

**Oakland A's Front Office Q&A: Billy Owens**

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OaklandClubhouse.com

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The off-season for all but two teams in baseball is fully in swing and Billy Owens and the rest of the Oakland A's front office are busy assessing the 2009 season and putting together plans for 2010. We caught-up with Owens, the A's Director of Player Personnel, in Arizona just after the conclusion of an Arizona Fall League game to get his thoughts on a variety of topics.

As always, it figures to be a busy off-season for the Oakland A's front office. The past two off-seasons have been spent re-shaping a roster that went to the American League Championship Series in 2006, but has since been mired in three consecutive losing seasons. A's Director of Player Personnel Billy Owens sees a very bright light at the end of the tunnel for his organization, led by the promise of a strong group of young major leaguers and up-and-coming prospects.

We caught-up with Owens last Thursday afternoon for a Q&A just as he was leaving the ballpark having watched the Phoenix Desert Dogs (featuring the A's contingent of Arizona Fall League players) in an AFL battle.

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*OaklandClubhouse: How has the A's contingent looked at the Arizona Fall League thus far?*

**Billy Owens:** Our contingent in the Fall League has been impressive. [Grant Desme](#) has been unbelievable, obviously. Most of his homeruns have been just no doubters and he has been hitting everything hard.

[Jemile Weeks](#) numbers aren't necessarily reflective of how he has been playing [as of Thursday]. He has been putting together a lot of good at-bats. And he has looked good defensively. He's definitely been on the upswing defensively. He's cleaned up his footwork and has made improvements all around.

[Corey Brown](#) hasn't had the hype because Desme is having such a great start, but he has been playing really well. He has four homeruns, which would be a lot if it weren't for Desme having 10. He's been swinging the bat well and playing great defense all over the outfield.

[Justin Friend](#) has pitched well. He's been at 91-92 with his fastball and he is at about 88 with his sinker.

[Sam Demel](#) has three above-average major league-caliber pitches. His numbers aren't good right now, but you can't really put too much stock in pitchers' numbers in this league. I think the league is hitting something like .300 right now. He has been at 93 or so with his fastball and has had good movement.

[James Simmons](#) is a command guy. He has been sitting at 88-90 most of the time with some sink. He has a really good change-up and he is working on his out-pitch down here. His linescore [for the start on Thursday] really wasn't indicative of how well he pitched. There were a couple of miscues behind him that were ruled hits that could have been ruled errors.

*OC: Is Simmons healthy again? I know he missed some time at the end of the year.*

**BO:** Yes. He was a little banged up at the end of the year, but he is healthy again.

*OC: How about [Mickey Storey](#)? His rise through the organization from being an unknown is remarkable. What have you seen from him?*

**BO:** Mickey Storey has been remarkable. All of the credit goes to our area scout for finding him down there in Florida, so we could grab him in the 31st round. He has tremendous command and his curveball is incredibly deceptive. He also mixes in a pretty good slider. It was remarkable how he was able to strike-out something like 70 batters and walk only eight this year. He has a good approach on the mound and really shows no fear.

Again, I wouldn't worry too much about his numbers [at the Fall League]. This is definitely a tough league for pitchers, so it is a good challenge all around for pitchers to come down here and go against all of these advanced hitters in these hitter-friendly ballparks.

This league has become a real 'who's who' of baseball over the past few years. So many Rookies of the Year have come out of this league recently. Everyone knows about it and its importance now and it is really just a shame that it hasn't been found by the fans yet.

*OC: How would you assess the state of the organization right now?*

**BO:** I think you have to be excited to be a fan of the Oakland A's right now. You had two 21-year-old pitchers who had good seasons in the big leagues and a young pitching staff that performed remarkably well. It is a team that will be looking to build off of the strong second half performance and we have a whole slew of great position players coming.

[Chris Carter](#) had a ridiculous year. He was like a Tyrannosaurus Rex against the rest of the competition. It was a really remarkable, amazing year given how he was able to hit for power and average like that. [Grant Green](#) [the A's first pick in the 2009 draft] can swing the bat as good as any player we have selected in the draft over the last 10 years. The youngster [Max Stassi](#) [the A's fourth round pick in 2009] is just born to catch. [Ian Krol](#) [the A's seventh round pick in 2009] has also shown a lot of potential.

If you look at the rankings [of minor league talent for organizations around baseball], whether it is Baseball Prospectus or Baseball America or another publication doing the rankings, you'd have to think that we'd be at least in the top-five in talent and I think you could make the argument that we have the most depth of talent top to bottom of any organization. It's exciting.

It's still the majors and we still need to get results there, but I think we are getting ready to take that next step forward. Next year I think we'll have a chance to surprise a lot of people and by 2011, watch out. I compare the 2010 team to the 1999 Oakland Athletics team in terms of the depth of talent and how those young players are starting to come together where you know you'll have that nucleus going forward. I'm elated. It's an exciting time to be wearing the white cleats.

