

## A's News Clips, Thursday, March 15, 2012

### Oakland A's notebook: Ryan Cook making strong impression with new team

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Ryan Cook was not the A's marquee acquisition from the trade that sent pitcher Trevor Cahill to the Arizona Diamondbacks over the winter.

But Cook, a hard-throwing right-hander, is squarely in the mix to land a spot in the bullpen.

"He's very impressive," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "He's got a chance to be right in the middle of our bullpen."

The A's also obtained starting pitcher Jarrod Parker and outfielder Collin Cowgill in the Dec. 9 trade for Cahill, reliever Craig Breslow and cash.

Parker vaulted to the top of the rankings among Oakland's pitching prospects, but Cook, 24, has drawn attention with a fastball that touches 97 mph, and he complements it with a developing slider and splitter.

Although Cook might have a future in Oakland's bullpen, baseball wasn't his first love when he was growing up in Clovis.

His father, Chuck, was a drag racer, and Ryan began driving quarter-midget race cars at age 8. He continued racing competitively through high school, winning races at Lemoore Raceway and Plaza Park Raceway in Visalia.

"I was fascinated my whole life with it," Cook said. "Anything mechanical -- engineeringwise, motorwise. It is still is a passion of mine."

He also showed promise on the mound at Clovis High, and when USC offered a baseball scholarship, he faced a decision.

"It was either drive race cars and go to college to be a mechanical engineer, or go play baseball and have somebody else foot the bill for it," Cook said. "Obviously that was enticing."

Now his energies are focused on winning a bullpen job with the A's.

Cook switched from starting to relieving in Double-A last season and led the Diamondbacks farm system with 19 saves, earning his first big league call-up.

"When they moved him to the 'pen, that was huge," Parker said. "His velocity picked up, and he's got a heck of an arm. Once he figures out command of that slider, he's going to be devastating."

While the rest of the A's enjoyed their only day off in the Cactus League schedule Wednesday, left-hander Dallas Braden threw a 45-pitch bullpen session at the team's minor league complex.

"Good work day -- came out of it healthy," A's pitching coach Curt Young relayed via a team spokesman.

Braden continues to progress well from surgery last May to repair a torn capsule in his throwing shoulder. Melvin projects Braden's return to the rotation at early May in the best-case scenario.

Catcher Landon Powell, released by the A's on Friday, signed a minor league deal with the Houston Astros and reported to their big league camp.

Josh Reddick, expected to start in right field for the A's, is 10 for 25 (.400) this spring. He hit his first homer Tuesday against the Milwaukee Brewers.

On the other end of the spectrum, outfielder Jonny Gomes, a designated hitter candidate, is 4 for 22 (.182).

Bartolo Colon is scheduled to start Thursday against the Texas Rangers in Surprise, with opening-day starter Brandon McCarthy staying back to pitch in a Triple-A game.

The A's have won five in a row and are 9-3-1, tying them with Seattle for most wins in the Cactus League.

### **Mark Purdy: Yoenis Cespedes is beacon of hope for Oakland A's**

By Mark Purdy, Mercury News Columnist

I do not care that Yoenis Cespedes is 0 for 6 since his big debut. I am still ready for him to be a sensation this summer as an A's outfielder. I am ready for Cespedesanity. I am ready to dance the Cespedesalsa.

I am ready for this partly out of wishful thinking. It would be such a welcome tonic for the struggling A's if Cespedes, signed out of Cuba last month for \$36 million over four years, can tickle the Bay Area's sports/entertainment fancy for even just a few weeks.

I am also ready for it because Cespedes is from my favorite baseball-playing foreign nation. I have covered Cuban teams at the Olympics. I spent three weeks in Havana for the 1991 Pan-American Games, I can confirm that no people are as passionate about the game as Cubans -- and no country's baseball players show more sincere emotion for the game.

Cespedes, who has a small Cuban flag stitched on the back of his new baseball glove, is obviously proud of that tradition. Bob Melvin, the A's manager, talks mostly about the diligence Cespedes brings to the ballpark.

"He's a serious guy," Melvin said. "At the end of the day, he's focused on baseball."

