

A's News Clips, Friday, December 17, 2010

Oakland A's add another bat by acquiring outfielder Josh Willingham from Washington Nationals

By Joe Stiglich_Oakland Tribune

The A's struck quickly with another move to beef up their offense, acquiring outfielder Josh Willingham from the Washington Nationals on Thursday for reliever Henry Rodriguez and outfield prospect Corey Brown.

Willingham, a seven-year veteran with three 20-plus homer seasons, will hit somewhere in the heart of a lineup that also includes designated hitter Hideki Matsui, signed Tuesday to a one-year contract.

General manager Billy Beane said he envisions Willingham, who turns 32 in February, starting in left field. David DeJesus, acquired from Kansas City in November, will play right field with Coco Crisp in center field. Ryan Sweeney, a starter for each of the past three seasons, would head to the bench.

Is adding Matsui and the right-handed hitting Willingham enough for an offense that ranked 11th in the American League in runs and 13th in homers last season?

"We think we're better," Beane said. "We think, if anything, it's a deeper lineup with a little more balance. We have some shortcomings, sure. But it's a better club and will be better with some guys coming back to health."

The A's have gotten little run production from their corner outfielders, and Willingham has averaged 20 homers and 66 RBIs over the past five seasons.

Sweeney has a higher career batting average (.286 to .265) than Willingham but has averaged just four homers and 45 RBIs in his three seasons with Oakland.

"I'm not a guy that's going to hit 40 (homers) and drive in 100 every year," Willingham said. "But I think I'm a guy that does a lot well and brings a lot to the lineup."

Willingham made \$4.6 million last season and is due a raise in arbitration. He's eligible for free agency after this season, as is DeJesus.

Willingham got off to a great start in 2010, hitting .281 with 15 homers and 46 RBIs before the All-Star break. But he tore the meniscus in his left knee and required season-ending surgery in August.

Will there be enough bandages to go around next season?

Four of the A's five projected outfielders -- Willingham, DeJesus, Sweeney and Conor Jackson -- underwent season-ending surgery in July or August last season, and Crisp played in just 75 games because of injuries.

Willingham said his knee feels great after finishing rehab in October, and Beane believes there will be enough depth to give rest to those who need it.

Beane added the A's would continue looking for hitters in free agency but reiterated he felt options were dwindling. Finding relief help is a priority, he said, particularly after trading Rodriguez, 23.

With a 100 mph fastball, Rodriguez is believed by some around the game to have closer potential. He's compiled 37 strikeouts in 312/3 big league innings but has been erratic with his command.

Brown, 25, was a first-round draft pick in 2007 but was not forcing his way toward the majors after three-plus seasons in the organization.

Chin Music: Highlights from Beane/Willingham conference call

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 12/26/2010 1:49PM

Here's a few nuggets from the conference call involving new A's outfielder Josh Willingham and A's GM Billy Beane:

–Willingham has played a bit of right field but says he's definitely most comfortable playing left field. Beane confirmed that Willingham is likely to play left field, with David DeJesus in right and Coco Crisp in center.

–Beane said he thinks the A's offense is improved, with more depth and balance by adding Willingham's right-handed bat. The team will still look for opportunities to acquire more offense, but Beane reiterated that he believes the free agent pickings are getting slim. (Something tells me that continuing to pursue Adrian Beltre isn't in their plans).

–The bullpen is an area they will look to address. "We just gave up a reliever (Henry Rodriguez), so that's an area we have to look at to get some depth there," Beane said. "Until the winter is over, you're always on the lookout."

–Willingham on what he'll bring to A's offense: "I'm not a guy that's going to hit 40 (homers) and drive in 100 every year. But I think I'm a guy that does a lot well and brings a lot to the lineup."

Chin Music: A's acquire outfielder Josh Willingham from Washington Nationals — what are the roster ramifications?