*OC: We've talked a lot about the organization's expansion of its scouting efforts internationally. How do you think that is going?*

**BO:** I am happy with all aspects of where our organization is at, including the international program. I've been with the organization for 12 years now and we are healthier in all areas of the organization than at any point since I've been with the team. We are signing international players from all over the spectrum, low-profile, mid-profile and high-profile guys.

I'm also pleased with the direction of the draft. Over the past few years, we have been able to take advantage of our higher draft position to bring in some top-level talent and sign some talented guys in lower spots. We have also been able to find some nuggets later in the draft. The arrow is definitely pointing up in both areas [of amateur scouting].

*OC: Are there any updates on the health of [Michael Ynoa](#) and [Fautino De Los Santos](#)?*

**BO:** There aren't really any updates. Michael Ynoa was at Instructional League and he was able to throw light side sessions and play catch. He will be participating full force at some point during the Dominican Instructional League. The great thing about Ynoa is that he is still immensely talented, and very, very young. Fautino De Los Santos is immensely talented, as well, and he will be healthy again soon and both guys will be able to show what they can do.

*OC: The team signed a player out of Australia, [Oliver Box](#). Will he be coming over to the US to play soon?*

**BO:** The best thing about the state of the organization right now is that we have so much depth that we will only move someone to a spot when they are ready for it. There is no rushing guys. He is in Australia staying in shape and working out and when he is ready to go, he'll come over to the US to play.

*OC: We talked last year about how, even though he had a great season, [Chris Carter](#) had room to improve to be a better all-around player. What sort of adjustments do you think he made to become that better all-around player?*

**BO:** I think the thing with Chris Carter is that he was a young player last year who was moving over into a new organization for the first time.. He hit .291 in Low-A with the White Sox [in 2007], but he might have been putting too much pressure on himself his first season here [in 2008, when he hit .259]. He still hit for the power, but there were holes that developed in his swing and the average dropped. He sat down with [A's Director of Player Development] Keith Lieppman and [A's Minor League Hitting Coordinator] Greg Sparks [after the season]. Chris really wanted to get back to being a good hitter again and not just a slugger. They made the necessary adjustments with him and he was able to take off.

I think his athleticism is often unjustly maligned in certain aspects. Chris is a good athlete. He has good hands, can run a little bit and has a good arm. I sort of equate [people's perception of his defense] to [Daric Barton](#) when he was in the minor leagues. People were always maligned his defense in the minors, but I knew that Daric was a good athlete and that he was better than people were giving him credit for. When Daric got to the big leagues, he showed that he was a good defensive player. Chris is going to be the same way.

*OC: Speaking of defense, do you think [Brett Wallace](#) is a third baseman moving forward?*

**BO:** I wish I had a dollar for every time someone has asked me that question. [laughs] The thing that is important to remember about Brett is that in his junior season at [Arizona State](#), his coach Pat Murphy moved him over to third base after he hadn't played there at all his first two years. A lot of people called it an experiment, but Brett took it as a challenge. He worked extremely hard there, played well there and still managed to win the Pac-10 Triple Crown for the second year. Then he was taken by the Cardinals in the draft and continued to play at third. This year, he spent much of the year playing third for teams that made it to the PCL finals and he played well at the hot-corner for them, too. That is a pretty high level to be playing at. I think the more important thing is to focus on what Brett has done defensively and not worry so much about what you might think will happen in the future. He is a tremendous player.

*OC: On a personal note, I saw your name come up in media rumors when the San Diego Padres' General Manager position was open. Is it a goal of yours to be a GM someday?*

**BO:** That is a tough question. You are always looking for new challenges in your career, but it has been and continues to be a blessing to wear the white spikes.

## **Jemile Weeks, Donnie Veal Week Three POW**

Phoenix — Phoenix Desert Dogs infielder Jemile Weeks (OAK) and Scottsdale Scorpions left-hander Donnie Veal (PIT) are the Arizona Fall League's week three player-of-the-week and pitcher-of-the-week, respectively.

Weeks — The 5–10, 175-pound Weeks hit .533 (8–15) for the week with 4 runs, 3 doubles, 2 triples, 3 runs batted in, and a 1.000 slugging percentage.

The 22-year-old Orlando, Florida native enters week four riding a seven-game hitting streak (.379) that also includes 8 runs, 3 doubles, 3 triples, and 5 runs batted in.

He ranks second in the league with three triples.

Oakland's first-round (12th overall) draft choice in 2008 out of the University of Miami, Weeks is a .282 hitter in two minor-league seasons. He split his 2009 campaign between High-A Stockton (.299) and Double-A Midland (.238).

Veal — The 6–4, 230-pound Veal was 1–0 with a perfect 0.00 earned-run average last week, allowing only five hits and walking two with seven strikeouts in 7.2 innings.

