

A's News Clips, Thursday, December 10, 2009

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City officials working with MLB task force for new home

By Alden Gonzalez / MLB.com 12/10/09

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Oakland A's release Santiago Casilla; select reliever Bobby Cassevah in Rule 5 draft

By Joe Stiglich, Bay Area News Group blog, 12/10/09

The A's selected right-hander Bobby Cassevah, a reliever from the Los Angeles Angels' organization, in this morning's Rule 5 draft that concluded the winter meetings. To make room on their 40-man roster, they released reliever Santiago Casilla, a member of the bullpen off and on since 2004.

The A's will send \$50,000 to the Angels for Cassevah's rights. Cassevah, 24, must remain on Oakland's 25-man roster for the entire 2010 season or be offered back to the Angels for \$25,000.

"We felt like he had a good shot to come in and compete in our bullpen," assistant GM David Forst said. "He had a phenomenal year in the Texas League, a 4-to-1 ground-ball ratio, and he's given up six homers in his entire minor league career."

The A's didn't have any of their prospects chosen in the draft ...

Oakland officials push to keep A's

By Kelly Rayburn_Oakland Tribune 12/10/09

Officials today will unveil as many as four sites where they believe a new ballpark for the Oakland A's can be built, as city leaders and team supporters aim to keep the club in Oakland.

The move comes as A's co-owner Lew Wolff is signaling his hopes to move the team to San Jose and after saying repeatedly the team has "exhausted" its time and resources in Oakland.

Oakland officials have been working with a Major League Baseball task force established by Commissioner Bud Selig to determine whether there are viable options in the city. The task force was created after the A's plans to move to Fremont fell apart.

"The general message is we are really working hard to keep the A's in Oakland," said City Council President Jane Brunner. "We've had some very successful meetings with the task force the commissioner set up."

Sources said the sites to be unveiled could include: Third and Oak streets, in the Jack London Square area near Interstate 880; an area near the intersection of Jefferson Street and Embarcadero West, also in the Jack London Square area; the Howard Terminal at the Port of Oakland; and possibly the current Coliseum site.

The first two locations have not been studied previously by the A's, sources said. City officials and others supportive of keeping the A's in Oakland see the potential for a new ballpark — particularly one with relative proximity to the water — to be a force for economic development.

Team officials did not return calls seeking comment Wednesday.

In a recent interview, Wolff said, "We spent three solid years trying to (look) in Oakland. There are some people who think we didn't do anything.

"If you sat down with me (to examine) the details with the effort in Oakland, it takes me about an hour and 45 minutes to go through my notes."

One major hurdle the team would have to clear before moving to San Jose is the San Francisco Giants' claim to territorial rights to all of Santa Clara County. Baseball, therefore, would have to clear the way for the A's to move to San Jose — a prospect the Giants oppose.

Mayor Ron Dellums is scheduled to participate in the news conference. His office would not discuss the sites.

"We're set to make an announcement (today), and we'll reserve comment until then," said Dellums spokesman Paul Rose.

Trades warm up winter meetings

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle, 12/10/09

The winter meetings in Indianapolis heated up Wednesday, with Milwaukee landing pitchers Randy Wolf and LaTroy Hawkins, Baltimore acquiring Kevin Millwood in a trade with Texas and the Yankees completing the three-team, seven-player swap that brought them All-Star center fielder Curtis Granderson.

New York also re-signed postseason star Andy Pettitte, Houston picked up reliever Matt Lindstrom from the Marlins and multiple reports said right-hander Rich Harden and the Rangers have reached a preliminary agreement on a one-year contract worth about \$7.5 million.

In the Granderson deal, Detroit obtained lefty reliever Phil Coke and outfield prospect Austin Jackson from the Yankees, plus touted young pitchers Max Scherzer and Daniel Schlereth from Arizona. The Diamondbacks got right-hander Edwin Jackson from Detroit and right-hander Ian Kennedy from New York.

In the Millwood deal, Baltimore will receive about \$3 million from Texas, along with the right-hander, who is due \$12 million next season. The Rangers get a player to be named.

Milwaukee agreed to a \$29.75 million, three-year contract with Wolf and a \$7.5 million, two-year deal with Hawkins.

Pettitte got an \$11.75 million, one-year contract. The 37-year-old left-hander was 14-8 with a 4.16 ERA in 32 regular-season starts and 4-0 with a 3.52 ERA in five postseason starts.

Giants: Agent Scott Boras said third baseman Adrian Beltre is a good fit for the Giants, but general manager Brian Sabean said, "Not at this time." ... Sabean said he has one or two center-field "what-ifs," and one is Scott Podsednik ... After hearing Boras' comments about the Giants, their need for offense and their revenue stream, Sabean suggested on "Chronicle Live" that the agent ought to buy his own team.

