

A's News Clips, Monday, December 7, 2009

Giants, A's have new approaches this offseason

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer 12/6/09

With the four-day winter meetings beginning Monday in Indianapolis, the Giants and A's approach with far different philosophies than a year ago.

At this point in 2008, the Giants already had signed Edgar Renteria, Jeremy Affeldt and Bobby Howry and were on the verge of finalizing a deal with Randy Johnson.

The A's already had traded for Matt Holliday and begun negotiating with Jason Giambi, a sign they weren't fully dedicated to their youth movement, later adding Orlando Cabrera and Nomar Garciaparra.

A year later, both teams have done a 180.

The Giants want to be more patient, the A's more youthful.

"What we really want to do is give our young players a chance to develop," A's general manager Billy Beane said, "and we want to hold on to them."

Last month, Beane spoke of improving the offense via trades, and he acquired Jake Fox and Aaron Miles from the Cubs on Thursday. Now he's looking mostly at free agents, if only because he appears unwilling to part with any of his valuable youth.

"We would probably be more interested in free agents," Beane said. "Given we're going through a rebuilding process, the advantage with free agents is you don't have to give up a player for them."

A draft choice, either. The A's aren't interested in elite free agents or any who'd cost a compensatory draft pick (Type A free agents who were offered arbitration by their original teams).

Same with the Giants. GM Brian Sabean is focusing on "second-tier" free agents.

As to why the Giants aren't as aggressive as last winter, when they were quick to acquire free agents, Sabean said, "People learned from last year that letting things develop might be worthwhile. Also, we're further along and don't have as many holes. We know we have to upgrade the offense. Other teams, their acute need is pitching and aren't as good roster-wise in that area."

Indeed, both the Giants and A's have far better pitching than hitting, and bats will be the focus in Indianapolis.

The Giants need a catcher - to replace Bengie Molina and bridge to Buster Posey - a first baseman and possibly an outfielder. They're not ruling out an experienced reliever (a Howry re-signing perhaps), especially to provide bullpen depth in case prospect Madison Bumgarner is in the rotation.

Oakland's goal is to find a long-term answer at third base. Fox is a third baseman by trade, but the A's might also play him at first, in left and as a designated hitter. Brett Wallace might not be ready for the majors. Dallas McPherson has been shelved with injuries. Adam Kennedy is a free agent but not entirely out of the picture. Eric Chavez still is around.

That's a lot of options, but the A's remain in the market for a third baseman.

"We're trying to surround the position," joked Beane, adding, "If Chavez is healthy, he's the guy. But we have to prepare for him not to be. Even if he is healthy, we still need someone long term."

Beane is said to have inquired about Kansas City's Alex Gordon and Alberto Callaspo and the Angels' Brandon Wood, but none is considered trade bait for now.

Third base appears settled for the Giants after Sabeen said the organization envisions Pablo Sandoval there (and not at first) in 2010. With Posey waiting in the wings, Sabeen wants to find a catcher only for one year. Certain free agents - including Rod Barajas, Miguel Olivo and Yorvit Torrelaba - prefer more than one year, but their agents still plan to meet with the Giants in Indy.

"Absolutely," said Dan Lozano, who represents Barajas.

Martin Arburua, Olivo's agent, said he already spoke with the Giants and will chat again.

"There's mutual interest," he said. "Miguel definitely likes Bruce Bochy (who managed Olivo in San Diego in 2005) and would love to play in the Bay Area. He resides in Modesto. Miguel would take the best opportunity to play. I'm not sure if the Giants are it or not. We've talked to several teams."

'Moneyball' Starts

RACHEL LEE HARRIS, New York, Times, 12/6/09

Sony Pictures Entertainment's "Moneyball" is back in the game, with a new director, [Bennett Miller](#), in negotiations to take over, Variety reported. In July the studio abruptly canceled the true-life baseball story — based on Michael Lewis's 2003 book about the Oakland A's and their general manager, [Billy Beane](#) — rejecting a script from the movie's first director, [Steven Soderbergh](#), and dropping him from the project just days before beginning production. But with [Brad Pitt](#) still attached, and a screenplay by [Steven Zaillian](#) and [Aaron Sorkin](#), the film seems to be back on track. A budget and production dates have not been announced.

TV actor now a star at making money

[Kathleen Pender](#), San Francisco Chronicle. 12/6/09

Many celebrities have an easier time making money than managing it, Nicolas Cage being the latest in a long string of examples. That makes Wayne Rogers a bit of an oddity in Hollywood.

Rogers has been acting since the late 1950s, but is best known for his role as Trapper John on the hit TV series "MASH" from 1972 to 1975.

