

## **Anti-A's group plans to field Fremont council candidates**

Fremont Citizens Network looks to broaden its political involvement.

By Matthew Artz

Oakland Tribune

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FREMONT — A citizens group that coalesced last year to keep the Oakland A's out of Fremont is now stepping deeper into city politics.

The Fremont Citizens Network announced Tuesday that it is going to field two "highly organized and well-funded" candidates in November to challenge incumbent City Council members Bill Harrison and Anu Natarajan, both of whom are seeking re-election.

The group won't name its candidates for a couple of weeks, but it's expected that one will be stadium opponent and group member Vinnie Bacon, who finished third in the 2008 council race.

Fremont Citizens Network, which has more than 1,000 online members, is also forming a separate political action committee that would allow it to raise money for political activities, said its president, Kathy McDonald.

The group sees itself as a counterbalance to developers and other entrenched interests, which McDonald said have too much clout in Fremont politics.

"We will be a grass-roots campaign taking our donations from the citizens of Fremont," she said.

In addition to opposing the city's latest attempt to woo the A's, the group is critical of Fremont's plan to raise new funds for redevelopment projects.

The group's candidates will likely face two major hurdles: money and history.

Fremont hasn't elected a challenger over an incumbent council member since 1989, and the city in 2008 doubled the maximum campaign contribution limit per

person to \$500, which helped Sue Chan raise more than \$90,000 for her successful council campaign two years ago.

McDonald didn't know whether the group could help its candidates raise that much money, but she said it will provide organizational support and a lot of volunteers.

"The problem in the past is that we've never had viable alternative candidates," she said. "I think we'll have viable candidates this time."

## **Newest A(cc) Ben Sheets signs with Oakland**

The newest A(cc)

By Joe Stiglich

Oakland Tribune

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The A's had cast their line in some high-priced free agent waters this winter, only to come up empty.

They finally landed a big catch Tuesday, signing right-hander Ben Sheets to a one-year, \$10 million contract that also could include up to \$2 million in performance bonuses.

A four-time All-Star with the Milwaukee Brewers, Sheets missed the entire 2009 season after undergoing elbow surgery. But if he makes a healthy comeback, he'll join two-time All-Star Justin Duchscherer atop a promising rotation that was the major leagues' youngest last season.

It's quite the high-priced gamble for the A's, who typically don't throw big money at free-agent pitchers and aren't viewed as strong contenders in the American League West this season.

They went against the grain and gave Sheets, 31, the largest one-year salary in franchise history for a free agent who wasn't their own.

"Ben's been one of the top pitchers in the game, and when you have that opportunity, regardless of where you are as a club, you're going to take the chance," general manager Billy Beane said. —... This is a very competitive division, obviously. For us, this is probably the best bet we can take to narrow that gap."

The A's reportedly made lucrative offers earlier this winter to third baseman Adrian Beltre, shortstop Marco Scutaro and Cuban left-hander Aroldis Chapman, only to be spurned.

They went hard after Sheets, who clocked his fastball in the low

90s during last week's throwing session before scouts in his native Louisiana. That showing helped ease the A's concerns about whether he'd recovered from surgery to repair a torn flexor tendon last February.

"Within an hour of that workout, we were already on the phone," Beane said.

Sheets talked enthusiastically about his new team during a news conference at Oakland Coliseum. He mentioned the Texas Rangers and New York Mets as other teams that pursued him but wouldn't say if they made offers to compete with Oakland's.

"(Beane) really sold me on the whole idea of this team," he said. "I told (agent) Casey Close, 'I like where this A's team is going.' Any time you think you've got a chance to be a part of something (special) like you feel like they're gonna have here, you jump on it."

However, there's the possibility that Sheets becomes this year's version of Matt Holliday — an attractive trade chip in July if the A's fall out of contention.

One major league scout said the right-hander could pay off for Oakland.

"If they get half or more of what he was like before (surgery), they're going to have a good pitcher," the scout said. "He threw hard and had a real big curveball. (After surgery) some guys just labor more to find the strike zone. But everything I've heard about the guy is he's a big-time competitor, and he'll probably be very focused."

A's manager Bob Geren christened Sheets his Opening Night starter, with Duchschere and lefties Brett Anderson and Dallas Braden likely to follow in that order.

Trevor Cahill, a starter all through his rookie season last year, won't be guaranteed the fifth spot, as Beane mentioned Gio Gonzalez and Vin Mazzaro as part of the competition.

Beane said he isn't concerned that two-fifths of his rotation missed all of last season. Duchschere was sidelined by an elbow injury and clinical depression.

Beane also said the A's medical staff gave Sheets' elbow a thorough exam and came away satisfied.

And Beane downplayed speculation that the A's might next sign outfielder Johnny Damon, saying that a utility infielder capable of playing shortstop is probably the team's biggest remaining need.

