

A's News Clips, Friday, March 12, 2010

Oakland A's catcher Kurt Suzuki earns trust of pitching staff

By Curtis Pashelka, Oakland Tribune

Catcher Kurt Suzuki and new A's pitcher Ben Sheets already have found a certain chemistry after Sheets' only two spring training starts.

There remain a few kinks to be worked out, though.

For instance, Wednesday against the Chicago White Sox, Suzuki put down a sign, and Sheets shook it off. Suzuki flashed two other signs before coming back to the first one, which Sheets finally agreed to.

"Think I threw a double," Sheets said.

But A's manager Bob Geren doesn't think it'll take long for the two to get on the same page. And Sheets said he won't necessarily throw everything that Suzuki wants at this stage of the spring, even though it might be the correct call.

That'll happen, though. Because from the time he took over everyday catching duties 21/2 years ago from veteran Jason Kendall, Suzuki has worked tirelessly to earn the trust of his teammates, be they veterans with All-Star Game appearances such as Sheets or younger pitchers still getting their feet wet.

"You want them to believe in you when you're putting down that finger. You want them to feel 100 percent convinced that this is the right pitch to throw in that situation," Suzuki said. "That comes with building the relationship and seeing how hard you work and how much you care and want them to succeed."

It wasn't an accident that Suzuki won last year's Jim "Catfish" Hunter Award, given by A's players to the teammate who best exemplifies the competitive spirit of the Hall of Fame pitcher.

"When he says something, you listen as a pitching staff. He's got his knowledge, and he knows what's going on," said left-hander Gio Gonzalez, who's trying to earn the final spot in the A's rotation. "He's not going to lead you down the wrong path."

Overshadowed by the AL MVP season of Minnesota catcher Joe Mauer, Suzuki last year hit a respectable .274 with 15 home runs and 88 RBIs. This year, as the likely No. 3 hitter, he will be relied upon to drive in runs with speedy Coco Crisp and Rajai Davis penciled in to bat ahead of him in the lineup.

Just as important, though, will be his underappreciated play on defense. In 135 games last season, Suzuki had 923 putouts (first in the American League), 68 assists (second) and a .995 fielding percentage (fourth).

"I get to see him every day," A's starter Brett Anderson said. "Being in Oakland and being on the West Coast, people don't get to see him as much. He's tremendous back there. "... Blocking balls, throwing guys out, doing all the stuff that catchers need to do."

Mauer has won the past two AL Gold Gloves for catchers, but Suzuki has put his name in the conversation.

"That kind of award would mean the most to me," Suzuki said. "But my goal is not to win a Gold Glove this year. I want to help the pitching staff, I want to do my job, and if I do that and it leads to a Gold Glove, then great."

Notes: Dallas Braden allowed three hits, including a two-run homer to Ryan Braun, in three innings in the A's 7-3 win over Milwaukee on Thursday at Maryvale Park. ... Outfielder Michael Taylor hit his first homer of the spring, a blast to left-center off LaTroy Hawkins in the eighth. "That was one of the longer ones I've ever seen. Very impressive," Geren said. ... Jason Jennings, a nonroster invitee, allowed two hits in two shutout innings. ... Shortstop Adam Rosales went 2-for-3 with a double and a run. He'll likely play second base today against Arizona in Tucson, Geren said. ... Anderson will start against the Diamondbacks. Also scheduled to pitch are Tyson Ross, Marcus McBeth, Jerry Blevins, Henry Rodriguez, Sam Demel and Pedro Figueroa. ... Justin Duchscherer is still scheduled to throw to hitters at Phoenix Municipal today.

Oakland A's notebook: Oft-injured Eric Chavez rediscovers stroke and health

By Curtis Pashelka, Oakland Tribune

Eric Chavez looked like his old self during the A's game against the Chicago White Sox on Wednesday as he hit two home runs, including one in the first inning to right-center field that manager Bob Geren estimated to be close to 500 feet.

Chavez said he's also starting to feel a bit like his old self.

