

A's News Clips, Monday, February 7, 2011

A's add some needed pop, bolster pitching

Hideki Matsui, Brian Fuentes highlight key offseason additions

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

An optimistic A's club, soaking in the good vibes that came from its evergreen starting rotation, entered the offseason looking to match its exceptional young pitching staff with an upgraded lineup.

In the months ahead, they appeared to represent something of a laughingstock of the American League, the persistently unsuccessful club that couldn't sway free agents to come play in its degrading ballpark.

Exhibits A and B -- Adrian Beltre and Lance Berkman.

Yet somewhere along the way, amidst the constant rejection, the A's found themselves miles ahead of their American League West counterparts in the wheeling and dealing department. Fast forward to the here and now, and that lackluster offense boasts a crop of new and proven faces, including Hideki Matsui, David DeJesus and Josh Willingham.

And the already potent pitching staff? Well that got better, too, both in the rotation and the bullpen. The A's added such talented hurlers as Rich Harden, Brandon McCarthy, Brian Fuentes and Grant Balfour.

So, with the pieces in place, this giddy A's team -- host to a gifted pitching staff, quality offense, superb defense, strong depth and a healthy serving of sanguinity -- puts behind its busiest offseason in recent years and looks to Spring Training with an eye on contending for a playoff spot.

Pitchers and catchers report

Feb. 15.

Full squad reports

Feb. 20.

First Spring Training game

Away vs. Chicago Cubs, Feb. 27, 12:05 p.m.

Opening Day

Home vs. Seattle Mariners, April 1, 7:05 p.m.

Triple play: Three questions that need answers

1. Who will win the fifth starter's spot?

Barring any health issues, the young quartet of Trevor Cahill, Brett Anderson, Gio Gonzalez and Dallas Braden are set to take the first four spots. Righties Rich Harden and Brandon McCarthy, along with lefty Josh Outman, will battle for the final slot of what's expected to be one of the league's best rotations.

Outman, arguably equipped with the best stuff of the bunch, hasn't pitched since 2008, and both Harden and McCarthy battled their fair share of injuries last year as well. If proven to boast the talent reminiscent of '08 when he was first traded by the A's to the Cubs, Harden could have the upper hand, though a bullpen role isn't out of the question for him either. Outman is a relief option as well. McCarthy, meanwhile, could surprise all as the winner. If not, he'll likely stay stretched out in Triple-A Sacramento while waiting his turn if a starter should go down.

Right-hander Tyson Ross and southpaw Bobby Cramer figure to be in the mix, too, but expect the competition's main attraction to come in the form of the other three.

2. Who will fill out the bullpen?

While all eyes will surely be on the fifth starter competition, the fight for a bullpen spot is one worth watching as well. Andrew Bailey, coming off minor elbow surgery, will presumably be joined by setup men Brian Fuentes, Grant Balfour and Craig Breslow, along with Michael Wuertz and Brad Ziegler. The seventh and final slot of an exceptionally formidable bullpen is up for grabs, with Jerry Blevins and Joey Devine -- each trying to prove their health -- leading the way as frontrunners. A healthy Devine is seen as the favorite, though the A's might also look to fill the spot with a runner-up from the fifth starter derby.

3. Where does Chris Carter fit into the picture?

Carter appeared primed for his first big league Opening Day start this year following a strong finish to the 2010 season, but he's now on the chopping block as the result of several offseason outfield pickups. The additions of David DeJesus and Josh Willingham, along with the presence of Coco Crisp in center, have Carter as the sixth man out, given Ryan Sweeney and Conor Jackson's presumed backup roles.

There's no telling who stays healthy in camp, though, so don't rule out Carter just yet. He could very well play himself into a role given a highly productive spring. If not, he'll start the year at Sacramento.

