

## A's News Clips, Sunday, January 3, 2010

### Herhold: A few challenges to conventional wisdom

By Scott Herhold, Mercury News Columnist 1/3/2010

I depart from ordinary format today to offer a few quick thoughts — think of them as challenges to conventional wisdom — for the new year.

**BASEBALL:** As the baseball wars heat up in the Bay Area, the wild-pitch count soars. A case in point is a Dec. 21 letter to San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed from an organization called Stand for San Jose, which is widely considered to reflect the views of the San Francisco Giants.

The Stand for San Jose people asked that the city sign a legally binding contract with the A's obligating the team to pay the city back if the economic benefits of a ballpark fall short of the rosy projections.

This is the sheerest political posturing. Economic projections are widely understood to be sales tools. Nobody can agree how to measure the benefits, much less believe them.

On the other hand, maybe the Stand for San Jose people are on to something that could revolutionize purchasing.

When your next flashy sports car doesn't do everything the advertisements promise — change your social life, invigorate your health, etc. — presto, the makers owe you a refund or perhaps their firstborn. It's only fair, isn't it?

**CAMERAS:** In mid-December, beset by complaints of unnecessary force, the San Jose police announced a pilot project to equip 18 officers with mobile cameras that sit behind the ear, much like a Bluetooth device. Chief Rob Davis said the police were trying to make the trial a matter of "cachet."

Two weeks later, Mercury News reporter Sean Webby revealed that at least 15 San Jose cops had used force three times or more during 2008. A number of them faced misconduct complaints.

Isn't there a logical next step in establishing fact? Instead of emphasizing cachet, why not put the cameras behind the ears of the cops accused of wielding quick sticks or fists?

You might or might not see a decline in use of force. But you'd almost certainly produce better YouTube videos.

**BOB BROWNSTEIN:** Last month, the San Jose City Council punted on a suggestion from Reed that would require people representing certain nonprofits to register as lobbyists. That proposal was widely seen as aimed at Bob Brownstein, the policy director for the labor-affiliated nonprofit Working Partnerships.

Labor cried foul, insisting that Reed's suggestion was a politically motivated attempt to silence criticism. In fact, however, Brownstein fits most of the standard definitions of lobbyist, wielding enormous influence at City Hall.

My suggestion? Instead of an onerous rule that could require other nonprofit people to file reports, let's agree on a voluntary Brownstein Report.

The Brownstein Report might not need all the bells and whistles of the standard filing. At a minimum, however, he should be required to list the council memos he has ghostwritten. And maybe the city clerk should put a heading on labor-friendly memos: "As told to (Council Member X) by Bob Brownstein."

Ghost writers of the world, unite. You have nothing to lose but your modesty.

**FALLOUT SHELTERS:** Back in the late '50s and '60s, San Jose was one of the fallout shelter capitals of the United States. Defense was a big employer.

I've always wondered what became of those shelters: What are they now? Pingpong rooms? Storage? Home theaters? Fight clubs?

If you've got one and would be willing to talk to me for a column, you can reach me at the number below.

## **Top 10 stories of 2009**

Appeal-Democrat 1/1/2010

### **Stassi gets drafted**

It wasn't a question of if; it was a question of when.

It was only a matter of time for one of the greatest prep baseball players to come out of Yuba City.

Max Stassi was drafted by the Oakland A's with the 123rd overall pick in the MLB First-Year Player Draft on June 11.

The fourth-round selection ended a tumultuous 36-hour period for the Stassi family as Max — who was projected to be a first-round pick leading up to the draft — was not one of the 111 players selected in the first three rounds on June 10.

The three-time Appeal-Democrat All-Area MVP hit .538 with 11 home runs and 38 RBIs as a senior to lead the Honkers to a third straight Sac-Joaquin Section Division III title in the spring.

### **Zepp's story**

Nothing more heart-wrenching took center stage this year than Tyler Zepp's touchdowns.

Just days before heart surgery, the Wheatland High senior football player got on the field for two plays.

Two plays, two touchdowns.

The Pirates made sure of it. Zepp carried the ball in from just yards out and then tossed a touchdown pass to best friend Vince Vetrone on Oct. 9.

### **Vega leads Pirates to cinderella title**

Jessy Vega bounced back from successful open heart surgery that repaired a congenital heart defect which is the second-leading cause of death among athletes.

While Vega went under the knife on Dec. 20, 2007, in three postseason games this season, Vega tallied six goals.

His effort propelled the Wheatland boys soccer team to the Northern Section Division I title.

The unlikely — the last-seeded Pirates were 3-8-2 heading into the postseason — playoff run culminated with a 2-1 win over Corning in the championship game on Feb. 28, with Vega notching both scores.

### **Moore's dominate career**

There has been no softball player in the Yuba-Sutter area to be more dominate than Jessica Moore.

In 2009 the Sutter High standout closed out her final season and headed off to Oregon, where she signed a national letter of intent last year.

Named the Cal-High Sports small school player of the year in softball, Moore led the Huskies to a No. 1 ranking in Division IV and back-to-back Northern Section titles by going 34-0 with 18 no-hitters and 29 shutouts, while posting a 0.17 ERA.

She allowed just five earned runs in 210 innings pitched and of the 662 batters she faced, only 24 got hits – 504 went down on strikes.

### **YC three-peat**

He may not have talked about it, but Jim Stassi was playing for it.

The Yuba City High baseball coach led the Honkers to their third straight Sac-Joaquin Section Championship, thanks in large part to a core group of returners.

They defeated Benicia 8-0 on May 25 to become just the third school in the section's history to win three straight.

### **Morehead, Chavez make state runs**

Jesus Chavez, Austin Morehead and a handful of local high school wrestlers put the Yuba-Sutter area on the state wrestling map on March 8 when Chavez finished third in the state at 189 pounds and Morehead took fifth at 215.

Chavez, who was a River Valley High senior at the time, went 2-1 at the California Interscholastic Federation State Championships in Bakersfield.

Morehead, a Sutter High senior, went 1-2. Chavez, a two-time state qualifier as is Morehead, finished the tournament with a record of 6-1.

### **Yuba College groundbreaking**

It was a big day for Yuba College alumni and future 49ers when the groundbreaking began for a new athletic complex on Dec. 1.

Those such as former Yuba College football coach Louis Menghini talks and trustee George Nicolau attended the event.

The complex will include a synthetic playing turf for football and soccer, a nine-lane all-weather track, grandstand seating for 1,500 and a new press box.

The new stadium will be located just south of the school's gymnasium.

The construction is expected to be completed by fall.

