

A's News Clips, Sunday, March 18, 2012

Oakland A's notebook: Cliff Pennington continues his batting tear

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Cliff Pennington is making quite a sales pitch to avoid the ninth spot in the batting order.

The A's switch-hitting shortstop is on a tear this spring. He notched two more hits in Saturday's split-squad 4-3 victory over the Chicago Cubs to raise his average to .484, second in the Cactus League behind the Los Angeles Angels' Howie Kendrick (.500).

Though Pennington doesn't make noise about wanting to hit higher, A's manager Bob Melvin is aware he does. But Melvin likes the thought of Pennington, leadoff man Jemile Weeks and Coco Crisp hitting one after another -- three switch-hitters who can give opponents trouble with their speed.

"I do like the dynamic of the three," Melvin said. —%o'Penny' does not like the dynamic of the three. He works really hard to try to hit farther up in the lineup."

Pennington batted .264 last season with eight homers and 58 RBI, both career highs. He hit .303 after the All-Star break.

"I think everybody would want to hit 1, 2, 3 or 4, depending on what kind of player you are," he said. "Melvin is going to put together the lineup he thinks is going to be best for the team."

Regardless of who sets the table, it only matters if the A's have hitters capable of driving in runs. And Melvin is less clear on whom he will bat 3-4-5.

Much depends on the readiness of Yoenis Cespedes, a potential third or fourth hitter. Cespedes might team in some combination with Josh Reddick and Seth Smith, two offseason acquisitions who will be looked upon to help improve an offense that ranked 12th in runs in the A.L. last season.

If no No. 3 hitter emerges, Melvin said he'll consider batting Crisp third.

Reddick said he feels comfortable in the fifth spot, where he has hit on occasions when Cespedes and Manny Ramirez have both been in the lineup.

But Ramirez won't be with the A's for the first 50 games while on suspension.

"I've just never had success in the '4' hole, and I think that just gets into my head," Reddick said. "It's like, I gotta be the guy who hits the long ball all the time."

Reddick, who has played in just 143 big league games, has not started a game at cleanup in the majors. He's hit .298 in 17 games hitting fifth.

- Cespedes went 0 for 4 and struck out swinging twice on breaking balls. He is hitting .188 in five games.
- Tommy Milone gave up four runs over four innings as the A's lost 7-2 to the Giants in their other split-squad game. They entered Saturday having won seven in a row.

Andrew Carignan relieved Milone and allowed two homers. Collin Cowgill went 2 for 4 with an RBI to lift his average to .424.

Daric Barton played first base for the first time since undergoing surgery on his throwing shoulder last season. Melvin said he looked comfortable, but would not speculate on whether Barton would be ready to travel to Japan with the team for its season opener.

"He's got to be able to play several days in a row," Melvin said.

- Travis Schlichting started against the Cubs and allowed one run in three innings. He's a bullpen candidate.

The A's had their 1972 World Series trophy on display at Phoenix Municipal Stadium to commemorate the 40th anniversary of that achievement.

To transport it from Oakland to Phoenix, the A's actually bought a Southwest Airlines ticket for the trophy. Senior director of marketing Troy Smith sat in an aisle seat, marketing manager Amy MacEwen took the window and the trophy was strapped in a seat belt in the middle seat.

"It had to go through security and be screened," Smith said.

Radio play-by-play man Ken Korach will undergo a knee replacement Monday and will miss the Japan series and possibly the first few weeks of the season. He hopes to return by mid-April.

Ray Fosse will join Vince Cotroneo to broadcast the two-game series against Seattle in Tokyo, but the A's haven't announced Korach's fill-in once the A's return to the Bay Area.

Purdy: Roaming around Giants, A's camps

By Mark Purdy, Mercury News Columnist

After spending several days in the baseball desert, I learned many things.

Mostly, I learned that the baseball desert is hardly barren of good stories. Spring training seems to move at a leisurely pace. But each day, with the Giants and A's, there is almost too much to process except in small bites.

