

A's News Clips, Monday, March 1, 2010

Well-traveled Coco Crisp at home with the Oakland A's

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Major league teams covet switch-hitting outfielders who play good defense and fly around the bases.

That explains why new A's outfielder Coco Crisp hasn't grown roots at any stop in his career.

Crisp has been traded three times since being drafted by St. Louis in 1999, and the acquiring teams have coughed up quality players to get him.

"It'd be nice to be in a spot where you don't have to move or think about next year," Crisp said. "But in this day and age, only a select few have that opportunity."

Crisp was a wanted man by the A's this offseason even as he was coming off surgery to both shoulders. The team, looking to strengthen its defense up the middle, signed Crisp to a one-year, \$5.25 million contract with a club option for 2011.

He's expected to take over center field with Rajai Davis shifting to left.

"I think there's some traditional stats that show he was a good player," A's general manager Billy Beane said. "But I think there's some other metrics that indicate his whole career he's been a very productive guy, more so than on the surface. He's a great defender, an outstanding base runner, and a switch hitter that gives you a lot of flexibility with the lineup."

Something else Crisp brings? Substantial postseason experience to a roster that's lacking in that department.

Traded from Cleveland to Boston before the 2006 season, Crisp was the everyday center fielder for World Series-winning

Red Sox in 2007. Jacoby Ellsbury replaced him in center for much of the postseason, but Crisp did make a running catch in deep center against Cleveland that clinched Game 7 of the American League Championship Series.

The following season, he hit .450 (9-for-20) for Boston in the ALCS against Tampa Bay.

"I think I've been fortunate to have played in good cities so far, and in the order in which I played in them," Crisp, 30, said. "Starting off with Cleveland, a young team with some veteran guys, I was able to learn a lot. Then I transitioned over to Boston "... going to where the atmosphere is probably the most electric in any stadium.

"I know there's a lot of guys who are Hall of Fame-type ballplayers and never win a ring."

Crisp was shipped to Kansas City before the 2009 season but played in just 49 games due to his shoulder injuries. He's most closely associated with his time in Boston, where his diving catches made him a regular on highlight clips.

The A's hope he'll patrol the Oakland Coliseum outfield as effectively.

Gabe Gross, another new A's outfielder, played against Crisp frequently while with Tampa Bay and saw Crisp's impact.

"He does such a good job of covering ground in the outfield," Gross said. "And he can do multiple things offensively to put pressure on you — stealing bases, taking extra bases, maybe laying down a bunt."

Crisp had surgery to repair tears in the labrum and rotator cuff of each shoulder last summer but said he won't sacrifice his all-out style of defensive play to preserve his health.

He's also likely to bat first or second and said he's happy to be with Oakland, even though it means getting acquainted with yet another set of teammates.

"When I started out I was dubbed as no more than a fourth outfielder," he said. "To be wanted is always a good thing."

A's notebook: Pitchers Jason Jennings, Brett Tomko added for depth

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's added some veteran pitching depth Sunday by signing right-handers Jason Jennings and Brett Tomko to minor league contracts.

Jennings, the 2002 National League Rookie of the Year with Colorado, flew into Phoenix in the morning and was in uniform. Tomko, who went 4-1 with the A's last season after being signed in August, still is recovering from nerve damage in his right arm suffered in his final start last season.

A's manager Bob Geren said he was told Tomko could be ready sometime in May. Tomko will report to minor league camp later this month to continue rehab.

Jennings, 31, is 62-74 with a 4.95 ERA in nine major league seasons split among Colorado, Houston and Texas. He was strictly a starter until the Rangers put him in the bullpen last season. He'll be stretched out as a starter, but Geren said Jennings also could serve as a long or middle reliever.

"I feel there's a good opportunity here to fill multiple roles if they need me," Jennings said.

His first order of business was to razz new teammate Ben Sheets, off whom Jennings hit a walkoff home run in college. Jennings starred at Baylor University. Sheets played at Northeastern Louisiana.

"I let him do it," Sheets cracked. "I had a date that night."

The A's have lots of bullpen depth, but Jennings could be a swingman option, a right-handed version of Lenny DiNardo, another nonroster pitcher in camp.

The A's pushed the start of their workout to noon in anticipation of morning showers, but the rain continued into the afternoon and altered their schedule. When it stopped, Sheets took the mound at Phoenix Municipal Stadium and threw live batting practice to Daric Barton, Jake Fox, Kevin Kouzmanoff and Ryan Sweeney.