2010 record

81-81, second in the AL West

Projected batting order

1. CF **Coco Crisp**:
.279 BA, .342 OBP, .438 SLG, 8 HR, 38 RBI in 2010
2. 1B **Daric Barton**:
.273 BA, .393 OBP, .405 SLG, 10 HR, 57 RBI in 2010
3. RF **David DeJesus**:
.318 BA, .384 OBP, .443 SLG, 5 HR, 37 RBI in 2010
4. LF **Josh Willingham**:
.268 BA, .389 OBP, .459 SLG, 16 HR, 56 RBI in 2010
5. DH **Hideki Matsui**:
.274 BA, .361 OBP, .459 SLG, 21 HR, 84 RBI in 2010
6. C **Kurt Suzuki**:
.242 BA, .303 OBP, .366 SLG, 13 HR, 71 RBI in 2010
7. 3B **Kevin Kouzmanoff**:
.247 BA, .283 OBP, .396 SLG, 16 HR, 71 RBI in 2010
8. 2B **Mark Ellis**:
.291 BA, .358 OBP, .381 SLG, 5 HR, 49 RBI in 2010
9. SS **Cliff Pennington**:
.250 BA, .319 OBP, .368 SLG, 6 HR, 46 RBI in 2010

Projected rotation

1. **Trevor Cahill**, 18-8, 2.97 ERA in 2010
2. **Brett Anderson**, 7-6, 2.80 ERA in 2010
3. **Gio Gonzalez**, 15-9, 3.23 ERA in 2010
4. **Dallas Braden**, 11-14, 3.50 ERA in 2010
5. **Rich Harden**, 5-5, 5.58 ERA in 2010

Projected bullpen

Closer: **Andrew Bailey**, 25/28 saves, 1.47 ERA in 2010
RH setup man: **Grant Balfour**, 2.28 ERA in 2010
LH setup man: **Brian Fuentes**, 2.81 ERA in 2010

The new guys

DH Hideki Matsui: Godzilla not only fills the DH void left by Jack Cust, but does so in a way that gives the club a legitimate lineup threat. The veteran slugger also enhances the clubhouse dynamic and is expected to maintain a leadership role.

OF Josh Willingham: Willingham has averaged 20 homers over the past five seasons, which qualifies as a power boost for the quiet A's. Acquired in a trade with Washington for reliever Henry Rodriguez and Minor League outfielder Corey Brown, Willingham is primed to rotate between the third and fourth spots of a respectable A's lineup, working the count and building on his career .841 OPS.

OF David DeJesus: DeJesus represented one of a couple offseason surprises, as his early winter arrival -- by way of a trade with the Royals -- meant the departure of speedy fan favorite Rajai Davis. The left-handed hitter has a 241-game errorless streak dating to Sept. 15, 2008 -- numbers that speak volumes to an A's team that heavily focuses on defense.

RHP Grant Balfour: The Aussie reliever, signed as a free agent to a two-year deal, has tallied 207 strikeouts in 181 innings over the past three seasons, numbers that represent the third-best strikeout ratio of any American League reliever over that span. Balfour will mainly be called upon as a right-handed setup arm to Bailey.

LHP Brian Fuentes: This four-time All-Star propelled himself into free agency last year by limiting opponents to a .181 batting average -- fifth-lowest among AL relievers -- and compiling a 2.81 ERA and 24 saves for the Angels and Twins. The veteran southpaw gives the A's both an alternate closer and a setup option in the form of a seasoned southpaw.

RHP Rich Harden: Signed as a free agent, Harden is set to embark on his second tour of duty with the A's. His role with the club is unknown but will ultimately be in his hands, as his spring performance will dictate rotation or bullpen responsibilities.

RHP Brandon McCarthy: Shoulder problems have limited the big right-hander to 22 Major League starts over the past three seasons, but McCarthy says those issues are behind him now, thus putting the former Ranger -- acquired via free agency -- right in the thick of things amidst the fifth starter competition.

Prospects to watch

OF Michael Taylor: Like Carter, high expectations have been placed on Taylor. Those lofty hopes were met with an up-and-down 2010 season, which Taylor finished with a .272 average in Sacramento. The A's would like to see him enjoy continual success at the Minor League level before bringing him to The Show, but that doesn't mean he won't represent one of the more intriguing attractions throughout spring.