In real life, Rogers plays a successful investor and businessman. He has helped start up or turn around banks, a vineyard, a convenience-store chain and a barge company. He is active in real estate and is a director of public company Vishay Intertechnology.

He owns a tiny piece of the Oakland Athletics and is chairman of Kleinfeld Bridal, the New York shop featured on the reality show "Say Yes to the Dress." He is a regular panelist on "Cashin' In," a weekly business show on Fox News.

Rogers, 76, was in San Francisco last week to speak to a National Investor Relationship Institute conference. He said some celebrities run into financial troubles because "they make too much money too quickly and feel entitled."

Others "rely on a friend of a friend who made a lot of money with someone. They let somebody else do their due diligence," Rogers said in an interview.

Rogers says he "does not use advisers per se. I do a lot of my own due diligence. If someone else does it, I ask a lot of questions: Where did you get this information? Who gave it to you? What were the circumstances? Have you verified it?"

Rogers lives in Destin, Fla., and has an office in Los Angeles, where he has people who help him crunch the numbers.

One key to his success is picking the right partners. "I was involved with bright people, innovative people, honest people, people who weren't looking for an edge," he says.

The home run

One of those people is Lew Wolff, a prominent real estate developer, hotel owner and managing partner of the Oakland A's. The two became friends when Wolff was head of real estate for 20th Century Fox and had a bungalow on the lot where Rogers was taping "MASH."

Wolff says Rogers, who majored in history at Princeton, "could memorize his lines in about 10 minutes" and during his ample free time would visit Wolff.

"We would talk about movies, business, everything," Wolff says.

Rogers and Wolff were part of a group that co-founded Plaza Bank of Commerce in San Jose, which they sold to Comerica in 1991. "That was a major home run," Rogers says.

Wolff says when he and a group of investors bought the A's, he gave Rogers "a very small piece," mostly for fun.

He calls Rogers a "very high-energy person" and "an astute businessman. If you have a project in trouble, he'll do whatever it takes to correct the situation. He doesn't run and hide or point the finger."

Thanks to his acting, "about 100 million people know who he is. That helps sometimes in his business dealings. He has access," Wolff says.

Say yes to distress

Although he has started some companies, Rogers likes to invest in distressed situations on the cheap. "I'm a thief," he says.

"When we bought Kleinfeld's in 1999, there was a brand but there wasn't a business," he says.

Rogers got into Kleinfeld's through another partner, Ronnie Rothstein, and his partner Mara Urshel, a former senior vice president at Saks.

The company that owned Kleinfeld's debt hired Urshel as a consultant. "After a month, she said, 'Get hold of Wayne and let's buy this business,' " he says. "I looked at the numbers. It was a disaster from that point of view. But she knew the name was valuable."

The new owners assumed some of Kleinfeld's liabilities and put in a small amount of cash, which they recouped when they discovered credit card charges that had never been submitted for payment.

Another valuable asset "was the demographic information we get when a bride makes an appointment. We said, 'How can we monetize that?' " Rogers says.

One way was getting into the honeymoon business. Later this month, the store will begin selling men's formal wear and suits.

The new owners moved the flagship store from Brooklyn to New York and opened boutiques in leading bridal shops in four other cities.

Rogers won't say what the company is worth, but a year and a half ago, someone offered to buy it for seven times their investment to date.

Reality spin-off

Rogers says they are also considering spin-offs of their reality show, which runs on cable network TLC. It features brides-to-be shopping for a gown at Kleinfeld with friends and family.

One spin-off would follow the future bride as she plans the reception menu and gets to know her mother-in-law. Another would feature brides trying to lose weight before the big day.

"Why is any of this of interest?" Rogers asks. "I don't know. It's not the dress. It's the people. It's a soap opera."

Even though he's an actor, Rogers says he's "not opposed to reality TV. It's all about making money. If it enhances our brand," he's for it.

Urshel says Rogers helps out on the operational side of things and Kleinfeld benefits from his diverse business experience. "Without him we could not go as far as we have," she says.

Banks and real estate

Looking ahead, Rogers says he sees opportunities in failed banks and real estate.

His bio says he has invested in real estate in California, Arizona and Florida - the triumvirate of property disasters.

Asked if he had lost money on these deals, he said, "Not yet. We own a shopping center in Temecula that is occupied and making money. In Florida I am doing a 500-home subdivision, just north of Eglin Air Force Base." He says the property is worth more than he paid three or four years ago.

In New Mexico and Arizona, he invested in raw land, developed homes, sold them and still owns some of the property.

Politically, Rogers considers himself a "Jeffersonian democrat. The best government is the least government," he says. "In some areas, I'm libertarian. I don't subscribe to any one party, they are all bad."

