

## A's News Clips, Wednesday, March 31, 2010

### A's notebook: Manager Bob Geren hasn't named starter at shortstop but has been impressed by Cliff Pennington's play

By Joe Stiglich\_Oakland Tribune

Manager Bob Geren had strong praise for Cliff Pennington on Tuesday.

And though Geren stopped short of declaring Pennington his starting opening night shortstop, Pennington has made a convincing argument in his competition with newcomer Adam Rosales.

Pennington is hitting .333 this spring and has been solid with the glove as he's split time at shortstop with Rosales.

"I don't want to announce anything at this point, because I don't have to," Geren said. "But if you're asking if I'm pleased with the way (Pennington) has played, I'd say yes. He's done everything well."

Rosales, acquired from Cincinnati in the offseason, made his case with strong play through much of the Cactus League season. But he's cooled at the plate, going just 3-for-27 (.111) over his past nine games. He's hitting .280 overall after going 1-for-3 in a 2-0 loss to the Chicago White Sox on Tuesday.

Geren noted Pennington is making the routine plays at shortstop and learning when to hold the ball when there's no chance to get a runner.

Ben Sheets wasn't completely satisfied with his final tuneup for opening night, but he showed more life on his fastball against Chicago than in last week's minor-league start.

Sheets went 5 1/3 innings, giving up one run and three hits. He struck out five but walked five.

He finished with an ugly 11.20 ERA in five exhibition starts.

"It's about on par with other springs I've had," he said.

He said he feels ready for Monday's opener against Seattle, not surprising considering his dislike for exhibitions.

"The Cactus League is the toughest league to pitch in — high sky, baked infields, Arizona air," he said. "Want me to keep going? I've got excuses for everything."

Eric Chavez said he'll play three innings at third base today against the Reds, his first game action all spring at his old position.

Reliever Michael Wuertz (shoulder tendinitis) won't rush his recovery just so he can try making it back April 10, when he's eligible to come off the 15-day disabled list.

Wuertz said the key will be knowing when he's ready to pitch back-to-back games. He may get work in extended spring training.

Reliever Jason Jennings was sent to the minors, making one less candidate for the season-opening bullpen. Infielder Steve Tolleson also was sent down.

### Oakland A's confident of better defense this season

By Joe Stiglich\_Oakland Tribune

The A's are confident they'll put a stronger defensive team on the field than last season.

Judging solely by spring training statistics, one would have reason to question that stance.

The A's entered Tuesday having committed 32 errors, the second-highest total in the majors. But it's wise to put spring numbers in the proper context, and veteran second baseman Mark Ellis doesn't see reason for concern.

"I'm not worried about our defense at all," Ellis said. "Errors are overrated, but silly mistakes are underrated."

Manager Bob Geren has emphasized that the A's must improve defensively over last season, when they allowed the second-most unearned runs (76) in the American League. Their 105 errors were the most by an Oakland squad since 2003, when they committed 107.

But Geren said he likes what he's seen defensively during Cactus League play, as the A's break camp after today's game against the Cincinnati Reds and head to the Bay Area.

"Our starting players haven't had many (errors)," Geren said before Tuesday's 2-0 loss to the Chicago White Sox. "We've had some young guys make mistakes, some routine errors (that they've) learned from. I'm not concerned about that."

When analyzing spring training errors, indeed it's important to note who's responsible for them.

Of the A's 32 errors entering Tuesday, only 20 were committed by players with reasonable shots at making the opening day roster. Broken down further, only 10 were made by projected starting position players.

The addition of center fielder Coco Crisp, signed over the offseason, is expected to give the A's one of the major leagues' top defensive outfielders. He didn't play his first game in center until March 24 as he continued rehabbing from surgery on both shoulders, but he's appeared sharp since then.

New third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff, acquired from the San Diego Padres in January, leads the team with three errors this spring. But his addition is another reason the A's believe they'll be better defensively.

Kouzmanoff's .990 fielding percentage in 2009 set a record for National League third basemen. He made just three errors in 311 chances during the regular season.

But Kouzmanoff said he's not one to shrug off errors during spring training.

"Sometimes it's hard playing these long games, and long innings, in spring training," he said. "But I think it's important to stay focused mentally because you're going to have those games during the season."

The A's have the makings of a strong defensive infield to complement their outfield. Daric Barton has developed into a very good first baseman, and Eric Chavez has shown signs of getting comfortable at first after spending his entire career at third.

Ellis is considered one of the majors' top second basemen, and Geren said shortstop Cliff Pennington has made strides this spring.

Kurt Suzuki, entering just his third full season in the big leagues, is gaining a reputation as one of the game's best all-around catchers.

Barton looks back on recent history in explaining why he's confident about Oakland's defense. Before 2009, the A's strung together five straight seasons of committing fewer than 100 errors, which tied a major league record.

"I think errors are part of the game," he said. "You look back on the last few years, and we've been one of the better defensive teams. We're going to be ready for the season."

## **Chin Music: Contemplating Jake Fox vs. Eric Patterson; other Oakland A's tidbits**

By Joe Stiglich, Contra Costa Times

Thought I'd switch things up and pose a question for you. One of the A's big decisions will be whether to keep Jake Fox or Eric Patterson on the 25-man roster. Both can play multiple positions and both are out of options. Of course, nothing says the team has to keep either one.

Who would you prefer? Fox has more pop in his bat and can serve as a third catcher. Patterson is faster so he's more of a threat on the bases. I think Patterson better fits the mold of what the A's are trying to do — be an aggressive baserunning team that relies on its speed to create runs. But you could point to that philosophy as a reason why they should keep Fox — he can provide power for a team that may not have enough of it.

Your thoughts?

—Cliff Pennington has made a strong case to retain the starting shortstop job with his play this spring, particularly in the second half of camp. I asked manager Bob Geren if Pennington has done enough to win the job. While he was careful not to be too definitive, Geren did say: "If you're asking if I'm pleased with the way he's played, I'd say yes. He's done everything well." If Pennington starts, the A's have to decide whether to keep Adam Rosales on the roster as a utility player. But keeping either Fox or Patterson likely would squeeze Rosales out of a spot.

—Checked in w/Michael Wuertz this morning. He said he was relieved that he only has tendinitis in his right shoulder, but he won't try to rush back by April 10, the first day he'd be eligible to come off the DL. He'll fly north with the team, but he might come back to Phoenix and pitch in extended spring training. He said the key is knowing when he's ready to pitch on back-to-back days.

—Eric Chavez said he'll play three innings at third base tomorrow against the Reds, which will be his first appearance there this spring.

—Today's lineup against the White Sox:

Crisp CF  
Davis LF  
Sweeney RF  
Kouzmanoff 3B  
Suzuki C  
Chavez DH  
Barton 1B  
Rosales SS  
Patterson 2B

Sheets P

## **New poll finds strong backing for ballpark deal to bring A's to San Jose**

By Tracy Seipel, San Jose Mercury News, 3/31/2010

Signaling strong and broad support for a deal to bring the A's to San Jose, a new poll finds 62 percent of San Jose voters would be willing to give the team city-owned land downtown for a major league baseball stadium.

A diverse spectrum of San Jose voters — both men and women, young and old, Democrat and Republican, and income earners at most levels — said they would favor a plan that would hold the A's responsible for the costs of building and operating a downtown ballpark on city-purchased property with a guarantee that no taxes would be increased to fund the project.

The stadium poll question — posed by San Jose State University's Survey and Policy Research Institute on behalf of the Mercury News — found that 62 percent of those surveyed favored the idea and 23.5 percent opposed it; 13 percent didn't know and 1.5 percent refused to answer.

Applauded by the A's and city leaders, the result is one of the first indications of how San Jose voters are leaning on the ballpark question, which the city hopes to put on the ballot in November — if Major League Baseball graces the move by overriding the San Francisco Giants' claims to Santa Clara County. The A's are anxious to move from the aging Oakland Coliseum and have said they cannot find a suitable home elsewhere in the East Bay.

A's owner Lew Wolff, who was attending an A's-White Sox spring training game in Arizona on Tuesday, said he was "delighted to hear" the results of the poll but declined to say more.

San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed called it "good news for baseball fans and it's good news for San Jose."

Results of the poll of 532 registered San Jose voters — conducted from March 15 to 26 — come just days before the A's and Giants return home from spring training with the question of a San Jose move adding a tense, off-the-field layer to their Bay Area rivalry. The margin of error for the poll is 4.25 percentage points.

The numbers may bolster San Jose's case to lure the A's, but one major hiccup stands in the way: Major League Baseball must first give the A's the go-ahead to head south.

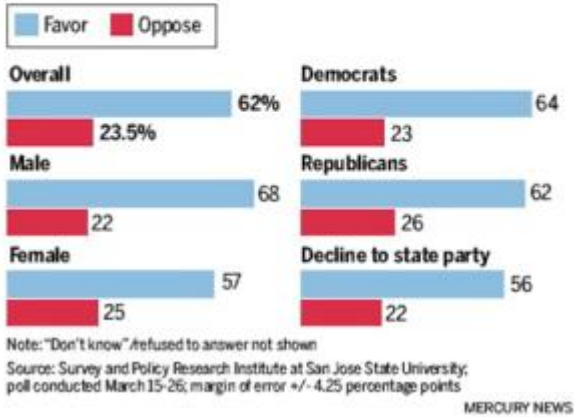
The poll "should help the commissioner reach the right decision," Reed said, noting he wasn't too surprised by the strong support because previous polling by A's boosters showed that "people are supportive of a privately financed, privately constructed and privately operated facility."

