

A's News Clips, Wednesday, March 14, 2012

Manny Ramirez hits first home run for Oakland A's

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

With one swing of the bat Tuesday, Manny Ramirez demonstrated the impact he might have on the A's lineup.

The slugger homered for the first time as an A's player, a towering shot off Milwaukee Brewers right-hander Mike Fiers in the second inning of the A's 8-6 victory at Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

It marked Ramirez's first hit of the spring after he went 0 for 8 in three previous exhibition appearances. It also was the first time Ramirez cleared the fence in an organized game since taking Max Scherzer deep on Sept. 17, 2010, when he was a member of the Chicago White Sox.

Not that Ramirez seemed carried away.

"Rome wasn't built in one day, so I'm going a day at a time," he said. "I haven't played for a year, so it's going to take time."

Others were more enthused when he connected on a 2-1 pitch from Fiers, launching a blast that cleared a tall sign that sits above the wall in left-center. He also walked and flied out to right.

"It was awesome," A's starting pitcher Jarrod Parker said. "Sweet swing."

But who knows what to make of Ramirez, whose spring highlights must seem like a mirage in the Arizona desert as far as the A's are concerned.

He is eligible to play in exhibitions, but he will miss the first 50 games of the season while serving a suspension for a second violation of Major League Baseball's drug policy.

The A's are using Cactus League games to evaluate Ramirez, who returned from his brief retirement and signed a minor-league contract Feb. 20. He is not guaranteed a roster spot once his suspension ends May 30.

Manager Bob Melvin said Monday that he needs to get other designated hitter candidates -- Jonny Gomes, Seth Smith and Chris Carter among them -- more at-bats because they will be available to start the season.

Ramirez went to minor league camp Sunday and Monday to hit off pitchers there because he wasn't in the lineup.

"We're just trying to evaluate and see where he is in limited at-bats right now," Melvin said. "We just want to see some at-bats where we feel like he's got the bat speed, his patience is there -- all the things we've seen in the past."

It seems unlikely Ramirez will be among the 30 players the A's take to Japan for their season-opening series against Seattle on March 28-29.

Though Ramirez's work ethic and attitude often have been questioned during his career, he received a ringing endorsement from Hall of Famer Rickey Henderson, who showed up to Phoenix Muni on Tuesday.

Henderson and Ramirez were teammates with the Boston Red Sox in 2002. Henderson said Ramirez would be in the batting cage long before other players showed up in the clubhouse.

"That guy had better work habits than probably all the guys I saw," Henderson said.

Yoenis Cespedes went 0 for 3 in his third game with the A's. He struck out twice, once swinging on a breaking ball and once looking on a fastball.

The Cuban outfielder, who played center field, is 2 for 8 this spring with one homer, two walks and three strikeouts.

"He has no knowledge of any of the pitchers, and the more he knows the pitchers the more comfortable he'll be," Melvin said.

Parker, contending for a rotation spot, pitched 31/3 shutout innings but made life hard on himself with three walks. He struck out four, which helped him strand two runners in scoring position in both the first and third innings.

Brian Fuentes, being considered for closer along with Grant Balfour, allowed Martin Maldonado's three-run homer and was charged with four runs in one inning.

Left-hander Jordan Norberto continued his bid for a bullpen spot with three strikeouts in a scoreless inning.

Henderson, who has worked extensively with Jemile Weeks as an A's roaming instructor, said he was proud of the rookie season turned in by the switch-hitting second baseman in 2011.

"For being a little bitty guy, I thought he had a big heart in what he was doing," Henderson said. "It made me feel great."

The A's claimed infielder Brandon Hicks off waivers from Atlanta.

Melvin: A's likely to carry seven-man bullpen

By Joe Stiglich, Bay Area News Group

The A's are likely to carry a seven-man bullpen, but who makes up that relief corps is still tough to tell.

