

## **A's News Clips, Thursday, February 18, 2010**

### **West is tougher in the AL**

[John Shea](#), San Francisco Chronicle, 2/18/2010

Both the Giants and A's will need drastic offensive improvements, good health and gobs of luck to make it to the playoffs this season.

Especially the A's.

Not necessarily because they're an inferior team. But because they play in a beefed-up division. While the American League West was upgrading, the National League West was dragging. A bummer for the A's. A benefit for the Giants.

The NL West's top two teams certainly didn't improve. The Dodgers, with the McCourts' divorce proceedings obviously restricting spending, did not re-sign Randy Wolf or Orlando Hudson, traded Juan Pierre (eating \$10 million in the deal) and added only a reliever (Justin Miller) and stable of backups (Reed Johnson, Jamey Carroll, Nick Green and Brian Giles).

The Rockies, convinced their 74-42 finish under Jim Tracy was no fluke, did little more than add a couple of role players, Miguel Olivo and Melvin Mora.

Meantime, the Mariners put a serious dent in the AL West. Fresh off a 24-win improvement (61 wins in 2008, 85 in 2009), they have the division's best 1-2 punch at the top of the order (Chone Figgins joins Ichiro Suzuki) and rotation (Cliff Lee joins Felix Hernandez), and also added Milton Bradley (the M's hope he'll behave alongside Ken Griffey Jr. as he once behaved alongside Frank Thomas), first baseman Casey Kotchman, reliever Brandon League and two players seeking rebirths (Ryan Garko and Eric Byrnes).

The Rangers, with a new ownership featuring Nolan Ryan, who's anticipating a division title (if his players stay somewhat healthy), added pitchers Rich Harden, Colby Lewis (from Japan) and Darren Oliver, designated hitter Vladimir Guerrero and infielder Khalil Greene.

The Angels lost ace John Lackey, but they're still deep with pitching and hitting and brought in pitchers Joel Piñeiro, Fernando Rodney and Brian Stokes and designated hitter Hideki Matsui.

The competition escalated in the AL West, not the NL West, and the A's and Giants will be affected accordingly.

## **Devine excited to be back in action**

### **A's reliever missed all of '09 after Tommy John surgery**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Joey Devine has already learned quite a few lessons in the four short years -- including just one full season -- he's spent in the big leagues.

First, there's the real estate advice he'd like to share with fellow relief corps members.

"I bought a house when I was playing with Atlanta," the A's reliever said. "Three weeks after I bought the house, I got traded. I learned a valuable lesson as a reliever in the big leagues. It's not very wise to buy a house where you're located."

Next were the lessons -- perhaps more so new perspectives -- that came along with being on the disabled list for all of last season.

"When I was away from those guys, I realized that's the first time in about 20 years I haven't been able to play baseball in the summer time," Devine said. "It definitely put things in perspective as far as what the game really means to me and how thankful I am to be able to put on a baseball uniform at this stage in my life."

Now just three days away from the A's first official workout for pitchers and catchers, Devine this week deemed himself ready for the rigors of Spring Training and "to just be one of the guys again."

That's big news from a guy who didn't pitch an inning last season. Devine, 26, was expected to share the closer's role, but he was sidelined with elbow pain and shut down after posting an 8.10 ERA in four spring games. His 2009 season was officially pushed aside in April when it was decided he needed Tommy John elbow ligament replacement surgery.

"It was extremely tough," he said, "just because I would sometimes just sit there and think about it, especially at the very beginning of the season when all my teammates were playing and I was back home rehabbing an arm."

Devine sat at the same home he mistakenly purchased on that day in Atlanta, knowing full well he'd probably be there awhile considering Tommy John patients usually need at least 12 months of recovery time.

As he approaches the 10-month mark, however, Devine is certain the work he's accomplished in that time will allow him to bypass the remaining two months of cautionary baseball activity. After enjoying a 10-day stay in Cabo San Lucas to celebrate his one-year anniversary with wife Erin, the couple packed up in December and found themselves in Arizona by the first week of January to allow Devine the opportunity to work with bullpen coach Ron Romanick and escape Atlanta's cold weather.