Jim Weyermann, president and chief executive of the San Jose Giants, is dubious.

"If you ask somebody in any poll, 'Do you want a positive outcome and there is nothing that is coming out of your

## 62% say: 'Build it'

In a new poll, 532 registered voters in San Jose were asked whether they would support the construction of a baseball park for the Oakland A's if the city provided the land, held the team responsible for construction and operating costs and guaranteed that taxes would not be raised. The results showed strong support.



(CLICK TO ENLARGE)

pocket to get that?' I think that most intelligent people would be affirmative about that," said Weyermann, whose minor league team along with the San Francisco Giants are funding a coalition opposed to any public money for an A's stadium.

San Francisco Giants spokeswoman Staci Slaughter declined to comment on the poll, as did MLB spokesman Pat Courtney and a representative for Oakland Mayor Ron Dellums.

Asked about the poll, Corey Busch, a member of the committee appointed by MLB Commissioner Bud Selig to study the A's stadium options, also declined to comment. Busch also would not say when a decision by the group, formed a year ago to explore potential ballpark sites for the A's in Oakland, Fremont and San Jose, would issue a decision.

In constructing the poll question, the Mercury News sought to make clear to survey respondents the extent of the likely taxpayer contribution. San Jose officials have said the city would provide the land, but that the team — and not taxpayers — would be responsible for building what the city estimates would be a \$461 million stadium and financing all stadium operating costs. Over the years, the city has been cobbling together 14 acres next to Diridon Station and just south of HP Pavilion. So far, the city has spent \$26 million for nine parcels with two parcels left that will cost about \$16 million to \$20 million more, land experts say.

Under city law, San Jose voters must approve any proposal for a sports facility that involves the use of public resources. Such a vote could come during a growing fiscal crisis at City Hall that could lead to hundreds of layoffs and widespread service cuts.

Still, supporters of a ballpark in the San Jose State poll said they saw the stadium as a generator of jobs and economic benefits. Sixty-eight percent of men and 57 percent of women favored the proposal; 67 percent of voters between the ages of 35 to 54 supported the stadium; 64 percent of Democrats and 62 percent of Republicans said yes.

"It would be a national status symbol for San Jose. It would also provide jobs — hundreds of job," even if they are part-time or seasonal, said Walter Soellner, a retired professor of art at Evergreen Community College and member of the city's arts commission and a poll respondent. "And I think it would bring a certain sense of pride to San Joseans."

An analysis of potential economic benefits, prepared for the city by a consulting firm last year, 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 analysis also estimated the city would receive \$1.5 million in new general fund revenue each year, mostly from property and sales taxes, with another \$1 million going to the city's redevelopment agency.

"They don't need more housing and they don't need more office space," poll respondent Tiffany Gelineau, a 38-year-old registered nurse, said of the city. A stadium, she said, would bring "entertainment and revenue for downtown San Jose. We have the Sharks, but something outdoors would be awesome."

Opponents, however, said they fear the congestion a stadium would cause and impacts on local neighborhoods.

"I hate getting caught in the football game traffic up in Candlestick and Oakland as I'm going past to Berkeley," said Robert Braine, a retired programmer who lives in South San Jose. "I don't want to see that kind of congestion here.

"I also tend to feel that too many of these situations end up being a taxpayer-financed arrangement," even though city officials swear that won't be the case. "I've heard that so many times," Braine said. "If I had trust in the honesty and integrity of the whole thing, I'd certainly be less inclined to oppose it."

Melinda Jackson, whose research institute conducted the poll, said while 62 percent is a "very positive result" it didn't surprise her given that San Jose's political establishment backs the ballpark. "We are not in the midst of a messy political" battle over this, she said.

## **A's to San Jose? 'No decision has been made'**

By Tracy Seipel / Mercury News

Has Major League Baseball cleared the way for the Oakland A's to move to San Jose?

Not yet, says a person close to the process in San Jose.

The denial comes as one Bay Area blogger claims a committee studying whether the A's can move to the South Bay is set to deliver the OK for such a move. The report, which is not attributed, says the committee will give its much-awaited report to Commissioner Bud Selig within three days.

The A's have announced their intention to move from Oakland, but the league would have to approve any move to San Jose because the San Francisco Giants own the territorial rights to Santa Clara County. The Giants say they will steadfastly defend those rights.

"It's patently absurd that the committee is preparing to issue a report and recommendation," said a person close to the process in San Jose. "There is no report coming out in the next three days. No decision has been made. The committee continues its work and the committee's work is not completed."

## **Editorial: Yo Bud Selig, check out San Jose's poll on the A's**

Mercury News Editorial

Yo. Bud Selig! How about that San Jose poll on the A's?

It must be hard for the Major League Baseball commissioner to see San Jose rolling out the welcome mat for a team and not be able to leap at the opportunity. Good. It should be hard for him. The South Bay is a gold mine of a sports market. Selig needs to come to grips with the San Francisco roadblock and let the A's move here.

A Mercury News poll of San Jose voters this month found 62 percent willing to give city land for an A's ballpark. Team owner Lew Wolff has given up on East Bay sites and wants to build in San Jose, but San Francisco was arbitrarily given the rights to this territory when it was trying to build a stadium here. Team owners and Selig can agree to shift the lines. It's really Selig's say.

What can he possibly be waiting for?

## **Oakland thinks beyond 25-man roster**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

The A's wrap up things in the Cactus League today, and their roster is continuing to take shape - it appears both out-of-options players will be with the club on Opening Night.

**Jake Fox** and **Eric Patterson** are likely to make the roster to help provide greater depth and flexibility; the A's are trying to maximize their best "33-34 man" roster, according to one team source, rather than focusing solely on the 25-man roster.

The A's are convinced that neither Fox nor Patterson would clear waivers, so indications are that catcher **Landon Powell** and utility infield candidate **Adam Rosales** will be sent out because they have options left. Powell and Rosales are still expected to contribute to the club during the season - Rosales, in particular, if the team decides that a real backup shortstop is a necessity.

Right now, second baseman **Mark Ellis** would be the emergency backup to **Cliff Pennington** because **Eric Chavez** has yet to play shortstop in a game. Chavez will play third for three innings today.

**Sheets' strong outing:** **Ben Sheets** had his best spring outing in his final appearance before taking the mound Opening Night against the Mariners. Sheets allowed three hits and five walks in 5 1/3 innings, but held the White Sox to one run.

According to an AL scout, Sheets had his best velocity of the spring, hitting 93 mph and maintaining at least 92 mph into the sixth. Sheets, who felt his rhythm was off, said he got a lot of outs with his fastball. He reiterated that he hates spring training, but noted that if his 10-run debacle against the Reds is thrown out, he wasn't that awful, with a 5.27 ERA.

**Wuertz's shoulder:** **Michael Wuertz** went through a full battery of tests Monday, getting X-rays, an MRI exam and an arteriogram, and he said he was relieved to learn he has posterior rotator-cuff tendinitis rather than anything more serious.

Cortisone should help the problem, and Wuertz was shut down for five days. He believes he will need work at extended spring training because he has pitched in only two games this spring and he'll need to be able to go in back-to-back games before rejoining the A's, probably in mid-to-late April.

**Briefly:** Right-hander **John Meloan** had elbow surgery Tuesday in Birmingham, Ala., but the A's had not received a report on the extent of the surgery by the end of their 2-0 loss to the White Sox. ... Infielder **Steve Tolleson** was optioned to Triple A Sacramento. ... Right-hander **Jason Jennings** was reassigned to minor-league camp.

## **Drumbeat: Random Tuesday business; panel report soon?**

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Glendale, Ariz.

Not much happening in A's news today; reliever Michael Wuertz spent a full day at the orthopedist's yesterday, he said, and he got every test possible; he's relieved the diagnosis is rotator cuff tendinitis near the back of his shoulder rather than something more serious (and surgical). He expects that he'll pitch in extended spring at least a few times, making sure he can go back-to-back outings before joining the A's. He doesn't have a strict timetable for his return, but he thinks he'd be back right around Joey Devine in mid to late April.

Eric Chavez told me this morning he'll play three innings at third base tomorrow, but there is still no plan for Chavez to play shortstop in a game this spring, which makes that thought of Chavez being the backup shortstop look pretty distant. Does that mean that Adam Rosales must stay on the roster in order to provide a backup shortstop option?

There was an sfgate.com blog indicating that the panel report on the A's stadium situation will be issued soon recommending a move to San Jose, but asking around here this morning, the team hasn't heard anything to that effect. In addition, I had checked in with a reliable source at Major League Baseball yesterday and was told that nothing is imminent on the report, it's still some way off and the panel's working is continuing.

I recall there were at least two other reports suggesting the panel findings would be presented soon....and those were more than a month ago. It almost seems as if there's some misinformation being put out by one of the cities involved, because this is becoming a trend.

