that Dallas Braden won't take the mound tonight. It's been reported that Braden has a neck injury. I can tell you that I saw him wearing a large neck brace one day in the middle of spring camp. That was the only day I saw

him wearing it, and when I asked Bob Geren about it that morning, he said he wasn't aware of any neck injury with Braden. Braden never missed any time with an injury during spring.

The bullpen could be thin tonight if Brian Fuentes isn't available with a blister on his left middle finger, so Ross might be coming up to add some relief depth. More on this later in the afternoon ...

## **Chin Music: Hideki Matsui sits, Conor Jackson starts vs. Blue Jays; Dallas Braden mystery explained**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 4/5/2011

Checking in from Toronto, where there was a light snow flurry earlier this afternoon. A cabbie told me it was in the high 30s today, but with the wind that was whipping, I'm guessing it was even colder. The roof is closed at the Rogers Center and it's nice and comfortable in here. Sometimes indoor baseball ain't so bad ...

—There's nothing major to report with Dallas Braden having his start pushed back to Wednesday. Braden and manager Bob Geren both said he was simply given extra time to fine-tune some things on the mound. The lefty wanted to work on his slider particularly. "If anything, I wanted to do more work on the side," Braden said. "It's best to throw another bullpen (session) to make sure I'm where I wanted to be. It's a fortunate thing to have these early off-days to manipulate and work around."

I think a couple things are at play here: Braden was the least sharp of any of the starting pitchers during spring training, so the A's probably want him as ready as possible for his first start. Plus, Brandon McCarthy, who was moved up a day to start tonight, hasn't pitched in 10 days, and you've got to think McCarthy was happy to get back on the mound sooner rather than later. I'll be interested to see how he fares tonight given that abnormally long layoff.

—A familiar face leads off for the Blue Jays tonight – Rajai Davis. But Jose Bautista, last year's major league home run champ, is out of the lineup for a personal matter. And there's thought he could miss the entire series. As for the A's lineup, there's lots of changes against Toronto left-hander Jo-Jo Reyes:

A's: Crisp CF, Barton 1B, Jackson LF, Willingham DH, Ellis 2B, DeJesus RF, Suzuki C, Kouzmanoff 3B, LaRoche SS; McCarthy RHP.

Jays: Davis CF, Escobar SS, Lind 1B, Hill 2B, Rivera RF, Encarnacion DH, Snider LF, Nix 3B, Molina C; Reyes LHP.

—Hideki Matsui gets his first game off, and David DeJesus drops down from the third to the sixth spot to get some right-handed hitters higher. Geren said he wanted to get Conor Jackson in, though I don't know how fired up A's fans will be to see Jackson in the '3' hole. "He's one of our better hitters historically against lefties," Geren said. "I'd like to get him in there as much as possible against lefties." Jackson is a career .294 hitter vs. southpaws, .269 against right-handers.

The right-handed hitting Andy LaRoche draws a start at shortstop in place of Cliff Pennington. I can't help but think what's going through LaRoche's head right now. He entered spring camp having never played shortstop in a major league game, and now he's starting there. "I told him he just has to make the routine plays," Geren said. "He's got a great arm. All he has to do is catch it."

This offense didn't knock my socks off in the Seattle series, so I don't think it's a bad thing to get some new people in there for a game. Geren said Matsui will play Wednesday and Thursday, and that DeJesus would probably sit Thursday.

That's all for now ...

## **A's defense, relief again fail in 7-6 loss**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer, Chronicle Staff Writer

Despite the efforts of the newest A's starter and one of the team's new hitters, Oakland's glitches in the field and in the bullpen were again too much to overcome.

Defense continues to be an issue for a team that is usually considered good in the field. Third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff had another rough day, and Oakland made two more errors, wasting an early five-run lead in a 7-6 loss to the Blue Jays on Tuesday night.

Josh Willingham put the A's ahead in the 10th with a solo homer, but in the bottom of the inning, Yunel Escobar blasted a two-run shot to right off reliever Grant Balfour.

"That couldn't have worked out any better for them," Balfour said. "I'm annoyed at myself for not executing pitches. ... I have to be better."

Balfour was closing because Brian Fuentes was unavailable with a blister on the middle finger of his left hand. Fuentes, in turn, is filling in for Andrew Bailey, who is on the disabled list with a right forearm strain. Fuentes played catch Tuesday and might be available tonight.

Relief pitching and defense are expected to be major strengths for a team that is considered a potential contender, but Oakland's bullpen has a 6.97 ERA, and the A's have made a major-league-leading nine errors, one shy of the Oakland mark for most in the first four games of a season.

"Errors cost us," A's manager Bob Geren said. "You look at the home run, but it was the inning that we didn't catch the ball that really hurt us."

Brandon McCarthy, making his Oakland debut and his first big-league appearance since 2009, went eight innings, allowing eight hits, a walk and five runs, four earned. McCarthy, who made one of the errors, said defensive miscues don't bother him; he sees them as an opportunity to make another pitch to get out of trouble, and he felt he hadn't done a good enough job of that in the Blue Jays' four-run sixth.

"I know in the long run, we'll be a sharp defensive team," he said. "That's not something I'd be too concerned about."

Kouzmanoff, who made two errors Friday, initially was charged with a second error Tuesday in the sixth when he ranged well to his left for a bouncer by Escobar and flubbed the play; it was changed to a hit after the game.