- John Shea

A's: GM Billy Beane left Indy but expected to continue his pursuit of finding more offense. He said he's still unwilling to trade prized youth. "We haven't been overly aggressive. That just causes teams to ask for players we wouldn't give up," Beane said.

A's pluck right-hander in Rule 5 Draft

Cassevah has chance to make club out of Spring Training

By Tom Singer / MLB.com

INDIANAPOLIS -- The Rule 5 Draft on Thursday morning finally gave the A's a chance to make a "trade" prior to leaving the site of baseball's Winter Meetings.

With the No. 10 pick in the Major League phase of the Draft, Oakland plucked right-hander Bobby Cassevah off the Triple-A roster of the Angels.

To make room for Cassevah on their 40-man roster, previously full, the A's designated for assignment right-hander Santiago Casilla, who had been one of their five candidates to not receive a contract offer by Saturday night's tender deadline.

A 34th-round pick by the Angels in the 2004 First-Year Player Draft, the 24-year-old Cassevah impressed Oakland scouts who tracked him last season, his first at the Double-A level.

With Arkansas of the Texas League, Cassevah had a 3.68 ERA in 57 appearances, finishing 27 of them.

A's scout Randy Johnson, after seeing Cassevah in July, called his sinker one of the best he had ever seen.

Cassevah will be in the A's Spring Training camp, with a chance to earn a seat in manager Bob Geren's bullpen.

According to rules of the Rule 5 process, the A's, who spent \$50,000 on the pick, must keep Cassevah on their 25-man roster for the duration of the 2010 season. Otherwise, he would be offered back to the Angels for \$25,000.

Like the 16 other teams making a pick in the opening round of the Major League phase of the Draft, the A's passed in Round Two.

Oakland also made a pick in the Draft's Triple-A phase, choosing right-hander Beau Vaughan off the Double-A Frisco roster of the Rangers.

Originally a third-round Boston pick in the 2003 First-Year Player Draft out of Arizona State University, Vaughan went 7-2 with a 3.77 ERA in 46 relief appearances between Double-A and Triple-A last season.

The A's did not have any of their own players among the total of 42 taken in the Rule 5 Draft's three phases, including the Double-A phase which generated a total of only four picks.

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Beane exits Indy with business to be done

Oakland GM leaves Meetings, ready for 'productive work'

By Tom Singer / MLB.com

INDIANAPOLIS -- It was cold outside the headquarters hotel of a true Winter Meetings, mid-20s and dropping.

It wasn't much warmer inside the Marriott Hotel for Oakland's Billy Beane, one of the general managers whose quest for improvement was put on ice.

In Beane's case, past is the correct tense. The 2009 Winter Meetings have a half-day to go, but not for Beane. He departed the premises late Wednesday afternoon, empty-handed but, rather than disappointed, finally ready to get to serious work.

"You really do more productive work when you get back home, and can get on the phone away from the distractions," Beane said.

The next few days certainly will be busier for the A's than were the last three.

Their name could come up in Thursday morning's Rule 5 Draft, even though their representatives will go into it with a full 40-man roster and players selected in the process must immediately be placed on that list.

"But we're always on the lookout -- it's just another opportunity, and we can always create [roster] space," Beane said.

Two days later, and more relevantly, arrives the deadline for clubs to tender contracts to players under their control, an important development for those with between three and six years of service. That is, those eligible for arbitration but not free agency.

Of the five Oakland players who fall into that category, Jack Cust is most precariously on the bubble. He earned \$2.8 million last season and is a left-handed hitting DH/corner outfielder -- a description on Beane's short shopping list.

Others on the non-tender lookout are pitchers Santiago Casilla and Michael Wuertz, and outfielders Scott Hairston and Rajai Davis.

Contract calls on all "will be eleventh-hour decisions," said Beane, making it clear that the lack of activity here will have no bearing on those verdicts.

"I wasn't worried at all here about the arbitration date being too close," Beane said.

He had spent another morning calling agents and having agents calling him, laying more of the groundwork for possible subsequent moves, getting a slightly clearer idea of how his market matches up with the A's needs.

"We have no problem identifying our needs; that's an easy part," said Beane. "And things did get focused a little bit. Some markets just get going slower."

From his perspective, this one belongs in that category.

"In many offseasons, one free-agent signing leads to other things. Right now, everyone seems to be doing the same things - gathering information.

"In some cases, we're still trying to get medical records, which is a normal procedure for players who had some injury issues. Until you have that, there are some steps you just cannot take."