### **River Valley baseball controversy**

The most controversial story of the year took place on May 10, when the River Valley High baseball team was denied entry into what would have been the school's first-ever postseason due to a paperwork error.

While the initial ruling excluded the Falcons from entering the Sac-Joaquin Section Division-III playoffs and were asked to forfeit the season.

An appeal was filed and the Falcons were given a last-minute second chance by playing against Woodland in a play-in game.

The Falcons lost.

River Valley now has a new principal, athletic director and baseball coach.

### **Hometown Duck**

Jordan Holmes was all smiles after signing a national letter of intent to play at Oregon in February of 2006.

On Aug. 13 the Yuba City High standout appeared on the cover of Sports Illustrated with quarterback Jeremiah Masoli.

SI picked the Ducks to win the Pac-10 this year, and they were right.

On Friday, Oregon faced off against Ohio State at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena.

While the outcome probably didn't spark smiles for Holmes, Oregon lost 26-17, the junior is expected to return next year with one more chance to win it.

### **Ballpark Battle**

There's a first for everything, and that includes an octagon in the middle of a ballpark.

It's not uncommon these days as mixed martial arts seems to be sweeping the nation, and Marysville has embraced it.

The area is home to a sudden upswing of fighters, including Walter Patterson, who defeated Rolando Velasco by split decision in the main event at the Battle at the Ballpark at All Seasons RV Stadium on Aug. 22.

## **A Conversation with Michael Taylor**

Athletics Nation, 1/2/2010

Michael Taylor makes an impression.

From an on the field perspective, his stats speaks volumes. Yep, that is a nearly 1000 OPS/400 wOBA in the minors. Yep, he stole 21 bases in 26 attempts last season. But Yogi once said something like numbers are only 90% of half of the game!

I first met Michael in February, 2006 at the Stanford Alumni game. It was a short, informal "hey how are you doing?" kind of introductory conversation. But in that conversation I came away a huge fan. He is a thoughtful, well spoken man without any of the trappings we have come to expect in modern athletes. He is unpretentious and curious.

The first thing you notice upon shaking Taylor's hand is the enormity of it. When I met him I thought "this guy looks like Frank Thomas." Michael is an imposing presence for sure, but to fixate on his size is a disservice. For a guy that big, he is unique in his athletic ability. He reminded me of, for lack of a better comparison, Shaquille O'Neal. He moved fluidly in the field, he had the lightening quick swing of a singles hitter but flashes of the brute power prevalent in late eighties Oakland.

So now that introductions are out of the way, let's get down to the nitty gritty: Who is this Titanic Taylor?

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*JA: First, what was your reaction to being traded? How did you find out? Did you know you were coming to Oakland by way of Toronto?*

MT: I can't really say that I was shocked, but I was a bit surprised because there really had not been much talk or focus on Philadelphia getting into the Roy Halladay trade. I was aware that there was a possibility but it happened extremely fast. I was actually at the gym on the Monday when all the news broke but no one had any concrete details. I actually found out I had been traded the next morning when I received a phone call from Philadelphia's head of minor league player personnel. In that phone call he informed me I was a part of a major league trade for Roy Halladay and that they in turn would flip me to Oakland. That was a shock.

*JA: What is it like to first be traded for Roy Halladay and then a guy you played against, in the same conference, in college all on the same day?*

MT: I was extremely honored to be a part of the Roy Halladay deal and really excited to be heading to Oakland straight up for a player of Brett Wallace's caliber. I know how talented that guy is as I watched him tear through a tough conference and ruin a lot of weekends for me personally.

*JA: You stole A LOT of bases for a big guy last year and were successful 80% of the time. Do you feel like you could one day be a 30/30 guy? Is that a kind of goal you set for yourself or do you focus more on process goals like taking 1,000 swings a day?*

MT: Well, honestly my goals are more focused on the process and preparation it takes to have success day in and day out in this game. I try not to set numbers goals because I don't want to sell myself short. What if I get to 30/30 with two weeks left in the season? I do not want to take a mental day off because I reached some preset goal; and vice versa, if I am going to fall short of an arbitrary number I do not want to become discouraged.

*JA: What was it like playing in Mexico? Tell us about the stadiums and the fans.*

MT: Mexico was a very interesting experience. The passion those fans have for the game is unlike anything in the States. The stadiums were full of bands, dancing and cook-outs. Yes, we had a live bbq in the right field bleachers.

JA: *Do you prefer playing in Right or Left? How do you prepare to play defense differently between the two spots?*

MT: It does not matter to me. It really just depends on the park actually. Some stadiums are tougher depending on their layout, but personally if I am in right field as opposed to left I try to make sure the ball does not get down into the corner. If that happens it usually means all the runners get an extra base. Not necessarily the case in left.

JA: *I just finished watching the home run you hit to complete the cycle in Lehigh Valley. It reminded me of a home run you hit at Santa Clara back in your Stanford days. I have read that your swing has been altered to generate more power since you left the Farm. Is that true and if so how did you go about changing it?*

MT: Honestly, my swing has not changed since I was in High School. What has changed, or been refined, is my approach. Also, my understanding of how pitchers and teams want to attack me has improved. The more you are aware of what your opponent wants to do to you the more chance you have to be successful.

JA: *Time for a non-baseball question here. If you were locked in a room for 6 hours with a DVD Player and the ability to pick any three movies to watch, what would they be and why?*

MT: Anchorman, Major League and Dodgeball. I love to laugh and those are three of my favorite movies of all time. Comedy keeps me in a good mood so If I had to be locked away for six hours I would want my spirits to stay up.

JA: *It is rare for a player to make it to Junior College ball. Even more rare to play in the Pac-10. Even more rare to be sitting on the door step of the big leagues after two seasons of minor league ball. Aside from God given talent, what do you attribute your success thus far to?*

MT: It takes a lot of hard work and more sacrifice than most people know. But I can sum up all my success with one phrase that I learned during my days as a Cardinal: Work as if everything depends on you and Pray knowing that everything depends on God. That has served me well.

JA: *True or False: Toby got robbed in that Heisman vote. Why or why not?*

MT: Toby got robbed for a few reasons. 1.) East Coast Bias 2.) Pac-10 does not have a conference championship game so the other candidates got one last game to boost their resumes. 3.) Toby was by far the most consistent and most outstanding running back from beginning to end this year, so how'd he lose the Heisman to a running back? The numbers do not even compare. AND if you wanted to make a tough SEC argument for Ingram, my rebuttle would be he did not play the whole SEC, it was a down year, and his "Heisman moment" was a missed tackle combined with a defense that was missing one of its best players.