"Those plays have to be made," Kouzmanoff said. "I didn't get the job done."

The strangest moment in the field for Kouzmanoff that inning wasn't even an error: He caught a foul pop near the stands, turned to throw the ball in and instead spiked it on the turf. He said he initially planned to throw home but then held up and decided to go to second instead, and as he did, the ball slipped from his hand.

Geren brought out his first right-handed heavy lineup of the season for Toronto left-hander Jo-Jo Reyes, and the A's ran up five runs in the first four inning. The two right-handed hitters added in, outfielder Conor Jackson and shortstop Andy LaRoche, contributed a total of four hits off the Blue Jays' starter.

Oakland will face lefty Ricky Romero on Thursday, but Geren said that designated hitter Hideki Matsui and shortstop Cliff Pennington will play in the remaining two games of the series.

## **Davis salivates at playing A's**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer, Chronicle Staff Writer

**Rajai Davis** missed the two previous games with an ankle sprain, but there was no way he was going to sit Tuesday against his former team.

Davis, traded to the Blue Jays last fall for two minor-league pitchers, has no ill will toward the A's, who gave him a great opportunity, but, he said, "It's exciting facing friends. It's like a backyard baseball game. I know them; they know me."

So which of the A's good young pitchers is he most looking forward to facing? "All of them," Davis said with a grin. "I know all of them."

Davis was a popular figure in the A's clubhouse and remains so. "We still love Rajai," left-hander **Gio Gonzalez** said. "He's No. 1 in our hearts. But we've got to keep an eye on him when he's on base."

Manager **Bob Geren** said the pitching staff had been instructed to vary times to the plate with Davis on base to disrupt his rhythm. Davis stole 50 bases with Oakland last year.

"Keep him off base," Geren said. "That's the best way."

Davis led off the 10th with a single off **Grant Balfour** and came in on **Yunel Escobar's** game-winning homer.

**Briefly:** Tuesday's starter, **Brandon McCarthy**, and left-hander **Dallas Braden** were flipped in the rotation because, Braden said, he was asked if he'd like an extra day to work on the side, and he liked the idea. The switch splits up right-handed starters McCarthy and **Trevor Cahill**, which Geren called "a nice byproduct." ... **Mark Ellis** extended his career-high hitting streak to 17 games; it's the longest spanning two seasons in Oakland history. ... **Rich Harden** will have hitters stand in the box for his next throwing session, on Thursday. ... **Andrew Bailey** (forearm strain) is getting close to pitching on flat ground or from the front of the mound.

### **A's leading off**

**Unlike:** Dallas Braden pays no attention to the rotation's order, because he's so different from the other left-handers, Brett Anderson and Gio Gonzalez. "They're all gasoline and movement," he said. "And I lull (teams) to sleep."

## **Drumbeat: Tyson Ross coming to join A's in Toronto**

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Toronto 4/6/2011 7:23AM

I've just had it confirmed: Tyson Ross is getting called up to join the A's tonight in Toronto.

I had a feeling when Ross didn't open the season on the roster that we'd see him in an Oakland uniform soon. Not quite this soon, sure, but the A's never use just five starters over the course of a season. It's not clear, though, if Ross will start. I'm told that tonight's scheduled starter, Dallas Braden, is fine. But I'm not sure what that means, precisely.

*UPDATE: ESPN's Buster Olney is reporting that Braden is making his start tonight.*

The only other issue I'm aware of with the pitching staff is in the bullpen, where Brian Fuentes has been unavailable for a few days with a blister on his left middle finger. He played catch yesterday and said it went well. He could be backdated on the DL only to Saturday, and that would be an awfully long time to be out with a blister, so I think that seems a little unlikely. Maybe there's a mystery ailment somewhere, or maybe the A's just want a fresh arm on the staff. My best guess - and it's been a morning of guesswork - is that someone else has an injury that we haven't heard about yet.

Braden was the logical assumption after his initially scheduled start was pushed back from last night to tonight, initially without any explanation, which seemed unusual. Braden told us yesterday that he was asked if he'd like an extra day to work on things and he jumped at it because he wanted to refine his slider, which he ditched in favor of a curveball briefly during the spring.

Braden's last outing was the final game of the Bay Bridge series last Wednesday, and there'd been no hint of any physical issues. He went 5 2/3 innings and he looked very good.

This morning's other A's news: A stats service provided the A's erroneous post-game info last night, and the A's nine errors in the first four games are indeed an Oakland record. The 1970 team made eight errors in the first four games, and 10 in the first five, if you're looking for the number the A's would like to avoid tonight.

## **Sputtering defense contributes to L in Toronto**

### **Willingham's solo homer breaks deadlock, but Blue Jays walk off**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com | 4/6/2011 12:26 AM ET

TORONTO -- Right-hander Brandon McCarthy's recipe for success is rather simple -- throw strikes and let opponents put the ball in play.

Normally, that scheme couldn't correlate any better with Oakland's general winning formula. But when the A's defense, considered one of the team's strengths, isn't playing to its potential, that method turns for naught rather quickly.

The A's learned that lesson a third time in their third loss of the season, a 7-6 extra-inning defeat to the Blue Jays on Tuesday -- wiping away a solid starting debut from McCarthy and wasting a 10th-inning go-ahead shot to left off the bat of Josh Willingham.