SS Grant Green: This 2009 first-round draft pick is said to be far more advanced offensively than defensively, but Green will have the chance to continue his work at shortstop in big league camp alongside Cliff Pennington, whom he's expected to push aside in Oakland in a few years.

INF Adrian Cardenas: Cardenas finished the 2010 season as the fourth-leading hitter in the A's farm system, posting a combined .304 average between Double-A Midland and Sacramento. The 23-year-old figures to eventually be an infield staple in Oakland -- but that won't be this year, as Mark Ellis is returning for his ninth season with the A's.

2B Jemile Weeks: Many expected Weeks to already be at the big league level, but constant health problems have limited the infielder's activity in recent seasons. When free of injury, as he is now, he's considered to be an offensive catalyst with defensive promise. Thus, if he can stay on the field, Weeks figures to battle Cardenas for a future at second base in Oakland.

OF Michael Choice: The A's 2010 first-round draft pick enters his first big league camp boasting an explosive bat, one primed for a lengthy Major League career someday. Still, there's plenty grooming left to do for this young man, who struck out 45 times in 109 at-bats during his 30-game pro debut season.

On the rebound

RHP Andrew Bailey: Bailey's second straight All-Star season was interrupted by an intercostal strain that cost him a month, along with an elbow issue in September that required minor cleanup surgery. But the A's closer is on the mend and expected to return to dominant form.

LHP Jerry Blevins: Blevins' left hip gave way for a season-long battle starting in July, one that forced other parts of his body to make up for the missing exertion. That explained a left shoulder strain that sidelined Blevins for the final two weeks of the season. Blevins has since undergone an operation to repair a labrum tear in his left hip, but is expected to enter camp just slightly behind the other pitchers.

RHP Joey Devine: It was about this time last year that Devine proclaimed himself on the mend from a 2009 Tommy John procedure. Multiple spring setbacks, though, left the right-handed reliever out of the 2010 picture. However, he's now ready to join an already strong A's bullpen, and remind fans of the 2008 version of himself that compiled a 0.59 ERA.

RHP Rich Harden: Since going 11-7 with a 3.99 ERA in 31 starts during the 2004 season, Harden's career has been hampered by a rash of various injuries. He has made at least 20 starts in just two of the six seasons that have followed, and has endured nine disabled-list stints -- six of them coming in Oakland -- throughout his career. This is his time to make those training room trips a distant memory.

LHP Josh Outman: Like Devine, Outman missed all of 2010 while recovering from Tommy John surgery. The lefty pitched well in a starting role before he got hurt in the middle of 2009, but he'll have to outduel the likes of Harden and McCarthy during camp to return to that role.

SS Cliff Pennington: Pennington is expecting a slow spring start as he continues to recover from an October surgery on his left shoulder, but the A's are confident that their starting shortstop will be deemed 100 percent healthy by Opening Day.

INF Adam Rosales: Pennington's backup is also on the mend from surgery, but Rosales and his surgically-repaired right foot -- recovering from a December procedure -- are no sure thing for the season's start. The ultra utility man, who lends the A's an extra dose of oomph when healthy, is hoping to be back on the field by mid-March. The A's won't rush his rehab process, though.

OF Josh Willingham: Willingham missed most of the last month and a half of the 2010 campaign 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. That's good news for an A's team looking for plenty of pop from its new outfielder.

OF Ryan Sweeney: The 25-year-old Sweeney underwent season-ending right knee surgery in July, at a time when he was leading the team with a .294 average. He'll look to maintain that number this year, but likely only from a backup role, as he figures to represent the club's fourth or fifth outfielder on the bench.

OF Conor Jackson: Jackson's role will be much like Sweeney's following a disappointing 2010 season that saw him play in just 60 games -- 42 with Arizona and 18 with Oakland -- due to injury. He underwent a sports hernia surgery at the end of the season but enters camp with health on his side.