The Ben Sheets file

Position: Starting pitcher

Age 31 EXP.: Eight seasons

HEIGHT: 6-1 WEIGHT: 226

Throws: Right

Career statistics

(All with Milwaukee)

W L G GS IP

86 83 221 221 1428

H ER BB SO ERA  
1,402 591 313 1206 3.73

## **Peterson: Ben Sheets is in a hurry to get going with the A's**

By Gary Peterson

Oakland Tribune columnist

Posted: 01/26/2010 07:52:51 PM PST

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On his first night in the East Bay as a member of the A's, Ben Sheets enjoyed dinner and a show. The A's sprung for the former. He supplied the latter.

"Before dinner, he said he wanted to throw," A's manager Bob Geren said Tuesday, shortly after Sheets had been introduced to the local media. "I asked him, 'Before or after dinner?' He said after."

At some point between the appetizer and the dessert, it began to rain in Danville — hard enough to put a damper on the prospect of any kind of baseball activity.

"I said, 'You all right throwing in the rain?' " Geren said. "He said, 'Heck yeah. Are you all right catching in the rain?' "

If you happened to drive past Sycamore Valley Park on Monday evening, you know the answer to that question. There was Sheets, the A's free-agent trophy signing, engaged in a 15-minute workout with his new manager.

Pretty surprising stuff.

"Hey, I can still catch," said Geren, who enjoyed a 15-year pro career. "It's getting up after I catch that's the problem."

Actually, that wasn't the surprising part. This is: An athlete so dedicated to his craft that he would doggedly stick to his throwing regimen in the rain, after a nice meal, three weeks before reporting to spring training.

According to Geren, it didn't stop there.

"He asked me for the team throwing program," Geren said, "so I printed that up for him. He wanted to see the team scouting

report on the rest of the (American) League, so I printed that up for him. He wanted to know what kind of computer system we used.

"It's my first experience dealing with someone that detail oriented. I'm catching him today, too."

Here we must pause to draw an interesting distinction. Last year about this time the A's were unveiling another high-profile acquisition, outfielder Matt Holliday. Holliday was accomplished (a three-time All-Star). He was expensive (due to make \$13.5 million in the final year of his contract). And as an impending free agent he clearly had no future with the A's.

He arrived via trade, and while he worked hard and bit his tongue, it was clear he'd been sent here against his will and was eagerly anticipating the day he could leave.

Sheets, who missed the 2009 season after surgery on his right elbow, chose to come here. He'll make \$10 million this season. That he signed for one year tells you two things — he hopes to parlay his 2010 comeback into a multiyear deal, and that makes him a likely candidate to play elsewhere come 2011. If not August.

Even so, he gives off a different vibe than did Holliday. He's clearly invested in the team and its fortunes, having chosen the A's over a handful of suitors in part because of how general manager Billy Beane talked up the roster.

"The opportunity to win presents itself," he said. "I'm a firm believer that when (Beane) says a team's going to be good, it usually comes true."

Holliday didn't fit the roster, the organizational philosophy or the team's stage of development. He was like a Renoir hanging on the wall of a frat house. You can see the logic with Sheets, even if he's just passing through.

For starters, he's a four-time All-Star with a career ERA of 3.73. That can be its own reward as well as an ancillary benefit.

"He's a veteran guy," Geren said. "He's got a lot of fire to him. He has elements you'd want to rub off on young guys."

Guys like last season's crew of 25-and-under starters — Trevor Cahill, Brett Anderson, Dallas Braden, Vin Mazzaro, Josh Outman, Clayton Mortensen.

"I'm sure they're going to be looking at everything he does," Geren said.

Beyond that, with Sheets and Justin Duchscherer — another former All-Star who missed last season — at the top of the rotation, the A's have the luxury of allowing their young guns to develop at a more organic pace.

Risk? You bet. There's a better-than-average chance the A's could get short-Sheeted, given that his final four seasons with the Milwaukee Brewers were interrupted by injury.

He dazzled in his coming-out workout, which attracted scouts from more than a dozen teams. Now he's got to prove he can dazzle every five days, rain or shine.

Or on those rare occasions, both.

## **A's sign pitcher Sheets**

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

Wednesday, January 27, 2010

A's manager Bob Geren named his first four starting pitchers Tuesday, 69 days before Opening Night. Quite a difference from 2009, when Geren waited until five days before the opener to announce his No. 1 starter.

It helps to have Ben Sheets - if he's a healthy Ben Sheets.

"I think I'm 100 percent physically ready to go," Sheets said at a Coliseum news conference after his one-year, \$10 million (plus incentives) contract was made official. "I feel like I'll be right where I need to be once the season opens."

The A's, who monitored Sheets' progress from elbow surgery in February, were among the teams to watch the right-hander throw at the University of Louisiana on Jan. 19, and they claim to have made an offer an hour later.