JA: *Thanks Michael, can't wait to see you in Oakland.*

## **Once proud sports city falls on hard times**

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer 1/2/2010

Greg Papa, for years the voice of pro sports teams in Oakland, has seen and broadcast better times.

He called Warriors games when Tim Hardaway, Mitch Richmond and Chris Mullin were "Run TMC." He did the A's in the 1990 World Series and early 2000s, when playoff appearances were annual. As the Raiders' play-by-play man, he was behind the microphone for the Super Bowl in 2003.

At various stages of Papa's career, the Coliseum and its adjacent arena were hopping with good teams and good times.

Now?

"If you lay out a map and put teams in the most desirable places, I don't think Oakland would be in the top 50 anymore," Papa said. "It's sad to say because I live in the East Bay and have worked with all these teams."

Oakland once was a city of champions. Its sports teams now are about lousy records, frustrated fan bases and questionable management decisions.

While the Raiders and A's would prefer to relocate because of the outdated Coliseum, the Warriors draw well as the only Oakland team without a San Francisco rival. Yet they're no better in the standings than the Raiders and A's.

A sampling:

-- The Warriors have had two winning records since the 1994-95 season, reaching the playoffs once (by going 42-40). During that 16-year funk, they've gone 460-769 (only the Los Angeles Clippers are worse) while burning through nine coaches. They haven't had an All-Star since 1997.

-- The Raiders have had 11 or more losses in six straight years, an NFL first - remarkably, the streak began immediately after their 2003 Super Bowl appearance. They're last in the NFL in attendance, averaging 45,125, their lowest since 1967, and seven of this season's eight home games were blacked out in the Bay Area after failing to sell out.

-- The A's have had three straight losing seasons since reaching the 2006 American League Championship Series. Their attendance has dropped six straight years, and they ranked last in the majors in 2009 with their lowest fan count since 1998, 1.4 million. They were last in their league in payroll.

"I think it's the owners and bad management," Oakland fan Morie Kahane said recently at Ricky's Sports Theatre and Grill in San Leandro. "Al (Davis, Raiders owner) needs a general manager, someone to make personnel decisions. The Warriors, with or without (Anthony) Randolph, they don't know what they're doing. The A's, you can't buy a jersey because they won't keep players year to year. They're only looking at the bottom line."

### **Silver, black and blue**

Davis remains the Raiders' boss at 80 despite deteriorating health and poor decision-making. He guaranteed \$84 million to his past three first-round draft picks: quarterback JaMarcus Russell, running back Darren McFadden and receiver Darrius Heyward-Bey, and the result is an offense that ranks second to last in the NFL.

He has little luck with coaches, having fired four since the Super Bowl. That came after he "traded" Jon Gruden to Tampa Bay because of a contract squabble and clash of egos, only to lose to Gruden's Buccaneers a year later in the Super Bowl.

"It's probably the worst decision they made," said Ricky Ricardo Jr., proprietor of Ricky's. "If Gruden stays, we would've won that Super Bowl. You wouldn't have had the other coach knowing your game plan."

Gruden, now on the "Monday Night Football" broadcast team, remains popular among Raiders fans. On the eve of the Dec. 14 broadcast at Candlestick Park, Gruden was honored during a festive night at Ricky's in which former and current Raiders employees showed up to party with the former coach.

That infuriated Davis, and a team staffer called Ricky's to ask it to remove photos of Gruden posing with current Raiders employees from its Web site. Gruden is seen in a No. 34 Bo Jackson jersey and Raiders visor that he purchased on site. Fans chanted for him to return to Oakland, and Gruden wasn't dismissing the possibility.

"It was a pro-Raider party," said Ricardo, not understanding Davis' distress. "The guy (Gruden) is working for ESPN. ... It's like the Gestapo over there."

A team spokesman ignored several requests for interviews for this story before finally saying the entire Raiders organization had no comment.

It wouldn't be so bad if the Raiders weren't perennial losers. They're 30-82 since their Super Bowl appearance - the third-worst seven-year run in NFL history (behind the 1983-89 Buccaneers and 2003-09 Lions).

Compounding the problem is Davis' resistance to hiring decision-making assistants. Bruce Allen, who exited in 2003, was the last closest thing to a general manager, prompting Raiders fans to rent a billboard this season near the Coliseum with this message: "MR. DAVIS, DO THE RIGHT THING. PLEASE HIRE A GM."

### **Moneyball, or lack thereof**

The A's have a GM, probably the most powerful GM in baseball. Aside from his duties of constructing the roster and overseeing all baseball matters, Billy Beane owns a percentage of the team, a gift from managing general partner Lew Wolff, who trusts Beane with practically every move.

But since the A's reached the playoffs four straight years through 2003 and appeared in the 2006 ALCS - the second year of the Wolff-John Fisher ownership - they've been virtually irrelevant with three straight losing seasons, all under manager Bob Geren. Geren replaced Ken Macha, fired by Beane after the ALCS over a "disconnect."

Wolff, the only owner among the three Oakland teams who's accessible to the media, said the A's were forced to change strategies after slipping from the ALCS in '06 to mediocrity in '07, a result of their "financial capacity," according to Wolff.

"Thus, in the winter of 2007, we came to the conclusion that the A's needed to rebuild and expand our resources on the draft and international players and rebuild our minor-league operations," Wolff said. "This is an ongoing activity and has resulted in a lot of positive trends for us. ... We realized we need to be patient and that results would not be immediate."

While the front office is determined to be patient with its youth movement, not all fans are. In 2009, the A's were in last place every day beginning May 3, a stretch of 161 straight days, the longest stretch by an A's team in 63 years.

But Wolff, offering an upside, cited an improved farm system. Before the 2009 season, it was ranked No. 1 by Baseball Prospectus, No. 3 by ESPN and Baseball America.

Still, Wolff said the A's can't regularly contend without a better revenue-generating ballpark. His latest venture involving San Jose prompted Oakland to offer three waterfront options near Jack London Square, and the city of San Francisco to threaten Major League Baseball with a lawsuit if it allows the A's to move to San Jose.

### **Nice place, lousy tenants**

The Warriors have the best venue in Oakland - the reconstructed arena is the 11th largest in the NBA - but a team that continues to lose despite having high draft picks 17 times in 24 years. They've used those picks on the likes of Todd Fuller, Adonal Foyle, Ike Diogu and Patrick O'Bryant, players even basketball fans might not recognize.