Beane reiterated that the majority of his business here was conducted with agents, not GM peers, and signings remain the most likely venue for the infielders and left-handed power bat he seeks.

"At times," he said, reflecting on his 11 years on the job, "we've been very aggressive going after trades. Not this time."

A strong finish by his young club has had little effect on that patience. True, the A's played .500 ball through the season's last three months and even won 15 of their last 26 games.

"But playing .500 ball for 80 games is still a long way from contending for 162," Beane said. "We have to continue developing young players, and then the only way you get there is by not trading young players. And then you acquire more young players. But that's difficult. That takes time."

To Beane, a Winter Meetings atmosphere increasingly seems to take time away from the mission.

"They put you among four walls, almost forcing you to interact," he said. "There are schedules to keep, with reporters and TV interviews, and it becomes hard to separate yourself for some quality work.

"You can get on the phone from anywhere and talk to people. Most guys [fellow GMs] go stir-crazy here. You certainly don't just bump into them in the lobby.

"That's where all the media hangs out. Might as well pin a slice of bologna to your rump and dive into a shark tank."

Newhouse: Abused A's fans deserve better

By Dave Newhouse, Oakland Tribune columnist 12/9/09

Oakland's sports teams re in a three-way losing funk, but staying a die-hard Raiders or Warriors fan is a cakewalk compared to remaining a staunch A's fan.

The Raiders and Warriors aren't threatening to move at the moment, while A's ownership is in a state of perpetual relocation. Great way to build a fan base.

The always perplexing Al Davis recently agreed to a Coliseum lease extension through 2013, pending approval. Now if the Raiders can only win two in a row.

The Warriors have signed a lease with the devil with the disastrous Chris Cohan ownership. Getting rid of Chris Mullin has been Cohan's latest brain cramp.

Meanwhile, A's fans are expected to be loyal to a team that is the carpetbagger of all sports franchises — Philadelphia to Kansas City to Oakland to ... where next, Lew Wolff?

The A's have been moving from Oakland — forever. Denver was the biggest scare 30 years ago. Then the Haas family rescued us by building a love affair with the community — unlike Uncle Lew's A's.

Steve Schott bought the A's in 1995 — and brought along henchman Ed Alvarez purposely to scout Bay Area sites where the A's might next call home.

Alvarez was unsuccessful, and Schott, whose frosty persona alienated this town, then tossed the A's into Wolff's lap in 2005 and fled without fanfare.

What has transpired since can be categorized in one depressing, defining word: depreciation.

Wolff, aided by general manager Billy Beane, has devalued the A's in the standings and at the turnstile with a clever, possibly calculated, stratagem.

Beane achieved national attention for his innovative "Moneyball" approach to baseball economics, but he has yet to produce any revolutionary results.

While Beane overturns players as quickly as IHOP overturns hot cakes, the A's wallow in the American League West. And their mistreated fans are asked to embrace ballplayers who stay one season or less — hello, goodbye Matt Holliday — and then are traded for players who haven't yet made anyone embrace them.

So how are fans to love the A's with transitory-minded owners and a slew of transient players? It makes perfect sense, then, that Oakland had baseball's worst attendance this year. Yet Wolff wails that he can't compete in Oakland.

Compete with what — logic?

Remember Wolff's original conditions: A new ballpark must be next to a freeway and BART. The Coliseum, right? There's all that additional south parking lot space for a potential ballpark.

Nope. Wolff contends he's exhausted all his options in Oakland. Phooey! He then targeted Fremont, except BART was located two miles from his proposed ballpark village. But Fremont rejected him, so he next eyeballed San Jose, which doesn't even have BART.

Nonetheless, San Jose may not want the illogical Wolff either. Early reaction to the A's shifting to the Prune City has been tepid at best. Plus there's that territorial rights business the Giants are wielding like a sledgehammer.

What's needed now is some common sense and a crash course in truth-telling from Wolff. His best option is Oakland — and Oakland's fans, if they're treated decently. This rancid smell of collusion between Wolff and college frat buddy Bud Selig, Major League Baseball's commissioner, has gone on long enough.

An Oakland downtown ballpark could have happened with the right mayor. "Over my dead body," declared Jerry Brown. Now Ron Dellums has a chance to mark his undistinguished mayoralty by saving the A's for Oakland.

There's a news conference planned in Oakland today at which up to four ballpark sites will be named. I'm told my favorite aesthetic site, along the Estuary east of Jack London Square, didn't make the cut. That's insane. Please reconsider.

The A's deserve a new ballpark in Oakland. But so do their heavily abused fans, who've shown remarkable restraint, and class, by not buying billboard space along Interstate 880 and telling Wolff what they really think of him.

