

## **A's News Clips, Thursday, January 20, 2011**

### **Oakland A's sign reliever Brian Fuentes**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

With so much business now being conducted via cell phone and text messaging, it was an old-fashioned gesture that helped land reliever Brian Fuentes in an A's uniform.

A's general manager Billy Beane, assistant GM David Forst and manager Bob Geren hopped in a car and visited Fuentes in his hometown of Merced. They had lunch at Fuentes' favorite Mexican restaurant and set in motion the two-year, \$10.5 million contract that the left-hander signed Wednesday. The incentive-laden deal includes a \$6.5 million club option for 2013.

"It was kind of awkward. I had never done much like that before," Fuentes said of the in-person recruiting effort. "I hadn't heard much from Oakland all offseason, and they came on strong."

The four-time All-Star joins a bullpen that also has added free agent Grant Balfour. Fuentes, 35, ranked fifth in the American League last season with a .181 opponents' batting average (.122 vs. lefties). Balfour held right-handed hitters to a .174 average.

Geren and Forst confirmed two-time All-Star Andrew Bailey remains the A's unquestioned closer, but they have an insurance policy in Fuentes, who's averaged 31 saves for each of the past six seasons.

"Anytime you have a guy who's used to getting the last three outs of the game pitching in the seventh or eighth inning, it's a huge bonus for your bullpen," Forst said. "And there may be times he's called upon to pitch in the ninth."

Bailey is coming off minor surgery on his right elbow. But he said Wednesday that he is doing well with a throwing program and will be full strength when pitchers and catchers report to spring training Feb. 15.

Fuentes grew up rooting for the A's, but when it comes to the current Athletics, he sees similarities to the team across the Bay.

"San Fran wasn't thought too highly of going into spring training (last year) but had pitching and good role players," he said. "... It's premature to say we're going to win the (AL) West, but certainly the opportunity is there."

The A's, though, might have to consider signing a shortstop. Cliff Pennington (left shoulder) and Adam Rosales (right foot) are coming off surgeries, and their availability for spring training is unknown. On Wednesday, the A's designated for assignment Steve Tolleson -- a potential fill-in shortstop -- to clear a 40-man roster spot for Fuentes.

Tolleson must clear waivers -- where he can be claimed by other teams -- before the A's can keep him.

Note: Single-game regular-season tickets go on sale Jan. 29 at 9 a.m. They're available at the Oakland Coliseum box office, online at [oaklandathletics.com](http://oaklandathletics.com) or by calling 877-493-BALL.

### **Oakland A's agree to deals with Dallas Braden, Josh Willingham, Conor Jackson and Kevin Kouzmanoff**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's maintained their hectic pace Tuesday as the final weeks tick down until spring training.

They avoided arbitration with four players, agreeing to one-year contracts with starting pitcher Dallas Braden, outfielders Josh Willingham and Conor Jackson and third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff.

Although Willingham signed the most lucrative deal (\$6 million), Braden received the biggest raise, jumping from the \$420,000 he made last season to \$3.35 million in his first year of arbitration eligibility. Kouzmanoff will get \$4.75 million and Jackson \$3.2 million.

That leaves reliever Craig Breslow as the only unsigned Athletic eligible for arbitration. Breslow is asking for \$1.55 million, and the A's are offering \$1.15 million. The A's can continue negotiating with Breslow until a potential hearing in February that would determine his salary.

The A's also made official the signing of right-handed reliever Grant Balfour to a two-year, \$8.1 million contract, with a \$4.5 million club option for 2013. That deal had been known since Friday but was contingent on Balfour, 33, passing a physical.

The team likely will announce Wednesday a two-year contract with lefty reliever Brian Fuentes, who agreed to a deal Sunday but also requires a physical.

The A's, if healthy, should have one of the American League's best pitching staffs -- and coupled with the additions of Willingham, Hideki Matsui and David DeJesus to boost the offense -- many view Oakland as a contender for the AL West title.

A's GM Billy Beane was asked if he agrees.

"I don't think there's anything to be gained by making declarations like that," Beane said. "Texas lost Cliff Lee, but they made a great signing in (Adrian) Beltre. I still think you have to look at Texas as the team to beat. That being said, we've made strides to narrow that gap."

Balfour held opponents to a .216 batting average in 57 appearances with Tampa Bay last season.

A native Australian, he shared news of his contract with his father, David, who lives in Sydney and was diagnosed with a rare form of stomach cancer in March. Balfour said the cancer is in remission and that his father is doing well.

"You want to get on a plane to get back there and be with him," Balfour said. "But I talk to him all the time. He tells me to stay here and concentrate on baseball."

To make room for Balfour on the 40-man roster, the A's designated right-hander Clayton Mortensen for assignment.

With a surplus of relievers, the A's have flexibility to trade a reliever to acquire more hitting. But Beane said no talks are brewing.

Notes: Willingham made \$4.6 million last season with Washington. "... Braden, 11-14 with a 3.50 ERA in 2010, secured his raise with five complete games, one of which was perfect. "... The Chicago White Sox claimed reliever Philip Humber off waivers.

## **Chin Music: A's sign Brian Fuentes to two-year, \$10.5 million deal**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 1/19/2011 1:54PM

Here's some quick-hitters from the Brian Fuentes media teleconference that just wrapped ... The lefty reliever signed a two-year, \$10.5 million deal with the A's, with a \$6.5 million club option for 2013.