Manager Bob Melvin said some surprise names have impressed him during camp, and he's in no rush to make a call on his seven relievers. Travis Schlichting and lefty Erick Threets, who is from Livermore, are two non-roster relievers who have caught his attention.

Pedro Figueroa and Jordan Norberto, both left-handers, have also looked good.

"Certainly there are some guys that are stepping up, and probably several we didn't expect at this point," Melvin said. "One thing we have is time. We definitely have time. I'm not going to rush it."

Grant Balfour, Joey Devine, Fautino De Los Santos and Brian Fuentes appear locked into four of the seven spots, with Jerry Blevins also a strong possibility.

Manny Ramirez connects for first home run with A's

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 3/13/2012 1:45pm

Manny Ramirez hit his first homer with the A's in his first at-bat Tuesday, a towering shot to left-center off Milwaukee Brewers right-hander Mike Fiers. That also marked Ramirez's first hit of the spring, as he came in 0 for 8. He started at DH after spending the previous two days getting at-bats at the A's minor league camp. Ramirez will miss the first 50 regular season games on suspension, and manager Bob Melvin has indicated he wants to start distributing more at-bats to D.H. candidates who will be on the roster once the season starts.

That homer kickstarted what otherwise has been a slow news day at A's camp. ...

The team is likely to carry a seven-man bullpen, but who makes up that relief corps is still tough to tell. Melvin said some surprise names have impressed him during camp, and he's in no rush to make a call on his seven relievers. Travis Schlichting and lefty Erick Threets, who is from Livermore, are two non-roster relievers who have caught his attention. Pedro Figueroa and Jordan Norberto, both left-handers, have also looked good.

"Certainly there are some guys that are stepping up, and probably several we didn't expect at this point," Melvin said. "One thing we have is time. We definitely have time. I'm not going to rush it."

Grant Balfour, Joey Devine, Fautino De Los Santos and Brian Fuentes appear locked into four of the seven spots, with Jerry Blevins also a strong possibility. Either Balfour or Fuentes will serve as closer.

California legislator proposes banning violent fans from pro sports games

By Jim Sander, The Sacramento Bee

Take me out to the ballgame? Maybe not.

California would become the first state to create a "Ban List" prohibiting violent fans from attending professional sports events anywhere in the state under newly proposed legislation.

The list would operate much like a restraining order: Anyone listed who went anyway would be guilty of a misdemeanor.

Offenders' names and photos would be published on the Internet and sent to sports arenas, police agencies and ticket vendors by the attorney general's office, which would maintain the list.

Sure, banned fans could sidestep the law and have relatives or friends buy tickets for them, but if they subsequently caused a commotion and were discovered at a stadium, their presence could draw a one-year jail sentence and a \$10,000 fine.

Assemblyman Mike Gatto said his measure is aimed at senseless violence such as the nearly fatal beating of San Francisco Giants fan Bryan Stow outside Dodger Stadium last year.

"Violence is something that has made a lot of parents be a little afraid to take their kids to the ball games, so I think we need to step in and do something," said Gatto, D-Los Angeles.

Under Gatto's Assembly Bill 2464, a judge could place a violent offender on the ban list for up to five years for a first offense, up to 10 years for a second, and up to 25 years for a third. The bill also provides sentencing enhancements to extend offenders' prison terms.

Verbal harassment or throwing beer are not covered by AB 2464, only serious felonies ranging from robbery to assault with a deadly weapon or infliction of great bodily injury committed inside or outside a stadium, while tailgating, watching, entering or leaving a stadium.

Incidents like Stow's beating would be covered by AB 2464, for example, as would the violence last year at Candlestick Park during a San Francisco 49ers-Oakland Raiders preseason game that left one man unconscious in an upper level restroom and two men shot outside the stadium.

Gatto's measure would charge each professional sports team \$10,000 to create the ban list and a rewards fund for crime witnesses. Teams would supplement the fund if it fell below \$180,000.

