

A's News Clips, Tuesday, March 22, 2011

Oakland A's notebook: Tweak to rotation could put Brett Anderson in line to start season opener

By Joe Stiglich_Oakland Tribune

PHOENIX -- Heavy rain washed out play Monday afternoon across the Cactus League, but there was still some intrigue involving the A's.

With Brett Anderson getting his start postponed against the Los Angeles Dodgers, A's manager Bob Geren said the lefty would pitch Tuesday against the Cincinnati Reds, which moves Gio Gonzalez back one day to throw Wednesday against the Chicago Cubs.

The upshot -- Anderson now lines up to start the April 1 regular-season opener. Gonzalez, who has a 1.76 ERA through four spring starts and was on turn to pitch the first game, no longer appears an option.

The A's would have to pitch Gonzalez on short rest to get him back on turn for the opener, and that seems unlikely.

Geren has remained tight-lipped on the subject the entire spring, but he said he might have an announcement as early as Thursday.

Some consider Anderson to have the best stuff of all the A's starters.

He went 7-6 last season with a 2.80 ERA but made just 19 starts because of elbow problems. He's 1-2 with a 4.50 ERA in four outings this spring.

There remains a chance the A's most veteran starter, Dallas Braden, could get the call. He and Brandon McCarthy both pitched Sunday and would be on turn to go Friday. If the A's pushed Braden back a day, he would line up to pitch the opener on five days' rest.

Braden took the ball in the A's 2009 opener.

Surprisingly, the only one of Oakland's top four starters who hasn't appeared an option -- based on how the spring rotation has unfolded -- is Trevor Cahill, who won 18 games last season.

Center fielder Coco Crisp, still nursing a left hamstring strain, would have been held out again had Monday's game been played. Crisp, who suffered the injury Friday, was a late scratch from Sunday's game.

He was getting dental work done Monday morning and not available for comment.

Geren said he's not concerned about his leadoff man.

"He has a little bit of soreness, so obviously we're going to take time to make sure he's up for it," Geren said. "It's very mild."

Joey Devine allowed a homer during a 23-pitch outing in a minor league intrasquad game and said his mechanics still need work. Devine has missed two full seasons while recovering from Tommy John elbow surgery, and he recently was delayed because of irritation in his biceps.

"I've still got some work to do," Devine said. "It'll happen. Whether it happens tomorrow or three or four weeks from now, it'll come."

It's appearing unlikely that he'll open the season in the big league bullpen.

Geren said he'll likely name his fifth starter by the weekend. McCarthy, Tyson Ross and Bobby Cramer are the candidates.

Chin Music: A's-Dodgers rained out — will Brett Anderson take ball opening night?

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 3/21/2011 3:17PM

An afternoon update from soggy Phoenix, where rain fell hard earlier this afternoon and the A's-Dodgers game was postponed ...

The cancellation means that Brett Anderson, scheduled to throw today, will instead pitch Tuesday and Gio Gonzalez will get bumped back to Wednesday, manager Bob Geren confirmed. Note that with an extra day of rest, Anderson is now lined up to be the opening night starter if he stays on his normal five-day cycle. Geren has been tight-lipped with his plans for the opener but said this morning that he might make an announcement Thursday or Friday. It's very interesting to ponder because you could make a strong case for either Gonzalez (based on his spring performance) or Anderson (based on his shut-down potential). And Dallas Braden, who started the 2009 opener, is a candidate if the A's manipulate their days off to give him extra rest. Of the A's top four pitchers, Trevor Cahill — the 18-game winner from last season — is the one who's not an option based on the current rotation.

After Wednesday, if Anderson and Gonzalez remain on their normal days' rest, Anderson would pitch the opener and Gonzalez would have the second game. That would surprise me only because Geren has liked to stagger his starters in the past so two pitchers with similar styles don't pitch back-to-back. And Anderson and Gonzalez are both hard-throwing lefties. We'll see how this plays out ...

—Talked to Joey Devine this morning after his minor league intrasquad game at Papago Park. He threw 23 pitches and surrendered a home run during the outing. Devine said his arm felt good but that his mechanics still require some fine-tuning. "I've still got some work to do." Judging from the conversation, it's sounding unlikely to me that he'll begin the season in the big league bullpen. Devine might be in a similar place as Josh Outman — after a long layoff from elbow surgery, he might just need a lot of innings to right the ship.

That's all for now ...

Chin Music: Possible rainout in the cards today; Crisp remains out with hamstring strain

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 3/21/2011 10:44am

We've turned back the clock to mid-February here in the desert. The chilly weather and gray skies are back, and the forecast calls for rain to hit the Phoenix area right around 1 p.m., which happens to be the start time for the A's-Dodgers game in Glendale. There's a feeling that we may be in for a rainout, but the A's are taking batting practice as I write this.

—If the A's do play, Coco Crisp is not in the lineup because of his left hamstring strain. His schedule was pushed back a day, according to manager Bob Geren, who added that Crisp could be ready "hopefully for tomorrow." Geren does not sound worried. Should you be, A's fans? I wouldn't sound alarms yet, but hamstring injuries tend to linger. You'll remember Crisp missed time last spring with a similar injury to his right one. He felt good enough to be included in Sunday's lineup but then was a late scratch. Crisp was getting dental work done this morning, so he wasn't available. There's 11 days (and 10 exhibitions including today's) remaining, so if he were to miss a couple more days, no biggie. Stay tuned ...