Such as:

Count me among those impressed with Gregor Blanco, who showed up as a Giants nonroster invitee with no guarantee of making the team but might become a vital cog. As far as I'm concerned, the Giants' quest for a fourth outfielder is over. It has been claimed by Blanco, who spent last season playing in the minors followed by Venezuelan winter ball. Kudos to the Giants scouts who spotted him there.

Why is Blanco the man for the job? He is versatile, skilled, has hit decently enough this spring and is faster than the slot buttons in the local Indian casinos. Wednesday against Cleveland, Blanco drew a base on balls, then went from first to third on a ground ball to the first baseman when the pitcher who took the throw at first dawdled. When's the last time you saw that happen in a Giants game?

Blanco, 28, can hardly be called a "prospect." He kicked around with the Atlanta Braves and the Kansas City Royals with modest success before going home to play in Caracas. The Giants are giving him second life, and he is grateful, saying he will play any outfield position or be a backup to earn a roster spot, saying: "I just want to be part of the team." At the very least, he will be a cool tool for manager Bruce Bochy in the late innings as a pinch hitter, runner or double-switch asset.

At the A's camp in Phoenix, playoff expectations are minimal, but they're still standing tall. Literally. Their 40-man roster has eight players who are 6-foot-4 or taller. So on the opening weekend of March Madness, outfielder Michael Taylor (6-5) took a stab at putting together a starting basketball lineup using his teammates. He had pitchers Tyson Ross (6-6), Brandon McCarthy (6-7) and Jerry Blevins (6-6) on the front line, with outfielder Chris Carter (6-4) as a swingman who could play shooting guard or small forward.

Oh, and what about point guard? In Taylor's mind, it was a fight between outfielder Coco Crisp and infielder Jemile Weeks until Crisp walked by and said he was just OK at hoops. "I don't like that answer," Taylor joked, as Weeks pounded his chest and said he would take the job. And what of Taylor, who played high school hoops in Florida before attending Stanford? He decided: "I could come off the bench and contribute -- I don't need a lot of touches."

Carter remains in a most familiar spot among A's prospects as the position player with the most potential. You would think that, at age 25, it's time for him to start showing his stuff at the major league level, but he still looks likely to start the season in Sacramento. Carter has progressed slowly through the A's system since arriving from the Arizona Diamondbacks in the 2007 Dan Haren trade. Says A's manager Bob Melvin of Carter: "At every level, it seems like it's taken him a while to feel comfortable. But he's gotten there."

Here's an off-the-wall (and down the outpatient hall) lunch tip for any Giants fans planning to take in a game at Scottsdale Stadium. If you arrive early and are looking for a quick bite nearby, simply walk across the street to the Scottsdale Hospital and eat in the cafeteria. The food's good, cheap and healthy. (No beer, though.) Thanks to the kindly usher at the stadium who gave me the suggestion.

Meanwhile, at the A's spring home games where Manny Ramirez is easily the biggest name in camp, a licorice-string vendor has been walking through the stands hawking his wares as "Manny Dreadropes." Yes, really.

Giants pitcher Matt Cain was listening with interest at an adjoining locker when closer Brian Wilson began explaining how he measured his heart rate electronically as it peaked at 180 beats per minute during some relief appearances. Afterward, I asked Cain if he measured his own heartbeat. Cain shook his head: "No, I don't. I think if I got up to 180, I might pass out."

□ Cain might be underestimating himself. Most medical experts say a person's maximum heart rate can be calculated by subtracting his age from the number 220. That would put Wilson's at 190, because he just turned 30. And going by the formula, the 27-year-old Cain's maximum rate would be 193. And in case you're wondering, Willie Mays' maximum would be 140. But I still like his chances to beat out a slow roller to third.

□ It's still a puzzle why the A's want to leave their traditional spring headquarters at Phoenix Municipal Stadium in a few years and move to Mesa when the Cubs leave HoHoKam Park. After a stroll around Phoenix Muni, it still resonates as a quintessentially friendly place to spend the month of March, with fine sightlines and a convenient location. It seems the city of Phoenix apparently has no money to make some modern upgrades, so the A's are accepting Mesa's advances. Too bad. Memories of those long Canseco and McGwire home runs clearing the left-field fence and bouncing toward Van Buren Street will never fade.