Although he's staunchly against regulation, Rogers testified in Congress against the repeal of Glass-Steagall, the law passed in 1933 that kept banks out of the securities business.

Because bank deposits are insured "it's a proper area to be regulated," he says. Rogers blames the recent financial crisis largely on the repeal of Glass-Steagall in 1999.

Zito was anchor of A's great pitching staff

Nick Peters, Sacramento Bee 12/6/09

It must be a mystery to Giants fans how Barry Zito never endured a losing season in seven years across the bay. And it might startle them that the left-hander's durability and consistency makes him The Bee's A's Player of the Decade.

Why? Simply because he averaged 14.6 victories a year as the heart of a rotation that pitched Oakland to four consecutive postseasons at the start of this century.

Zito's durability enabled him to make 222 consecutive starts for the A's, winning 102 of those. His 63 losses gave him a .618 winning percentage along with a solid 3.55 ERA.

He reached his peak at age 24 in 2002 by becoming the youngest Cy Young Award winner since Roger Clemens in 1986. Zito did it with a 23-5 record and a 2.75 ERA, finishing ahead of Boston's Pedro Martínez and Derek Lowe with 17 first-place votes, six more than Martínez.

That stellar season included two streaks in which he was virtually untouchable – a 2-1 interleague victory over the Giants made him 8-0 with a 2.03 ERA in a span of nine starts, and he ended the regular season with a win over Texas, his eighth in a row for a league-leading 23 victories.

Zito accepted the award in his typical humble and laid-back style, respectful of the ace he beat for the prize, telling reporters at a news conference: "I don't consider myself as beating him out. A guy like that can't be beat – he's almost immortal."

A Las Vegas native, Zito gained prominence as a prep at San Diego's University High and continued his pitching success at USC before the A's drafted the lanky 6-foot-4 left-hander in the first round. He learned the rudiments of his craft from former Padres Cy Young winner Randy Jones as a San Diego youth.

"I remember vividly the five years we spent in the backyard with Randy," Zito recalled. "When I did something incorrectly, he'd spit tobacco juice on my shoes – brand new high tops I could barely afford, he's spitting tobacco juice on them, saying, 'Do it right, lefty.'"

Those five years of \$50 lessons paid dividends and served as an inspiration because Jones displayed the Cy Young Award in his home for the eager teen to see.

"I didn't know too much about what the Cy Young Award was, but I knew he'd won it and it was in his living room," Zito said. "I'd look at it every day and marvel at it."

Jones returned the praise, telling reporters: "He wanted to be a complete pitcher and had the work ethic to do it. I saw the real desire in his eyes, and I could relate to that. Barry was just a real joy to work with."

Zito became the fifth Oakland pitcher to win the prestigious award, joining Vida Blue (1971), Catfish Hunter (1974), Bob Welch (1990) and Dennis Eckersley (1992).

Blessed with a solid work ethic, and a conditioning regimen that included an unconventional stretching routine, yoga and mountain biking, Zito has never been on the disabled list. He keeps his mind sharp with an appetite for reading, and relaxes by playing his guitar and surfing.

But it was his sweeping curve that launched his pitching prowess after the A's made him the ninth pick in the first round in 1999. Zito signed a pro contract on June 12 and was in the low minors 10 days later, immediately showing flashes of brilliance.

Zito was even better as a major league rookie, posting a 7-4 record and a 2.72 ERA in 14 starts.

His first full year in the bigs produced a 17-8 record and a 3.49 ERA. He spiced his American League success with three All-Star appearances and a 4-2 record and a 2.43 ERA in six American League Division Series starts.

Zito was overshadowed by teammates Tim Hudson and Mark Mulder for awhile but bounced back in 2006 – impeccable timing for a free agent, especially one with agent Scott Boras, who was aware his client's 208 starts since 2001 were the most in baseball.

The Giants wanted a star to eventually replace Barry Bonds, and they opened the vault and outbid the Mets, Rangers and Mariners with the biggest contract ever given to a pitcher or by the club – seven years and \$126 million.

It wasn't a difficult decision to cross the Bay Bridge. Zito embraced the San Francisco lifestyle, but he also realized the lucrative contract was accompanied by high expectations. His 31-43 record and 4.56 ERA in three years as a Giant confirm that they haven't been met.

Prospects may be up sooner than later

Promising bats may make bigs in 2010 youth movement

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- In the midst of a full-blown rebuilding of their big league club, the A's are going young more than ever before.

The franchise has always prided itself on procuring and developing top-tier young talent, and the 2009 season brought with it more examples of the farm system's success in that regard.