Sheets said he felt good during the 30-pitch session, which prepares him for his first Cactus League outing Friday against the Milwaukee Brewers at Phoenix Muni.

Trevor Cahill, DiNardo and Marcus McBeth also threw to hitters. Geren said Cahill, contending for the fifth starter role, was especially sharp with all of his pitches.

The Cactus League opener Thursday against the Chicago Cubs will be broadcast on KTRB-860. First pitch is 12:05 p.m. (PST). Cahill is the A's scheduled starter.

Chin Music: Oakland A's sign Brett Tomko, Jason Jennings to minor league contracts

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 2/28/2010

The A's were right to push their workout time back a few hours today, but they still can't escape the rain. It's coming down pretty good right now, and pitchers were playing catch but just headed indoors.

The position players went over to Papago to get in some batting practice. Then later today, they'll return to Phoenix Muni for some live BP, assuming the rain lets up. Not sure that's gonna happen ...

Anyway, on to the day's news ...

The A's signed pitchers Brett Tomko and Jason Jennings to minor league contracts. You're familiar w/Tomko from his stellar work in Oakland last year. He's still rehabbing the irritated nerve in his right arm and will report to A's minor league camp. Bob Geren was told Tomko could be ready sometime in May.

Jennings, the 2002 NL Rookie of the Year, arrived at A's camp this morning and said he's ready to serve whatever role is available. Jennings was a starter with Colorado, Houston and in his first year in Texas in 2008, but the Rangers used him out

of the 'pen last year. Geren mentioned Jennings will be stretched out for possible starting, long relief or middle relief work. I'd consider him a right-handed version of Lenny DiNardo, a swingman who can fill in as needed. Jennings said he's recovered from elbow problems that plagued him from 2006-08.

Wow, the rain is coming down hard and it looks nasty out there. I think I'm in Phoenix but it could be Seattle ...

A's sign pitchers Jason Jennings, Brett Tomko

[Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer](#)

The A's signed the 2002 NL Rookie of the Year on Sunday and also brought back the man with the best ERA among Oakland starters last year.

Right-handers **Jason Jennings** and **Brett Tomko** agreed to minor-league deals, and Jennings, who won 16 games with Colorado as a rookie, reported to camp Sunday morning. He'll be groomed to start, but he also could wind up in middle or long relief. General manager **Billy Beane** noted that Jennings was effective in relief for Texas last year until he started to get used frequently, then his numbers took a dip.

Jennings, 31, said he'd be happy to work in any role for the A's. He nearly signed with the Giants, he said, and he also talked to the Mets and Cardinals.

"It's a good opportunity here to maybe fill multiple roles if they need me to," Jennings said. "I'm hoping to make an impression and make the club."

Tomko told The Chronicle he'll drive to Phoenix later this week and report right to a rehab coordinator because he is still working his way back from the nerve problem in his right arm that ended his season with Oakland last year.

Tomko, 36, expects to be back pitching in games anywhere from mid-April to the end of May as that nerve regenerates. He believes he'll go to extended spring training.

"I thought I'd be ready by now," Tomko said, "but that was me just hoping."

He had a comparable offer from the Twins, but he liked his time in Oakland last year (he went 4-1 with a 2.95 ERA for the A's) and he'll be closer to his San Diego home.

"Brett did a great job for us last year," Beane said. "And in fairness to him, we wanted to give him the possibility to carry forward."

Jennings will throw a bullpen session today.

Each man would earn about \$700,000 if he makes the big-league team.

Briefly: Opening Night starter **Ben Sheets** threw a 30-pitch bullpen session in a light rain and said all went well. ... The A's Cactus League opener Thursday will air on KTRB (860 AM).

Drumbeat: Jennings, Tomko sign minor-league deals, rain messes up plans

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Phoenix 2/28/2010

The A's signed right-hander Jason Jennings and Brett Tomko to minor-league deals and Jennings reported this morning. Tomko told me he'll drive to Phoenix later this week and report right to a rehab coordinator because he is still working his way back from that nerve injury that ended his season with Oakland last year.

Tomko, 36, expects to be back pitching in games anywhere from mid-April to the end of May as that nerve regenerates; he's feeling better all the time. The best news for him is that the Tomkos' five-month-old twins are finally sleeping through the night. "Life changing!" he said.

He had a comparable offer from the Twins but he liked his time in Oakland last year (he went 4-1 with a 2.95 ERA for the A's) and he'll be closer to his San Diego home.

Jennings, the 2002 NL Rookie of the Year, was in Texas' bullpen last year and, he said, "I think I pitched in every game we played the A's."