□ I'm old enough to remember that when athletic shoe vendor/representatives visited major league clubhouses, they came in single doses. This week in the Giants' clubhouse, one shoe company sent three people, all of whom visited each player's locker at once. What, one guy handles the sole, one the shoestrings, one the tongue?

□ After eyeballing both Bay Area teams, I'm prepared to predict. The A's will be lucky to win 70 games (with Manny's dreadropes after he becomes eligible in May mostly a non-factor) while the Giants should be ashamed if they lose 70 games (with catcher Buster Posey's ankle holding up fine -- as long as he spends 30 games or so at first base). If only the A's could play hoops against the Giants instead of baseball.

Daric Barton plays 1st base in A's loss to Giants

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Daric Barton got back to first base at last Saturday, and he enjoyed a strong game there, with two hits, including a double, off **Tim Lincecum**, plus a walk.

He played well in the field and made one throw with his surgically repaired right arm, but it's unlikely that one game at the position will be enough to put Barton back into the first-base race before the A's leave for Japan on Thursday.

"I have a feeling that was some kind of test of whether I'm ready," Barton said. "All signs are positive."

The A's probably will leave Barton at extended spring training to continue to play the position, but there's no reason he can't rejoin the competition for first base once Oakland returns from Tokyo. The team plays only two regular-season games there and has four exhibition games after returning.

Barton said he felt a little tentative with the one throw he made, so he just tried to get rid of it quickly. "I was happy with the way my arm felt," he said.

Overall, he said, "That was a great day for me. It felt good to get out there on defense and do something. ... I've been waiting for a while."

Barton was the A's starting first baseman much of the past three seasons until underperforming offensively and defensively - the result of the shoulder injury, he says - and being sent down June 22.

Manager **Bob Melvin** said it's difficult to say what the plan will be with Barton; he'll play every other day in Arizona, and, Melvin said, "He had a nice start today."

Kila Ka'aihue will start at first base today against the Diamondbacks - if there is a game. Rain is in the forecast.

Arizona's scheduled starting pitcher is former A's All-Star **Trevor Cahill**, traded away during the winter.

"He's going to get raked. Put that on the record," catcher **Kurt Suzuki** said with a laugh, adding, "I love Trevor. Trevor is one of my favorites."

Briefly: Melvin said it wouldn't be the worst day of the spring to get a rainout because of the split-squad games Saturday (combined with a night game Friday). Getting **Tyson Ross** his start would be the only issue, but he can start a Triple-A game Monday if need be. ... **Brett Anderson** said he threw a 35-pitch bullpen session that included 8 to 10 changeups. ... The A's unveiled their latest "Green Collar Baseball" ad campaign, put together again by Hub Strategy, which won an industry award for last year's ads. Among the highlights: Suzuki and starter **Brandon McCarthy** attending couples therapy. "Sometimes when I'm on the mound, I feel like he's thinking about other pitchers," McCarthy says.

A's 4, Cubs 3; Giants 7, A's 2

Notable: By beating Chicago at Phoenix Muni, the A's extended their winning streak to eight games in a row, but the streak ended 15 minutes later when Oakland lost at Scottsdale. ... **Collin Cowgill** went 2-for-4 with a triple against the Giants, and he is batting .424. ... Manager **Bob Melvin** said starter **Tommy Milone** made just two bad pitches in that game, one of them a two-run homer by **Ryan Theriot**. Milone remains a favorite for a rotation spot. ... **Cliff Pennington** was 2-for-3 against the Cubs and is batting .484. ... **Seth Smith** went 3-for-3 with a double and two RBIs.

Quotable: "He's been great all camp. ... He's done nothing but impress us."

- *Bench coach Chip Hale, who managed the game at Phoenix Muni, on starter Travis Schlichting, who allowed two hits, a walk and a run in three innings.*

Today's game: A's (**Tyson Ross**) at Diamondbacks (**Trevor Cahill**), 1:05 p.m. Radio: 95.7 FM.

