

A's News Clips, Tuesday, December 29, 2009

The '00s: A sports decade in review

By Cam Inman, Bay Area News Group, 12/28/09

OUR BAY AREA sports teams sure put the "0" in the 2000s. The decade is done. Our championship tally is none.

Review the past 10 Super Bowls, World Series, NBA Finals and something apparently known as the Stanley Cup Finals: We went 0-for-40. We should have seen this drought coming, considering the 1994 49ers produced the last major sports championship, with all due respect to the trophy-toting San Jose Sabercats, San Jose Earthquakes and Bay Area/San Jose CyberRays.

Why no major titles since Y2K?

We've blamed incompetent owners and their general managers. We've changed coaches almost as often as stadium names (4.2 coaches per team, 3.2 names per venue). We've ridiculed players for their unfulfilling draft status, unworthy free-agent jackpots and positive drug tests.

Yet we celebrated Giants slugger Barry Bonds' march to a record-setting 71st home run in 2001 and 756th career home run in 2007. (P.S. The Giants lost in those record-setting games.)

We "believed" in a better tomorrow for the Warriors. And we waited for Billy Beane's next trade with the A's, the Sharks' next playoff collapse and the next great quarterbacks to turn around the 49ers and Raiders. Our college campuses chipped in with the occasional March madness, bowl games, Olympic-bound athletes and, egads, tree sitters.

Let's now bow our head and pay respect to all we've learned from this dreary decade (born: Jan. 1, 2000; died: Dec. 31, 2009):

BIGGEST STORY: Embers still pollute our air thanks to the performance-enhancing drug scandal that arose in 2003 from Victor Conte's Bay Area Laboratory Cooperative (a.k.a. "BALCO"). Does that make IRS agent Jeff Novitzky the decade's MVP for uncovering a web that ensnared so many athletes, chief among them Bonds?

QUOTE OF THE DECADE: "This record is not tainted at all. At all. Period." — Bonds, after his 756th home run eclipsed Hank Aaron's all-time record on Aug. 7, 2007.

BEST 49ER: Defensive lineman Bryant Young. A stoic leader throughout a 14-year career, he finished strong despite the 49ers' struggles.

BEST RAIDER: Quarterback Rich Gannon. His leadership and on-field production has been irreplaceable since his career-ending neck injury in 2004, two years after a league-MVP effort and Super Bowl trip.

BEST GIANT: Left fielder Barry Bonds. He won four of his seven National League MVP awards in this decade, honors overlooked by his controversial assent to the all-time home-run title (insert: *) in 2007, his final season.

BEST ATHLETIC: General manager Billy Beane. His constant trades and roster moves turned the low-payroll A's into contenders (up until 2007). As for their best player, pick between Miguel Tejada, Eric Chavez, Jason Giambi, Barry Zito and a minor-league prospect to be named later.

BEST SHARK: Goaltender Evgeni Nabokov. Arguments could be made in favor of Patrick Marleau and Joe Thornton, but the chants of "Nab-by! Nab-by!" echoed loudest in The Shark Tank.

BEST WARRIOR: Point guard Baron Davis. He sparked the Warriors' 2007 playoff run, and had a poster-esque dunk over Utah's Andrei Kirilenko in Game 3 of the Western Conference semis. No, B.D. wasn't here long, but who ever is in the NBA?

BEST BOOKENDS: Stanford football. The decade began with Cardinal in the 2000 Rose Bowl (losing 17-9 to Wisconsin) and it ends with Stanford in the Sun Bowl this New Year's Eve.

BEST GAME: The 2002 49ers' 39-38, wild-card win over the New York Giants that went down as the second-greatest comeback in playoff history. The 49ers rallied from a 24-point deficit and haven't posted a postseason win since then. Did Chike Okeafor cast a spell on the 49ers by getting away with pass interference on the Giants' last-gasp pass?

OTHER THRILL OF VICTORIES: The 2002 Raiders regular-season win at Denver, ending a four-game losing streak and sparking their Super Bowl run. ... The 2002 Giants clinching the first National League pennant on Kenny Lofton's ninth-inning RBI single. The Sharks staved off playoff elimination thanks to overtime goals by Patrick Marleau in 2009 against Anaheim and Joe Pavelski in 2008 against Dallas, only to lose those series in the ensuing game. Stanford men's basketball team topping Arizona in 2004 on a buzzer beater at Maples Pavilion. ... Cal football beat USC 34-31 in triple overtime in 2003 at Memorial Stadium.