Desired free agents have refused to join the Warriors. When Baron Davis escaped to the Clippers in the summer of 2008, they threw the checkbook at Gilbert Arenas and Elton Brand and were turned down, then settled for Corey Maggette (five years, \$50 million), a non-starter.

"I've never understood why players wouldn't love to come here," said Don Nelson, in the fourth season of his second stint as Warriors coach. "I know they want to play with a good team, and we haven't had a really good team here for a long time. But it's such a great area to live in with terrific fans. It's up to us to create a winning environment, and then I think people would love to be here."

The Warriors average 18,161, their lowest figure in three seasons but still among the top third in the NBA. Yet, while roughly a third of teams have current payrolls that would exceed \$69.9 million - forcing them to pay a luxury tax to the league - the Warriors always are below that limit.

"You don't have a 20-year reign in which you're going to win titles and contend unless you're a team that functions over the cap, like the Lakers and other big-market teams," Nelson said. "When you can't function over the cap, you've got to do a better job managing your cap and money and selection of players that fit."

Selecting players has been a problem. Executive Chris Mullin, one of the most popular Warriors in team history, was let go in May and replaced by Larry Riley. Mullin, who clashed with president Robert Rowell (reclusive owner Chris Cohan's right-hand man), had four lottery picks in five drafts and did well by selecting Andris Biedrins and Randolph and trading for three players (Davis, Stephen Jackson and Al Harrington) instrumental in the "We Believe" team that made the playoffs in 2007-08.

However, Mullin also drafted Diogu and O'Bryant, hired Mike Montgomery away from Stanford (a failed experiment) and gave huge contracts to Jason Richardson, Troy Murphy, Mike Dunleavy, Derek Fisher and Foyle, leaving little room under the cap for outsiders.

Mullin also brought back Nelson, who is within reach of the NBA all-time wins record but has never won an NBA title.

### **Is there any hope?**

What does the future hold?

"I do think there are cycles. Some last longer than others," said 49ers executive Andy Dolich, a marketing whiz for the A's in 1981-94 and the Warriors in 1994-95. "I would say I'm a big believer and saw it myself that the East Bay is a very strong market, and I wouldn't hold to the point that it couldn't support the three teams."

Papa, the play-by-play man who anchors "Chronicle Live" on Comcast SportsNet Bay Area, said both the Raiders and A's would benefit from new facilities, considering their inferior revenue stream compared with other football and baseball teams.



"The Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum is pretty antiquated for both situations," said Papa, who supports a Raiders-49ers joint stadium venture. "The worst three stadiums in the (NFL) are in California, including Candlestick and (San Diego's) Qualcomm. You're at a revenue-generating handicap."

Meanwhile, the '70s are just a memory. In Oakland's golden era, the A's won three straight World Series through 1974, the Warriors won the NBA title in 1974-75 and the Raiders won the 1977 Super Bowl.

"Things can change around quickly," said Al Attles, who coached the Warriors' only championship team. "We came out of nowhere to win it. Sometimes it takes just one draft pick and one player, like (the San Antonio Spurs') Tim Duncan. Players tend to want to play with someone like that. I'm still hopeful things will change around. I've been in the Bay Area a long time. I've seen the ups and downs. I'm an eternal optimist. It's going to get better."

## **A's Carter pays immediate dividends**

### **Slugger earns MiLBY for Overall Minor League Hitter**

By Lisa Winston / MLB.com 1/1/2010

Oakland Athletics first base prospect **Chris Carter** certainly set the bar high for himself in 2008.

In his first year in the system after coming over as part of the six-prospect package the A's received from Arizona for ace Dan Haren in December 2007, Carter headed to Class A Advanced Stockton.

There he earned the organization's 2008 Minor League Player of the Year honor after hitting .259 with 39 homers (second in the Minors), 104 RBIs, 101 runs scored and a .569 slugging percentage.

In 2009, he not only managed to reach that bar but he exceeded it. And in doing so, he picked up the MiLBY for Overall Minor League Hitter of the Year.

Spending most of the season at Double-A Midland, Carter raised his average nearly 80 points, hitting .337 with 24 homers and 101 RBIs in 125 games. His .576 slugging percentage, 67 extra-base hits, 41 doubles and 108 runs scored led the Texas League.

Carter also earned the A's Player of the Year honor for the second year in a row and nabbed Texas League MVP laurels as well.

Adding in his numbers from a brief Triple-A debut at Sacramento at season's end, Carter's final stat line reads .329, 28 homers and 115 RBIs in 138 games. He led the Minors with 179 hits, tied for the Minor League lead in total bases (310), ranked second in RBIs and extra-base hits and finished third in runs scored.

He achieved all of this at age 22, leading the Oakland system as well in doubles (43), walks (85) and slugging (.570).

He also added 13 steals, though speed is not the forte of the 6-foot-4 225-pounder, and drew 82 walks in 125 games at Midland. After starting "slow" with a .296 average in April and a .288 mark in May, he torched the ball when the temperature rose, hitting .324 in June, .365 in July and .424 in August.

Originally a 15th-round pick in 2005 out of high school in Las Vegas by the Chicago White Sox, Carter was dealt first to Arizona during the 2007-08 offseason for outfielder Carlos Quentin and then, two weeks later, to Arizona.

Though he hit just .259 in 13 games at Sacramento as he got his Triple-A bearings, he had four multi-hit games. That included arguably his best game of the year Aug. 31, when he **hit three homers** and drove in seven runs against Reno (D-backs).

Power has always been a hallmark of Carter's game, dating back to his 10 homers at short-season Bristol in his 2005 pro debut, but the now-23-year-old has started to develop the plate discipline and focus to complement his remarkable bat speed.

His average this year reflected that.

The accomplishments he's reached over two years in the organization, coupled with the strides he made in some key intangible areas in '09, have placed him firmly in the Athletics' big league picture at first base in the not-too-distant future.

In fact, with all of his amazing numbers, what impressed Oakland player development director Keith Lieppman most this season was the development Carter made in his focus and intensity.

"The biggest change I've seen in him this year is how his intensity level has really gone up," Lieppman said. "He doesn't give at-bats away, he focuses on every pitch. It's something he had to learn to do because deep down he knows he can hit, but because of that sometimes he'd take an at-bat for granted. This year he never exhibited that."

Lieppman thinks that, more than anything, contributed to the huge rise in average.

"He grinds out every at-bat now," he said. "He's already good, but now he's starting to visualize what he could become."

Carter acknowledges that as well.

"For me, it was strike-zone discipline and learning to make pitchers pitch to me instead of just swinging at anything close they threw in there," he said.

When asked about which of his many accomplishments in 2009 he was most proud, his answer was not a particular stat.