Garagiola tireless in his antitobacco campaign

John Shea, Chronicle Columnist

Joe Garagiola walked into the Giants' clubhouse, sat next to **Willie Mays** and reminisced about baseball in the 1950s. Garagiola's final weeks as a player were as a rarely used catcher on the '54 Giants, who swept Cleveland in the World Series.

Garagiola told a story, and Mays laughed.

Mays told a story, and Garagiola laughed.

They combined on a few stories, and everyone in the vicinity laughed.

Then Garagiola, as he often does, turned the conversation to his fight against the use of smokeless tobacco, and nobody laughed.

"Here's the guy you should emulate," Garagiola said, his voice rising as he points to Mays. "They threw the ball, he hit it. They hit the ball, he caught it. That's Willie Mays' great theory on baseball. Emulate him, not some guy who has tobacco in his back pocket. Kids see that."

Garagiola, 86 and six years older than Mays, has spent much of his life talking to players about the hazards of chewing tobacco, testifying before Congress and state legislatures and citing horrid examples of the deadly effects of tobacco use.

Major League Baseball and the players' union finally budged, albeit an inch. As part of the new collective bargaining agreement, players cannot go on the field carrying tobacco tins (often noticed in back pockets) or pouches in their uniforms, or be seen using tobacco in interviews.

The regulations, which certainly are being overlooked in spring training, are cosmetic - Garagiola wants tobacco banned; no use at all on the field - but at least they're a start, he admitted.

"I like it," Garagiola said. "But it's like blaming the Johnstown Flood on a leaky faucet, for goodness sake. Why don't you just let a ballplayer smoke a cigarette in the on-deck circle? What's this going to do? What the hell's the difference? They chew it all the time. What I'm trying to do is get it kicked out."

Tobacco is banned in the minors. Minor-leaguers have no union, and the commissioner's office implemented a no-tobacco rule, but don't tell Garagiola that minor-leaguers don't dip or chew.

"That's the worst myth in the world," he said. "They put sunflower seeds in there, mix it in with tobacco and spit sunflower seeds."

Back in the day, Garagiola was a tobacco user. He quit after his grade-school daughter asked if he was going to die from cancer. The other day, he vowed to thank Giants manager **Bruce Bochy** for recently telling his how-I-quit-tobacco story to The Chronicle's **Gwen Knapp**.

"What you need is more things like that," Garagiola said. "What Bochy did, that's more than a story, believe me."

Garagiola wants players to come out against tobacco use and eventually agree to have it banned, but he's getting little support. An Arizona resident, he said whenever he walks into the Diamondbacks' clubhouse, players scatter, knowing what message he's about to deliver, knowing they don't want to be told to kick the habit.

"One guy, I told him, 'You put that tin in your back pocket, you think you're tough. You think you're macho. **John Wayne**. That's bull. Don't do it for yourself. Do it for your family,' " Garagiola said. "All these guys say, 'Oh, when I get out of the game or when my kids grow up, I'm going to quit.' I say, 'Oh, really? When did you get that contract from God?' "

Analyzing Sanchez: With **Matt Cain**, **Cole Hamels** and **Zack Greinke** eligible for free agency next winter, **Jonathan Sanchez** would be on a second tier of pitchers heading for the open market. In retrospect, both players in that Sanchez-for-**Melky Cabrera** trade are a year from free agency.

Sanchez is entering his walk year in Kansas City, and that can be translated two ways.

The year the Giants won the championship, Sanchez led the league with 96 walks. Last year, his 5.86 walks per nine innings topped the majors.

As he told CBS Sports, "You see **Randy Johnson** and **Nolan Ryan**. Those guys walked a lot of guys, but they had success in the big leagues. That's why I don't worry about walks. One day you walk five guys, the next you don't walk anybody.

"This is the kind of pitcher I am. I walk guys. I strike guys out. That's how it is. They say, 'You throw too many pitches.' That's how it is. In 2010, I led the league in walks and we won the World Series. Nobody cared about walks back then.