I am ready to focus on that focus. And I am definitely not ready for those doubters who forecast that Cespedes will be a bust. After hitting an impressive home run in his first exhibition game, he has indeed struggled a bit at the plate. So what? It's spring training. Those doubting people are haters.

Know why? They have Yoenis envy.

Yoenis envy can be a terrible thing to carry around. The haters need to lose it. Cespedes has obvious physical talent. He can field and run well, even as he learns to handle MLB pitching. And while Cespedes said Tuesday that he is no student of Cuban baseball history, he does realize that if he makes the A's opening day roster, he will continue a long line of great Cuban players who have graced the major leagues over the years.

That attitude is reflected in some of the answers Cespedes gives during his brief interview sessions after each game. He confesses to feeling a little pressure. And when he was asked after Tuesday's game to describe the difference stylistically between playing in Cuba and playing in the major leagues, Cespedes' answers were innocently instructive. He spoke through interpreter Ariel Prieto, the former A's pitcher, who is also a Cuban native.

"First of all, we have a lot of equipment here," Cespedes said of the A's training facility. "And the fields are so good."

Another interesting change, said Cespedes, is that major league teams take batting practice with perhaps a hundred baseballs in the mix, to keep things moving.

"In Cuba, there were only 20 baseballs in BP," Cespedes explained, which meant stopping frequently to pick them up and return them to the batting practice pitcher.

"And if the balls get wet," Prieto added with a grin, "the practice is over."

This little stuff pales in comparison to the big-picture adjustment faced by Cespedes. After spending his whole life in the somewhat remote Granma province of Cuba, it could be a jolt to his everyday life when he moves to the metropolitan Bay Area.

Campy Campaneris, the A's shortstop from Cuba who played on the 1972, '73, '74 World Series dynasty teams, said he is worried about something else: That the cool summertime nights at the Coliseum might perplex Cespedes after so many years of playing in the hot tropics. But my gut feeling is, Cespedes will soon figure it out. He might even earn a spot on the list of all-time finest Cuban-born players in the major leagues, topped by Hall of Fame first baseman Tony Perez.

More recent players from the island -- such as pitchers Orlando and Liván Hernández -- have had mixed results. But none had the position-player toolbox owned by Cespedes. At 5-foot-10 and 210 pounds, he's built like an NFL defensive back. His thick caterpillar eyebrows make him appear to be concentrating even harder than the average outfielder.

The intensity might be cultural. During the '70s and '80s when covering Cuba's national team, I recall several games against Puerto Rico where blood flowed from gashed legs on hard slides.

Then, during my 1991 sojourn to Havana when I witnessed many games at the classic old Estadio Latinoamericano, I saw how religiously the country's fans treat the sport. Nobody left their seats between innings, and arguments about strategy were common in the bleachers.

Cespedes, who felt the heat of those fans while playing for his national team and thrived (he hit .458 in the 2009 World Baseball Classic), can certainly deal with any pressure he faces in Oakland. But he could be pressing at first. Tuesday, facing three different pitchers in three at-bats, Cespedes never took a pitch for a ball. He struck out swinging in the first inning on a breaking ball, took a called third strike in the third inning and grounded out to shortstop in the sixth.

"I like facing the different pitchers," Cespedes said through Prieto. "I feel good. I feel OK. I try to make adjustments with each pitcher. I don't think it will be any trouble."

I don't think so, either. Hey, haters. Drop the Yoenis envy. Try to enjoy the Cespedes ride. It might be the only real A's fun this summer.

### **Top 10 Cuban-players in major-league history**

Bay Area News Group

CUBANOS DE MAGNIFICEN

The 10 best Cuban-born players in major league history, ranked by Amaury Pi-Gonzalez, A's Spanish language play-by-play radio announcer and native of Cuba.