Yunel Escobar's game-winning two-run homer in the bottom of the 10th inning off Grant Balfour ultimately gave the Blue Jays the victory. But in the A's clubhouse, there was no denying that the contest was lost in the four-run sixth inning, when two Oakland errors aided Toronto's comeback effort.

The miscues gave the A's a Major League-leading nine errors on the season, three by third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff, who made one in the frame.

Former A's outfielder Rajai Davis jump-started the escapade with a leadoff double. Escobar followed with a ground ball to Kouzmanoff, who bobbled it and was unable to make a play on what was initially ruled an error. Following the game, the ball -- which advanced Davis to third -- was ruled a hit.

An Adam Lind sacrifice fly in foul territory made the score 5-2 and, after Aaron Hill collected an RBI single and moved to second on a throwing error by McCarthy, Juan Rivera reached base courtesy of Kouzmanoff's throwing miscue to first base. An RBI double from Juan Encarnacion made it 5-4, and a run-scoring groundout from Travis Snider knotted the game at five.

"I felt like I could have done a better job in the sixth, getting us out of that," McCarthy said. "Just a couple things here and there, some adjustments I could have made a little quicker probably could have ended that inning a little sooner. I felt pretty good, pretty efficient, threw a lot of strikes. But I have to minimize the damage in that sixth."

It was McCarthy's first Major League start since 2009, when he went 7-4 with the Rangers before enduring an injury-plagued 2010 campaign that kept him at Triple-A Oklahoma. He compiled three squeaky clean frames before giving up Toronto's first hit of the night with one out in the fourth -- a single up the middle to Escobar. The Blue Jays' shortstop advanced to third on Lind's base hit and scored on a fielder's choice grounder from Hill.

Overall, McCarthy gave the club eight innings of work, surrendering four earned runs -- five overall -- on seven hits with two strikeouts. Had Escobar's sixth-inning hit remained an error, only two earned runs would have been attached to his name. But McCarthy is not one to point blame elsewhere.

"I have to do my job the way they have to do theirs," he said. "Errors behind me don't affect me because it's another opportunity to compete, to make a pitch and get out of it. They're not going to blame me when I make mistakes, and it won't go the other way either. I know, in the long run, we're going to be a sharp, defensive team. It's not something to be too concerned about."

Manager Bob Geren echoed his pitcher's comments and raved about McCarthy's 89-pitch performance, which came a day earlier than originally planned after he flip-flopped with lefty Dallas Braden -- who starts opposite Jesse Litsch on Wednesday -- in the rotation.

"He was great," Geren said. "I thought he did a great job going eight. That's what we saw in Spring Training. I was real happy with his outing -- very nice."

The A's jumped out to a big lead in the third against Blue Jays starter Jo-Jo Reyes with three runs and five hits -- two of which came in the form of doubles by Andy LaRoche and Conor Jackson.

LaRoche, making his Major League starting debut at shortstop, went 2-for-3 and scored two runs. Jackson went 2-for-4 with a walk in the first start of the season for each.

Oakland extended its lead in the fourth when Kouzmanoff singled and scored on LaRoche's second hit of the game, an RBI single to center field. Reyes fanned Coco Crisp for the first out of the inning, but he followed the strikeout with a walk to Daric Barton and was promptly pulled.

Blue Jays reliever Carlos Villanueva walked Jackson and offered up a sacrifice fly to Willingham, bringing Reyes' total to five earned runs.

"The offense was good," Geren said. "We strung together some hits, got some extra-base hits, and we were able to go ahead with that homer. I'm very happy with the offense."

A's reliever Jerry Blevins tossed a shutout ninth frame before Balfour entered in the 10th and picked up his first loss of the season. Lefty Brian Fuentes, filling in for closer Andrew Bailey (forearm), was unavailable due to a blister, Geren said, but he could potentially go on Wednesday.

Balfour yielded a single to Davis before throwing Escobar a fastball up in the zone.

"I couldn't have worked it any better for them, I guess," Balfour said. "A hit, a bomb, they walk off with the win. It's definitely not the way I saw it going out there. I felt good and I'm just annoyed at myself for not executing a couple of pitches.

"Obviously, I just left a fastball up there, and it was a good piece of hitting. I was trying to keep the ball down. Obviously, you don't want to get the ball up because he's a guy that can do that to you. He showed that tonight. You make a pitch, fastball down, and he hits it to the ground, you get a double play. You leave it up, he hits it out. That's the difference -- difference of inches."

Geren knows, though, that the difference was on the field. He said Kouzmanoff will receive a day off at some point and that he's not too worried about his third baseman -- or anyone else for that matter.

"Watching the offense come alive and how well everyone is throwing the ball, as far as our starting pitchers go, you have to be encouraged by that," Geren said. "When all is said and done, we were a real good defensive team last year, and I believe they'll be good this year, too."

## **Braden gets extra day to prepare for Blue Jays**

By Evan Drellich / MLB.com | 4/5/2011 8:58 PM ET

Dallas Braden was initially scheduled to make his first start of the season on Monday night, but the A's approached him and asked if he'd like an extra day to make improvements.

Who would say no to such a thing? Not Braden.

"If anything, I wanted to do more work on the side," Braden said. "It's best to throw another bullpen to make sure I'm where I wanted to be. It's a fortunate thing to have these early off-days to manipulate and work around."

Making his first start of the season Wednesday in Toronto, the southpaw scratched his slider in favor of a curve this spring -- but that experiment didn't last long. Braden went back to the slider and is still trying to polish it -- hence the value of the extra day.