A lingering issue with the Giants was that Sanchez didn't believe in himself enough. If his nasty arsenal was good enough to get him a no-hitter, why didn't he challenge more batters instead of preferring to be so fine with his pitches?

Especially when considering he averaged 9.37 strikeouts per nine innings over five seasons, the third best mark in the majors.

Around the majors: Ex-Giant **Jerome Williams**, after his feel-good comeback last season, was penciled in as the Angels' No. 5 starter, but a hamstring strain is hurting his chances. Now the Angels are looking at prospect **Garrett Richards** and left-hander **Brad Mills**. ... The talk was that **Yu Darvish** had seven pitches, and that might be true. What's also true is that they're not all effective. He threw more balls (31) than strikes (29) in his last start, and the Rangers are trying to have him cut his repertoire to three or four pitches. ... The Rangers' **Michael Young**, who moved to the cleanup spot when **Adrian Beltre** was shelved last year, is hitting fifth again. No worries. He batted .351 as the 5 hitter last year. Here's Texas' first six: **Ian Kinsler**, **Elvis Andrus**, **Josh Hamilton**, Beltre, Young and **Nelson Cruz**. ... Many pitchers use spring training to regain their timing and touch. The Brewers' starters are pitching as if spring training actually matters. Their Cactus League ERA was 1.18 before **Yovani Gallardo** gave up four runs in three innings Friday.

Drumbeat: A's win one over Cubs, lose to Giants, Barton plays well at first

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Phoenix Muni, 3/17/2012 4:54pm

The A's split their split-squad games today, beating the Cubs here 4-3 and losing 7-2 to the Giants over at Scottsdale.

Perhaps the most interesting development of the day was over there – Daric Barton played his first game of the spring at first base, he doubled down the left-field line, he singled to right and he walked, and both his hits came off Tim Lincecum. He made several plays at first base, and, he said, he made one throw: Angel Pagan took off for second, Tommy Milone threw to Barton and Barton went on to second.

Milone was called for a balk on the play, but for Barton, the main thing was that the throw felt OK with his surgically repaired right shoulder. He said he felt a little tentative with it, just tried to get rid of it quickly, and it was just fine.

Barton was very encouraged by his day, and he said he felt as if he passed something of a test.

"That was a great day for me," he told me. "All signs are positive."

I'm not sure this puts Barton back into the immediate running for first base; considering Barton has one game at first and the team leaves Thursday, it seems only logical that he'd remain at extended spring for more regular work there.

But if Barton shows he can swing the bat and if his defense is back to its pre-2011 form (the shoulder injury contributed to a poor offensive and defensive season), then he just might be a real option at first base if the team decides Brandon Allen or Kila Ka'aihue is not the option once the club returns from Japan.

Manager Bob Melvin said it's difficult to say what the plan will be with Barton; he'll play every other day here, and, Melvin said, "He had a nice start today."

Ka'aihue will be at first base today against the Diamondbacks – if there is a game. Rain is in the forecast.

Melvin said it wouldn't be the worst day of the spring to get a rainout because of the split-squad games today (combined with a night game last night). Getting Tyson Ross his start would be the only issue, but he can always start a Triple-A game Monday if need be.

Melvin said that Tommy Milone, who started at Scottsdale and allowed five hits and four runs, really only threw two bad pitches (one a homer by Ryan Theriot). He didn't walk any batters, and all four runs off him came in the fourth inning.

Collin Cowgill had two more hits in that game, including a triple, and he's batting .424.

In the game here, the highlight of the day might have been the play at the plate in the sixth in which Marlon Byrd tried to score on a double by Geovany Soto. Jonny Gomes whipped a throw to Cliff Pennington, who threw a strike to Anthony Recker, and the A's one-run lead was preserved.

Pennington had two more hits to lift his average to .484. Travis Schichting started and pitched well, allowing two hits, one walk and one run in three innings, and he also recorded a strikeout.

Brett Anderson told me he threw a 35-pitch bullpen session that included 8-10 changeups and he said the pitch was much better than he'd expected.

