

A's News Clips, Saturday, March 17, 2012

Oakland A's notebook: Ailing reliever Joey Devine still hopes to make Tokyo trip

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

A biceps injury to reliever Joey Devine might create a bullpen opening for the A's season-opening trip to Japan.

Devine hasn't pitched since March 8, when his right arm flared up in a rough outing against the Los Angeles Dodgers. He was treated with anti-inflammatories and has played catch the past few days.

The tentative plan is for the right-hander to throw off the mound Sunday and possibly pitch in a game Tuesday.

Devine has made just three appearances this spring and has a 13.50 ERA. Manager Bob Melvin wants him to pitch in one more Cactus League game if he's to be an option for Oakland's two-game season-opening series against Seattle on March 28-29 in Tokyo.

The A's play their Cactus League finale Wednesday and fly Thursday to Tokyo, where they'll play two exhibitions against Japanese teams before their series with the Mariners.

Melvin said one option is to have Devine remain in Phoenix while the team travels to Japan so he can continue rehabbing.

If that's the case, right-handed relievers Andrew Carignan, Ryan Cook and nonroster invitee Travis Schlichting have all impressed Melvin this spring and could help fill the void.

Lefties Pedro Figueroa, Jordan Norberto and Erick Threets, a nonroster invitee who is from Livermore, also are earning consideration for jobs in the A's seven-man bullpen.

Grant Balfour, Fautino De Los Santos and lefty Brian Fuentes have spots locked up, and lefty Jerry Blevins is a strong bet for a fourth spot.

Devine said he's experiencing the same inflammation he's had periodically since undergoing reconstructive right elbow surgery in April 2009. He's still aiming to pitch in Tokyo.

"I'm the first to realize that plane takes off in a week," he said. "I'll just take it one day at a time."

The A's can travel 30 players to Japan, so the A's could bring Devine to Japan and decide there whether he's an option against Seattle.

Collin Cowgill is hitting .414 and appears to have sewn up a roster spot as a backup outfielder.

"Without tipping my hand, I don't know how he's not on our team at this point," Melvin said.

Cowgill reached base in 11 straight plate appearances -- eight hits, three walks -- before lining out in the sixth inning of Friday's 6-1 victory over the Mariners.

Cowgill has carved out steady playing time and played capably in all three outfield spots. Assuming Yoenis Cespedes makes the big league club, the A's would carry six outfielders if they keep Cowgill. Coco Crisp, Josh Reddick, Jonny Gomes and Seth Smith would be the others.

They could accommodate such an arrangement because Gomes and Smith are also expected to share the D.H. duties.

The A's have won seven straight and are a Cactus League-best 11-3-1.

Right-hander Graham Godfrey started for the A's and allowed one run over 32/3 innings, striking out five and walking one. It was a bounce-back from his previous outing, when he allowed four runs in two innings of relief against the Royals. His solid outing likely kept his chances afloat for a rotation spot.

Bartolo Colon, scratched from Thursday's start because of a blister on his throwing hand, faced hitters on the back field of Phoenix Municipal Stadium. The likely plan remains for him to start Wednesday in his final spring tuneup.

A's reliever Joey Devine suffering from biceps soreness

By Joe Stiglich, Bay Area News Group

A's reliever Joey Devine has been sidelined for the past week by soreness in his right biceps, pitching coach Curt Young confirmed.

The team is taking a day-by-day approach with the right-hander, and there's no timetable yet for him to return to the mound.

Devine hasn't appeared in a game since March 8, when he gave up four runs in two-thirds of an inning against the Los Angeles Dodgers. Considering how close the A's are to their season-opening series in Tokyo on March 28-29, Devine's availability for that series is in question.

Grant Balfour, Fautino De Los Santos and lefty Brian Fuentes are locked into three of the spots in Oakland's seven-man bullpen. Lefty Jerry Blevins is considered a strong bet for a fourth spot. But if Devine misses extended time, three spots could be open to a large pool of candidates that includes Andrew Carignan, Ryan Cook, Travis Schlichting, Evan Scribner, Neil Wagner and lefties Pedro Figueroa, Jordan Norberto and Erick Threets.

