

A's News Clips, Sunday, April Fool's Day, 2012

Oakland A's pitcher Dallas Braden suffers setback with shoulder injury

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

WEST SACRAMENTO -- Pitcher Dallas Braden, who was already scheduled to start the season on the disabled list, suffered a setback with his left shoulder before the A's left for Japan last week, and the timetable for his return to the club is uncertain.

Manager Bob Melvin said Saturday night before Oakland's exhibition with the Sacramento River Cats at Raley Field that Braden strained his shoulder playing catch following his last bullpen session in Arizona.

When asked if Braden's return might be pushed back projections of early May, Melvin was frank.

"It could very much," he said. "Actually, we're on hold with that right now. I don't have a timetable for him right now."

A's assistant general manager David Forst confirmed the injury and added, "When the doctors get together (with Braden), we'll know more about the extent of it."

Braden was at the ballpark Saturday during batting practice but made a hasty departure before game time and did not speak with reporters.

The left-hander had surgery May 17 to repair a torn anterior capsule in his shoulder and missed the rest of the 2011 season. He had been on a throwing program during spring training but had not thrown in a game.

- A's designated hitter Manny Ramirez might have played Saturday and during the Bay Bridge Series next week against the Giants but suffered a left hamstring strain during Arizona workouts after the club left for Japan.

Melvin did not know how Ramirez's injury occurred but wasn't concerned, even if Ramirez isn't ready to participate in extended spring training starting April 9.

"For me, he gets 10 days either in Sacramento or wherever it is, and if he were to get five to six games in extended before that, I don't know why he would need more time than that the way he swings the bat."

Ramirez is serving a 50-game drug suspension and won't be eligible to play for Oakland until May 30, the date of his 40th birthday.

- The A's beat the River Cats 9-0 in a seven-inning no-hitter, with left-hander Tommy Milone throwing six perfect innings with six strikeouts in a game called by rain.

Melvin said Milone effectively nailed down the No. 3 spot in the rotation with his latest sterling performance.

"That's what we've seen all spring," Melvin said. "When he misses, it's usually by design. Great command, precision mechanics, a real still head, and he has real good feel for reading hitters and their swings."

Milone said he had no ill feelings about coming out the game while he was perfect.

"It would have been cool to keep going, but I know what I was out there doing, and I know I was only supposed to throw a certain amount of pitches," he said. "It's hard for

them when I'm not really built up to leave me out there like that."

Andrew Carignan pitched a hitless seventh but gave up a one-out walk to Grant Green to end the run of perfection.

- Melvin wouldn't rule out the possibility that Daric Barton could be his first baseman for the home opener.

"A lot of it's going to be health with him," the manager said. "I don't think he's quite comfortable yet throwing. He's playing in games, but I'm not sure we're quite there yet. He could be soon, I'm not sure. But he's definitely still in the mix."

Brandon Allen started at first Saturday and took a ball off his face during infield warm-ups heading into the bottom of the fourth inning and was replaced by Kila Ka'aihue. He suffered a small cut under his right eye but was fine.

- The A's had a bit scare in the top of the first when River Cats starter Jarrod Parker hit catcher Kurt Suzuki with a pitch on the left shoulder blade. Suzuki left the game, but the club announced he was simply removed for precautionary reasons.

Oakland's O.co old and gray but still beloved

By Angela Woodall Oakland Tribune

It was Jan. 27, 1964. Oakland had invited Charles O. Finley to move his storm-tossed Kansas City Athletics here to play the 1964 season in a rebuilt Frank Youell Field and to stay for 25 years in the \$25 million Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum. The team -- renamed the Oakland A's -- played its first game in Oakland in 1968.

Four world championships and 44 seasons later, the A's are still pitching no-hitters in the cement colossus at the eastern end of the city.

Of course, the iconoclastic Finley long ago gave up the team, and the gray lady has become the last dual purpose football-baseball stadium left in the nation.

"We've nurtured the hell out of that building," Coliseum usher Nick Cabral said.

Cabral helped pour the concrete that created the Coliseum. He returned to work as an usher in 1995 in his free time. Now 70, the Alameda native said the workers, who have made a tremendous effort diverting attention of fans from the antiquated state of the complex, deserve a new building.

The Coliseum, he said, "is like a lady who needs a new dress."

"That little ol' bullring filled with blue-collar crazies." That is what former Raiders quarterback Kenny Stabler called the Coliseum. But it has always been more than a building. The stadium especially embodied a big-league dream come true for the group of men -- Robert Nahas, Edgar Kaiser and former Oakland Tribune Publisher William Knowland -- who pushed and prodded and pleaded to make the Coliseum a reality. It would "break the log jam and unleash progress and prosperity throughout the entire county," predicted then-Oakland Chamber of Commerce President Nils Eklund in 1961.

Not everyone was convinced and argued for elected officials to weigh the financing against demands for education, transit, parks and welfare.

But the enthusiasm was contagious.

Candlestick Park was just across the bay, but every community wants its own stadium, said George Vukasin Sr., who led the seven-member Coliseum board beginning in 1984.

"Oakland had a sports complex and ended up having three sports franchises. It was exciting," he said.

But in 1961, while Oakland scrambled to push through a vote in the City Council to approve the Coliseum plan, San Jose stood poised to catch the Raiders if the deal had fallen through. Then-San Jose City Manager A.P. "Dutch" Hamann told the Tribune he was sure Spartan Stadium would be available.

Instead, the Raiders played the first pro game at the Coliseum on Sept. 18, 1966.

It was raining that day. When owner Al Davis walked onto the field, the rain stopped, said Harold Miller, 82, who worked as a ticket-taker that day and is now the longest-serving employee at the Coliseum.

His full-time job while the Coliseum was being constructed was as an equipment operator, and he helped lay the water main to the complex. As a part-time Coliseum event manager, he has seen some of the most famous performers take center stage in the arena or the stadium.