Drumbeat: A's unveil latest TV ads – more good stuff on tap

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Phoenix Muni, 3/17/2012, 12:29pm

Every year, the A's have among the best TV commercials in baseball – last year's spots won an industry award for *the* best TV sports ads, all sports included – and we just got a quick look at some of this year's commercials. They don't disappoint. Here's one that's already airing:

Among the highlights of the other ads we saw: Dallas Braden showing A's Hall of Famer Rollie Fingers the handlebar mustache tattooed on his finger in honor of Fingers (he really does have such a tattoo on his finger), and then other "tattoos" he has to honor Fingers, including this one on his arm:

My favorite, though, might be Brandon McCarthy and Kurt Suzuki doing everything together – the bond between starter and catcher is very important – and winding up in couples therapy. "Sometimes when I'm on the mound, I feel like he's thinking about other pitchers," McCarthy says as Suzuki throws his hands up in the air in response.

Hub Strategy CEO DJ O'Neill directed the spots, and he said that Coco Crisp is the A's best actor, a real natural, and that Braden should go into stand-up comedy (I think we'd all agree). He also noted bench coach Chip Hale's resemblance to "a young Bruce Willis," and that's a strong call.

For the first time, Hub Strategy and the A's also showed us some of the billboard ads, and they're clever, too, such as the Rollie Fingers Bobblehead Day ad: "Your other bobbleheads are going to have mustache envy." Jemile Weeks in mid-steal running form: "We don't walk the walk, we run it."

The A's will have lots of fun social media things going on all season. Today there's a promotion to find the hidden leprechaun on the team website, for instance, and there will be a Mustache Madness bracket leading up to the Fingers Bobblehead day.

Smith sparks offense in A's win over Cubs

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Outfielder Seth Smith's two-run double highlighted a three-run first inning that helped the split-squad A's to a 4-3 victory over the visiting Cubs Saturday at Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

Smith's hit followed a two-out fielding error by third baseman Josh Vitters, making all three runs to lefty Paul Maholm's name unearned. The Cubs starter lasted three innings, giving up two hits while walking two and fanning three.

A's right-hander Travis Schlichting, meanwhile, fared well against the Cubs in his first start, allowing one run on two hits with one walk and one strikeout in three innings.

Cubs outfielder David DeJesus was responsible for the lone run, as the former A's player led off the first inning with a triple and came home to score on Starlin Castro's groundout.

Geovany Soto homered for Cubs, his first of the spring.

Up next for the A's: Sunday's 1:05 p.m. PT matchup between the A's and D-backs at Salt River Fields will feature right-hander Tyson Ross taking on former Oakland pitcher Trevor Cahill, dealt this winter for a trio of prospects, including Jarrod Parker. Ross, a strong candidate to break camp in the A's rotation, has compiled a 1.29 ERA in three starts this spring.

A's trying to get Barton on their schedule

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- The A's always had mid-March circled on their calendar for Daric Barton's return to first base. So considering his debut at the position came Saturday, 17 days into the month, Barton is seemingly right on schedule.

But how his schedule pairs with the A's, who depart for Japan on Thursday, is significant. Manager Bob Melvin would like to see Barton play several games in a row before deciphering his readiness for the overseas trip, which might not even be possible.

"I don't know, at this point," Melvin said. "It's difficult, based on him not being able to play the field too many days. But he had a nice start today."

Barton didn't see much action at first base, but at the plate he went 2-for-2 with a double and a walk in the team's 7-2 loss to the Giants.

"He looked good," Melvin said. "He didn't really have any plays of significance defensively, but he looked comfortable out there. He swung the bat well today."

Barton will serve as the designated hitter in Sunday's game against Arizona, while Kila Ka'aihue gets the start at first base. Ka'aihue has tallied 23 at-bats this spring, and fellow first-base contender Brandon Allen has collected 26. Both might not see many more in the coming days, as Melvin attempts to help Barton catch up.

Crisp 'shakes' things up in A's commercials

PHOENIX -- Shake weights have always made for good commercials. Coco Crisp makes them even better.