Collin Cowgill's on-base streak ends at 11 for A's

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Collin Cowgill is riding such a hot streak, it appears it has lifted him onto the Opening Day roster.

"Without tipping my hand, I don't know how he's not on the team at this point," manager **Bob Melvin** said after Cowgill extended his streak of reaching base safely to 11 plate appearances before lining out in his final at-bat Friday.

Cowgill, who had an RBI single in the first inning Friday night, had eight hits and three walks during the streak. He said hitting coach **Chili Davis** urged him to trust a little adjustment to his swing. Cowgill had a set-up with a lot of movement so Davis got him to calm it down, and Cowgill said he now feels he has more time to see the ball. He is batting .414.

Asked about his drive to grab a roster spot, Cowgill said, "It's up to those guys," pointing toward the executive offices and adding, "I'm just trying to play as hard as I can and help this team win."

Melvin said he can see carrying six outfielders if two (probably **Seth Smith** and **Jonny Gomes**) are also in a designated hitter rotation.

Devine update: After a bout of biceps soreness, it is expected that **Joey Devine** will remain in Arizona for extended spring training while the A's travel to Japan for the season-opening series against Seattle on March 28 and 29.

Devine said the biceps and flexor-tendinitis that has kept him out since March 8 has abated, and he has thrown long toss the past several days, so he believes the issue will not set him back too much. Still, the earliest he'd appear in a game would be Tuesday.

Melvin said that Devine will throw off the mound on Sunday and then be re-evaluated.

Korach's surgery: Radio broadcaster **Ken Korach** will have knee-replacement surgery on Monday in Las Vegas and miss some of the games in April. **Ray Fosse** will fill in for Korach for the two regular-season games in Tokyo, and the team will announce a substitute for the April games at a later date. Korach is likely to return for home games initially.

Briefly: **Bartolo Colon** threw 75 pitches in five innings in a simulated game, wearing a bandage to protect the blister on his right middle finger. He'll start on Wednesday in the Cactus League finale. ... The A's have split-squad games today, and **Yoenis Céspedes** and **Manny Ramirez** will be in action at Phoenix Muni.

A's 6, Mariners 1

Notable: **Collin Cowgill** singled in a run in the first, walked in the fourth and lined out in his final at-bat, ending a streak in which he reached safely in 11 consecutive plate appearances. ... **Josh Reddick** ripped a two-run double in the first, and **Manny Ramirez** followed with an RBI double. ... Starter **Graham Godfrey** allowed two hits, a walk and a run in the first inning, then retired 11 in a row to finish his 3 2/3 innings of work. ... Closer candidates **Brian Fuentes** and **Grant Balfour** each pitched a scoreless inning. ... Oakland has won seven in a row and is 11-3-1, the best record in the Cactus League.

Quotable: "It was a matter of getting out under the lights the first time. I was excited. I had a couple of body parts moving quicker."

- *Godfrey, on settling down after allowing the first four men to reach*

Today's games: Cubs (**Paul Maholm**) at A's (**Travis Schlichting**), 1:05 p.m. Radio: 95.7 FM. A's (**Tommy Milone**) at Giants (**Tim Lincecum**), 1:05 p.m.

Collin Cowgill is on a tear; Melvin suggests he's made roster

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Phoenix Muni, 3/16/2012, 8:36pm

After the A's 6-1 win over the Mariners tonight, manager Bob Melvin said that hot-hitting Collin Cowgill is a good bet for the Opening Day roster, saying, "Without tipping my hand, I don't know how he's not on the team at this point."

Cowgill's chances of a roster spot had dipped when the A's kept adding outfielders this offseason, trading for Josh Reddick and Seth Smith and signing Coco Crisp, Jonny Gomes and Yoenis Cespedes. And while it might look a longshot for the A's to keep more than five outfielders on the 25-man roster and Cowgill does have options, he has made a strong statement: An RBI single and a walk in his first two plate appearances tonight made it 11 consecutive plate appearances in which Cowgill reached safely. He was 8 for his past 8 with three walks until lining out in his final at-bat tonight.