The Rat Pack trio of Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr. and Dean Martin crooned there.

Madonna (three times), Elton John (four times) and the Rolling Stones (four or five times) rocked out there.

Evangelist Billy Graham commanded an audience of 55,000 people. And Bill Graham filled the stadium year after year for Day on the Green, grossing millions from tickets and merchandise sales. The concert series was "pretty awesome," Miller said.

The Grateful Dead sold out every show it played there but one, he said, demonstrating in his living room the way "Dead Heads" used to dance in a circle with their arms in the air.

"The Coliseum is still a great place to see a game," Miller said.

For Finley, it was the only ballpark vacant when he was itching to move his team out of Kansas City. But the front offices hadn't even been finished, and the cinder blocks were still visible in 1968 said Nancy Finley, daughter of Charlie Finley's right-hand man and cousin, Carl Finley. She still attends games there.

"It's like going to my old neighborhood," she said, remembering exploring the "catacombs" through underground tunnels and doing her homework at the very top of the third deck, which is now covered by a tarp during A's games.

She recalled Charlie Finley's orange baseballs, mule on the field, the white-dyed kangaroo leather Finley put on players' feet. During a 1971 game, women paraded on the field in hot pants, and later a young MC Hammer phoned blow-by-blow accounts of games to his boss.

"I feel like ghosts are there," Nancy Finley said. "It's very haunting."

Charlie Finley sold the team in 1980, and the front office walls were finally finished by the new owner, Walter Haas. The Coliseum changed hands twice before current owners, Gap magnate John Fisher and Lew Wolff, took control.

The Raiders meanwhile had left for Los Angeles in 1982 in search of club seats and luxury boxes. The team's return in 1995 was accompanied by a new wave of euphoric and overconfident proclamations.

"Oakland is now on the threshold of greatness," former City Councilman Nate Miley proclaimed that summer, echoing the chant by many elected officials and boosters.

The return of the Raiders prompted the only major physical change the Coliseum has seen in its 46-year life span. The arena was gutted and rebuilt, and the stadium was reconfigured with luxury suites, to which the moniker Mt. Davis has been attached.

The luxury boxes gave the stadium another dimension, Cabral said.

"They gave it a little more class."

Others complained that it took away their view of the hills.

Eventually, Mt. Davis will be torn down along with the edifice to possibly make way for a shiny new sports-entertainment complex.

Or the teams could move elsewhere. The Coliseum would be filled with other events in their absence, and Cabral and Miller would still have work to do. But Cabral said he foresaw a "tremendous void in the city of Oakland" without a Coliseum.

"It gives Oakland an identity," he said.

Inside the Oakland A's: Braden suffers setback, Manny will miss the Bay Bridge with hamstring

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune, 3/31/2012 8:13pm

Carl Steward, filling in for Joe Stiglich here in Sacramento as the A's play an exhibition against the Triple-A RiverCats. The A's are still looking a bit haggard and bleary-eyed following their Japan trip, but better than expected. One guy who looked particularly sharp was left-hander Tommy Milone, who threw six perfect innings against the RiverCats and probably nailed down the No. 3 spot in the rotation. Milone has looked pretty sensational all spring. Here's the report I filed for online Saturday night ...

Pitcher Dallas Braden, who was already scheduled to start the season on the disabled list, suffered a setback with his left shoulder before the A's left for Japan last week and the timetable for his return to the club is now uncertain.

Manager Bob Melvin said Saturday night before Oakland's exhibition game with the Sacramento RiverCats at Raley Field that Braden strained his shoulder playing catch following his last bullpen session in Arizona. He has not thrown since, and it's not known when he might be cleared to do so.

When asked if Braden's return might be pushed back projections of early May, Melvin was frank.

"It could very much," he said. "Actually, we're on hold with that right now. I don't have a timetable for him right now."

A's assistant general manager David Forst confirmed the injury and added, "When the doctors get together (with Braden), we'll know more about the extent of it."

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"A lot of it's going to be health with him," the manager said. "I don't think he's quite comfortable yet throwing. He's playing in games, but I'm not sure we're quite there yet. He could be soon, I'm not sure. But he's definitely still in the mix."

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The A's had a bit scare in the top of the first when RiverCats starter Jarrod Parker hit catcher Kurt Suzuki with a pitch on the left shoulder blade. Suzuki immediately left the game headed for the clubhouse for treatment, but the club announced he was simply removed for precautionary reasons.

Prior to the game, Melvin said that Parker was still in the mix for the fifth spot in the major-league rotation, but the right-hander did not help his cause. He walked the first two hitters of the game, and then after getting two outs, hit Suzuki. Josh Reddick followed a fly to center field that appeared to be the third out, but Grant Green dropped it for an error and all three runs scored.

Parker then surrendered a three-run homer to Coco Crisp in the second inning after a walk to Seth Smith and a single by Jemile Weeks. He walked four and struck out two in just two innings of work.

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Yoenis Cespedes had just one at-bat Saturday, grounding out, before exiting the game. Melvin said it's possible Cespedes could move up in the order at some point, but for the time being, doesn't want to put any added pressure on the Cuban import. He did say Cespedes is adjusting well after his solid performance in Japan.

"You see him getting more and more comfortable every day," Melvin said. "A home run like he hit the other day can go a long way toward really making you feel like you belong and you're one of the team."

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The A's, who got back to the Bay Area in the late afternoon Thursday, seemed to be dealing with post-Japan jetlag fairly well.

"I was more messed up in Japan," said Weeks. "Once I got back here, I think I got back to my regular schedule somewhat, and these four games give us an opportunity to get that sleep pattern back. But up to now, it's been pretty much sleeping, eating, then going back to sleep again."

Melvin said he got some winks in on the bus ride from Oakland to Sacramento.