Closer Andrew Bailey, a sixth-round pick in the 2006 First-Year Player Draft, was named the American League Rookie of the Year after racking up 26 saves, including 20 in a row to end the season.

Left-hander Brett Anderson, acquired in a 2007 trade with the D-backs, emerged as one of the top young starters in the AL. He won 11 games, set an Oakland rookie record with 150 strikeouts and picked up a few points in the ROY voting.

Joining Anderson as regulars in the A's rotation were fellow 21-year-old Trevor Cahill, a second-rounder in the 2006 First-Year Player Draft; 22-year-old righty Vin Mazzaro, a third-rounder in 2005; and 23-year-old Gio Gonzalez, acquired in a 2008 trade with the White Sox.

Perhaps the best of Oakland's young starters, however, was lefty Josh Outman, who was 24 years old and 4-1 with a 3.48 ERA in 14 games when his season ended with an elbow injury that required Tommy John elbow ligament replacement surgery. Outman was picked up in a 2008 trade with the Phillies.

Several other rookie pitchers made it to the big leagues for the A's in 2009, suggesting a rosy future on the mound. Now attention turns to the offensive prospects, two of whom are expected to make their Major League debuts in '10 at positions of great need.

Here's a look at those two, as well as two more that should be on the radar of Oakland fans looking forward to the next phase of the rebuild.

Chris Carter: Carter was named the organization's player of the year for the second consecutive season after turning the Texas League into his personal playground while earning its Player of the Year Award as a first baseman/outfielder for the Double-A Midland RockHounds. Blessed with prodigious power from the right side of the plate, Carter will be in big league camp this spring and has an outside shot at making the team. More likely, he'll open the year at Triple-A Sacramento, and if he gets off to a hot start there, he'll be in Oakland early in the season.

Acquired in the same trade as was Anderson, Carter is a defensive "work in progress," according to Oakland director of player development Keith Lieppman. He played 105 games at first base for Midland and nine in left field, but Lieppman suggested that Carter might split time between those positions at Spring Training.

"Offensively, he's kind of where Travis Buck was heading into Spring Training in 2007, and Travis had a great spring and made the team," Lieppman said. "Defensively, he's kind of where Daric Barton was before he took off as a really solid defensive first baseman, but he's got enough speed and a good arm, so we'll take a look at him in left field, too. ... Where we are as a team, if we're really going young, I'd expect Chris to be [in the big leagues] at some point next year."

Brett Wallace: Acquired in the Matt Holliday trade with the Cardinals in July, Wallace was assigned to Sacramento and quickly proved that the hype surrounding his offensive skills was justified. He batted .302 with nine home runs, 28 RBIs and a .365 on-base percentage in 44 games.

"He's spent more time in Triple-A than Chris, so he's ahead of him in that respect," Lieppman said. "But I'd put him in that same category, where he's similar to where Buck was in '07."

Questions abound regarding Wallace's defensive prowess at third base, prompting speculation that he'll eventually end up at first base, but Lieppman suggests that Wallace is better on defense than people who haven't seen much of him think.

"He's a little bit unorthodox in his actions and his throwing, but he gets the job done," Lieppman said. "And the important thing is that he *wants* to stay at third base. Growing up, [former A's third baseman] Carney Lansford was his guy, and he's committed to being a good third baseman. So that's where we're going to keep him this spring, and we'll kind of go from there. But I'd say he's probably going to be in the big leagues at some point this year, too."

Grant Desme: Way under the radar entering the 2009 season because he'd missed most of the previous two years with injuries, Desme opened a lot of eyes in the organization while splitting the year between Class A Stockton and Midland, batting a combined .288 with 31 homers, 89 RBIs, a .365 OBP and 40 stolen bases.

That was nothing, though, compared to the splash he made in the prestigious Arizona Fall League, where he batted .315 with a league-high 11 homers, 27 RBIs and a .413 OBP in 27 games to earn MVP honors.

An outfielder with good speed, Desme, a second-rounder in 2007, likely will be rewarded with an invitation to big league camp, but will probably open the season at Midland.

"That jump to Double-A is a big one," Lieppman said. "The Texas League only has eight teams in it, and it's fairly sophisticated in terms of advance scouting. You see every team quite a bit, and if you have a weakness they'll absolutely pound you on it. You're forced to constantly adjust or they'll eat you up."

"There's a lot of good things happening with him right now. At this stage, he looks like the complete package."

Grant Green: Oakland's first-round pick in the 2009 First-Year Player Draft, Green is the shortstop of the future. He'll be in big league camp as part of his contract, but with only five Minor League games under his belt, he's not going to be in Oakland any time soon.