WORST GAME: The 2002 World Series, Game 6. Eight outs shy of San Francisco's first-ever crown, the Giants blew a 5-0 lead and fell 6-5 to the host Anaheim Angels. Dusty Baker took out pitcher Russ Ortiz, handed him the ball as a souvenir and Felix Rodriguez promptly yielded a three-run, rally-sparking homer to Scott Spiezio.

OTHER AGONY OF DEFEATS: The "Tuck Rule" game in which the 2001 Raiders lost at snowy New England, after a controversial call on a Tom Brady sack (er, incompleteness) erased a game-clinching fumble. ... Of all the Sharks' playoff pratfalls, last season's first-round exit was embarrassing, but the true agony came via a four-overtime elimination loss at Dallas in the 2008 conference semis. ... Derek Jeter's surreal relay flip to nab Jeremy "Didn't Slide" Giambi at the plate in Game 3 of the Yankees-A's 2001 playoff series. ... Cal football, on the cusp of a No. 1 ranking, blew a second-half lead to Oregon State and lost six of its final seven regular-season games in 2007.

BEST COMEBACK: Garrison Hearst, 49ers. Two years after breaking his ankle in a playoff-opening loss at Atlanta, Hearst returned in 2001 and ran for 1,206 yards.

MEMORABLE INJURIES: Raiders quarterback Rich Gannon (neck, from Derrick Brooks' hit, 2004), Giants pitcher Robb Nen (arm, wear-and-tear, 2002), Giants second baseman Jeff Kent (wrist, motorcycle/truck washing accident, 2002), Monta Ellis (ankle, unconfirmed moped crash, 2008).

BEST TRADE: Joe Thornton, Sharks. No, he hasn't taken the Sharks to Stanley Cup glory since his November 2005 arrival from Boston, but he's annually kept them on the precipice. Other top trades: Baron Davis to the Warriors in February 2005, Jason Schmidt to the Giants in 2001.

WORST TRADE: Randy Moss, Raiders. He came to Raiders HQ with a police motorcade, played two loafing seasons and left to New England in exchange for a fourth-round draft pick (cornerback John Bowie). Other nominees: A.J. Pierzynski to the Giants in 2004; Terrell Owens from the 49ers to the Eagles in 2004 after he forgot to void his contract and hit free agency.

CLASS OF CAL: Swimmer Natalie Coughlin. Three-time NCAA Swimmer of the Year, she won six medals at the 2008 Beijing Games and defended her title as the 100-meter backstroke gold medalist.

CLASS OF STANFORD: Running back Toby Gerhart. The Heisman Trophy runner-up and Doak Walker winner has run for a school-record 1,736 yards and 26 touchdowns en route to the Cardinal's first bowl game in eight years.

CLASS OF SAN JOSE STATE: Safety Neil Parry. Three years after having his lower right leg amputated — he broke it against Texas-El Paso and developed life-threatening infections -- he made an inspiring return with a prosthetic limb against Nevada in 2003.

CLASS OF SANTA CLARA: Midfielder Aly Wagner. A two-time Olympian and veteran National Team member, her goal lifted the Broncos to a 1-0 win in the 2001 national championship against North Carolina.

CLASS OF SAINT MARY'S: Point guard Patty Mills. The Australian native and 2008 Olympian delivered two sensational seasons in Moraga before turning pro.

BEST COACHING CHANGE: Jeff Tedford has turned a 1-10 Cal football program into a perennial bowl team (no roses, though) in eight seasons. Other nominees: Don Nelson 2.0 (Warriors, 2006), Joanne Boyle (Cal women's basketball, 2005), Jim Harbaugh (Stanford football, 2007).

WORST COACHING CHANGE: The Raiders trading Jon Gruden for a bounty of draft picks and cash in 2002 to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, whom he promptly led to a Super Bowl rout that season over the Raiders. Other nominees: Mike Montgomery, Stanford to Warriors, 2004; 49ers, Steve Mariucci to Dennis Erickson, 2003; Giants, Dusty Baker to Felipe Alou, 2003.