"It was the best sleep I've had since I've been back," he said. "I slept every minute of it."

Back from Japan, A's announce setback for Braden

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

In the latest episode of "As the Rotation Turns," one A's pitcher won a job and was named the No. 3 starter. Another might have ruined his candidacy. A third was shelved again and won't join the mix any time soon.

After Saturday night's rain-shortened 9-0 victory over Triple-A Sacramento, manager Bob Melvin named lefty Tommy Milone the No. 3 starter behind Brandon McCarthy and Bartolo Colon. Milone justified the decision with six perfect innings, collecting six strikeouts and showing no signs of jet lag after the team returned from Tokyo on Thursday.

Reliever Andrew Carignan walked his second batter, Gary Green, ending the perfect-game bid. The no-hitter remained intact when the game was called after seven innings.

"It's an honor," Milone said of his new post; he'll start April 9 against the Royals. "Obviously, that's what I've been working toward this whole time, this whole spring. I'm excited to get going."

On the flip side, Jarrod Parker hurt his rotation chances. Pitching for Sacramento, Parker surrendered six runs (three earned) on two hits and four walks. He walked his first two batters and plunked Kurt Suzuki (left arm), who exited after the half-inning for precautionary reasons. All three runners scored when center fielder Grant Green dropped Josh Reddick's two-out flyball.

In the second inning, Parker surrendered a three-run homer to Coco Crisp.

Despite Parker's struggles, Melvin didn't rule him out of the rotation, but Graham Godfrey could clinch the final spot with a solid showing Monday against the Giants. Tyson Ross, the projected fourth starter, faces the Giants on Tuesday.

"I don't know how it's all going to line up, but that's the way it is as we speak," Melvin said.

Dallas Braden, who was expected to join the rotation in early May, had a setback in his rehab and sustained a strained shoulder. His throwing program was shut down, and Melvin said of an early May return, "Actually, we're on hold with that right now."

Melvin said the setback occurred when Braden was playing catch a day after his last bullpen session, just before the A's left for Japan on March 22, though the club made no public mention of it until Saturday.

Assistant general manager David Forst said the A's won't know the extent of the injury until they hear from doctors. Braden's shoulder capsule surgery was in May. It was similar to Johan Santana's, which was performed eight months earlier. Only now is Santana ready to return to the majors as the Mets' Opening Day pitcher.

Manny Ramirez was a Sacramento no-show because of an injured left hamstring that will shelve him through the Bay Bridge Series. He was hurt in Arizona after the A's left for Japan and is expected to return to the field when extended spring training games begin on April 9.

A'S 9, RIVER CATS 0

Notable: **Yoenis Céspedes** cleared the wall a bunch of times in batting practice, the heavy wind making the drives more impressive. In the game, he batted seventh and went 0-for-4. ... **Coco Crisp** and **Josh Donaldson** homered. ... First baseman **Brandon Allen** exited in the fourth inning with a cut below his right eye, the result of a tricky hop on a throw between innings. ... **Bob Melvin** didn't rule out **Daric Barton** for the first-base job even though Barton missed Japan and still isn't throwing at full strength.

Quotable: "I told Curt (Young), 'I'm not going out there in the middle of a perfect game.' "

- *Melvin, who wanted to let Tommy Milone face one batter in the seventh but pulled him after six. Milone retired all 18 batters.*

Monday's game: A's (**Graham Godfrey**) at Giants (**Madison Bumgarner**), 7:30 p.m., CSNCA, 95.7 FM, 680.

New teams for a boatload of former A's and Giants

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

A year removed from playing for the A's and Giants, a flood of players are preparing with new teams for a new season. Here's a glance:

Former A's

Gio Gonzalez: Shortly after his trade to the Nationals, who gave him a five-year, \$42 million extension, he bought himself a Lamborghini, his dad a Ferrari and his mom a Rolls Royce. He's the No. 2 starter behind **Stephen Strasburg** and will make his National League debut at Wrigley Field. He'll also pitch the home opener for the Nats, who are hoping his spring stats mean nothing (12 runs, 20 hits, nine walks, 15 innings).

Josh Willingham: After joining the Twins for three years and \$21 million, he was told he'd play right field. Manager **Ron Gardenhire** needed a few games to realize Willingham is better suited for left, where he made 647 big-league starts compared with 33 in right. He's batting fifth behind **Joe Mauer** and **Justin Morneau**.

Andrew Bailey: He's replacing the Red Sox's career saves leader, **Jonathan Papelbon**, and saying all the right things, calling Boston the "best baseball market," but he didn't get off to a great start, straining his lat during a vertical leap as part of his physical.

Trevor Cahill: He's a Giant-killer (3-0, 1.30 ERA, four starts) but will miss the season-opening series against the Giants because he's the Diamondbacks' fourth starter. He's aligned to face the Giants twice in May.

Ryan Sweeney: As in Oakland, Boston folks are talking about his untapped power. He's 6 feet 4 and 225 pounds and homered once in each of the past two seasons, and Boston manager **Bobby Valentine** cited bad mechanics. He's the right fielder for now.

David DeJesus: He has a .356 career on-base percentage and will lead off for the Cubs, but he's batting .182. He got \$10 million over two years to replace **Kosuke Fukudome** in right, the Cubs' biggest free-agent signing in the **Theo Epstein** era.

Guillermo Moscoso: He appeared destined for the Rockies' rotation but was 0-2 with a 7.36 ERA, got beaten out by 49-year-old **Jamie Moyer** and will open in Triple-A. **Josh Outman**, of the same trade, won a bullpen spot.

Craig Breslow: Medical school remains on hold for baseball's smartest man (molecular biophysics and biochemistry degrees from Yale). He's simply a Diamondbacks reliever, reunited with GM **Kevin Towers**, who signed him to a Padres deal out of a tryout camp before the 2005 season.