He gave up four hits, including one homer, in 6 2/3 innings against the A's last year, and Oakland hit .190 against him in three games.

Jennings, 31, said he'd be happy to work in any role for the A's. Manager Bob Geren said Jennings will be stretched out to start, but he also could be used in long or middle relief. Jennings said he nearly signed with the Giants, and he also talked to the Mets and Cardinals.

Jennings is playing catch right now at Phoenix Muni and he said he'll throw a bullpen session tomorrow and hopes to throw to hitters later in the week.

Are these additions just a chance to add more depth to a team that has been decimated by injuries over the years? Is it an opportunity to get a decent rotation at Triple-A Sacramento, with most of the A's best young pitchers already in Oakland? Or might it indicate more worry about Justin Duchscherer's health, or Ben Sheets'? Sheets has pitched with no trouble whatsoever so far - he's scheduled to throw a bullpen session today, although right now things have been stalled and it appears the pitchers might have to get their work in in the Papago batting cages. Sheets looks and acts as healthy as an ox. Duchscherer, however, was nursing an injury on reporting day and he had a procedure to burn nerve endings in the area of the sacroiliac joint last week. He's been on the DL in each of the past four years.

Whatever the A's motivation, these are nice, no-risk pickups; experienced pitchers with some big-league success. My guess is that one or both winds up contributing - maybe even quite a lot - this season.

I forgot to mention yesterday, but Joey Devine, another A's pitcher coming off an injury (elbow surgery) told me he throw a 30-pitch bullpen session and "it went very well," he said.

It's pouring here at Phoenix Muni, which I believe is a sign I need to go watch the hockey game.

Time to shine for Barton

First baseman ready to put together consistent season

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- More than two years have passed since a fresh faced 22-year-old kid jolted the A's community as a late-September callup.

With a bat that produced a .347 average and 1.067 OPS in 18 games, the rookie presented a struggling Oakland team with an offering of hope in the form of a power-hitting first baseman.

That hope has since begun to fade. And those numbers have diminished greatly.

But the kid is still a kid -- in baseball years at least.

And Daric Barton, now 24, is out to prove he's done some major growing up.

He doesn't care that the jury is still out on whether he can produce consistent numbers. He wants to be his own judge.

"I have nothing to tell anyone who doubts me," Barton says. "Really, it's about me and what I can do, but I don't care what other people think. Some people are going to think negative, and some are going to think positive."

The doubters are likely to look to 2008 and point fingers at the .226 average he posted during 140 games in his first full big league season. They'll then recall the time the A's pushed Barton aside and brought back Jason Giambi to fulfill first-base duties in 2009. Surely the organization has lost all faith in him, they would conclude.

Not at all, insists Barton. In fact, "they have never done anything to make me feel like they don't want me here."

"They've given me every opportunity in the world," he says. "I think I took advantage of that opportunity in '07. In '08, I don't think I did. I might have taken it for granted a little bit, and that's something that's behind me. This game isn't easy, and I know that once you get here it's harder to stay here than you think."

MAKING THE LEAP

Daric Barton has yet to display offensive consistency in the big leagues, where he's been expected to put up big numbers since coming over to Oakland in a 2004 trade. Here's a look at how his Major League numbers compare to those in the Minors.

Stat	Minors	Majors
BA	0.293	0.249
OBP	0.408	0.348
SLG	0.455	0.394
OPS	0.863	0.742

Barton realizes he had to learn that the hard way. After a disappointing 2008 season, he was shipped to Triple-A Sacramento at the beginning of the year and didn't make his 2009 debut until June. Again, he struggled. Barton hit .118 in 17 games for the month before batting .188 in another 17 games in July.

Things got worse before they got better, as Barton battled a hamstring injury. But in September, he created flashbacks of that strong 2007 finish and went out batting .310 with 16 RBIs for the month to end the year with a respectable .269 average.

"I think starting off last year at Triple-A was the best thing that ever happened to me," he says. "I learned to be myself again and realized what it took to get to the big leagues in the first place. That was big for me last year. When I came up and got the time in at the end of the season, I think it showed that I was back to my normal self."

Whether he has maintained such presence has yet to be seen in a game situation, and Barton understands the A's won't wait forever for him to develop. After all, they have the power-heavy prospect Chris Carter right behind him in queue.

Barton won't let any of that shake him, though. A year ago it may have, but a mental makeover has done wonders for this Southern California kid.