—The A's have 35 players left in camp, and Geren said the entire group is likely to travel north for the Bay Bridge Series before final cuts. Geren said he could announce his Opening Day starter by Thursday or Friday. I still consider Gio Gonzalez the front runner to get the call, although Brett Anderson could slot in there if the A's pushed his schedule back a day. Geren said he might also have a decision on his fifth starter by the weekend. Brandon McCarthy looks like a solid bet for that, but Tyson Ross gets a start Wednesday against the Cubs to continue making his case.

The lineup vs. Dodgers:

Pennington SS; Suzuki DH; DeJesus RF; Jackson 1B; Kouzmanoff 3B; Carter LF; Carson CF; Powell C; Sogard 2B; Anderson LHP.

Monday rainout might impact Opening Night

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

The nasty weather from California moved to spring training Monday and wiped out the A's game with the Dodgers.

That could have an impact on Oakland's Opening Night-starter plans. **Brett Anderson** will be pushed back to today, working on six days' rest, and **Gio Gonzalez** will move to Wednesday, according to manager **Bob Geren**.

That would make it more likely that Anderson will pitch Opening Night (April 1) against Seattle, because he directly lines up for the start. With Gonzalez pitching Wednesday, it would be difficult for him to go Opening Night - he'd have to work on short rest at some point.

If everyone gets pushed back a day this week - and it's not entirely clear that will happen - then **Dallas Braden** conceivably could work Opening Night. He's the longest-tenured A's starter, and he threw a perfect game last year. He also has pitched a season opener.

However, the A's could decide to keep **Trevor Cahill** on his normal turn Thursday and Braden on Friday, then push **Brandon McCarthy**, the apparent fifth starter, to Saturday. That would split up the right-handers, Cahill and McCarthy, and it would all but assure the Opening Night start for Anderson, with Gonzalez, Cahill, Braden and McCarthy to follow.

Geren is likely to name the Opening Night starter and fifth starter later this week.

Briefly: Geren is hopeful that **Coco Crisp** (hamstring) will play today. ... Reliever **Joey Devine** said via text that he felt good after throwing 20 pitches and two hits in a minor-league simulated game Monday, but his pitches were up in the zone and, he said, "I still have a lot of work to do." ... Because the A's weren't granted the designated hitter for Thursday's game against Arizona, **Hideki Matsui** probably will play in the outfield.

A's Balfour will provide R-rated relief

Scott Ostler, San Francisco Chronicle, 3/22/2011

PHOENIX — A few more good seasons for Grant Balfour, the A's new late reliever, and he will join an illustrious group of high-achieving blowtops.

Golf had Terrible Tommy Bolt and now has Tantrum Tiger Woods. John McEnroe is the benchmark for churlish rudeness in any sport. In baseball, we've seen Roger Clemens, Al "The Mad Hungarian" Hrabosky and Jake Peavy, the 2007 NL Cy Young winner.

Balfour is unique. Woods blows up as his game goes south. McEnroe used anger to pump himself up, but his anger was directed outward, at umpires and linespeople.

Anger once got Clemens bounced from a playoff game. Balfour directs his anger inward, and effectively. He curses and rails at himself

and often responds to his tongue-lashing by getting his stuff together.

His anger, like a good sauce, has to heat up slowly. You don't want to break out the serious swearing the first week of spring training. You build into the season.

"I haven't really shown any of (the anger) in spring training," Balfour said as he relaxed in the A's dugout at Phoenix Municipal Stadium. "That's probably why my game's not as good in spring training; I really don't take (the anger) out there. But once the season starts, I really want to step it up and use it to motivate myself and get focused and really lift my game."

Balfour seems quite the pleasant fellow. He's from Australia and has that easygoing, garrulous, let's-have-a-beeror- 10

Aussie charm and a ready smile.

But make a bad pitch, get himself into a jam, and Balfour goes to his bullpen for his inner child, who comes in swearing and yelling. Balfour makes no apologies. To whom would he apologize? Himself?

"It's not a meltdown," Balfour said. "It's like a buildup.

It's like having a coach standing right there on the mound beside you, saying, 'Come on, let's go, pick it up!' "It keeps me focused. 'Let's get this guy, let's make this pitch!' I feel like I get locked in, I zero in, as opposed to just get the ball and make the pitch."

Balfour is a blend of Hrabosky, who worked best with his boilers near bursting; Mark "The Bird" Fidrych, who talked to himself and the baseball; and Chris Farley's motivational-speaker character on "Saturday Night Live."

Balfour, who signed a two-year contract as a free agent, said Australians are passionate anyway, but his inner anger has increased in recent years.

It's hard to be easygoing when you're 33 and your career got derailed by shoulder and elbow surgery in 2005, and as recently as 2008, you were demoted to the minors.

When the Rays sent him down in '08, frankly it ticked off Balfour. He fought his way back to the Show, helped pitch the team to the World Series, and established his big-league credentials.

"I was angry; I came back (from the minors) with some fire in me," Balfour said. "I was like, 'I want to show these guys that I belong here.' Since then, I feel like I've really taken off."

His temperament seems better suited to, say, football.

Balfour, 6-foot-2 and 195 pounds, might have followed in the footsteps of his father, who played rugby in Australia at a level comparable to our NFL.

Balfour's fate took a turn when he was 6 or 7 and he and his father saw people in a park playing a strange game.