Player Pos. Teams

1. Tony Pérez INF Cincinnati, Montreal, Boston, Philadelphia
2. Rafael Palmeiro INF/OF/DH Chicago Cubs, Texas, Baltimore
3. Minnie Minoso INF/OF Cleveland, Chicago White Sox, St. Louis, Washington
4. José Canseco OF/DH Oakland, Texas, Boston, Toronto, New York Yankees, Chicago White Sox
5. Tony Oliva OF Minnesota
6. Luis Tiant RHP Minnesota, Boston, New York Yankees, Pittsburgh, California
7. Adolfo Luque RHP Boston Braves, Cincinnati, Brooklyn, New York Giants
8. Tony Taylor INF Chicago Cubs, Philadelphia, Detroit
9. Mike Cuellar LHP Cincinnati, St. Louis, Houston, Baltimore, California
10. Bert Campaneris INF Kansas City, Oakland, Texas, California

### **Dallas Braden will miss A's Japan trip**

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

**Dallas Braden** continues to make progress as he recovers from shoulder-capsule surgery, but he will not travel with the team to Japan.

Braden threw a 45-pitch bullpen session at Papago Park on Wednesday and afterward pitching coach **Curt Young** said the left-hander needs to get his regular work in and that would be too difficult while the A's are in Tokyo.

Braden had been expecting the decision, and he noted that he was on the team's last trip to Japan, in 2008. He went back on his own after that; he spends much of the offseason traveling.

Even though Braden would always love to stick with his teammates, he's entirely focused on returning to Oakland's rotation.

"I'm fortunate enough to have been to Tokyo before, and what I need to do is get myself ready to pitch without any potential conflicts in my workout schedule," he said. "It would behoove me to stay here."

The A's are pointing toward early May for Braden's return, which would be almost a year since his May 17 surgery. He is hopeful the timetable might inch forward a bit, and his bullpen session Wednesday is considered a big step. Braden jumped from 25 pitches to 45, all fastballs and changeups, and his effort level was increased.

That makes today bigger still. How his body reacts to the session will tell him a lot.

"What I've been feeling before and after these sessions is no pain and no discomfort," he said. "I want to make sure that doesn't go away. I'd hate to do too much and set myself back."

Braden has been throwing sliders on flat ground, but he will not incorporate the pitch during bullpen sessions for another week or more.

Braden was less than satisfied with his location Wednesday, though to onlookers, including coaches and minor-leaguer **John Nester**, who caught Braden, it appeared as if he hit his spots with regularity. Young said that Braden's arm speed was consistent, he had a good arm path, and his changeup was particularly sharp.

"The feedback I was getting was that everything was great, I only missed six spots - but I don't want to miss six spots," Braden said. "They continue to drill into me that that's the last thing I should worry about. I want to throw strikes, but Curt does a good job of telling me, 'Dallas, they rebuilt your shoulder. You didn't just have a Band-Aid put on.' "

**Anderson's next step: Brett Anderson**, who is coming back from July 14 Tommy John surgery, said he will throw changeups off the mound for the first time during his bullpen session Saturday. Anderson threw 30 pitches in his session Tuesday, all fastballs.

**Today's game:** The A's are at Surprise, Ariz., to play the Rangers at 1 p.m., with **Bartolo Colon** on the mound. Opening Day starter **Brandon McCarthy** will start today's Triple-A game.

### **Drumbeat: Oakland A's video: Dallas Braden bullpen session**

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser, 3/14/2012, 10:59am

The coaching staff and minor-league catcher John Nester were happy with Dallas Braden's 45-pitch bullpen session, even if Braden – a perfectionist who is coming back from shoulder-capsule surgery – was not thrilled with his location.

"Eight out of 10 isn't good enough," Braden told me. "I want 9 1/2 out of 10."

The main thing for Braden is that he physically feels good and he has bounced back well from his throwing sessions. Tomorrow will be a big day, he said, to see how his body responds after jumping up from a 25-pitch bullpen session to 45 pitches, and at a higher intensity level.

Pitching coach Curt Young said that Braden's delivery, his mechanics, everything looks like the Dallas Braden of old, one major thing the team wants to see after surgery. Young said it looks as if Braden is letting it go like he usually does, and you can see this for yourself here:

That's video I shot this morning at Papago Park – I was lucky and caught a sequence in which Braden wasn't swearing. He is a perfectionist! When he did miss, though, it was by not a lot, and Triple-A pitching coach Scott Emerson was particularly impressed with Braden's changeup. "He threw some really good ones," Emerson said.