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 12/15/2010 12:02PM

****TO UPDATE: The players going to the Washington Nationals are reliever Henry Rodriguez and outfielder Corey Brown. Rodriguez, gifted with a 100 mph fastball but erratic command, always struck me as a good trading chip. Some baseball people have thought he's got the stuff to be a closer down the road. But he's had trouble with walks and controlling the running game. The A's always thought Brown, 25, had good tools — nice combo of power and base-stealing ability. But his strikeout numbers have been high in the minors, and he wasn't exactly flying through the system. Very nice kid. I got to know him in spring training a bit ... The bullpen depth takes a hit with Rodriguez gone. I could see the A's looking for relief help in free agency, even with the impending signing of Rich Harden.

The A's roster continues to change by the day. A major league source confirmed for me that the A's have acquired outfielder Josh Willingham from the Washington Nationals in exchange for two players. Those players aren't known yet, but at least one has major league experience. It's my understanding that neither will be a name that makes your jaw drop. Some medical details are still being exchanged between the teams, but this trade could be announced this afternoon. I was busy cranking out a news story on the trade for our Web site, which is why I'm just now getting to the blog.

Willingham turns 32 in February. He's a seven-year major league vet with three 20-homer seasons under his belt. Last season, he hit .268 with 16 homers and 56 RBIs. Fifteen of those homers came before the All-Star break, but his season ended in August after he needed left knee surgery. Willingham played strictly left field last season, so I'm seeing an A's starting outfield of Willingham, Coco Crisp and David DeJesus, left to right. That would push Ryan Sweeney to the bench. Sweeney is a terrific defender and one of the A's all-around best players, but this move doesn't surprise me based on the A's need for power from their outfield. Let's remember that Crisp, DeJesus, Willingham and Conor Jackson (who would presumably be the fifth outfielder) all missed significant time with injuries last season. Sweeney is likely to get playing time off the bench as the aforementioned players are going to need breaks (Sweeney, of course, has to rebound from knee surgery himself).

The A's have been linked to Willingham going back to last season's trade deadline. He's not the biggest name out there (I thought Magglio Ordonez made a lot of sense as a free agent target, but he re-signed with Detroit today). Honestly, Willingham's name didn't thrill me when I first heard rumors that the A's liked him. But if he produces his typical output in 2011, it will be an upgrade over the power production the A's have gotten from their outfielders. Is Willingham better than other options they could have explored? Let's see who the A's gave up in this trade first.

A question to now consider: Where does this trade leave Chris Carter? On Tuesday, GM Billy Beane told us media types that he could envision Carter, the A's top power-hitting prospect, possibly acting as the fifth outfielder/backup first baseman. But there's no room for that as this roster is shaping up. The five outfielders look to be Willingham, Crisp, DeJesus, Sweeney and Jackson. Daric Barton is handling first base and, assuming the A's carry 12 pitchers, the only extra infielder they'll have is Adam Rosales. This points to Carter starting the season in Triple-A. Of course, unforeseen injuries can alter things. And if Carter rips the cover off the ball in spring training, who knows? Might he leapfrog Barton at first? Or would he bump DeJesus or Willingham from the lineup?

All things to consider ... Feel free to sound off on anything I've rambled about ...

Remade lineup adds 1 more bat

Willingham says Oakland is 'ready to win'

Ron Kroichick, Chronicle Staff Writer

Two days after introducing Hideki Matsui to great fanfare - at a news conference packed with Japanese media - the A's made a quieter move Thursday, trading for Washington outfielder Josh Willingham and plopping him on a conference call with a handful of reporters.

Willingham could have just as much impact as Matsui on Oakland's offense. He averaged 20-plus home runs over the past five seasons, and his acquisition instantly balances a distinctly left-leaning lineup. The A's sent reliever Henry Rodriguez and minor-league outfielder Corey Brown to the Nationals.

Between Matsui and Willingham, the A's suddenly have some pop in the middle of the order. Imagine that.

"I'm excited, because I know the potential of this club," Willingham said. "I know they have really good young pitching, and obviously they upgraded the lineup with their previous acquisitions. I think this team is ready to win."