"Just being consistent every day and not letting up," he said. And the fact that he got hotter when most players would have hit the wall? He gives a nod to his Vegas roots. "It gets pretty hot here in the summer, so this wasn't too much of a stretch."

Last season, he hit .333 with two doubles in eight games in big league Spring Training when he was occasionally brought over for an afternoon. But this year will mark not only his first time on a 40-man roster, but his first official big league Spring Training stint.

He's been getting ready for it by getting into shape at home -- working out, lifting weights and running -- as well as practicing some outfield skills.

In all likelihood, his April destination would be a return to Sacramento for now, but the possibility of breaking camp with the A's as their first baseman is not far-fetched.

The team is focused on an upcoming youth movement. Last year three pitchers broke with the team to make their big league debuts, including eventual American League Rookie of the Year Andrew Bailey and vote-getting southpaw Brett Anderson (who came over with Carter in the Haren deal). This year could be the year of the rookie hitters.

"He got a taste of Triple-A and did well in the playoffs, so that was his first hurdle, and once he gets familiar with a level he makes adjustments quickly," Lieppman said. "My sense is that he's further down the road than we might have thought and is capable of rising to the occasion. It will be a battle, but he's certainly right there in it."

In a perfect world, the club wouldn't mind seeing Carter get more Triple-A reps, and they have young Daric Barton who can man first base. But A's fans will be excited about seeing Carter, and they'll get to do so this spring.

"The organization will do what they feel is in his best interest, that is the one thing we look for," Lieppman said. "But he's certainly on the forefront of being there."

Knowing that he heads into his first big league Spring Training so close to achieving his goal has helped Carter's motivation, not that he needed much help in that department.

"Knowing I'm so close keeps me working harder every day trying to get there," he said.

## MEMORABLE MOMENTS: The Decade's Key Events in Bay Area Sports

### On the losing end of Jeter's famous flip

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer 1/1/2010

In a decade in which the A's went to the playoffs five times and set an American League record by winning 20 games in a row, the one moment remembered most vividly did not go Oakland's way.

Jeremy Giambi did not slide.

It was Game 3 of the 2001 Division Series against the Yankees, the A's up two games to none. New York led 1-0 in the seventh when, with two outs, Giambi singled off Mike Mussina. The next batter, Terrence Long, ripped a shot down the right-field line, and Giambi chugged around third.

Right fielder Shane Spencer fired toward the plate, but his throw overshot two cutoff men and headed toward foul ground along the first-base line - where, amazingly, Yankees shortstop Derek Jeter materialized. He grabbed the ball, and while heading the opposite direction, made a flip toward the plate.

On-deck hitter Ramon Hernandez signaled furiously for Giambi to get down, but he remained standing and was called out on the tag from Jorge Posada. The A's lost the game, and ultimately the series.

Many of those A's still believe that Giambi was safe. Others marvel that Jeter was in position to make that play, a crazy spot for a shortstop to be. And certainly no other Oakland play has inspired a lengthy ode in the New York Times by George Vecsey, which started:

"Slide, Jeremy, slide, for you carry the weight of history on your broad back." And ended: "Slide, Jeremy, slide. Change the world. Get down, man."

#### **Sports of The Times; Slide, Jeremy, Slide, Slide**

By GEORGE VECSEY, New York Times, 10/26/2001

SLIDE, Jeremy, slide, for you carry the weight of history on your broad back.

Slide, Jeremy, slide, the way they taught you at Spokane and Lansing and Wichita and in the sandlots at West Covina and on the national college champs at Fullerton State.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. You have the weary old Yankees on the ropes.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. You have earned this run with your solid single with two outs.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. Tie the score, and soon Big Brother Jason will unload one, deep into the Oakland night.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. The headlines will forever commemorate Oct. 13 and the Giambi Boys with blazing letters: "OH, BROTHER!"

Slide, Jeremy, slide, and the old champs will slink out of town on their chartered jet, leaving the coast clear to some new boys, new towns, new stories.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. The manager should have used a pinch-runner, but this is the lumbering American League, in which such hallowed baseball intricacies are not observed.

Slide, Jeremy, slide, and make the world a better place for the Giambi brothers, or perhaps for Ichiro and Sasaki, or perhaps for Randy and Curt.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. Don't let the Yankees revive tomorrow in the fourth game. Don't let them get back to Yankee Stadium with all the gloomy ghosts and the inevitable nonreleasable American bald eagle and Yogi and Scooter and Bob Sheppard's classic diction and all that civic emotion and those vicious Yankee fans chanting vile things at visiting players.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. Three and out.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. Don't be like the Texas Rangers and the other teams that faltered in four previous world championship Octobers.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. You bear the hopes of all the small-market franchises that still dare to dream.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. Mussina has been wonderful. As Joe Torre will say from the vantage point of late October, "To me, Mussina made that play important by the way he pitched." But perhaps Mussina is tiring. Get to him quickly, before they go to that bullpen.

Slide, Jeremy, slide, for Long has slashed one into the right-field corner. You are running with the pitch. There will be no red light at third base. You must make something happen.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. That is Spencer, still unproven, uncorking a wild throw from the corner.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. Soriano stretches. Tino lunges. The old order is coming apart.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. The ball is scuttling loose down the first-base line. This is your time.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. Outrun that shadow flashing from the mound to the line.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. Take no chances. You have won the first two games. Put them away.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. Ramon Hernandez is flapping both arms in the universal semaphore for slide. Perhaps he is too far back to influence your decision. As Willie Randolph, the wise old Yankee third-base coach, will observe about Hernandez a week later, "Maybe he was in the vicinity, but was he really there?"

Slide, Jeremy, slide. Like a ballet dancer, Jeter has extended his body, snagged the ball, turned sideways in full stride in an unchoreographed motion Balanchine would have loved.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. This young century can belong to you and your brother and all the scuzzy young dudes.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. You must not watch Jeter flipping the ball across his body toward home, becoming even more immortal than he already was at, oh, my goodness, 27.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. There is the plate, a whole patch of it unblocked, but Posada is right there, waiting. As Torre, the old catcher, will say much later, "It would have been so tempting to lean up the line, but Georgie stayed home." Still, there is every possibility you can negate Posada's stance with one churning jab of your foot.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. Don't go wide, the way the players do today -- "sashaying around," as the old pro Randolph will put it. Straight line. Hard slide. Stay low. Make Posada find you. Knock the ball loose.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. No hipper-dipper halfback moves from you, a bulky cinderblock of a designated hitter.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. Torre will try to see it both ways, and say: "I'm sure Jeremy felt this was the way to go. When you slide, you are committed." But perhaps he is being kind.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. Don't give the umpire any opportunity to suspect a nimble tag. Maybe Posada touches you, maybe he doesn't, but the ultimate sad truth is that a hard slide always looks better than busting a disco move.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. Do not touch off that emphatic punch-out fist.