—Fuentes was told by the A's front office that Andrew Bailey is the unquestioned closer ("There's no competition in my mind,") but he'll be ready for the ninth inning if needed. From what I'm told, he'll get some save opportunities if Bailey needs a rest. Fuentes added that he's comfortable whether he's pitching the seventh or the ninth. "I've mopped up, set up, and closed. My mindset is be efficient with pitches and get guys out."

—He says the A's remind him of the 2010 Giants a bit — good pitching, solid role players, and a team that might be under the radar to start the season. Could he envision the A's winning the AL West? "It's premature to say we're going to win the West, but certainly the opportunity is there."

—Fuentes, 35, grew up in Merced and was a huge A's fan. He particularly liked Mike Gallego — who just so happens to be the A's current third-base coach — and Dave Stewart ("bulldog mentality").

—A's GM Billy Beane, assistant GM David Forst and manager Bob Geren impressed Fuentes by driving down to Merced and having lunch with him last Friday. I guess that's the advantage of pursuing a free agent who lives so close to the Bay Area ... Fuentes hinted that he could have signed elsewhere with opportunities to close, but that the chance to win wouldn't have been as good. "Me and my family felt Oakland was the best place for us."

Look for more in tomorrow's Contra Costa Times, Oakland Tribune and San Jose Mercury News

## **Chin Music: A's sign four arbitration-eligible players; Balfour deal official**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 1/18/2011 12:35PM

There's lots of A's news today, so here's a quick round-up of what's going down ...

–The A's announced they've avoided arbitration with pitcher Dallas Braden, outfielders Josh Willingham and Conor Jackson and third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff. All signed one-year deals, with Willingham getting \$6 million, Kouzmanoff \$4.75 million, Braden \$3.35 million and Jackson reportedly \$3.32 million. That leaves reliever Craig Breslow as the only unsigned player who's eligible for arbitration. If Breslow doesn't sign today, his agent will exchange salary figures with the A's in advance of a possible arbitration hearing in February. That's not the biggest development, as both sides can continue working to negotiate a contract somewhere in the middle ground of what each side proposed. I'd expect the A's and Breslow to hammer out an agreement long before they get to the arbitration table.

–The team officially announced the two-year, \$8.1 million contract with reliever Grant Balfour. He'll be addressing the media in a conference call a bit later, but it appears the A's won't announce the signing of fellow reliever Brian Fuentes until tomorrow. It's likely Fuentes still needs to take his physical. To make room on the 40-man roster for Balfour, right-hander Clayton Mortensen was designated for assignment. That's not insignificant, as Mortensen has drawn a few big league starts over the past two seasons and was considered insurance as a possible fifth starter. The A's have 10 days to either trade, release or send Mortensen to the minors, but he still must pass through waivers, where any team can claim him. Reliever Philip Humber was claimed by the White Sox earlier today, so Humber's A's career ended before he even put on the uniform.

–Braden, who made \$420,000 last season and will get \$3.35 million in 2011, got the biggest pay hike among the four Athletics to sign. The baseball world discovered Braden last season when he threw his Mother's Day perfect game, but surely his season-long body of work was even more important when it came to salary negotiations. Braden went just 11-14 but had a solid 3.50 ERA. He also ranked fourth in the AL with five complete games and he tied for the league lead with two shutouts. "I told my grandmother, and I don't think she's stopped crying yet," Braden said of his new contract. Braden told me he and A's assistant trainer Walt Horn have come up with a stretching routine that should help ease the pain in his left foot as he pitches. Since the end of 2009, he's been pitching with permanent nerve damage and numbness in his foot.

–Willingham, acquired in December as the A's new left fielder, is eligible for free agency for the first time after the upcoming season. His agent, Matt Sosnick, told me Willingham is open to signing an extension with the A's. "He'd like to stay here for a long period of time," Sosnick said. "That's at the A's discretion. If they came to him with a deal that's reasonable, he'd consider it." But Sosnick added that if Willingham enjoys a healthy and productive season, testing the open market also is an attractive option.

That's all for now

### **A's building strong bullpen to back rotation**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Oakland's already fine bullpen is getting ever more accomplished, with the signing Tuesday of Australian right-hander Grant Balfour and today's expected addition of left-hander Brian Fuentes.

Balfour, who agreed to an \$8.1 million two-year deal with a team option, said that Oakland's current team reminds him of the 2008 Tampa Bay team that went to the World Series, because of its great young pitching, its speed and its strong defense.

"We've got a good shot at winning it," said Balfour, who is also celebrating the fact that less than a year after being diagnosed with a rare form of cancer, his father, David, is cancer-free.

Along with announcing Balfour's deal, the A's busy day also included agreements with four arbitration-eligible players, including new outfielder Josh Willingham, who will earn \$6 million in 2011. Willingham told The Chronicle if the A's would like to discuss a long-term deal, "absolutely, I would do that." According to one source, such talks could begin this spring.

Third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff (\$4.75 million), left-hander Dallas Braden (\$3.35 million) and outfielder Conor Jackson (\$4.2 million) also signed, leaving Craig Breslow as the A's only unsigned arbitration-eligible player. Breslow filed for \$1.55 million, and the A's countered with a \$1.15 million offer.

The 35-year-old Fuentes, a four-time All-Star, was close to finalizing a deal Sunday, pending a physical that could be today, sources told The Chronicle.

The projected payroll, with Fuentes getting about \$5 million a year according to a team source, is about \$69 million.

Breslow will be one of essentially four set-up men for A's closer Andrew Bailey, along with Balfour, Fuentes and Michael Wuertz, with Brad Ziegler in middle relief.