Willingham figures to start in left field, with Coco Crisp in center, David DeJesus in right and Matsui as the designated hitter. That's not a core likely to stir comparisons to the 1927 Yankees, but it's clearly an upgrade over the power-starved A's of 2010.

Oakland hit 109 homers, which ranked 28th in the majors (ahead of only Houston and Seattle). The A's scored 663 runs, which put them 23rd.

"If anything, it's a deeper lineup," general manager Billy Beane said. "There are shortcomings, but I think our offense is better. ... Now we may have the opportunity to rest guys properly and keep them healthy."

Said Willingham: "I'm not a guy who's going to hit 40 homers, but I bring some power and balance to the lineup."

Willingham, who turns 32 in February, hit .268 with 16 homers and 56 RBIs last season. His year was cut short by August surgery on his right knee. Willingham completed his rehabilitation in October and said the knee is now 100 percent.

He began his career with Florida and heads west one year before potentially becoming a free agent. Willingham earned \$4.6 million last season in Washington and is arbitration-eligible for the upcoming season.

His arrival displaces Ryan Sweeney, also trying to come back from knee surgery. Sweeney and Conor Jackson seem headed for reserve outfield roles.

"We haven't had a problem finding at-bats for guys the last few years - and having too many good players hasn't been a problem, either," Beane said. "There will be plenty of at-bats for everybody."

Beane acknowledged he's not necessarily done dealing. For one thing, he might seek to replenish his bullpen: He relinquished a young power pitcher in Rodriguez, who offered eye-popping velocity last season. Rodriguez's fastball routinely reached 100 mph.

"There's no getting around the fact he's a unique talent," Beane said. "But the attraction of bringing Josh on board was something we couldn't pass up. We're fully prepared for (Rodriguez) to have an outstanding career."

Said Nationals GM Mike Rizzo: "We have high hopes. We feel he's a big-arm guy who can fit in the back of our bullpen."

Offseason moves

Key additions: Josh Willingham, Hideki Matsui, Brandon McCarthy, David DeJesus. (Rich Harden has agreed to a one-year deal, pending a physical).

Key losses: Rajai Davis, Vin Mazzaro, Jack Cust.

Filed for free agency: Justin Duchscherer, Ben Sheets, Eric Chavez, Travis Buck, Gabe Gross, Jeremy Hermida.

Josh Willingham career stats

Year	Team	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	AVG.
2004	Fla.	12	25	2	5	0	0	1	1	0	4	8	.200
2005	Fla.	16	23	3	7	1	0	0	4	0	2	5	.304
2006	Fla.	142	502	62	139	28	2	26	74	2	54	109	.277
2007	Fla.	144	521	75	138	32	4	21	89	8	66	122	.265
2008	Fla.	102	351	54	89	21	5	15	51	3	48	82	.254
2009	Was.	133	427	70	111	29	0	24	61	4	61	104	.260
2010	Was.	114	370	54	99	19	2	16	56	8	67	85	.268
Totals		663	2,219	320	588	130	13	103	336	25	302	515	.265

Drumbeat: Willingham: "power and balance"

Ron Kroichick reports from the A's trade conference call: 12/16/2010 2:38PM

The A's have a lot more pop in their lineup than they did at the start of this week.

Two days after introducing designated hitter Hideki Matsui, the club acquired Washington outfielder Josh Willingham today. Willingham has hit 20-plus homers in three of the past five seasons -- and 15 or more in all five -- which immediately qualifies him as an honorary Bash Brother in homer-hungry Oakland.

"I'm going to bring some power to the lineup," Willingham said on a conference call. "I'm not a guy who's going to go out there and hit 40 homers. ... But I'll bring some power and balance to the lineup, and I also get on base a lot, walk a lot. I think I do a lot of things well."

Williamson, who turns 32 in February, had 16 homers and 56 RBIs last season for the Nationals. His season was cut short by a knee injury, which required arthroscopic surgery in August and cut his season short. He said he completed rehabilitation in October and is now 100 percent. General manager Billy Beane made it sound as if he's not necessarily done dealing. Beane relinquished 100-mph throwing reliever Henry Rodriguez in this trade, along with minor-league outfielder Corey Brown.