"They're coming to me, asking me, 'How do you feel? What would you like to do?'" Braden said. "Having that opportunity to take some more time and get everything right, it's huge. It's night and day from last year."

Braden posted a 5.24 ERA in six Cactus League outings this spring. He'll be opposed by the Blue Jays' Jesse Litsch, who is also set to make his season debut.

Litsch was supposed to throw a Minor League game on Thursday, but that was scratched because of the weather. He threw in the cage instead, but that wasn't ideal.

"I was able to throw six innings in the batting cages," Litsch said. "There were tornadoes and everything going on down there, but we got it in and then got out of there. We got 85 pitches in, to simulate six innings.

"If I can do that on Wednesday, that's good, that's where we're sitting. But right now, we're just looking to get late into the ballgame."

Litsch threw 22 innings in Grapefruit League action this spring, the third-most on the team. He finished with a 4.09 ERA in six outings (five starts) and an impressive 20-to-3 strikeout-to-walk ratio.

### **A's: Matsui expected back**

Hideki Matsui should return to the A's lineup Wednesday after sitting out with Blue Jays left-hander Jo-Jo Reyes on the mound. After going hitless in his first two games of the season, Matsui went 2-for-4 on Sunday, collecting hits Nos. 2,500 and 2,501.

Signed as a free agent this offseason, the 36-year-old didn't get hot for the Angels until June last season.

### **Blue Jays: Bautista away from team**

Slugger Jose Bautista isn't expected to return to the Blue Jays' lineup until Friday because of a personal matter.

"He has been excused from the club to attend to a family matter," manager John Farrell said. "We do expect him back to rejoin the club when we open up in L.A. If for some unforeseen reason that were to change, hopefully he gets back to us sooner, but he is dealing with a family matter at this point."

Jayson Nix started for Bautista on Tuesday, playing third base. Edwin Encarnacion moved to designated hitter and Juan Rivera slotted into right field.

### **Worth noting**

The Jays have outscored opponents 29-14 in their first four games of the season, all at home. ... Oakland has lost 17 of its past games 23 to Toronto.

## **A's start Jackson, LaRoche against southpaw**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

TORONTO -- Conor Jackson and Andy LaRoche received their first starts of the season on Tuesday, when A's manager Bob Geren decided to load his lineup with a handful of righties against Blue Jays lefty Jo-Jo Reyes.

Jackson, who made his season debut on Saturday as a pinch-hitter, started in left field and was inserted into the third spot of the lineup, moving David DeJesus down to the sixth slot for the eventual 7-6 loss.

Jackson, whom Geren called "one of our better hitters against left-handed pitchers," owns a career .294 average and .857 OPS against lefties, compared to a .269 mark and .745 OPS when facing righties.

"We're going to get everyone in there," Geren said. "We'll keep everyone fresh and let everyone contribute."

Away from left field for the night, Josh Willingham was handed designated-hitter duties, giving Hideki Matsui the game off. Geren said Matsui will play the final two of the three-game set in Toronto.

LaRoche received his first Major League start at shortstop, where he debuted in the late innings of the club's season opener. He was replaced by Cliff Pennington in the sixth inning, but not before going 2-for-3 with two runs and an RBI.

The 27-year-old LaRoche, in his fifth season in the Majors, was signed by the A's to a Minor League contract as a free agent and is the only non-roster invitee to break camp with the club. While with Pittsburgh last year, LaRoche hit .256 against left-handed pitching, compared to .180 against righties.

LaRoche appeared mostly at third base -- his natural position -- for the Pirates and has already made steady progress at shortstop, Geren said.

"In Spring Training, he looked a little uncomfortable the first time or two out there, and then his comfort level went up," Geren said. "I told him to just make all the routine plays and don't try to do anything spectacular."

"He has a great arm. All he has to do is catch it. He doesn't have to be quite as quick to balls as other guys. He just has to center the ball and use that great arm he has. It's about as good of an arm as I've seen."

### **Braden move designed to give extra work day**

TORONTO -- A day after the A's announced Brandon McCarthy and Dallas Braden would switch spots in the rotation, manager Bob Geren explained on Tuesday that the change was simply made to hand Braden an extra day of work.

"They came to me and asked how I felt, and I told them I could use another day," Braden said. "If given the opportunity, I'll always take that day to reassure myself I'm where I want to be."

The right-handed McCarthy made his first start in green and gold in Tuesday's 7-6 loss to the Blue Jays, and Braden is scheduled to make his first start of the year on Wednesday. As a result, Geren was afforded the chance to split up the staff's righties and lefties.

"I don't make a big deal about that, but the way it worked out is perfect for everyone," he said. "[Braden] got an extra day to do two sides, and we got to break up the lefties."

Braden spent the latter part of his spring refining his slider, which was briefly pushed aside in favor of a curveball that never really worked. As a result, Braden has been refining his slider during his most recent bullpen sessions.

"This gave me a chance to work on it some more," he said. "Just a final tuneup."

### **Davis enjoying reunion with Oakland mates**

TORONTO -- Void of white cleats, Rajai Davis stood near his newly inhabited Blue Jays locker on Tuesday, pondering which former A's teammate he'd most like to face during this three-game set.

"I don't know," Davis said, smiling. "I'm pretty excited just to be playing the Oakland A's, facing my friends. At the same time, I'm competitive and I know some of their strengths and some of their weaknesses, and I'm here to win."