"It's not a question of my ability or hand-eye coordination. It's more physical," said Chavez, who hit cleanup and went 2-for-3 with three RBIs in the A's 9-5 loss at Municipal Stadium. "I just told (A's trainer Steve Sayles) today, for the last two days, my body's felt as good as its ever felt."

Chavez is now 4-for-8 in three Cactus League games, and his homers were his first in any game since he hit two during spring training last year. He also started at first base.

The A's understandably are taking a cautious approach this spring with a number of banged-up players. Chavez, who has had five surgeries (three on his shoulders, two on his back) since September 2007, won't play again until Saturday. He had his second microdiscectomy operation on his back last June.

Chavez said if things continue to progress, he could start to play five or six innings on back-to-back days in a week or so.

"During batting practice, I thought it was the loosest and best I've seen him swing in a long time," Geren said.

Chavez has cut back dramatically on his throwing, estimating he's played catch only four or five times

since spring training began. His right shoulder still isn't totally pain free, so he wants to get comfortable at the plate and at first base before he thinks about returning to third base.

"As long as I stay away from as many throws as I possibly can," he said, "I have a fighting chance with my shoulder."

Chavez said the first 45 minutes are the most critical of the day when he's "walking on eggshells" after he wakes up.

Coco Crisp's debut in center field will have to wait, as he has a left hamstring strain. The injury occurred during Tuesday's game against Texas when he leaned over to pick up his bat in the on-deck circle. Geren said Crisp is day-to-day. Crisp, who didn't believe the injury was serious, was being used as a designated hitter but was supposed to play in the outfield this weekend. He had surgery on both shoulders last summer.

As a precautionary measure, Joey Devine won't pitch for five or seven days. The right-handed reliever — who had Tommy John surgery last April — reported some elbow soreness and inner forearm tendinitis after he threw a side session Tuesday.

Ben Sheets felt he took a step in the right direction in his second start Wednesday by utilizing his changeup more. The right-hander allowed five earned runs, all in the third inning, and five hits in 22/3 innings. Sheets said the velocity on his fastball was down, but Geren liked the way Sheets threw his changeup and curveball.

Outfielder Travis Buck, who was kept out of Tuesday's split-squad game against Kansas City because of dizziness, felt better and was a late-inning replacement Wednesday. Buck had his left ear flushed out Wednesday morning.

Righty John Meloan has elbow soreness and was examined by Dr. Doug Freedberg on Wednesday. Meloan pitched two-thirds of an inning against the Royals on Tuesday and gave up two hits and two earned runs. ... The commissioner's office announced the New York Mets' waiver claim of former A's reliever Jay Marshall has been voided. Marshall was returned to the A's, who then released him. ... Pitcher Justin Duchscherer is tentatively scheduled to face hitters Friday. Duchscherer threw 32 pitches in a bullpen session Tuesday and reported no problems.

Chin Music: Duchscherer still throwing to hitters Friday

By Curtis Pashelka, Oakland Tribune

Weather's a bit warmer today than yesterday, as the temperature should get up to the mid-60s. I know, not quite Phoenix-like yet. But it's getting there.

Not a ton of news today compared to Wednesday, but Justin Duchscherer is still scheduled to throw to hitters here tomorrow at Phoenix Muni as the team travels down to Tucson for a game against the Diamondbacks. We should have a report from Bob Geren on how things went either by the time the team arrives there or by after the game.

Gio Gonzalez will pitch Saturday's split squad game at Scottsdale Stadium against the Giants, and Clayton Mortensen will pitch here in Phoenix against the Padres. No update from Geren on pitcher John Meloan (elbow soreness) or outfielder Coco Crisp (left hamstring).

Today's A's lineup — Patterson CF, Ellis 2B, Sweeney RF, Kouzmanoff 3B, Barton 1B, Rosales SS, Buck LF, Powell C, Braden P

Competition heats up for A's shortstop slot

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Adam Rosales had two more hits Thursday, and he started and played most of the game at shortstop. The infielder is 5-for-11 a week into the spring.

Do the A's have a shortstop competition brewing?

Manager Bob Geren said last week that there is "competition" at the position, but Thursday he said emphatically that Cliff Pennington, who spent the second half of last season playing shortstop for Oakland, remains the favorite.