"There are still some things we'd like to do, and we have plenty of time," Beane said. "It doesn't have to stop here. We just gave up a major-league reliever (Rodriguez), so that's certainly something we have to look out for."

A's acquire Willingham from Nationals

By Greg Johns / MLB.com

Looking to further beef up their offensive attack, the Oakland A's acquired left fielder Josh Willingham from the Washington Nationals in a trade for young reliever Henry Rodriguez and Minor League outfielder Corey Brown, the club announced Thursday afternoon.

Willingham, 31, joins newly signed free-agent designated hitter Hideki Matsui, as the A's moved this week to bolster a lineup that didn't do enough to support a pitching staff that posted the lowest ERA in the American League last season.

"Our motivation is the continued desire to upgrade our offense, particularly from the right side of the plate," A's general manager Billy Beane said. "We just thought Josh was too good of a player to pass up at this juncture."

Willingham brings some right-handed pop, having averaged 20 home runs and 66 RBIs over the past five seasons for the Marlins and Nationals. Kevin Kouzmanoff led the A's with 16 home runs last year.

Willingham hit .268 with 16 home runs and 58 RBIs in 114 games for the Nationals in 2010, before missing most of the last month and a half with a left knee problem. He underwent surgery in mid-August and said he's fully recovered now and has been back on his normal workout routine since October.

"I'm excited because I know the potential this ballclub has," Willingham said about an hour after learning of the trade. "I know they have really good young pitching and have already upgraded their lineup a lot. So I'm excited to be part of that. I think this team is ready to win."

The A's acquired outfielder David DeJesus from the Royals earlier this offseason and now add Willingham to the returning mix of Coco Crisp, Ryan Sweeney and Conor Jackson. Willingham has played almost exclusively in left field in his career, with 560 games in left as opposed to 34 in right field.

Beane envisions Willingham filling the same left-field role for the A's, with DeJesus having the versatility to play right field. He also said the deal doesn't mean the club has lost any confidence in Sweeney, but speaks more to the desire to add depth to avoid the injury problems that built up last year.

"Ryan had trouble staying healthy the last couple years, but he's a good hitter and very much in our short- and long-term plans," Beane said. "In a positive sense, we've got what we think are good Major League players who deserve to play, and the trick will be getting them all enough at-bats to stay productive and also stay healthy and fresh for a 162-game season."

"We still feel highly about Ryan and will continue to do so despite this trade."

Matsui also played left field earlier in his career, but he's targeted strictly at DH in place of Jack Cust, who signed with Seattle last week.

Willingham is a career .265 hitter with 103 home runs and 336 RBIs. He became the 13th player in Major League history to hit two grand slams in one game -- and seventh to do it in back-to-back innings -- on July 27, 2009, against the Brewers in a 14-6 victory at Milwaukee. He finished that season hitting .260 with 24 home runs and 61 RBIs.

The 6-foot-2, 215-pound Alabama native earned \$4.6 million last year and is likely in line for a pay hike going into his third and final season of arbitration eligibility. He'll become a free agent in 2012, though Beane said he'd talk to his agent soon about whether a contract extension might make sense for both parties.

The A's have been interested in Willingham for several years and Beane said talks kicked up when the club was pursuing DeJesus earlier in the offseason, then resumed in the past week. Beane likes not only the long-ball potential, but Willingham's career .367 on-base percentage.

Willingham has never played in Oakland, but says he looks forward to his first AL stint and isn't worried about the ballpark's reputation.

"I don't think I've ever really played in a hitter's ballpark in my career," he said. "Florida isn't really a hitter's park and Washington played really fair. In my experiences, I'm going to pull most of my home runs. They'll go out of anywhere, anyway."

Beane said it wasn't easy giving up the hard-throwing Rodriguez, 23, who pitched 29 games in relief for the A's last season with a 4.55 ERA in 27 2/3 innings.