AB 2464 would apply to the Sacramento Kings but not to the Sacramento River Cats. It would cover major-league baseball, football, basketball, hockey and soccer teams, beginning July 2013.

No professional league or team has taken a position yet on the bill, introduced Feb. 24. National Basketball Association spokesman Tim Frank said he is not familiar with AB 2464. Baseball and football officials could not be reached for comment Monday.

Italy and England have adopted similar laws to crack down on hooligans at soccer games, Gatto said.

"Everybody who is at these ballparks are sports fans," Gatto said. "So to take away what they love, to say, 'You can't attend a game anymore,' that's a real penalty to them."

Republican lawmakers have not yet seen AB 2464, but two interviewed Monday said they were wary of its \$10,000 cost to each team and the viability of requiring the state to maintain the ban list.

Assemblyman Kevin Jeffries, R-Lake Elsinore, questioned the wisdom of banning violent felons who commit their crime at a stadium but not violent felons who commit their crime elsewhere.

"I don't feel that we, with a straight face, can say that one violent felon is OK but another is not," Jeffries said.

Gatto countered that it makes no sense to penalize felons who committed their crimes decades ago, far from any stadium.

Sacramentans at MVP's sports bar Friday had mixed feelings about AB 2464.

Bill Witry, 48, said he sees no reason to create another layer of bureaucracy when violent offenders will be jailed "for a long time anyway."

Kelsey Taylor, 22, said she has worn opposing jerseys to Oakland Raiders and San Jose Sharks games and never felt threatened. She doubts that extreme violence at stadiums is common.

"I've never had a problem yet," she said.

Other sports fans applauded Gatto.

"I'm a hockey fan -- I like my violence on the ice," said Douglas Mower, 29.

"You have people of all ages at the games, so I think people should be held accountable," said Craig Shoemaker, 37.

John Lovell, lobbyist for the California Police Chiefs Association, called the bill thought-provoking but said he has taken no position on it, pending analysis.

"I think it's a good idea," Lovell said of a ban list. "And I think what you're going to see is the general public look at that and say, 'Finally -- someone's addressing this.' "

A's Ramirez homers for his first hit of spring

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Phoenix -- Manny Ramirez has 555 career homers. One blast to left center during spring training doesn't mean a whole lot to him, even if it was his first hit of the spring and first hit with the A's.

"I feel like I feel every day," Ramirez said. "Rome wasn't built in one day."

But his teammates were excited to see one of the best power hitters of the past two decades unleash one.

"It was awesome," starter **Jarrod Parker** said. "It was a sweet swing."

Ramirez, who was hitless in his first eight at-bats, said he hit "a sinker or something" from Milwaukee's **Mike Fiers** in the second inning, on a 2-1 count. He drew his first walk of the spring the next inning.

Manager **Bob Melvin** said that the team is looking for both bat speed and patience from Ramirez, which is usually the designated hitter's M.O. "I think early on, he was trying too hard," Melvin said. "It's uncharacteristic of him to swing early in the count. This is more what you're used to."

Yoenis Céspedes, playing center and batting third, just in front of Ramirez, struck out in his first two at-bats and grounded out in his third. Céspedes, through interpreter **Ariel Prieto**, noted that he has seen six pitchers in his past six at-bats. He likes that, he said - in order to learn to make adjustments, he needs to see lots of pitches, lots of pitchers and their different mechanics.

"He has no knowledge of any pitchers, and the more he knows the pitchers, the more comfortable he'll be," Melvin said.

"You'll see him take the first pitch a lot." So Céspedes will be behind in the count quite a bit initially, but Melvin says that he doesn't mind - he knows Céspedes is going up to the plate with a plan.

Briefly: The A's picked up infielder **Brandon Hicks**, 26, on waivers from the Braves. Melvin said he's unsure if Hicks even will report to big-league camp; primarily a shortstop, Hicks is expected to provide depth for a team that has few infielders at the big-league and Triple-A levels. ... The A's have today off and the only player scheduled for action is left-hander **Dallas Braden**, who will throw a bullpen session at Papago Park. ... **Bartolo Colon** will start Thursday's game against Texas at Surprise, Ariz., and Opening Day starter **Brandon McCarthy** will start a Triple-A game.