After Cowgill came out of the game, he said he was aware of his streak, but he'd tried not to think about it. He made an adjustment while working with hitting coach Chili Davis last week – Davis got him to calm down something of a violent set-up, and Cowgill, now more relaxed in his set-up, said he feels as if he has more time to see the ball. As for his chances of making the team, Cowgill said, "It's up to those guys (pointing up toward the front-office offices). I'm just trying to play as hard as I can and help this team win."

Considering Manny Ramirez must sit out the first 50 regular-season games, the A's DH is likely to come out of the Smith/Gomes combo, potentially leaving a spot for Cowgill on the bench – especially early on, in Japan, when the club won't need to carry two or three starting pitchers each night.

Melvin said after the game that he could see carrying six outfielders if one or two (Smith and Gomes) are in the DH rotation.

Melvin is a big Cowgill fan who values that high energy level on the club. Between go-go-go Cowgill and equally revved-up Gomes, the A's bench could power a small city.

Other A's players are nearly as hot: Eric Sogard has reached base in all 12 games he's appeared, and Josh Reddick has hit safely in all nine of his games – including a two-run double tonight.

Manny Ramirez followed Reddick's first-inning double with an RBI double of his own.

The A's have won seven in a row and at 11-3-1, they have the best record in the Cactus League.

(This post was rewritten after Melvin's post-game comments made it clear he sees Cowgill on the roster – that doesn't leave much room for speculation.)

Reddick continues to rake as A's down M's

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- A four-run first inning catapulted the A's to their seventh straight victory on Friday night, as they claimed a 6-1 victory over the split-squad Mariners at Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

With the win, Oakland now owns the Cactus League's best record, with a mark of 11-4-1.

Facing Seattle right-hander Hisashi Iwakuma, whom the A's failed to sign in 2010 after winning his bidding rights, Oakland's Coco Crisp reached base on an error by shortstop Gabriel Noriega that proved costly. Eric Sogard followed with a base hit, and Josh Reddick continued his torrid spring by sending a two-run double to left field. Reddick is hitting .393.

With two runs already in, the A's added to their total on an RBI single by Manny Ramirez, who ultimately came around to score courtesy of Collin Cowgill's eighth consecutive hit. The A's outfielder had reached base in 11 straight plate appearances before lining out to second base in the sixth.

Oakland starter Graham Godfrey endured a rocky first inning, allowing one run on two hits and one walk, but settled down nicely, retiring his final 10 batters, five on strikeouts. Meanwhile, Iwakuma lasted four innings, giving up five runs -- three earned -- on seven hits with one walk and three strikeouts.

Ichiro Suzuki was responsible for Seattle's lone run, collecting an RBI base hit in the first.

Up next: Rotation candidate Tommy Milone is set to make the short journey over to Scottsdale Stadium for a meeting with Giants ace Tim Lincecum and Co., while right-hander Travis Schlichting makes his first Cactus League start in front of a home crowd at Phoenix Municipal Stadium. Both contests are set for 1:05 p.m. PST.

Arm issue may keep Devine off A's Japan roster

Reliever still hopes to be ready in time to make trip

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Right-hander Joey Devine is calling it "typical inflammation" in his right biceps, leftover effects from his 2009 Tommy John surgery. But the reliever's latest setback could potentially keep him off the club's roster in Japan.

Devine, 28, has not been ruled out of making the trip, but he must first pitch in a game and come out of it feeling 100 percent healthy. The goal, manager Bob Melvin said, is to have him back on the mound on Sunday and in a game as early as Tuesday, so long as the former goes well.

The A's embark for Tokyo on Thursday, and Devine has every intention of making the journey.

"I just want to feel good," Devine said. "I'm the first to realize that the plane takes off in a week. That's my goal [for] when to be ready, be right. But for now, I have to take it one day at a time.

"It's just frustrating, because this offseason I worked harder than I've ever worked in my life. I was ready to help this team, but I'm not going to let this one little thing affect how I move forward."

The oft-injured Devine said the inflammation surfaced following his 35-pitch outing on March 8, when he struggled with his command -- walking three and surrendering four runs in just two-thirds of an inning. That followed scoreless outings in each of his previous two spring appearances.

"After the game, I just felt real tired. And the next day, it was really, really sore," Devine said. "It just got tight, and it probably didn't help that I threw 35 pitches, too."