"There's no getting around the fact he's a unique talent with a 100-mph fastball," Beane said. "But we knew we'd have to give up something and felt at this time the attraction of bringing Josh on board was not something we can pass on. He is a unique talent though, and we're prepared for him to go on and have an outstanding career."

Brown, 25, was a first-round sandwich Draft pick in '07 out of Oklahoma State, but has yet to reach the Major Leagues.

He hit .320 with 10 home runs and 49 RBIs for Double-A Midland last year and was named to the Texas League All-Star team, but batted just .193 with five home runs in 41 games after a late-season promotion to Triple-A Sacramento.

The A's have been busy this week. In addition to signing Matsui and trading for Willingham, they also came to contract agreements with veteran free-agent pitchers Brandon McCarthy and Rich Harden.

Beane said the team may still pursue bullpen help to make up for the loss of Rodriguez, but sounded as if his offensive makeover is likely complete.

"At this time, there are obviously a lot of guys off the board," he said. "That's one of the reasons we jumped on Josh when we did. You see the dwindling opportunities, and if we're going to get another impact bat, it was unlikely we could get one going forward. But we'll keep our eyes and ears open."

How much improved is the lineup with the addition of Willingham, Matsui and DeJesus?

"We think we're better," Beane said. "If anything, we're deeper and more balanced. Are there some shortcomings? Sure, but that's going to happen in this marketplace. We're not going to have the perfect club with our payroll capabilities. But it is better and it'll also be deeper with some guys coming back."

A's get Willingham from Nationals

Oakland trades prospects for outfielder who hit 16 homers in 2010

By JANIE McCAULEY, ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — The Athletics suddenly have a lineup that could make them a contender in the AL West — if the oft-injured A's stay healthy, of course.

Oakland acquired outfielder Josh Willingham on Thursday from the Washington Nationals, who received two prospects in the trade.

"I think this team is ready to win," said Willingham, who expected to be dealt during the recent winter meetings. "And the organization, with the moves it has already made this offseason, proves it is ready to win also."

A's general manager Billy Beane certainly has worked to upgrade his lineup. Willingham is a middle-of-the-order hitter who should complement two other new faces: Hideki Matsui and David DeJesus.

Willingham batted .268 with 16 home runs and 56 RBIs last season, his second with Washington after five years with Florida.

The A's hit just 109 homers and scored 663 runs last season, their second-fewest in the last 28 non-strike seasons.

"We think we're better," Beane said. "If anything, it's a deeper lineup with more balance, too."

Willingham, 31, finished last season on the 60-day disabled list as he recovered from surgery on his left knee. He was sidelined after Aug. 15 and played 114 games, 108 of those in left field.

While Oakland pursued Willingham earlier this offseason, trade talks took off in the 48 hours before the deal got done.

Willingham's agent, Matt Sosnick, said his player would be "very open" to talking to Oakland about a contract extension. Beane said he would soon begin conversations with Sosnick regarding Willingham's future but declined to elaborate.

The Nationals got right-handed reliever Henry Rodriguez and outfielder Corey Brown in the swap.

"The decision to trade Josh was not based on his salary or money whatsoever," said Nationals GM Mike Rizzo, who acknowledged the injury played a role in the move.

Washington said Rodriguez, 23, threw a pitch at 103.2 mph in 2010, when he went 1-0 with a 4.55 ERA in 29 appearances for Oakland. He had 11 saves and a 1.69 ERA in 20 appearances at Triple-A Sacramento. Brown, 25, hit a combined .283 with 15 homers, 11 triples, 69 RBIs and 22 steals in 131 games at Sacramento and Double-A Midland.

It's been a busy week for Beane, to say the least.

The A's formally introduced Matsui as their new designated hitter Tuesday and have agreed to terms on a contract with right-hander Rich Harden, pending a physical.

Oakland manager Bob Geren will have options in the outfield, along with much-needed depth considering the histories of all the players expected to contribute regularly.

"We've had a number of injuries in the past and two outfielders didn't finish the year," Beane said. "We have to be a little bit gun shy. Now, we have the opportunity to rest guys properly and keep them healthy."