Sheets' camp agreed to a contract several days ago, according to a source close to negotiations, but it was kept secret because the team had to do an extensive physical and didn't want the deal to get leaked, considering a failed physical would have hurt his value if Sheets returned to the open market.

If or when he starts the April 5 opener, it will be Sheets' first big-league appearance since 2008. The A's, based on results of the physical and the throwing session - seen by director of player personnel Billy Owens - were convinced Sheets was worthy of a \$10 million gamble.

Now, if all goes well, the A's have a legitimate ace atop their rotation, which also includes, in order, Justin Duchscherer and lefties Brett Anderson and Dallas Braden. The No. 5 spot would be a three-way competition involving Trevor Cahill, Vin Mazzaro and Gio Gonzalez.

"This is a good thing," Gonzalez said. "Ben Sheets is a well-known pitcher; he's a name. I'm excited, we're excited, to have him in the rotation, on our staff. You can appreciate a guy with that kind of experience. You can learn from him."

A year ago, Geren was expecting a rotation with Duchscherer at No. 1. But like Sheets, Duchscherer missed the entire season, so part of management's 2010 game plan includes crossing fingers.

Asked if Sheets or Duchscherer will be restricted at all in spring training, Geren said, "They should be treated like anybody else unless they have any kind of setback. They're both throwing. They're both feeling great. They're both healed, and you go from there."

Sheets, 31, who spent his first eight seasons in Milwaukee, is 86-83 with a 3.72 ERA in his career. In 2008, he started the All-Star Game and went 13-9 that season with a 3.09 ERA. Sheets was set to join the Rangers last season but failed a physical and underwent surgery to repair a torn flexor tendon near his elbow.

"If he doesn't have this injury," A's general manager Billy Beane said of Sheets, "you're probably talking about a guy who was signed back in November to a long-term deal. In short, it's an opportunity for us to get involved. Is there a risk? Yeah, that's the life on the edge a little bit. A risk for us worth taking."

The A's mostly are set, though Beane said he wants a utility infielder.

Meantime, Sheets called the A's an opportunity to win.

"When (Beane) says a team's going to be good, it normally comes to be true," Sheets said. "It got me very excited and got me thinking about this place. I think we'll do fantastic this year."

For starters

With the acquisition of Ben Sheets, the A's starting pitching came into sharper focus. Here's the projected rotation (all stats from 2009 unless noted):

1. Ben Sheets (13-9, 3.09 in 2008)
2. Justin Duchscherer (10-8, 2.54 in 2008)

3. Brett Anderson (11-11, 4.06)
4. Dallas Braden (8-9, 3.89)
5. Trevor Cahill, Gio Gonzalez or Vin Mazzaro

While we're at it, here is a projected Opening Day lineup:

1. LF Rajai Davis (.305 BA, 3 HRs)
2. CF Coco Crisp (.228, 3)
3. C Kurt Suzuki (.274, 15)
4. DH Jack Cust (.240, 25)
5. 3B Kevin Kouzmanoff (.255, 18)
6. RF Ryan Sweeney (.293, 6)
7. 1B Daric Barton (.269, 3)
8. 2B Mark Ellis (.263, 10)
9. SS Cliff Pennington (.279, 4)

### **Ratto: Holliday gone, now it's Sheets**

Ray Ratto

Wednesday, January 27, 2010

Since we long ago came to grips with the A's way of doing business, the acquisition of pitcher Ben Sheets is a lot less reckless than it at first seems to be.

Then again, because we long ago came to grips with the A's way of doing business, it is also a lot less satisfying.

True, it's another Matt Holliday special - a one-year, \$10 million contract, minus whatever any trade partner might have to pick up at the deadline. It's the right length for



Oakland - which likes to keep its deals with the injury-dogged flexible - and for Sheets - who wants to show baseball he is back to 100 percent and play the field next winter.

And maybe it will have the added benefit of putting some scales on the skins of the A's young pitchers, Brett Anderson, Dallas Braden and, eventually, Trevor Cahill and Vin Mazzaro. At least that's the undercurrent of the deal as provided by Billy Beane at Tuesday's news conference.

But it does undercut whatever feelings of glee might be generated if Sheets is as healthy and dominant as he was in his heyday. I mean, how excited do you, the loyal A's fan, get when confronted with the "I hope he's so good he gets us a bunch of 20-year-old prospects in July" battle cry?

This is the Oakland dynamic, and we all know that. It's why Beane could be aggressive in approaching Sheets and muscle his way to the front of the line even before Sheets' workout last week in Monroe, La. Beane could throw out his best offer early, and if other teams wanted to come in higher, well, nothing ventured, etc.