So are the A's, as manager Bob Geren noted.

"We have to keep him off base," Geren said. "The second goal is to stay heads up at all times. Hopefully, if he gets on, we can pick him off a time or two. He's one of the fastest guys in baseball. One of his biggest strengths is a base steal, so we gotta keep him off there."

Davis was traded to the Blue Jays this offseason in exchange for Minor League pitchers Trystan Magnuson and Daniel Farquhar, after he posted a .284 average with five home runs, 52 RBIs and a career-high 50 stolen bases in 143 games last season.

The Oakland fan favorite emphasized how grateful he is to the A's organization for the playing opportunity he received, and he said he is enjoying his time in Toronto and anxious to find a home in the heart of the downtown area.

"I like it here," Davis said. "And it's always nice seeing the guys come through here, especially guys you really grew to know and feel real close to. It's fun. It makes the game that much more fun, just seeing how everyone in the game is connected in some way."

### **Worth noting**

Andrew Bailey (forearm) threw from a distance of 120 feet on Tuesday. A's manager Bob Geren said it "went well." Bailey is steadily progressing toward a return to the mound. ... With a third-inning double, Mark Ellis extended his hitting streak to a career-high 17 games, dating back to last season. It is the longest two-season hitting streak in Oakland history. ... Catcher Kurt Suzuki showed up in Toronto on Tuesday without his beard, which made its debut in Spring Training. "I just couldn't get used to it," he said.

## **Drumbeat: A's rotation shuffle, and a right-handed heavy lineup tonight**

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the former SkyDome 4/5/2011 2:59PM

First off, the lineup, because it's much different from the homestand; apparently we'll see a lot of right-handed hitters (Conor Jackson, especially) against left-handed starters. Hideki Matsui is sitting tonight, but he'll be in Thursday against left-hander Ricky Romero, and David DeJesus will get that start off, instead. Cliff Pennington is off tonight, too, and he'll play on Thursday, according to manager Bob Geren.

So here's tonight's batting order: Crisp cf, Barton 1b, Jackson lf, Willingham DH, Ellis 2b, DeJesus rf, Suzuki c, Kouzmanoff 3b, LaRoche ss.

Brandon McCarthy is starting; the A's made that switch yesterday and Geren texted last night that it was to get Dallas Braden an extra day off. Braden said that they'd asked him if he'd like another day in order to be able to work on some things, and he said he'll always take a day to do more honing and refining. It makes even more sense for him after a spring in which he briefly dropped his slider in favor of a curveball, a pitch that, it turns out, doesn't really work for Braden. So he's trying to get his slider back up to speed.

McCarthy hasn't thrown in a game in more than a week and a half, since the team was in Arizona, so getting him back on the mound a little earlier also seems reasonable.

The switch splits up right-handers McCarthy and Trevor Cahill, making this all work out "perfectly," Geren said. He called splitting up the right-handers a nice byproduct of flipping McCarthy and Braden.

Andrew Bailey had a long-toss session today and it went well; both he and Rich Harden had great sessions yesterday. Harden threw a bullpen session and he should be facing hitters soon.

Former A's outfielder Rajai Davis has an ankle sprain but he's back in the Blue Jays' lineup tonight, and I doubt much would have kept him out against the A's. I asked him which of the A's pitchers he'd most like to face, and he said, "All of them. I know them all."

He's not at all bitter to have been traded this offseason - Davis has always emphasized how happy he was that Oakland gave him an opportunity. But I'm sure he'd still like to show the A's they made a mistake. It's only natural.

Davis remains hugely popular in the A's clubhouse. "We still love Rajai! He's No. 1 in our hearts," starter Gio Gonzalez said.

Geren said the A's best chance of stopping Davis on the bases will be to keep him off base altogether, but the pitchers have been alerted to vary their times to the plate and otherwise throw him off however possible when he's on base.

The A's no longer have a left-handed batting practice pitcher with Curt Young's departure to Boston. So they're all hitting against right-handers tonight as they prepare for lefty Jo-Jo Reyes. Geren said that's not a big deal at all, but in some cities, he said, the team might try to round up a left-handed BP pitcher.

Geren raved about the work video coordinator Adam Rhoden has done pairing video to all of the team's computerized scouting reports, so every pitcher, for instance, can be viewed along with his stuff as he's discussed. The team is not using an advance scout for the first time ever, going instead with a scouting service.

The Blue Jays are a tiny bit easier to scout this week: slugger Jose Bautista will miss this entire series for personal reasons, the team says.

## **A's start Jackson, LaRoche against southpaw**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

TORONTO -- Conor Jackson and Andy LaRoche received their first starts of the season on Tuesday, when A's manager Bob Geren decided to load his lineup with a handful of righties against Blue Jays lefty Jo-Jo Reyes.

Jackson, who made his season debut on Saturday as a pinch-hitter, started in left field and was inserted into the third spot of the lineup, moving David DeJesus down to the sixth slot. Jackson, whom Geren called "one of our better hitters against left-handed pitchers," owns a career .294 average and .857 OPS against lefties, compared to a .269 mark and .745 OPS when facing righties.

"We're going to get everyone in there," Geren said. "We'll keep everyone fresh and let everyone contribute."

Away from left field for the night, Josh Willingham was handed designated-hitter duties, giving Hideki Matsui the game off. Geren said Matsui will play the final two of the three-game set in Toronto.