"Cliff is definitely the front-runner," Geren said. "Cliff is doing exactly what we want."

Still, the A's made a strong run at Marco Scutaro this winter, offering him a three-year deal to take their starting shortstop job. Scutaro took two years in Boston instead. Then, Oakland acquired Willy Taveras only to dump him, absorbing his \$4 million salary to pry Rosales, 26, from the Reds.

One reason Oakland did that, of course, was because Rosales has options remaining, giving the team roster flexibility. So he's likely to open the season at Triple-A Sacramento, but a standout spring could put heat on Pennington.

Pennington, 25, is well aware that he is one of the few A's position players, with first baseman Daric Barton, whose spot is iffy. Pennington, too, has options remaining.

"I definitely feel like I still have to perform," he said. "I'm definitely still trying to earn the job. But competition brings out the best in everyone."

As for the A's attempt to land Scutaro and the Rosales deal, Pennington said that he'd expect little else from general manager Billy Beane and assistant GM David Forst.

"That's baseball," he said. "If I was in their shoes, I'd be trying to make it the best team I can."

Pennington fared just fine last season, slowing himself on defense as the team wanted. He can move runners over, which is important to a team that doesn't have much power. And he's striving to get better in both areas.

Rosales is making a strong impression. He hit a double Thursday, and he hustled to help the A's to their first run, beating out an infield single and taking second on a flyball to left-center. He's playing all over the infield as he auditions to be a utilityman.

Pennington, meanwhile, hasn't taken any grounders at another position.

"If I don't make it at shortstop, I guess I'm not the utility guy," he said.

Barton could lose significant playing time to Eric Chavez, who is playing first base as he returns from back and shoulder surgeries. First baseman Chris Carter is expected to come up sometime this season.

Michael Wuertz is taking it slow this spring

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Michael Wuertz hasn't appeared in a spring game yet, and he won't until Wednesday.

Never fear, however. The A's setup man is spending the first two weeks of the Cactus League season doing side sessions, building up his arm strength to be ready for April 5.

He got plenty of work last year, and he throws a slider, which can be hard on the arm - taking it slow in the spring is a nod to the 74 appearances he made last year, the eighth most in Oakland history.

"In the past, it's always taken me a while to get ready," Wuertz said. "So we're trying to do something else, get my work in different ways."

Wuertz tends to have poor springs, anyway, in part because in the dry air, his slider isn't as sharp as usual; he allowed 15 hits and 10 runs in 11 innings last spring, and he wasn't happy with how he pitched in batting practice two weeks ago. Last year, he was trying to make sure he'd make his new team, but this year, he's established. Wuertz said he should be at 8 to 10 innings before the end of the spring.

Trainer's room: Reliever **Joey Devine** (tendinitis) said that he was feeling much better, and he played catch Thursday morning. ... **Justin Duchscherer** will throw to hitters today at Phoenix Muni, probably two innings. ... Catcher **Max Stassi** (knee) traveled to Maryvale with the team.

Ynoa update: **Michael Ynoa**, the pitcher from the Dominican Republic, will throw 35 to 40 pitches of batting practice today at minor-league camp. Ynoa, who had some elbow issues last year, is throwing off the mound with no problem, according to director of player development **Keith Lieppman**, who said Ynoa will be limited to about 75 to 100 innings this season.

Briefly: **Dallas Braden** allowed a two-run homer to **Ryan Braun** in the first inning of Oakland's 8-3 win over the Brewers. Braden, instructed not to swing the bat, also managed to walk despite standing as far away from the plate as possible. ...

Michael Taylor belted a three-run homer. ... **Jason Jennings**, appearing ever more to be a roster possibility, pitched two scoreless innings.

Drumbeat: Odds and ends from Thursday morning

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Phoenix

Something of a quiet morning here at Phoenix Muni, with the travel squad set to head over to Maryvale to play the Brewers. Here's the lineup: Patterson CF, Ellis 2B, Sweeney RF, Kouzmanoff 3B, Barton 1B, Rosales SS, Buck LF, Powell C. Dallas Braden will start for Oakland and he's scheduled for three innings or thereabouts. It's clear Patterson, who has played in every possible game, is getting a very long look (or showcase) because he's out of options. And Rosales is at shortstop - there is potentially an interesting situation at that spot, as I mentioned last week.