"Actually, I wasn't really worried about our offer because we'd been pretty aggressive with Ben and his agent," Beane said. "I was concerned when (Joel) Piñeiro came off the market last week, because I thought that might draw more buyers toward Ben."

In fact, by the time Piñeiro signed his two-year, \$16 million deal with the Angels last Wednesday (but announced Saturday), the A's were well on their way to getting their deal. Plus, they had reached their take-it-or-leave-it-threshold; with the Sheets deal (which does not include \$2 million in incentives), they are in Beane's words, "right up against the (payroll) limit."

That would presumably preclude a \$2 million foray toward outfielder Johnny Damon, particularly when Beane said he is showing more interest in finding a utility infielder. "We're shaping up as a team with pretty good speed and pretty good defense," he said, cleverly omitting the "not very pretty offense" part.

Sounds a bit like the Giants of a year ago ... well, except for the speed part.

But if you're losing a bit of heart about the A's long-range plans, you can always feel good for Sheets, whose \$10 million audition tape after a year rehabbing his elbow very well might bring him an even bigger cash-out next year - which is why he and his agent,

Casey Close, were also fine with a one-year deal. They, too, were ordering the Holliday special, for the same general reasons the A's did.

"Look, that's always part of our thinking," Beane said of the one-year deal and the fallback position of a trade. "It's not the reason, and it's not goal No. 1, but it's more sort of the consolation prize. We want this to work out for us, first and foremost."

That goal, of course, is a flexible one, depending on circumstances, and the best of all worlds is that Sheets is so consistent and available that the A's become a charming surprise. The worst of all is the one where he doesn't see the sunny side of May, and adds to a list of injuries that already includes:

- Tendinitis in his right rotator cuff
- A lumbar disk herniation
- Vestibular neuritis, also known as labyrinthitis, also known as a swollen inner ear that causes vertigo and other balance issues
- A torn right back muscle
- A tight right pectoral muscle
- Tendinitis in his right shoulder
- A groin strain
- A partially torn tendon in his right middle finger
- A tight hamstring
- Elbow surgery

Sheets said he is pain-free after missing the 2009 season, and might even have to gear back a little before spring training. Indeed, he said all the right things to please his employer with the proper level of enthusiasm, as though his career finally has been fulfilled with the Elephants. And once he gets the No. 15 jersey pried from Ryan Sweeney's grip, it very well might be.

But for the A's fans, Sheets is one of those worrisome signings that leaves them wondering how good he is supposed to be for them to get full value out of his acquisition. And when you're answering questions like "How good is too good?" you know you're not getting maximum enjoyment out of a deal. The A's might like it, and Sheets might like it, but the fan base is left to wonder how much allegiance to invest in this, the new Matt Holliday.

## **Sheets ready to lead A's young rotation**

Geren hands newly signed righty Opening Day duties

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The youthful band of brothers that is the A's starting rotation has officially found its front man.

This newly acquired rock star brings with him an All-Star presence and just the right pinch of confidence, not to mention an innate fire that is sure to bring fans to their feet.

Add in the immediate likable Southern drawl to go along with a scruffy yet peaceful look, and it's easy to assume those same fans will quickly warm up to this delightful chap before The Show even starts.

Cue in said star Ben Sheets, who Billy Beane and Co. officially welcomed into the Oakland fold on Tuesday morning with a one-year contract worth \$10 million plus incentives.

The right-handed pitcher, who was brought in as a free agent after missing all of 2009 because of elbow surgery, quickly assured media at an introductory press conference that he is more than ready to be the head honcho of an already strong but growing staff.

And the A's, claimed manager Bob Geren, are more than ready for him to take on that role.

"It's a real pleasure to add him to our roster," said Geren, who wasted no time in naming Sheets his Opening Day starter. "If you think about what he's done in the past and look at how rejuvenated he feels to get back on the mound, it's a big plus for us.

"Quite frankly, we had a lot of young guys last year who were trying to learn on the job and are very talented, but they didn't necessarily have that fire and confidence because they were still learning that craft. But when you add a guy like Ben into the mix, you know it's going to affect your team in a lot of ways besides pitching."

That same mindset is exactly what Beane envisioned long before the 31-year-old Sheets even threw a pitching session in front of several scouts and more than 15 team officials -- including those from Oakland -- last week at the University of Louisiana at Monroe.

The A's general manager said he met with Sheets' agent and close friend, Casey Close, at the Winter Meetings in early December and kept in touch on a steady basis.

"I told Casey if we liked what we saw," Beane said, "we planned on being aggressive.

"When he threw, we were pretty much ready with an offer on the phone within an hour. His velocity that day was pretty much the same velocity he had during the seasons of '07 and '08, and I'm not sure there are too many guys on our Major League staff who could go out and hit 90 and 92 in January, so we were impressed and got right on him."