There does seem to be a general sense around baseball that the panel will be pro-San Jose, but I don't believe that's based on any inside knowledge. I think it's based on the fact that there's a consensus around baseball that the Coliseum is no longer a great option for a major-league team coupled with the fact that San Jose is the biggest city in Northern California, as well as the biggest city in the country without a major-league team. That, however, doesn't mean that the panel will find in San Jose's favor - sports leagues don't always make decisions based on the most practical assessment, and the Giants' territorial rights do complicate matters.

## **A's banking on healthy outlook for 2010**

### **Staying off DL will be key to team's success in new season**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Any optimism built up for the 2010 season must be tempered with the reality that the A's, seemingly as always, have a lot to overcome medically.

In the past three seasons, the club has used the disabled list a combined 64 times while finishing with a losing record each year. It's hard to ignore the correlation between those two stats, but a slightly healthier 2010 Oakland team is hoping to close doors on both sides of the spectrum.

Still, the A's will be riding much of the year on cautious optimism, as they root for talent to reign over injury -- on the mound and beyond.

As was the case in Spring Training, surely all eyes will be on franchise player Eric Chavez and his surgically repaired back and shoulder. Ditto the rotation-leading duo of Ben Sheets and Justin Duchscherer, who are expected to throw out All-Star numbers and commandeer a rather young staff despite not having pitched an inning last year due to their own bouts with injuries.

Add in Dallas Braden's awry left foot numbness and Coco Crisp's pair of surgically-repaired shoulders, along with more than a couple of spring bullpen setbacks, and it's easy to see why much of Oakland's success will heavily depend on the progression of several key guys.

"It's hard to really look at the whole picture until everyone is on the field," said A's assistant general manager David Forst. "I think we're certainly not going to peak too early. I think we're going to be ready Opening Day, as far as healthy bodies go."

As Spring Training winds down, the A's are relatively healthy, the only exceptions being right-handed reliever Joey Devine, who is still recovering from last year's Tommy John surgery, and lefty Josh Outman, who underwent the same operation and isn't expected back until midseason.

#### **Oakland Athletics**

##### **Projected Opening Day lineup**

- 1 CF Coco Crisp
- 2 LF Rajai Davis
- 3 RF Ryan Sweeney
- 4 3B Kevin Kouzmanoff
- 5 C Kurt Suzuki
- 6 1B Eric Chavez
- 7 DH Jack Cust
- 8 2B Mark Ellis
- 9 SS Cliff Pennington

##### **Projected rotation**

- 1 RHP Ben Sheets
- 2 LHP Dallas Braden
- 3 RHP Justin Duchscherer
- 4 LHP Brett Anderson
- 5 RHP Trevor Cahill

##### **Projected bullpen**

- CL RHP Andrew Bailey  
SU RHP Brad Ziegler

SU LHP Craig Breslow  
SU LHP Brad Kilby  
MI RHP Chad Gaudin  
MI RHP Edwar Ramirez  
MI LHP Jeremy Blevins

Without those two guys, though, the A's still boast much of the same bullpen that compiled the American League's lowest ERA (3.46) last season and led the league in strikeouts. Reigning American League Rookie of the Year Andrew Bailey, who suffered a minor spring setback due to elbow soreness, will be joined by the likes of the recently injured Michael Wuertz (shoulder) and Craig Breslow (elbow), along with Brad Ziegler.

"We've got the best bullpen in the game if you ask me," Braden said. "We've got four guys down there who can be legitimate big league closers. And we've got three guys out there who can make 70 appearances or more."

Bailey, Wuertz, Breslow and Ziegler appeared in an average of 72 games last year -- a number that rightfully reflects the trust ingrained in them. At the same time, it's also one that the A's would like to decrease this year to avoid work overload and, subsequently, injury -- which got the best of the former three this spring.

Along the same lines, the A's will have to be cautious with Chavez, who enjoyed a productive and surprisingly healthy six weeks in camp. If that trend continues in the days leading up to April 5, when the A's are slated to open the season at home against the Mariners, the six-time Gold Glove infielder is expected to start at first base.

"I just want to make a good run at it," Chavez said. "My biggest concern this year is to be productive, and I know for me to have a healthy shoulder I have to minimize my throws, so I think that being out there at first base really allows me to do that."

A healthy Chavez also means a healthier lineup, which has been in dire need of power for several years now. The 2009 club hit 139 home runs, which was the fewest in the American League and fourth fewest in the Majors while it also marked the first time in Oakland history the A's ranked last in the AL in that category.

Kevin Kouzmanoff, added to the mix this offseason via trade to replace Chavez at third, will also offer a boost to a rather lackluster lineup. However, the club knows runs will be in high demand if the top of the order, led by Crisp and Rajai Davis, doesn't consistently reach base.

"Speed was the one bright spot in our offense last year and one of the ways we created runs," general manager Billy Beane said. "We made huge strides last year, and we'll have to continue to do that, because we're not exactly a power-laden club as we sit right now."

Still, the A's will continue to rely on what's been their biggest strength since the start of the decade -- starting pitching. That is, if Sheets, Duchscherer and Braden can prove their ever-changing health every five days.

"Starting pitching is something I think we'll rely on early in the season while the position players get up to speed," Forst said, "and then hopefully the bullpen is just as healthy."

"We should be in good shape this season if we can limit the injuries."

## **Athletics' 10 prospects to watch in 2010**

### **Trades for Top 50 Prospects Carter, Taylor bolster organization**

By Lisa Winston / MLB.com

*With the 2010 season approaching, MLB.com takes a look at 10 of the Oakland Athletics' most intriguing prospects that you should keep an eye on.*

#### **Keepers**

Prior to the 2009 season, we identified 10 prospects to watch in the Athletics' farm system. Of those 10, three remain on the 2010 list.

**Adrian Cardenas, IF:** The national high school player of the year in 2006, Cardenas was drafted in the supplemental first round by the Phillies and dealt to Oakland in the 2008 trade for Joe Blanton. He has seen time at shortstop, second base and third base and could be a solid utility player, thanks to that versatility. A left-handed line drive hitter, he batted .326 at



Double-A Midland in 2009 and .251 at Triple-A Sacramento, earning Texas League All-Star honors . He combined for a .280 average and 79 RBIs.

**Chris Carter, 1B:** The unanimous pick for MLB.com's Minor League Hitter of the Year, Carter ranked among the Minor League leaders in nearly every slugging category in 2009 as he combined to hit .329 with 28 homers, 115 RBIs, 13 steals, 43 doubles, a .422 on-base percentage and a .570 slugging percentage between Midland, and Sacramento. The Texas League MVP, he came to Oakland via the Dan Haren trade from Arizona. The 6-foot-4, 225-pounder has taken some reps in the outfield, but he looks to be the club's first baseman of the near future. He hit 39 homers in 2008, second in the Minors, but raised his average nearly 100 points in 2009 without sacrificing much power.

**Jemile Weeks 2B:** The younger brother of big leaguer Rickie Weeks was the Athletics' first-round pick in 2008 out of Miami, but a hip injury ended his season prematurely. The injury lingered long enough to keep him off the field until nearly Memorial Day. Once back, he quickly strung together a 22-game hitting streak to open the season at Class A Advanced Stockton and hit .299 before moving up to Double-A Midland, where he finished with a .238 average. The switch-hitter is a solid defender with good tools across the board.

## Prospects to watch

### Subtractions

These seven players were on our 2009 list but are not on the 2010 list, due to the loss of rookie status, trade, poor performance, injury, the addition of other prospects to the list, etc.

**Brett Anderson, LHP:** Anderson made the Athletics' rotation right out of Spring Training in 2009 and was up all year, going 11-11 with a 4.06 ERA. A 2008 Olympian, he came to the club from Arizona as part of the Dan Haren trade.

**Trevor Cahill, RHP:** Like Anderson, Cahill spent the entire season in the big leagues, going 10-13 with a 4.65 ERA as one of three rookies who graduated from the preseason top 10 list to the Major League rotation.

**Aaron Cunningham, OF:** Cunningham was dealt to the Padres in the offseason for Kevin Kouzmanoff but had already worked his way off the list as he lost rookie eligibility due to service time in 2008-09. Slowed by a shoulder injury in '09, he hit .151 in limited action. Like Anderson and Carter, he came to Oakland from Arizona in the Dan Haren trade.

**Sean Doolittle, 1B/OF:** Knee tendinitis slowed Doolittle in 2009 and cost him a spot on a loaded top 10 as he tries to regroup in 2010. A supplemental first-round pick in 2007 out of Virginia, he hit .286 with 22 homers and 91 RBIs between Stockton and Midland in his first full season, but his '09 campaign ended in May due to the injury.

**Vin Mazzaro, RHP:** A high school star in New Jersey taken in the third round of 2005, he struggled in his first few years before putting it together in 2008 between Midland and Sacramento. He moved up to the big leagues midway through 2009, going 4-9 with a 5.32 ERA.

**James Simmons, RHP:** The 2007 first-rounder out of Cal Riverside moved up quickly in his first two seasons but stalled in 2009 as he went 7-7 with a 5.72 ERA at Sacramento. He had posted a 3.97 ERA at Midland in his pro debut and then a 3.51 ERA, third in the league, in a return to the Rock Hounds in 2008.

**Michael Ynoa, RHP:** The club still awaits the pro debut of the highly touted Dominican teen who signed in 2008 at age 17 for a \$4 million-plus deal but has yet to throw a pro pitch due to elbow trouble. When healthy, he is said to have a fastball in the low 90s and is working on a changeup and curveball. He did see some mound time in instructional league and did not undergo surgery, just rest and rehab.