In a quick injury check:

Manager Bob Geren tells me that Coco Crisp's hamstring really is not considered serious, which echoes what Crisp told me yesterday. Also, Justin Duchscherer will face hitters tomorrow at Phoenix Muni while the team heads to Tucson; he's scheduled for one inning of about 24 pitches.

Joey Devine (tendinitis) said he's feeling much better today and he'll do some throwing tomorrow. Catcher Max Stassi is still sporting a nasty lump on his right knee, grapefruit-sized, but he said he can play, and he'll be on the bus to Maryvale. He took a foul tip off the knee on Tuesday.

Geren said that for Saturday's split-squad games, Gio Gonzalez will start in Scottsdale against the Giants and Clayton Mortensen and Matt Wright will be in action at Phoenix Muni against the Padres. Geren will be at the Scottsdale game.

John Shea has an interesting [story in today's Chronicle](#) about service time and he mentions that the A's have had no conversations yet about a multi-year deal for catcher Kurt Suzuki, who is arbitration eligible after this year. That fits with what Suzuki's agent told me on Tuesday; the issue has not been broached by the two sides. That doesn't mean it's not on the A's future agenda, but nothing along those lines has happened yet at all.

Gallego's tutelage paying dividends

A's infielders benefit from coach's approach to instruction

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Mike Gallego relates his simple but effective coaching style to that found in a classroom.

The A's infield coach is no professor, but he feels like one when doing his job right.

"When I've done what I'm supposed to do," Gallego said, "I'm sure it's the same feeling a math teacher gets when a student doesn't understand an equation but then after explaining it the right way, they're the first to raise their hand the next morning.

"That gives you so much pride in your job. We're not really coaches here. We're teachers."

While teaching, Gallego stresses the significance of confidence and comfort level. Without those tangibles, players like Eric Chavez can't properly learn the inner workings of playing first base. Nor can utility players, such as Adam Rosales or Jake Fox, succeed at more than one position.

"As a coach, you want to make a player feel confident," said Gallego, who played 12 seasons with Oakland, beginning in 1985. "That's the easiest way to make them feel comfortable. It's important to be comfortable with your own ability than try to be someone else."

Now in his second season as the A's third-base and infield coach, Gallego is in the process of aiding some players at new positions while also helping others just trying to improve at old ones. Chavez, attempting to transform his Gold Glove third-base self into a respectable defensive first baseman, has perhaps logged the most hours with Gallego this spring.

"As a coach and ex-player, I know that there's a lot of anxiety involved with moving to a different position and treading unrecognized waters," the 49-year-old coach said. "There's so much anxiety because professional athletes don't want to disappoint or embarrass their team. For a guy like Eric, he has to realize that the basic fundamentals are the same. It's just a different position."

No matter the position, Gallego says a strong set of eyes can do wonders for a player's defensive makeup. He is constantly reminding his players to make better use of what is possibly the most underrated body part used in the game.

"No one ever talks about using your eyes," Gallego said, "so I'm trying to show these guys that they're one of the more useful things they can use. Good eyesight really slows the game down and helps increase a player's range.

"Also, picking up the ball off the bat helps them immediately feel comfortable, so it's important to get them doing that at their position as soon as possible."

Newcomer Fox, who has already seen time behind the plate and in both the outfield and infield this spring, credits Gallego with creating a calm working environment for a rather young and inexperienced Oakland team.

"He's so easy to work with," Fox said. "Sometimes former players have this way about them that gets in the way of the learning process, but he really puts us first and wants us to do well out there."

Said Rosales: "I definitely feel comfortable out there with him. I've only been working with him for a couple weeks, but he really takes the time to help you make improvements on the little stuff, like footwork, that make such a big difference in the game."