"It's been really good coming out here early," he said. "I feel great. I've already been throwing off the mound. I've thrown about six bullpens by now and every week is getting better, so I'm excited with Spring Training being here and knowing I'll get to face hitters again."

That said, Devine believes he should be able to perform at the same level as his fellow teammates thanks to a program that has allowed him to be "definitely ahead of schedule."

Said program includes stretching and conditioning followed by a throwing routine with Romanick and strengthening exercises in the weight room three days a week. On the other two days, Devine has been doing arm exercises while mixing in a variety of other weight room activities.

"It's five days a week," he said. "And that's basically what I've been doing the past six weeks. So I'll have zero restrictions. I'll be with everyone from stretching to our fielding practice to throwing bullpens. Everything."

Whereas the mundane routines of Spring Training often bore most players after a couple of weeks, Devine knows he won't be able to get enough of them. And his appreciation for the game assuredly extends to those who have kept close tabs on him over the past year.

"To be able to have the club back you up and give you confidence makes your mind at ease and really helps you focus on getting back," said Devine, who avoided arbitration with the A's in December by signing a one-year contract. "I tell you what, it's huge. It makes you really want to get back to help that team."

The A's will certainly be looking to Devine to aid an already strong bullpen that boasts American League Rookie of the Year winner Andrew Bailey, along with Michael Wuertz, Brad Ziegler and several others who are sure to make a competition out of bullpen slots.

"We have a great bunch of guys, and I'm just very thankful for the organization," Devine said. "It's been tough being on the disabled list, but it's part of the game and I'm just blessed to have an organization back me up the way they have."

## **Inbox: Why pay Taveras to go?**

### **Beat reporter Jane Lee answers A's fans' questions**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com 2/18/2010

*This time next week, more than 60 players will sprinkle Phoenix's Papago Park with flashes of green and gold. Several question marks will begin to see answers as concerns surrounding health and youth unfold. For now, though, let's take a look at the queries we can put to rest for the time being.*

**Given the constant talk about the A's austere budget, how do you explain general manager Billy Beane trading for Adam Rosales and Willy Taveras, only to have to eat the latter's \$4 million salary two weeks later?**

**-- Robert N., McMinnville, Ore.**

You're not the only one still scratching your head at the A's trade with the Reds for Rosales and Taveras. At first glance, it appears Oakland is on the hook for all \$4 million owed this year to Taveras, who signed a Minor League deal with the Nationals this week. However, any time the outfielder spends on Washington's big league roster equals less money Oakland has to pay him. Basically, the Reds are responsible for any pro-rated portion of the Major League minimum of \$400,000 for days spent in the Majors.

Yes, you're right. That still means the A's owe a ton of money to a player who was immediately designated for assignment upon his arrival. But in reality, the A's and Reds -- who received Aaron Miles, owed \$2.7 million -- swapped some big-buck salaries, and Oakland also got Rosales in the deal. So you have to look at it as getting a much-needed utility infielder for \$1.3 million -- a number that could decrease. You also have to remember that the A's also got \$1 million from the Cubs in the trade that brought in Miles and Jake Fox.

Still, I'll admit all this movement on the field and in the bank seems a little silly for a utility infielder. But Beane got what he wanted, and the money part doesn't seem too crazy if you break it all down.

**If Joey Devine is healthy, who closes for the A's this year?**

**-- Andrew C., Pleasanton, Calif.**

I'll give you one hint, Andrew. Your 2010 closer won a shiny piece of hardware this offseason after a surprisingly dominating 2009 campaign. Remember Andrew Bailey? It's hard to forget a guy who entered Spring Training as a long shot to make the roster and not only made the team but eventually took over the closer's role, was the only rookie in either league to earn a trip to the All-Star Game and set an Oakland rookie record with 26 saves to go along with a 1.84 ERA. Oh, and that shiny award? That came in the form of AL Rookie of the Year honors.