Surely, though, most assumed the small-market A's were dealing with some heavy competition -- including the Mets and Rangers, among others, Sheets confirmed. The fact is they were, but that didn't stop Beane from getting his marquee man.

"I was a little concerned when [Joel] Pineiro signed [with the Angels] on Thursday," he admitted. "I was hoping he would stay out there just to divert some of the attention from Ben. We were already starting to gain some momentum, and we made sure we kept that momentum because once Pineiro was off the board, I was sure there would be some people coming for Ben. I didn't really pay attention, though, because by then they knew we were ready to make a deal.

"We weren't too focused on the competition. We were either going to get him with what we had or we weren't."

The lone piece to the puzzle at that point was selling Sheets on joining a rebuilding A's team, which both Beane and his new pitcher believe was the easy part.

"I had my eye on the AL West last year, and again this year," Sheets said. "The first time I talked to [Beane] he really sold me on the whole idea of this team, and when I really dived into the information on this team, I really liked what I saw.

"I told Casey, 'I like where this A's team is going, and I like how confident they are in their organization.' This is where it worked out. This is where God wanted me to be, and this is where I wanted to be, and I'm glad they've welcomed me with open arms."

Still, that didn't stop Sheets from considering other teams like Texas, which signed the All-Star to a two-year deal just before Spring Training last year until the contract was voided when it was determined during his physical that surgery was required to repair a torn flexor in his right elbow.

The Rangers were still very interested in Sheets after his session last week, but the team knew affordability would present a road block.

"Oakland made him an offer we were not going to make," Texas general manager Jon Daniels said. "I got a chance to know Ben last year, and I'm glad he's getting back to

health. I would have preferred he sign in one of the other five divisions. I hope his turns in the rotation miss us."

It's not hard to see why after assessing Sheets' first eight seasons in the Major Leagues, which include an 86-83 record with a 3.72 ERA. The four-time Milwaukee All-Star tallied double-digit wins seven times while recording an ERA under 4.00 in each of his past five seasons, and he went 13-9 with a 3.09 ERA in 31 starts for the Brewers during the 2008 season.

"Ben's been one of the top pitchers in the game, and when you have that opportunity to sign a guy like him -- regardless of where you are as a club -- you're going to take a chance," Beane said. "It's really simple. We've got a long way to go considering last year's finish, but this was probably the best step we could take in narrowing that gap."

Just as important for the team was finding the right guy to act as another veteran presence on an otherwise young A's rotation that now boasts plenty of depth. Sheets joins fellow veteran Justin Duchscherer along with Dallas Braden, Brett Anderson, Trevor Cahill, Gio Gonzalez and Vin Mazzaro in the mix.

"Our rotation is just getting better and better it seems," Anderson said. "It's great having these veterans in there knowing that they can help us younger guys with bits of information here and there. You can pick their brain a little bit, and hopefully they can help us any way they can."

At the same time, Sheets expects much of the same from the junior crew.

"They've got some good arms in here, and they can only develop further," he said. "I think I can come in and help out and just talk about some of the things I've been through. Vice versa, these guys are going to help me because they've been in this league before."

However, Geren doesn't see Sheets having any trouble getting acquainted with his newly formed league rivals.

"He's already asking me for scouting reports on the Angels and Mariners, trying to learn the AL West right now," the skipper said. "I printed him stuff last night, and he also wanted to know about scouting and how we prepare for game plans. These are questions you don't normally hear. Each veteran guy brings in a different thing. With him, I think it's the competitive nature and the work ethic that's really going to rub off."

Geren wasn't just busy at the printers the night before the A's announced the signing, though. He also played what Sheets called a "good old-fashioned game of catch" at a park in nearby Danville, where the manager resides.

"He wanted to stay on his throwing program, so he and Bob threw in the rain after dinner under the lights," Beane said.

Added Geren: "He said he wanted to throw up to 200 feet, so I had to call in a replacement. I had my son meet me at the park in five minutes, and so they threw long toss for a while."

Nevertheless, the quick session further left the A's even more confident entering Tuesday knowing that Sheets' health will not be a question mark dancing around Arizona in just three short weeks at Spring Training.

"The elbow's doing great," said Sheets, who rehabbed in Dallas for almost six months last year before finishing his program at home in Louisiana. "I think the biggest thing that I'm going to take out of this year is that my whole body feels a lot better. Baseball's such a grind that you kind of forget how good you can feel, and missing this whole year, I feel renewed for the game. I'm real antsy to get back out there because I miss the competitive part.

"I think I'm 100 percent physically ready to go. To get ready for the season is a bit different. I have to build up my pitches ... but I feel like I'm going to be right where I need to be when the season opens. I hope, at the end of the day, they end up getting the better end of this deal. I feel like I've got some good years left."