AFL announces All-Prospect Team

Nats boast three of 22 stars, including top pick Strasburg

By Lisa Winston / MLB.com

The Arizona Fall League announced its 2009 All-Prospect Team on Wednesday, featuring an impressive assortment of recent first-round Draft picks and up-and-coming prospects.

The one constant among the group? All enjoyed outstanding fall campaigns in the elite "finishing school" for top-level Minor Leaguers.

It will surprise few to see the names Stephen Strasburg and Drew Storen on the list of 22 players named to the team.

The Washington Nationals' top two picks in the 2009 First-Year Player Draft, the two pitchers teamed up for the first time -- but likely not the last -- on the staff of the Phoenix Desert Dogs.

For Strasburg, the No. 1 pick out of San Diego State, it marked his unofficial professional debut, and he made the most of it, leading the league in wins while going 4-1 with a 4.26 ERA, striking out 23 and walking seven in 19 innings. Strasburg earned one of only two starting pitching slots.

Storen, taken with the No. 10 overall Draft pick out of Stanford, had already pitched at three levels in the Minors in 2009, combining between Class A Hagerstown, advanced A Potomac and Double-A Harrisburg to post a 1.95 ERA and 11 saves, while fanning 49 and walking eight in 37 innings. With Phoenix, Storen led the league in ERA (0.66) and saves (four) to nab one of the two reliever spots.

"It was a great honor just being asked to participate in the league," said Storen. "Then being asked to play in the Rising Stars Game was great. To carry that over to be put on this list is exciting. There were a lot of great guys out there, and it will be fun to see how they do in their careers."

Strasburg and Storen were two of three Nationals on the All-Prospect Team. They were joined there by shortstop Danny Espinosa, who hit .345 for Phoenix, after hitting .264 with 18 homers, 72 RBIs and 29 steals for Potomac in 2009.

"Those two guys are just a small bite of the talent we have in the organization," Storen said. "It's going to be exciting to watch. You can't put a price on what Espinosa can do out there. He makes all the plays and makes my job as a pitcher much easier."

Arizona Fall League MVP Grant Desme of the Oakland Athletics joined his Phoenix Desert Dogs teammates on the All-Prospect Team, hitting .315 with a league-high 11 homers and 27 RBIs, second in the league. Desme, an outfielder, was the lone 30-30 man in the Minors in 2009, combining between Class A Kane County and Advanced A Stockton to hit 31 homers and steal 40 bases.

Also on the All-Prospect Team was another AFL award winner, Los Angeles Dodgers first-base prospect Russ Mitchell, who was honored with the Dernel Stenson Award for character and leadership. Mitchell was one of two first basemen on the team after hitting .319 with 25 RBIs.

Among the other six outfielders named to the squad was Pittsburgh Pirates prospect Jose Tabata, who hit .392 with 21 RBIs and a league-leading 47 hits. Along with Tabata were Bryan Petersen (Cubs), Chris Heisey (Reds), Jordan Danks (White Sox) and Domonic Brown (Phillies).

Highlighting the infielders on the squad was Cubs shortstop prospect Starlin Castro, who batted .376 and tied for third in the league with nine stolen bases. Other infielders on the team were third basemen Mike Moustakas (Royals) and Josh Vitters (Cubs), second basemen Jemile Weeks (A's) and Scott Sizemore (Tigers) and first baseman Ike Davis (Mets).

The two catchers on the squad were top Giants prospect Buster Posey, who made his big league debut at the end of the 2009 season, and Nevin Ashley, who hit .366 in fall ball after earning the Rays' award for Best Defensive Player of '09.

Among the other league leaders who made the squad were Indians catcher/designated hitter Matt McBride, who led the league with a .511 on-base percentage, hitting .378 with four home runs and 18 RBIs. McBride was one of two DHs on the squad, joined by Brandon Laird (Yankees).

Joining Tabata among Pittsburgh's prospects honored was left-handed starter Donnie Veal, who shared the starting pitcher honors with Strasburg. Veal, who was the Pirates' Rule 5 Draft pick a year ago but missed much of the regular season due to injury, was 3-1 with a 2.14 ERA and struck out 22 while walking seven in 21 innings.

Rounding out the pitchers on the staff was reliever Tanner Scheppers, the Rangers' supplemental first-round Draft pick this past spring.

Geren Talks Young A's At Winter Meetings

OaklandClubhouse.com

Dec 9, 2009

The baseball world is currently convened in Indianapolis for MLB's annual winter meetings. Oakland A's manager Bob Geren spoke with the media on Tuesday about his young team. Here are some of his thoughts on his young players and the team's 2010 plans...