So it's pretty safe to say the job is Bailey's to lose, yet it's going to take more than one or two blown saves to give the team any reason to look elsewhere for a closer. That said, Devine -- health being a key factor here -- is expected to be a regular right-handed contributor to the bullpen this year. And possibly more than any other team, the A's highly stress the notion that job titles are fairly overrated. All seven members of Oakland's relief corps know the team is more important than how or when they're being used.

**What are the chances of Travis Buck and Eric Patterson beating out Gabe Gross for a reserve outfield spot? Both are more talented than Gross.**

**-- Shawn G., San Jose, Calif.**

The chances are not as slim as some might assume. That's not saying Gross doesn't have the edge, though. He carries with him six years of big league experience and has dutifully filled the thankless role of extra outfielder during that time. In essence, he perfectly fits the club's need for a backup to presumable starters Coco Crisp, Rajai Davis and Ryan Sweeney.

At the same time, Gross is making \$750,000, so it's not like the A's will look like broke fools if they think Buck or Patterson would make the team better. But neither Buck nor Patterson, both of whom own career Minor League batting averages over the .300 mark, have proven they can bring along that success to The Show. Plus, the A's didn't exactly help their situations by acquiring both Gross and highly anticipated prospect Michael Taylor this offseason. Still, I suspect Buck and Patterson to turn the fourth outfield spot into a competition this spring. Come April, though, I see Gross getting that invitation to Opening Day.

**Are the A's going to continue to be a running team in 2010 and go for more of a small-ball approach again?**

**-- Franz S., Chicago**

Without a doubt. I think that's their only option right now based on a projected lineup that boasts little power but speed at both the top and bottom. The speedy Davis and Crisp act as an interchangeable one-two punch with Cliff Pennington, Mark Ellis and Daric Barton -- not in that exact order, mind you -- most likely rounding out the lineup.

I don't think it's any secret that the A's changed their offensive style rather quickly last season after the departures of sluggers Matt Holliday and Jason Giambi. Rather than sit back and hope for that two- or three-run homer, the club successfully began taking extra bases, not to mention some stolen ones as well. Given the makeup of the current roster, I see this team being the perfect match for that approach again.

**I never see Josh Outman's name mentioned as a possible starter. He was lights-out when healthy. Did I miss something? Is he still rehabbing? Is he not in the A's future?**

**-- Bil F., South Lake Tahoe, Calif.**

Outman is definitely still in the mix -- but not until he is healthy. The 25-year-old lefty appeared to be on his way to a breakout year after posting a 4-1 record with a 3.48 ERA in 14 games -- 12 of them starts. If you recall, however, he succumbed to the contagious injury bug that's put a major damper on the organization over the past few years. Outman underwent Tommy John elbow ligament replacement surgery in June, but he's very much expected to rejoin the A's midseason. In what role, though, is an entirely different question considering the team is well-stocked both in the starting rotation and in the bullpen. If Outman can prove he's still a hard thrower with pinpoint control and solid secondary stuff, the A's will be hard-pressed to ignore his presence.

**Over the last decade or so, the A's have had a reputation of having a loose, player-friendly clubhouse. With a lot of new, younger players, who do you expect to be the clubhouse leaders this year? Who is the clubhouse prankster?**

**Jason W., Santa Rosa, Calif.**

I see many of this year's clubhouse leaders -- think Ellis, Kurt Suzuki and Eric Chavez (if healthy) -- being the quieter lead-by-example types. Same for Ben Sheets and Justin Duchscherer, who are expected to tutor the younger players along in the rotation. All five guys mentioned may not be the loudest of the bunch but there's no denying the intelligent and consistent way in which they go about their work on a daily basis.

As for the pranksters, I can easily see Dallas Braden, Crisp and Gio Gonzalez teaming up to make some trouble around the clubhouse -- all in good nature, though. At the very least,

they'll probably be the most candid and offer some pretty good costume ideas for the annual rookie hazing season.