LaRoche received his first Major League start at shortstop, where he debuted in the late innings of the club's season opener. He was replaced by Cliff Pennington in the sixth inning, but not before going 2-for-3 with two runs and an RBI.

The 27-year-old LaRoche, in his fifth season in the Majors, was signed by the A's to a Minor League contract as a free agent and is the only non-roster invitee to break camp with the club. While with Pittsburgh last year, LaRoche hit .256 against left-handed pitching, compared to .180 against righties.

LaRoche appeared mostly at third base -- his natural position -- for the Pirates and has already made steady progress at shortstop, Geren said.

"In Spring Training, he looked a little uncomfortable the first time or two out there, and then his comfort level went up," Geren said. "I told him to just make all the routine plays and don't try to do anything spectacular."

"He has a great arm. All he has to do is catch it. He doesn't have to be quite as quick to balls as other guys. He just has to center the ball and use that great arm he has. It's about as good of an arm as I've seen."

### **Braden move designed to give extra work day**

TORONTO -- A day after the A's announced Brandon McCarthy and Dallas Braden would switch spots in the rotation, manager Bob Geren explained on Tuesday that the change was simply made to hand Braden an extra day of work.

"They came to me and asked how I felt, and I told them I could use another day," Braden said. "If given the opportunity, I'll always take that day to reassure myself I'm where I want to be."

The right-handed McCarthy made his first start in green and gold on Tuesday against the Blue Jays, and Braden is scheduled to make his first start of the year on Wednesday. As a result, Geren was afforded the chance to split up the staff's righties and lefties.

"I don't make a big deal about that, but the way it worked out is perfect for everyone," he said. "[Braden] got an extra day to do two sides, and we got to break up the lefties."

Braden spent the latter part of his spring refining his slider, which was briefly pushed aside in favor of a curveball that never really worked. As a result, Braden has been refining his slider during his most recent bullpen sessions.

"This gave me a chance to work on it some more," he said. "Just a final tuneup."

### **Davis enjoying reunion with Oakland mates**

TORONTO -- Void of white cleats, Rajai Davis stood near his newly inhabited Blue Jays locker on Tuesday, pondering which former A's teammate he'd most like to face during this three-game set.

"I don't know," Davis said, smiling. "I'm pretty excited just to be playing the Oakland A's, facing my friends. At the same time, I'm competitive and I know some of their strengths and some of their weaknesses, and I'm here to win."

So are the A's, as manager Bob Geren noted.

"We have to keep him off base," Geren said. "The second goal is to stay heads up at all times. Hopefully, if he gets on, we can pick him off a time or two. He's one of the fastest guys in baseball. One of his biggest strengths is a base steal, so we gotta keep him off there."

Davis was traded to the Blue Jays this offseason in exchange for Minor League pitchers Trystan Magnuson and Daniel Farquhar, after he posted a .284 average with five home runs, 52 RBIs and a career-high 50 stolen bases in 143 games last season.

The Oakland fan favorite emphasized how grateful he is to the A's organization for the playing opportunity he received, and he said he is enjoying his time in Toronto and anxious to find a home in the heart of the downtown area.

"I like it here," Davis said. "And it's always nice seeing the guys come through here, especially guys you really grew to know and feel real close to. It's fun. It makes the game that much more fun, just seeing how everyone in the game is connected in some way."

## **A's lose 7-6 in 10 innings to Blue Jays**

ASSOCIATED PRESS

TORONTO — Oakland manager Bob Geren knows what really beat the Athletics on Tuesday: sloppy defense.

Yunel Escobar hit a game-ending two-run homer in the 10th inning, lifting the Toronto Blue Jays to a 7-6 victory over the Athletics.

Oakland made two errors and misplayed another potential out in a pivotal four-run sixth as the Blue Jays erased a 5-1 deficit.

"We had a rough inning there," Geren said. "Definitely, the errors cost us. You look at a walkoff homer as how you lost but it was the four-run inning where we didn't catch the ball that really killed us."

Josh Willingham hit a leadoff homer in the top the 10th to give Oakland a 6-5 lead. But former Oakland outfielder Rajai Davis led off the bottom half with a single against Grant Balfour (0-1), and Escobar followed with a first-pitch homer that landed in the right-field bullpen, his first of the season.

"It couldn't have worked out any better for them," Balfour said. "A hit and a bomb and they're walking off like that. It's definitely not the way I saw it going out there. I felt good. I'm just annoyed at myself for not executing a couple of pitches there."

Geren went to Balfour because left-hander Brian Fuentes is sidelined with a blister on the middle finger of his pitching hand, something that's bothering him for the past few days.

"We're hoping that he'll be ready (Wednesday)," Geren said of Fuentes. "Today was the first time he could play catch in a couple of days."

Escobar sensed he would deliver the big hit.

"When we started getting closer, I got the feeling that I was going to win this game," he said through a translator.

Blue Jays right-hander Jason Frasor (1-0) earned the win despite allowing Willingham's homer.

The Athletics were punished for two errors. Oakland, which committed seven errors over the weekend in losing two of three at home to Seattle, leads the majors with nine miscues. The A's made 10 errors in their first four games of the 1970 season, a club record.

"We were a good defensive team last year and I fully anticipate us being a good one this year, too," Geren said.

Oakland opened the scoring with a three-run, five-hit third against Blue Jays left-hander Jo-Jo Reyes. Conor Jackson and Mark Ellis each hit RBI doubles and David DeJesus drove in a run with an infield single.