Former Giants

Cody Ross: He's Boston's left fielder with **Carl Crawford** on the DL and is treating spring training like the postseason, hitting .366 with a team-leading six homers and 15 RBIs. After last year's bummer, he's eager to take aim at the Green Monster. He might have the perfect swing for it and could be a \$3 million bargain.

Jonathan Sanchez: He's the Royals' No. 3 starter and will get his first American League assignment next Sunday in Anaheim, meaning he'll miss the ensuing series at the Coliseum.

Andres Torres: He hasn't played in an exhibition since March 20 because of a calf strain, leaving **Scott Hairston** as the Mets' interim center fielder. The Mets want Torres to return to 2010 form and replace **Angel Pagan** in center and **Jose Reyes** at leadoff.

Carlos Beltran: He's a Cardinal because **Albert Pujols** isn't. Because he wants to play in a World Series for the first time and didn't reach that dream in San Francisco. Because the Cards offered \$26 million over two years. He's in right, enabling **Lance Berkman** to take Pujols' spot at first.

Mark DeRosa: He hit .387 in September, showing life after missing most of two seasons with a bum wrist. At 37, he's 12-for-28 with a .590 on-base percentage and competing for the Nationals' left-field job. He homered early in spring training after hitting exactly one homer as a Giant - in his first game, Opening Day 2010.

Ramon Ramirez: He isn't impressing the Mets' brass with a 5.40 ERA over eight appearances, but he's socially involved as a clubhouse barber.

Aaron Rowand: The Giants are on the hook for \$12 million. He hit .133 (6-for-47) and was released by the Marlins, but not before providing insight on all the Showtime cameras cluttering the clubhouse. Like the Giants last year, the Marlins are a reality show.

Now it gets tough: The Brewers' first road games are in Chicago and Atlanta, and if fan reaction to **Ryan Braun** is anything like it was in spring training, he'll be getting booed. Perhaps the left fielder is making it worse by suggesting heckling fans don't know all the facts, while he refuses to provide them.

"It's unfortunate and disappointing that people would make judgments and form an opinion without knowing what actually happened," he told reporters, who responded by asking if it would be better for him if fans knew the entire story about his positive test and 50-game suspension that he successfully appealed.

"Would it be? Potentially, but then it just makes it a bigger story again. It's not good for anybody if that occurs; it's really not. I've already been exonerated. Nobody else's opinion is relevant to me. I've got to be honest with you. The people that are close to me - my friends, my family - know the truth. Beyond that, people are always going to have an opinion."

Braun is hitting .216 (8-for-37).

Around the majors: **Hideki Matsui** told Japanese media he continues to work out and seek work. He's on an unemployed list that includes **Johnny Damon**, **Vladimir Guerrero**, **Miguel Tejada**, **Derrek Lee**, **Magglio**

Ordoñez, J.D. Drew, Ivan Rodriguez, Edgar Renteria and Rowand. ... Texas pitcher **Yu Darvish** will debut against Seattle on April 9, creating international buzz: a showdown with **Ichiro Suzuki**. ... With **Corey Hart** opening the season on the DL after knee surgery, the Brewers have an open roster spot, and it appears utility infielder **Brooks Conrad** (yes, that Brooks Conrad) is a lock. ... The Rangers released minor-league outfielder **Ruben Sierra**, son of the former A's outfielder by the same name. In three seasons, the kid never made it past short-season A-ball. ... You say former A's third baseman **Jack Hannahan**, now with the Indians, can't hit? Yes, he batted .250 with a .331 on-base percentage and .388 slugging percentage, but the AL average for third basemen was .247, .316 and .394. The guy rakes.

The Drumbeat: Dallas Braden has setback; comeback bid with A's on hold

John Shea reporting from Sacramento . . . 3/31/2012, 5:39PM

The A's were hoping Dallas Braden would be available to join the rotation in early May, but that no longer seems an option.

"Dallas had a little setback, so he's not throwing right now. The shoulder, a strain again. We'll see where he's at," said manager Bob Melvin, adding it actually happened in Arizona before the A's left for Japan.

As for delaying the target date for the pitcher's return, Melvin said, "Actually we're on hold with that right now. I don't have a timetable with him right now."

Assistant GM David Forst said the A's would know the extent of the injury when hearing from doctors.

When I spoke with Braden on March 10, he made a telling comment: "If the progress is not impeded and things continue to go well and I continue to take steps, there's no telling how accelerated the program can be. There's also no telling if a setback will occur, how long that'll take to get around. I'm truly taking the day-by-day approach to its fullest."

Braden's shoulder surgery was 10 months ago, a similar procedure to Johan Santana's, which was 18 months ago. Santana finally is ready to pitch in the majors again. He's the Mets' Opening Day starter.

Milone perfect in A's rain-shortened no-no

Lefty breezes for six innings vs. Triple-A Sacramento in exhibition

By Alex Espinoza / Special to MLB.com

SACRAMENTO, Calif. -- Tom Milone did his best Dallas Braden impression at Raley Field on Saturday night. For six innings, anyways.

Milone tossed six perfect frames to cement his status as the third starter for the Oakland Athletics, who rolled to 9-0 victory over their Triple-A affiliate, the Sacramento River Cats, in a game called after seven innings due to rain.

Much like Braden, who tossed baseball's 19th perfect game in 2010, Milone relies on his control and his defense to get outs. It worked like a charm on Saturday, as he struck out six and controlled the game throughout.

"It's what we've seen all spring," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "When he misses, it's usually by design. Great command, I mean, you see his mechanics. Real still head and really has a great feel for pitching and reading hitters. He can read swings real well."

Reliever Andrew Carignan walked two batters in the seventh.

Said Milone, who threw 80 pitches: "It would have been cool to keep going, but I know what I was out there doing. I was supposed to throw a certain amount of pitches. When I'm really not built up to throw that many pitches, it's hard to keep me out there like that."