On team's needs, signing veterans: Well, we have real good, young starting pitching. I thought we had one of the better bullpens in baseball last year. Our offense was down towards the bottom. But the second half we really used speed to increase our run production. You know, if you could add another bat or two into the lineup somewhere to add some more power, it would definitely help, because anybody would like to have good power and speed, and we were looking a bit in power last year.

We're open to any kind of possibilities. We're open to -- if we need a veteran to kind of fill in the spot for a year or two, then that would be fine. If we could find somebody that we could keep long-term that would be a great situation because we want to try to keep the core group of these young players, a lot of them arrive at the same time together for a long time. Our goal is not just to try to build a winner in the short-term but for the long-term, and you do that by keeping guys as long as you can. So somebody could fit in for a long-term, be it a trade or a free agent, we'd be all for that.

On Jake Fox: Well, he's going to obviously come to Kemp, compete for a job. Obviously we like his offense, his right-handed power, and I'm going to take a look at him in positions and see how it all fits in.

He's a tough guy, likes to catch. He's played third, played left field. All the reports on his defense is more kind of an average defender. I don't think there's one specific position where he stands out defensively, but he doesn't necessarily have any bad deficiencies anywhere defensively. He's really known for his offense and his versatility.

On whether Fox would play third base next season: If Eric [Chavez] was healthy and played every day, that would be great. That's what we all want. If not, {Fox}'d be a candidate for that position. There's always competition at first base. You have the outfield situation where last year we were very left-handed heavy and then we became right-handed at the end, so that could work itself out, too. As you say, he'll be given an opportunity to earn playing time like a lot of these guys. It depends how the roster shapes up. I think in Spring Training, I'd like to look at him at all the positions to see what he can do and how the roster might shape up, where he'd fit in.

On the DH situation: Well, last season our season ended with Jack Cust as our DH, and he had a good year for us. As of right now, that's -- there's really no change at this point. I mean, Jake Fox is a guy that obviously we like -- we talked about him earlier, we like his bat. He could move in and take some at-bats in that there, too. It's really early in the process being December. We have a lot of time to get everything, the roster, all situated. Come Spring Training, I think we're going to have a pretty young team, but we're going to have some talent. It's going to be a fun team to watch. **On the first base competition:** I thought Daric Barton on had a great second half of the year. He had an 820 OPS the second half of the year. We didn't have anybody on the team at 820 for the year, so if he can maintain that type of production, that's what we envisioned him all along as being that type of hitter where you have a high on-base and he can drive the ball in the gaps and hit an occasional home run. He did do that the second half of the year last year. And he's very, very young. Without a doubt [he's a front-runner for the job].

We have some first basemen in the fold, that's for sure, with Chris Carter coming along and Sean Doolittle and Fox. So there's plenty of first base production on its way. **On Chris Carter:** You know, in a perfect world he could get some more Triple-A at-bats and kind of dominate that league like he's dominated every other league he's been in. When he goes to Triple-A and dominates, then what are you going to say? He's absolutely fantastic in the California League and the Texas League MVP and goes to Triple-A and does that again, then you have to say he's ready. Ready for a shot anyway.

On Brett Wallace: I'm sorry, when we were talking first basemen, I totally missed on Brett. Brett is a third baseman right now, but he could end up being a first baseman someday also. He has the ability to play both. When we got him in a trade, obviously we were very happy with that acquisition. He was a guy at Arizona State that we thought highly of, and our scouting heads, the top guys in scouting, say he's one of the best pure hitters to come along in a long time. He's definitely - he's also a local guy in the area, from the Bay Area, so that adds a little extra.

On whether Wallace should start at Triple-A or the big leagues: I'd like to see Eric [Chavez] come back in Spring Training

and be ready to play every day and give these guys a little bit more time. When you can really hit like [Wallace] can, I hate to put a timetable on it. I'm anxious to see him play on a daily basis. He's going to be talked about the way he can hit the ball to all fields off lefties and righties and make it look real easy and natural. You don't see that come around very often. So I'm anxious to see that.

On Cliff Pennington: I saw him do a little bit of everything. I saw him struggle a little bit everywhere, too, and I think that's what you see in young players. He hasn't really established himself yet as an everyday Major League player yet, but he's shown flashes of what he can do. He's showed incredible range. Obviously we know about his arm strength, and he swung the bat pretty well at times. He did struggle at the end. Now, whether that's just a league adjusting to him or him getting a little bit tired towards the end or just a bad week, like can happen to anybody, that's still to be determined.

Yeah, he is [the starter at short], if we started tomorrow, definitely.

On Dallas Braden: The reports on him, just went and saw our medical people just recently, he's doing very well.