Slide, Jeremy, slide, and in the long and official replay of time, you will always be safe.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. Relocate the center of the baseball universe to the East Bay or the Pacific Rim or the Arizona moonscape.

Slide, Jeremy, slide. Change the world. Get down, man.

## **10 A's questions for '10**

### **Changes still to come as team transitions into next season**

By Tom Singer / MLB.com 1/1/2010

It's time for some questions. "What's your New Year's resolution?" isn't one of them.

For the Oakland A's to bounce back vengefully from their first last-place finish in over a decade, a lot of pieces will have to fall into place. They need answers.

But before they can come up with those, we need the corresponding questions.

Normally, talking to one's self isn't healthy. Interviewing one's self is even nuttier. However, in honor of the end of the Naughts, we'll make an exception and let the left side of our brain grill the right side.

#### **1. So, how has the offseason been so far, and is the roster makeover complete?**

Busy, and hardly.

General manager Billy Beane traded with the Cubs for a pair of role players, Jake Fox and Aaron Miles. Then he anointed Coco Crisp as the veteran du jour (following in the footsteps of Frank Thomas, Jason Giambi, Orlando Cabrera) -- a move that in itself suggests others to come, since the A's already had an outfield set in Scott Hairston, Rajai Davis and Ryan Sweeney.

Overall thus far, arrivals have been less significant than departures -- Jack Cust, Adam Kennedy, Bobby Crosby.

#### **2. The rest of the AL West appears to have been hyperactive; are the A's keeping pace?**

They're on their own pace.

True, they've been playing that kids' game, "Take one step forward, two steps back." Of the three teams they finished behind, only the Angels have done less -- but they were 22 games better than Oakland. Seattle added Cliff Lee, Chone Figgins, Milton Bradley. Texas added Rich Harden and Darren Oliver.

But the A's have been bent on getting even younger, so their new names may not be as recognizable. However, better keep in mind those of Michael Taylor, Chris Carter, Dallas McPherson -- even Bobby Cassevah, the right-hander taken from the Angels in the Rule 5 Draft.

#### **3. So, realistically, I can see where the power in the AL West will come from. But where will the power in the A's lineup come from?**

Good question, right now.

The aforementioned trio took 42 homers away with them, and 29 more had gone off the books earlier (with Matt Halladay, Giambi and others). That's 71 homers gone from a team that ranked last in the league with 135 to begin with.

Fox has some serious thunder, with his 11 homers in 216 at-bats for Chicago last season. Playing full time, Hairston would be good for 20-plus. And the hope is Daric Barton could turn back on the power he'd flashed in his 2007 debut. But no one wields a bigger power threat than Carter, who could be ready to step up after 118 homers in the Minors.

#### **4. Carter then is the blue-chipper to watch?**

Actually, he's only A-1 in the blue-chip parlay.

"A" is Taylor. Carter's .329-28-115 card on two rungs of the organizational ladder last season is enticing. But A's people need to wear bibs when discussing Taylor, they so salivate over his potential.

The 6-foot-6, 250-pound outfielder is a defensive work-in-progress, but the Stanford product already has the stroke, speed and smarts that have labeled him "Major League ready." Taylor has both the physical and mental tools to emerge as the next face of a team, which at the moment does not really have one -- barring an inspirational return by Eric Chavez.

**5. Oh, yeah, would love to see him back at the hot corner. But if not him, who?**

Dallas could be the right McPherson for the job.

A few years ago, he was a hot-shot prospect for the Angels, coming off a 40-homer, 126-RBI season in the Minors. Then injuries got a hold of him, but the lefty hitter still hasn't turned 30 and can yet approach his one-time potential. And how is this for irony: One reason McPherson was available as a free agent to sign a Minor League contract is that he missed the entire 2009 season with a back problem for which underwent surgery in July.

That's right, an issue similar to what has haunted Chavez for years. The A's will hold their breath that yet-another delicate operation cured Chavez, but they can't hold the position for him. Both Fox and Miles have experience there, but if McPherson, the best fallback bet as the everyday third baseman, falters in Spring Training, watch the trade mart. Miguel Tejada, perhaps?

**6. How would Tejada, or another of the comparable veterans still clogging the free-agent market, possibly fit in with this team?**

As the voice, not to mention the temperament and leadership, of experience.

Right now, the projected starting lineup has 32-year-old Mark Ellis and a bunch of 20-somethings. The A's are so young, a seasoned vet such as Tejada wouldn't even move the needle on the roster's average age. Manager Bob Geren is terrific at nurturing a young team, but there's nothing like a battle-tested pro to lend a steadying on-field influence. Giambi had provided some of that in his brief return.

**7. Assuming they're inclined to sign a free agent, wouldn't the A's be better off finding someone with that missing power?**

You have a better chance of finding a Nook e-reader before Valentine's Day.

Other than a guy they're not going to get (Jason Bay) and a couple of guys they've already had (Holliday, Cust) there is little power to be found on the remaining market.

Which is fine, because the A's are ahead of baseball's changing curve. There will be a growing shift back to the the little ball of speed and bat-control. The A's got a jump on that last season, when they stole 133 bases, the team's most since 1992, when Rickey Henderson was still the ringleader. Davis (41) was the first to go 40-plus since Rickey. This is another thing the A's love about Taylor, who will fit right in, belying his size and bulk: In 2 1/2 Minor League seasons, he has hit 45 homers -- and stolen 44 bases.

**8. I don't even know why we're worrying about the offense. That precocious pitching staff should only get better, right?**

Should, but two words of caution -- Florida Marlins.

In 2006, the Fish had a similarly young rotation, with rookie starters winning 45 games. The next season, injured and sophomore jinxed, the same guys won 13.

So Trevor Cahill and Brett Anderson bear close watch after a season in which both 21-year-olds logged 175-plus innings -- about 50 more than either had ever worked before. But Geren and pitching coach Curt Young were careful to not push them, and will continue to monitor them.

Actually, the A's have their own cautionary tale. In 2008, bullpen phenoms Brad Ziegler and Joey Devine combined to go 9-1 with an 0.85 ERA. Last season, Ziegler was merely human and Devine excused himself for an elbow operation.

**9. But isn't Devine on track to return? And how will that affect the bullpen?**

It will make it deeper, and tougher.