The team is looking at early May for Braden's return. I know he's hoping it's a little earlier than that, but the A's have been clear they don't want Braden rushing. He told me today that he, too, wants to make sure he doesn't do anything to cause a setback, so he's listening to the team and taking it cautiously – kind of contrary to his usual brash nature, but Braden is happiest when he's pitching, and he wants to make sure he doesn't jeopardize a relatively quick return to big-league action.

Braden wasn't the only A's pitcher working on the team's day off. Brett Anderson did conditioning work and long toss this morning at Papago, Graham Godfrey threw a bullpen session and Bartolo Colon was arriving to play catch just as I was leaving. Colon is starting tomorrow against the Rangers; Brandon McCarthy, who also was scheduled for some catch today, will start the A's Triple-A game.

### **Call to arms a tough one in A's bullpen**

### **No less than six candidates vying for two open spots**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Decisions that surround the A's rotation are equal in number to those involving that same group's support staff -- the bullpen, no longer the veteran-laden outfit the team employed last year.

A's manager Bob Melvin, already having to handpick three starters to join the 1-2 punch of right-handers Brandon McCarthy and Bartolo Colon, is also going to have to choose a trio of relievers to complement the seemingly locked-in quartet of southpaw Brian Fuentes and righties Grant Balfour, Joey Devine and Fautino De Los Santos.

Left-hander Jerry Blevins, who is out of options, is a strong favorite to grab one of those spots. Beyond that, there are at least six pitchers vying for the other two -- many of whom have made Melvin's job even tougher.

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

Here's a look at the contenders, and how likely they are to pitch their way onto the roster.

**Ryan Cook:** Cook's exploding fastball has repeatedly caught Melvin's attention, and his improved command of the pitch, along with an impressive display of two secondary pitches -- a hard slider and split-fingered fastball -- has greatly helped his chances of landing in the bullpen. At this point, it wouldn't be a surprise if such a scenario unfolds, as long as Cook keeps throwing strikes.

**Andrew Carignan:** This 25-year-old right-hander, equipped with a devastating fastball and sharp breaking ball, is quietly making a strong case to return to an A's bullpen he helped as a September callup last season. In 4 2/3 innings this spring, Carignan has fanned five and walked none, allowing just three hits and no runs. Like Cook, Carignan is a favorable contender for a bullpen spot, and his ability to consistently throw strikes will likely ensure him of one.

**Jordan Norberto:** Norberto's command has long been of concern for the A's, who watched him walk five in just two-thirds of an inning in his final outing of the season last year. But the lefty flashed signs of improved composure while working as a starter in the Dominican this winter, and he was also able to work on a changeup that he's used with more frequency in camp. So far, he's walked just two, next to seven strikeouts, in 4 1/3 innings, forcing Melvin to consider potentially carrying three lefties in the 'pen.

**Travis Schlichting:** Schlichting, a 6-foot-4 right-hander signed to a Minor League deal in January, is receiving rave reviews from Melvin and catcher Anthony Recker, who says the pitcher has "electric stuff." Schlichting's low release

point is tough on right-handers, and a big, breaking slider nicely complements a good fastball. The team has decided to stretch him out, and he's fared well, posting a .063 WHIP and .143 opponents average in 6 1/3 innings, striking out six and walking just one. Schlichting could be a nice long-relief option for the A's but is not on the 40-man roster. He could start the year at Triple-A, but is bound to be in Oakland at some point this year.

**Erick Threets:** Threets, a Bay Area native and non-roster invitee on the comeback trail from Tommy John surgery, has not allowed a run in 4 2/3 innings this spring. A hard-throwing lefty like Threets is rare, so though he's positioned lower on the depth chart than the likes of Blevins and Norberto, a continued strong Cactus League performance could position him for a mid-season callup.

**Pedro Figueroa:** The left-handed Figueroa has also yet to allow a run, and his positioning on the 40-man roster only helps his chances of breaking camp as a surprise bullpen pick. Those odds are still slim, though, as the A's would likely prefer to continue his grooming process at the Minor League level. Figueroa missed the last year and a half after undergoing Tommy John surgery, and the A's will have to decide whether he's best suited as a starter, a role he's held throughout his career in the Minors, or as a reliever.

**Others to watch:** RHPs Neil Wagner and Evan Scribner