Long gone

OF Travis Buck: Buck endured another injury-plagued season in 2010 and wasn't offered much of a shot in Oakland when healthy. Despite once being tagged as a top franchise prospect, Buck's Super Two status all but ensured December's inevitable news of the club's decision to non-tender him. He's currently without a big league job.

3B Eric Chavez: Chavez has been considered gone for quite a while now due to his oft-injured status, but his departure from the organization that groomed him into a six-time Gold Glove winner didn't become official until October, when the A's officially declined to pick up his 2011 contract option. He signed a Minor League deal with the Yankees.

DH/OF Jack Cust: Cust's contract was non-tendered for a second straight year by the A's, who this time chose not to resign the slugger but instead watch him land a one-year deal with Seattle.

OF Rajai Davis: After tallying a career-high 50 stolen bases, the speedy Davis was shipped north of the border to Toronto in November. The deal brought Minor League pitchers Trystan Magnuson and Daniel Farquhar to the A's. **RHP Justin**

Duchscherer: Duchscherer made just five starts for Oakland last year before succumbing to his second left hip surgery. Now back on track, the right-handed starter is looking to make good on a one-year deal with the Orioles.

OF Gabe Gross: Gross spent the entire 2010 season with the A's, but received sporadic playing time and greatly struggled in the second half. He was outrighted by the club in October and signed a Minor League deal with the Mariners.

RHP Ben Sheets: Sheets' endearingly loud and entertaining personality was unfortunately removed from the A's clubhouse far too soon last year, when he succumbed to another torn flexor tendon in his right elbow in July. The former Cy Young winner -- who made just 20 starts last year -- will spend all of 2011 rehabbing.

Waller following example set by Robinson

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The sheer essence of a man, specifically one who emanates a full room's worth of personality as does A's first-base coach Tye Waller, can rarely be encompassed by a single sentence.

Not just any sentence but, rather, one which speaks volumes in so few words, one which was vocalized by a man whose life, on a larger spectrum, resembles that of Waller's.

"A life is not important," Jackie Robinson once said, "except in the impact it has on other lives."

Robinson, in that regard, stands in a league of his own for his efforts of integrating -- literally and figuratively -- the world of sports. His worth is incomparable, his influence immeasurable, and his legacy, often times, can be seen through the lens of another's story.

This story, in conjunction with the celebration of Black History Month, belongs to Waller. There is no ending -- at least not yet. But Waller's journey, from his sandlot days to his current role as A's first-base coach and assumed mentor, is already one worth telling.

The birth of a passion

It begins nearly 50 years ago, just behind the Waller household in southeast San Diego, where three brothers -- Tye, the middle one between older brother Reggie and younger brother Kevin -- discovered baseball in the form of a scene that really was eerily reminiscent of the film "The Sandlot."

"We had these vacant lots behind our house that we used to clear off, we spaced out the bases, did all that," Tye said. "I grew up in a neighborhood where there were a ton of guys of the same age as my brothers and myself, and we basically created our own league out there."

This wasn't your typical league, though. The three teams -- divided by age group -- consisted of just three players. Girls that lived in the area came out and kept score, with games being played two to three times a week after school for nearly six years. It wasn't organized ball by any means, and the Waller kids didn't flash the newest equipment. But what they had was plenty.

"A bat, a glove, and a baseball that we taped up so many times until it fell apart," Waller said, laughing. "That's all we needed."

When the ball was no more, Tye and friends proceeded to take up a collection of glass bottles to exchange at the local grocery store for some spending cash that would afford them a new one -- one that, in all likelihood, would yet again be gone just days later.

"There was a canyon off to the right, and also houses off to the left," Reggie recalled. "So if you hit the ball to the right, those balls, you might never find them. So we learned how to pull the ball, which really ended up being detrimental to our swing, because we learned how to pull the ball instead of staying inside of it."

"But, if you look back, those early years were really the starting grounds for understanding the love and passion for the game."

Learning along the way

That passion was never so much directed toward a goal, other than for simple enjoyment. The lessons most young boys learn -- responsibility, awareness of others, etc. -- came on the field for the Wallers, whose parents supported them on the sidelines of those handmade fields on a daily basis until dusk fell and signaled homework time. But it was a baseball, not a chalkboard, that brought about Tye's infectious personality.