He leads Fall League starters with a 0.71 earned-run average (1 ER, 12.2 IP) that also ranks fifth overall. He is tied for the league lead with two wins, and ranks second in opponent batting average (.159) and third in WHIP (0.71).

He made his major-league debut for Pittsburgh in 2009, logging a 1–0 record and 7.16 earned-run average in 19 relief appearances. He also pitched for Double-A Altoona (0–0, 1.35 ERA in seven games) and Triple-A Indianapolis (0-1, 6.43 ERA in nine games) in 2009.

In five minor-league seasons, he registered a 25–29 composite record and 3.77 earned-run average in 112 games.

The

Jackson, Mississippi native was drafted in the second round (68th overall) by the Chicago Cubs in 2005 out of Pima (AZ) Community College.

## **Big Mac back but where's his Bash Brother?**

Robert Robino, Santa Rosa Press Democrat, 10/31/09

Remember the Bash Brothers? The dynamic duo of Mark McGwire and Jose Canseco led the Tony La Russa-managed Oakland Athletics to three straight World Series appearances, including the 1989 title — the Bay Area's only baseball championship in the past 35 years.

Funny thing happened to the Bash Brothers on their way to the Hall of Fame. Well, funny only if you get a chuckle over the whole steroids mess. McGwire and Canseco became poster boys for the performance-enhancement era and widely lambasted — for intriguingly opposite reasons; McGwire because he refused to talk, and Canseco because he refuses to stop talking. That says as much about the public's split personality as it does about the moral choices of two muscular ballplayers.

La Russa, who with the A's and Cardinals managed McGwire for more than 15 seasons, made a gracious move last week in hiring Big Mac as the St. Louis batting coach, bringing the 1987 American League Rookie of the Year and the majors' former single-season home-run king back to the big leagues after an eight-year self-imposed absence.

But La Russa didn't go far enough.

He should have brought back the other Bash Brother, too. La Russa, the wise father figure, should have made it a prodigal sons reunion of biblical proportions. McGwire is the hitting coach? OK. How about Canseco as pitching coach? Well, why not?

Think of it. The Bash Brothers. Together again, for a third time. (That's right, trivia nerds, besides playing together on the A's from 1987 to the middle of the '92 season, McGwire and Canseco were also Oakland teammates for the first half of the '97 season.)

At first glance, the Cardinals' hiring of McGwire as hitting coach seems a bit odd for a number of reasons, not least of which is his thoroughly mediocre .263 batting average over 17 big-league seasons. The man he replaces, Hal McRae, had a .290 batting average over 19 seasons.

But it might not be so odd. Putting the steroid issue aside, McGwire hit 583 homers. That's a ton of homers, 392 more than McRae. So, if nothing else, he may be well qualified to teach home-run hitting — not a useless skill for a team to possess. And McGwire's on-base percentage of .394 is 43 points higher than McRae's. So there.

Besides, some of the most notable batting coaches over the past several decades weren't high-average hitters. Just two examples:

Charlie Lau, George Brett's guru with the Kansas City Royals of the 1970s and 1980s (and, incidentally, McRae's K.C. hitting coach, too), had a .255 career average over 11 major-league seasons.

Jim Lefebvre, who has been a hitting instructor for several teams and has authored books about hitting, batted .251 over an eight-season career.

So, you might grant me that the Cardinals' choice of McGwire as batting coach isn't that odd after all.

But, come on, you say, Canseco as a pitching coach? That's insane, you say. Forget everything else about the man. The fact is: He wasn't a pitcher.

Oh, yes he was. One inning. For George W. Bush's Texas Rangers in 1993. You can look it up. His 27.00 ERA? A learning experience.

Besides, the Cardinals' current and longtime pitching coach, Dave Duncan, wasn't a pitcher, either. He was a catcher.

OK, La Russa would never part with Duncan. "Where he coaches, I manage, he's that good," La Russa said last week. Their relationship has lasted longer than most marriages, and with far fewer arguments.

But Canseco hit 462 home runs. And he stole 200 bases. He must know something about playing baseball. Hey, his career batting average is three points higher than Mac's.

La Russa could have hired Canseco as a co-hitting coach. Something. Anything.

Too bad. La Russa made a bold statement in bringing Big Mac back to the big leagues. But he missed an opportunity to make a much bolder statement.

## **Saturday's Arizona Fall League roundup**

### **Mariners prospect Ackley collects first RBIs as pro**

By MLB.com

#### **Javelinas 12, Rafters 5**

Mariners prospect Dustin Ackley, who was the No. 2 overall pick in the 2009 Draft, doubled twice and knocked in three RBIs (the first of his pro career), and Dodgers farmhand Russ Mitchell doubled and homered during a five-RBI, 3-for-5 day at the plate for the Javelinas. Justin Cassel (White Sox) gave up a run over two innings to pick up his second victory with Peoria. Mets prospect Jenrry Mejia continued to struggle, allowing four runs on 1 2/3 innings pitched and absorbing the loss for Surprise while seeing his AFL ERA balloon to 12.91.