A's 8, Brewers 6

Notable: Rotation hopeful **Jarrod Parker** walked three and got out of jams in the first and third innings as he worked 3 1/3 scoreless innings. Parker allowed two hits and struck out four. **Josh Reddick** joined **Manny Ramirez** in the home-run column; both hit solo shots. ... **Jordan Norberto** got the win with a scoreless eighth inning that included three strikeouts. ... Closer candidate **Brian Fuentes** allowed three hits, a walk and four runs in one inning, with three runs on a homer by **Martin Maldonado**.

Quotable: "Reddick had a couple of bad at-bats and he made the comment, 'Maybe I should put one in play.' Then he put one in play - and out of play."

- Manager **Bob Melvin** on Reddick's sixth-inning homer, which followed strikeouts in his first two at-bats.

Drumbeat III: A's acquire infielder Brandon Hicks

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Phoenix Muni 3/13/2012, 3:50pm

The A's picked up infielder Brandon Hicks off waivers from the Braves, and I'm told that this is a move about infield depth rather than a move to fill the third-base spot. Hicks, 26, is considered more of a shortstop than a third baseman, and he hit .048 in 17 games with Atlanta last year. He has played 432 minor-league games at shortstop, 20 at third base.

Hicks has options left, and the A's are very thin in the middle infield and at third base – with Scott Sizemore going down and catcher Josh Donaldson moving to third, the team's only middle-infield/third-base types besides the starters are utility infielders Eric Sogard (yep, he recorded another hit today) and Adam Rosales and non-roster invitee Wes Timmons. That means Triple-A Sacramento is also thin in the infield, and Hicks now will provide at least another option.

So it's no indictment of Donaldson or anyone else, though I'd imagine we'll certainly see Hicks at third as the A's evaluate him. He did hit 18 homers at Triple-A last year.

I think if the A's were to make a move to fill the third-base spot, it would be more someone like Alberto Callaspo, whose name has been kicked around. Callaspo might be available if the Angels decide Mark Trumbo can play third base every day.

Drumbeat II: Manny Ramirez's first A's hit: a home run

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Phoenix Muni, 3/13/2012, 2:52pm

Manny Ramirez was hitless in his first eight at-bats with the A's, but in the second inning today, he crushed a homer to left center on a 2-1 pitch from Mike Fiers of the Brewers. He then drew his first walk of the season his next time up.

Ramirez's homer was a no-doubter, so maybe he has shaken off the rust after being away from the game for nearly a year.

Outfielder Yoenis Cespedes is having a rougher day: He struck out in his first two at-bats and he grounded out his last time up. This is still just his third game, however.

Also having a bad day: closer candidate Brian Fuentes just allowed four runs, three of them coming on a homer by Martin Maldonado.

Drumbeat I: Yoenis Cespedes, Manny Ramirez in lineup vs. Brewers

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Phoenix Muni, 3/13/2012, 12:08pm

Is it even news when Yoenis Cespedes and Manny Ramirez are playing any more? They do seem to be the most compelling figures in camp, and there's not much of note otherwise today. Cespedes is playing center and batting third, Ramirez is DHing and hitting cleanup.

A scout just asked me if Cespedes is a prospect or if he's a big-leaguer, and while of course the plan is that Cespedes will be in the A's lineup on Opening Day – or at the very least when they get back from Japan – no one really knows yet if he's an everyday big-leaguer. Can he hit big-league pitching consistently? We might not have a real read on that for weeks, months even.

Ramirez is in sort of the same boat: Can he still hit big-league pitching? Will spring training games, extended spring training and 10 games in the minors prepare him to do that?