DeJesus, who came to the A's in a trade with the Royals in November, could start in right field and Willingham in left. Oakland also had penciled Ryan Sweeney into one of the corner spots. Sweeney agreed to a \$1.4 million, one-year contract earlier this month.

Sweeney hit .294 with one homer and 36 RBIs in 82 games last season before being sidelined in July by a right knee injury. He has gone 117 games without committing an error.

DeJesus batted .318 with five homers and 37 RBIs in 91 games with Kansas City this year. He was sidelined for the final two months following right thumb surgery.

Starting center fielder Coco Crisp, whose \$5.75 million option was exercised early last month, hit .279 with eight homers, 38 RBIs and a career-high 32 stolen bases despite being limited to 75 games. He spent stints on the disabled list with a broken left pinkie finger — it kept him off the opening day roster — and a strained rib cage.

The A's stayed in the AL West chase until late in the season, losing out to the AL champion Texas Rangers, and finished 81-81 for second place in the division. That was despite using the disabled list 23 times, two shy of the franchise record set in 2008.

Rizzo expects Rodriguez, who is out of options, to earn a spot in the bullpen out of spring training and perhaps work as an eighth-inning setup guy or closer at some point.

Brown probably will start 2011 at Triple-A Syracuse.

To fill Willingham's spot, Rizzo said the Nationals might go with a platoon of Roger Bernadina and Michael Morse in left.

In addition, Rizzo said the Nationals are "in discussions" with representatives for right-hander Chien-Ming Wang, who hasn't pitched in the majors since July 2009 and is trying to come back from right shoulder surgery. Wang originally signed with Washington in February, but was not tendered a new contract in December.

2010 Oakland A's Position Analysis: Catcher

Sam McPherson, examiner.com, 12/16/2010

The Oakland Athletics most valuable player is probably Kurt Suzuki.

At this point in his career, Suzuki is the A's veteran leader on the field and in clubhouse. He's only 27, and he's probably the second-best backstop in the American League behind Minnesota's Joe Mauer (even if he doesn't get the recognition, playing in a smaller media market).

To wit: Oakland had the best pitching staff in the AL last season, with a 3.56 ERA. That staff was even better with Suzuki behind the plate, as the pitchers had a 3.31 ERA with their MVP calling the game.

Amongst the six other catchers in the AL that qualified defensively with enough playing time, only Toronto's John Buck posted a better ERA differential (+0.26) than Suzuki -- and just barely, despite the fact Suzuki caught 125 more innings on the year than Buck did.

Throw in Suzuki's offensive contributions (13 home runs, 71 RBI), and it's just icing on the cake. Sure, his overall hitting might be weak (Suzuki posted the lowest OPS of the AL catchers which qualified offensively in 2010), but he's a distinct improvement at the plate over his predecessor with the A's (Jason Kendall).

In 2010, Suzuki struggled against lefties, hit poorly on the road and wasn't at his best with the bat in day games.

But consider this piece of circumstantial evidence: with their regular catcher behind the plate, the A's swept the World Series champions at home by a combined score of 10-1.

And without him, Oakland got swept on the road in San Francisco by the combined score of 17-8.

The dropoff both offensively and defensively at the catcher position for the A's in 2010 was dramatic. Landon Powell hit .214, and a few other players who played the position fared even worse. In addition, the team ERA overall suffered negatively with the other guys behind the plate, as noted above.

Suzuki can't play every day, even though he tries: his 123 games last year was a full-season career low, impacted by injuries and personal bereavement. He played 276 games combined in 2008 and 2009, but as he gets older, it might be wise for the A's to try to limit his games to preserve his value and contributions to the team's overall success.

Suzuki is a workhorse, and the A's recognized his value to the team by signing him to a contract extension through 2013, with a club option for 2014.

But this also means they need to come up with a capable backup as Suzuki enters his prime years ahead. Powell may not be that answer, even if he thrives as Dallas Braden's personal catcher and comes with a small price tag.