"There's going to be a closer pitching in every inning," right-hander Joey Devine said of the way the relief roles set up.

"I told Trevor Cahill and Dallas Braden that it's five-and-dive for them from now on," Bailey joked of how little work the starters might need.

The candidates for the final spot in the bullpen: Devine, coming off Tommy John surgery; lefty Jerry Blevins, coming off hip surgery; and Rich Harden or Josh Outman, depending on the fifth-starter decision. There is little doubt, barring injuries or a trade, that a quality reliever or two will be left off the Opening Day roster.

General manager Billy Beane said that the A's had some financial flexibility, so when the opportunity came along to add some good arms to the bullpen, they took it, even though it's already an area of strength.

Asked about the possibility of trading some extra relievers, Beane said. "I can say that was not necessarily our purpose in doing it. If that did happen, it would come later, down the line. If there was something that could improve another position, we could address a deal at that time."

Devine and Bailey are both expecting to be ready for spring training. Devine describes himself as 100 percent and said he is in the midst of his regular throwing program. He's working with Braves All-Star catcher Brian McCann, who came up with Devine in Atlanta. "I'm in really good hands," Devine said. "He's helping with my mechanics, my arm slot."

Bailey, who had a minor elbow cleanup in September, is throwing at a distance of 105 feet and needs to get to 120 feet before beginning to throw off the mound, which he expects to do Feb. 1 in Arizona. He said he will be right with the rest of the pack, throwing bullpen sessions when camp opens.

Further behind is utility infielder Adam Rosales, who had surgery to put two screws in the navicular bone in his right foot on Dec. 8. Rosales said he will be on crutches for another month and he believes he will not be 100 percent cleared to play until March 15 at the earliest.

To make room for Balfour on the 40-man roster, right-hander Clayton Mortensen, acquired in the Matt Holliday deal with St. Louis, was designated for assignment. Pitcher Philip Humber, designated last week, was claimed by the White Sox.

## **A's announce reliever Brian Fuentes' 2-year deal**

Susan Slusser, Staff and News Reports

Four-time All-Star Brian Fuentes, an A's fan when he was growing up in Merced, became the second man in two days to join the Oakland bullpen when the team announced his two-year, \$10.5 million deal.

The A's also hold a team option for 2013 at \$6.5 million, with a \$500,000 buyout. Fuentes will earn \$5 million each of the next two seasons.

The addition of Fuentes gives the A's a second potential closer behind two-time All-Star Andrew Bailey, because that is the role the left-handed Fuentes has handled much of his career, with 187 saves. His contract includes performance bonuses for finishing games: \$100,000 each for 30, 40, 45 and 50 games and \$250,000 each for 55 and 60 games, which assistant general manager David Forst described as a request from Fuentes' side to make sure he is paid accordingly should he wind up closing.

Fuentes said it's clear that Bailey will remain in his current spot. "I was told he's the closer," Fuentes said. "There's no competition in my mind."

Fuentes, 35, said he'll pitch in any role he's asked; he's expected to be a primary setup man.

Fuentes said that A's third-base coach Mike Gallego was his favorite player when he was a kid, and he also was a fan of Oakland starter Dave Stewart.

- Susan Slusser

**Ford gets pretrial diversion:** Giants outfield prospect Darren Ford has been accepted into a pretrial diversion program that, if completed, will enable him to avoid trial and potential incarceration in a New Jersey theft case.

One requirement of the program is Ford repaying \$2,297.23 that he allegedly stole from an auto dealership that employed him.

Ford, 25, was charged with five felonies in July after police in Vineland, N.J., alleged he concocted a story of being robbed at gunpoint as he was taking the money to a bank for the dealership. Charges included theft, filing a false police report, conspiracy and obstruction.

Ford will attend his second spring training with the Giants in 2011. He made his big-league debut in September. Though he got no at-bats, he stole two bases as a pinch-runner, including a daring steal of third that, combined with a wild throw, gave the Giants a victory against Colorado in his Sept. 1 debut.

**Casilla signs:** The Giants averted arbitration with reliever Santiago Casilla by agreeing to a \$1.3 million contract for 2011. Casilla is the fourth of six arbitration-eligible Giants to sign. Negotiations continue with Andres Torres and Javier Lopez.

- Henry Schulman

**Briefly:** Roy Hartsfield, the Blue Jays' manager for their first three seasons, died Saturday at his daughter's home in Georgia. He was 85. Mr. Hartsfield also played in the majors from 1950-52 for the Boston Braves. He was named the Blue Jays' manager when they joined the American League in 1977, and had a career managerial record of 166-318 in his three years managing Toronto. ... The Padres and reliever Chad Qualls have agreed to a \$2.55 million, one-year contract. ... The

Nationals finalized their trade to acquire left-hander Tom Gorzelanny from the Cubs for three minor-league prospects. Washington also agreed to a \$2 million, one-year contract with utility player Jerry Hairston Jr.

## **Drumbeat: Fuentes says there is no closer competition, it's Bailey**

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser 1/19/2011 1:33PM

A few quick hits from the conference call with the A's reliever du jour, Brian Fuentes:

\*Fuentes says that he's an all-purpose reliever, willing to work in any role, even though he primarily has been a closer. But the A's have two-time All-Star Andrew Bailey in that job. "I was told he's the closer," Fuentes said. "There is no competition in my mind." Fuentes described Bailey as "electric" when he's healthy.