The Athletics chased Reyes with two more in the fourth. Andy LaRoche singled home a run and Willingham hit a sacrifice fly off reliever Carlos Villanueva.

Toronto got one back in the bottom half off Oakland starter Brandon McCarthy, who didn't give up a hit to the first 10 batters he faced. Escobar ended that streak with a single, went to third when Adam Lind singled off the first base bag and scored on Aaron Hill's fielder's choice.

The Blue Jays took advantage of sloppy Oakland defense to tie it in the sixth. Davis led off with a double and Escobar singled off the glove of third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff before Lind hit a sacrifice fly. Hill hit an RBI single and took second on McCarthy's throwing error before Juan Rivera reached on a throwing error by Kouzmanoff. Edwin Encarnacion made Oakland pay with an RBI double and Travis Snider capped the rally with an RBI groundout.

Escobar's single was originally ruled an error but was changed to a hit after the game. Either way, Kouzmanoff was left frustrated.

"Those plays have to be made," Kouzmanoff said. "Those are routine plays and I didn't get my job done at third base tonight."

Limited to 22 starts over the past three seasons because of shoulder problems, McCarthy made his first start since Oct. 2009. He allowed five runs, four earned, and seven hits in eighth innings, walked one and struck out two.

"It felt the way I remembered," McCarthy said. "It's fun to be back in a big league ballpark and competing in a big league game."

Reyes allowed five runs and nine hits in 3½ innings, walking one and striking out three.

Coco Crisp hit a one-out double off Jon Rauch in the top of the ninth but Davis ended the inning with a running catch on the warning track to retire Jackson.

NOTES: Seven of Oakland's 13 hits were for extra bases, including six doubles. ... Blue Jays OF Jose Bautista left the team Tuesday for the birth of his first child, a daughter. He's expected to miss the entire three-game series against Oakland, returning Friday when Toronto visits the Los Angeles Angels. ... Davis returned to the lineup after missing two games with a sore right ankle. ... Attendance was 11,077.

## **So far in 2011, oblique injuries a common problem**

By JANIE McCAULEY, AP Baseball Writer

Manager Bob Geren is already giving out daily injury updates for the Oakland Athletics as he did all last year. So far, though, pretty much just for a pair of key relief pitchers: 2009 AL Rookie of the Year Andrew Bailey and hard-throwing righty Rich Harden.

It's not much different across the bay in San Francisco, where right fielder Cody Ross and bearded closer and 2010 majors saves leader Brian Wilson are down for the reigning World Series champions.

From the Bay Area to Tampa Bay, and Seattle in the Northwest to Milwaukee in the Midwest, many high-profile faces are on baseball's sidelines in early April for the opening weeks of the season.

While some years seem to feature more sore shoulders or pulled hamstrings, strained oblique muscles - those side abdominal muscles running along the ribs - are a common culprit across the league less than a week into 2011.

The Rays placed All-Star third baseman Evan Longoria on the 15-day disabled list Sunday with a strained left oblique muscle - the same injury Wilson hopes to return from soon. Brewers outfielder Corey Hart is also on the DL with the injury.

The Astros' J.A. Happ and Atlanta right-hander Jair Jurrjens are two others nursing oblique strains. Like Longoria, Jurrjens went on the disabled list Sunday.

"Certainly there are a lot of oblique injuries right now - more than typically what you see," Giants athletic trainer Dave Groeschner said. "I'm not 100 percent sure why, whether it's the kind of training players are doing, a lack of training, or if it's just random. Four or five years ago, you saw a lot of Achilles' injuries. Guys are in tune to their core (muscles), so it could be an overuse thing. It's something we have to look at. We have one right now, and that's one too many."

In St. Louis, Cardinals cleanup hitter Matt Holliday is recuperating from an appendectomy last Friday. The All-Star slugger assured his club he didn't need a DL stint and he hopes to be back in the lineup as soon as this weekend.

The Marlins said Tuesday that slugger Mike Stanton is missing time this week with a mild hamstring strain, while Colorado ace Ubaldo Jimenez has a tender thumb on his pitching hand from a cracked cuticle.

The heavily favored Philadelphia Phillies are without All-Star second baseman Chase Utley because of an injured knee and closer Brad Lidge with a strained shoulder, while the Brewers are also down pitcher Zack Greinke - their biggest offseason prize - as he recovers from a cracked rib.

White Sox pitcher Jake Peavy, Reds right-hander Johnny Cueto, Cleveland outfielder Grady Sizemore, Mets left fielder Jason Bay and Padres ace Mat Latos are among the other stars who are out.

So many big-name pitchers are pushing themselves to heal in a hurry, too. Former NL Cy Young Award winner Brandon

Webb, now with the AL champion Texas Rangers, is working to return from a 2009 shoulder injury that kept him out all of last season. And Mets ace Johan Santana is sidelined until at least midsummer following shoulder surgery.

Yankees reliever Pedro Feliciano is on the DL for the first time in his career as he begins his ninth big league season after signing an \$8 million, two-year free agent deal with New York in January. The lefty led the majors in appearances each of the last three seasons, including a career-high 92 appearances in 2010 for the Mets.

The Mariners are minus closer David Aardsma as he recovers from hip surgery and Gold Glove center fielder Franklin Gutierrez, on the 15-day disabled list with stomach gastritis.