MOST EPIC FIRING: Al Davis' two-part press conference in October 2008, when he used an overhead projector to declare Lane "Flat-Out Liar" Kiffin's firing. Then Tom Cable was introduced as the interim coach (and aren't they all?).

BEST CELEBRATION: Confetti fell from Oracle Arena's roof, fans rejoiced in their yellow "WE BELIEVE" T-shirts and the Warriors notched a 111-86 Game 6 win to clinch a first-round upset of the top-seeded Dallas Mavericks in 2007. It was the Warriors first playoff appearance in 13 years and first series win since 1991.

WORST CELEBRATION: Terrell Owens rushed to the Dallas Cowboys' midfield logo twice after scoring touchdowns in a 2000 49ers victory at Texas Stadium, birth place of the controversial T.O. alter-ego.

GREATEST SAVE: Giants first baseman J.T. Snow grabbed bat boy Darrin Baker -- manager Dusty Baker's son — safely away from the plate during a Game 5 rally in the 2002 World Series at AT&T Park.

BIG GAME SCORECARD: Cal 7 wins, Stanford 3. Cal has won seven of the past eight.

BIG SCORER: Candice Wiggins became Stanford women's basketball's all-time leading scorer and sparked the Cardinal to the 2009 Final Four behind 44- and 41-point games.

FARM FRESH: Good news: Tagged a 41-point underdog, Stanford football topples host USC 24-23 in 2007. Bad news: Stanford's men's basketball team got stunned in the second round of the NCAA Tournament as a No. 1 seed in both 2000 (to North Carolina) and 2004 (to Alabama).

PRO FOOTBALL HALL OF FAMERS: Joe Montana (49ers, Class of 2000), Ronnie Lott (49ers/Raiders, 2000), Dave Wilcox (49ers, 2000), Howie Long (Raiders, 2000), Dave Casper (Raiders, 2002), Marcus Allen (Raiders, 2003), James Lofton (Raiders, 2003), Bob Brown (Raiders, 2004), Steve Young (49ers, 2005), John Madden (Raiders, 2006), Fred Dean (49ers, 2008), Rod Woodson (49ers/Raiders, 2009).

BASEBALL HALL OF FAMERS: Dennis Eckersley (A's, Class of 2004), Manager Dick Williams (A's, 2008), Rich "Goose" Gossage (Giants/A's, 2008), Rickey Henderson (A's, 2009).

MARK McGWIRE'S LEGACY: The former A's and St. Louis Cardinals slugger didn't want to talk about the past to Congress. But we can talk about his deteriorating Hall of Fame candidacy: 23.5 percent of the vote in 2007, 23.6 in 2008, 21.9 in 2009.

LET'S GO STREAKING: The A's won an American League-record 20th straight game when Scott Hatteberg delivered a pinch-hit home run in the ninth inning on Sept. 4, 2002 against Kansas City. ... De La Salle High School's football program had its national-record 151-game win streak end in 2004 against Bellevue (Wash.) at Seattle's Qwest Field. ... Jerry Rice angrily spiked his Raiders helmet on the sideline in 2004 when he failed to make a catch for the first time in 275 games. ... A franchise-record seven straight losing seasons, by both the 49ers and Raiders.

REST IN PEACE: Bruce Snyder (2009), Marquis Cooper (2009), Gene Upshaw (2008), Pete Newell (2008), Bill Walsh (2007), Dick Nolan (2007), Rod Beck (2007), Bill King (2005), Thomas Herrion (2005), Darrell Russell (2005), George Best (2005), Pat Tillman (2004), Ken Caminiti (2004).

Internal Affairs: The wonderful, wacky year that was

By the Mercury News 12/27/09

As longtime readers of this column know, now is the time we typically look back at the previous 12 months' zany doings in Silicon Valley's political world. And yes, IA will admit that on occasion, all the nostalgia makes us a bit misty-eyed. So sit back, raise a toast and keep the hankies handy as we recount a year's worth of highlights (and plenty of lowlights).