Should Devine progress slower than hoped for in the coming days, the A's could choose to keep him in Arizona for extended Spring Training during the week-long Japan trip. Such a move would hopefully ensure him of being completely healthy by the time the Bay Bridge exhibition series begins on April 2.

"It really just depends on how he responds on Sunday," Melvin said.

If he is without Devine for the two regular-season games against the Mariners in Japan, Melvin still has plenty of late-inning bullpen options to complement Brian Fuentes and Grant Balfour, including right-handers Fautino De Los Santos and Ryan Cook.

Melvin rewards Schlichting with a start

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Travis Schlichting's 6-foot-4 figure is hard to miss as it is, but the right-hander's spring performance is really making him a must-see product.

Manager Bob Melvin has taken notice, and in return is awarding Schlichting with a start on Saturday in a dose of split-squad action. Schlichting gets the nod against the visiting Cubs at Phoenix Municipal Stadium, while lefty Tommy Milone is slated to face off against San Francisco's Tim Lincecum in Scottsdale, Ariz.

In 6 1/3 innings, Schlichting has posted a 0.63 WHIP and .143 opponents' average to go along with six strikeouts and just one walk -- numbers that could make this non-roster invitee a potential long-relief option for the A's.

"He's been a guy that's been able to give us some length," Melvin said. "He's a guy we want to take a longer look at. He's earned the opportunity to start based on he's given us some length and he's pitched well. We'll take a hard look at him."

Schlichting was signed to a Minor League deal in January, following a year-long stay with the Dodgers' Triple-A team, for whom he compiled a 5-3 record and 7.10 ERA with four saves in 51 relief appearances. He struck out 51 in 64 2/3 innings, and A's catcher Anthony Recker wouldn't be surprised if he accounted for more than one of them.

"I know he wasn't my favorite guy to face, that's for sure," Recker said. "From what I've seen so far, he's got really good command of the zone. He's got great stuff and has done really well this spring, and I think he's put himself in a really good position to succeed."

His time as a pitcher has only spanned six years, as he was drafted by the Rays as a third baseman in 2003. But he made the switch after hitting .250/.321/.334 during the first three-plus years of his professional career, never advancing past the Class A level.

Cowgill continues to sizzle at the plate

PHOENIX -- When Collin Cowgill entered Friday having reached base in nine consecutive plate appearances, the A's outfielder was well aware of his streak but insistent on not thinking about it.

"I was aware," Cowgill said. "I knew something was going on."

That something extended to 11 plate appearances, as Cowgill laced an RBI double in his first at-bat and followed with a walk three innings later. Cowgill finally saw the streak snapped when he lined out to second base in the sixth. He's hitting .414 (12-for-29) in 12 games this spring, in part a nod to his work with hitting coach Chili Davis.

"I feel great," Cowgill said. "I've been in the cage every day with Chili, made a little adjustment about a week ago. My setup has been fairly violent, and now it's just a little more quiet. I'm a little more relaxed at the plate, allowing myself a little more time to see the ball."

Cowgill's performance would seemingly make him a lock for a roster spot, but the A's are already expected to carry five other outfielders. Along with Coco Crisp, Yoenis Cespedes and Josh Reddick, the club anticipates rotating outfielders Jonny Gomes and Seth Smith in and out of the designated-hitter spot.

After Friday's game, though, manager Bob Melvin made it clear he would have no problem placing six outfielders on his roster.

"Without tipping my hand, I don't know how he's not on our team at this point," he said of Cowgill.

Donaldson making most of opportunity so far

PHOENIX -- No one in baseball has compiled as many innings this spring as Josh Donaldson, who is soaking in plenty of time in the infield, while making his case for the starting third-base job.

Donaldson entered Friday with 85 innings to his name and, by day's end, surpassed the 90-innings mark, following his 13th start of the spring. The Braves' Tyler Pastornicky is the next closest, at 70 innings.

This is the A's way of giving Donaldson every opportunity to break camp as the everyday guy at the hot corner, and so far manager Bob Melvin is satisfied with how he's responded -- despite making three errors.

"He's been resilient at third," Melvin said. "This is a lot being thrown at him. He's playing at a new position, he's got a chance to be the starting third baseman. There's a lot coming his way right now, so we're going to be patient with him."