The AL West rival A's used the disabled list 23 times last season, two shy of the franchise record set in 2008 - but Oakland's brass is optimistic added depth on the current roster will help solve the problem this year.

The A's got a big scare in Friday night's season-opening 6-2 loss to the Mariners when catcher Kurt Suzuki went down with a mild left ankle sprain after being clobbered by a scoring Miguel Olivo. It looked much worse, like he might have hurt his lower back or knees.

The durable Suzuki was back in the lineup the next day.

"I thought it was his knee," Geren said. "That was one of those injuries where it was good news."

With only a handful of games in the books so far for most clubs, many managers are already talking about backup plans and the importance of giving players "strategic nights off," as new Seattle skipper Eric Wedge put it when referring to Olivo. The catcher is recovering from a groin injury and came in to pinch-run for Adam Moore in Saturday night's victory against the A's.

Olivo ran the bases during Seattle's winning ninth-inning rally, and that was enough to make Wedge a little nervous. Infielder Adam Kennedy would likely be the next catcher - and he has no experience as a backstop.

"I threw it out there the other day and Adam Kennedy jumped up and said, 'I'll do it.' So, I said, 'You got it,'" Wedge said.

Yet managers around the league certainly hope they don't have to go to such second and third options at this early stage. For some, there's been no choice.

## **Return on bullpen investment lacking early for A's as Balfour blows save**

Sam McPherson, Oakland A's Examiner

The Oakland Athletics have been very good at maximizing their limited finances over the past ten years, to the tune of paying less per win -- while accruing a lot of wins -- than the other most successful teams in baseball.

Right now, however, they have to be questioning their strategy, as the newly-revamped bullpen took another loss in a 7-6, extra-innings defeat on the road in Toronto Tuesday night.

On Saturday, it was Brian Fuentes giving up three runs in a ninth-inning, tie game. On Tuesday, it was Grant Balfour failing to record a single out while trying to protect a one-run lead in the bottom of the tenth.

So, the A's now stand with a 1-3 record, with all three losses being pinned on the bullpen -- including Friday night's Opening Night loss to Seattle.

Considering the amount of money the Oakland organization gave to Fuentes and Balfour in free-agent contracts this winter (\$8.75M this year for the two relievers), they probably didn't expect two horrendously blown games within the first week of the season from their prize acquisitions.

That's an awful lot of money for two losses in very winnable games.

To think the A's could be 4-0 right now with merely decent relief pitching (and some tolerable defense, too) simply reminds everyone that fast starts are nice in baseball. Any win in April means less stress in September, but Oakland is already burying itself in the American League West standings.

While they can't control the Texas Rangers' 5-0 start, they can control their own wins and losses -- and by blowing first a 5-0 lead and then the 6-5 lead in this game against the Blue Jays, the A's are continuing to drift downward.

Throw in the two errors that allowed Toronto back from that 5-0 deficit -- Oakland has already made nine errors in just four games this year, as well -- and the team is on the verge of becoming an early punchline for the "experts" who suggested the A's could compete in 2011.

Things look pretty much the same as they did in 2010: good starting pitching, bad offense, spotty bullpen, suspect defense.

If the organization wants to maintain its reputation for financial efficiency translating to success on the baseball diamond, these new investments better start playing up to their salary levels.

And soon, before it's too late.

## **Minor League News**

### **A's Pick Up Where Yordy Cabrera's Father Left Off**

By Casey Tefertiller. Baseball America

PHOENIX—A legion of scouts descended on Lakeland (Fla.) High to watch Yordy Cabrera play shortstop prior to the 2010 draft. Nearly all agreed his future would be at third base.

Two folks dissented, however, and their opinions carry the most weight for the Athletics: farm director Keith Lieppman and Cabrera himself.

"I can play there, (and) for the rest of my career," Cabrera said. "I love it."

"He has a good arm—that may be his best tool," Lieppman said. "He has good hands. He has all the skills to stay at shortstop."

Scouts expect that the 6-foot-4 Cabrera eventually will outgrow the position. For now, the Athletics intend to keep their rifle-armed 20-year-old in the middle of the diamond.

"His size is fine," Lieppman said. "Something would have to change dramatically to make us want to make the switch right now."

A second-round pick last June, Cabrera has become one of Oakland's more intriguing prospects. He spent his early years in his native Dominican Republic, but at age 14 he called his father and told him that he wanted to live with him in the United States.

His father is Basilio Cabrera, a manager and hitting instructor in the Tigers system. Yordy came to the U.S. and entered the Lakeland school system, graduating at age 19 and entering the draft. He also got an education in baseball from a father devoted to teaching him the skills that would enhance his career.

"Oh yes, he taught me everything I know before getting into pro ball," Cabrera said. "He was the one who developed me. He's always there for me—we talk every day. We're best friends, pretty much."

Cabrera signed at the deadline for \$1.25 million, then joined the Rookie-level Arizona League squad in time to play in five games.

"He's a very tools-oriented player. In the short amount of time we've had him, he's really shown the capability to hit for power," Lieppman said. "He has a real easy swing. You can tell that he's from a good baseball family, (and) his dad taught him to have a good work ethic.

"When you combine that with the talent, you have the makings of a good major league player."

#### A's ACORNS

- Elbow soreness will keep 19-year-old lefty Ian Kroll out for at least the first month of the season.
- Righthander James Simmons missed last season with arm injuries and did not report to spring training until the end of camp as he continued his rehab program at home.