They called it baseball. Balfour asked if he could play. By the time he was 14, he was all baseball, all the time.

They are passionate people, those Balfours. His father and mother became baseball coaches and formed a 30-team baseball club. Balfour's sister played baseball with the boys, then softball. After Balfour signed a pro contract, his grandparents followed him around the world, his fan club.

His grandfather was buried in a baseball jersey, the mourners singing "Take Me Out to the Ballgame."

Baseball has been very, very good to Balfour. Even his two surgeries had a silver lining.

He met his wife when she was a physician's assistant in the surgical team repairing Balfour's arm. How Aussie is that, hitting on someone who is cutting up your arm?

Grant: "What's a pretty Sheila like you doing in a joint like my elbow?"

Angie: "Aw, that's just the anesthesia talking."

The season approaches.

"This last week, I'm going to have to step it up, get more into my game mode," Balfour said.

You know what that means.

For you folks in the good seats, cotton in the kids' ears.

Drumbeat: Rain, wind in forecast- update, game canceled

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Phoenix Muni, trying to decide whether to drive to Glendale 3/21/2011
10:36AM

UPDATE: Game canceled, and Brett Anderson will be pushed back to tomorrow, Gio Gonzalez to Wednesday, according to manager Bob Geren.

If that plan remains in place, it makes it all the more likely that Anderson will be the Opening Night starter. It would be difficult for Gonzalez to go on Opening Night - he'd have to work on short rest somewhere. Chances of that happening: virtually nil.

If everyone gets pushed back a day this turn through the rotation - and it's not entirely clear that will happen - then Dallas Braden also conceivably could work Opening Night, going on five days' rest. He's the oldest of the returning bunch and the longest tenured A's starter, and he threw a perfect game last year. He's also pitched on Opening Day before.

The A's are hearing that there is a "100 percent chance" of rain at 1 p.m., so today's game is definitely iffy at this point. It's also very windy, as the weather from California has moved here.

If the teams do play today, here's the A's lineup behind Brett Anderson: Pennington ss, Suzuki dh, DeJesus rf, Jackson 1b, Kouzmanoff 3b, Carter lf, Carson cf, Powell c, Sogard 2b.

Coco Crisp is getting another day for his left hamstring strain, plus he spent the morning at the dentist, and of course, today wouldn't be a good day for a player with a leg injury to be on the field even if they do play - wet turf would not be the best idea. Manager Bob Geren expects he'll be in the lineup tomorrow.

Joey Devine pitched in a minor-league simulated game this morning over at the Papago Park complex; we're waiting for results. Rich Harden threw long toss for the second day in a row.

Geren said that this group of 35 players, which includes two or three DL candidates (Adam Rosales, Harden and probably Andrew Bailey), will be the one that goes back to the Bay Area for the Bay Bridge series. He believes he might name the Opening Day starter and the fifth starter by the weekend, possibly Friday or Saturday.

Hideki Matsui is likely to play in the outfield on Thursday because Arizona will not allow the A's to use a DH in that game.

Speaking of Matsui, if you didn't notice it in today's Chronicle notes, he has donated 50,000,000 yen to Japanese relief efforts, which is about \$620,000. There also was a charity event here at the stadium yesterday for Japan that raised \$1,200, some of it from the Japanese reporters who cover Matsui.

Speaking of charitable efforts, if you're in the Phoenix area and would like to give to Craig Breslow's wonderful Strike 3 Foundation, which provides funding for pediatric cancer research, there will be a celebrity bartender event Wednesday at American Junkie in Scottsdale that will help the cause. The event runs from 9-11 p.m. and players working the bar will include Bailey, Breslow, Dallas Braden, Cameron Maybin, Cody Ross and Dontrelle Willis. Ten percent of bar revenue will go to the Strike 3 Foundation, and so will 20 percent of pre-booked tables. For booking information, email ICAbaseball@aol.com.

A's have multiple options for two bullpen spots

Blevins, Ross at forefront of race to join Oakland on Opening Day

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- With fewer than two weeks before the A's christen the 2011 season, a handful of names are still being considered for two bullpen slots that remain open on a thinning roster.

One spot is almost assuredly reserved for one of the fifth-starter candidates who doesn't earn a rotation spot, while the other will likely be handed to either Joey Devine or Jerry Blevins -- the latter is the frontrunner despite a poor statistical spring.

Blevins has allowed 10 runs, 14 hits and two walks in eight Cactus League appearances, but the left-handed reliever has showcased continual improvement with his velocity following months of offseason rehab on his surgically repaired left hip. His roster spot appeared rather iffy up until last week, when closer Andrew Bailey suffered a strained right forearm that will have him start the season on the disabled list.

"Numbers-wise, it doesn't look so good, but I feel unbelievable and that's what spring is for -- to get yourself ready for the season," Blevins said. "I feel healthy and my arm feels great. I feel like every outing I've gotten better and stronger and everything is progressing just as I hoped."

Blevins spent all of 2010 in the A's bullpen, compiling a 3.70 ERA with 46 strikeouts next to 18 walks in a career-high 48 2/3 innings over 63 appearances. He was forced to miss the final two weeks of the season due to a left shoulder strain, which was ultimately a result of his hip pain.

Both injuries forced skewed mechanics, and Blevins said he has spent the majority of his spring reintroducing himself to his old ways. His hip has occasionally proven sore, but only to a typical extent following surgery.