"Baseball had its own way of shaping me to be accountable to your teammates by showing up on time, and doing the things together to reach the goal of winning," he said. "It became an environment I felt the most comfortable in. I didn't realize that, because I'm a lot more outgoing now than I was growing up. I was a little bit shy at the time."

"The baseball field would always bring out my personality, because it was there where I felt like I could do better than most guys. I felt very confident in the game that way. Those lessons that we were learning, it became a way of life."

"I think it's a trait we all had," Reggie said. "It was very difficult for me to stand up and take a speech class or do those types of things. At home, Tye would keep to himself, reading. When he started playing baseball, that was when all the light would shine on him."

Moments at the local field were only interrupted by those at San Diego Stadium, where the Padres were introduced in 1969. Tye and his brothers, accompanied by their father, attended 20 to 30 games per season thanks to the organization's Little Swingers Club, which brought in kids to the games for minimal cost. The remaining 100-plus games weren't all on TV, but Tye was the first one to know which were.

"I wouldn't miss those games," he said. "I had a passion for the game. I always loved watching it."

One player, though, stood above the rest in Tye's eyes.

"Willie Mays was the guy," he said. "He was the guy that could play the field. He could run. He could hit for average. He could hit for power. He could drive in runs. He did it all. I grew up idolizing him."

An invitation to 'The Show'

It wasn't until the sandlot crew lost a member to college that the Waller boys began playing in organized leagues. Even then, though, Tye never quite took the time to imagine baseball as part of his future. After all, it would have taken away

from the time he had in the present, the time to slowly but surely transform into a quiet high school phenom at Herbert Hoover High. He stood 5-foot-3 with a 105-pound frame during his sophomore year. By the time he was a senior, in 1975, he showcased approximately eight more inches.

Major League scout Joe Henderson took notice -- so much so that he'd drive Tye, then a second baseman and third baseman, up to Los Angeles nearly every weekend that year to display him in tournament play. The result: news that Tye was a 33rd-round Draft selection by the Giants.

"That's when I started thinking, 'You know what? I might have a chance,'" he said. "I always practiced. I always worked hard. But I was so small of a guy in those days that I thought I was going to be too little to play the game. I didn't think it was going to happen, and then I just started growing."

Tye ultimately turned down the Giants' offer, to which he equated "peanuts." Instead, he spent two years playing at San Diego City College, grooming into a ballplayer -- still with help from Henderson -- whom he hoped the Giants would again take notice of and, in turn, award with a substantially sound contract.

But in a surprise move, the St. Louis Cardinals swept in and claimed Waller in the fourth round of the 1977 Draft. His debut came three years later and lasted for just five games at the Major League level before he was on the move again. This time, the Cubs wanted him. More specifically, manager Bob Kennedy wanted him.

"He wanted to make me his center fielder," Waller said. "He always believed I could run and throw, so he traded for me with Leon Durham and Ken Reitz in exchange for Bruce Sutter."

Making the switch to the outfield, especially in such a quick fashion, was no easy task. But in doing so, yet another lesson, one now being bestowed upon A's prospect Chris Carter, came to form.

"This is the way I look at it," he said. "I always believe I can get it done. I believed it as a player, I believe it as a coach, because when you believe you can accomplish something you will exhaust every avenue to make it happen. If you believe it can't happen when it gets tough, you'll give up. You hear that saying out there that failure's not an option. That's basically how I live my life. I believe that whatever I set my mind to, I gotta go make it happen. If I can have that attitude, I'm always looking for a solution to any problem that is before me. I think that's important."

In doing so, Tye enjoyed 11 professional seasons of pro ball, including parts of four seasons in the Majors. He garnered life lessons in each of those years, the culmination of which can now be seen through not only those he coaches, but in his four children, including a set of triplets, as well.