"He's a fairly polished guy, coming out of a big-time college program," Lieppman said of the UCS product. "But as little as he played at Stockton, he probably won't be in [big league] camp too long. Obviously we're high on Grant, but like anyone less than a year after being drafted, he's got some things to learn and work on. We'll probably start him at Stockton again and see how he does there."

A's players go shopping with kids

Davis and Ziegler help underprivileged enjoy Christmas

By Jane Lee / MLB.com 12/5/09

PLEASANTON, Calif. -- The prospect of shopping with 10 kids, each armed with a wish list and \$250 -- not to mention an endless supply of energy -- seems somewhat daunting, and rightfully so.

Enter A's mascot Stomper into the picture, and images of complete chaos continue to develop.

But bring in Rajai Davis and Brad Ziegler -- guys all too familiar with facing clutch situations -- and the idea doesn't seem too crazy after all.

Such was the scene Friday at Stroneridge Shopping Center, where the two A's players treated five boys and five girls from the Henry Robinson Multi-Service Center to a special shopping event.

The center, a transitional housing program in Oakland that serves 54 homeless families, handpicked 10 kids (out of 71) based on grades, behavior and needs, to play hooky from school for a day and purchase items of their choice off their Santa wish lists, while being escorted by Davis and Ziegler.

Each child, aged 7-13, received a \$200 gift card to the mall to help fulfill their Christmas wishes. In addition, a \$50 gift card was also awarded to purchase items for a family member or friend.

The task proved more than successful -- and in more ways than one. Just ask 12-year-old Kevon Thomas, who not only walked away with a shiny new silver iPod shuffle and a red and black skateboard -- to match his shirt, of course -- but also a new friend in Davis.

"I've met other athletes, but Raj is different," Thomas said while looking for a video game for his brother. "He's fun to talk to. And even though he's an athlete and has a lot of money, you can't tell because he's just normal and cool."

That's exactly what the A's outfielder likes to hear.

"The thing that separates the people that watch professional baseball and the players is that line where you really don't get to know them," Davis said. "You just look at athletes like they're something else when they're just like you. They were born from a mother just like you, and they've got families too."

At the same time, Davis is well aware that most of the kids he met Friday come from broken homes and are a little too familiar with poverty -- all the more reason to aid in their Christmas memories.

"One little thing like this could change a kid's life," he said. "Something simple as spending some time with them, you never know what people nowadays are going through. Things like this are encouraging for the kids."

At the end of the day, Dee Johnson says that's the goal of the Lend A Hand Foundation, which aims to offer youth in transition the opportunity to experience educational, sporting and cultural activities not otherwise available to them. The organization, which started with fish fry sales back in the day and is now writing grants, is responsible for teaming up with the shelter and the A's organization to make Friday's event possible.

"This is such a blessing," said Johnson, the foundation's founder and executive director. "I know what it's like not to have. I grew up not having, so that's why I'm so passionate about it. This is just so wonderful and such a great experience."

"I just took one of the girls to Nordstrom, and she was just so excited. She's so happy. She has a coat, a top and pants, and she's going back to get some shoes. And that is just so important for a girl who doesn't get much."

Ziegler, who is taking part in multiple community events as a tag-team effort with Davis this week, experienced just as much satisfaction with his time spent aiding the kids.

"I'm honored to be able to give back a little bit," the Oakland pitcher said. "When the A's asked me to do something like that, how can you say no?"

"It seemed like the kids were able to fill up their lists pretty well and get the stuff they wanted. They had fun with it, so it seemed like they were enjoying themselves and were happy with what they bought. And that's the most important thing -- just trying to help these kids have a great Christmas."

After more than an hour spent wandering in and out of stores, 7-year-old Tariq Ford began complaining of sore feet before realizing a visit with Santa and lunch at P.F. Changs waited for him and his friends to complete their unforgettable day.

"This is my best Christmas memory," the shy Ford said with a smile as he tried to hold a skateboard larger than himself. "I had a lot of fun today."

Said Ziegler: "To me, the idea of getting to go shopping with a Major League baseball player is awesome. If I had gotten to do that as a kid, that would have been the coolest thing ever. That's definitely why I wanted to be a part of this. I hope they're as excited as we are to do something like this."

That much was true based on the constant grins, as well as the regular peeks inside bags of new toys, clothes and gifts for mom and dad.

"I know one of the top things I wanted when I was their age was a Gameboy," Davis said. "I was looking for baseball games. These kids are looking for football. It seems like they're on that same path I was."

And while Johnson couldn't be happier watching wishes come true for these underprivileged kids, she often is left wondering when her own will come true.

"I wish that others would reach out," she said. "I feel that there are so many athletic organizations around here, and if each one of them would reach out, I just don't see us having homeless people. If each player was to give just \$1,000 a year, that could really make a big difference in someone's life. That's what I wish for."