Milone's counterpart, right-hander Jarrod Parker, didn't leave the type of impression he wanted. Hours after A's manager Bob Melvin deemed Parker's Saturday start to be an audition for the fifth spot in Oakland's rotation, the **top prospect** lasted just two innings. Hampered by poor control and a suspect defense behind him, Parker gave up six runs (three earned) on two hits and four walks while striking out two.

Parker seemed poised to get out of a rocky first inning unscathed, but center fielder Grant Green dropped a deep fly ball to allow three unearned runs to score. The next frame, Parker issued a walk to Josh Donaldson and a single to Jemile Weeks before Coco Crisp sent one out to deep right field to give the A's a 6-0 lead.

"When he falls behind, at times he doesn't command the ball as well as he can," said Melvin, who hasn't ruled Parker out of the fifth spot. "But he's got great stuff. Once he gets his rhythm and he starts throwing the ball over the plate he'll be a quick mover."

Donaldson added a solo shot in the fifth.

Up next: After an off-day on Sunday, the A's will finish their exhibition schedule with three games against their Bay Area rivals, the San Francisco Giants. Right-hander Graham Godfrey is scheduled to get the start on Monday at 7:35 p.m. PT in San Francisco. The teams will play in Oakland on Tuesday at 7:35 p.m. and in San Francisco on Wednesday at 12:45 p.m.

Weary A's readjust to exhibitions after Japan

By Alex Espinoza / Special to MLB.com

SACRAMENTO, Calif. -- Jet-lagged from Japan, the Oakland Athletics arrived at Raley Field on Saturday feeling a bit sluggish. Manager Bob Melvin told reporters he took a nap on the bus ride up to Sacramento as his team traveled to play its Triple-A affiliate, the Sacramento River Cats.

"It was the best sleep I've had since I've been back," Melvin said. "Honest to God."

The players were also feeling the effects of traveling several time zones. Not even 48 hours passed from the time they touched down in the Bay Area on Thursday to Saturday's batting practice. Catcher Kurt Suzuki said he was still affected by the jet lag, while second baseman Jemile Weeks said his Friday consisted of "sleeping, eating and then back to sleep again."

As their bodies recover from the travel, the A's will tune up for a return to the regular season with four exhibition games: Saturday's tilt and then three games with the San Francisco Giants. Though Weeks acknowledged there was a bit of an exhibition feel to the pair of contests against the Seattle Mariners in Tokyo, he said the regular-season intensity was there.

"We had to go out there with the mentality that it was a real game," Weeks said. "We clicked that switch and it became different than Spring Training. But, yeah, it was a weird thing to jump into the season then come back."

A's report injury setbacks for Braden, Manny

SACRAMENTO, Calif. -- Dallas Braden and Manny Ramirez have each suffered injury setbacks recently, according to Oakland manager Bob Melvin.

The A's skipper told reporters that Braden strained his shoulder while playing catch after a bullpen session, shortly before the A's left for Japan. Braden made the trip to Sacramento, but it's unclear when he will be able to resume throwing again.

"We're on hold with that right now," Melvin said. "I don't have a timetable for him. The doctors are going to have to tell him when they're comfortable with it."

Braden was originally expected to make a return in early May from last year's season-ending surgery, but the latest setback casts serious doubt on that possibility.

Melvin said Ramirez tweaked his hamstring in extended spring training in Phoenix while the A's were in Japan. The veteran slugger didn't make the trip to Sacramento and won't be available for the three-game exhibition series with the San Francisco Giants, which begins Monday at AT&T Park. Melvin said Ramirez's injury isn't serious and that he's not too concerned because Ramirez has to sit out 50 games due to suspension.

Fifth starter, first base still unsettled for A's

SACRAMENTO, Calif. -- Two games into the regular season and six days off from rebooting the 2012 campaign, the A's are still a bit unsettled. Oakland manager Bob Melvin said the fifth spot in the rotation and the starting first-base job are still up for grabs.

Right-hander Jarrod Parker, the A's **top prospect** who was acquired in the Trevor Cahill deal from Arizona this offseason, made the start for Triple-A Sacramento on Saturday, facing his teammates from Spring Training. Asked if Parker's start was something of an audition for the fifth spot in the Oakland rotation, Melvin said, "Absolutely."

For the time being, Melvin said he's content with the first four starters on the staff: Brandon McCarthy, Bartolo Colon, Tommy Milone and Tyson Ross. Parker's main competition for the fifth spot is fellow right-hander Graham Godfrey.

"We'll keep it like that right now," Melvin said. "We're still a work in progress. Anytime you're in Spring Training mode, you're still a work in progress."

Brandon Allen, who started on Opening Day in Japan, was back in the starting lineup on Saturday batting eighth. Allen is competing with Kila Ka'aihue and Daric Barton for everyday at-bats at first base.

Barton suited up with the River Cats to take batting practice on Saturday before rejoining his A's teammates. Melvin said Barton, who didn't travel to Japan, isn't fully recovered from surgery to his throwing shoulder and that his status for the April 6 home opener against Seattle is unknown.

"A lot of it is going to be health and how he feels," Melvin said. "I don't think he's quite there yet. He doesn't feel quite comfortable yet throwing. He's playing in games, but we got to make sure he's comfortable throwing the baseball and I'm not sure we're quite there. We could be soon, I'm not sure."