### Additions

The following seven players are new additions to the Athletics' Prospects to Watch list.

**Fautino De Los Santos, RHP:** Acquired from the White Sox prior to the 2008 season in a deal for outfielder Nick Swisher, De Los Santos underwent Tommy John surgery that spring, costing him the whole season and most of 2009. He came back to throw limited innings in the Arizona Fall League and his fastball was back in the low- to mid-90s in instructional league. He's slowly bringing back his changeup, slider and curveball. Before his injury he was one of the most promising young pitching prospects in the game, making his Futures Game debut in 2007. The A's plan to move him to the bullpen this year to potentially accelerate his rise and lower his innings.

**Josh Donaldson, C:** Yet another pickup via trade, Donaldson came over to Oakland midway through 2008 from the Cubs in the Rich Harden deal after having been Chicago's supplemental first-round pick out of Auburn in 2007. After hitting just .217 at Class A Peoria before that trade, he batted .330 with nine homers and 39 RBIs at Class A Advanced Stockton post-trade

and then hit .270 with nine homers and 91 RBIs at Midland last summer. He could be the best viable option in the upper levels of the Minors for the A's behind the plate while they await the arrival of top prospect Max Stassi.

**Pedro Figueroa, LHP:** Just added to the 40-man roster, Figueroa has been brought along carefully as he's worked on his command. He has a quick arm and great stuff, highlighted by a lively sinking fastball, slider and changeup. He combined between two Class A stops last summer to go 13-6 with a 3.38 ERA and 145 strikeouts in 152 innings to earn Oakland's Minor League Pitcher of the Year honors.

**Grant Green, SS:** The A's top pick in 2009 (13th overall) out of USC, he is agile defensively and has plus speed and athleticism. After hitting .374 as a junior and .390 as a sophomore, he signed at the deadline and batted .316 in a brief five-game trial at Stockton.

**Tyson Ross, RHP:** Drafted in the second round of 2008 out of California, Ross pitched briefly that summer before making his full-season debut in 2009 between Stockton, where he posted a 4.17 ERA in 18 starts, and Midland, where he had a 3.96 ERA in nine outings. The 6-foot-5, 215-pounder throws a cutter and slider, both above-average pitches. An excellent athlete, he continues to work on command and delivery issues.

**Max Stassi, C:** Stassi was a first-round talent who fell to the fourth round due to concerns about his signability as he was committed to UCLA. A third-generation catcher whose dad, grandfather and uncle all played pro ball, he is the whole package of fine defense, great makeup and a live bat with power potential. The A's were especially impressed with his leadership abilities during instructional league. He hit .280 in a brief pro debut at short-season Vancouver.

**Michael Taylor, OF:** Acquired in the four-team deal that involved Roy Halladay and Cliff Lee, Taylor was technically picked up from Toronto for fellow prospect Brett Wallace, but in reality comes over from the Phillies, for whom he was the Minor League Player of the Year in both 2008 and 2009. The fifth-rounder from 2007 out of Stanford is one of the most exciting all-around players in the Minors and could be Oakland's left fielder in a hurry. After combining to bat .346 with 19 homers, 88 RBIs and 15 steals between two Class A stops in 2008, he split '09 between Double-A Reading and Triple-A Lehigh Valley, batting .320 with 24 homers, 84 RBIs and 21 steals. He's 6-foot-6 and 260 pounds of muscle with a strong arm in right field and off-the-charts makeup.

## **A's 2010 organization preview**

### **Oakland system boasts impressive depth**

By Lisa Winston / MLB.com

*The future success of every Major League team lies largely in its Minor League pipeline. With that in mind, each preseason, MLB.com takes a comprehensive look at the farm systems of all 30 organizations, from **top prospects** to recent Draft picks.*

The Athletics' list of "10 Players to Watch" heading into the 2010 season features an intriguing balance of infielders, outfielders and pitching with a lot of versatility up and down the line. Their depth made it a tough call, and even the surprising retirement of outfielder Grant Desme, who would have been a new name on the list this year, didn't make the cutdown decisions much easier.

The team already features a young nucleus of pitchers, and there are several top prospects who look like they could be ready for prime time this season. In the Draft, Oakland focused on polished premium position players and though they only signed half of their picks, they inked their first eight picks, including six college prospects and a top-of-the-line high school catcher.

#### **Coming Soon**

##### **Adrian Cardenas, IF**

The national High School Player of the Year in 2006 when the Phillies drafted him in the supplemental first round out of Miami, Cardenas joined the Athletics in the deal for pitcher Joe Blanton. A high-energy player who can play any of the three left-side infield positions, he hit .326 at Double-A Midland, earning Texas League All-Star honors last summer, and .251 in a brief stint at Triple-A Sacramento. His combined .280 average was good for seventh in the system and he has gap power to all fields.

##### **Chris Carter, 1B**

The Texas League MVP, Carter was a unanimous pick for MLB.com's Minor League Hitter of the Year honors as he ranked among the Minor League leaders in several offensive categories, while hitting a combined .329 with 28 homers, 115 RBIs and a Minor League-best 179 hits and 108 runs scored between Midland and Sacramento. Originally a 15th-round pick out of

high school in Las Vegas by the White Sox in 2005, he was dealt to Arizona in the 2007-2008 offseason for outfielder Carlos Quentin and then to Oakland in the Dan Haren deal shortly thereafter.

### **Michael Taylor, OF**

The Athletics added to their already impressive list of hitting prospects when they dealt third-base prospect Brett Wallace to Toronto in the four-team Roy Halladay deal and picked up Taylor, who had been the Phillies' two-time Minor League Player of the Year in 2007 and 2008. The fifth-rounder from 2007 out of Stanford comes "home" to the Bay Area and could be the club's starting left fielder very soon. He is the whole package, with power, speed and smarts. He hit a combined .320 with 20 homers, 84 RBIs and 21 steals between Double-A Reading and Triple-A Lehigh Valley in 2009.

### **Under the Radar**

#### **Corey Brown, OF**

Oakland drafted Brown with a first-round pick out of Oklahoma State in 2007 and though his 2009 season was interrupted with a right knee strain that limited him to 66 games at Midland, where he hit .268 with nine homers, he combined for 30 home runs the previous summer between two Class A stops. He tends to strike out a lot but is a good athlete who offers an intriguing power package to keep an eye on.

#### **Henry Rodriguez, RHP**

The flame-throwing Venezuelan pitcher made a brief big league debut in 2009, with three games in Oakland, but spent most of his season at Sacramento where he was tantalizing though inconsistent. He posted a 5.77 ERA in 37 games out of the 'pen in his first full season of relief, but also struck out 71 batters in 44 innings and limited hitters to a .228 average. If he can harness his nearly-triple-digit fastball he could be a force to be reckoned with in the back end of the bullpen.

#### **Corey Wimberly, IF/OF**

Wimberly is 5-foot-8-inches of energy, speed and versatility. Acquired from Colorado for outfielder Matt Murton, he has played nearly every position and consistently hit for high average and ranked among his league's stolen-base leaders when healthy. He's averaged .307 over five pro seasons and had two 50-plus steal seasons as well. Slowed by a knee injury in 2009, he played just 70 games at Midland but if healthy could be an option as a utility man for the club.

### **2009 Draft**

**SS Grant Green** (1) hit .374 as a junior at USC last year after batting .390 as a sophomore. He has plus speed and great instincts in the middle infield. Taken with the 13th pick, he signed late and will make his pro debut in 2010. ... **C Max Stassi** (4) signed at the deadline, softening the blow of not having a second- or third-round pick. An outstanding defensive prospect, in his brief pro debut he hit .280 in 14 games at short-season Vancouver. ... **LHP Ian Kroi** (7) was another steal, taken out of high school in Illinois. He didn't pitch as a senior due to a school suspension but went 9-1 with an 0.94 ERA and three no-hitters as a junior. ... **OF Myrio Richard** (9) out of Prairie View A&M, already has some Oakland ties in his older brother, speedy shortstop Michael "Runway" Richard who was at Advanced A Stockton. Richard, the SWAC Player of the Year as a sophomore, is an agile defensive whiz with speed and upside. He hit .259 with 22 RBIs between the Arizona League and Vancouver. ... **2B/OF Conner Crumbliss** (28), all 5-foot-8 of him, combined for speed and a live bat playing at both positions, which kept him busy during infield practice. He hit .290 with 28 RBIs and 13 steals between Vancouver and Kane County after coming out of Emporia State, and had a .427 on-base average thanks to 60 walks in 71 games. ... Try to find a 2009 Draftee who had a better year than **RHP Paul Smyth** (35). You won't. The Kansas closer combined between Vancouver and Kane County to pitch 36 1/3 scoreless innings, scattering 14 hits and walking four while striking out 44 for a .115 average against. A senior signing, the 22-year-old collected nine saves.

### **Predictions**

#### **Hitter of the Year -- Max Stassi, C**

With the obvious candidates, such as Carter, Taylor and Cardenas, all very much in the big league picture this year as Oakland continues its youth movement, look for this remarkable teenage catching prospect to have a big year in his first full season. Stassi, who boasts an impressive baseball bloodline three generations deep, was a first-round talent who fell to the A's in the fourth round due to signability questions and his commitment to UCLA. He's an all-around player with all the tools on both sides, a live bat and power potential to go with his outstanding defensive abilities. He's still a few years away from the Majors, but he appears to be the closest thing to a sure bet a high school catcher can be.