A's continue to stockpile young talent

Oakland able to sign first eight picks from '09 Draft class

By Lisa Winston / MLB.com 12/5/09

With the 2009 season and Arizona Fall League (where several 2009 Draftees got their first taste of pro ball) in the books, we take a look at the early results of each club's '09 Draft class: how their top picks did; late-round picks that fared well; which picks are likely to move up the ladder quickest; and which picks clubs were unable to sign.

With an organization that saw some high-impact performances from its big league rookies in 2009, most notably American League Rookie of the Year Andrew Bailey, the Athletics continued to add to the cache of polished talent as they signed eight of their top nine picks, six of whom were college players.

Overall, Oakland signed 29 out of its 49 picks (it lost its second-round pick in exchange for the signing of free-agent infielder Orlando Cabrera) and focused on polished premium position players, with three of its first four signings coming in the forms of a top collegiate shortstop in Southern California star Grant Green and a pair of high-upside catchers in California prep star Max Stassi (fourth round) and Oregon State's Ryan Ortiz (sixth round).

Top five picks

1. Grant Green, SS: One of the top shortstops coming into the 2009 season, there are those who felt he had an inconsistent campaign at USC as a junior, but if hitting .374 is inconsistent, Oakland will take it. He hit .390 as a sophomore and impressed on the Cape as well by batting .348 with a wood bat. He has plus speed and great instincts in the middle infield. Taken with the 13th pick, he signed late and will make his pro debut in 2010.

3. Justin Marks, LHP: The Louisville product signed late and then, once he got on the mound, suffered a groin pull in his first start that ended his season having given up six runs without getting an out. He'll get that ERA down to something printable in 2010. At Louisville, he was 11-3 with a 3.77 in his Draft year.

4. Max Stassi, C: The loss of a second-round pick was certainly made less painful by the signing of Stassi, one of the premier two-way catching prospects in the Draft. Signed for first-round bonus money at the deadline to keep him from heading to UCLA, a commitment that many thought was engraved in stone enough to let him fall to the fourth round, the third-generation pro catcher whose dad and grandfather played in the Minors and great-uncle was a teammate of Babe Ruth is an all-around player with all the tools on both sides. He has power potential and a live bat and his defensive is

outstanding. The A's were also especially impressed with his leadership at instructional league despite his young age. In his brief pro debut he hit .280 in 14 games at short-season Vancouver.

5. Steve Parker, 3B: Drafted out of Brigham Young University, the left-handed hitter combined to bat .243 with five homers and 41 RBIs between the Arizona League and Class A Kane County and he could be a quick mover at one of the few positions where the A's lack depth.

6. Ryan Ortiz, C: One of two catchers taken with their first five picks, the Oregon State backstop was an All-Pac-10 selection this year and hit .358 with four homers, 24 RBIs and 12 doubles in his pro debut at Vancouver.

Best of the rest

Like Stassi, the Athletics gambled on a guy they weren't sure they could sign and won with left-hander **Ian Krol** (seventh round). The Illinois high-school hurler, who went 9-1 with an 0.94 ERA and three no-hitters as a junior, did not pitch his senior year due to a school suspension. But the A's did due diligence on the young man with the sinking fastball and lively repertoire that includes a plus curve and potential plus changeup and were happy to bring him into the fold. They signed him away from Arizona. Outfielder **Myrio Richard** (ninth round), out of Prairie View A&M, already has some Oakland ties in his older brother, speedy shortstop Michael "Runway" Richard, who was at advanced Class A Stockton. Richard, the SWAC Player of the Year as a sophomore, is an agile defensive whiz with speed and upside. He hit .259 with 22 RBIs between the Arizona League and Vancouver. Right-hander **Connor Hoehn** (12th round) moved into the closer role at Vancouver when **Paul Smyth** was promoted, and went 7-for-7 in save opportunities with a 1.00 ERA. Drafted out of junior college in Florida, his eventual role will probably be as a starter, but for now the converted outfielder limited hitters to a .153 average in 20 innings. The A's got some production from a pair of late-round Kansas-based tornadoes. Second baseman/outfielder **Conner Crumbliss** (28th round), all 5-foot-8 of him, combined for speed and a live bat playing at both positions, which kept him busy during infield practice. He hit .290 with 28 RBIs and 13 steals between Vancouver and Kane County after coming out of Emporia State, and had a .427 on-base average thanks to 60 walks in 71 games. Try to find a 2009 draftee who had a better year than right-hander Smyth (35th round). You won't. The Kansas closer combined between Vancouver and Kane County to pitch 36 1/3 scoreless innings, scattering 14 hits and walking four while striking out 44 for a .115 average against. A senior sign, the 22-year-old collected nine saves.