\*Fuentes has performance bonuses in his two-year, \$10.5 million deal for finishing games. It's not remotely an indication that Bailey is on his way out via trade or a suggestion that the A's might shuffle Bailey aside or anything like that. It's just smart business on Fuente's agent's part, considering the frequency of injuries on the Oakland roster. Here's the breakdown: \$100,000 each for 30, 40, 45 and 50 games finished and \$250,000 each for 55 and 60 games finished. He'll make \$200,000 if traded. The team holds a \$6.5 million option on him, with a \$500,000 buyout; he'll earn \$5 million each of the next two seasons.

*UPDATE: I just asked assistant GM David Forst about the performance clauses, and as I suspected, it was Fuentes' side, quite reasonably, saying, well, if he does wind up closing we want him to be paid for it. Nothing more to it than that.*

\*Fuentes grew up in Merced an A's fan and his favorite player was Mike Gallego - who is now the team's third-base coach. Gallego was also on the Colorado staff when Fuentes was there. Fuentes also was a big fan on Dave Stewart and his tenaciousness on the mound.

\*Fuentes was asked about his 2010 Angels teammate Hideki Matsui and if the A's new DH has anything left in his tank and Fuentes replied that he believes Matsui can hit 25-30 homers. He notes that Matsui was much better after Fuentes moved on to the Twins, so Fuentes hopes he's not Matsui's bad-luck charm.

\*Infielder Steve Tolleson was designated for assignment to make room for Fuentes, which is slightly surprising considering that the A's have few backup infielder types, particularly with Adam Rosales coming off foot surgery and likely to miss the very first part of the season and with shortstop Cliff Pennington coming off shoulder surgery. Pennington is expected to be healthy come Opening Day, but right now, Eric Sogard is the only real backup possibility on the roster. My guess is that Oakland believes Tolleson will get through waivers or the team is eyeing someone on the waiver wire right now.

*UPDATE: Forst said the team would like to hold onto Tolleson, but there have been discussions about the fact that the team might need to address infield depth before the season. I don't get the impression that there's much anxiety over this; I believe that backup infielder types aren't all that difficult to find. Tolleson came off waivers from the Twins; Sogard was part of the Kouzmanoff deal. Or hey, maybe Grant Green gets a longer look this spring; no harm in that at all.*

\*Billy Beane, Forst and Bob Geren met with Fuentes at Trevino's in Merced on Friday, and I'm told the Mexican food was outstanding. Fuentes described the meeting as a little awkward - he didn't really hear much about the A's until the last moment, and then they came on strong, he said. He liked their aggressiveness, and even though he had options to close elsewhere, he felt Oakland was the best fit, especially considering the fact that he still lives in Merced in the offseason.

I just was provided with some clauses for Conor Jackson's \$3.2 million deal, too, and he has some performance bonuses: \$25,000 each for 300, 325, 350, 375, 400, 425 plate appearances, along with the standard awards package. In case you're wondering, among other things, if he's a Silver Slugger or wins the World Series MVP, he gets \$100,000.

## **Single-game A's tickets go on sale Jan. 29**

By Chris Haft / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Single-game ticket sales for an A's home schedule filled with novelties will begin Saturday, Jan. 29.

Tickets can be purchased online at [oaklandathletics.com](http://oaklandathletics.com).

The 81-game slate at Oakland Coliseum begins with an April 1 home and season opener against the Seattle Mariners. It marks the first time that the A's have begun a season on a Friday at home since April 6, 1979, against Minnesota.

Oakland's myriad of promotional giveaways features bobbleheads of Hall of Famer Rickey Henderson (April 30), MC Hammer (July 17) and broadcaster and ex-catcher Ray Fosse (Aug. 13). Henderson and Hammer, an A's batboy before embarking upon his music career, are scheduled to throw the ceremonial first pitches on their respective giveaway days.

Other promotions include Kid's Bat Day (May 14) and five fireworks nights (scheduled for May 28, July 2, July 29, Aug. 20 and Sept. 16).

Another highlight is a traditional doubleheader on July 16 against the Los Angeles Angels. It will be Oakland's first scheduled twinbill since Aug. 10, 1997, against Milwaukee.

High-profile series on the schedule include visits from the Boston Red Sox (April 19-20), New York Yankees (May 30-June 1) and cross-bay rival San Francisco Giants (June 17-19).

The A's will launch a new promotion called "Free Hot Dog Thursdays." At each Thursday game, 10,000 fans will receive a voucher upon entry, redeemable for a free hot dog from concession stands for that day's game. Free Hot Dog Thursdays will replace the \$1 hot dog promotion that previously ran on Wednesdays.

## **Stat Speak: A's continue great pitching legacy**

By Roger Schlueter / MLB.com

The Athletics franchise, which has won nine World Series titles and captured 15 American League pennants, has also made a name for itself in the pitching department. Ponder some (or all) of these particulars:

- Seven pitchers elected to the Hall of Fame threw at least 600 innings for the A's. They are Eddie Plank, Rube Waddell, Chief Bender, Lefty Grove, Catfish Hunter, Rollie Fingers and Dennis Eckersley. No other Major League franchise (since 1901) can claim more (the Indians, Yankees and Giants also have seven).
- Lefty Grove -- the greatest left-handed pitcher of all-time (and some might say the best ever) -- spent his first nine seasons with the Athletics. During that time, he won five ERA titles, led the league in strikeouts seven times, and led in wins four times.