#### **Pitcher of the Year -- Tyson Ross, RHP**

With a few good candidates to choose from for this pick, we went with the second-rounder from 2008 out of Cal. Ross comes off a 2009 campaign in which he posted a 4.17 ERA in 18 starts at Stockton and a 3.96 ERA in nine more games at Midland, combining for 113 strikeouts in 136 1/3 innings. At an imposing 6-foot-5 and 215 pounds, he throws a sinking fastball in the low-mid 90s and a plus slider. He continues to work on command.

## Sheets struggles with control in loss

### Right-hander walks five in 5 1/3 innings against White Sox

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com

#### **WHITE SOX 2, ATHLETICS 0**

*at Phoenix*

*Tuesday, March 30*

**Athletics at the plate:** Ryan Sweeney's double off of Tony Pena served as Oakland's only extra-base hit among six hits.

**White Sox at the plate:** Carlos Quentin, Omar Vizquel and Paul Konerko knocked out two hits apiece. One of Quentin's hits went for his fourth home run with two outs in the seventh.

**Athletics on the mound:** Location was not exactly perfect for Ben Sheets, as he walked five over 5 1/3 innings. But Sheets used that bit of wildness to his advantage, limiting the White Sox to just one run on three hits.

**White Sox on the mound:** It was a slick final Cactus League start for Mark Buehrle, who worked five scoreless innings, giving up just four singles to Oakland. Buehrle struck out three, walked two and will next step onto the mound Monday afternoon at U.S. Cellular Field for his franchise-record eighth Opening Day start.

**Worth noting:** Buehrle has often talked about pitching for his hometown Cardinals in St. Louis before the end of his illustrious career. But maybe the ace left-hander should consider a stint with the D-backs, considering his success in Arizona. Since the White Sox moved Spring Training to Arizona, Buehrle has posted two of their top three spring ERAs with a minimum of 15 innings pitched. He finished with a 2.08 ERA this spring and produced a miniscule 1.13 ERA in 2003. Josh Stewart ranked third with his 2.05 ERA in 2003.

**Cactus League records:** White Sox 9-15-5; Athletics 11-14.

**Up next:** Left-hander Dallas Braden will make his final spring start Wednesday against the visiting Reds at Phoenix Municipal Stadium beginning at 1 p.m. PT. In four starts, Braden has compiled a 3.94 ERA despite pitching with a consistently numb left foot, which he doesn't believe will affect his results this season. It marks the A's last game from the confines of Arizona, as the team heads to the Bay Area immediately after the contest to prepare for a three-game exhibition series with the Giants beginning Thursday.

## **A's send Jennings to Minors**

### **Former Rookie of the Year had been long relief candidate**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- The A's decreased their bullpen candidates by one Tuesday by reassigning right-handed pitcher Jason Jennings to the Minors.

Jennings, 31, posted a 10.45 ERA in five games -- two starts -- for the A's after signing a Minor League contract Feb. 28. He allowed 18 hits in 10 1/3 innings.

The righty was considered a potential long relief option for an Oakland bullpen that will be without right-hander Michael Wuertz (shoulder) to begin the season. However, the recent additions of right-handers Chad Gaudin and Edwar Ramirez have given the A's a slightly larger selection from which to pull.

Jennings' big league ride has turned into something of a roller coaster since being the Rockies' first-round pick in the 1999 First-Year Player Draft. He earned 2002 National League Rookie of the Year honors with Colorado in 2002 and, in six seasons with the Rockies, compiled a 58-56 record and 4.74 ERA.

He started 18 games with Houston following the 2006 season before signing with Texas in 2008. There, he appeared in just six games and posted a 0-5 record and 8.56 ERA. Subsequently, he was moved to the bullpen and released in late August before signing on with the A's six months later.

## **A's looking to run more**

PHOENIX (AP) — 3/30/2010

Oakland leadoff hitter Coco Crisp slapped a routine base hit to center field earlier this week, took a sharp turn around first base as Seattle's Franklin Gutierrez bent to retrieve the ball, then hustled his way to second and slid in to easily beat the throw.

An ordinary play, to be certain, but one that typifies the Athletics' new philosophy.

Gone are the days of the Bash Brothers and monstrous shots soaring out of the Coliseum. These are the new A's, young, fun and, most importantly, full of speed.

"With any team, not just ours, speed is big in this day and age," said Crisp, who signed with Oakland this past offseason after spending 2009 in Kansas City. "Teams are buying into it now because the power numbers are dropping, for whatever reason. A lot of teams are transitioning back to the speed game."

Perhaps none more so than Oakland.

The A's have historically built their offense around slugging power hitters like Reggie Jackson, Tony Armas, Dave Parker, Jose Canseco and Mark McGwire.

Canseco and McGwire were so famous for their home run swings that fans dubbed them the Bash Brothers, and souvenir stands sold gigantic replicas of the two players' arms in the late '80s and early '90s.

That's no longer the case. Oakland general manager Billy Beane and manager Bob Geren revamped the A's roster slightly with an emphasis on more speed and less power. There's no better example of that than at the top of the batting order, where Crisp and speedy Rajai Davis are penciled in 1-2 in the lineup.

"They're getting on base and making things happen," Geren said. "When they're getting on base, they're creating havoc and getting into position for the lineup to drive them in."

How serious are the A's about their new philosophy?

Davis, who in 2009 hit .305 and became the first Oakland player since Rickey Henderson to record 40 or more steals in a season with a career-high 41, is featured prominently in one of the team's promotional commercials. The theme: Davis does everything fast, from shaving to getting dressed, even blowing past a pair of women race-walking on a sidewalk.

"It gives our team a little more different dynamic than this team has had in the past," Crisp said. "The capability we have to put pressure on other teams and make pitchers worry a little more will play a huge part into us winning those extra couple games we might need."

Earlier this spring the A's tested their players' initial burst off first base. Tripods with infrared cameras were set up along the basepath, clicking off the times at the 20-, 40- and 60-yard marks. The idea, Geren said, is to find out where each player is strongest and where they need work.

Oakland did the same test last spring and found that 235-pound designated hitter Jack Cust had a surprisingly strong first burst. Geren used the information and had Cust steal a career-high four bases in 2009.

Cust won't be at the heart of the A's speed attack but he, and others, will be on the move more than they have been in the past. Crisp, playing with his third team in three years, and Davis will be catalysts for Oakland's offense.

"If we're both on base, we're going to be scoring runs even if it's hit and miss for one of us," Crisp said. "It allows your big guys, your middle of the lineup guys, to possibly see some more fastballs."

The A's also invited Henderson, baseball's career leader in stolen bases, to camp in early March and had him teach the players the nuances of running the bases. Henderson's lessons included sliding and decreasing the wear and tear on a player's body.

That's key for Crisp, who is coming off surgeries on both shoulders. The 30-year-old was also slowed by a tender hamstring early in the spring and didn't play in the outfield until last week.

"If we allow ourselves to play the little man's game as far as running the bases it will make us a lot better," Crisp said. "We have a shot of surprising not only ourselves on the basepaths but other people (and) start to make them fumble around a little because they're worried about whether or not we're going to be aggressive."

## Hot Stone League

### Forecasting the AL West: I'm picking...the Angels

Larry Stone, Seattle Times, 3/30/2010

The Seattle Times writing staff had to submit their 2010 predictions today, which will run in the newspaper this weekend (I'm not sure which day, but I'll find out). Here's how I forecast the AL West:

- 1, Angels
- 2, Mariners
- 3, Rangers
- 4, A's

It's a cliché to say every year that the division is wide open, and it's also become de rigueur to speculate that the Angels aren't what they used to be.

This year, I'd say both those sentiments are more or less accurate. It's not that difficult to foresee a scenario by which the A's, last year's last-place team, greatly surpass their 75-87 record. And it's not that difficult to forecast a scenario by which the Angels have a dropoff from last year's 97-win season.

That said, the toughest decision I had was not picking the Angels to win the division. Again. If it happens, that would make it four AL West titles in a row, and six out of seven. **Hideki Matsui**, pictured above, knows something about winning division titles.

No, the toughest call was for second place between the Mariners and Texas. As I've written before, there have already been some ominous signs this spring for Seattle, topped by the injury to **Cliff Lee**. The offense still worries me, as does the rotation depth even when Lee gets healthy. And the Rangers did win 87 games last year, and they are getting a great influx of young talent from a farm system universally regarded as one of top three, if not No. 1, in all of baseball.

Yet what finally swung it for me was the whole sordid **Ron Washington** affair, in which the manager was revealed during spring training to have tested positive for cocaine use last year. That's pretty heavy stuff. While it could draw the team together, I think there's a greater potential for the tension and scrutiny surrounding Washington to create an atmosphere that's not conducive to success.