That's the middle part of the Oakland lineup, right there, and at this point, no one can say how they'll perform. That makes projecting the A's offense awfully difficult; another scout wondered if the A's will win even 75 games. I think they will – I think the pitching will surprise, the defense will be better than last year (it'd have to be) and just having Jemile Weeks and Coco Crisp at the top of the order will ensure that the team scores runs.

But you knew coming into the spring that the best the A's really can hope for is third place after the moves the Rangers and, especially, Angels made.

The A's are off tomorrow, and the only action taking place is Dallas Braden's bullpen session. He is still throwing just fastballs and changeups, but Braden notes that he got through two months in 2009 with just fastball/change. He'll work the slider in at some point, of course. The A's are still saying early May for Braden's return, but I wouldn't be surprised if it's a little earlier.

On Thursday, it's Bartolo Colon against the Rangers in Surprise, and Brandon McCarthy will throw in a Triple-A game. (I asked why Colon is in the big-league game and McCarthy in the minor-league game, and there isn't really a reason: both men will face Texas plenty during the regular season, and of course the Rangers are familiar with McCarthy, their former starter.) Brad Peacock starts against the Mariners on Friday night here at Phoenix Muni.

The battle for the final spots in the bullpen will be heated; lots of the contenders are faring well. Manager Bob Melvin praised Jordon Norberto – a left-hander who is getting a lot of work – along with East Bay native Erick Threets and Pedro Figueroa. Melvin still considers returning lefty Jerry Blevins ahead of all of those men, and when it comes to right-handers, he reiterated that the A's will give Ryan Cook a very strong look, and for the second day in a row, he mentioned the good work turned in by Travis Schlichting.

I think we can assume that Joey Devine and Fautino De Los Santos are both solidly on the team, and Blevins, too. Devine and Blevins are out of options, for one thing, and De Los Santos is considered the closer of the future.

Threets and Figueroa have yet to allow a run; both have made four appearances. Figueroa is on the 40-man roster, as are Norberto and Cook. Threets and Schlichting are not. It looks as if there would be room for two of those four if the A's don't elect to keep a starter in long relief – and Andrew Carignan and Neil Wagner are also still in the mix, too, making it really a half dozen candidates for the two final spots. Wagner is having a tough spring – he has allowed eight hits and five runs in 2 2/3 innings – but Carignan hasn't allowed a run in his three outings.

Manny cracks first Cactus League blast in win

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Manny Ramirez hit his first homer with the A's in his first at-bat Tuesday, jump-starting Oakland to its fifth straight win, 8-6, over the split-squad Brewers at Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

Ramirez, who entered the game hitless in eight spring at-bats, took right-hander Mike Fiers' 2-1 pitch to left-center in the bottom of the second. He also walked, finishing the day 1-for-2, while Yoenis Cespedes came up empty in his three at-bats, striking out twice.

The A's entered the seventh down, 4-3, but they climbed ahead for good, beginning with Collin Cowgill's RBI single -- his sixth of the spring -- that tied the game. Jeff Fiorentino followed with a fielder's choice ground ball to Brewers first baseman Sean Halton, who threw home hoping to catch the running Eric Sogard. Caught in a rundown, Sogard safely crossed home plate for the go-ahead run, as interference was called on the play.

Brandon Moss and Anthony Recker also collected RBI hits in the frame.

For Milwaukee, Martin Maldonado hit his first home run of the Cactus League off lefty Brian Fuentes in the sixth, a three-run shot to left field. Fuentes surrendered four runs total, giving up three hits and a walk in just one inning of work.

Teammate Jarrod Parker fared better on the mound while making his third Cactus League appearance and second start, pitching 3 1/3 scoreless innings. The A's right-hander, heavily in the mix for a rotation spot, gave up two hits, walked three and struck out four.

Fiers, the Brewers' 2011 Minor League Pitcher of the Year, struck out four in two innings in his first Cactus League start.