The A's outfielder is tasked with handling two of them in one of seven of the club's 2012 television commercials -- this one promptly called "Shake Weight," which highlights the switch-hitting trio of Crisp, Cliff Pennington and Jemile Weeks practicing everything from both the right and left sides.

This year's version of the award-winning "Green Collar Baseball" campaign, in its third season, also features Dallas Braden showing off his Rollie Fingers tattoo to the A's pitching legend himself, and battery mates Brandon McCarthy and Kurt Suzuki in couples therapy -- an ode to their commitment to maintaining chemistry, with McCarthy confessing, "Sometimes when I'm on the mound, I feel like he's thinking about different pitchers."

"It's been well-received each year, so we wanted to keep it going, but we wanted to freshen it up a little bit," said DJ O'Neill, the founder and CEO of Hub Strategy, which is responsible for the advertising campaign. "It's been real interesting to work with these guys, and I think this year was maybe the most fun. The guys are really fun. The overarching theme is that all these guys want to do really well. These guys are competitors."

The A's 2011 campaign won Best Television and Best Social Media at the 2012 National Sports Forum ADchievement Awards, considered the most recognized advertising competition in the sports industry.

Worth noting

- A's lefty Brett Anderson, on the road to recovery from Tommy John surgery, threw a 35-pitch bullpen on Saturday, mixing in changeups for the first time. A team official said he came out of the session fine.
- Yoenis Cespedes, making a start in center field against the Cubs on Sunday, went 0-for-4 with two strikeouts, upping his spring strikeout total to six in 16 at-bats.

Bench coach Chip Hale, managing the club's home team Sunday, said it's too early to worry about Cespedes' production and noted that "he knows what he's swinging at, and he's not swinging wildly."

Milone struggles as A's fall to host Giants

By Chris Haft / MLB.com

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- Ryan Theriot's two-run homer highlighted a four-run, fourth-inning outburst that propelled the San Francisco Giants to a 7-2 victory over the Oakland A's in a split-squad exhibition for both teams on Saturday at Scottsdale Stadium.

Oakland owned a 1-0 lead behind left-hander Tommy Milone when designated hitter Freddy Sanchez singled to open San Francisco's fourth. Melky Cabrera's double set up Pablo Sandoval's sacrifice fly. After Nate Schierholtz doubled in Cabrera, Theriot drove a full-count pitch into the left-field bullpen.

Angel Pagan and Pablo Sandoval homered off reliever Andrew Carigan in the fifth and sixth innings, respectively, to pad the Giants' lead. San Francisco entered the game leading all National League teams in exhibition batting average, runs, hits, home runs and slugging percentage.

Right-hander Tim Lincecum became the first Giants starter to work six innings this spring. Lincecum surrendered six hits, including consecutive second-inning doubles by Daric Barton and Derek Norris that opened the scoring for the A's. The two-time Cy Young Award winner also walked none and struck out four.

Lincecum didn't get carried away with himself. "You look at the swings and the contact people are making. Sometimes they're making good contact; sometimes they aren't," he said. "You just try to feed off of the positives."

This was the first of four exhibitions between the teams but the only one that'll be played in Arizona. The other three will occur in the Bay Area from April 2-4.

Up next for the A's: Sunday's 1:05 p.m. PT matchup between the A's and D-backs at Salt River Fields will feature right-hander Tyson Ross taking on former Oakland pitcher Trevor Cahill, dealt this winter for a trio of prospects, including Jarrod Parker. Ross, a strong candidate to break camp in the A's rotation, has compiled a 1.29 ERA in three starts this spring.

Smith leads A's to 4-3 win over Cubs

Associated Press

PHOENIX -- Seth Smith's place on the Oakland Athletics' major league roster is as left-handed bat who can play in the outfield and be plugged in as a designated hitter.

Acquired from Colorado in mid-January, Smith went 3 for 3 with two-run double in the first inning that helped the A's beat the Chicago Cubs 4-3 in a split-squad game.

"He's faced so many left-handed pitchers all spring and he's really starting to swing it better and better against them," Oakland bench coach Chip Hale said. "He's got a great approach at the plate. That's the reason why we went out and traded for him."

