



Notes: Cruz working his way back

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By Steve Gilbert / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Outfielder Jose Cruz Jr. took batting practice and performed baseball activities Monday as he continues his rehabilitation from a strained lower back that has had him on the shelf since April 10.

"So far, so good," D-Backs head athletic trainer Paul Lessard said. "Everything's going very well."

Cruz ran in the outfield, going through various change-of-direction drills before stepping into the cage. Though he's been working hard with rehab specialist Derek Steveson, Cruz was feeling fatigued after his session Monday.

"It was the first time I've done this much activity," Cruz said. "I pooped out there at the end, but it felt good to get on the field, put on the uniform, take batting practice and hang out with the guys."

Cruz will continue to work on strengthening his legs and will be evaluated each day to see how he recovers. Once he's strong enough, Cruz will be sent on a minor league rehabilitation assignment to regain his timing at the plate.

"It all depends on how well he does," Lessard said.

Valverde back: Reliever Jose Valverde was activated from the 15-day disabled list Monday. The right-hander has been on the disabled list since the end of Spring Training with right biceps tendinitis.

Expected to compete for the closer's job during the spring, Valverde will be used earlier in games for right now, though Arizona manager Bob Melvin could see using him in a setup role similar to that of Mike Koplove.

"He's a guy we envision pitching deep into games similar to a Koplove-type spot," Melvin said. "We might start him out in a little bit of a lesser role, but if we get into a game here where we use some guys and we're in extra inning games, we're certainly not afraid to use him in that [late-inning] role."

Pitching coach Mark Davis has worked hard with Valverde, trying to get him to adjust his mechanics a bit. Valverde doesn't always get out far enough over his front leg, which can put more pressure on his arm.

Hairston gone: To make room on the roster for Valverde, the club optioned outfielder Scott Hairston back to Triple-A Tucson.

In his time with the D-Backs, Hairston got just eight at-bats. With that in mind and given that the Diamondbacks don't have an off day until May 16, Melvin decided to keep 12 pitchers, at least for now.

"Having thought about it quite a bit, [I] wasn't getting Scotty enough at-bats really," Melvin said. "With this 10-day stretch, and ending up with four in Colorado in Coors Field, I think that 12 is probably the best thing to do as far as pitchers go."

Fine by us: Melvin said he supported MLB commissioner Bud Selig's proposal for stiffer penalties for those who test positive for steroids.

"Because of what's transpired, you certainly can understand it," Melvin said. "You ask our players, they're going to tell you they're fine with it. There should be strict penalties and I think our guys are fine with it."

Health update: Greg Aquino (ulna nerve) has been playing catch from 120 feet, and if he keeps progressing, the right-hander could throw off the mound later this week.

Fellow reliever Oscar Villarreal (rotator cuff strain) is continuing his strengthening program. He was scheduled to be re-examined by team physician Michael Lee. It will likely be a little while before Villarreal begins a throwing program.

Saving grace: Closer Brandon Lyon, who leads the Majors with 10 saves, came into Monday's game tied with the Reds Danny Graves in the National League Roloids Relief Man race.

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