### ***Most Starts of 6+ IP and no runs allowed in 2010***

Team	Starts
Padres	26
A's	24
Cardinals	23
Mets	23
Phillies	22
Giants	19
Rockies	19
Twins	19

- After the pitching distance was moved to 60 feet, six inches in 1893, the first hurler to reach 300 strikeouts in a season was Rube Waddell. In 1903, Waddell, pitching for the Athletics, fanned 302 batters. The following year, Waddell struck out 349 batters. No other pitcher would reach 300 Ks in consecutive seasons until Sandy Koufax in 1965-66.
- The first lefty in history to reach 300 wins did it mostly while pitching for the A's. Plank won 326 games in his career -- 284 of them for Connie Mack's A's.
- The 2001 Athletics featured four starters -- Tim Hudson, Cory Lidle, Mark Mulder and Barry Zito -- each with at least a 120 ERA+. Only 24 other teams have ever had as many as four starters have that good an ERA+ in the same year. All four that season finished in the top-10 in the AL in ERA.
- The 1910 Athletics put up a team ERA of 1.79 -- the lowest in the history of the AL.
- Five Cy Young Awards (Vida Blue in 1971, Hunter in 1974, Bob Welch in 1990, Eckersley in 1992, Zito in 2002) and four league MVPs (Grove in 1931, Bobby Shantz in 1952, Blue and Eckersley) have been won by Athletics' pitchers.

### ***Notable seasons by A's pitchers***

Pitcher	Year	W-L	K's	ERA	ERA+
Rube Waddell	1904	25-19	349	1.62	165
Jack Coombs	1910	31-9	224	1.30	182
Lefty Grove	1931	31-4	175	2.06	220
Vida Blue	1971	24-8	301	1.82	185

- Closer Dennis Eckersley had 48 saves with a 0.61 ERA and a 0.614 WHIP in 1990

- The Athletics have been on the positive side of 11 no-hitters, with two of them perfect games (Hunter on May 8, 1968, and Dallas Braden on May 9, 2010). The A's are one of five franchises to claim multiple perfect games.

Considering all of this context and precedent, the 2010 A's pitching staff had a compelling legacy to try and follow. Throughout last season, it became more and more apparent that the current hurlers in Oakland have the goods to align themselves with some of the greatest of Athletics past.

### ***Most Starts of 6+ IP and No Runs Allowed in the AL since 1980***

Year	Team	Starts
2002	Athletics	26
2002	Red Sox	24
2010	Athletics	24
1989	Angels	22
1989	Royals	22
2008	Red Sox	21
1989	Athletics	20
1990	Athletics	20
2008	Rays	20
2009	Red Sox	20

Braden's perfect game was one of 24 times that an Athletics starter went at least six innings and allowed no runs. That figure led the AL and was the highest by an AL team since 2002 (when Oakland had 26 such starts and Red Sox had 24).

Gio Gonzalez led the A's in those types of starts with eight. Trevor Cahill had the second-most on the club, with six. Cahill was followed by Ben Sheets and Braden with three each and then by Brett Anderson and Justin Duchscherer with two. Gonzalez's eight starts of at least six innings and no runs allowed placed him in a tie for third-most in the Majors, and was the highest total by any AL pitcher.

In his age-22 season, Cahill won 18 games and posted a 2.97 ERA for a 139 ERA+. Since 1901, only 25 pitchers have posted at least 18 wins with that high of ERA+ in their age-22-or-younger season. Before Cahill, the last AL pitcher to do it was Bret Saberhagen in 1985. Cahill is one of four Athletics' pitchers to do this -- no other franchise can claim more.

In 2010, the Athletics received 93 starts from the trio of Cahill (18 wins, 139 ERA+), Gonzalez (15 wins, 128 ERA+) and Braden (11 wins, 118 ERA+). All three of these pitchers were in their age-26 season or younger. Cahill and Gonzalez became only the sixth pair of teammates since 1901 to be in their age-24 season or younger, win at least 15 games, and put up an ERA+ of at least 125. Others duos to reach that achievement include:

- Doc Crandall and Rube Marquard for the 1911 Giants
- Ted Lyons and Ted Blankenship for the 1925 White Sox
- Wes Ferrell and Mel Harder for the 1932 Indians
- Elden Auker and Schoolboy Rowe for the 1934 Tigers
- Wilson Alvarez and Alex Fernandez for the 1993 White Sox
- Trevor Cahill and Gio Gonzalez for the 2010 Athletics

Cahill, Gonzalez and Braden became the ninth trio of teammates since 1961 to each be in their age-26 season or younger, qualify for the ERA title, win at least 10 games, and put up an ERA+ of at least 115. Others trios to reach that achievement include:



- Jim McGlothlin, Gary Nolan and Wayne Simpson for the 1970 Reds
- Orel Hershiser, Alejandro Pena and Fernando Valenzuela for the 1984 Dodgers
- Steve Avery, Tom Glavine and John Smoltz for the 1992 Braves
- Wilson Alvarez, Jason Bere and Alex Fernandez for the 1994 White Sox
- Tim Hudson, Mark Mulder and Barry Zito for the 2002 Athletics
- Mark Prior, Kerry Wood and Carlos Zambrano for the 2003 Cubs
- Edwin Jackson, Rick Porcello and Justin Verlander for the 2009 Tigers
- Braden, Cahill and Gonzalez for the 2010 Athletics

\* \* \*

In 2010, Daric Barton hit 10 home runs and drew 110 walks. This combination of numbers is quite rare, historically, for a first baseman. In the live-ball era (since 1920), a first baseman has drawn at least 100 walks while hitting no more than 10 homers only 15 times. Incidentally, five of those seasons belong to Ferris Fain, a former player for the A's (1947-52), White Sox (1953-54), Indians (1955) and Tigers (1955), and a two-time batting champ.