I could be wrong. Heck, judging by my past prognosticating, I probably will be wrong. What I like about the Angels most is their pitching depth, even without **John Lackey**. They can throw out a decent starter every single night with **Joe Saunders, Ervin Santana, Jered Weaver, Scott Kazmir** and **Joel Pineiro**. The bullpen should be better with **Fernando Rodney** added as a setup guy. **Hideki Matsui** should be an adequate replacement for **Vlad Guerrero** - at least the **Vlad Guerrero** that was around last year. **Chone Figgins'** loss hurts a lot, but I still see an offense that will be good enough. Especially if **Brandon Wood**, the new third baseman, lives up to his minor-league hype. The Angels are getting a little old, however, especially in the outfield, where **Torii Hunter, Juan Rivera, Bobby Abreu** and Matsui (who could see occasional duty in the field) have an average age of 34. Bottom line: The Angels, under **Mike Scioscia**, have become a winning machine, and I don't see them sputtering to a halt quite yet.

As for the Mariners, I'm going to go on the assumption that **Cliff Lee** will come back fairly quickly, and at full strength. If not, all bets are off. But with Hernandez and Lee, and what should be the best defense in baseball, the Mariners stand to be a bona fide contender. If they are close, I'd expect **Jack Zduriencik** to go get a slugger at the trade deadline (**Adrian Gonzalez** being the obvious top candidate). If that happens, it could really get exciting down the stretch.

The Rangers have pitching depth the likes of which they haven't had for awhile, even after trading **Kevin Millwood**. When **Tommy Hunter** returns from the DL (probably late April), they could have six valid starting candidates (**Rich Harden, C.J. Wilson, Scott Feldman, Matt Harrison, Colby Lewis** and Hunter). Setup rookie **Neftali Feliz** throws 100 mph and was lights-out in a showcase last year. I'll admit, I'm infatuated with this guy's potential. They can hit a little, too, especially if Guerrero is back in form. **Elvis Andrus** is sensational at shortstop. It's easy to see a lot of upside for this team, despite my cautionary note earlier.

The A's are a really interesting team. If **Ben Sheets, Justin Duchscherer** and **Eric Chavez** all stay healthy - a longshot, at best, based on their body of work - they could really surprise. Sheets, Duchscherer and rising star **Brett Anderson** have the potential to be a pretty formidable top of the rotation, while the bullpen has four guys who, if healthy, can close (**Andrew Bailey, Michael Wuertz, Joey Devine** and **Brad Ziegler**). Devine is coming back from Tommy John but should be ready by mid-April. The defense is better than it has been, but like the Mariners, Oakland's offensive pop is a concern. The A's do have two impressive boppers in the minors on the verge of being ready (1B **Chris Carter** and OF **Michael Taylor**).

I truly believe that this could turn into a four-team race, but until they show me otherwise, I have to pick the Angels.

## **Top 10 for '10: What I'm most looking forward to this season**

Tom Verducci, Sports Illustrated

You have to start somewhere. The Gregorian new year begins in Kiribati, an island nation in the Pacific Ocean that is the inhabited landmass most near, on the west side, to the international date line. For those of us who measure time by the Doubledayan calendar, the new year begins in Washington on Monday at 1:05 p.m. with a pitch from Nationals left-hander **John Lannan**, shortly after the ceremonial one from another southpaw, President **Barack Obama**.

(Yes, there is a game Sunday night, but the Yankees-Red Sox game is more of a made-for-TV event than it is a traditional Opening Day.)

It's the start of not just a new year but also a new decade. Welcome, as the Romans might have said, to MMX, though that would also happen to be the same greeting you could expect after touching down at Malmo Airport in Sweden.

A new year brings new storylines. It's much of the magic of Opening Day -- the anticipation of what is to come, like the first page of a good book or the clackety-clack slow climb of a roller coaster up the first hill. When it comes to the baseball storylines I most eagerly await this year, here are my favorites: the top 10 for '10:

#### 10. The surprise team

Fourteen teams had losing records last year. One of them will be in the playoffs this year. How do I know this? Of the 120 playoff teams in the wild card era, 30 of them had a losing record in the previous season. That's 25 percent of your playoff teams, or an average of one turnaround team in each league each year. There has been at least one turnaround team in the playoffs every year but one in the 15 wild card seasons.

So who will be this year's surprise team? Pick one from among the Brewers, White Sox, Diamondbacks, Reds, Mets and A's.

#### 9. The Cuban influence

Left-hander **Aroldis Chapman** of the Reds (\$30.25 million) will be fun to watch, capable of very high strikeout games when he has command of his breaking ball. He is the most celebrated player among the biggest exodus of Cuban baseball talent since **Fidel Castro** gained power in the country more than half a century ago. Other recent defectors include shortstops **Adeiny Hechevarria** of Toronto (\$10 million) and **Jose Iglesias** of Boston (\$8.25 million), left-hander **Noel Arguelles** of Kansas City (\$6.9 million) and first baseman/outfielder **Leslie Anderson** of Tampa Bay (\$3.75 million).

Wait a minute. The Reds, Blue Jays, Royals and Rays are winning international bidding wars?

#### 8. California courtroom drama

In the Bay Area, the Giants and A's do battle over Oakland's strategy to relocate to San Jose. In SoCal, the McCourts continue their *War of the Roses* divorce proceedings, a nasty feud that could lead to someone else owning the Los Angeles Dodgers, but not before the Dodgers -- a team stopped short of the World Series twice in a row only because of the mighty Phillies -- could see their window slammed shut because of the owner-driven austerity.

#### 7. Carl Crawford

There is almost no chance that the Rays will re-sign Crawford, not with a 2011 payroll barely north of \$50 million and with the Yankees and the Red Sox lining up to snag him (or **Jayson Werth**) as a free agent. But do the Rays have the nerve to trade Crawford during the season even if they are in a race? It's crazy, sure, but they were only 4 1/2 games out of the wild card last year when they traded **Scott Kazmir** and they could have prospect **Desmond Jennings** ready to replace Crawford by midseason. The more likely names tossed around the trade market in July could include A's starter **Ben Sheets**, Indians pitchers **Jake Westbrook** and **Kerry Wood**, Nationals first baseman/outfielder **Adam Dunn** and Rangers starter **Kevin Millwood**.

#### 6. The Seattle Mariners

The darlings of the offseason now actually have to play baseball. Not since The Flying Karamazov Brothers has there been a troupe this sure-handed. But can a great defensive club win with a popgun offense and thin pitching rotation? **Milton Bradley** is their cleanup hitter. Yes, the same Milton Bradley who turns 32 in April and never has knocked in 78 runs in a season.

The pitching is heavily dependent on **Felix Hernandez** and **Cliff Lee** throwing 450 dominant innings, because there are no certainties otherwise in the rotation. And Lee's Seattle career, short though it may be, already includes foot surgery, a five-game suspension, an abdominal strain (his third in eight years) and an assignment



to the disabled list.

## 5. Target Field

And a target of critics it will be in April, May, September and, if applicable, October, when baseball will be played, when it can be at all, in miserable conditions. In this era in which sport is as much about programming as it is competition, and when stadium roof technology has been around for more than a quarter of a century, Major League Baseball should never have allowed a ballpark to be built in Minnesota without a retractable roof. Think of it as a minimum industry standard for an anticipated building lifespan of 50 years.

## 4. Roy Halladay's win total

From 2001 through 2009, Halladay pitched to a .685 winning percentage for a team that played .466 baseball otherwise. So what kind of total might he put up while pitching for the best team in the National League, the Phillies, and freed from the grind of the DH and the Yankees, Red Sox and Rays (against whom he made 14 of his final 18 starts for Toronto)?

The Phillies are due for a big winner. They haven't had an 18-game winner since 1983, the longest such drought in baseball.

## 3. The Nationals Are on the Clock (Again)

What to do with their second straight No. 1 overall pick of the draft: take 17-year-old junior college catcher **Bryce Harper** or 18-year-old, 6-foot-7 Texas high school right-hander **Jameson Taillon**? No high school pitcher ever has been taken with the first pick of the draft -- thanks in part to Texas schoolboy **Todd Van Poppel**, whose contract demands led the Braves to happily take **Chipper Jones** first overall in 1990. Van Poppel wound up 40-52 with a 5.58 ERA for six teams.

By the way, here is the list of the worst ERAs of all time by anyone who threw at least 900 innings:

1. Todd Van Poppel (1991-2004) 5.58
2. **Jimmy Haynes** (1994-2004) 5.37
3. **Scott Elarton** (1998-2008) 5.29
4. **Jose Lima** (1994-2006) 5.26
5. **Brian Bohannon** (1990-2001) 5.19

Van Poppel, Elarton and Bohannon all were first-round picks -- out of high school.

## 2. Stephen Strasburg

The number of expected minor league starts for the right-hander before he gets called up by the Nationals is 10: slightly more than **Mark Prior** and half that of **Justin Verlander**. And the day he gets called up is the day the Washington Nationals become relevant and their television audience might actually be larger than your local community access channel.

## 1. Jason Heyward

The Braves' right fielder created the most spring training buzz since **Albert Pujols** tore up Cardinals camp in 2001. Which would you rather have when it comes to the NL Rookie of the Year Award: Heyward or the field? I'm not taking the field, not even a field that includes Strasburg and Chapman.

Heyward seems like a lock for 20 home runs. Not so impressed by that number? The dude is 20 years old. Only

13 players have ever hit 20 homers at or before their age 20 season, and that includes only two 20/20 Club members in the past 31 years: a couple of guys named **Ken Griffey Jr.** and **Alex Rodriguez**.