#### **Scorpions 6, Saguaros 0**

Pirates prospect Donnie Veal struck out five and allowed just two hits without surrendering a walk over four innings, paving the way for Scottsdale's first shutout of the season. Domonic Brown (Phillies) had three RBIs and a run scored for the Scorpions, and Brandon Crawford (Giants) was 3-for-5 with two stolen bases and a run scored. Freddie Freeman (Braves) and Zack Cozart (Reds) each had a pair of hits for the Saguaros.

## **Desert Dogs 4, Solar Sox 3**

Brad Emaus, a Blue Jays prospect, went 4-for-4 for the Desert Dogs, raising his Arizona Fall league average to .314 through nine games. He also scored half of Phoenix's runs, and Corey Brown (A's) was 3-for-4 with an RBI. Major League veteran Robert Ray (Blue Jays) allowed two runs on four hits over five innings to pick up the win. Red Sox prospect Luis Exposito had a pair of hits and scored a run in the losing effort for Mesa.

## **Giants, A's owners present study in contrasts**

By Tracy Seipel, San Jose Mercury News

Twenty years ago, the San Francisco Giants and Oakland A's faced off for baseball's biggest prize. But today, the players — on the field and in the front office — have changed, and so has the prize: Now it's Bill Neukom vs. Lew Wolff competing for the city of San Jose.

With their teams sitting out this week's World Series, both are looking ahead to winter, when baseball's 30 owners will meet to decide everything from TV deals to big trades. As Wolff, co-owner of the Oakland A's, and Neukom, managing general partner of the San Francisco Giants, rub elbows, they'll no doubt be mindful that this same group of millionaires soon could redraw the Bay Area's baseball map.

With a three-quarters vote, baseball's owners can terminate the Giants' territorial rights to the South Bay and let the A's move to San Jose. But first, a commission appointed by Major League Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig is studying the A's stadium options. That committee met Thursday with San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed and other city officials who've been assembling plans for a privately financed \$489 million ballpark.

Neither the city nor committee member Corey Busch would comment on the discussion, nor would Busch say when the group would issue a decision.

So Neukom and Wolff must wait.

The two contemporaries (Neukom is 67, Wolff is 73) are a contrast in styles: One has a legalistic view of the world, the other a pragmatic view. They remain respectful adversaries nevertheless.

"If we went to high school together, and they handed out diplomas by grade point, he would be home by the time I got mine," said Wolff of Neukom's intellect. "He's a very impressive person."

Likewise, Neukom calls Wolff "very smart and very, very successful. ... He's got a great sense of humor and a good, healthy perspective on life."

Both are known as shrewd professionals who have earned tens of millions of dollars in their respective fields.

Neukom, a 6-foot-4-inch attorney with a penchant for bow ties and suspenders, is a former president of the American Bar Association. He grew up in San Mateo, where he said his love with the Giants began. He became a team limited partner in 1994 and last year was made managing general partner.

But he is perhaps best known as the longtime Microsoft general counsel who defended the company against antitrust suits brought by the U.S. Justice Department and the European Union. The cases ended in consent decrees in which the company admitted no wrongdoing but agreed to change some business practices.

Lauded for his keen tactical mind, Neukom can also play hardball. During the Microsoft trial, some legal experts believed his repeated challenges of Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson created an adversarial tone.

Not all cases have been as divisive; good lawyers are sometimes mediators, Neukom said. "I try very hard to have a sense of the merits (of a case) and to develop a position for my client and then to zealously advance that position. And the position should be based on the facts and on sound principles."

The Giants have relied on facts and principles as the basis of their territorial rights claim, but they've also made efforts to woo their South Bay fans. In April, the team agreed to buy a 25 percent stake in the San Jose Giants, its Class A minor league affiliate.

Wolff, meanwhile, is described by those who know him as affable and low-key. The St. Louis native is a longtime developer of commercial buildings and hotels. Among other achievements, he helped transform parts of downtown San Jose, often with the aid of generous city subsidies. Keeping a sharp eye on the real estate market, in 1996 he and one of

his investors, a billionaire Saudi prince, snapped up a two-thirds stake in the San Jose Fairmont Hotel when it was in financial straits.

In 2005, with Gap heir John Fisher, he bought the A's and took the helm as managing partner. Wolff also owns the San Jose Earthquakes and recently unveiled plans for a 15,000-seat soccer stadium near the airport.

Shorter in stature than Neukom, Wolff is fond of wearing a golf shirt and Windbreaker. "I waited all my life not to wear a suit and tie," quipped the A's owner.

For all his successes, Wolff's biggest business mistake ironically was related to a sports venture. In 1999, he joined a group of investors who had just bought Toronto's SkyDome. The stadium and its famous retractable roof ended up bleeding money, and after five years, the group sold it at a loss.