Player	Year	Homers	Walks
Lu Blue	1921	5	103
Lu Blue	1929	6	126
Lu Blue	1931	1	127
Elbie Fletcher	1942	7	105
Elbie Fletcher	1946	4	111
Ferris Fain	1948	7	113
Ferris Fain	1949	3	136
Ferris Fain	1950	10	133
Ferris Fain	1952	2	105
Ferris Fain	1953	6	108
Joe Cunningham	1962	8	101
Mike Hargrove	1978	7	107*
Mike Hargrove	1982	4	101
Keith Hernandez	1982	7	100
Daric Barton	2010	10	110*

\*Hargrove in 1978 and Barton last year are the only two players on this list who led their league in walks that year.

## **Balfour welcomed as A's reach deals with four**

## **Grateful reliever lands two-year contract after trying year**

By Chris Haft / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- On a day devoted mostly to determining costs, the A's newest member reflected on something priceless.

Grant Balfour's two-year, \$8.1 million contract with a club option for 2013 became official Tuesday, while dozens of other Major Leaguers weighed offers prompted by the customs of salary arbitration.

Balfour catapulted himself toward his lucrative deal with an impressive 2010 performance that included a 2.28 ERA and a .216 opponents' batting average in 57 appearances for Tampa Bay.

Balfour managed to excel while his father, David, endured a rare form of cancer. The elder Balfour was diagnosed in March after the discovery of a malignancy near his stomach. A Whipple procedure, commonly associated with pancreatic cancer, was performed on David in May. He since has been declared cancer-free.

As one of the few Australians in the Major Leagues, Balfour frequently found his thoughts traveling half a world away as he thought of his father, who lives in Sydney.

"It's tough," said Balfour, 33. "You want to get on the plane to be with him and help him. He wanted me to stay here and concentrate on baseball."

With his father healthy and gaining weight, Balfour can focus primarily on pitching as he launches his A's career. After making a point of thanking the Rays, with whom he compiled a 14-7 record with a 3.33 ERA and 234 strikeouts in 203 innings from 2007-10, Balfour compared his new team to his old one.

"The pitching's similar to where I came from -- a young rotation with a lot of upside," Balfour said. Regarding the postseason, which he reached twice with Tampa Bay, Balfour said of the A's, "Looking at the team we have, I think we have a really good chance."

Balfour would appear to improve those chances. He has struck out 207 batters in 181 innings spanning the last three seasons. "We have a lot of different looks in the bullpen," A's general manager Billy Beane said, contrasting Balfour with sinkerballer Brad Ziegler, who coaxes ground ball after ground ball.

The A's bullpen will diversify even more once they finalize free-agent left-hander Brian Fuentes' two-year contract. The A's are waiting for Fuentes to pass the requisite physical examination.

"With some of the available resources we have left, we felt like that our money was best spent in his area, because it's still a zero-sum game," said Beane, who couldn't discuss Fuentes' signing because it wasn't yet official.

Additionally, Oakland avoided arbitration with left-hander Dallas Braden, third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff and outfielders Conor Jackson and Josh Willingham. Braden settled for \$3.35 million, a vast increase over the \$420,000 he earned last year. Kouzmanoff will earn \$4.75 million, up from \$3.1 million. Jackson's salary inched to \$3.2 million, up from \$3.1 million, while Willingham coaxed an increase to \$6 million from \$4.6 million.

Left-hander Craig Breslow remained Oakland's lone arbitration-eligible player. Teams and arbitration-eligible players were scheduled to exchange proposals on one-year contracts Tuesday, accounting for the flurry of deals. Breslow filed for \$1.55 million; the A's countered with \$1.15 million. Beane anticipated a settlement with him.

"It's always best for all parties to get a negotiated settlement," Beane said.

Oakland designated right-hander Clayton Mortensen for assignment to clear a 40-man roster spot for Balfour. In addition, right-hander Philip Humber was claimed off waivers by the Chicago White Sox.

## **Prospect Watch: Top 10 second basemen**

### **Mariners' Ackley leads a diverse group at the position**

By Jonathan Mayo / MLB.com

*The 2011 version of MLB.com's Top 50 Prospects list will be unveiled on Tuesday on MLB.com as well as on a one-hour show on MLB Network, airing at 9 p.m. ET. Leading up to that, MLB.com will take a look at baseball's top 10 prospects at each position.*

The term "natural second baseman" doesn't come up very often. It's not that it never happens, but it's more than common to see any list of second-base prospects consist of shortstops who slid over or very good bats and athletic players who are trying to find a defensive home. This Top 10 list is no different, with a variety of conversions and permanent experiments up and down the ranking.

**1. Dustin Ackley, Mariners:** The No. 2 overall pick in the 2009 Draft, Ackley started his pro career in Double-A and struggled mightily. But he dug out of that hole, made it to Triple-A and then went on to win MVP honors in the Arizona Fall League. Still working on his defense, he'll be just fine at second and could fill that position in Seattle very soon.

**2. Brett Lawrie, Blue Jays:** Toronto got the top Canadian prospect from the Brewers in the Shaun Marcum deal and he's another one still learning the position after being drafted No. 16 overall in 2008. Lawrie can flat-out hit and should have power and speed at the big league level. He may never win a Gold Glove, but a Jeff Kent-like evolution isn't out of the question.