2010 Oakland A's Season in Review: The Ugly

Sam McPherson, examiner.com, 12/14/2010

Note: This is the third article in a multi-part series assessing the Oakland A's 2010 season. Read the second installment [here](#).

It's one thing to have your season sabotaged by injuries; it's another thing to suffer self-inflicted disaster through neglect and foolishness.

And that sums up the Oakland Athletics offense in 2010.

How General Manager Billy Beane ever thought these hitters would amount to much last season could be a case study in self-delusional optimism.

The reality is the Oakland A's had (maybe) three hitters who might have started for a playoff-capable team in 2010: catcher Kurt Suzuki, first baseman Daric Barton and rookie shortstop Cliff Pennington.

Yet all three are flawed players, even if they're the best ones in the Oakland lineup.

Suzuki is a great team leader, and his management of the pitching staff is invaluable. That being said, he isn't all that great at the plate, as his .669 OPS verifies. Barton may have led the American League in walks in 2010, but his .405 SLG and mere 57 RBI at a key offensive position are somewhat pathetic, in truth. And Pennington has a lot of potential as his 29 stolen bases indicate, but his .687 OPS and 25 errors diminish his positives.

And that was as good as it got for the A's offense last year.

No regular player posted an OPS over .800 on the year -- Barton was the closest at .798, albeit primarily because of his walks -- and overall Oakland was 11th in the AL in runs scored and 10th in OPS. The A's were also 13th in both SLG and total bases.

On the bright side, the team was 3rd in stolen bases and tops in stolen-base percentage.

Not exactly the recipe for winning, though, as even with the top pitching staff in the league, Oakland could manage only a .500 record. The worst moment was the 24-game historic stretch in August, when the A's pitchers established a modern-day record for holding opponents down -- yet the team only went 12-12 because of the offensive uglies and couldn't gain anything in the standings despite the pitching prowess.

(Consider the San Francisco Giants, who also had a historic pitching stretch in September and rode that streak into the playoffs -- with a mediocre offense, too. Yet still, the hitters across the Bay managed to win somehow in support of their pitchers.)

Beyond that "top three" in the A's lineup, Oakland's Ryan Sweeney was second-to-last in OPS (.725) amongst AL rightfielders with at least 300 at-bats, so it may have been a blessing in disguise for him to get hurt halfway through the season. Centerfielder Rajai Davis may have stolen 50 bases, but with only 26 walks on the year, he's just not on base enough to make a significant contribution.

And with 14 different players seeing time in left field -- and none with over 121 at0bats at the position (Davis, in truth) -- the outfield was an offensive disgrace for Oakland. No team in the league fielded a worse outfield on a regular basis than the A's.

In all, the Oakland organization needs to add a handful of real major-league hitters if they want to make the playoffs. They absolutely cannot head into 2011 with the same foolish hope as they did in 2010.

2010 Oakland A's Season in Review: The Bad

Sam McPherson, examiner.com, 12/13/2010

With the offseason well under way and only a few more weeks until Spring Training begins, it's time to look back at the Oakland Athletics' season to see what went wrong.

And once again, it was the injury bug that bit the Oakland Athletics hard.

After using the disabled list 65 times in the last three seasons, the A's recently parted ways with their head trainer -- hopefully, that will improve the team's health outlook for 2011, although Oakland also takes some injury risks with its free-agent signings (see Ben Sheets and Justin Duchscherer in 2010).

But enough is enough: while the starting pitching was able to overcome injuries to three-fifths of its Opening Day rotation, the bullpen and the offense suffered a lot of injuries and lost games in 2010.

Overall, the A's used the disabled list 23 times last season, and they lost a franchise-record 1,426 games to injury in 2010.

That's going to cripple any team's chances at the playoffs, especially a team on a shoestring budget like the Oakland A's.

In truth, it's somewhat amazing Oakland was able to manage an 81-81 record in 2010 -- the best season for the organization since it lost the American League Championship Series in 2006.