On the outfield competition: Well, I mean, right now you have Scott Hairston and Rajai Davis and Ryan Sweeney. Those guys all are talented players. What Rod did the second half was just phenomenal. The numbers he put on the board, he's played so well. And Ryan was one of our most consistent guys all year. And Hairston came over, was one of the top hitters for the Padres, their number three hitter, he hit over .300 in the National League. He came over and he had a couple of injuries late for us and missed some time, but you could see his talent level, too.

On Joey Devine: He just flew out to see our doctor about three or four days ago I talked to him, and he's doing great. He's been throwing, and he's up to a point where we actually want him to take a week off or just take a break. He's been following the program very hard. He's going and working out in the Atlanta area with two different people, one for physical therapy for his arm and throwing, and the other one for his body. He feels great. He's coming along perfectly. We came out just to give him like a little look, physical, the doctors flew out and the doctors gave him all thumbs up. Everything is really good.

On the team's young pitching: First, I'm very happy with the bullpen. If we could just equal that production from the bullpen, I don't really think we need much improvement there. They're very, very good. And getting Joey -- talking about Devine, getting him back adds another real good piece to that. But as far as rotation goes, Dallas Braden threw strikes all year. He's our best strike thrower, and we missed him a lot when he was injured in the second half. But as far as the young guys, Vince Mazzaro, Trevor Cahill and Brett Anderson, Anderson threw the most strikes, he was more aggressive in the strike zone, and he's coming around. He had an incredible year, really. If you think about a few breaks here or there, he could have been considered rookie of the year, also.

The other thing with Trevor and Vinny, they just need to throw more strikes. We tracked them from start to start and they did improve, but for them to reach their potential, they have to get their strike percentage higher.

Same [for Gio Gonzalez]. Gio we saw steady improvements like from Cahill as far as all year, just slow and steady. Gio was up and down. Gio would have a game where he didn't have any command, and then he'd have like the game in New York where he was just pounding strikes in the 70 percent range. So he was more of a hit or miss as far as his command from game to game. So it tells you what he can do when he does throw strikes. And with Trevor, you just saw him slowly get better throughout the year. I don't know which one is better to be honest with you. I know that if they keep improving, pretty soon they'll be pretty good.

On adding a veteran starter: We could definitely use some depth in that position. If we add another free agent, I mean, that would be one that would fit in real nice is another starting pitcher, because as you saw last year, it's almost -- it feels almost impossible to have too much depth in that position. But the young guys are going to get their chance to go out there every five days.

On Josh Outman: Josh is doing well, too. His surgery was in late May, early June. Yeah, he's questionable ready for Spring Training.

No [setbacks]. Now, whether we use him as a starter or reliever will depend on how quickly he can come back. You're talking about maybe a month difference if you're building him up for a starter. But he's got a great arm, too. You talk about all those guys, and he's actually a guy that might have had better numbers than all of them, had he not got hurt.

Rule 5 buzz nothing new for Wimberly

Speedy prospect could be plucked from A's organization

By Lisa Winston / MLB.com 12/9/09

He's been through the anxious few weeks in November, waiting to see if he'd be added to his team's 40-man roster.

He's been through the disappointment of finding out he hadn't been, through hearing his name mentioned in pre-Rule 5 Draft buzz, through sitting at his computer on the final morning of the Winter Meetings, waiting to hear if his name would be called.

And he's been through not hearing his name called.

The Rule 5 Draft will take place at 9 a.m. ET on Thursday. During the Major League phase, eligible players left unprotected from their clubs' 40-man rosters may be selected for \$50,000. A player selected must remain on his drafting team's active Major League roster during the following season or be back to the original club for \$25,000. MLB.com will carry the audio live from Indianapolis with Jonathan Mayo and Mike Siano as co-hosts.

A year ago, Wimberly was coming off of his fourth pro season in the Colorado Rockies organization and hoped to be added to the club's 40-man roster in his first year of Rule 5 eligibility.

He certainly had the resume that spoke on his behalf. The 5-foot-8 switch-hitter, who had led the NCAA in hitting with a .462 average at Alcorn State before being drafted in the sixth round in 2005, won the Pioneer League batting crown that same summer, hitting .381 in his pro debut at short-season Casper, stealing 36 bases in 67 games.

Skipping to Advanced A Modesto the next summer, he hit .325 with 50 steals. He batted .268 at Double-A Tulsa with 36 steals in 2007, and went on to win the Arizona Fall League batting title that fall, hitting .407.

In a return to Tulsa in '08, Wimberly hit .291 with 59 steals, leading the Texas League in stolen bases while seeing time at second base, shortstop, third base and center field.