## **American League West preview**

### **Figgins leaves large hole in Anaheim ... A's look for comebacks from Chavez, Devine ... Eight new faces on the Mariners ... Watch for Smoak in Rangers camp**

By [BOB ELLIOTT](#), Toronto Sun, 2/18/2010

#### LOS ANGELES ANGELS

ADDITIONS: RHP Fernando Rodney, RHP Joel Pineiro, DH Hideki Matsui.

DEPARTURES: DH Vladimir Guerrero, LHP Darren Oliver, 3B Chone Figgins, RHP Kelvim Escobar, OF Gary Matthews Jr. RHP John Lackey.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS: Who replaces Figgins? Brandon Wood at third, either SS Erick Aybar or 2B Maicer Izturis at leadoff?

- Can Matsui play any outfield on shaky knees?
- When will Scot Shields (knee injury) return to the mound.

CANADIAN CONTENT: Waterloo's Terrell Alliman hit .306 at rookie-class Orem.

PROJECTED PAYROLL: \$120 million.

KEEP AN EYE ON: INF Freddy Sandoval seeking backup role.

#### SEATTLE MARINERS

ADDITIONS: LHP Cliff Lee, OF Eric Byrnes, OF Milton Bradley, C Josh Bard, 3B Chone Figgins, RHP Brandon League, 1B Casey Kotchman, 1B Ryan Garko.

DEPARTURES: 1B Russ Branyan, C Kenji Johjima, RHP Carlos Silva, RP Miguel Batista, 3B Adrian Beltre, RHP Brandon Morrow, OF Bill Hall.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS: Who starts after Felix Hernandez, Lee and Ryan Rowland-Smith? Ian Snell, Doug Fister, Luke French and Jason Vargas are contenders.

- Who hits first, Ichiro or Figgins?
- Who is second catcher -- Rob Johnson, Adam Moore or Bard?

CANADIAN CONTENT: OF Michael Saunders of Victoria, B.C.

PROJECTED PAYROLL: \$90 million.

KEEP AN EYE ON: RP Nick Hill, West Point grad.

#### TEXAS RANGERS

ADDITIONS: RHPs Colby Lewis and Chris Ray, INF Khalil Greene, DH Vladimir Guerrero, RHP Rich Harden, LHP Darren Oliver.

DEPARTURES: OF Marlon Byrd, 1B Hank Blalock, RHP Kevin Millwood.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS: Will OF Josh Hamilton rebound from injury-plagued 2009?

- Who completes rotation after Harden, Scott Feldman, Tommy Hunter and Lewis? Derek Holland, Matt Harrison, Brandon McCarthy contending.

CANADIAN CONTENT: Harden of Victoria the opening day starter.

PROJECTED PAYROLL: \$58 million.

KEEP AN EYE ON: 1B Justin Smoak, reached triple-A Oklahoma City in his first full pro season.

OAKLAND RANGERS

ADDITIONS: 3B Kevin Kouzmanoff, RHP Ben Sheets, DH Jack Cust, RHP Justin Duchscherer, OF Coco Crisp.

DEPARTURES: INF Adam Kennedy, RHP Brett Tomko, INF Nomar Garciaparra, OF Scott Hairston.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS: Who is fifth man? RHP Trevor Cahill, LHP Gio Gonzalez or RHP Vin Mazzaro?

- Can 3B Eric Chavez rebound after two back surgeries?

CANADIAN CONTENT: Mississauga RP Jamie Richmond was at single-A Stockton in 2009.

PROJECTED PAYROLL: \$56 million

KEEP AN EYE ON: Joey Devine, coming off elbow surgery, hopes to regain closer role.

### **San Jose mayor will be introduced by special guest star at speech: Oakland A's owner**

By John Woolfolk, San Jose Mercury News, 2/17/2010

The biggest surprise in San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed's annual State of the City speech today may not be the red ink all over the municipal ledger, but the fellow who will introduce him: Oakland A's owner Lew Wolff.