"Until I looked at video, I didn't realize I had changed my mechanics so much, so I'm just working on staying linear," Blevins said. "When I had the bum hip, I finished by swinging around instead of moving forward and keeping my legs in line. So remaining consistent with proper mechanics has been my target. It's harder than it seems. It's a simple concept, but sometimes I think my body almost gets lazy and reverts back."

Devine hurled three consecutive shutout appearances at the start of the spring schedule, but then experienced biceps tightness after pitching on one day of rest on March 7 for the first time in more than two years. The right-handed reliever, who had Tommy John surgery in April 2009 and hasn't pitched in a big league game since '08, walked four of five Seattle batters that day en route to allowing two runs in just one-third of an inning because of hampered mechanics.

Devine took a step forward Monday by pitching in a Minor League simulated game. He said via text that "the box score wasn't great, but as far as I felt, it was quite a bit better." Devine noted he still has "a lot of work to do," which means he's likely ticketed to start the season at Triple-A Sacramento while he continues to get back to his 2008 form -- a year in which he posted an 0.59 ERA in 42 appearances for Oakland. Like Blevins, Devine has an option remaining.

"I think I still have some things I need to work on mechanically and just feeling good for consecutive outings," Devine said. "I'm trying to get on that pace I was on during the first three outings of the spring. I'm just trying to keep making strides in the right direction."

"I just want to pitch. That's my biggest thing. I want to do whatever is best for the organization and whatever is best for myself, and the rest will take care of itself. I know, once everything starts to click and I get rolling, I know where I belong."

The A's will presumably look to fill out their relief corps with Brandon McCarthy, Tyson Ross or Bobby Cramer -- all of whom are still being considered for a rotation spot. Manager Bob Geren's decision will likely come down to McCarthy and Ross, both of whom have big league relief experience.

Ross, who was a surprise roster pick out of camp last year, made 26 appearances with the A's before being sent to Sacramento at the beginning of July to get stretched out as a starter. The hard-throwing righty was shut down in August because of a strained right elbow, but regained health has allowed him to resume starting duties again.

With McCarthy throwing well -- he's tallied more innings than any other pitcher this spring (20 2/3) while compiling a 3.05 ERA without issuing a walk -- Ross may be primed for the bullpen once again. As of Monday, he was given no indication which way the club was leaning.

"They've told me to get ready to be a starter somewhere, and if there is a bullpen position open and they need me to fill in, I'd be happy to do it," Ross said. "Either way, I'm in no position to complain about anything. I got a little taste of the big league bullpen last year, and if they want to try me in that role again, I think I have a better understanding now of what it takes to do well, just with the whole mental process."

"Hopefully I'll be doing a lot better job of it this year. I know they sent me down last year to be a starter, but I just want to pitch in the big leagues, in whatever role it may be."

Ross has focused his attention on fastball command, and he's also working to improve his changeup. In 9 2/3 shutout Cactus League innings, he's fanned seven and walked two. The 23-year-old righty likely won't know his fate until the end of the week, when Geren is scheduled to make the call on the fifth-starter spot, but for now, he's content with the work he's put in this spring.

"My arm's been feeling pretty healthy all spring and my pitches are coming along, so that's all I can ask for," Ross said. "Things, in my mind, are on track."

In contrast, Rich Harden -- initially considered the favorite for a rotation spot -- has yet to pitch in a spring game because of a lat muscle strain. As a result, he's out of the fifth-starter race but is still being viewed as a possibility for a long-relief role by Opening Day. Harden threw long toss on Monday, but he has yet to throw off the mound in more than a month, leaving speculation surrounding his actual readiness for a big league game.

The chosen two bullpen additions will join a relief group that already features Brian Fuentes, Craig Breslow, Grant Balfour, Michael Wuertz and Brad Ziegler. Breslow is slated to work in his first spring game on Tuesday and is expected to be ready

by season's start to again guide an A's bullpen that posted a 3.75 ERA in 2010 -- good for sixth-best in the American League.

"I haven't been around a better group of pitchers my whole life, so I want to be able to be a part of that," Blevins said. "I want to be a part of the nucleus here, which is pitching, and I think it'll be that way for a long time."

Worth noting

Monday's game between the A's and Dodgers was canceled because of rain. As a result, scheduled starter Brett Anderson will go Tuesday -- a 1:05 p.m. PT game with the Reds broadcast on oaklandathletics.com with an exclusive audio webcast -- and Gio Gonzalez will be pushed to Wednesday. ... Coco Crisp (hamstring) could possibly return to the lineup on Tuesday. ... Comcast Sportsnet California announced on Monday that former Major League players Fernando Vina and Greg Cadaret will serve as analysts for the A's pregame and postgame shows this season.

Major League: Game canceled; Anderson to pitch tomorrow

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 3/21/2011 12:59PM

As expected, this afternoon's A's and Dodgers game has been rained out. As a result, Geren said Brett Anderson will make his start on Tuesday against the Reds, and Gio Gonzalez will be pushed to Wednesday against the Cubs. That means Tyson Ross and Bobby Cramer, who were initially scheduled to pitch that day, will likely throw in a Minor League game, though nothing has been decided for certain beyond Wednesday. Trevor Cahill will make his sixth start on Thursday, and Dallas Braden or Brandon McCarthy will pitch Friday, with one of them going in a Minors game. With the changes, it looks like the schedule sets Anderson up nicely to be the team's Opening Night starter. For awhile it appeared Gonzalez could get the nod, but now he would have to go on just three days of rest to do so. This also means we could hear from Geren sooner than Friday or Saturday about the fifth-starter spot, as the way he sets up his rotation toward the end of the week could reflect the rotation that will start the season in Oakland.