"This year I'm going out there like I'm trying to make the team," he says. "It's different than before because I kind of took things as they were and saw things as whatever happens, happens. This year I'm trying to make it hard for them to make a decision."

"I don't feel any pressure at all. I'm not worried about anybody else but myself. I never thought making the team was going to be easy, but I just don't think I took it as serious as I should have, and it showed."

The only thing Barton wants to show off now are the extensive efforts he's made to become a constant in Oakland's lineup for years to come. That process began when he cut his offseason short -- not before a five-day trip to Costa Rica -- and made the move to Arizona in the second week of January "to get ready and get in baseball shape."

He says his central focus this spring is offense. After all, it's what the A's liked most about him when he arrived in 2004 as part of the Mark Mulder deal with St. Louis.

"I'm absolutely working harder on offense than defense this spring," he says. "I'm not trying to dissect it too much. I'm just trying to go back to the simplest form of hitting that I used to do. That means not thinking and looking for a pitch up in the zone to attack right away, and hopefully the results will come."

Barton firmly believes he can bring to the plate what he displayed in those three short weeks as a rookie. He's also acutely aware of his defensive abilities, which have transformed from what he deems "terrible" to "tremendously better" over the last couple years.

"When I first came over here, it was pretty bad," Barton admits. "I think it affected my offense. That's another thing I've had to learn -- balancing out what you're working on and honing all your skills. Now I've learned to work on both the same amount."

Through it all, the A's organization has kept his youth and track record -- including a .293 career Minor League batting average -- in mind. They've been patient and forgiving, along with trusting of Barton's ability.

He'll be the youngest of Oakland's expected starting position players on the field come Opening Day, but he could arguably be the most experienced in growing pains and lessons learned.

"I think my mind's going to be a lot more clear," he says. "I'm not worried about what anyone else thinks. I'm just focusing on what I can do, and I know I can do it well."

A's sign Tomko, Jennings to Minors deals

Veterans have combined for 162 Major League victories

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- The A's on Sunday signed veteran right-handers Jason Jennings and Brett Tomko to Minor League contracts.

Jennings, who arrived at Phoenix Municipal Stadium on Sunday after catching an early flight out of Dallas, will play catch immediately and then throw a bullpen session Monday. Meanwhile, Tomko will join Minor League camp this week to continue rehabilitation of last year's arm injury that sidelined him following six impressive starts -- which resulted in a 4-1 record and 2.95 ERA -- with the A's. If all goes well with his rehab schedule, Tomko should be good to go in May.

The 31-year-old Jennings owns a 62-74 lifetime record and 4.95 ERA in 225 games, including 180 starts, in nine big league seasons. He was the Rockies' first-round pick in the 1999 First-Year Player Draft before going on to earn 2002 National League Rookie of the Year honors with Colorado. In six seasons with the Rockies, he compiled a 58-56 record and 4.74 ERA, making him the franchise's winningest pitcher.

Jennings was traded following the 2006 season to Houston, where he started 18 games, before signing as a free agent with Texas in January 2008. He appeared in just six games with the Rangers, posting a 0-5 record and 8.56 ERA, and was then moved to the bullpen and released in late August.

"I felt like I threw well last year, and this is the healthiest I've felt since '05," said Jennings, who experienced elbow problems the past couple seasons. "I was just waiting on an opportunity to pitch, and I feel like I can fill multiple roles here."

Jennings said he came close to a deal with the Giants, and also had interest from the Cardinals and Mets. In the end, though, he said he liked all Oakland had to offer -- including a chance to reminisce with Ben Sheets, whom he hit a home run against in college.

"I'm happy with this opportunity," he said. "This seems like a young, energetic team. I enjoyed watching them last year, and hopefully I'll be a part of it this year."

Manager Bob Geren said he likes the possibility of using the newly acquired Jennings in a multitude of roles, including as a starter, or in middle and long relief.

"I've heard he's 100 percent healthy, so we'll treat him as anyone else," the A's skipper said. "He not only adds depth, but experienced depth."

Meanwhile, Tomko is no stranger to the A's, as he initially signed a Minor League contract with Oakland on Aug. 5 of last year after being released by the Yankees. Before ending his season with an irritated nerve in his right arm, the 36-year-old righty earned his 100th career victory with a five-hit shutout against Texas on Sept. 15.

Tomko's career line includes a 100-102 mark and 4.65 ERA in 389 games (266 starts) over 13 Major League seasons, during which he's pitched for nine teams.

In their Major League careers, Jennings and Tomko have combined for 162 victories and 614 appearances.