Don't expect a big announcement on whether baseball's honchos have cleared Wolff to move his team to San Jose, the mayor's office says. The team owner just happens to be fond of Reed.

Even so, Wolff's appearance underscores his desire to dump Oakland for Silicon Valley, something San Jose consultants say would pump millions of dollars into the local economy and help the city reverse nine consecutive years of budget shortfalls. A group of residents backed by the San Francisco Giants — who own baseball's territorial rights to the South Bay — argue a ballpark would drain precious dollars from city services such as parks and libraries.

Reed's 8 a.m. community breakfast at the McEnery Convention Center is already sold out, with a crowd of 1,400 expected. But it will be broadcast live on Ch. 26 Comcast cablevision and online at the city's Web site: [www.sanjoseca.gov](http://www.sanjoseca.gov).

### **Baseball: Five things to look for in spring training**

## **1. WHERE IS THE CONTROVERSY?**

Last year, baseball was in the midst of the steroid blame-game, with Alex Rodriguez front and center. This year, it's suspiciously quiet. No rumors, no innuendos, no pictures of A-Rod in the New York tabloids. Manny hasn't been being Manny. There haven't been any bitter contract squabbles or off-the-field incidents.

Perhaps the biggest story has been the admission of steroid use by Mark McGwire, above, to several media outlets as he prepared to begin his duties as hitting coach for the St. Louis Cardinals. And that blew over relatively fast, despite McGwire's ridiculous assertion that steroids never helped him hit the ball farther.

But don't expect the quiet to remain. Soon, a player will be unhappy with his role, or another book or allegation will surface. It's become an annual rite, just like spring training.

## **2. THE AMAZING METS' MESS**

Rarely do the New York tabloids run out of things to mock on their back covers, but the Mets have provided plenty of fodder in the slowest of times. Whether it was seemingly overpaying for outfielder Jason Bay, whose power doesn't seem to translate well to cavernous Citi Field, or Carlos Beltran, above, having knee surgery a month ago without consulting the team, meaning he'll miss a month of the regular season, it's been an amazing mess.

Let's not forget that the Mets underachieved last season with a 70-92 record due to injuries to Beltran, shortstop Jose Reyes (hamstring surgery), ace left-hander Johan Santana (elbow surgery), horrible seasons from pitchers Oliver Perez and Mike Pelfrey and an overall lack of talent.

This year, they have a \$140 million payroll and most people think they will finish no better than third in the NL East, even under optimal conditions. Perhaps it's time to start the office pools as to when general manager Omar Minaya and manager Jerry Manuel will be fired.

## **3. RECOVERY OF KEY PITCHERS**

There are few things more uncertain than the recovery of pitchers from offseason surgery. And yet each year, teams have to hope key pitchers will return from injuries and become their former selves.

This season, several teams' success will be directly tied to pitchers returning from injury.

Diamondbacks ace Brandon Webb, above, is returning from labrum surgery, and the Mets are banking on Santana. Both are No. 1 starters and vital to their teams.

Other recovering front-line starters include Jeff Francis of the Rockies, Ben Sheets of the A's, Jake Westbrook of the Indians, Tim Hudson of the Braves and Erik Bedard of the Mariners.

## **4. FIRST TEAM LABELED 'WORST'**

Usually it's a pretty safe bet the honor will go to the Washington Nationals, who have lost more than 100 games the past two seasons. But it appears the Nats are somewhat better.



Yes, the signing of players such as Jason Marquis and Pudge Rodriguez, above, is nothing more than placing aging bandages on gaping wounds, but they should make Washington better.

There are teams with vastly worse problems than the Nationals.

The Kansas City Royals continue to generate insults and cries of pain with questionable personnel moves. They traded for Yuniesky Betancourt last year, and signed Jason Kendall to a two-year, \$6 million contract in the offseason. These are the types of moves that help a team go from 97 losses to 101 losses.