Nothing that he has done at this point has made us say, 'We gotta scrap him.' We are still behind him, and we are still gonna run him out there."

At this point, it appears Donaldson will still be there come Opening Day, though the red-hot Eric Sogard is considered a possibility, as is a trade for another third baseman by season's start. But for now, all eyes are on Donaldson, who has 10 hits in 42 at-bats along with four walks.

"I think that you look at the offensive numbers, you see his at-bats are getting better," Melvin said. "He went through a period where his at-bats were good early, and he didn't get much to show for it and went into a bit of a lull. But now his swings are better. He's not getting out front as much."

Worth noting

- Right-hander Graham Godfrey quickly turned a poor outing into an impressive one on Friday, fanning five of his final 10 batters after giving up a run on two hits and a walk in the first inning. He went 3 2/3 innings and is still considered a candidate for the rotation.

It marked quite the turnaround for Godfrey, who said he felt ill in his last appearance on Sunday, when he gave up four runs in two innings in a relief outing.

- Righty Bartolo Colon, scratched from his Thursday start because of a blister on his middle finger, tossed 75 pitches in five innings of a simulated game on Friday. Colon came out of the session fine and is expected to make his next scheduled start on Wednesday, as planned.

- A's radio broadcaster Ken Korach is scheduled for knee-replacement surgery on Monday, and will be forced to miss the beginning of the season. Ray Fosse will join Vince Controneo for radio broadcasts in Japan next week, but it is not yet known who will fill in for Korach during the time he's away from the team.

Reddick, Ramirez leads A's past Mariners, 6-1

Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Hisashi Iwakuma is trying both to work his way into the Seattle Mariners' rotation and get ready for the season in general.

Iwakuma allowed five runs — three earned — on seven hits over four innings in the Oakland Athletics' 6-1 victory over Seattle split-squad team Friday night.

"For the rotation, I need to have more effort to get the result for it," Iwakuma said through an interpreter. "For the season, I also need to work and get ready. I feel I'm getting better every time."

The 30-year-old right hander was 6-7 with a 2.42 ERA for the Tohoka Rakuten Golden Eagles last season but started only 17 games because of right shoulder troubles. He signed a one-year, \$1.5 million contract with the Mariners in January.

Iwakuma had a rocky start against the Athletics. Coco Crisp reached on an error, Eric Sogard had a hit-and-run single and Josh Reddick and Manny Ramirez added consecutive doubles to give Oakland a 3-0 lead.

Collin Cowgill drove in Ramirez with two outs to complete the Athletics' four-run first.

Iwakuma settled down giving up two hits but facing only seven batters in the second and third before giving up a fifth run on a walk, a single and a sacrifice fly by Adam Rosales in the fourth.

"The difference between the first and second inning is I tried to pitch a little bit higher because they were aiming for the low ball," Iwakuma said. "Then I tried to use my curveball to change their minds and their eye levels."

Oakland starter Graham Godfrey also struggled in the first, surrendering a run before he got an out as Chone Figgins walked, went to third on a single by Luis Rodriguez and came home on an Ichiro Suzuki single to right.

After Ichiro, however, Godfrey retired the final 11 batters he faced and struck out five.

"It was just a matter of getting under the lights for the first time," Godfrey said. "I was excited. I had a couple of body parts moving in different directions."

Cowgill walked in the fourth to reach base in his 11th straight plate appearance before lining out in the sixth.

"I was aware of it but I tried not to think of it," said Cowgill, who is on the bubble for a reserve spot on the roster. "I'm just trying to play as hard as I can and help this team win."

NOTES: Ichiro finished 3 for 4. ... Ramirez, who hit his first spring home run on Tuesday, flew out to the warning track in the third and struck out looking in the fifth. ... Friday was the last of three spring meetings between the A's and Mariners, but they'll be seeing each other often in the coming weeks. Oakland and Seattle open the season with a two-game series beginning March 28 in Tokyo, then come home to play twice more April 6-7 in Oakland. They also meet for Seattle's home opener on April 13. ... The Mariners lost for just the second time in nine road games. ... Sogard has reached base in each of the 12 games in which he has played. ... Oakland leads the majors with 107 runs in 15 games.