"Tye is almost methodical in everything he does," Reggie said. "He plans out every single thing he does, and if it doesn't fit just the way he wants, he won't do it. In order to play ball, that's what you've got to do. Things have got to be done in a timely fashion, and there's a time and rhythm to what you do in baseball as there is in life."

The game of life

That very approach has guided his post-playing days, a busy string of years that has included multiple stints with the A's and, formerly, his hometown Padres for 19 years, five of which were spent as the organization's director of player development.

Tye, coincidentally or not, wasn't the only Waller to gain employment with the Padres. Reggie, who, like Kevin, played Minor League ball, served as scouting director for San Diego during the 1992 and '93 seasons before being named assistant general manager in 1994 -- representing the first minority executive in Padres history.

"Our family, we've been exposed to so many things all because of a game," Reggie said. "Back when I was a kid dreaming about the opportunity in a front office, that was just nonexistent. It just wasn't seen during my childhood. Being the first minority front-office member, you just don't think along those terms. You don't think those things are possible, but both my parents told us to follow our dreams, to pursue the things you believe in and want to accomplish. You don't worry about this factor or that. You just go after it. That's exactly what we've done."

His mindset mirrors that of Tye, who encourages his players to never stray from growth, to never be complacent, no matter the challenge. He doesn't just want to teach, but grow alongside his students at the same time. He may be done playing the game of baseball, but not the game of life.

"If you're not chasing anything or headed somewhere, I think you become a wanderer," he said. "You just go whichever way the wind blows. I want to have a destination in mind, because if I have that in mind, I know when I get there. If you don't have a destination in mind, you don't know if you've arrived or not, or if you're even close because you have nothing to measure it.

"I strongly believe in that, and that's what I try to create in relationships, not only with the players but in all aspects of my life. I want to know what my end is and when I can get there."

Reggie knows this version of Tye all too well. Today, they're not just brothers but best friends. They live all of 10 minutes apart in San Diego, the place where it all started. The sacrifices each has had to make for the game that raised them -- missing much of their children's lives -- only reminds them of the good that has come out of it all. And they want everyone to know that much of the baseball life is good. Really good.

"Back in our day, you did what the coaches said and that was it," Reggie said. "Tye gets to his players on a man-to-man basis and is very successful because of that. He doesn't force guys to do things. He wants them to understand why it's a necessity they do it in a certain way. There's a camaraderie that comes with that. He's probably one of the best I've ever seen at speaking to a heart of a man.

"Some guys do it because they want to see what they can get out of the situation. I think each of the players who have known Tye over the years, they know he has a genuine concern for their well-being. It's not unusual for him to hear from guys from 20 years ago that are asking for advice for beyond baseball. He showed himself to be a very fine example that they could emulate in order to have success."

The destination

These days, Kevin gives baseball lessons. Reggie, former director of the San Diego School of Baseball, helps run the M.I.T. Baseball Academy. And Tye, now 53 and rather mindful of advice relayed from his brothers and the faith each of them share, mentors the talent that finds its way to Oakland.

"I would never fathom all this, what we're all doing, how we got here," Tye said. "I could never have imagined it. I don't even know how to explain it. The guy that I was then -- back on those fields behind our house -- and the guy I am now, it's the people I've met and the things that I've learned that have changed me little by little.

"I believe my faith in God has directed my steps in a way, that God has led me to this place because he knew the desires of my heart when I was that youngster just starting out at nine years old starting organized baseball. He knew what was inside of me, and everything I've experience since then has transformed me into what I am today -- the good and the bad, because it's been both. It creates that drive and that awareness that if you're going to make it, you have to do this."

Tye is well-known for his relationship-building skills, the same ones that have helped the likes of Ryan Sweeney better understand center-field duties, the same ones that have aided manager Bob Geren on the bench and the same ones that have helped bullpen catcher Casey Chavez transform from a boy-like figure into a solid man.

"Because of Tye's faith, I know that he understands you will not be able to reach any person unless you develop a relationship with them outside of baseball, and that's what he tries to do," Reggie said. "He tries to make sure he gears his instruction, all of his planning and goals and efforts, to each player based on who that individual is."