January

Bay Area pols were riding high with the inauguration of President Barack Obama. U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein was running the festivities, which meant California wines at the inaugural luncheon and a famed painting of Yosemite on the wall behind the fledgling prez. In the ensuing months, local folks like attorney Tony West, Santa Clara County Counsel Ann Ravel and Foothill-DeAnza Community College Chancellor Martha Kanter were tapped to join the new administration.

February

Perennially strapped San Jose inked a new contract with its police union, avoiding an arbitration process that was bound to be pricey. That was about the year's only good news on the city's budget front, though — and much of the news from the cop shop was bad, too, as Mercury News investigations into use-of-force complaints and arrests for public drunkenness sparked community concerns. Budgetary battles also consumed Sacramento, and though state Sen. Abel Maldonado got to be the hero by casting the final vote to balance the budget, things quickly went south again as expenses continued to outstrip tax revenue.

March

Word got out that Oakland A's owner Lew Wolff was nixing efforts to move the team to Fremont, and San Jose officials hastily dusted off plans for a baseball stadium in their downtown. Former S.J. Mayor Tom McEnery fended off a labor-backed challenge to win \$6 million in grants and loans for his San Pedro Square retail row. Meanwhile, Councilwoman Madison Nguyen beat back a fierce recall effort with a surprisingly robust showing at the polls.

April

San Jose Councilman Sam Liccardo had something of an April Fool's moment when he acknowledged accepting free admission to a San Jose Sharks game in violation of city and state laws. That wasn't nearly as embarrassing, though, as the brouhaha that ensued once word leaked that the guy nominated to investigate complaints about the city's police department was the brother of a San Jose police officer (something that Mayor Chuck Reed, incredibly, dismissed as simply an "interesting fact"). Across the valley, the Monte Sereno council, no doubt living paycheck to paycheck, voted to give themselves \$300-a-month salaries.

May

News broke that MACSA, one of San Jose's most politically powerful nonprofits, was under investigation for skimming workers' retirement funds. (IA suspects that just might become an issue for Xavier Campos, a longtime top official at MACSA who's now running to succeed sister Nora on the City Council.) Speaking of Nora Campos, some members of the city's Elections Commission openly wondered if she might be behind the leaking of a supposedly confidential (and ultimately dismissed) ethics complaint targeting ex-Mayor McEnery. In other news, former South Bay Congressman Tom Campbell, hoping to boost his long-shot gubernatorial campaign by capitalizing on the lack of SoCal Republicans in the race, decamped for Irvine.

June

The Santa Clara City Council voted to move ahead on stadium talks with the San Francisco 49ers; city voters get to weigh in next summer. Palo Alto council members apologized for a Salem-like investigation into alleged fraud at the Children's Theatre, which dragged a number of folks through the mud. Meanwhile, not to be outdone by their peers in Monte Sereno, many San Jose council members bristled at the idea of a \$250-a-month pay cut to help plug the city's \$78 million deficit. Speaking of money, San Jose Downtown Association boss Scott Knies publicly called on the council to get tough with the city's employee unions; labor-friendly councilfolk responded by slashing funds for Knies' association.

July

Political fireworks went off when oft-criticized Santa Clara County DA Dolores Carr had to recuse herself from a high-profile murder case after it was revealed that her husband, a former San Jose cop, had been paid as a "security consultant" by a lawyer hired by the victim's family. That same month, San Jose City Attorney Rick Doyle used the phrase "an embarrassment" to describe the DA's office improper confiscation of money from hundreds of folks charged with or suspected of crimes, which forced city staff to track down those people and return the dough.

August

Ex-San Jose Mayor Ron Gonzales looked to mend his tattered legacy by landing a gig as CEO of the Hispanic Foundation of Silicon Valley. He replaced Teresa Alvarado (daughter of local political legend Blanca Alvarado), who's among the throngs gunning for Santa Clara County's District 1 supervisor's seat. And it was a bad month for Bob Nuñez, the superintendent of East Side Union High School District, who was placed on leave — and ultimately fired — for tens of thousands of dollars worth of questionable expenses.