"It was the worst deal I ever made," Wolff told the Mercury News in 2006. But he also learned some important lessons, especially on control of teams and the places they play, saying, "Every team should control its own destiny."

Asked to characterize his negotiating style, he said, "I believe the best outcome is when everybody wins a little bit of something."

But some wonder whether Wolff, at 73, will have the endurance to find yet another location for the team if he can't move to San Jose.

"He's spent a lot of time and money in Fremont and time in Oakland" looking for a stadium site, noted one person who has worked with Wolff. "He's got to be thinking, 'How long do I have to wait for this?'"

Both Wolff and Neukom may know more in a few weeks when they attend an MLB owners' meeting in Chicago. League officials said it's unknown whether the territorial topic will be on the meeting's agenda.

But there is no rule against deal-making during breaks — or afterward. Both men say they're not lobbying their fellow owners.

Still, many say the decision over territorial rights really lies with Selig, a college fraternity brother of Wolff's who encouraged the developer to invest in the A's.

Asked what he would do if he was trying a case, and the judge was a fraternity brother of the opposing attorney, Neukom said: "I would count on the judge to persuade us that he would be utterly impartial."

He added: "The commissioner himself has said many, many times how fundamentally important territorial rights are for each of the 30 teams."

However, Selig's committee may conclude that a move to the South Bay would make the most money for baseball's owners. MLB teams participate in revenue sharing, where the wealthiest teams end up supporting less lucrative ones like the A's. Team boosters are certain a move to the more demographically affluent San Jose would lead to higher ticket sales and end the team's taking subsidies from the revenue pool.

The Giants also are fighting to hold onto that affluent South Bay fan base, as well as the profitable advertising deals, sponsorships and club suites the team has secured at AT&T park with high profile Silicon Valley companies.

One source close to MLB, who asked not to be identified because of the sensitive nature of the issue, stressed that whatever Selig does will be based on what is best for baseball, not his friendship with Wolff.

Other league observers said they would not be surprised if Selig ultimately cuts a deal between the two teams that gives financial concessions to the Giants. In that scenario, the A's might be required to pay their Bay Bridge rival handsomely — perhaps a larger share of television rights for a period of time. Selig was involved in similar negotiations that let the Montreal Expos move into the Baltimore Orioles' traditional territory in 2005 and become the Washington Nationals.

"Wolff will be happy to move to San Jose, and the Giants will be happy that they got a big slice of Wolff's bacon," said another source close to the league, who also asked not to be named. "And if that happens, Selig will have pulled off a very good move for both sides."

## **Henderson working with A's prospect**

## **Hall of Famer teaching Weeks to be leadoff man**

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Rickey Henderson, who was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame this summer but never officially retired, is finally getting to do something for which he's publicly lobbied since his playing days in the big leagues came to an end.

He's back on the field with the Oakland A's.

Yet instead of tormenting pitchers and wreaking havoc on the bases -- two hallmarks of a career that led Henderson to Cooperstown -- he's teaching Jemile Weeks to do the same type of things.

Henderson, who will turn 51 on Christmas Day, recently spent three days at Oakland's Minor League complex at Papago Park in Phoenix working with Weeks, whom the A's selected in the first round (12th overall) in the 2008 First-Year Player Draft.

"Rickey came down for our instructional league in early October to work with Jemile, and it was an outstanding event," A's director of player development Keith Lieppman told MLB.com this week.

Henderson, who is depicted on his Hall of Fame plaque wearing an A's cap, is under contract with Oakland as an ambassador of sorts, but he made it clear on the day before joining baseball's immortals that he planned to work with the club's young players.

"Any way I can get back out there and share some of the things I can do, I'd like to do that as much as they want me to do," Henderson told MLB.com. "I think I can be a good teacher of the game."

Weeks, a switch-hitting second baseman out of University of Miami and the younger brother of Brewers second baseman Rickie Weeks, got a late start in 2009 after recovering from hip surgery, but batted .299 with a .386 on-base percentage over 50 games at Class A Stockton before moving up to Double-A Midland, where he hit .238 with a .303 OBP.

One of the faster players in the organization before the injury, Weeks stole nine bases in 10 attempts overall this season and has made 14 errors in 92 career games at second base for a .968 fielding percentage.

Oakland's No. 1 goal for Weeks this offseason is for him to improve defensively. To that end, Minor League roving infielder instructor Juan Navarrete has been working with Weeks, who is playing for the Phoenix Desert Dogs in the prestigious Arizona Fall League.

"He's played really good defense there," said Lieppman, who is based in the Phoenix area. "Everything Juan has been doing with Jemile has been going really well."

Also high on the organization's list of priorities for Weeks, 22, is to become more of a prototypical leadoff man, and Henderson, considered the best leadoff man of all-time, is his new mentor in that regard.