Gallego's experience extends well past the realms of Oakland. He spent nine seasons with the Rockies organization, including a storybook 2007 season that resulted in a National League pennant. Under his tutelage, Colorado set a Major League record for fielding percentage with a mark of .989 that year.

In his first season coaching with his former team, Gallego's infielders put together a .980 fielding mark. He plans on improving that percentage with an almost entirely new set of players, as Mark Ellis represents the lone infielder who started 2009's Opening Day game.

"Players want to be valuable to their team, and as coaches we want to do the same thing," he said. "Here, we are all about creating good habits. Once you've got the player's attention and you've got their trust, you can get to work."

"And when you watch it all come together, you can see it on their face. That's the best part."

Taylor belts first spring homer vs. Crew

Lefty Braden recovers from slow start as A's prevail

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

ATHLETICS 7, BREWERS 3

at Phoenix

Thursday, March 11

A's at the plate: Michael Taylor collected his first home run of the spring in the form of a three-run shot to left-center in the eighth inning. Gabe Gross drove in a pair of runs with a triple in the seventh, and the A's got another run in the fourth courtesy of a sacrifice fly from Travis Buck. Oakland tallied 10 hits, and among those making contributions were Mark Ellis and Adam Rosales, who each notched two.

Brewers at the plate: Outfielder Ryan Braun had the biggest hit of the day -- a two-run homer that brought home Alcides Escobar, who collected his first of two hits in the first. The Brewers also got an RBI single from Adam Stern in the seventh and saw hits from Rickie Weeks, Prince Fielder and George Kottaras.

A's on the mound: Left-hander Dallas Braden surrendered the two-run homer to Braun in the first before settling down and making quick work of the Brewers. He allowed three hits on the day while striking out two in three innings. After Brad Ziegler pitched a scoreless fourth frame, right-hander Jason Jennings tossed two innings of two-hit ball and struck out one. Righty Fautino De Los Santos also pitched an inning and gave up one run.

Brewers on the mound: Making his second start of the spring, lefty Randy Wolf tossed three shutout innings, scattering two hits, two walks and four strikeouts along the way. Righty Kameron Loe pitched the next three innings and gave up two runs in the fourth before throwing up zeroes over the next two innings. Oakland snagged two runs off Amaury Rivas, who surrendered the two-run triple to Gross and walked one while striking out two in an inning of work.

Worth noting: Braun didn't head out on the road Thursday, after all. Instead of traveling to Goodyear to play the Reds, Braun stayed home and was in the starting lineup for the Brewers' other split-squad game, against the A's. Chalk it up to Brewers manager Ken Macha being cautious with his starting left fielder. "That was a 'this morning' decision," Macha said on Thursday. "Not that this has been a problem, but he said his hamstrings have been a little tight. It's not going to keep him out of the game, but [by staying at Maryvale Baseball Park] as soon as he gets out of the game, he can go get his treatment."

Wolf's brother, Jim Wolf, was the game's first-base umpire.

Cactus League records: Brewers 3-5; Athletics 3-4-1

Up next: Doug Davis' first Cactus League start was rained out earlier in the week, so he will try again on Friday, when the Brewers host the Cubs at Maryvale Baseball Park at 12:05 PT. Davis, a left-hander who spent 2003-06 with the Brewers and rejoined them over the winter, was supposed to make his unofficial return on Sunday against the Reds but Mother Nature

intervened. Instead, he threw two simulated innings from a covered mound and worked on a new pitch in his arsenal: a two-seam fastball designed to be tough on left-handed hitters. Davis already features a cutter that neutralizes righties.

Brett Anderson gets the nod -- his second spring start -- as the A's make the trek to Tucson Electric Park for a 12:05 PT meeting with the D-backs on Friday. In his first outing, the left-hander quickly ran up his pitch count but surrendered just one hit while walking two and fanning three in 1 2/3 innings. Anderson is working on making better use of his changeup early in the count to minimize his workload. Tyson Ross, Marcus McBeth, Jerry Blevins, Henry Rodriguez, Sam Demel and Pedro Figueroa are also scheduled to take the mound. Back in Phoenix, rehabbing right-hander Justin Duchscherer will throw to live hitters for the first time this spring.