Worth noting

- Catcher Kurt Suzuki was taken out of Saturday's exhibition vs. Triple-A Sacramento for precautionary reasons after being hit by a Jarrod Parker pitch on his back near his left shoulder in the first inning. Suzuki eventually scored on a three-run error later in the inning but was replaced by Anthony Recker in the bottom of the first.
- First baseman Brandon Allen left the game in the bottom of the fourth inning after a warmup throw from an infielder appeared to hit him in the face. Allen immediately walked to the clubhouse with team trainers and was replaced by Kila Ka'aihue.
- River Cats radio broadcaster Johnny Duskow called Saturday's game for the A's Triple-A affiliate but will be in the big league broadcast booth starting Monday. Duskow will fill in for A's play-by-play man Ken Korach on an interim basis, starting with the exhibition contest in San Francisco, as Korach rehabs from knee replacement surgery. It will mark Duskow's first Major League broadcasting experience since calling two games in Oakland during the 2004 season as a Toronto Blue Jays radio fill-in.

"He's been so welcoming and been so genuinely happy for me," Duskow said of Korach. "It's going to be amazing, I can't wait."

A's-River Cats game a familiar scene at Raley Field

Matt Kahawara, Sacramento Bee

One of the lesser-known A's was making his way down the dugout steps at Raley Field, clad in anonymous warmups, head covered by a green beanie, when a woman in a River Cats jersey called out to him from a nearby seat.

"Hey, Josh!" she said.

"Hey," Josh Donaldson answered. "What's going on?"

A major league team returned to Sacramento for the first time in five years on Saturday evening, as the A's and River Cats, Oakland's Triple-A affiliate, played an exhibition game. But the occasion was marked by familiarity, as a handful of players who spent stretches in Sacramento last season returned as well, albeit wearing green and gold.

They included Donaldson, who played 201 games for the River Cats over the past two seasons, and speedy second baseman Jemile Weeks. Infielders Wes Timmons and Eric Sogard took batting practice in the same group at one point while catcher Anthony Recker signed autographs down the first-base line.

Those players drew some of the loudest cheers from an announced crowd of 10,112, which spilled over seats and onto the grass beyond the right-field fence despite the absence of A's slugger Manny Ramirez, who didn't make the trip, and the threat of rain.

Weeks, who played 45 games with the River Cats before his midseason call-up last year, said before the game that returning to Raley Field was "lovely, man."

"It's just a good feeling to come back to a place where you felt wanted and you felt like you were a part of," he said.

Around 4:15 p.m., a few dozen fans lined up outside the stadium's front gate. Some wore A's or River Cats gear. More were clad in heavy jackets and carrying umbrellas as dark clouds drifted overhead.

By 4:30, when ushers opened the gates, the sun had broken through. Fans streamed in to watch the A's take batting practice. Several dozen autograph seekers leaned on the railing along the first-base line with pens ready.

Murmurs floated through the throng following the final batting-practice swing of Yoenis Cespedes, as the A's free-agent signee from Cuba hit a ball that cleared the clubhouses in left-center field and bounced on the asphalt among several parked cars.

"It was funny," said Mark Clementi, 56, a police psychologist who brought his two sons to the game from Santa Rosa. "I called the front office yesterday to see if they had any plans, because the forecast was horrible.

"They said: 'Ah, it's not going to rain. We've only had four rainouts in 11 years.' I guess they were right," he said, indicating blue sky.

So baseball was played, until the rain returned and shortened the game to seven innings. Oakland starter Tommy Milone pitched six perfect innings as the A's beat the River Cats 9-0 in a game in which Sacramento did not muster a hit.

"Seeing the big-league club on Raley Field, against the local team, it's kind of fun," said Lanny Freeman, 62, of Orangevale, wrapped in an A's jacket. "It's a sign of spring, too. Spring's around the corner."

Donaldson, who started at third base for the A's, homered to deep center field in the fifth inning.

Before the game, A's manager Bob Melvin said that "as of right now, Donaldson would get the brunt of the playing time" at third.

Sogard, a left-handed hitter, is another candidate.

"I've been coming back here (to Sacramento) for two years now," Donaldson said. "And I enjoyed my time here. But it's just one of those things where I'm trying to move on and hopefully build a foundation in Oakland."

Baseball heaven is in Arizona

Marcos Breton, Sacramento Bee

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. – "Is this heaven?"

No, it's Scottsdale.

That's an admittedly clumsy paraphrase of the classic line from "Field of Dreams," the tear-jerker baseball film of Kevin Costner's distant past.

But the feeling of baseball heaven is strong and constant in the Valley of the Sun.

In "Field of Dreams," heaven was a brilliant, green baseball diamond carved from an Iowa cornfield where ghosts of long-dead idols were awakened by "the thrill of the grass."

In the arid metropolis of greater Phoenix, baseball heaven is landscaped with cactus, agave, desert marigolds and acacia.

The players are flesh-and-blood stars of Major League Baseball. Or they are near-stars on their way up – or college ballplayers with a dream of following that path to the big leagues.

It's a path that runs through here like no other place in the world, which is why I traveled here for the first time in years recently to cover baseball for The Bee – and to experience baseball heaven in Arizona.

It was glorious. It was bigger and better than I remembered it.

By the time you read this, big league teams will be packing up and going home to begin a new season.

But that's OK. Baseball is played and celebrated here year round. And it's never too early to start planning for spring training next year.

If you love the game, there are reasons to return throughout the year.

The Arizona Diamondbacks open the 2012 season in downtown Phoenix on Friday at Chase Field, the impressive air-conditioned stadium where patrons can swim in a pool beyond the right-center field fence.

The Diamondbacks will face none other than the San Francisco Giants, who return for three more games in May. The Oakland A's play here in June. Then the Giants return again in September, and a battle for the National League West title may well be in the offing.

In October and November, baseball's best young prospects perform in the Arizona Fall League – which is run by all 30 MLB teams as a proving ground for tomorrow's stars.

Baseball became a perennial event here because the warm climate allows teams to evaluate players no matter the season.

Many professional ballplayers live in Arizona and work on their craft while the rest of us shiver or try to stay dry in the dead of winter.