Tolleson takes it hard as A's trim roster to 35

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Sunday brought about expected news for many in the A's clubhouse. For a select few others, not so much.

Infielder Steve Tolleson was part of the latter group, after hearing of his demotion to Triple-A Sacramento as part of the day's 12 roster cuts -- a group that also included top prospects Michael Taylor, Grant Green and Michael Choice.

Tolleson, 27, was officially taken out of the race for the club's backup infielder spot, following a .154 performance in 26 at-bats across 16 Cactus League games. He made seven appearances at third base, five at second base and just four at shortstop -- the position he knows is a high priority for a team that is watching Cliff Pennington come back from left shoulder surgery.

"They just wanted to make sure that the guys that were around were getting a lot of at-bats in the next couple days," a disappointed Tolleson said. "Unfortunately, I wasn't one of those guys."

"They told me it came down to defense. I'm guessing that's what they're basing their decision on. I told [manager Bob Geren], point blank, I feel I played just as good of defense as anyone. I felt like I played solid at three different positions, and they agreed with that. I've played shortstop my entire life. I'm very comfortable there. For that reason, I felt I was probably the guy coming into camp, because it's what I've done in the past."

Eric Sogard, who is already on the 40-man roster, appears to be the front-runner for the utility spot, and on Sunday he proved his worth by collecting three hits to raise his spring average to .258, while playing solid defense at shortstop. Non-roster invitee Andy LaRoche is also an option.

Tolleson made his Major League debut with the A's last year, and saw two separate stints with the club. He hit .289 in 22 games after being recalled Aug. 13 when Adam Rosales went down to injury, and figured he'd have the opportunity to post similar numbers come April 1.

"It's tough," he said. "I told them that I thought last year, during the last two months of the season, I was the utility guy for the team, and played well and helped them win some games down the stretch.

"I thought I played great defense all spring and made a lot of plays that don't get made, along with a lot of routine plays. I didn't swing the bat the way I'd like to, but my track record shows I can hit, and they know I can hit. It's just a disappointing day. I wasn't expecting it to be this early. I thought if it was something that was going to happen, it would go right down to the wire. But this is a game of resilience. You have to be able to bounce back, and I'm more driven now than ever because of the experience I got last year and how I was successful."

Equally driven is Taylor, who was optioned to Sacramento after struggling at the plate this spring. The A's outfield prospect hit just .175 and struck out 11 times in 40 at-bats, though he insists the numbers don't tell the whole story.

"My average could have been a lot better, but I felt like I squared a lot of balls, just missed some balls -- lined out five or six times, skied some fly balls five or six times," he said. "In 35 or 40 at-bats, that's the difference between hitting .180 and .280, especially when you're talking about the last 15 or so being really spread out. They were spread out early, and then I got 10 or 12 in a row and started feeling good and, the nature of the beast is, it got to be time for the starters to get their four or five at-bats and then you're pinch hitting and getting an at-bat here or there."

The 25-year-old Taylor, who hasn't climbed the ranks as quickly as many expected, is carrying a positive approach back to Sacramento, where he struggled mentally during a rollercoaster 2010 season at the plate.

"I'm really excited about going out and having a good time this year," he said. "This isn't much of a surprise or a shock. I was told, go out and create a spot for yourself."

Also optioned to Sacramento was right-hander Trystan Magnuson. And along with Tolleson, Taylor, Green and Choice, the A's also reassigned hurlers Fernando Cabrera and Yadel Marti, catcher Anthony Recker, infielder Jemile Weeks and outfielder Jai Miller to Minor League camp. Hurlers Josh Outman and Guillermo Moscoso were sent out earlier in the day.

The A's now have 35 players remaining in camp, including 32 players on the 40-man roster and three non-roster invitees (LaRoche, Wes Timmons and Matt Carson).

Worth noting

Lefty Dallas Braden, who gave up just one run in six innings in Sunday's split-squad game against the D-backs, noted continued improvement with his slider. "I liked everything about his performance," Geren said. "He was pounding the zone." ... Righty Joey Devine is slated to throw in a Minor League simulated game on Monday. If all goes well, he'll re-enter Cactus League action this week.

Urban: Giants vs. A's, blow by blow

Mychael Urban, CSNBayArea.com

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- It's an oddly grey day here in the desert, but the vibe at Scottsdale Stadium for a Sunday matinee between the host Giants and A's is decidedly sunny, so the executive decision is to provide a running commentary on the proceedings. Enjoy.

[RECAP: McCarthy leads split A's to 6-4 win over split Giants]

Pre-game I: Stands slowly filling, a somewhat surprisingly stout number of A's fans mixing it up with puffed-chested Giants fans. I have a bit of a fascination with couples that feature one fan of each team walking hand-in-hand while rocking their respective club colors, and I've noticed that the A's fan in the majority of such couples are women. Most men older than 30 have accepted as gospel the notion that women are smarter than men, but I'm not quite sure it's applicable in this particular case.