Forget the **Fred McGriff** comparisons; Heyward is far more athletic. Forget the **Willie McCovey** comparisons; McCovey was only a .270 career hitter. Forget the **Willie Stargell** comparisons; Stargell never walked even 90 times. Just let Heyward be who he will be, and enjoy a very unique player.

## **Oakland Athletics 2010 Preview**

By Mike Castiglione, Sports Network

The Athletics, though, played a lot of small ball, stealing more bases than any Oakland team in the last 17 years. However, they lacked the long ball, ranking last in the American League with 135 home runs.

The power shortage should continue this year, as the front office did not add any big boppers in the offseason. The team did, though, sign free agent pitcher Ben Sheets in January.

While injuries have sidetracked Sheets' career of late, he is one of the game's top pitchers when healthy. He should provide Oakland's young pitching staff with a much needed veteran presence.

Below we take a capsule look at the 2010 edition of the Oakland Athletics, with a personnel evaluation and prognosis included therein:

2009 FINISH (75-87) - Fourth Place (AL West)

KEY OFFSEASON ADDITIONS: Ben Sheets (RHP), Coco Crisp (OF), Jake Fox (OF), Aaron Miles (2B)

KEY OFFSEASON SUBTRACTIONS: Bobby Crosby (1B), Nomar Garciaparra (1B), Scott Hairston (OF), Aaron Cunningham (RF), Adam Kennedy (2B), Santiago Casilla (RHP), Jeff Gray (RHP)

PROJECTED LINEUP: Coco Crisp (CF), Rajai Davis (LF), Kevin Kouzmanoff (3B), Jack Cust (DH), Mark Ellis (2B), Ryan Sweeney (RF), Daric Barton (1B), Kurt Suzuki (C), Cliff Pennington (SS)

PROJECTED ROTATION: Ben Sheets (R), Dallas Braden (L), Justin Duchscherer (R), Brett Anderson (L), Trevor Cahill (R)

PROJECTED CLOSER: Andrew Bailey (R)

MANAGER: Bob Geren

### INFIELD

After being non-tendered in the offseason, designated hitter Jack Cust tested the free agent market, only to return home to Oakland. The 31-year-old slugger has a reputation for swinging out of his shoes, and he has led the team in home runs in each of the last three seasons. But after belting 33 long balls and 77 RBI in 2008, he dipped to 25 homers and 70 RBI last year. Cust hit .240, which is right on par with his career average of .239.

In January, Oakland landed third basemen Kevin Kouzmanoff in a three-team deal that sent outfielders Aaron Cunningham and Scott Hairston to San Diego. Kouzmanoff has impressed throughout Spring Training, hitting for average and power. After spending the last three seasons in San Diego, Kouzmanoff comes to Oakland as a career .308 hitter who typically puts up about 20 homers and 80 RBI. He drove in a career-best 88 RBI last season while hitting .302. Those numbers can rise further if he improves his pitch selection, as he seldom walks and hits a large percentage of ground balls.

Oft-injured Eric Chavez, a six-time Gold Glove winner at third base, has made the jump to first base and will rotate in with starter Daric Barton. Chavez was once a cornerstone of this team and one of the game's most promising young stars, but frequent back and shoulder injuries have relegated him to a utility role. Of course, he can also DH or spot Kouzmanoff at the hot corner, even play a little shortstop when needed. Despite flashing some pop at the plate this spring, the organization has no plans to rush Chavez into regular duty, as his next health setback could be his last.

At shortstop, Cliff Pennington held down the job quite well after Orlando Cabrera was dealt. He went on to hit .279 in 60 games, while displaying an aggressive style on the basepaths. The book is still out on Pennington, who is out to prove he is a starting-caliber player at the big league level. His speed and steady bat helped him climb the Minor League ranks, and those are assets he'll need to keep a starting job in the majors.

Second baseman Mark Ellis was limited by a calf injury early in the season, though he did hit his stride in August with a .340 batting average and 22 RBI for the month. He drove in 43 runs in the second half of the season. As long as he is healthy, Ellis is a steady presence in Oakland's infield. A career .265 hitter, he has hit double-digit homers in five straight seasons.

First baseman Daric Barton got off to a painfully slow start, hitting .118 in June and .188 in July after missing the first two months. But after Giambi left, Barton started to pick it up, hitting .310 with 16 RBI in September. For the year, Barton hit .269 with a .372 OBP. He still has some work to do in the field, but Barton is hopeful for a breakout year in 2010. Since breaking onto the scene with a .347 average two Septembers ago, the hype around Barton has faded, as have his statistics. This could be a make-or-break year for the first baseman.

Catcher Kurt Suzuki launched 15 home runs and drove in a team-high 88 RBI while hitting .274 in his second full big league season. While he could improve on his .313 on-base percentage, Suzuki is a manager's dream for Bob Geren. He handles the young pitching staff well, and was a unanimous choice in the A's clubhouse for team MVP last season. Among Major League catchers, Suzuki ranked fourth in RBI, third in runs (74) and stolen bases (8), and first in doubles (37). Assuming his .280 BABIP improves, Suzuki could be one of the league's next breakout players. That is, if he doesn't break down after leading AL catchers in starts for the past two seasons,

## OUTFIELD

Tampa Bay's Carl Crawford has a new challenger in the thefts department. Rajai Davis took over at center field for Oakland halfway through the season and went on to steal a career-high 41 bases -- in only 125 games. With Davis setting the pace, Oakland ranked 4th in the majors with 133 steals. But a good base stealer is nothing if he can't get on base, and Davis also led the team with a .305 batting average. Usually when he gets on first base, it's as good as a double.

While Davis has the tools of an ideal leadoff hitter, that job belongs to free agent acquisition Coco Crisp, who will also man center field. Crisp is looking to put an ugly '09 campaign behind him, in which he hit .228 with Kansas City and had season-ending shoulder surgery in June. A career .277 hitter, Crisp notched 20 or more steals in four of the previous five seasons. With pure home run hitters less prevalent in the aftermath of the steroid era, more and more teams are looking to manufacture runs, and the A's have the speed on the basepaths to do just that.

After a slow first half, Ryan Sweeney posted a .319 batting average after the All-Star break. Still, for a No. 3 hitter, his 53 RBI leave much to be desired. Sweeney did hit a respectable .268 against lefties, which keeps him in the lineup as an everyday player. However, he'll never hit for much power. In the last two seasons, Sweeney has hit a combined 11 home runs. Defensively, he is one of the better right fielders in the league.

## STARTING ROTATION

The A's biggest splash this offseason was the signing of injury-plagued starter Ben Sheets to a one-year, \$10 million contract. However, Sheets has gotten knocked around all spring, with minor leaguers teeing off on his changeup hard in a recent outing. Coming off right elbow surgery that caused him to miss the entire 2009 season, that's not exactly comforting news. Still, manager Bob Geren has not changed his plans for Sheets to be his Opening Day starter. If healthy, the four-time All-Star would anchor a young pitching staff that boasted the fourth-lowest ERA in the AL last season.

Left-hander Dallas Braden was impressive until a left foot rash caused him to miss all of August and September. In 22 starts, Braden had compiled a 3.89 ERA, though he had only an 8-9 record to show for it. The 26-year-old southpaw still feels numbness and tingling in his foot, which were to be expected, though he says the pain is nothing like it was last year. The question will be how long he can continue to pitch effectively with discomfort and a couple of numb toes. He has been prone to an errant pitch or two, and a staph infection surfaced in the foot late in Spring Training.

Trevor Cahill won 10 games and posted a 4.63 ERA last year as a rookie. The 22-year-old spent the spring refining a new curveball grip -- called a "spike curveball" -- which has produced solid enough results that he is hopeful it becomes his go-to pitch. Cahill did log a team-leading 178 2/3 innings, for a young pitcher, that type of workload often tends to result in some problems the following year.

Never content for pitching, the A's took a stab at free agent and former two-time All-Star Justin Duchscherer. After missing the entire 2009 season due to shoulder surgery, Duchscherer began receiving treatment for clinical depression. If he returns to form, the A's would be getting a solid right-hander with a career 3.14 ERA. In his first full season as a starter, Duchscherer won 10 games and posted a 2.54 in 22 starts for the A's during the 2008 season.

Brett Anderson had a 3-1 strikeout-walk ratio last year, and he set an A's rookie record with 150 punchouts. After going 11-11 with a 4.06 ERA in 175 1/3 innings as a rookie, Anderson is hoping to build on those numbers in his second year. First, he must re-earn a spot in the rotation, as Geren has not finalized the back end.

Gio Gonzalez has put up similar numbers as Cahill during Spring Training, although other factors will play into Geren's decision. If there is one factor that could work against Gonzalez, it's that he is the only pitcher in the competition with bullpen experience and could wind up with a long relief role. Vin Mazzaro was also in the mix, but he was recently optioned to the minors after struggling with his control. Rookie Josh Outman was cruising along last year until Tommy John surgery shut down his season. He isn't expected back until sometime after the All-Star break.

## BULLPEN

The bullpen is anchored by closer Andrew Bailey, who burst onto the scene to win AL Rookie of the Year in '09. Opposing batters hit just .167 against Bailey, who finished the year with a 1.84 ERA and 26 saves in 30 chances. In 83 1/3 inning pitched, he notched 91 strikeouts and issued only 24 walks. However, Bailey began experiencing elbow soreness late in Spring Training and was shut down for about a week.