**3. Billy Hamilton, Reds:** Any time a player steals 48 bases in a rookie-level, short-season league, it's time to sit up and take notice. He uses his plus-plus speed on both sides of the ball, and while he's got the range to play short, he's probably better suited for second base. He's not going to be a power guy, but with his strike-zone knowledge and speed, he should be a dangerous leadoff hitter in the future.

**4. Jason Kipnis, Indians:** An outfielder at Arizona State, Kipnis made the transition to second and played there during his first full season. While he's the first to admit he still has work to do there, it hasn't affected his ability to swing the bat. He hit .307/.386/.492 across two levels, then helped Triple-A Columbus win a title. He's knocking on the door now, without too much of a roadblock standing in his way in Cleveland.

**Top 10 second base prospects**

#	PLAYER	ORG
1.	<a href="#"><u>Dustin Ackley</u></a>	SEA
2.	<a href="#"><u>Brett Lawrie</u></a>	TOR
3.	<a href="#"><u>Billy Hamilton</u></a>	CIN
4.	<a href="#"><u>Jason Kipnis</u></a>	CLE
5.	<a href="#"><u>Danny Espinosa</u></a>	WAS
6.	<a href="#"><u>Oscar Tejada</u></a>	BOS
7.	<a href="#"><u>Cesar Hernandez</u></a>	PHI
8.	<a href="#"><u>Jemile Weeks</u></a>	OAK
9.	<a href="#"><u>Eduardo Nunez</u></a>	NY Yankees
10.	<a href="#"><u>Johnny Giavotella</u></a>	KC

**5. Danny Espinosa, Nationals:** A shortstop for much of his pro career (and at the infielder factory that is Long Beach State), Espinosa played second every day in Washington last September. That could very well be his job to lose this spring, though he does have the defensive ability to play both middle-infield positions. Offensively, he's got some speed and power and was one of the few 20-20 guys in the Minors in 2010.

**6. Oscar Tejada, Red Sox:** It's taken him a little while to get going, spending two seasons in the South Atlantic League, but he moved up to the Carolina League in 2010 and was an All-Star there, hitting for average (.307) some power (.455 slugging percentage) and even running a bit (17 steals). Last year was his first at second base and it seemed to suit him, though that Dustin Pedroia fellow isn't going anywhere in Boston.

**7. Cesar Hernandez, Phillies:** Hernandez made his United States debut in 2009 in the Gulf Coast League, but really jumped out with his All-Star performance in the short-season New York-Penn League last year. His 32 steals were good for second in the league and he was sixth in the batting race (.325). He should be a fun one to watch during his full-season debut with Lakewood in the South Atlantic League.

**8. Jemile Weeks, A's:** When Rickie's younger brother has been healthy, he's shown some pretty good tools on the field. Unfortunately for the 2008 first-round pick, he didn't play more than 80 games in either of his first two full professional seasons. If he can get past the injuries that have sidelined him, he could develop into a highly interesting leadoff type with good speed and even some pop.

**9. Eduardo Nunez, Yankees:** With another team, Nunez might be preparing for a full-time job. He's got all the tools to play a very good defensive shortstop and can also play third as well as second. But with Robinson Cano, Derek Jeter and Alex Rodriguez entrenched in New York, he'll have to be more of a utility guy to get in the lineup in 2011. Still, it's telling the Yankees didn't want to deal him to Seattle for Cliff Lee last July.

**10. Johnny Giavotella, Royals:** Giavotella doesn't get a lot of love prospect-wise, overshadowed by some of the elite Minor Leaguers in the Royals' system, but he can hit and get on base, as evidenced by his .322 average and .395 on-base percentage in 2010. He'll be in Triple-A, waiting for that first call to the big leagues.

*To be eligible for the list, a player must have rookie eligibility. To qualify for rookie status, a player must not have exceeded 130 at-bats or 50 innings pitched in the Major Leagues, or accumulated more than 45 days on the active roster of a Major League club or clubs during the 25-player limit period, excluding time on the disabled list or in military service.*

## A's need to get moving or else

Ken Rosenthal, The Sporting News, 1/19/2011

Free-agent third baseman **Adrian Beltre** was the player the A's wanted most this offseason. They made him an initial offer of five years, \$64 million and later raised their bid to six years, \$78.6 million, according to major league sources.

Yet, they never stood a chance.

### **CATHEDRALS OF THE GAME**

From the oldest to the newest, these 10 venues are baseball's best. **Check out MLB's greatest ballparks.**

Beltre, like most star players, wanted no part of **Oakland**. No part of the Coliseum. No part of a franchise that has ranked in the bottom five in home attendance in each of the past five seasons.

The solution for the A's is simple — in fact, the simplest of any struggling franchise in the game today. The team needs to move to San Jose, a more populous, prosperous city 40 miles south of Oakland.

"If we want to be successful in the game, we've got to take advantage of situations that are right in front of us," says Scott Boras, the agent for Beltre and several other top players. "And this is one of them."

Yes, Boras is speaking partly out of self-interest; a stronger A's franchise would possess greater spending power and help drive the market for his players. But a stronger A's franchise is in the game's best interests, too.

No longer would the team be a revenue-sharing recipient. Franchise values would increase as the industry grew more robust. Baseball could move on to other problems.

So, what's the holdup?

The Giants, of course.

The Giants, who hold territorial rights to San Jose's home county, Santa Clara, only because the A's were kind enough to surrender them in the early 1990s, when the San Francisco team was exploring a move to the area.