"We don't expect Jemile to be another Rickey; Jemile has some pop to him, but there's only one Rickey in terms of the power he brought to the leadoff spot," Lieppman said. "But we want Jemile to be the kind of baserunner that Rickey was -- stealing bases, bunting more to take advantage of his speed, being aggressive, being disruptive [on the base paths]. That's why we hooked them up."

Weeks was 2-for-2 in stolen base attempts in the AFL through Thursday.

"It's not something that's going to happen overnight, but Jemile has the skill set to be an excellent leadoff man," Lieppman said. "Rickey took him through a lot of different things, from how to read pitchers and time jumps to stealing third base, and even though Rickey didn't do a lot of bunting, that was probably because he didn't need to and wasn't asked to; he did know how to do it well."

"It was just a great experience, and Jemile kind of ran with that."

### **Dribblers**

The A's outrighted outfielder Matt Carson and right-hander Chad Reineke to Triple-A Sacramento on Friday. Prior to his outright, Carson was signed to a 2010 Major League contract and will be a non-roster invitee with Oakland this spring.

Carson, 28, spent the entire regular season with Sacramento before making his Major League debut with Oakland in September. He batted .286 with a home run and five RBIs in 10 games with the A's after hitting .264 with 25 home runs and 77 RBIs in 118 games with the River Cats. He posted career highs in home runs, RBIs, walks (38), extra-base hits (57) and slugging percentage (.514) with Sacramento. Reineke, 27, spent the entire season at Sacramento with the exception of one start -- a no-decision in early August -- with Oakland. He went 9-4 with two saves and a 4.75 ERA in 30 games, including 22 starts, for the River Cats. ... Top prospect Chris Carter, who was leading the Mexican Winter League with four home runs in 14 strikeouts in seven games with Algodoneros de Guasave when he was recently sidelined with the flu and left the country, has been cleared to return to the team and is expected to do so Monday. ... Outfield prospect Grant Desme homered twice for the AFL's Desert Dogs on Wednesday, giving him 10 home runs in his past 10 games and moving him to within four of the AFL's single-season home run record, held by Brandon Wood of the Angels.

## **GM brings whole new game to Canada**

By Benjamin Hill / MLB.com

Jason Takefman, the new general manager of the Northwest League's Vancouver Canadians, is a unique individual in a unique situation.

The aptly named Canadians are the only affiliated Minor League team left in the entire country, a distinction they earned after the International League's Ottawa Lynx relocated to Lehigh Valley following the 2007 campaign. And making the Canadians' situation even more anomalous is that they are a Class A Short-Season club in a distinctly "big league" city, one that supports NHL and Canadian Football League franchises and soon will host the Winter Olympics.

And as for Takefman? Well, he's just 27 years old, with only four years of Minor League front office experience under his belt.

The Montreal native was promoted to GM earlier this month. Takefman replaces Andrew Seymour, the 2009 Northwest League Executive of the Year, who resigned from the position in order to pursue an opportunity with the Grand Prairie Air Hogs of the independent American Association. Takefman began working for the Canadians in 2006, most recently serving as director of ticket operations. Prior to arriving in Vancouver, his only stint in the sports industry was as an intern with a most unlikely entity -- the Israeli National Hockey Team.

But despite this relative lack of experience, Takefman exudes confidence and is intent on "hitting the ground running" when it comes to his new position.

"I've always aspired to learn as much as possible and to take on as many tasks as I could in as many departments as I could in order to acquire a full understanding of the industry," said Takefman, who speaks quickly and energetically, as though the pace of his speech can't quite keep up with the pace of his thoughts. "[Team president] Andy Dunn is a blue-chip name in baseball, and I just feel lucky he decided to keep me around.

"We're coming off of a big year," he added. "Attendance increased by 20,000, because we had great promotions and an affordable ticket price."

In a cosmopolitan city such as Vancouver, there's no shortage of competition for a family's disposable income. Therefore, it has been Takefman's strategy to put a premium on customer service and face-to-face interaction.

"I love meeting people and hearing how much this team and [Nat Bailey Stadium] means to them," he said. "There are fans who came here with their grandparents and are now bringing their grandkids, or people who have made a point to come to every opener for the past 35 years. ... We want to continue to promote what we have, which is affordable family entertainment.

"All of us here treat people really well and put in a lot of hard work. But it's only stressful if you make it stressful. I think we just look at it as an amazing opportunity."

### **In it for the long haul**

The Canadians' current success is especially gratifying considering the city's recent baseball history. Vancouver fielded a Triple-A Pacific Coast League team for 22 seasons, but that franchise abruptly relocated to Sacramento following the 1999 campaign. The Northwest League club began play the following year, but Class A Short-Season was initially a tough sell in a city accustomed to seeing players who were just one step away from the Major Leagues. Further public relations problems soon arose as a result of the dilapidated facility -- Nat Bailey Stadium first opened its doors in 1951 -- and a generally inattentive out-of-town ownership group.