September

The month got off to a hilarious start when SoCal Republican Mike Duvall, vice chair of the Assembly Utilities Committee (and a reliable "family values" vote), was forced to resign after unwittingly bragging into a live mic that he'd been sleeping with a lobbyist. Speaking of downfalls, disgraced financier William "Boots" Del Biaggio was sentenced to eight years in prison for swindling investors, despite a Silicon Valley who's-who that begged the judge for mercy on his behalf. Hard times also hit the San Jose Redevelopment Agency, which abruptly laid off a quarter of its staff in the face of a state funding raid.

October

Ex-eBay boss Meg Whitman, who's running for governor, tried to blame her virtual lack of a voting record on the challenges of raising a family. Things were even rougher in the Democratic primary, where an endorsement from Bill Clinton couldn't save the doomed campaign of San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom. But the funniest political moment of the month — and maybe of the year — came when Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger issued a veto message for a bill penned by an S.F.

assemblyman who'd insulted him; the first letters of each line clearly spelled out an obscenity, which Arnold gamely claimed was just a zany coincidence.

November

In a month known for turkeys, former Stanford football player Damon Dunn obliged by launching a bid to become California's next secretary of state — and oversee the entire elections system — despite having voted only once in his life. In other campaign news, former HP chief Carly Fiorina, who's looking to unseat U.S. Sen. Barbara Boxer, went panning for conservative votes by declaring, "I share Sarah Palin's values" — which might not go over so well in a state that Obama carried by a record 24-point margin. And Deputy District Attorney Jeff Rosen officially got into the race to unseat his boss, DA Carr, after she acknowledged intervening in the case of a suspect whose lawyer contributed to her campaign.

December

The state Assembly gave an early present to freshman John Perez, a Los Angeles Democrat, who's been tapped to become the chamber's first openly gay speaker. There was coal for the Santa Clara Valley Water District (aka the Golden Spigot) after a judge ruled it had illegally collected a fee that makes up about a fifth of its budget. And the agency designing California's high-speed rail program admitted that fares will be much higher and ridership lower than earlier projections, while the cost of the project has risen by nearly \$10 billion. But officials still insist the line will be profitable. They also probably believe in Santa Claus.

Oakland A's MLN: Winter Update And Releases

OaklandClubhouse.com

Dec 28, 2009

The winter league seasons are heading into the post-season. We have updates on some of the Oakland A's farmhands actively participating in winter baseball, as well as news on two farmhands released from the A's system inside...

Winter League Update

Many of the winter leagues have headed into their post-season tournaments. Below is an update on a few of the Oakland A's farmhands participating in winter baseball:

Jake Fox: Fox was a regular player for the Tigres del Licey during the second half of the regular season. Through 20 games, he batted .284 with a homer, 13 RBIs and a 716 OPS. Fox was acquired by the A's from the Chicago Cubs on December 3rd.

Aaron Cunningham: Cunningham was one of the top hitters in the Venezuelan Winter League during a 13-game stint with the Caribes de Anzotegui in late November-early December when he hit .340 with three homers, eight RBIs and a 977 OPS. Cunningham was sidelined on December 6th with a strained muscle in his abdomen and didn't appear in another game.

Henry Rodriguez: It has been an eventful few weeks for Rodriguez in his native Venezuela. The A's reliever was traded from his longtime VWL team, Zulia, to the Leones del Caracas, the team of many current and former A's farmhands. Rodriguez earned his first victory for Caracas on December 20th, against his old team. He struggled with Zulia to start the winter season, allowing seven runs in 3.1 innings, but pitched better in three appearances with Caracas, allowing a run on four hits and three walks in three innings. He struck-out six.

Gregorio Petit: Petit was a mainstay for Caracas throughout the season as the team's regular shortstop. He has been described in the Venezuelan media by Caracas manager (and former A's hitting coach) Dave Hudgens as the team's defensive captain. At the plate, Petit hit .251 with 25 RBIs and a 639 OPS in 43 games. Petit's Caracas teammate and former A's farmhand [Raul Padron](#) finished tied for seventh in the VWL in homeruns. He is a minor league free agent.

Alexander Valdez: The A's infield prospect is having a standout winter season. The switch-hitter batted .308 with an 831 OPS in 40 games for the Leones del Escogido of the Dominican Winter League. He is a leading candidate to win the league's Rookie of the Year award.