"Last year, I really, really had my hopes high to make the 40-man roster," said Wimberly, who sports a career .307 average over five Minor League seasons. "I was heartbroken when I didn't. Then I thought maybe I'd get [picked in the] Rule 5 [Draft], and I saw all these write-ups that said I'd be a good fit, and I got my hopes high again. I was patiently waiting by my computer that morning. I admit when it was over, I was teary-eyed."

This year, Wimberly entered the week of the Rule 5 Draft in a similar situation, but with a different organization -- the Oakland Athletics, who added just four top prospects to their 40-man roster in November.

It's been an eventful year for the 26-year-old Wimberly, who spent the 2008-09 offseason rehabbing from postseason hamate bone surgery to get back into shape and head down to Tucson for Spring Training ready to go at 100 percent.

After one of those workouts in early February, he picked up his cell phone to find seven missed calls from unfamiliar phone numbers, a hint that something was up. He found out that the Rockies had traded him to Oakland for outfielder Matt Murton.

The Athletics informed him that they were bringing him to camp as a non-roster invitee, Wimberly's first Major League camp.

"I was told that there would be a lot of opportunities there," said Wimberly, who has played every position except catcher, first base and right field. "They were going to start me in the infield, and towards the end they'd move me to the outfield a little more."

After getting over being a little star-struck in his first big league clubhouse, Wimberly fit in quickly as he got better acquainted with players he'd played against in the Minors. And each time the list of players being reassigned to Minor League camp was posted, he was surprised that his name was not on it.

In fact, Wimberly lasted until the final week. In 27 games for Oakland last spring, he scored 13 runs, tied for most on the team, and stole five bases, which ranked second. By the time he was reassigned to Minor League camp a week before the team broke, he'd made quite an impression.

Sent back to Double-A for what would be a third time because the Athletics' Triple-A Sacramento roster was loaded with older veterans, he was assured that if he played hard he'd be in the mix for an early move up to make his Triple-A debut.

In the first three weeks of the Texas League season, Wimberly hit .348 with nine steals in 17 games for the Midland RockHounds.

On April 28, Oakland player development director Keith Lieppman was in the stands at Midland for a home game against Corpus Christi. It was the second inning and Wimberly had already drawn a pair of walks, stolen a base and scored a run when he rounded third and headed home on a two-out extra-base hit by teammate Danny Putnam.

"I didn't think I would have to slide until I saw their catcher set up," Wimberly said. "I went into a feet-first slide and had to brace myself. I put my hand down and my right thumb got caught in the ground."

Wimberly had torn the ligament in his thumb.

So, instead of delivering the postgame news, as planned, that Wimberly had been promoted to Sacramento, Lieppman had to accompany his player to the doctor with the knowledge that he was likely going to miss the next few months.

Between surgery to reattach the ligament and the ensuing rehabilitation, Wimberly missed 10 weeks, and even when he returned to action in mid-July, it still took time for him to fully regain his strength and what he calls his "baseball IQ."

His final stats at Midland, rust notwithstanding, were still impressive, as he hit .296 in 70 games in the leadoff spot with 21 steals, as his post-injury time was spent at the three infield positions. He also spent a week in the Mexican League playing center field before heading home with a slight hamstring pull that he didn't want to take a chance of aggravating by continuing to play.

Instead, he is home in Jacksonville, Fla., healthy, working out with a vengeance, and counting the days until Spring Training.

Wimberly knows that his injury history might make clubs leery. Last year, when he underwent the postseason surgery to remove his broken hamate bone, there had been rumor that he had a wrist injury, which would have been of more concern than a hamate bone.

"I had a couple of scouts call me last year to see if I was healthy because they were thinking about taking me in the Rule 5," he said. "I don't know if the rumor I had wrist surgery played a part in my not being taken."

With speed, a live bat and versatility in the infield and outfield, it's no surprise that, once again, Wimberly's name is being mentioned in the Rule 5 buzz. And those who have played with and against him think he'd be a good addition to any big league club.

"Corey is a hard worker who can only make a team better," said his former teammate and good friend, current Rockies prospect Eric Young Jr., who made his big league debut with the Rockies in 2009 and still stays in touch with his old teammate. "He can play everywhere and he ignites a lineup with his speed."

For Wimberly, the past year has made a difference in the way he looks at his chosen career.

"I've gotten a year older and more mature, and I understand the business part of baseball better now," he said. "But being able to play baseball for a living is the opportunity of a lifetime."

Will Wimberly be sitting by his computer again on Thursday morning?