The situation improved dramatically prior to the 2007 season when a pair of prominent local businessmen -- Jeff Mooney and Jake Kerr -- bought the franchise with the goal of ensuring that it remained in Vancouver. One of their first moves was to hire Andy Dunn as team president. A former Minor League general manager and Major League Baseball sales and marketing director, Dunn had most recently served as the Washington Nationals director of player development. And when it came time to assemble his staff, Dunn stayed true to these roots by emphasizing potential over immediate results.

"When I first came in, it would have been real easy for me to call [experienced executives] back in the States. But for the long-term, that was no good," said Dunn. "We only needed one ugly American around here, and unfortunately that's me. The goal was to develop future baseball people in this community, so we hired kids coming off of internships, and not many of them had more than a year of experience under their belt.

"That's been the most fun part of my job, watching the staff develop," he added. "The people here that are in an everyday role, they just get it. Everyone here works together so closely and the jobs are not compartmentalized, so people just jump in and help wherever they're needed. It's a team of one mentality, and that's something that Jason spearheaded."

It was Dunn's decision to elevate Takefman to the role of general manager, and he claims it was an easy one despite Takefman's relative lack of experience.

"I tell him that while he may be in his 20s, he looks like he's 45," joked Dunn. "But really, age isn't a factor. Whether someone is 25 or 45, what matters is the skill set, and it's a privilege to watch him work. He's a workhorse, and has the attitude and commitment to get things done. He's going to be successful."

As a result, Dunn is confident that Northwest League baseball will continue to make inroads within a city that has traditionally preferred its sports on ice.

"I'm real proud of where we are, to be a short-season franchise doing well in a town where hockey is king," he said. "We've put ourselves in a situation where we're now one of the big three -- there's the NHL, the CFL and us."

### **Fighting for attention**

Perhaps no one is more knowledgeable about what it takes to promote Minor League Baseball in Vancouver than Rob Fai, who handles media relations for the club and serves as the team's broadcaster. (Fai, along with director of ballpark operations JC Fraser, was also elevated to assistant general manager in the wake of Takefman's promotion.)

"It can be a tough road to hoe at times, because we're not the big dog in town and not every move we make is covered," said Fai, 35, who is in his second stint with the club. "So we have to be very creative and make sure that our [story] pitches are focused and easy to comprehend. The bar is set really high here, and sometimes I'm pulling my hair out trying to figure out how to get coverage."

Nonetheless, the Canadians have been able to get the word out to the extent that Nat Bailey Stadium -- "The Nat" for short -- has gained a reputation as one of the Northwest League's most lively environments.

"The crowd that has been coming out to our games is young and raucous," said Fai. "We have fans in the stands singing songs, and fans who paint signs and bring them to the game. I know the players like it. A lot of them just got out of extended [spring training] and had been used to playing in front of their parents and a couple of instructors. So to walk out of the dugout in front of 5,000 fans who are ready to rock, I think a lot of players migrate to that. I'm proud to be a part of it."

This raucous fan base is also remarkably diverse, which is a reflection of Vancouver's burgeoning immigrant population. Prominent ethnic groups include Chinese, Punjabi, Vietnamese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino and Latin American.

"The Japanese and Koreans, for example, are very comfortable with the game of baseball," said Fai. "But what we've become more astute at doing is inviting all communities to come out for the baseball experience. Are they going to learn what a 6-4-3 double play is? Probably not. But it's an opportunity to enjoy an afternoon in the sun, to learn a little bit about what's happening on the field, to have a couple of beers and a hot dog. That's more what we're pitching -- that each game is an event. And we have 38 events a year."

Many Minor League broadcasters approach their careers in a manner similar to a player, always angling for a promotion to the next level. But Fai has no plans to leave Vancouver anytime soon.

"There are 25 hockey broadcasters in this town, but I'm the one guy that does baseball," he said. "So I've got my niche carved out. Plus, it's hard to create a following and develop passion if every year or two you've got a new broadcaster coming in with a new perspective. I've been amazed at the number of people who have come up to me in this town, where baseball is not king, and said 'Thank you for sticking around and for being part of this community.' My reaction is like 'Are you kidding me? There's no place I'd rather be.'"

## **Oh Canada**

Many reasons have been given as to why affiliated baseball has nearly disappeared from Canada, encompassing everything from the cold weather to the weak dollar to the increased hassle of crossing the border in the wake of 9/11. Nonetheless, the Canadians are living proof that America's pastime is still capable of thriving up north.

"I had been in the media for 14 years before I took this job, and when I decided to return to Vancouver people would ask me, 'Why are you going to a short-season team?'" recalled Fai. "But I felt like I had just bought stock in Apple. It's been great to see how far we've come, and to see the way people look at this team as opposed to how they did 10 years ago."

"We're not going to bill ourselves as 'This Is All That's Left,'" said Takefman. "Our job is to let people know that we're the best value in the city, and that once they get in the door they'll have an unbelievably fun time."