Jennings jumps right in after agreeing with A's

Associated Press, 2/28/2010

Jason Jennings and Brett Tomko agreed to minor league deals with the Oakland Athletics on Saturday, and less than 24 hours later Jennings was getting ready to play catch at A's camp.

Also, Ben Sheets threw live batting practice for the first time and impressed the coaching staff with his velocity.

"He threw the first pitch right by somebody," A's manager Bob Geren said.

Tomko, who finished the season with Oakland last year, will continue to rehab an irritated nerve in his right arm that ended his 2009 season prematurely. He'll report to the minor league camp and is expected to be ready to pitch by May.

Jennings, the 2002 NL Rookie of the Year, pitched for the Texas Rangers last year and was eager to get started this spring.

"I packed a couple of suitcases last night and caught a 7 a.m. flight (from Dallas) this morning," Jennings said minutes after arriving at Phoenix Muni on Sunday. "It's been crazy. I've been working out at home trying to keep up with everybody else in spring training waiting for an opportunity."

Jennings, sporting the number 77, braved a light drizzle to play catch with A's pitching coach Curt Young in the outfield. He hopes to throw a bullpen session Monday.

"I want to jump into some kind of routine," he said. "This is the healthiest I've felt since 2005."

Jennings endured elbow problems the past three years as he pitched for the Houston Astros and Texas Rangers. He was converted into a relief pitcher with the Rangers last year and was 2-4 with a 4.13 ERA in 44 appearances.

"He's experienced, he's a former Rookie of the Year and he had some great years for Colorado," Geren said. "He pitched well for the Rangers last year and he's healthy. We're happy to have him."

Jennings was 9-13 with a 3.78 ERA despite the NL's third-lowest offensive support of 4.03 runs per game in his final season with the Rockies in 2006.

He was 20-9 in his first 39 starts with Colorado, which included a sparkling debut on Aug. 23, 2001, when he threw an 8-hitter at the New York Mets in a 10-0 victory. He led off the ninth with a home run and had three hits in the game.

"I felt I threw the ball well last year," Jennings said. "I started until last year and was put in a relief role. It was brand new for me and I proved to myself I could do it."

The A's plan to stretch him out as a possible starter or long relief.

"He's been a starter so we know he's a multiple-inning guy," Geren said. "We want to get him slotted in somewhere and get him going."

Jennings played with Jack Cust on the Rockies and has known Sheets since they were both in college.

"We have a history," Jennings said.

It turns out Jennings, playing for Baylor, hit a walk-off home run against Sheets, pitching for Louisiana-Monroe.

"I think I let him do it," Sheets joked. "I had a date that night."

Geren also said that right-hander Trevor Cahill, slated to start the first game of spring training Thursday at the Cubs, threw the best he's seen.

"As far as throwing all of his pitches combined, it was a solid outing," Geren said.

Lee's Leftovers: Sunday notes: Sheets, Cahill and more

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 2/28/2010

Tidbits from a rather quiet Sunday that saw way too much rain pound Phoenix Muni for the majority of the day:

Ben Sheets threw live BP and said everything felt great. Among those who stood in against him: **Ryan Sweeney, Daric Barton, Kevin Kouzmanoff** and **Jake Fox**. As I've noted before, Sheets has turned out to be quite the character around the clubhouse. On the mound, though, he turns into a completely different creature. Very intense. Less than five minutes after walking off the mound, though, he was back to his joking self. And if anything, he learned to stay away from the Mexican burrito spread right before he heads out to throw...

Bob Geren was very impressed with **Trevor Cahill's** BP session today and said his performance was "the best I've seen from him." Looked like he had all his pitches working for him, and he was getting quite the response from guys watching him in the dugout.

As you've probably already read here, the A's signed veteran right-handers **Jason Jennings** and **Brett Tomko** today. Buzz is already circulating about what these moves mean for the current pitching staff. Are these additions simply **Billy Beane's** way of adding more depth to a team with a longstanding injury history, or might this bring to question **Justin Duchscherer** and Sheets' health? Hard to say right now, but I'd like to hear your thoughts.

I was told today that the A's exhibition opener against the Cubs on Thursday will be on the radio for the first time in more than a decade. So for those of you within range of KTRB-860 in the Bay Area, you'll be able to listen to all the sights and sounds of Oakland's opener.

And if you didn't get a chance to see this video of **Rickey Henderson** lending some advice to **Rajai Davis**, make sure you do so.

One final note to leave with you: As Jayson Stark observed today, this is the last Sunday without a baseball game to watch until November 7.