Pre-game II: Here in the press box there's a guy sporting a bastardized version of a Giants jersey with "World Champions 2010" on the back beneath "Poet" where the last name would typically be. Dude. Really? The "No cheering in the press box" applies to non-verbal communicators, too, and while it's painfully obvious that you'd like me to ask you what kind of poet you are, I'm not sure I could get it out without laughing at the ridiculousness of the entire get-up.

Pre-game III: There's nothing more tired than a sportswriter complaining about the rigors of this job that pays us to watch games for free and do something that comes relatively easy to us, so I give you this: The food provided here in the Scottsdale press box is amazing, day after day, and unlike in most Cactus League venues, it's free. Next colleague I hear coming remotely close to sniveling about his gig gets a slice of pork tenderloin stuck in his lower-back crack, OK?

Top of the first inning: Madison Bumgarner on the bump for the Giants. A's shortstop Cliff Pennington singles up the middle to open the game, but MadBum -- it pains me to write "MadBum," by the way, but it's quick and fans like it -- quickly dispatches Mark Ellis before getting Daric Barton to bounce into a 4-6-3 double play one pitch after nearly depositing a fastball in Barton's earhole. Pretty sure this young lefty is going to make the team.

Bottom of the first: Brandon McCarthy, now the frontrunner to win the No. 5 spot in the A's rotation, gets Andres Torres on a fly ball to left, Freddy Sanchez works a full count before flying out to right, and Aubrey Huff, who consistently draws some of the loudest ovations on the team, goes down flailing at a McCarthy fastball. And save your e-mails, folks; I'm well aware that my prediction of Josh Outman winning the No. 5 for the A's spot was wrong. Outman, who hasn't pitched since 2009 and clearly needs time to iron out his mechanics, was sent to minor-league camp this morning.

Top of the second: David DeJesus batting cleanup for the A's. Might be the first time he's ever hit fourth; he has 61 career homers in eight years. But he channeled his inner Jack Cust just now and worked a walk, bringing to the plate Chris Carter, whose skill set is far better suited for cleanup duties. Alas, MadBum has turned into WildBum. Carter walks, Bumgarner throws a comebacker from Ryan Sweeney wide of third base in an attempt to start a 1-5-3 double play, and two runs score while Sweeney takes second base. Andy LaRoche spans a please-get-me-over fastball to right for an RBI single, and now pitching coach Dave Righetti is out for a chat. Highly doubtful that he's telling the kid his roster spot is in serious jeopardy, but his chances of working deep into this game sure are. Josh Donaldson and Matt Carson single after the chat, loading the bases for Pennington with nobody out. "Penny" -- clever nicknames these guys have, eh? -- makes it 4-0 with a sac fly before Ellis goes down looking at a gorgeous breaking ball, and Barton swings through a fastball to end the half-inning. Bumgarner, who shows virtually no emotion at all times, shows virtually no emotion.

Bottom of the second: Good lord, this piece is going to be way too long if I keep breaking down every half-inning. But Buster Posey, Cody Ross and Miguel Tejada are due up, followed by Brandon Belt, so continue for the time being we must. Posey is greeted like a god by the sellout crowd, but he grounds out weakly to third base. Ross singles through the left side to inject a little life into the Giants fans dying for something to cheer, but Tejada flies out to center and DeJesus makes a very nice grab of a Belt scorcher to the base of the wall in right. Every woman in an A's lid nods in smug, knowing appreciation.

Top of the third: Dan Runzler replaces Bumgarner, who has thrown -- unofficial count here -- 322 pitches. My friend the "Poet" is dejected, but it looks like he's still doggedly working on the sonnet he started after Barton bounced into that first-inning double play. If he asks me to assess it, I swear I'm going to pretend I'm Slovakian, here as an exchange journalist, and have no idea what he's saying. Meanwhile, Runzler makes quick work of the A's despite a single by Sweeney.

Bottom of the third: Ryan Rohlinger is playing third base today. Pablo Sandoval is too busy to play, wearing a rubber sweat suit in the team steam room, screaming at the water-proof TV that's looping Richard Simmons' "Sweating to the Oldies." (Actually, he's in Mesa taking on the Cubs.) Apparently Simmons can't hang with the Panda, who can be heard yelling, "I own you, fat boy! Mix in a salad, tubby! Work it, bay-bee! Work it!" Out on the field, McCarthy is yelling -- figuratively -- at A's manager Bob Geren: "Competition OVER!" The cat looks pretty slick. The Giants go down quietly with the exception of the loud collision in foul ground on a popup that ends the inning. Third baseman LaRoche and catcher Donaldson go all NASCAR on each other, with Donaldson getting the worst of it. Not sure what he was doing four-fifths up the line trying to make a play that was LaRoche's all the way, but everyone's chassis seems to be intact.

Top of the fourth: Runzler rolls. He's one of four candidates for the long-man job in the Giants' bullpen, and on Saturday the other three candidates -- Jeff Suppan, Ryan Vogelsong and that Mota guy whose first name I have to look up every time I write it but am at the moment too lazy to do so, each gave up two runs. This has nothing to do with today, but if I'm running the show, I'd probably go with Runzler. He's nobody's minor leaguer, and he's the only one of the four with a real future with the team.

Bottom of the fourth: Huff and Posey single with one out. McCarthy's aura of invincibility has been pierced! But wait a second ... he reaches into his pocket for one of those bicycle-tire repair kits that no more than 0.11 percent of the population actually know how to use, and damn if he doesn't use it, striking out Ross and getting Tejada on a fly ball to right. Remember how utterly convinced I was that Outman was going to win the No. 5 spot, A's fans? I'm there with McCarthy now, and yes, I'll be very careful out on that limb.