Where Sheets will be at the end of the year is anybody's guess, but he'll be the first to say signing a multiyear deal never made sense despite multiple reports linking him to a two-year contract recently.

"That's what makes sense for everybody," he said. "I'm realistic. How are you going to get a multiyear deal after a year of nothing? You have to prove you're healthy. This was the right thing.

"I'm glad to get this process over with, and I'm going to take my normal process into Spring Training and be one of the guys. I'm excited to get back into routine. There's one place I always feel comfortable, and that's on the mound, so I'm pretty sure when I get up there that all my instincts and what I've learned in the past will come back. I'm not that nervous about getting back out there, I'm just ready to go."

More than ready for the change are his sons, 2-year-old Miller and 7-year-old Seaver -- the latter who told dad he missed hanging out in the clubhouse last year. Sheets, though, said the time spent at home with his family made his injury a blessing in disguise of sorts.

"It was strange having to watch the baseball season from home, but it was rewarding in the fact that I'm a dad also," he said. "I'm a dad first and foremost. I got the chance to see my kids on an everyday basis, got to enjoy Fourth of July with them, got to take them to a ballgame."

One of those games in Texas happened to be against the A's and outfielder Ryan Sweeney, who quickly caught Sheets attention thanks to his aggressive, all-out style of play -- not to mention a certain number on the back of his jersey.

"I'm going home and doing some bicep curls and some bench pressing, and I'm going to take down Ryan Sweeney," joked Sheets, who has always worn Sweeney's No. 15. "I think we're going to work out a deal, which I'd like a lot."

Either way, Sheets is simply happy to be back on the field, and even more thrilled to share it with a team like the A's.

"I wanted to go geographically to one spot last year, and then I realized I just love the game, and it doesn't matter where you play," he said. "We don't get to play this game forever. You want to be somewhere where people want you, and you want to help them out the best you can."

## **AL West figures to be an arms race**

Halos' division foes loading up with pitching this offseason

By Lyle Spencer / MLB.com

Armed and dangerous. That's the new and potentially improved American League West, where all four clubs look locked and loaded with deep, young, talented rotations.

With the Angels bidding for a fourth consecutive division title, all three of their AL West rivals have made bold offseason moves involving starting pitching in an effort to make up ground.

Seattle acquired Cliff Lee from Philadelphia, pairing one of the Majors' premier lefties with right-hander Felix Hernandez in a duo that could be game's most dominant.

Texas shipped anchor Kevin Millwood to Baltimore and replaced him with Rich Harden's blazing heat to go with returning ace Scott Feldman, one of the finds of the 2009 season.

Not to be outdone, Oakland on Tuesday brought in a top-shelf starter, Ben Sheets, to provide veteran leadership for a youthful group of power arms.

Surrendering John Lackey to Boston's free-agent riches, the Angels didn't stand idly by. They filled out their rotation by signing Joel Pineiro, arguably the next-best right-hander in the marketplace, coming off a 15-12 season with the Cardinals.

"Our division has been the strongest in baseball since I've been here, so this is nothing new," said Angels manager Mike Scioscia, noting that the AL West as a group finished 40 games above .500 in 2009. "It's always a competitive division with a lot of talent."

And this is an opportune time to strike, rival GMs must feel, judging by all the offseason maneuvering.

With the Angels parting company with one-fourth of their 2009 roster, including centerpieces Lackey, Vladimir Guerrero and Chone Figgins, the Mariners in particular have moved forward with a clear sense of urgency.

Seattle has former Angels Casey Kotchman and Chone Figgins manning the infield corners, bringing gloves of gold as well as educated bats to the lineup that features a pair of future Hall of Famers in Ichiro Suzuki and Ken Griffey Jr.

With Guerrero bringing respect to the heart of their lineup, the Rangers are stacked offensively. Harden, with his lights-out stuff, could lift the staff while Darren Oliver, another ex-Angel, solidifies the bullpen.

Seattle rallied late in 2009 to finish two games behind the runner-up Rangers, who stayed in the hunt until unraveling in September. Only the A's, at 75-87, were below .500, and they've added speed (Coco Crisp) in the outfield and solidified third base (Kevin Kouzmanoff) in addition to Sheets.

It remains to be seen if the Angels can compensate for the loss of Lackey, their big dog, but Pineiro, when healthy, is a high-end starter who pounds the strike zone and throws ground balls. He led the Majors last season in fewest walks per nine innings (1.1) and most grounders induced (64.1 percent).

Pineiro, at 31, has career numbers not far removed from those of Sheets, an acknowledged ace during his eight-year run with the Brewers. Pineiro is 87-79 with a 4.39 career ERA compared to Sheets' 86-83, 3.72.

Pineiro joins Jered Weaver (27), Joe Saunders (28), Ervin Santana (27) and Scott Kazmir (26) in a rotation that could be dealing together for several years under the watch of Scioscia and pitching coach Mike Butcher.