Cedrick Bowers: Bowers was signed by the A's to a minor league free agent contract earlier this month. He has spent the off-season with the Navegantes del Magallanes of the VWL. Bowers has a 5.06 ERA in 21.1 innings for the Navegantes. He has made five starts and seven relief appearances.

Fernando Hernandez: Hernandez was also signed as a minor league free agent by Oakland in early December. The reliever has pitched this off-season with the Tiburones de La Guaira. In 29 innings spread over 23 appearances, he had a 3.41 ERA and 18 strike-outs against 12 walks.

Arnold Leon: After a rough start for his Mexican Winter League team, Leon has pitched well of late. In nine December

outings, he has allowed only one run in 13.2 innings. His last appearance was on December 22nd and was a season-long 4.2 inning outing.

Steve Sharpe: Sharpe was a swingman for the Caribes de Anzoategui this winter, appearing in 12 games, seven as a starter. He had a 4.23 ERA and one save in 44.2 innings. Sharpe struck-out 38 and walked 18.

Matt Wright: Wright, another A's minor league free agent signing this off-season, had a strong campaign with the Tigres del Licey. He appeared in nine games, starting six, and posted a 2.27 ERA in 31.2 innings. He struck-out 19 and walked 11.

Cobb, Roquet Released

The A's have released two minor leaguers from their farm system: infielder [Larry Cobb](#) and reliever [Rocky Roquet](#). Both are now minor league free agents.

Cobb was the co-MVP of the Kane County Cougars in 2008, but he saw his season cut short in 2009 when he was suspended for testing positive for an amphetamine. He was handed a 50-game suspension and wasn't returned to active status even after the 50 games were up. In 31 games with Sacramento and Stockton, Cobb hit .226 with three homers and a 667 OPS. He was a 27th round pick of the A's in 2006 out of the College of Charleston. Cobb hit .273 with 13 homers and 70 RBIs for the Cougars in 2008 and was a midseason and post-season All-Star in the Midwest League. In 2006, he hit .292 and was seventh in the Northwest League in batting for the Vancouver Canadians.

Roquet was released after one season in the A's organization. He had been acquired by the A's from the Chicago Cubs before the start of the 2009 campaign. Roquet spent the entire season with the Midland Rockhounds, with whom he posted a 5.37 ERA in 58.2 innings. He struck-out 46 and walked 26. Roquet was originally signed as an undrafted free agent by the Cubs in 2006 out of Cal Poly. He was an AFL Rising Star in 2008 and a Midwest League All-Star in 2007. Roquet was a non-roster invitee to the Cubs' major league spring training camp in 2009.

Oakland Athletics Top 20 Prospects for 2010

by [John Sickels](#), www.minorleagueball.com 12/28/09

All grades are EXTREMELY PRELIMINARY and subject to change. Don't get too worried about exact rankings at this point, especially once you get beyond the Top 10. Grade C+/C guys are pretty interchangeable depending on what you want to emphasize. Complete reports on these and over 1,000 other players will be in the [2010 Baseball Prospect Book, now available for pre-order, shipping on February 2nd!](#)

- 1) [Chris Carter](#), 1B-OF, Grade A-: I just absolutely love this bat, enough to override the questions about defense and give him an A-. He added pure hitting skills to go with the power.
- 2) [Michael Taylor](#), OF, Grade B+: Borderline A-. This was a great pickup: he fits into Oakland's needs more easily than [Brett Wallace](#). More defensive value than Carter, but a year older and doesn't have quite as much power.
- 3) [Grant Green](#), SS, Grade B+: Glove is very fine at shortstop, and I'm optimistic about his bat. At worst a steady regular, and could develop into a star.
- 4) [Grant Desme](#), OF, Grade B: Strikeout rate precludes a higher grade, but he's always had good tools and put them to use last year.
- 5) [Adrian Cardenas](#), 2B, Grade B-: I'm not sure why, but there's just something here holding me back from giving him a straight B. [Todd Walker](#) type with better glove?
- 6) [Jemile Weeks](#), 2B, Grade B-: I don't think we've seen him at his best. Between Cardenas and Weeks they have two good options for future second basemen.
- 7) [Tyson Ross](#), RHP, Grade B-: Reminds me of a young [Scott Erickson](#) with hard sinker, let's see if he can keep his command in gear.