"I'll have my eyes open," he said, "but I won't hold my breath this time. "

Winter meetings notebook

A's like Fox's offense, versatility in the field

By Nat Newell, Indianapolis Star 12/9/09

Greenfield, Ind., native **Jake Fox** could be in line for the Oakland Athletics' starting job at third base next season.

Or first base. Or left field. Or designated hitter.

Manager **Bob Geren** mentioned all of those possibilities at a news conference during the winter meetings Tuesday when asked about the former Cathedral High School star whom the A's obtained in a weekend trade.

"He'll come to camp and compete for a job," Geren said. "We like his offense, his right-handed power. We'll look at him at different positions and see how he fits in."

Geren didn't mention Fox as the leading candidate at any position, but third baseman **Eric Chavez** is coming off three consecutive injury-ravaged years, first baseman **Daric Barton** hit just three home runs in 192 at-bats and the projected starting outfield combined for 16 homers last season.

Fox, who caught at Cathedral and the University of Michigan, batted .259 with a .468 slugging percentage in 82 games for the Chicago Cubs, with 11 home runs and 44 RBIs in 216 at-bats while playing third (27 games), left (23), first (seven), catcher (three), right (three) and DH (three).

"He'll be given the opportunity to earn playing time," Geren said.

La Russa on Lynn

Don't expect to see former Brownsburg star **Lance Lynn** in the St. Louis Cardinals' rotation quite yet.

"That's a push," Cardinals manager **Tony La Russa** said just a block from Victory Field, where Lynn led Brownsburg to state championship games in 2004 and '05. "He's well thought of, but we've got a nice club. When he gets his opportunity, he's going to walk into a good situation. We'll take a look at him."

St. Louis has signed **Brad Penny** at the meetings to add to Cy Young candidates **Adam Wainwright** and **Chris Carpenter**.

Lynn was ranked the Cardinals' third-best prospect by Baseball America after going 11-4 with a 2.84 ERA, striking out 124 in 148 2/3 innings at three levels, primarily at Double-A.

Etc.

The first major news of the meetings took place with **Chone Figgins** signing with the Mariners and the three-way trade that sent **Curtis Granderson** to the Yankees, **Edwin Jackson** to Arizona and **Max Scherzer** to Detroit, in addition to other players. . . . **Peter Gammons** will leave ESPN after the meetings for the MLB Network, according to reports.

White Sox could have interest in Athletics' Cust

By Mark Gonzales, Chicago Tribune, 12/9/09

INDIANAPOLIS -- There will be some busy baseball general managers in the next 24 hours. With Saturday night's deadline approaching for tendering contracts to their remaining players, teams may try to make deals to move those players so they at least get some compensation if they know they can't sign the player before the deadline.

Among the players who could be non-tendered are San Diego pitcher Kevin Correia and Oakland slugger Jack Cust, who could attract interest from the White Sox.

The left-handed hitting Cust struck out 185 times but hit 25 home runs and drove in 70 runs in 149 games. He had a .356 on-base percentage and can play left field, first base and designated hitter.

Photo: Athletics slugger Jack Cust hit 25 homers and drove in 70 runs in 2009. (Dan Rosenstraunch/AP)
According to the San Francisco Chronicle, the Athletics also are interested in Hideki Matsui and would have to move Cust in order to make room for Matsui.

Most executives plan to leave the winter meetings shortly after the Rule 5 draft Thursday. With some teams not planning to draft a player for the \$50,000 price, they can place their focus on a potentially expanding free agent market after Saturday.

Northwest League unveils new playoff format

The Northwest League announced Wednesday it has split its 76-game regular season schedule to give teams, like the Vancouver Canadians, a better chance at qualifying for the post-season.

The changes will take effect when the 2010 NWL season begins in mid-June.

Teams will now have two chances at winning the division pennant because of the new schedule, which will see two 38-game halves. The two division leaders at the midway point of the schedule will be awarded the first half pennant and earn a spot in the post-season.

Following game 38 of the season the schedule will reset and a second 38-game schedule will begin allowing all eight teams to battle for the division title and a playoff berth.

The reason for the change to the playoff format is to try and create more meaningful games throughout the entire 76-game schedule.

"For teams that struggle out of the gate, this new format gives them and their fans the chance to get a clean slate at the half way point of the season instead of playing the final 25-30 games of the season well out of the playoff hunt," said Canadians President Andy Dunn on the team's website. "This should make for much more exciting baseball on the field as now, every game matters that much more."

The Canadians will remain the Northwest League affiliate of the Oakland Athletics for 2010.

Vancouver will open its season on the road in Eugene, Oregon on June 18. The Canadians will play their home-opener three nights later, June 21, at Nat Bailey Stadium against the Spokane Indians.