Early A's stars highlight All-Decade squad

Tejada, Giambi, Big Three made mark before departing

By Tom Singer / MLB.com

The Oakland A's weren't included in most discussions about Major League Baseball's team of the decade, indicating that people tackling those ratings suffered from short-term memory syndrome.

The A's did end the 2000-09 period in the basement of the American League West, and with three virtually identical also-ran seasons. However, no one should forget the impressive fact that they ran first or second in the first seven seasons of the 10-year stretch.

The three-member board convened by MLB.com to select the Oakland All-Decade Team certainly has not forgotten. Three of their choices were out of an A's uniform by the time the team's streak of four consecutive postseason appearances ended in 2004.

MLB.com's panel included Mike Selleck, Oakland baseball information manager; radio play-by-play broadcaster Ken Korach; and Mickey Morabito, the team's director of travel.

All were with the A's throughout the decade, daily eyewitnesses to the exploits and tribulations of every player who left his mark -- some more indelibly than others.

A spirited round-table discussion finalized their All-Decade selections -- including the aforementioned trio of catcher Ramon Hernandez, first baseman Jason Giambi and shortstop Miguel Tejada.

Tejada, the 2002 American League MVP who averaged 31 homers and 116 RBIs in the four seasons through 2003, was a "no-brainer" for the group.

The other two, however, were not -- even though Giambi was an MVP and an MVP runner-up in his two seasons, and Hernandez was an ironman catcher (503 starts behind the plate) on four playoff teams.

Morabito was a holdout on both counts, for Scott Hatteberg (2002-05) and Jason Kendall (2005-07), respectively.

"Hatteberg played longer [420 games to Giambi's 318] and for more postseason teams," said Morabito. "I guess I lean toward Scott's consistency and longevity ... but it's a tough call."

Morabito was more emphatic in lobbying for Kendall, whose impact wasn't evident in his personal line. Kendall was a by-example leader very instrumental in handling Oakland's signature pitching staff.

"Just the way he went about it ... he was an unbelievable player," Morabito said. "The impact he had on the team and the pitching staff through those years ... he could turn a game all by himself."

A's All-Decade team

POS	Player
C	Ramon Hernandez
1B	Jason Giambi
2B	Mark Ellis
SS	Miguel Tejada
3B	Eric Chavez

POS Player

OF Jermaine Dye
OF Mark Kotsay
OF Nick Swisher
DH Erubiel Durazo
SP Barry Zito
SP Tim Hudson
SP Mark Mulder
SP Dan Haren
SP Joe Blanton
SU Justin Duchschere
CL Huston Street
MGR Ken Macha

"But Hernandez was a more productive player, and had an impact on the postseason," Korach said.

Such debates were common throughout a process that yielded only seven other consensus "no-brainers" among the total of 16 selections -- four of those in the starting rotation.

That quartet above quibble includes Barry Zito, Tim Hudson, Mark Mulder and Dan Haren. Also without opposition were current team elders second baseman Mark Ellis and third baseman Eric Chavez, and outfielder Jermaine Dye.

Ken Macha was selected as manager after leading the A's to a 368-280 record while managing the club from 2003-06. He also presides over the club's only trip to the American League Championship Series of the decade in 2006. Beyond them, the verbal jousting was lively.

Rounding out the rotation

Morabito: "I'm torn on the fifth starter. Joe Blanton [2004-08] gave us durability and steadiness, and he was consistent. But Kirk Saarloos [2004-08] was what a fifth starter should be, someone who always took the ball and bailed us out of tough situations."

Korach: "For me it's between Blanton and Cory Lidle [2001-02], who gave us two of the best months you'll ever see [going 9-1 down the stretch in 2001]."

Selleck: "I lean toward Lidle because of the results. He had a better record [21-16] for two years, and in one of them he was a key for us down the stretch."

Korach: "The case for Blanton is that once we lost Mulder and Zito, he kept going out there. He always answered the bell and was durable, after the Big Three left. That's the case I would make for Joe."

Morabito: "I guess I lean to Blanton, too."