Takefman has been successful in conveying this message thus far, and the organization is convinced that he's the right man for the job at the right time.

"Jason is committed to baseball, and not just baseball but baseball in Canada," said Dunn. "I like where we are now as an organization, but there is still plenty of room to grow."

## **Friday's Arizona Fall League roundup**

### **Royals' Moustakas homers twice, plates four**

By MLB.com

#### **Saguaros 6, Rafters 5**

Padres outfielder Cedric Hunter pinch ran and scored on an error in the ninth inning to give Peoria a walk-off win over Surprise. Former Royals first-round pick Mike Moustakas hit a pair of homers and drove in four RBIs and Yankees right-hander Ian Kennedy struck out four and held the Saguaros to a pair of runs on four hits over four innings in his fourth AFL start. Moustakas enjoyed his most productive day since going deep and driving in seven runs on Oct. 15.

#### **Javelinas 5, Desert Dogs 4**

Brewers catching prospect Jonathan Lucroy homered and drove in three runs as Peoria held on to defeat Phoenix. Tigers right-hander Scot Drucker started and pitched four scoreless frames before former Mariners first-round pick Phillipe Aumont picked up his first win despite allowing four runs in 1 1/3 innings. Former Nationals' first-round pick Chris Marrero homered for Phoenix en route to his sixth multi-hit game of the season.

#### **Solar Sox 6, Scorpions 6 (11 inn.)**

Giants catcher Buster Posey hit his first homer of the fall for Scottsdale after Twins first baseman Chris Parmalee launched a three-run drive for Mesa in a game that was suspended and later ruled a tie after 11 innings due to the league's 11-inning limit. Angels catcher Hank Conger hit a go-ahead homer in the fifth for Mesa, his second of the season, while Darin Holcomb (Rockies) drove in two runs for the Scorpions.

## **Kennedy says he's interested in rejoining A's**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer 10/30/09

**Adam Kennedy** was one of the final additions to the A's in 2009, but he might be one of the first to join the roster this offseason.

The veteran second baseman, who spent most of the year at third for Oakland after coming from Tampa Bay in a minor-league deal in May, would like to return, and his agent, **Paul Cohen**, told The Chronicle that talks have been "very positive."

Players may file for free agency one day after the World Series ends, but if Kennedy does so, that won't indicate a shift in thinking about Oakland.

A's assistant general manager **David Forst** said the team expects that Kennedy will file for free agency, and, he said, "The ball is in their court. We let them know we're interested in bringing Adam back."

The A's have not been in contact with free-agent infielder **Nomar Garciaparra** or starter **Brett Tomko**, though they plan to check in with Tomko as he recovers from a nerve problem in his right arm.

**Outman rehab:** Left-hander **Josh Outman**, who was having a strong rookie season before requiring elbow ligament replacement surgery in late June, began his throwing program in St. Louis last week. Outman, who was 4-1 with a 3.48 ERA in 12 starts this season, expects that he'll be throwing off a mound by spring training but says he will not be ready to pitch in a big-league game until roughly the All-Star break.

**Briefly:** Top prospect **Chris Carter** will return to the Mexican winter league Monday. The first baseman/outfielder left because of suspected appendicitis, but it turned out to be the flu and he has been cleared to resume baseball activity. ... Outfielder **Ryan Sweeney** (patella tendinitis) has started physical therapy and will be ready for spring training.

## **Thursday's Arizona Fall League roundup**

### **Marlins left-hander Miller delivers his first sharp AFL start**

By MLB.com

#### **Javelinas 3, Solar Sox 2**

Marlins left-hander Andrew Miller rebounded from a pair of lackluster outings, allowing a run on three hits with four strikeouts in 4 2/3 innings as Mesa fell to Peoria. Miller retired 10 straight batters during the course of the game before Andrew Lambo (Angels) singled to start the fifth. Matt Long (White Sox) allowed one hit in three scoreless innings of relief for his second win. Zach Braddock (Brewers) added two perfect innings to pick up the save for first-place Peoria.

#### **Rafters 3, Scorpions 0**

Coming off Tommy John surgery, Mike Parisi only gave up two hits and fanned four over five innings as visiting Surprise blanked Scottsdale. Royals' 2006 50th-rounder Jarrod Dyson collected two runs, two hits and a walk, while Daniel Descalso (Cardinals), Mitch Moreland (Rangers) and Daryl Jones (Cardinals) plated runs for the Rafters.

#### **Saguaros 4, Desert Dogs 0**

Cleveland infield prospect Carlos Rivero doubled and scored twice in Peoria's shutout of Phoenix. Rivero doubled in the fourth and scored the game's first run on a single by Freddie Freeman (Braves). He crossed the plate again on a single by Zack Cozart (Reds) in the eighth. Grant Desme, who had homered 10 times in the previous 10 games, went 0-for-4.