When returning to his thoughts on a destination, Tye thinks of the one he has in mind for himself. And it's a rather simple answer.

"My end is becoming the best Tye Waller that he can be," he said. "That means the best coach, the best staff member, the best friend, the best husband, the best father. I'm always looking to improve. I'm not saying I'm going to be the best in those areas, but I know that if I'm attempting to grow in those areas, I know I'll be a better husband, a better father, than I was last year. I'll be a better coach this year than I was last year.

"That, to me, is how you balance life out. It keeps you on task. It keeps you conscious of those around you. When you do that for someone else, I think the way the world works, it will come back to you. I can't say I've always had this perspective. I think life has taught me that. Now that I'm older, I've learned how to appreciate how to balance all of these things out and continue to learn how to grow as an individual year after year."

This year, Tye hopes to see an end in the form of a celebration, one shared by a group of front-office members and fellow coaches and players who, for 162 days, took advantage of the journey.

"It's the journey to get to that end, to chase down that World Series," he said. "That chase is something strong, and a lot of people, they give everything they have and never reach it. I don't want that to happen to me. I enjoy that chase, but it's about that celebration and giving everything you have to make it happen."

Robinson would most likely agree.

Eric Chavez will try to earn spot with Yankees

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

After a dozen seasons with the A's, Eric Chavez is heading to the Yankees on a minor-league deal, hoping to back up New York star Alex Rodriguez at the position where Chavez has earned six Gold Gloves.

Chavez also can play first - where the Yankees have All-Star Mark Teixeira - and he can DH, a spot held by Yankees fixture Jorge Posada.

"Obviously, they've got the best third baseman in the history of the game, and they have one of the best first basemen right now," Chavez told The Chronicle by phone on Friday evening. "I'm not going in worried about playing too much (of the time)."

Chavez said that with numerous injuries the past three years, this might be a good situation if he makes the club.

"Being realistic about my injury history, I'm able to come in without expectations being too high," he said. "Hopefully I can prove that I can still be an elite player and fit in there. If I can help them out of spring, that's what I want to do."

Chavez said his deal with the Yankees came together quickly; he had heard from a number of teams this winter but had narrowed his options to New York and the Dodgers. The Yankees are expected to announce the deal Monday.

Going from Oakland to the Bronx and from Moneyball to baseball's biggest payroll, plus Florida camp for the first time, "is about the biggest change of scenery you could get," Chavez said with a chuckle.

Chavez's health continues to be good, he said, after a winter of working out at Athletics Performance in Phoenix, and he credits Dodgers hitting coach Jeff Pentland with helping find a new swing that takes pressure off his shoulder.

Does Chavez know many of the Yankees well?

"Just Nick Swisher," he said. "Swishalicious."

After 13 years with A's, Chavez going to Yanks

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Eric Chavez's desire for a change of scenery following multiple injury-plagued years in Oakland was well-known.

How big of a change, though, not so much.

Chavez's decision on a new home, reported Friday, resulted in a surprise one. The six-time Gold Glove third baseman has agreed to a Minor League deal with the Yankees, against whom Chavez and Co. experienced the ultimate baseball heartache.

The A's went up on the Yankees, 2-0, in the American League Division Series in 2001. And the Bronx Bombers found their way to three straight wins, shutting down Oakland's playoff run. Oakland also led New York, 1-0, in the ALDS in 2000, before losing in five games.

Now, if healthy through camp, Chavez will likely be awarded the opportunity to spell Alex Rodriguez at third base and Mark Teixeira at first, with intermittent DH stints possible as well.

The 33-year-old veteran is coming off a 2010 season, his last of a six-year, \$66 million contract, in which he batted .234 with one home run and 10 RBIs in 33 games for the A's. He watched each of his past four seasons end early with injuries, the most recent being neck spasms.

But Chavez has felt completely healthy all offseason and reportedly tried out for several other teams, including the Dodgers, Indians, Marlins and Blue Jays. He ranks among the top 10 in nearly every category on Oakland's career lists.