Former Oakland outfielder David DeJesus tripled to lead off the game and scored on a groundout off Travis Schlichting, who allowed two hits in three innings during his first start following three relief appearances.

"He's done nothing but impress us every time out," Hale said.

Cubs starter Paul Maholm gave up three runs - none of the them earned - and two hits in three innings with three strikeouts and two walks. Manny Ramirez reached on a run-scoring error that tied the score, and Smith followed with his double on a hanging slider.

"It's good to have to battle through an inning," Maholm said. "It's a step in the process, having to get through that stuff and then bouncing back the next two innings and having some pretty quick innings."

Oakland left fielder Jonny Gomes had a nice throw in the sixth when Geovany Soto doubled with Marlon Byrd on first. Gomes threw to shortstop Cliff Pennington, who relayed to catcher Anthony Recker.

Recker and Byrd collided, but Recker stood up with the ball and took an extended look at Byrd as he headed for the dugout.

"Every day we're doing some kind of fundamental, and when we do it right, it's very nice to see," Hale said.

NOTES: Oakland extended its spring training winning streak to eight games, but it ended Saturday with a split squad's loss to San Francisco in Scottsdale. ... Former World Series champions Bert Campaneris and Blue Moon Odom threw out ceremonial first pitches in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the 1972 Athletics' World Series title ... Cubs reliever Esmailin Caridad came on in the bottom of the eighth inning and struck out the side in order, all looking, in his spring training debut. ... Soto homered on Ryan Cook's first pitch of the fourth.

Yoenis Cespedes was very close to being a Cub

BY GORDON WITTENMYER, Chicago Sun Times

PHOENIX — Cuban superstar Yoenis Cespedes said he was willing to sign with the Cubs and had reason to believe this winter that he might wind up in Chicago.

The bottom line, Cespedes told the Sun-Times on Saturday, was that the Cubs offered six years for the same \$36 million that the Oakland Athletics offered for four years.

In addition to the significant difference in annual salary, the center fielder told his agent he didn't want a six-year deal from anybody. If not four, he wanted eight or more.

The A's agreed to allow him to become a free agent at the end of his contract, when he'll be 30, instead of binding him to the arbitration process.

Would he have signed with the Cubs if they offered the same deal as the A's?

"If they make the deal before Oakland, probably," he said through team translator Ariel Prieto, the former major-league pitcher who also defected from Cuba. "You never know."

One thing's for sure: Nobody got closer to Cespedes during the winter. Cubs officials from the upper front office all the way through the scouting department spent time with him at games and away from the field.

"A lot of time," he said. "They had dinner with me three or four times."

Besides the big commitment for an unknown commodity who already was in his mid-20s, the Cubs didn't push as hard for Cespedes as other teams. They've had their sights set on 20-year-old outfielder Jorge Soler, another Cuban defector who has yet to be declared eligible to sign.

Cespedes said he knows Soler and is aware of the Cubs' interest, but he hasn't talked to Soler about the outfielder's interest in the Cubs.

In his first look at Cubs pitching, Cespedes went 0-for-4 on Saturday with two strikeouts and a line out to center.

Starter Paul Maholm's impressions:

"I struck him out and blew up his bat [on a grounder], so ..." the left-hander said. "Obviously, he's got all the tools in the world. I'm sure he's going to make adjustments. From everything you hear, he's a hard worker. He's just got to get acclimated to being over here."

Maholm 'stronger'

Maholm spent the last six weeks of last season on the disabled list because of a strained shoulder. Then it took more than a week into the schedule to get him into a game this spring after a bout with the flu.

But the projected No. 3 starter said Saturday he hasn't had so much as a twinge in the shoulder.

"I did what I was supposed to do in the offseason. I rested, rehabbed," he said after throwing three innings without allowing an earned run against the A's. "Ever since I started throwing, it's felt great. It feels normal. The strain wasn't a serious thing.

"My shoulder feels a little bit stronger. I'm still not going to blow up the radar gun, but to me it feels good."