But consider the planned Opening Day batting order and how many games were missed: center fielder Coco Crisp missed 87 games, right fielder Ryan Sweeney missed 80 games, second baseman Mark Ellis missed 38 games, and designated hitter Eric Chavez missed 129 games.

While it's unreasonable for older players to play every day, this was still a big blow to the A's offensive plans -- flawed as those plans might have been. Crisp has played only one full season since 2005; Sweeney is a mediocre offensive contributor even when healthy; Ellis has played on 125+ games twice in his nine-year career.

And Chavez? Well, he's played 154 games in the last four seasons combined.

But the injury bug extended even to new players, like left fielder Conor Jackson. After playing relatively healthy from 2006-08 for the Arizona Diamondbacks, Jackson came to the A's and promptly injured himself -- finishing with only 18 games played in the Oakland uniform in 2010.

Throw in injuries to key members of the bullpen (Michael Wuertz and Andrew Bailey), and it was another disaster for the A's on the injury front last season.

Overall, Oakland has used the disabled list 65 times in the last three seasons, and you know what they say: once is an anomaly and twice is coincidence, but three times is a pattern.

If the A's injury woes extend into a fourth season, there will be no one to blame but management.

2010 Oakland A's Season in Review: The Good

Sam McPherson, examiner.com, 11/4/2010

With the 2010 MLB postseason complete, it's time to look back at the Oakland Athletics' season to see what went right.

When the season opened, the A's had reason to think their starting pitching would be pretty good -- but while that reasoning proved to be correct, it wasn't necessarily for the exact personnel at the time.

As spring training opened, it looked like the Oakland rotation would be led by two injured veterans returning from missed seasons in 2009, and if all went well, those guys -- Ben Sheets and Justin Duchscherer -- would bring some veteran integrity to the young guys in the rotation -- Brett Anderson and Gio Gonzalez.

Dallas Braden was the man in the middle: neither young nor old, but just about to enter his prime.

Fast-forward to the end of the year: the A's finished No. 1 in the majors for starters' ERA with a 3.47 mark, even better than the starting staff for the World Series champion San Francisco Giants (3.54, which also trailed St. Louis' 3.50 mark in the National League).

But the cast of characters had changed dramatically.

Duchscherer never made it out of April, succumbing to injuries again. For their \$1.75M investment, the A's got 28 innings out of the two-time All-Star, albeit with a 2.89 ERA. But his 2-1 record certainly wasn't worth that kind of money.

Sheets made it to mid-July with a 4.53 ERA, but his 4-9 record demonstrated another wasted investment: the \$10M the A's gave the right-hander netted very little in return.

Throw in Anderson's multiple stints to the disabled list (he made only 19 starts), and it's a miracle the Oakland starters finished the year with the best ERA in baseball.

Thanks to stellar and relatively injury-free seasons from Braden and Gonzalez, the A's were able to give the team a chance in almost every game. The two lefties went a combined 26-23 with a 3.30 ERA. Gonzalez made 33 starts, and Braden made 30 starts -- giving the staff two solid anchors throughout the turmoil.

With those anchors in place, the injury to Duchscherer opened the door for Trevor Cahill -- and he responded with the best season by an A's pitcher since Barry Zito won the Cy Young Award in 2002 for Oakland. After starting the season in the minors, Cahill made his first start on April 30 and promptly got bombed by the Toronto Blue Jays.

But 29 starts later, he finished with 18 wins and a 2.97 ERA -- easily the best numbers for the starting staff in 2010.

Cahill also became the "stopper" for the A's, winning numerous times after a loss and keeping the Oakland squad around .500 for most of the season. The amazing season for the righty included an All-Star selection and a four-month stretch from May to August where he went 14-5 with a 2.56 ERA over 154 2/3 innings.

Beyond the aforementioned contributions, Vin Mazzaro made 18 starts with varying degrees of success to fill in the extra gaps left open by the injuries, and he pitched slightly better than Sheets did.

But without the three guys at the core of the rotation -- Braden, Cahill and Gonzalez -- the 2010 season might have been a lost one for the Oakland A's.