Joey Devine was penciled into the closer's role entering last season, but that plan was sidetracked when he underwent Tommy John surgery and had to miss the whole season. A year earlier, Devine compiled a minuscule 0.59 ERA in 42 appearances. While Bailey has a stronghold on the closer's job for now, Devine can step in if needed, though his recovery has been sidetracked by a recent bout of tendinitis.

Left-hander Craig Breslow is a solid setup man and has no problem pitching consecutive days. But like Bailey, Breslow experienced some elbow soreness late in Spring Training. He is another guy who can save games if needed, as he posted a 3.36 ERA and held opposing hitters to a .197 average last year.

Michael Wuertz and Brad Ziegler also figure to play key roles once again. Wuertz enjoyed the best year of his career last year, his first in Oakland, as he went 6-1 with a 2.63 ERA. Wuertz also fanned 102 batters in 78 2/3 innings, and held opponents to a .188 batting average. Ziegler has a 2.17 ERA over two big league seasons and has saved 18 games. Ziegler had his closer's job snatched by Bailey last season, though he is still a valuable bullpen option for Geren.

## BENCH

Look for outfielder Michael Taylor and first baseman Chris Carter, two of the organization's top prospects, to join the roster at some point in the season. Taylor came to the A's from Philadelphia, where he was one of the Phillies' prized prospects, while Carter has been Oakland's top prospect each of the last two seasons.

As for the A's bench, there isn't a ton of depth entering the season. Chavez is no doubt a solid player, but health will always be a concern. Adam Rosales can play anywhere in the infield, though he hit just .213 last year with Cincinnati. Jake Fox hit 11 homers in 216 at-bats during his first big league action last year with the Cubs, and he can play both corner infield spots. In the outfield, Eric Patterson hit .287 after losing his starting job last year. Travis Buck is another option in the outfield, but his productivity, and health, have slipped over the last few seasons.

## OUTLOOK

Since racking up 93 wins en route to a playoff appearance in 2005, Oakland has hovered around the 75-win mark for the last three years. If it seems general manager Billy Beane is stockpiling young talent every year, well, he is. With a payroll in the league's bottom tier, Beane has taken the lightning-in-a-bottle approach; hoping to get maximum production from young players at minimum cost, while mixing in the right veteran free agents.

Despite the team's big-ticket free agent boasting a 31.15 ERA after his first three Spring Training starts, there is optimism entering this season. The A's broke in a lot of young players in the second half of '09, and from June 29 on, they went 44-44. At the same time, A's fans have grown weary of the constant youth movement, as attendance sunk to the very bottom of the majors last year. If the team can avoid another slow start, and those youngsters continue to develop, the A's could make some headway in the AL West. But with the offseason moves Seattle has made, and with Texas and Los Angeles still locked and loaded, the A's are likely still a year or two away from thinking postseason.

## Oakland A's Spring Q&A: Keith Lieppman

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

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Opening Day for the minor leagues is less than two weeks away. The Oakland A's front office is busy evaluating the team's minor leaguers and working on the rosters for the organization's four full-season affiliates. We caught-up with the A's Director of Player Development Keith Lieppman on Sunday to find out the progress of a number of A's prospects in minor league camp.

*OaklandClubhouse: How is spring training going?*

**Keith Lieppman:** It's actually going really well. Still a whole lot of injuries, unfortunately. The ongoing issue is that we are banged up. A lot of them are from last year and they are just nagging injuries. Beyond that, we are hanging in there, just trying to get through this time where a lot of guys are rehabbing and trying to make it to the next stage of health.

*OC: I noticed that James Simmons isn't on any of the spring rosters. Is he hurt?*

**KL:** Yeah, he stayed home and is just still trying to figure out what is wrong with his shoulder. He continues to have issues with that and there is still a lot of pain in there.

*OC: So it may be a while before we see him then?*

**KL:** Yeah. We anticipated that he would come to extended spring [training camp], but we are still trying to get him to the point that he can throw. Right now, he is not in a throwing program. He is still trying to figure out what is causing it.

*OC: Josh Horton had off-season elbow surgery. Is he ticketed for extended spring, as well?*

**KL:** Josh Horton showed up today. We brought him in once his throwing program ended. He is able to hit and he'll just have to finish his throwing program in extended spring.

*OC: Has anyone had a standout spring thus far that maybe surprised you?*

**KL:** Max Stassi has really looked good in his first spring training here. Going from big league camp and then starting to play in some games down here, he has looked really good, just like he did when he went to Vancouver last year and when he came to Instructional League. He is standing out. People are impressed by the way he handles himself, his maturity and just his performance. He has really done a good job as an 18-year-old in camp.

*OC: Do you think that he can make that jump to full-season baseball even though he is just 18?*

**KL:** Yeah, I think there is a very good chance that he will go to Kane County and we will see how he does.

*OC: Ryan Ortiz is another solid catcher who was taken in last year's draft. Has he looked good in spring training thus far?*

**KL:** Yes. The whole idea is, if you have two quality catchers like that, you'd like to split them up to make sure that they both get equal time. At this stage, it looks like Ortiz more than likely would go to Stockton. He is a little bit older and more mature just as far as experience-wise. You just want to make sure that they both have an opportunity to catch regularly. That's what we will try to do by splitting them up.

*OC: Petey Paramore [a catcher taken in the 2008 draft] has had a tough first two years hitting in professional baseball. Do you feel like he is getting his swing together at this point?*

**KL:** He has looked a lot better this spring. More aggressive. And he certainly was highly thought of. He will just have to continue to improve the swing because the competition level has increased considerably with the addition of Ortiz and Stassi coming. This will really be an interesting battle to see who kind of wins this one.

*OC: Is Yusuf Carter still behind the plate or was that a one-year defensive experiment?*

**KL:** No, it looks like Yusuf will go to Midland and be there along with Joel Galarraga. Both of those guys should be the catchers at Double-A.

*OC: Is Joel throwing without any restrictions after the shoulder surgery he had last year?*

**KL:** We have to be careful with him, but he should be okay to start the season. His throwing is a lot better. The surgery was successful and it is just a matter of him getting a little fatigued from time-to-time. But he has otherwise been fine.

*OC: Has Rashun Dixon picked up where he left off after winning the Instructional League MVP?*

**KL:** You know, he ran into the wall the other day. He had about 15 stitches just above his eye, so he has been setback on the shelf for the past week. We have not had that many opportunities to see him, unfortunately. He just had that fluke injury, so we are just waiting to see how it turns out with him.

*OC: How have two standouts from last year's draft, Conner Crumbliss and Paul Smyth, looked in camp?*

**KL:** Crumbliss has been outstanding. He had such a great year last year and he has been playing second base, outfield. He will definitely be at Kane County and he has definitely had one of the better springs of all of the guys in camp. Very aggressive and pretty much left off where he was at in Instructional League.

Smyth came in and had dropped about 20, 25 pounds from last year. So he is in great shape looking to have another great year.

*OC: Is Ian Krol a possibility to pitch at home with Kane County this year?*

**KL:** I think we are going to attempt to send him to Kane County. I think he is ready for it and should be able to handle it.

*OC: How has Fautino De Los Santos looked since coming down from big league camp? He was hit around a lot in big league camp.*

**KL:** His velocities are really good. They are up. But he really hasn't had any experience except one month in High-A ball and that was when he got hurt in Stockton two years ago. He hasn't developed his other pitches, his change-up and breaking ball, so more than likely he will start at a lower level just to try to increase his ability to do more than just throw hard. Because guys time his fastball and you have to have another pitch to get them off of it. A lot of our initial work with him will be on his secondary stuff and try to have something to complement that great arm of his. Once he does that, he'll go pretty fast through the system.

*OC: Do you think he will be at Stockton then?*

**KL:** Yeah.

*OC: And he will be relieving exclusively at this point, right?*

**KL:** Yes, that's correct.

*OC: How about Arnold Leon? Is he going to relieve or start?*

**KL:** Right now since Leon continued to play during winter ball [in Mexico] last year, we are going to try to hold him back so that we don't overtax him and maybe let him pitch in a piggy-back situation or out of the bullpen initially, just to save the wear-and-tear on him. But he is really looking good. He will be at Midland and has really improved and gotten better each time out.

*OC: Where is Dusty Coleman at in his rehab from wrist surgery?*

**KL:** He is taking groundballs and just now getting into a swing progression, which should take a little bit of time. He is not going to be able to break [camp] until he has been through games and we can make sure that he is healthy. So he is a ways away.

*OC: Is Grant Green looking good?*

**KL:** Yeah, he has been at shortstop. He is swinging the bat well and has improved a lot on his defense and his throwing. He looks like he will be the shortstop at Stockton.

*OC: Will you try to keep Jemile Weeks and Adrian Cardenas at different levels at this point, similar to Stassi and Ortiz?*

**KL:** Cardenas had an injury to his thumb. He has a slight tear of the ligament of his thumb. He got that diving into second base. He is out for about a month.

*OC: Would that mean that Weeks would go up a level then?*

**KL:** No, we are still in a situation where once the big league club breaks, Weeks will more than likely still start at Double-A.