Fast risers

Collegiate high picks such as Green, Marks and Ryan Ortiz could move up quickly, as could polished prep catcher Stassi, despite his youth. Also keep an eye on later-round pitchers such as Hoehn and Smyth.

Unsigned

Right-hander **Sam Dyson** (10th round), out of South Carolina, had an inconsistent season as a sophomore-eligible draftee, as past shoulder problems may have contributed to both his 5.21 ERA and the inability to come to terms with the A's so he'll look to rebound and return in 2010. Right-hander **Drew Gagnier** (14th round), out of Oregon, will return to school for his senior season. Outfielder **Pat Stover** (17th round), a high school prospect from California, will play his college ball at UC Santa Clara.

Cust could be odd-man out in A's DH search

By Carl Steward, Bay Area News Group, 12/6/09

Oakland's deal for jack-of-all-trades hitter Jake Fox in advance of the winter meetings probably wasn't good news for another Jack — slugging designated hitter Jack Cust.

If the A's do nothing else in Indianapolis this week, they will be making a decision on Cust, their leading home run hitter the past three seasons.

Most signs point to their not tendering an arbitration offer to Cust before Saturday's deadline, meaning the A's wouldn't get draft compensation if he signed elsewhere.

Cust, who'll turn 31 on Jan. 16, made \$2.8 million in his first arbitration year last season and figures to command between \$4-5 million in 2010, even though his production numbers slipped slightly in 2009 (27 homers, 70 RBI, 185 strikeouts).

While it might seem strange the power-starved A's would part with Cust, they have myriad options that might not require such a sizable investment.

What's more, the A's still have a shot at trading Cust this week instead of nontendering him. The New York Mets and Seattle Mariners reportedly might be interested.

A's general manager Billy Beane wouldn't tip his hand on Cust last week.

"We've still got some time to decide, and that's certainly a matter of in-house conversation right now," Beane said. "The decision has yet to be made on Jack, and no doubt, it's one of the bigger ones we have to make in the next week or so."

But the acquisition of the right-handed-hitting Fox, who hit 11 homers with 44 RBI in 82 games for the Chicago Cubs in 2009, might mean that the A's diversify the DH role in 2010. Fox can play third and first base as well as the outfield, but he could also receive a fair share of at-bats at DH, particularly if Eric Chavez is healthy enough to contribute.

Health reports are good on Chavez, who has been troubled by injuries in recent years and last June underwent a second microdiscectomy on his back that forced him to miss the balance of the 2009 season. The A's aren't counting on him being the everyday third baseman, but he could split time between third and DH with Fox.

Other possibilities at third are top prospect Brett Wallace and former Angels third baseman Dallas McPherson, who was signed to a minor league deal. Still, Beane said the A's will look to add another option at third base.

"Eric's feeling great," Beane said. "But for us to go into spring training and just hope that he's going to be OK — one, that's probably not a great strategy for 2010, and two, ultimately it's obviously a position we're going to have to fill long-term even when Eric is gone."

Chavez is entering the final year of a six-year, \$66 million contract.

Beane said he would prefer to find another young player in addition to Fox who could man third base for an extended period as opposed to a one-year stopgap such as Adam Kennedy, who performed well last year. Kennedy may yet be an option to re-sign in 2010, but that's not the priority.

"In a perfect world, Eric comes back and has a great year, and Brett continues to work at the position," Beane said. "But we have to cover all sides."

A season after several young pitchers established themselves at the major league level, the A's might see a wave of position players do the same this year, led by Wallace and first basemen Chris Carter and Sean Doolittle.

Carter, the A's best power prospect, and Doolittle will get a trial in the outfield in spring training. If either or both makes the club, that could affect the DH spot, with Daric Barton also still in the running at first base.

Beane indicated that the A's are more likely to sign a free agent during the winter meetings than make a trade. He said he routinely fields calls from other clubs asking about young players such as Brett Anderson, Trevor Cahill, Gio Gonzalez, Ryan Sweeney and others, but that the A's aren't inclined to mess with their nucleus.

Power, veteran pitching areas of need

Thursday's deal with Cubs gives A's more infield stability

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

Club needs:

Power on the corners: The A's had a pronounced lack of pop in 2009, so they're surely on the lookout for hitters capable of regularly driving the ball out of the spacious confines of Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum. Ideally, such hitters would be able to man one of the four corner defensive positions. Penciled in for now at left field is Scott Hairston, with Daric Barton the top established option at first base and still-rehabbing Eric Chavez (back surgery) a question mark at best at third base. The A's acquired Jake Fox on Thursday from the Cubs, who may challenge Chavez for a full-time role. Chavez's recent injury history may have led to the move.