Honestly? There is a spiritual link between the desert and the game. The landscape can be soothing and life-affirming. Or it can be chaotic and unforgiving.

Baseball is the same way.

For those of us who travel here to watch some ball, the experience is structured to seem pastoral and relaxed. Baseball is big business here, pumping more than \$300 million into the local economy, according to Arizona tourism statistics.

But for those who make their living at baseball?

Jobs are won and lost as we are being entertained. Teams arrive here feeling relaxed and then leave hardened and battle-ready for the season ahead.

In the winter, 15 big league teams are clustered within an hour's drive of Scottsdale, and you can drive from stadium to stadium by sometimes traversing the Superstition Highway. How cool is that name?

The backdrop for several parks are lovely views of dramatic mountain ranges called Camelback and Beyond Red, among others.

In Scottsdale are two gorgeous parks, one old and one new. Scottsdale Stadium is the winter home of the Giants and is quaint and warm and always packed with Northern California fans draped in orange.

But the most beautiful little park you will ever see is Salt River Fields, where the Diamondbacks and Colorado Rockies play. It's only 2 years old and is on the tribal lands of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community.

This wondrous place is perfectly integrated into the rugged desert landscape.

It has a sweeping concourse that is open and cool no matter how hot the sun. The outfield provides cool grass berms for fans on beach blankets, and sunblock dispensers are everywhere – a very nice touch.

"We are very active all 12 months of the year," said Aaron Studebaker, director of marketing at Salt River Fields. "During spring training alone, 360,000 people go through here."

Next year and for many years to come, I hope to be one of those people.

When I came back from this baseball trip, I missed the desert and longed to be that close to the game again.

Mariners, Oakland could take time adjusting

Based on previous trips by major-league teams to Japan, the Mariners and Athletics can expect a slow start to the regular season.

Larry Stone, Seattle Times baseball reporter

What toll the trip to Japan took on Ichiro and the rest of the Mariners remains to be seen.

Anyone who has made the flight to — and from — Japan knows the toll it can take on the body.

When that body has to then play professional baseball, the residual effect of jet lag becomes a legitimate cause of concern. Before the Mariners and Athletics, six teams had opened the season in Tokyo, and it appears there was at least some price to pay for traveling nearly 10,000 miles round-trip (even farther for East Coast ballclubs).

It's clearly not doing irreparable damage, mind you. The 2000 Mets played in Japan and went on to win the National League pennant and advance to their only World Series in the last 25 years. The 2004 Yankees played in Japan, won 101 games and were a victory away from the World Series before collapsing in the ALCS while up three games to none against the Red Sox (I don't think we can blame that on a Japan trip six months earlier). The 2008 Red Sox played in Japan and won 95 games, advancing to the ALCS.

But there have been a lot of slow starts associated with teams that played in Japan, both by teams and individuals. Those pennant-bound Mets won their first game back (they had to get right back into games that count after playing in Tokyo, unlike the current week off that subsequent teams, including the M's and A's, are getting), then lost five of six. Their opponents, the Cubs (on the way to a 97-loss season) lost their first three games back, and five of their first six. After a three-game winning streak, they then lost nine of 11.

The powerhouse 2004 Yankees started 8-11 after returning from Japan. Their opponents, the Rays (en route to 91 losses), got off to a 10-28 start once back from Japan. They also became the first team in MLB history to fall as many as 18 games under .500 and return to .500 in the same season. The 2008 A's, on the other hand, got off to a great start — 17-10, and were still over .500 as late as July 28 before losing 10 in a row, en route to a 75-86 finish.

Tom Verducci of Sports Illustrated, in a column touting the virtues of the trip, did the math and discovered that the six previous teams in Japan played losing baseball in their first 10 games back in North America (29-31) compared to .518 afterward.

Verducci wrote, "They will pay for their trip with jet lag, exhaustion and disruption of the usual rhythms of baseball. ... What they gain for themselves, especially in the cultural realm, and for the sport far outweigh a few weeks of inconvenience."

That's certainly the stance of commissioner Bud Selig, who told me in 2000, reacting to criticism of the trip, "What we're doing here is what anyone would do in the 21st century. It's a global economy. It's not the world of the 1950s or 1960s. I was struck reading some of the critical columns about this trip that it was like they were writing in 1942, when we had isolationism. It's not that world anymore.

"People say, 'How dare you play in Japan? It's a sacred American institution.' I reject that as out of touch with the time we live in, and irrelevant. Someone told me that once we were in Japan, we'd wonder what took us so long. I think that's exactly the way we feel."

Major League Baseball learned from the Mets and Cubs that teams couldn't just go right back into their regular schedule. So subsequent teams have returned from Japan and eased back in with exhibition games, which seems weird but beats the alternative. Another change since 2000 is that the traveling teams now resume their season against each other, somewhat mitigating the disadvantage of the arduous travel.

But the effects could linger. Joe Girardi, catcher for the Cubs team that opened in Japan in 2000, told The New York Times that "a lot of us woke up at 3:30 in the morning for two weeks after we got back."

The A's elected to go home, rather than back to Arizona. They played an exhibition game in Sacramento against their Class AAA affiliate on Saturday night, and will face their rival Giants on Monday through Wednesday before resuming the season against Seattle on Friday at the Oakland Coliseum.

The A's also opened spring training a week after the Mariners, who opted for the earlier start to prepare for the earlier opening day. And the Mariners still have more travel after leaving Oakland. They head to Texas for four games with the Rangers before finally returning home April 13 — to face Oakland.

Of course, it's impossible to calculate definitively the effects of all that travel. Some players, and teams, struggle early even without going to Japan. The Rays were 1-8 out of the gate last year and the Red Sox were 2-10; Tampa Bay made the postseason, and it took an epic collapse to keep Boston out.