Up next for the A's: The A's will enjoy their first off-day of the spring Wednesday, before resuming activity in Surprise, Ariz., for a 1:05 p.m. PT meeting with the host Rangers on Thursday. It marks the first Cactus League matchup of the spring for the division foes, who will see A's righty Bartolo Colon and Rangers southpaw Martin Perez on the mound. In two starts, Colon has given up a four runs with five strikeouts and no walks in a combined 6 2/3 innings.

Cespedes adjusting to life in Major Leagues

OF hitless in three at-bats against Brewers in Cactus League

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Yoenis Cespedes stared down a good share of breaking balls without moving his bat an inch on Tuesday, but it's too early to verify the theory he can't hit them.

The Cuban outfielder, adjusting to several facets of his new life as ballplayer in the United States, is simply doing homework for now -- learning pitchers he's never before faced or even scouted, familiarizing himself with their repertoire and mechanics.

"The more he knows, the more confident he will be," manager Bob Melvin said. "He's got a plan every time he goes up there."

Cespedes' 0-for-3 day against the Brewers included two strikeouts, and he hasn't picked up a hit since his Saturday debut, when he homered and singled. But after completing his sixth inning in center field on Tuesday, Cespedes confidently told reporters through translator Ariel Prieto that he feels comfortable and is learning to make adjustments.

While the pressure Cespedes to showcase his skills and how they translate to the big leagues, A's general manager Billy Beane says there's no rush to determine his readiness for Opening Day.

"He'll have good days and bad days," Beane said this week. "I don't know if there is any benefit in giving a daily evaluation. He's got a lot of physical talent, and it's fun watching him go up there each at-bat as we learn more about him."

On Tuesday, Cespedes found himself in the three-hole for the second time in as many starts, batting ahead of new mentor and friend Manny Ramirez. He first went down on strikes swinging, then looking, and ended his day at the plate with a sharp groundout to shortstop.

Cespedes noted he feels good physically and is ready to play a full nine innings, though Melvin is easing him into games, just as he does with any player on his club. The A's skipper liked what he saw of his new outfielder in center field and will soon have to determine whether it's best to keep him there and move incumbent Coco Crisp to left.

Melvin has yet to show any hint, though, on when that decision will be made, as the organization hasn't even committed an Opening Day roster spot to Cespedes.

"When it comes to the outfield, Bob will decide who's the best, what the best decision for each guy is and who are the best three at the positions," Beane said. "That's going to come down to putting the best defenders in the right place. It's not going to revolve around one person."

The A's are off Wednesday, and Melvin did not share his lineup for Thursday's meeting on the road with the Rangers. By then, the team will have just one week to go before its charter departs for Japan, where the A's are set to open the regular season with the Mariners on March 28.

Even then, the A's will still have plenty questions about Cespedes, who won't provide all the answers for weeks, months and possibly years.

"How we think he'll handle the Major Leagues and whether or not he'll be able to handle the first game of the year or the 10th game of the year, we just don't know," Beane said. "And I don't want to set any timetables or statistical goals for him to each. We'll just have a feel. If he can handle it up here, we'll make that decision."

FBI can wait as Recker vies for catching spot

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- On the verge of Minor League free agency last year, Anthony Recker made a deal with a buddy back home that, if things didn't work out with baseball, they'd team up for an attempt to land a job with the FBI.

Recker can forget the backup plan, at least for now. He's got a job as a backup catcher with the A's to win.

Following Landon Powell's release last week, Recker automatically became the favorite for the role. Even before then, he felt good about his chances to break camp with the big league team -- better than ever before.

"Absolutely," Recker said. "Coming in, I felt like I had a real good opportunity. This is easily the most exciting Spring Training for me, because I'm getting looks. I feel like I'm finally getting that opportunity, starting a lot of games, getting a lot of playing time, doing well defensively. Offensively, I'm still figuring out some things and getting comfortable, but I'm feeling great and think I have a legitimate shot, which is all you can ask for."