#### AL WEST PROJECTED ROTATIONS

Angels	2009	Career
Jered Weaver	16-8, 3.75	51-27, 3.73
Joe Saunders	16-7, 4.60	48-22, 4.22
Joel Pineiro	15-12, 3.49	87-79, 4.39
Scott Kazmir	10-9, 4.89	57-46, 3.83
Ervin Santana	8-8, 5.03	59-45, 4.52
Rangers	2009	Career
Scott Feldman	17-8, 4.08	24-21, 4.58
Rich Harden	9-9, 4.09	50-29, 3.39
Derek Holland	8-13, 6.12	8-13, 6.12
Tommy Hunter	9-6, 4.10	9-8, 5.20
Brandon McCarthy	7-4, 4.62	20-24, 4.56
Mariners	2009	Career
Felix Hernandez	19-5, 2.49	54-41, 3.45
Cliff Lee	14-13, 3.22	90-52, 3.97
Ryan Rowland-Smith	5-4, 3.74	11-7, 3.62
Ian Snell	7-10, 4.84	38-48, 4.71



Angels	2009	Career
Doug Fister	3-4, 4.13	3-4, 4.13
Athletics	2009	Career
Ben Sheets	Did not pitch	86-83, 3.72
Brett Anderson	11-11, 4.06	11-11, 4.06
Dallas Braden	8-9, 3.89	14-21, 4.68
Trevor Cahill	10-13, 4.63	10-13, 4.63
Justin Duchscherer	Did not pitch	31-24, 3.14

"Our starting pitching has been our foundation since we've been here," said Scioscia, embarking on his 11th season at the wheel in Anaheim. "Every club looks to have five guys who will keep you in the game on a consistent basis, and that's what we think we have."

Among the 20 probable starters in the division, only Pineiro, Sheets (31), Lee (31) and Oakland's Justin Duchscherer (32) are on the other side of 30.

In terms of track records, the Angels' rotation has been the most productive of the four.

Pineiro, Weaver (51-27, 3.73), Saunders (48-22, 4.22), Santana (59-45, 4.52) and Kazmir (57-46, 3.83) have combined for 302 career victories. Average age: 27.8.

After Hernandez (58-41, 3.45) and Lee (90-52, 3.97), the Mariners have strong arms and question marks. Southpaw Ryan Rowland-Smith (11-7, 3.62) is slotted as the third starter, with righty Ian Snell (38-48, 4.71) in the fourth spot.

The fifth starter will emerge from a pack including right-hander Doug Fister (3-4, 4.13) and lefties Luke French (4-5, 5.21), Jason Vargas (9-14, 5.43) and Garrett Olson (13-18, 6.46).

If Olson, the most experienced of the group, claims the job, the Mariners will enter 2010 with a total of 210 wins from their rotation and an average age of 27.2.

In Texas, Harden (50-29, 3.39) and Feldman (24-21, 4.58) could approach the level of Hernandez and Lee -- if Harden can stay healthy. That's a big hurdle to clear, given that his 26 starts for the Cubs in '09 were his most since his career-best 31 for the A's in 2004.

Coming up behind Harden and Feldman are lefty Derek Holland (8-13, 6.12) and righty Tommy Hunter (9-8, 5.20). Right-hander Brandon McCarthy (20-24) and southpaw Matt Harrison (13-8, 5.76) figure to duel for the No. 5 spot.

This is the youngest unit in the division, averaging 25.4 years with McCarthy, 25 even with Harrison. Harden is the rotation elder at 28. The group has 111 wins with McCarthy, 103 with Harrison.

The A's are banking on Sheets and Duchscherer (31-24, 3.14) both to make comebacks after missing all of '09.

Oakland has no shortage of starting candidates. Righties Dallas Braden (14-21, 4.68), Trevor Cahill (10-13, 4.63), Vin Mazzaro (4-9, 5.32) are joined by southpaws Brett Anderson (11-11, 4.06), Gio Gonzalez (6-7, 5.75) and Josh Outman (5-3, 3.77).

Anderson has the talent to emerge as a premium starter, and no one has to convince the Angels. He engaged Lackey in a memorable scoreless duel last season, taking a perfect game into the seventh before Bobby Abreu singled. Abreu homered to win it in the 10th against closer Andrew Bailey.

Scioscia has compared Oakland's young starters to the early days of Barry Zito, Tim Hudson and Mark Mulder in the East Bay.

The flip side is Sheets has claimed more wins than the A's other seven rotation candidates combined. If Anderson, Cahill and Braden join Sheets and Duchscherer, the A's would have 152 rotation victories with an average age of 26.6.

The A's, Mariners and Rangers understand the magnitude of the challenge. The Angels won 97 games, claiming the division by 10 games, with a rotation that was patched together for five months in the wake of springtime injuries to Lackey and Santana and the stunning death of promising Nick Adenhardt in a car wreck the first week of the season.