Eight months after his ligament-replacement surgery, Devine was working so hard and so well that Geren had to ask him to ease up. Get him back and team him up with Rookie of the Year Andrew Bailey, Michael Wuertz, Craig Breslow and Ziegler -- the ones mostly responsible for Oakland's AL-best 3.54 bullpen ERA -- and the A's obviously will be well-armed with one of the most important weapons in the modern game's arsenal.

#### **10. Lots of positives. Now add that hot September ... there will be a carryover, correct?**

You never know about these things. But indeed it could have been more precedent than accident.

The A's tore through a 17-10 September to shutter 2009 with a good feeling and, almost immediately, Beane, Geren & Co. tried to downplay the long-range effect of the happy month. It must have been their way of saying, "Don't get overconfident. We're not there yet."

Still, the spree was significant. Because it came minus the veterans who had already left the scene, leaving behind the 2010 core. Because it came against teams fighting for postseason berths -- the Twins, White Sox and Rangers. Because it imbued a young team with confidence, that prized intangible hard to find but, in the right hands, even tougher to lose.

### **Seeing 2010: Storylines abound in new year**

#### **Setting the stage with 10 stories to watch in coming season**

By Mark Newman / MLB.com 1/1/2010

There is nothing better than 2010 vision.

It means you can see: the flight of an Albert Pujols home run from the moment it comes off the bat; the glimpse of a Mariano Rivera cutter as it eludes another abject failure of a swing; the gliding blur of Jacoby Ellsbury stealing second, third and home; the takeoff of Torii Hunter as he goes up and over a wall to bring back a potential home run.

Possessing this Major League Baseball acuity, a fan can see it all. Possibly the only better vision would be that of a Hawk, such as White Sox broadcaster Ken Harrelson or Hall of Fame candidate Andre Dawson. Let's test out this 2010 vision now with 10 storylines to watch, and feel free to test your own by commenting below on the year to come:

**Roy Halladay vs. Cliff Lee.** There is always a possibility they could pitch against each other -- either at the 81st All-Star Game at Anaheim or in the 106th World Series -- but this is really a question of which former Cy Young winner involved in that recent megadeal will pay off the most. Lee is back in the American League with Seattle, and Halladay leaves his 146-76 Toronto history behind and joins the reigning National League champs. These kinds of deals tend to be measured best in the long run rather than in the first year, but it was the first time multiple Cy winners went in a multideal trade, and it means there will be intense scrutiny every step of the way.

**See you at Target Field, and bring blankets.** There will be some brisk days in Minnesota, but whatever. Hearty Twins fans cannot wait to see outdoor baseball again, and in a gorgeous new ballpark. What will be most interesting is seeing how the Twins themselves conform to the new, real-grass setting. This has been a club that seems to always compete, and it was built indoors. Goodbye, Metrodome.

**The Stephen Strasburg Show.** He was drafted No. 1 overall last June by the Nationals, riding a level of hype and expectation (see: contract) never seen among top picks. Now it is time to put potential to the test. Will he break Spring Training as a member of the Nationals' rotation? Will it be easier to do so on a club that had the National League's worst record the last two years? Will he sell tickets? Is he 100 percent after suffering a minor injury at the end of the Arizona Fall League?

**Joe Girardi's jersey.** The Yankees' manager wore No. 27 in 2009, and his club won its 27th World Series title. Girardi is upping the jersey number to 28 in 2010 for that very reason, even forcing newcomer Curtis Granderson to forego his No. 28 in favor of 14. The Yankees were the last club to repeat back in 1998 to 2000, and now they are in position to do it again. Competitive balance is greater now than it was a decade ago, so it figures to be even harder. The champs have done some tinkering, not only adding Grandy, but also trading Melky Cabrea for Javier Vazquez in a five-player swap.

**Pujols finishes The Best Decade Ever.** The Cardinals' first baseman enters his 10th season, and that will complete the best first decade of Major League service by a position player. Bring on Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb, Willie Mays, Joe DiMaggio and anyone else in Cooperstown you can think of, it doesn't matter. Pujols has reached at least (and generally far above) a .300 average, 30 homers and 100 RBIs each time. He has finished in the top four of NL MVP voting every year but 2007 (ninth).

He has won basically everything you can win, on and off the field. The Triple Crown is his theater now, because in 2009 he finished in the NL's top three for home runs (47), third in RBIs (135) and third in batting (.327).

**Cubs, cont'd.** The question must be asked every year until they finally win their first World Series title since 1908. So we'll ask it again. Will "next year" finally be the year? Now that they are under new ownership with the Ricketts family, does top leadership have an influence? Do odds have to eventually fall in their favor? If you are tired of dealing with this question at the start of every single year without fail, then tell it to the Cubs.

**Chris Coghlan just keeps hitting.** The Marlins had the NL Rookie of the Year in 2009, as Coghlan led all of MLB with the most hits in the second half of the season. He finished with 162 total hits in just 128 games, like it was no big deal. We'll be watching to see whether he picks up where he left off and goes right into All-Star outfield consideration. Other guys we can't wait to see continue to blossom include Braves right-hander Tommy Hanson (11-4, 2.89 ERA, 116 strikeouts in 21 starts); A's closer and AL Rookie of the Year Andrew Bailey (26 saves, 0.88 WHIP); and Pirates center fielder Andrew McCutchen (74 runs, 124 hits, 12 homers, 54 RBIs, 22 steals in just 108 games).

**April with Zack.** If this April is anything like last April, then get out of Zack Greinke's way. When you dissect his 2009 Cy Young season, what jumps out most is what he did before May even arrived. Greinke was 5-0 with an 0.50 ERA, 44 strikeouts to eight walks, and only two earned runs allowed -- both in his fifth start. Best time to get him as a hitter is in July, when he was 0-3 last summer. Can this guy get even better, and can the Royals help him become a 20-game winner? One amazing thing about his Cy is that he did not even win half of his starts.

**Alex Rodriguez and the 600 Home Run Club.** It is projected to happen in the Subway Series: June 19 at Yankee Stadium against the Mets. Rodriguez -- now free of the postseason-pressure yoke -- enters the season with 583 homers. His first long ball of 2010 he will pass Mark McGwire for eighth place on the all-time list.

**AL West changing of the guard?** Seattle and Texas are two of three active franchises never to have reached the World Series (also Washington, nee Montreal). Chone Figgins went from the Angels to Mariners, the Angels lost John Lackey to Boston, Lee was traded to Seattle, and Texas returns an offensive powerhouse and 17-game-winner Scott Feldman on a club that stayed in the hunt late last season.