Recker appeared in his seventh game for the A's on Tuesday, collecting an RBI double to up his spring average to .333. He's 4-for-12 overall, with two RBIs and two walks -- numbers reflective of those he's posted in a lengthy Minor League career.

Recker, 28, has spent the past three seasons in Triple-A Sacramento, most recently hitting .287 with 16 home runs and 48 RBIs in 99 games in 2011. His team-leading 56 walks helped him to a .388 on-base percentage, and he tacked on a .501 slugging percentage -- both career highs in his six full professional seasons, leading to his first callup with the A's on Aug. 23.

"The possibility of free agency, it was obviously in the back of my mind as the season progressed last year before getting called up," he said. "I was having a really good year and kind of figured, either way, whether with the A's or another team, I was going to have a chance coming into this year."

Recker's path to the Majors now appears clear, unless the A's choose to go with Eric Sogard at third base. Should such a scenario unfold, Josh Donaldson could hang on and play the dual backup roles of infielder and catcher, which would leave Recker out of the mix.

A's claim infielder Hicks off waivers

PHOENIX -- The A's added to their depleted infield depth Tuesday, acquiring Brandon Hicks off waivers from the Braves.

To clear a spot on the 40-man roster, Oakland transferred rehabbing lefty Brett Anderson to the 60-day disabled list.

The 26-year-old Hicks, a right-handed hitter, made Atlanta's Opening Day roster last year but collected just one hit in 21 at-bats for a .048 average spanning three stints. He spent most of the season at Triple-A Gwinnett, batting .252 with 18 home runs and 50 RBIs in 104 games.

Originally a third-round Draft pick by the Braves in 2007, he's compiled a .241 average to go along with 62 home runs and 211 RBIs in 473 games over five Minor League seasons.

A's manager Bob Melvin said he was unsure if Hicks would even make his way over to big league camp, furthering the assumption that in no way does his presence have an effect on the open third-base job that Josh Donaldson is trying to win.

Hick has options left, and he simply fills an organizational need in the middle infield, where the A's currently only have Eric Sogard, Adam Rosales and non-roster invitee Wes Timmons as backup options.

After slow start to spring, Ramirez finds swing

PHOENIX -- Forgive Manny Ramirez for displaying an underwhelming reaction to his first home run in an A's uniform.

"He's obviously done it before," manager Bob Melvin said, smiling.

Count 555 in 2,302 regular-season games, to be exact. So even though Tuesday's second-inning blast off Brewers right-hander Mike Fiers was his first of the spring and happened to be his first hit, he didn't exactly go out of his way to express enthusiasm or a sense of relief.

"I know what I can do," he said after.

Does it at least tell him something about his progression at the plate, following an 0-for-8 spring start and year-long absence from baseball?

"Like I've said before, Rome wasn't built in a day," he replied. "I'm going one day at a time."

Most of Ramirez's at-bats this spring have come in Minor League camp, and he'll continue to see work there, as Melvin juggles time in the designated hitter spot with several other players in need of at-bats. Ramirez doesn't mind the back-and-forth movement, fully understanding his teammates need to get work in while preparing for a Japan trip he likely won't make himself.

"You go over there to get the most you can," he said. "I'm trying to catch up. Every time I go over there, I love it. Those guys down there are competitive, they like to play. I enjoy myself over there, enjoy playing, because once you don't have it, you don't have it."

Worth noting

- Unlike the rest of his teammates, lefty Dallas Braden won't get the day off Wednesday. The rehabbing hurler (shoulder) is set to throw 45 pitches in a bullpen session, marking another step in his preparation to be back in the A's rotation by May.
- Right-hander Jarrod Parker walked three and found himself in more than one jam during Tuesday's start against the Brewers but managed to post zeroes in each of his 3 1/3 innings of work. He also struck out four and found another positive in being able to work with batterymate Kurt Suzuki in establishing his fastball as the game went on and turning to his changeup when need be.