The verdict: Blanton.

Outfield

Korach: "After we acquired Dye [on July 25, 2001], he just carried the team the second half of that season [13 homers and 59 RBIs in 61 games]. He had incredible, sudden impact. By comparison, Terrence Long [598 games from 2000-03] had a long, steady tenure and was consistent, but not a lot of moments stand out with him."

Selleck: "I think Nick Swisher [80 homers in 2004-07] stands out for a lot of people who watched those teams."

Morabito: "And Mark Kotsay [2004-07] was the ultimate gamer. You want him on your team. He never got credit for what a good defensive center fielder he was, but he played everything hit out there, and he also got a lot of big hits for us. He's one of the few who left here without burning any bridges, he talked about wanting to come back here in a mentoring role. Jermaine was similar."

The verdict: Kotsay and Swisher alongside Dye (irrespective of which of the three fields the selections normally played).

Designated hitter

Morabito: "Without Frank Thomas, we don't win in 2006. He's a Hall of Famer who had an almost-MVP season that year."

Selleck: "Erubiel Durazo did it for a longer time [2003-05] in a spot that otherwise was pretty transient throughout the decade."

Korach: "Exactly. So a lot of players went through it, but nobody had as much impact in a short time as did Thomas."

Morabito: "If we're talking one year, Frank is the one. But if looking at the whole decade as the tiebreaker, I'm OK with Durazo."

The verdict: Durazo.

Setup reliever

Korach: "I'm hung up between Chad Bradford [2001-04] and Justin Duchscherer [2003-07 in the role]."

Selleck: "Duke was a long guy. He filled many roles well, and was sort of a last-of-breed by regularly going two-plus innings."

Morabito: "For me, it's Duke and Jim Mecir over Bradford. Mecir [2000-04] was just made for that role, and was really consistent, with what he did for Izzy, then Koch and Foulke. Bradford also had different roles, but Mecir was always the setup guy."

Korach: "You're outnumbered on that one. But as for Bradford or Duke, I can go either way."

The verdict: Duchscherer, even though, relief pitching having been an Oakland staple ever since Tony La Russa devised the shuttle process in the '80s, worthy candidates were plenty.

Closer

Morabito: "Same argument as Thomas. It's hard to pick a one-year guy, so that's against Billy Koch [44 saves and 79 games finished in 2002] and Keith Foulke [43 saves and 67 games finished in 2003]. So it's got to be between Jason Istringhausen and Huston Street. Street had pretty amazing impact, and until his last year was pretty consistent."

Korach: "My choice is Street. He had the longest run, and we're talking biggest impact across the decade."

Selleck: "I'll go along with that."

Morabito: "Very well. But I didn't get that [Dennis Eckersley] feeling from anybody. Well, maybe from Huston, for a stretch."

The verdict: Street.

Gross, Taylor display power in A's win

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Gabe Gross hit a two-run triple against his former team in the seventh and Michael Taylor added a three-run homer in the eighth to power the Oakland Athletics to a 7-3 win over a Milwaukee Brewers split-squad on Thursday at Phoenix.

Dallas Braden started for the A's, allowing two runs and three hits in three innings, including Ryan Braun's two-run homer to deep left-center field. After rounding the bases, Braun and Prince Fielder engaged in their shadow boxing routine.

Braun wasn't even supposed to play, but was a late addition to the home roster after experiencing some tightness in his left hamstring that kept him off the traveling split-squad.

Braden settled down after that. As a batter, Braden walked on a full count in the third against Randy Wolf, drawing loud cheers from Oakland's bench. Braden clearly had no intention of swinging and was standing on the outside edge of the batter's box chalk.

"I didn't even see him," Wolf joked. "My peripheral vision's not that good."

Braden joked that he was just looking for a good pitch to hit.

"We're not allowed to swing. We're not even allowed to think about swinging," he said. "I've been on the other side when you know you have a freebie, and it almost makes it a little tougher when you have no competition."

After an offseason in which he helped the University of Pacific pitchers, Braden, 26, has discovered a taste for instruction and has become a sort of teacher's aide to pitching coach Curt Young.