Veteran starting pitcher: This isn't a pressing need, given the team's wealth of young rotation talent, but only left-hander Brett Anderson and righty Trevor Cahill -- both 21-year-old rookies in 2009 -- are absolute locks for 2010. Thus, the A's have expressed interest in re-signing righty Justin Duchscherer, a 32-year-old free agent who missed all of last season with various injuries and a bout with clinical depression. A two-time All-Star, Duchscherer is getting plenty of attention on the

free market, so Oakland might have to lower its sights a bit and take a flier on someone like free-agent lefty Mark Mulder, who is finally healthy after years of shoulder problems but hasn't yet committed to making a comeback.

Infield depth: If free-agent Adam Kennedy doesn't re-sign, the A's will be losing a versatile and valuable veteran jack-of-all-trades. That would create the need for someone capable of not only stepping in for veteran second baseman Mark Ellis and unproven second-year shortstop Cliff Pennington, but also able to handle the hot corner for extended stretches, as did Kennedy in 2009. Along with Fox, the A's also acquired Aaron Miles, who could serve in a utility role.

Whom they can or need to trade:

C Landon Powell: A rookie backup to starter Kurt Suzuki last season, Powell provided solid power production in limited playing time and appears only to need regular playing time to blossom. Suzuki, 26, isn't going anywhere and plays virtually every day, and because the A's have some organizational depth at the position, they might consider moving Powell, a solid defensive player with a lengthy injury history, in exchange for a big league-ready prospect at one of their positions of need.

OF Travis Buck: Heading into the 2008 season, Buck was cast as one of the young faces of the rebuilding franchise, a charismatic doubles machine with upside galore. Two disappointing, injury riddled seasons later, Buck, now 26, seems to have fallen out of favor. Scouts are unsure if he's the type of dynamic everyday player the A's once figured he'd develop into, but the Mariners -- manager Don Wakamatsu and bench coach Ty Van Burkleo are former A's coaches high on Buck -- are among the teams that have expressed interest.

LHP Gio Gonzalez: Armed with a devastating curveball and impressive Minor League statistics, Gonzalez has been quite the tease in Oakland. In part because of what Gonzalez himself admits is a "composure" problem, he's been inconsistent in several opportunities at the big league level. When he's on, though, he's the kind of southpaw that makes GMs drool, and the A's have plenty of young starters to weather the loss of Gonzalez.

OF Scott Hairston: Acquired in a midseason trade with the Padres, Hairston struggled with injuries and was largely unproductive with the A's. He was enjoying a breakout season of sorts in San Diego, proving to be worthy of an everyday job, but the A's seem set in center field (Rajai Davis) and right field (Ryan Sweeney) and will look to move Hairston if they decide to go with Buck or a prospect in left field.

RHP Brad Ziegler: A rookie sensation in 2008, Ziegler was projected as the team's co-closer in '09 but got sick during Spring Training and struggled early before losing his role to 2009 American League Rookie of the Year Andrew Bailey, who saved 26 games. Ziegler posted solid numbers and is Oakland's best groundball reliever, but Michael Wuertz emerged as the top righty setup man, and with the re-signing of Joey Devine, who missed the '09 season after undergoing Tommy John elbow ligament replacement surgery, Ziegler could be expendable.

Top prospects:

3B Brett Wallace, 1B/OF Chris Carter, SS Grant Green, 2B Jemile Weeks, 2B Adrian Cardenas, LHP Brad Kilby, RHP Fautino De Los Santos, RHP Henry Rodriguez, UTL Eric Patterson: The A's are committed to rebuilding with youth, so they'll be reluctant to deal away top prospects. OF Aaron Cunningham and 1B Tommy Everidge are in the second-tier, a little older with less upside, and could be used to sweeten various potential trade packages.

Big contracts they might unload:

None: Chavez, due a reported \$12 million in 2010, is virtually untradeable, and the only other player on the roster set to make more big money is Ellis (\$5.5), a Gold-Glove quality defender and widely respected clubhouse leader.

Arbitration-eligible in 2011: Wuertz, Devine, Davis, Hairston, Jack Cust, Santiago Casilla.

Non-tender candidates: Casilla.

Payroll summation: The A's, who opened last season with a payroll of about \$62 million, have nearly \$19 million tied up in guaranteed contracts for Chavez, Ellis and released slugger Jason Giambi for next season. The rest of their contracts, factoring in arbitration raises and any free-agent or trade acquisitions, likely won't push the payroll higher than it was for 2009.