Appeasing the Giants will not be easy — their owner, Bill Neukom, took over the club in 2008 with the knowledge that San Jose was part of the team's territory. He understandably does not want to lose sponsorship opportunities or diminish the value of his club in any way.

Well, baseball developed a blueprint for solving such a problem in March 2005, when it reached an agreement to move the Montreal Expos into the Orioles' territory in Washington, DC. The deal created the Nationals and guaranteed the Orioles at least \$130 million a year in revenues and a sale price of at least \$360 million.

The A's/Giants conflict, in some ways, should be easier to resolve — the A's already exist in the Bay Area, while the Nationals did not exist in Washington. The Orioles/Nationals arrangement also included the formation of a new regional television network. The Giants and A's already maintain deals with separate Comcast entities.

"The idea that we're here, sitting on our hands and not letting this franchise get going is detrimental to the game," says Boras, who grew up in Elk Grove, Calif., near Sacramento.

### **VIP SECTION**

Celebrities enjoy going to games as much as regular folks do. They just get better seats. Check out our **gallery of stars at the ballpark**.

"A few franchises need to be evaluated and examined. Oakland can immediately improve and become a success if moved to San Jose. You would then have two well-run and successful franchises in the Bay Area."

Neukom, like Orioles owner Peter Angelos, is an accomplished attorney. Baseball surely would not relish a prolonged, contentious negotiation with the Giants, but if that's what it takes to fix the A's, so be it.

Other low-revenue clubs are much more challenged.

Teams such as the Pirates, Royals, Padres and Reds believe that winning will solve their problems. Well, winning didn't work for the Rays and Indians, who failed to generate appreciable revenue increases during periods of recent success.

Now both clubs are stuck: The Rays can't get financing for a new ballpark, and the Indians are trapped in a city with a diminishing population and corporate base.

An NBA team can relocate to a city as small as Oklahoma City, but a major league franchise must be in a market strong enough to support 81 home dates.

Name a better possibility in North America than San Jose, where a 32,000-seat park for the A's is all but ready to go.

"If we had approval from baseball, it would take six to nine months to finish our drawings, then a maximum of two years to build," A's owner Lew Wolff says. "So, I would say 30 to 36 months.

"The city has purchased most of the land. We are willing to give the money to buy the rest of it if they don't happen to have it. As far as financing, it will be done through debt and equity. We're not waiting for any kind of bond issues or government help, which we can't get anyway.

"In some ways, that makes it more difficult. But in some ways, it's simpler. We don't have to go to anyone."

Absent public financing, the A's are confident the ballpark would pass a citywide ballot measure. The team in 2006 struck a 30-year naming-rights deal with Cisco that would provide \$4 million annually. Its new multi-year agreement with Comcast SportsNet California also will help with financing, Wolff says.

Commissioner Bud Selig formed a committee in March 2009 to study the A's ballpark options. Wolff says it is his understanding that the committee's work is now done. Selig, through a spokesman, declined comment.

## CASH COWS

See which MLB stars earn the **highest annual salaries**, who's in the **\$100 million club** and which player makes **the most at each position**.

Meanwhile, the A's remain in limbo, plodding along in Oakland. Franchises in baseball's other two-team markets — New York, Chicago and Los Angeles — share the same geographic territory. The Bay Area is different. The population in the Giants' territory, Wolff says, is twice as large as that in the A's territory.

"The whole thing is really ludicrous," Wolff says.

For all their obstacles, the A's have built an intriguing club, one that might very well contend in 2011.

Their young pitching staff last season led the American League in ERA, and general manager Billy Beane has spent the winter making improvements through trades and modest free-agent signings.

The A's failure to sign Beltre for the second straight offseason, however, illustrates the difficulty the team faces in landing premier free-agent talent.

A year ago, Beltre spurned a three-year, \$24 million offer from the A's to sign a one-year, \$10 million deal with the Red Sox. This time, he went to the **Rangers** for more money than the A's offered — five years, \$80 million.

His decision could help determine the outcome of the AL West race.

"You talk to players," Boras says, without referring specifically to Beltre. "It's not the city. It's not the team. It's the ballpark. And there are no fans there.

"When teams recruit against the Oakland A's, they say, 'Why do you want to play in an empty park?' It's not about the organization. It's not about ownership. It's about locale."

Earlier this offseason, **Lance Berkman** rejected a two-year offer from the A's to sign a one-year deal with the **Cardinals**. When the A's do land free agents, it's usually because the players want to be in northern California or lack better options.

True, the A's signed designated hitter Hideki Matsui and relievers Grant Balfour and Brian Fuentes this offseason, but none is an elite talent. The team's outlay for the three in 2011 will be about \$13 million combined.

For Beltre, the A's were willing to guarantee six years, but at \$12.8 million per season, not \$16 million. After Beltre signed for that price with the Rangers, the A's added Balfour and Fuentes, bringing their 2011 payroll to nearly \$70 million.

## **FOX SPORTS POLL**

Imagine how much stronger they would be in San Jose.

The three other AL West clubs — the Rangers, Angels and Mariners — play in terrific markets with terrific parks. The proposed 32,000-seat stadium in San Jose would be the smallest in the majors. But the A's average home attendance would almost double if they filled the park, and premium seating and luxury suites would provide additional revenue.

It's time. It's past time.

"In the end, this is hurting baseball," Boras says. "It's depriving baseball players and baseball fans of a successful franchise. That's wrong. We need to correct that."

The solution is within reach.