As Terry Francona, then Red Sox manager, said in 2008, "We can talk about this until we're blue in the face. Every time we walk somebody or we make an error, somebody asks did the Japan trip (hurt)? Our job is to play good baseball. When we play good baseball, it's OK."

Yankees manager Joe Torre had the same sentiment in 2004: "If you get caught up in it, you'll talk yourself into it. If there's jet lag, there's jet lag. You just have to deal with it."

The Mariners are already a team with obstacles to overcome, and the travel to Japan — as rewarding an experience as they say it was — may well be another.

Bouton's "Ball Four" redux as an e-book

"Ball Four" is back, and for those of us who were bowled over by this book as a kid and still revere it as an adult, that's always cause to celebrate.

Jim Bouton's classic diary of the 1969 season — much of it centered on his time with the expansion Seattle Pilots — is being rereleased by Rosetta as an e-book, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Bouton's first career win with the New York Yankees. It will be a Kindle exclusive, and it will be the same hilarious, ribald tale that let the world know that — gasp — ballplayers weren't choir boys.

"I've been getting so much email from fans saying that is the 21st century, we'd like to have this as an e-book," Bouton said in a phone interview.

The book will also be released in audible form via audible.com, with Bouton himself — now 73 — doing the reading. As one who has heard Bouton read from the book, I can vouch that it was a wise choice to have him do it rather than an actor.

"An actor, as much as they have a trained voice, usually a great voice, they weren't there," Bouton said. "I'm not sure an actor could capture that environment."

The process of reliving "Ball Four" is getting more poignant for Bouton with the passing of many key characters in the book. Pilots teammate Don Mincher died on March 4 — the 11th player from the '69 Pilots to die, in addition to manager Joe Schultz.

"It's heartbreaking," Bouton said. "Probably more heartbreaking for me than anyone else. I've been living with these guys for so many years. I know them so intimately now. I remember them not so much as players but as human beings. I've answered so many questions and so many emails, done so many talks, my Seattle Pilot teammates are like members of my family. I love every one of them."

And now they're going to live again in a 21st century format.

Milone perfect through six, A's beat River Cats

Csnbayarea.com

SACRAMENTO -- Tommy Milone pitched six perfect innings, Coco Crisp hit a three-run homer and the Oakland Athletics beat Triple-A Sacramento 9-0 on Saturday night.

The A's showed no signs of jet lag in their first game since they split their first two games of the regular season on Wednesday and Thursday in Japan. They returned to Oakland on Thursday.

Oakland got back in the groove quickly against its Triple-A affiliate, roughing up Sacramento starter Jarrod Parker. Milone also struck out six.

The A's scored three runs in each of the first two innings. Josh Donaldson's solo homer in the fifth capped the scoring.

The game was called after seven innings due to rain.

After the game, Melvin named Milone the A's No. 3 starter.

"It's an honor," Milone was quoted. "Obviously, that's what I've been working toward this whole time, this whole spring. I'm excited to get going."

Milone will pitch the first of a three-game series at home against the Royals on April 9. He threw 3.2 innings against the Royals in a Cactus League game earlier this month, allowing two earned runs on four hits, striking out one and walking none.

Melvin has not announced the rest of his rotation, but Tyson Ross and Graham Godfrey are the next two likely to be in line.

A's Nearly Perfect In Rout Of River Cats

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Apr 1, 2012

WEST SACRAMENTO - The Oakland A's dominated their Triple-A affiliate on a cool and ultimately rainy night at Raley Field, defeating the Sacramento River Cats by a score of 9-0. Two A's pitchers combined to no-hit the River Cats in a rain-shortened affair, limiting Sacramento to two walks. We have the details and photos from the game inside...

It wasn't hard to pick out the major league team on the field on Saturday night. The Oakland A's shined against their Triple-A brethren, pushing across nine runs in seven innings to defeat the Sacramento River Cats, 9-0. Tom Milone threw six perfect innings, striking out six batters, and Andrew Carignan worked around two walks to complete what was a rain-shortened, seven-inning no-hit win for Oakland.

Sacramento starter Jarrod Parker, who was auditioning for a spot as the A's fifth starter later this month, struggled in his outing. The right-hander allowed six runs in two innings, walking four and hitting A's catcher Kurt Suzuki in the shoulder. Three of the runs were unearned and came across on a two-base error by centerfielder Grant Green, but Parker did allow a three-run homer to Coco Crisp to account for the three earned runs against him.

Sacramento's defense was also shaky for reliever Justin Souza, as a Chris Bostick error led to two unearned runs in

the third inning. Souza would allow just those two unearned runs in his two innings of work. He struck-out four. Pedro Figueroa gave-up the final A's run of the game, allowing a Josh Donaldson solo homerun to centerfield in the fifth inning. Figueroa struck-out two in his one inning of work. Jim Miller and Erick Threets combined to throw two scoreless innings to round out the River Cats' pitching line for the evening.

The A's wouldn't need nearly as many pitchers in their seven innings of work. Milone was masterful in his six innings, allowing only one hard-hit ball (a comebacker off of the bat of Bostick that Milone fielded himself) and he barely broke a sweat in striking out six River Cats. The perfect game was broken up with one-out in the seventh inning when Carignan walked Grant Green. Carignan would walk Brandon Moss later in the inning before working out of the jam. The rain was coming down heavily during the bottom of the seventh and the game was called after the third out of the inning.

The River Cats will next face-off in a two-game set against the A's High-A affiliate, the Stockton Ports, this upcoming Monday and Tuesday. Sacramento's regular season begins in Las Vegas on Thursday night.

The A's square-off against their cross-Bay rivals, the San Francisco Giants, for three exhibition games Monday through Wednesday before starting the US portion of their regular season schedule on Friday. Oakland split the first two games of their regular season with the Seattle Mariners last week in Tokyo, Japan, and they finish the four-game series with the Mariners in Oakland this Friday and Saturday.