## **San Jose Giants fan club seeks guarantee on proposed A's ballpark**

By Tracy Seipel, San Jose Mercury News, 12/30/09

A group of San Jose Giants fans trying to keep the Oakland A's from relocating to San Jose is demanding that the A's make up the difference if projected economic benefits for a downtown ballpark don't pan out.

The request, issued in a one-page letter to San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed, came from Stand For San Jose, a coalition unveiled last month that is backed by the San Francisco and San Jose Giants. The group's members oppose public funds or subsidies that would bring the A's to San Jose, whose territorial rights are owned by the San Francisco team.

"Because these purported economic benefits are central to the rationale of stadium supporters, and because our families' and our City's budgets are strained, we simply ask that the A's ownership, John Fisher and Lew Wolff, provide San Jose with an ironclad money-back guarantee of their rosy economic promises," reads part of the letter.

Dan Newman, a coalition spokesman, added that the letter seeks assurances the A's owners "won't attempt a hidden-ball trick to conceal the true costs to taxpayers."

An analysis of potential economic benefits, prepared for the city by a consulting firm, was published in September. The consultants predicted that a 32,000-seat ballpark would lead to \$130 million in annual spending throughout the local economy and \$2.9 billion over a 30-year period. It also said a new stadium would create 980 new jobs in San Jose.

The estimated annual return to the city would be \$1.5 million in new general fund revenue, the consultants wrote, mostly from property and sales taxes, with another \$1 million going to the city's redevelopment agency.

Wolff and Reed both said it was premature to address the letter's concerns before it's even known whether the A's will get permission from Major League Baseball to relocate to San Jose. Major League Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig has appointed a committee to study the A's options. It would take a vote of three-quarters of baseball's owners to terminate the Giants' territorial rights.



"I think this front organization for the San Francisco Giants should go to San Francisco and talk to their puppet masters and tell them to get out of the way so we can negotiate some guarantees," Reed said.

While City Attorney Rick Doyle called it "unrealistic" for any team to agree to such a money-back guarantee, he said reducing the city's financial risk is "very do-able." Doyle pointed to the 1990 deal between the city and the San Jose Sharks over funding the arena, now called HP Pavilion.

The original contract provided for the city to build the arena and gave the Sharks the right to operate it through at least the 2007-08 hockey season; the contract has since been extended. San Jose taxpayers paid \$137 million toward the arena's construction, while the Sharks paid \$40 million and took control of the building and nearly all its revenues.

"We did everything we could to minimize the risk to the general fund," said Doyle, noting that the team annually pays the city \$3.5 million to \$4 million.

The September consultants' report established a set of negotiating principles that frame any possible agreement with the A's, including that the team — and not taxpayers — would be responsible for building the \$461 million stadium and financing all stadium operating costs. And, should the city or its redevelopment agency recommend a contribution to the project in the form of land or a financial contribution, a vote by the citizens of San Jose would be required.

Roger Noll, professor of economics emeritus at Stanford University whose studies include the economics of sports, agreed it's improbable that a team would guarantee the spillover benefits projected in an economic impact report, and in particular, the increased tax revenues forecast in the report.

"Economic impact statements have a huge amount of uncertainty in them. No one would guarantee their validity," said Noll, who usually challenges the rosy conclusions in such reports. "It's like somebody came in with the Farmer's Almanac and said, 'On Oct. 17, it will rain.' You can't guarantee it for me."

In its letter, the coalition also writes that the terms of the agreement would require an annual economic benefits report card issued by a major accounting firm. "Responsible City governments like those in Washington D.C. and Phoenix, Arizona instituted similar Taxpayer Protection Policies," the letter reads.

In fact, neither city has anything like the coalition's proposal on its books, according to spokesmen in both places.

## **In baseball, last licks ain't worth a lick, Cal State East Bay researchers say**

By Matt Krupnick, Contra Costa Times 12/30/09

There was no joy in Mudville, but perhaps the fans expected too much out of mighty Casey.

Two Cal State East Bay professors have concluded that baseball teams gain little advantage from playing on their home field in close games, despite the sport's uniquely sequential nature that gives home teams the final chance at victory with the last at bat. Home-field advantage actually declines in extra innings, Frank Lowenthal and Steve Shmanske found.

"The (home-field) figures aren't very impressive," said Lowenthal, a Pleasanton resident and lifelong New York Yankees fan who teaches accounting and computer science. The home advantage "is the least of all major sports."

The professors said they were surprised by the results, which were published in the fall issue of *Nine*, an academic journal dedicated to baseball.

The study was based on the 2002 through 2005 Major League Baseball seasons. In 2,426 cases in which the home team needed one run to win or tie in the potentially last inning, the pair found the home team scored that run only 690 times — 28 percent of the time.

The results imply, in part, that a visiting team's defensive options are stronger than a home team's offensive options, the men said. But the primary causes remain unclear, they said.

"It would be nice if you could find the reason," said Shmanske, a Berkeley resident and economics professor who stopped attending baseball games after the 1994 strike led to the cancellation of the World Series.

"I can hold a grudge for a long time," he said.

It would be pointless to search for reasons behind such statistics, said St. Louis Cardinals Manager Tony La Russa, an Alamo resident. Better teams simply have the tools to win close games, he said.

"You win games late because you keep the other team from scoring," La Russa said, calling defensive strategy a "very minor" factor. "It's because your bullpen is stronger or you have more game-breakers."

The study is the latest baseball-related research by Lowenthal and Shmanske, who — along with colleague Paul Staudohar — in 2007 wrote an article advocating for a change to baseball's playoff structure. Their proposal: The team with the best record chooses its first-round playoff opponent, rather than have its opponent determined by team win-loss records.

Lowenthal also has strong feelings about the sacrifice bunt, at least when it is not being used by a National League pitcher. The strategy, in which a player essentially guarantees he will be thrown out while advancing a runner already on base, cuts down dramatically on scoring opportunities, Lowenthal said.

Such attention to percentages and strategies served Lowenthal well during his years coaching youth baseball, he said.

"The other coaches who were more athletically inclined were always so upset that my teams did so well," said Lowenthal, who grew up in the Bronx, a mile from Yankee Stadium. "The kids all wanted to know their batting average. I told them very clearly that I pay attention to on-base percentage."

Despite Shmanske's lapsed interest in baseball, the sport lends itself well to statistical studies, he said. More than a century of box scores are available online, for example.

"If there are propositions that you think would be interesting to test, the data is there," he said. "You can look at discrimination, you can look at attendance."