- 8) [Max Stassi](#), C, Grade B-: Glowing scouting reports from high school are nice, need to see some performance before ranking higher. Baseball people rave about his intangibles.
- 9) [Josh Donaldson](#), C, Grade B-: Great plate discipline, nails baserunners, still polishing other defensive aspects and power remains largely untapped.
- 10) [Sean Doolittle](#), OF-1B, Grade B-: Knee injury was badly timed. Needs a fast start to separate himself from the 1B/OF pack in this organization.
- 11) [Henry Rodriguez](#), RHP, Grade B-: 5.77 ERA at Sacramento was deceptive; FIP was 4.20 and he still has the amazing K/IP ratio. I'm going to cut him some slack for one more year, but obviously he needs to get the walks down.
- 12) [Corey Brown](#), OF, Grade C+: On a good day he looks like a cross between a young Kurt Gibson and [Jeromy Burnitz](#). On a bad day he looks completely helpless. No way to know what we'll get here.
- 13) Fautino De Los Santos, RHP, Grade C+: Could move quickly back up the prospect charts now that Tommy John is further behind him. Will stuff and command both return?
- 14) Michael Ynoa, RHP, Grade C+: Impossible to rank or grade accurately at this point. Still has all-world potential, but we need to see him take the mound against real hitters.
- 15) [Arnold Leon](#), RHP, Grade C+: Gets a lot of attention from A's fans for some reason. I think he's a good prospect as a fourth starter or strong reliever but I don't see ace potential in him.
- 16) Pedro Figueroa, LHP, Grade C+: Live-armed lefty needs better control as he moves up.
- 17) Ben Hornbeck, LHP, Grade C+: Amazing K/IP ratio in the California League stands out. Upper-80s fastball with strong changeup and decent breaking ball. Will have to prove himself in Double-A but I lean towards optimism.
- 18) Sam Demel, RHP, Grade C+: Funky delivery with above average stuff, could help in pen soon if command sharpens up.
- 19) Anthony Capra, LHP, Grade C+: Decent stuff with strong K/IP ratios, walk rate a bit higher than it should be, Double-A transition should be interesting.
- 20) Connor Hoehn, RHP, Grade C+: Unhittable as a closer in the Northwest League, could move fast in that role but more slowly if he starts.
- 21) Justin Marks, LHP, Grade C+: I liked him a lot coming out of college at Louisville, advanced feel for pitching with decent stuff, but we need to see some innings.
- 22) Mickey Storey, RHP, Grade C+: Amazing statistical performance at four levels last year, finishing strong in Triple-A pen. Could help in middle relief due to pinpoint command of curveball.

OTHERS: (Grade C): Jeremy Barfield, OF; Bobby Cassevah, RHP; [Jason Christian](#), 3B; Dusty Coleman, SS; Conner Crumbliss, 2b-OF; Rashun Dixon, OF; [Brad Kilby](#), LHP; Ian Krol, LHP; Tyler Ladendorf, SS; Josh Leyland, C; Clayton Mortensen, RHP; Ryan Ortiz, C; Shane Peterson, OF-1B; James Simmons, RHP; Paul Smyth, RHP; Wilfredo Solano, SS-3B; Justin Souza, RHP; Matt Sulentic, OF.

I like this system a lot, and it's not because Billy Beane gave me an interview.

Chris Carter and Michael Taylor are two of my very favorite prospects. The more I study Carter, the more I think he can be a special hitter, enough to override concerns about his glove. Taylor is a tools guy who made good; blocked in Philadelphia, he'll get a chance much sooner here and I trust Oakland to be patient with him if he has any growing pains. Grant Green could end up being one of the steals of the 2009 draft. Desme still has some questions, but I've liked him since he was in college and I'm not going to stop after this season. So right at the top, this system ranks well.

There is a huge mass of B-/C+ types. Cardenas, Weeks, Stassi, Donaldson, and Doolittle all have the potential to develop into regular major league players. Stassi has the highest ceiling of the group, but is also the furthest away. All of the others could contribute as soon as 2010 under the right circumstances, although more probably 2011. I don't think any of them except maybe Stassi will become stars, but they should all have long careers, at worst as productive role players. Corey Brown could turn into something very interesting too. Shane Peterson and Matt Sulentic could also prove valuable, although they are more likely to get lost in the shuffle than the other guys.