Top of the fifth: The Giants just announced that Bumgarner is available to discuss his outing in the clubhouse, and several writers in the press box rise as one and dutifully drudge downstairs. I decide against it for several reasons, chief among them the fact that Bumgarner is still finding his "voice" as a big-league stud, and even in the best of times, his interviews are as revealing as an Amish woman's winterwear. My decision proves wise when the writers return about eight minutes later -- about twice the time it takes Runzler to rip through his third inning of work.

Bottom of the fifth: The Brandon Belt joyride appears to be closed for repairs today. Groundout to second base. Then again, he *is* facing Brandon McCarthy. I mean, come on. The guy is Secretariat in full stride right now. He cruises through the inning with the ease of a Wal-Mart greeter's gig.

Top of the sixth: G-U-I-L-L-E-R-M-O. There, I bit the bullet and did it. Mota is in the game now, having taken over for Runzler, who struck out three without a walk over his three innings of one-hit work. His ERA is 2.77 over 13 innings here. Mota, rocking a 5.00 ERA over nine innings entering today, answers with a very quick and perfect frame. He's no Brandon McCarthy, but he looks good today.

Bottom of the sixth: OK, I think this is going to be McCarthy's last inning, and it might very well be mine in terms of play-by-play. The pressure that comes with trying to be clever for nine innings is simply too much to bear. McCarthy, however, is impervious to pressure. Three up, three down. Again. Did I really say Outman was going to win that job? I *totally* meant McCarthy.

Top of the seventh: What the heck -- Mota's back out there, and I feel an obligation to stay with him in spirit. He's one of the Giants who always greets people warmly and sincerely, and he throws gas -- two qualities I very much enjoy in the subjects whose exploits I detail. He's a massive man, too. I'm thinking he'd be a load to guard in a pickup hoops game, much like Lee Smith, with whom I've squared off a few times over the years in the bi-weekly games that go down here every spring. The guy's nickname should be "Stonehenge." Impossible to move. ... Back to the game at hand: Mota throws up another zero.

Bottom of the seventh: Glad I stayed. McCarthy is still out there, with Posey, Ross and Tejada once again due up. And once again, Posey bounces out with all the authority of Barney Fife. The crowd -- the Giants portion of it, anyway -- is in a state of stunned silence, and it grows more quiet still when Ross strikes out and Tejada lines out to shortstop. McCarthy resists the temptation to howl, "This is *my* house!" But today, it is. Emphatic statement delivered.

Top of the eighth: Javier Lopez on for the Giants, and it doesn't go well for him. Oakland makes it 6-0 on a two-run triple by Carter.

Bottom of the eighth: OK, now it's just showing off. McCarthy again? Belt's had about enough of the guy, too, so he spans a single to left, and Rohlinger follows suit. McCarthy exits, and I follow suit because I want to head down to the clubhouse to see if McCarthy will say what he's probably thinking: "You sure you want me in the No. 5 spot? I'm thinking No. 3."

No way he says that, but I really do have to go. Huff just hit a three-run homer to make it 6-4, so the Giants are right back in this thing, but several women in A's hats are down on the concourse providing the answers to life's greatest mysteries, and I'd like to check it out.

I just hope one of them isn't, "Why did Urbs hand the job to Outman before he'd even pitched in a game?"

Delaying First Pitch Debated in Baseball-Loving Japan

By KEN BELSON, New York Times, 3/22/2011

TOKYO — As bodies are still being pulled from the rubble, as the effects of a nuclear crisis spread, as many companies and schools remain closed if they are standing at all, is it time to play baseball?

Just 10 days after an earthquake and a tsunami combined to upend Japan, the country is uneasily starting to debate how and when life will get back to normal, and whether it is appropriate to try so soon. And as the United States did in the days after the attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, the Japanese are contemplating whether baseball can play a role in comforting a reeling nation.

In a country where public disputes are muted and agreements are often choreographed behind closed doors, the dialogue has been uncharacteristically emotional and confrontational, with fans accusing teams of selfishness, owners publicly split, normally docile players challenging their bosses and government ministers bashing the overlords of the game.

The six-team Central League, including the dominant Yomiuri Giants, favored opening the season on time. If nothing else, hundreds of stadium workers would continue to collect paychecks. Ryozo Kato, the commissioner of Nippon Professional Baseball, invoked the palliative effects of the return of baseball to New York after the attacks, an analogy that irked sportswriters and led some fans to call for games to be boycotted.

But while Lower Manhattan and the Pentagon were directly hit in 2001, the damage and disruption in Japan is far more extensive, and has occurred just before the start of the season, scheduled for Friday.

Like the New Orleans Saints after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the Tohoku Rakuten Golden Eagles from Sendai are now essentially homeless and appear destined to play games in Kobe, which suffered its own major earthquake in 1995. The Chiba Lotte Marines, outside Tokyo, may need to make repairs as well. Some foreign players have gone home, spooked by the potential fallout from disabled nuclear reactors in Fukushima. Japanese players from the hard-hit Tohoku region have relocated families or rushed back to help those still there.

Even here in Tokyo, where damage was minimal, rolling blackouts to save energy have disrupted everyday life, throwing into question whether fans will be able to attend games.