Wolf, who agreed to a \$29.75 million, three-year deal with the Brewers during December's winter meetings, struck out four in three scoreless innings. Wolf has not allowed a run in five innings this spring.

Comebacks at forefront for Atlanta Braves, Oakland Athletics

By Seth Livingstone, USA TODAY

TAMPA — For the Atlanta Braves, survival in the National League East could hinge on the revival of proven weapons.

Early spring returns on new acquisitions Troy Glaus and Billy Wagner have been positive.

The same is true for the Oakland Athletics, who are seeing progress from six-time Gold Glover Eric Chavez and 2008 All-Star Gamel Bartholomew, both trying to jump-start careers interrupted by injuries.

Both Glaus, who had nine hits in his first 12 at-bats of the spring, and Chavez, who homered twice Wednesday vs. the Arizona Diamondbacks, are making the transition from third base to first.

Glaus, 33, led the American League with 47 homers in 2000 and hit 27 for the St. Louis Cardinals in 2008 but missed most of 2009. He said spring training results amount to positive reinforcement.

"It's nice to see the hits," he said. "But none of those hits show up on the back of a baseball card."

Braves manager Bobby Cox said he thought Glaus could help his team improve upon the 149 home runs it hit last year, 10th most in the league.

"We've been looking for a right-handed hitter for two years, and it looks like we've found one," Cox said.

Meanwhile, Wagner was happy to be getting his old spot back as the Braves' new closer. Wagner, 38, has 385 career saves but no saves this season. His season ended with a need for Tommy John elbow surgery.

In A's camp, manager Bob Geren was encouraged by Chavez, who has managed 17 of his 229 career homers for Oakland since 2005. Geren also has back problems, and Sheets, who was 25-14 for the Milwaukee Brewers from 2007 to 2008 but missed 2009 after elbow surgery.

"He's looking like the Chavez of a couple of years ago," Geren said. "We need him."

Business leaders back A's for San Jose

David Goll, Silicon Valley / San Jose Business Journal 3/12/2010

The **Silicon Valley Leadership Group** has endorsed the San Jose City Council's efforts to build a downtown baseball stadium for the Oakland A's.

Members of the board of the directors of the organization, an advocacy group for 300 of Silicon Valley largest and most prominent employers, have voted unanimously to support the San Jose City Council in its campaign to build a privately built-and-operated ballpark for a Major League Baseball team.

"The stadium effort touches all the bases," Carl Guardino, CEO and president of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, said in a statement. "It provides jobs, strengthens our economy, offers a cultural aspect for our families and is a stone's throw from the future BART station, already home to Caltrain, light rail and Amtrak."

San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed expressed his appreciation for the organization's support.

"Silicon Valley's business and technology leaders know that professional baseball makes fiscal and economic sense for San Jose and our neighboring communities," he said in a statement. "As the largest city in Northern California and one of the most dynamic markets for sports in the U.S., the time is right for professional baseball to turn its attention to San Jose."

The city has a 14-acre site on downtown's western edge, near HP Pavilion at San Jose, where a 32,000-seat ballpark could be built. City leaders tout the site's convenience not only to downtown businesses and residential areas, but close proximity to the area's public transportation hub at Diridon Station.

Lew Wolff, owner and managing partner of the A's, has expressed a strong desire to move his team to San Jose after unsuccessful attempts to build new stadiums in Oakland and Fremont. The American League team -- which won World Series titles in 1972, '73, '74 and '89 -- has played at the 44-year-old Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum since it moved to the East Bay from Kansas City in 1968.

A three-member committee has been assigned by Major League Baseball to examine the team's possible move to Silicon Valley. Owners of the San Francisco Giants has said publicly they would oppose the move, which they said would encroach on their territorial rights to populous, affluent and big corporation-rich Santa Clara County.

After attempts to build a stadium at the south end of Fremont -- located a few miles north of the Santa Clara County line -- were abandoned by Wolff last year, Major League Baseball officials have also revived the possibility of building a stadium on land surrounding Fremont's **New United Motor Manufacturing Inc.** auto plant that is scheduled to close.