Hitting at the lower levels thins out. Rashun Dixon has amazing tools but is so raw that I can't give him anything higher than a Grade C right now. 2009 international signee Wilfredo Solano has great scouting reports for his power potential, but it is really easy to get burned by these Latin free agents until we actually see them play against real competition. He gets a "Grade C with higher potential" for now. Jason Christian and Dusty Coleman both have some tools and flash skills, but both have uncertain bats. I put Ladendorf in the book because Oakland was going to draft him in '08 before the [Twins](#) beat them to it, then they asked for him in the Cabrera trade. His numbers aren't much at this point, but he's got tools too.

Last year's graduations thinned out the pitching at the upper levels, but there is still some talent here. I don't like Tyson Ross' mechanics, but I didn't like Scott Erickson's either. Their stuff is similar and if Ross can improve his command a bit he could take off quickly. Rodriguez has amazing stuff and I'm going to give him an aggressive Grade B-. There are a variety of interesting arms behind them, with potential relief options and possible four/five starters being predominant. Ynoa is the big wild card, but as with Solano we need to see some game action.

Overall, I think there is a lot to like here: impact bats, several potential role players, interesting arms, skill guys, some tools guys. They could use some additional arms and it will be interesting to see what direction they take in the 2010 draft.

Duchscherer's return about courage, loyalty

Mychael Urban, csnbayarea.com, 12/24/09

Justin Duchscherer is not a greedy man, and as far as his free agency is concerned, he was in no position to be one.

Those are the primary factors in the deal that CSNBAYAREA just confirmed: Duchscherer, whose veteran presence will solidify one of the most promising starting staffs in the game, is on the verge of signing a one-year deal to return to the A's, who paid him nearly \$5 million last year -- and got exactly nothing in return.

A two-time All-Star, once as a setup man and most recently as a starter, Duchscherer missed 2009 for a variety of reasons. Coming off a second hip surgery in two years, he suffered an elbow injury that required surgery during spring training, saw his comeback stalled by the back problems that have occasionally shelved him over the years, then shut his season down completely after being diagnosed with clinical depression just as he was set to make his season debut.

Having covered Justin during the length of his time in Oakland, I know him as well as a person as I know him as a player, and he's every bit as impressive off the mound as he is on it.

First of all, it took a tremendous amount of courage to admit to his depression. Big-league baseball is a machismo-driven animal, and any sign of vulnerability is viewed as nothing short of weakness. Factoring in Duchscherer's lengthy injury history, more than a few players -- on the A's and elsewhere -- cast at his plight in a less-than-flattering light.

"Bank robber" is the label some players attach to guys who cash checks without producing, and I heard that label attached to Duchscherer -- as well as a number of other, more crude versions -- several times over the season's final month or two.

Anyone with a basic knowledge of clinical depression, of course, knows how patently ridiculous, unfair and ignorant that is, but hey, that's life in the bigs.

Now Duchscherer is ready for that life again, and among the lessons he learned while working through his depression was that it's unhealthy and counterproductive to worry about how others perceive him.

He's knows he's probably never going to be known as a warrior, but he's cool with that now. What matters most to Duchscherer is being a good father to his young son, and performing on the baseball field is a close second.

Is that not admirable? Perhaps not to a certain segment of fans who care about wins, losses and ERAs above all, but most of us can and should appreciate and applaud Duchscherer.

We should respect him, too, because there were other teams that offered him a shot at making more money than the A's are giving him.

That's not to say the A's are low-balling him. None of the teams interested in Duchscherer were going to offer much in the way of guaranteed salary -- not coming off an MIA year. And if he hits the incentives in the deal on which he's essentially agreed with the A's, he'll get right back to where he was last year financially.

But there was a chance to make more out there, and Duchscherer, assuming this deal gets done, is passing on them in part because he feels a little bit like he owes the A's.

Imagine that. A professional athlete with a sense of loyalty.

Happy holidays, Justin. Good to have you "back."