"Honestly, I cannot think about encouraging people by playing baseball now," Yusei Kikuchi, the Seibu Lions pitcher who grew up in Iwate Prefecture, told reporters. "The field I used to practice at, the beach I visited with my family, everything is gone now."

Players from the Seibu Lions, Yokohama Bay Stars and other teams have helped collect donations near train stations. There was talk of a player strike, a remote possibility, but a sign of how divisive the issue has become.

After much public handwringing, the executives who run the game announced a solution on Saturday that spoke volumes about the art of compromise and sacrifice in Japan.

The Central League will open its season on March 29, four days late. After being publicly chastised as insensitive wastrels, the teams will play only day games during the first week of the season; lights at stadiums in the affected areas will be dimmed at games played at night or indoors. All games will end after nine innings, which is sure to lead to a surge in unsatisfying tie scores.

"We have not changed our feelings toward helping revitalize the community by showing you players who are working hard," the Central League said in a letter to fans. But "baseball will be different this year. We hope that you will understand the changes we need to make to the games in order to conserve energy."

The less popular Pacific League, meanwhile, will start play on April 12. At Tohoku Rakuten's stadium in Sendai, walls and walkways are cracked, lounges and suites are flooded and the ceilings in the team offices fell. Even if construction crews could be found, repairs would take weeks, if not months.

"In some cases, we can't get experts into the stadium to look at things to get a real estimate of how long it will take," said Marty Kuehnert, an adviser to the Eagles who fled Sendai for Kyoto.

Despite the obvious hardship ahead for the team, he and other baseball experts believe the Eagles could become the face of the nation's renewal, especially to beleaguered residents in Tohoku. If the team ends up having a Cinderella season, "the roof will come off the place," said Bob Whiting, the author of "You Gotta Have Wa," a seminal book on Japanese baseball. "It would be an appropriate end to the season."

There is a precedent. In 1995, the Orix Blue Wave, the longtime second division club that plays in Kobe, surprised many by winning the Pacific League, leading grown men to cry in the streets. The team's slogan that year was "Gambare Kobe," or

"Go Kobe," to encourage fans. The team's star player, Ichiro Suzuki, became a media sensation. Mr. Suzuki, now an outfielder for the Seattle Mariners, donated 100 million yen (about \$1.2 million) to the Red Cross in Japan last week for relief efforts.

"I was in Kobe when the big earthquake hit in 1995, and for the first time in my life I experienced the fear of death," Mr. Suzuki told ESPN in 2008. "So 1995 was a very important year for me and the people of Kobe."

Despite jitters about resuming play in 2001, the first game in New York after the attacks turned out to be a galvanizing moment. Police officers, firefighters and others involved in the rescue effort at ground zero marched on the field. Bagpipes were played. The Mets wore hats with F.D.N.Y. and N.Y.P.D. logos.

When Mike Piazza hit what turned out to be the game-winning home run, "it helped everyone realize that we could move on," said Bobby Valentine, the Mets' manager at the time. "It was the beginning of the road to recovery here in the States."

Still, Mr. Valentine, who went on to manage in Japan for six years, believes that the situation here is different. The level of destruction is greater, and uncertainty about the fate of the hobbled nuclear reactors remains. "Baseball, being such a central part of the Japanese character, has to help, but it has to help in a timely fashion."

Haviland Earns A's For Aptitude On Diamond

By Casey Tefertiller, Baseball America, 3/17/2011

PHOENIX—When righthander Shawn Haviland left Harvard with a degree in governmental studies, he knew he still had a thing or two left to learn.

His lessons continued courtesy of two coaches whose education came on the diamond, not the ivy-covered halls.

"I can't even spell Hah-vahd," laughed Athletics minor league pitching coordinator Gil Patterson, who along with Don Schulze, last year's pitching coach at high Class A Stockton, worked to refine Haviland's delivery.

"He threw well across his body," Patterson said. "We kept him on a better line to home plate."

Haviland said the mechanical tweaks made it easier to repeat his delivery and throw his fastball with improved control.

A 33rd-round pick in 2008, Haviland threw in the mid-80s when he signed. The improved mechanics helped nudge his fastball up to an average of 90 mph, topping out at 92. The increased velocity has helped the 25-year-old become a complete pitcher whom Patterson considers a legitimate prospect.

"He can locate his fastball, and it's got life and movement," Patterson said. "He's got a good change, a very good curveball. He's intelligent and has all the attributes you want."

"He's going to be one of those guys who keeps grinding it, from level to level, then one of these days he'll be in the big leagues from about (age) 26 to 36."

Pitching for Stockton last year, Haviland went 9-6, 3.65 and struck out a California League-leading 9.9 batters per nine innings. This season, he and Shulze will move on to Double-A Midland.

The A's praise Haviland's intense work ethic. He spent the last two offseasons toiling at Cressey Performance, a highly demanding training program based near Boston. "A lot of it has to do with the strength program and the nutritional aspects," Haviland said.

He has changed the way he eats, limiting his pasta intake and replacing it with regular doses of spaghetti squash. He even blogged about spaghetti squash, including his favorite recipe.

A's ACORNS

- Signed to a minor league deal, speedy outfielder Jai Miller played well early in spring training, thus positioning himself as a possible early callup. The 26-year-old could serve in a reserve role or as a pinch-runner.
- The A's rewarded minor leaguer pitchers Neil Wagner, Lance Sewell and brothers Jared and Josh Lansford for their early arrival to camp by carrying them as depth at early spring training games.