If the Royals aren't the worst, watch out for the Pittsburgh Pirates and San Diego Padres, who could overtake the Nationals as the worst team.

## **5. CAN ANYONE BEAT THE YANKEES?**

There was some sentiment last season that it's good for baseball when the Yankees win the World Series – though you'd be hard-pressed to find any non-Yankees fan, who would agree.

They were easily the best team last year, and they added outfielder Curtis Granderson, above, and pitcher Javier Vazquez to a loaded roster.

But can they repeat? Well, it starts in their own division. The Boston Red Sox added right-hander John Lackey to a rotation that features Josh Beckett, Jon Lester and a healthy Daisuke Matsuzaka. They also got better on defense by adding center fielder Mike Cameron and third baseman Adrian Beltre.

The Tampa Bay Rays could also contend in the AL East using the core that got them to the 2008 World Series. The key will be a better start.

Out of the division, the Twins and Mariners are greatly improved, and the Angels are solid despite defections.

In the National League, the Phillies weren't intimidated by the Yankees in the World Series, and the addition of Roy Halladay to the staff and the return of some position players make them the favorite. The St. Louis Cardinals will have Matt Holliday for a whole season.

## **Take me out to a spring game? Try these sites**

Jorge Ortiz, USA Today, 2/17/2010

Anybody who has endured the onslaught of snowstorms in the Mid-Atlantic and the East Coast this winter would agree there's no such thing as a bad spring training site. Spring weather in Arizona and Florida is almost always pleasant, the attendants at the ballpark are cheerful and the players often accessible.

What's not to like?

But there are gradations of paradise. Here are some random thoughts on the best and worst spring baseball sites have to offer.

- The Dodgers have retained some of the charm of the old Dodgertown by setting up their practice fields at Camelback Ranch (in Glendale, Ariz.) so players get to walk through the fans and interact with them. The players' daily migration from practice to

ballpark amid adoring fans was one of the highlights of the team's former facility in Vero Beach, Fla.

- If you're partial to the bare-bones facilities employed before spring training became big business, the Pirates' McKechnie Field in Bradenton, Fla., might be your cup of tea. The same goes for the Blue Jays' Dunedin (Fla.) Stadium. There's a certain folksy allure to walking through a neighborhood to attend a game after paying the local folks a few bucks to park in their yard. But if you prefer the comforts and amenities of the newer ballparks, skip these two entirely.
- Much like their homes in the Bay Area, the Giants and A's offer contrasting ballparks in Arizona. The Giants' spring ballfield in trendy Scottsdale sits close to the downtown and provides one of the coolest spots from which to watch a game, the berm behind the outfield wall.
- The A's, on the other hand, are stuck in Phoenix Municipal Stadium, located in a barren desert spot surrounded by a whole lot of nothing and exuding all the charm of, well, the Oakland Coliseum.
- Red Sox fans will travel to the end of the world to watch their team, and in some ways they may feel they've arrived there when they get to Fort Myers, Fla. With the Orioles leaving Fort Lauderdale for Sarasota, Fort Myers (also home to the Twins) is now the southernmost outpost in the Grapefruit League, considerably removed from the heart of the action. It doesn't help either that the Red Sox's training complex sits more than two miles away from City of Palms Park, although the club moves to the ballpark once exhibition games begin.
- For Marlins and especially Cardinals fans who may travel to the Jupiter, Fla., facility they both share, the seacoast town of Melbourne may provide a nice lodging alternative. Although it is 90 miles north, it has a quaint little downtown with a couple of bustling bars and three Marriott properties, for those keen on their rewards program.
- If you're looking to pack a lot of action into a whirlwind spring trip, Arizona is clearly the place. Twelve of the 15 teams are within 40 miles of each other, and when the Rockies and Diamondbacks leave Tucson next year, all 15 will be concentrated in the greater Phoenix area. By contrast, if you want to see both the Yankees (Tampa) and Mets (Port St. Lucie) at home, you have to drive more than 150 miles.