It wasn't until September, when Kazmir settled in after his Aug. 28 arrival from Tampa Bay and Lackey, Santana and Saunders (season-long shoulder issues) were firing on all cylinders with Weaver, that the Angels felt fully equipped.

The wheels will be turning soon. When the chase starts in 10 weeks, the Angels once again will be wearing the familiar targets.

## **2010 Oakland A's: Is Ben Sheets Enough?**

by Joseph Lopez

The fact that the Oakland A's took a risk in signing Ben Sheets—who didn't pitch at all since the 2008 season—is one thing. But the fact that they're dishing out \$10 million plus incentives is absolutely unheard of.

The A's are known throughout the league and by their fans as "penny-pinchers." Seldom do they ever pay their players more than the league minimum. In fact, only Eric Chavez, who is making \$11.5 million this year, is making more than the newly signed Sheets.

The main question is, is Sheets worth that much money?

For the A's, personally, I think he will be.

The A's were in need of another veteran presence in their youthful and talented rotation. The A's front four will include Ben Sheets, Justin Duchscherer, Dallas Braden, and Brett Anderson. As for the fifth spot, Trevor Cahill, Gio Gonzalez, and Vin Mazzaro are expected to compete for it.

The A's rotation, with the addition of Sheets, becomes pretty good. In fact, if Sheets and Duchscherer prove to be healthy, the A's staff could be a dangerous one.

And with the A's current focus on defense, opponents might find that scoring runs is an easy task to do. With the additions of Coco Crisp and Kevin Kouzmanoff, the A's defense will probably be one of their best attributes.

So I guess a more important question is, will the A's make the playoffs?

Well, you never know with baseball.

It's an extremely daunting task to predict what will happen over a course of an entire season, but I say the A's will have an outside chance. If Ben Sheets can live up to that \$10 million contract, anything is possible.

## Billy Beane: What the Heck Is He Thinking?

by Steven Resnick

I'm really not sure what general manager Billy Beane has planned for the Oakland A's for the 2010 season. So far, this offseason has been a total failure for the A's, except for one signing.

The first mistake Beane made was keeping Bob Geren as manager. I've written numerous articles detailing my disdain for the pathetic Geren. So, there's no need for me to go into anymore detail than that.

Beane's second mistake may be the worst yet. The signing of Coco Crisp. Who in their right mind would give Crisp a one-year deal for \$5.25 million? Crisp is terrible offensively, he doesn't have any power, and he doesn't even hit for a high average.

With the signing and the trade of Scott Hairston back to San Diego, it means that Rajai Davis moves over to left field. So, the starting outfield for the A's is Davis, Crisp, and Ryan Sweeney.

Offensively, that means the A's have the worst outfield in all of baseball. Defensively, Crisp and Davis have the speed, and Sweeney has the outstanding arm, but that doesn't make up for how offensively inept that outfield is going to be.

Out of the three, Sweeney has the best chance to produce, especially if he learns to hit for power instead of just spraying the ball to all fields. Davis is the best option in terms of causing havoc on the base paths, and Crisp is worthless.

Just recently, Beane made another decision: This time, he signed oft-injured Ben Sheets to a one-year, \$10 million contract. Prior to that, Beane also brought back Justin Duchschere with a one-year contract.

Both those moves do solidify a strong, young starting rotation. The bullpen for the A's should also be stronger than it was last year especially if Sheets and Duchschere can stay healthy.

Still, the A's are going to struggle offensively. What's interesting, though, is that Beane could have brought back Miguel Tejada for a year instead. Tejada went back to the Baltimore Orioles, recently signing a one-year, \$6 million contract.

With the money given to Sheets and the money potentially going to a Johnny Damon deal, I'm pretty sure that the A's could have come up with the ability to pay Tejada at least \$6 million for one year.

Even with the decline in power production and defense, he still is a way better option than Cliff Pennington. What makes Tejada a good fit for the A's is, even though he's not the 30 home run hitter that he once was, he can still find the gaps. He led the National League in doubles last year with 46, still hit .313, and drove in 86 runs.

I'd much rather the A's have Sheets and Tejada than Crisp, Sheets, and possibly Damon. Well here's to another last-place finish for the A's.

Even the trade of Scott Hairston and Aaron Cunningham for Kevin Kouzmanoff is questionable at best. Kouzmanoff is not a patient hitter—while driving in 88 runs last year, he struck out 106 times while walking only 27.

My prediction is that Michael Taylor, the outfielder that the A's received from the Toronto Blue Jays in the Brett Wallace trade, will be joining the A's roster before the All-Star break.

The other hope for the A's is that Travis Buck has a great spring and forces Crisp out of the lineup.