

## A's News Clips, Valentine's Day, February 14, 2011

### Interview with Oakland Athletics General Manager Billy Beane

by [John Sickels](#), [minorleaguebaseball.com](#) 2/14/2011

Oakland Athletics general manager Billy Beane (R) looks on as Hideki Matsui (L) speaks during a press conference, December 14th, 2010. Oakland signed Matsui to a one-year deal worth \$4.25 million plus possible incentives. (Photo by Justin Sullivan/Getty Images)

Thursday morning I spoke with [Oakland Athletics](#) General Manager Billy Beane by telephone. I asked him a few general philosophical questions, then a few specific questions about the Athletics.

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SICKELS: Billy, thanks for taking the time to talk with me today. Generally speaking, when looking at pitchers and trying to judge their current value and future potential, do you have a personal preference for pitchers with velocity, or pitchers with command? Obviously you want a pitcher who has both, but if the choice is between a guy with plus velocity/stuff but shaky command, or a guy with average velocity/stuff and good command, which way would you lean?

BEANE: Well, that's a tough question to answer. It really is a case-by-case situation where you have to judge the pitcher on his own merits. You look at the velocity and his stuff, obviously, and you look at his command obviously, but you also look at his delivery, his size, his health record, everything.

Both velocity and command are components among others. Velocity is related to strikeouts, but they aren't always the same thing. What I find myself looking for from pitchers is the swing-and-miss. They can get that from velocity, but they can also get that by changing speeds and deception. There are some pitchers who have plus velocity but don't get the swing-and-miss, and other pitchers who don't have big radar readings but do get the strikeouts.

There is a general idea that velocity can't be taught but that command can. I think there is something to that, but there are exceptions.

SICKELS: In your own system, you have pitchers like Shawn Haviland and Paul Smyth who did improve their velocity compared to where they were in college.

BEANE: That's right, it does happen. And of course there are plenty of examples of pitchers with velocity who didn't have command, but who did develop command later. So that's what I mean when I say it is a case-by-case thing. Velocity or command isn't something that I look at as a rule of thumb, other than that we look for a pitcher who gets strikeouts, no matter how he gets them.

SICKELS: Can you walk us through an average day for you during the off-season? How busy is it compared to the regular season?

BEANE: Well, this job never ends. It depends on what part of the off-season you are talking about. In October, you work on things like contracts for next year, target lists for free agents, beginnings of trade talks. November is similar, but you might start preparing for arbitration and the prep for the winter meetings.

The period between the end of October and Christmas is very busy. It will slow down for a few weeks after Christmas to about the middle of January and that's the point where you might be able to take a vacation with your family, but even then you stay in touch every day, and it isn't long before you have to get ready for spring training. Even on days when you technically work 9-to-5, you are still talking phone calls on the way to the office or on the way home.

SICKELS: When you make a decision about a player, a signing or a trade, obviously both scouting and statistics play into it. But is there any role for "gut feeling" or "intuition"?

BEANE: That depends on how you define intuition. Some people would define intuition or gut feeling as the same thing as a wild guess. We have to be more objective.

SICKELS: Well, I was thinking of intuition more in the sense of your brain or your subconscious, not to get Freudian on you, but some part of your mind that is involved in pattern recognition that might notice something in a player that you don't think about consciously right away, but that comes into your awareness as an "aha!" insight.

BEANE: Oh, I would agree with that, yeah. Intuition, like what you are talking about, is what I would call the benefit of experience. You have all this past experience in your mind stored away, and something current will trigger a memory of that experience, I can see that expressed as intuition, and yeah, there is certainly a place for that, though when something like that happens, we'll still try to find something objective to back it up.

SICKELS: With the basic agreement up for negotiation as we approach 2012, what do you think of the idea of trading draft picks?

BEANE: I think it would be a great idea. I have always been in favor of that, it would create more interest in the draft for the fans, and as a GM anything that improves my flexibility is a good thing.

SICKELS: Will it happen? It always gets talked about but it never gets implemented.

BEANE: Well, I can't say for sure obviously, we'll have to see what gets negotiated. I would say that it is a better than 50/50 chance, but it is not guaranteed. We'll just have to see.

SICKELS: You've made some roster changes this year, bringing in David DeJesus and Josh Willingham, adding Hideki Matsui. With Daric Barton entrenched at first base, and with Ryan Sweeney and Conor Jackson around, does this make Chris Carter the odd man out?

BEANE: You never know what will happen when you go into spring training. I would rather have too much depth than not enough depth. . .people get hurt, have bad springs. With Chris, we remain very high on him, but Barton is the man at first base and we want Chris to get more outfield time. He is a good enough athlete to handle it, he just needs more experience defensively.

SICKELS: You remain high on the bat though?

BEANE: Certainly.

SICKELS: He had adjustment problems in the majors but played much better after the 0-for-33 beginning.

BEANE: Yes, he did. Carter has a history of slow starts when he reaches a new level, so we didn't expect he would dominate in the majors right away. We didn't expect him to go 0-for-33 either, but he adapted and stayed level mentally, and it wasn't a surprise to us that he did so. That fits his pattern.

SICKELS: Another outfield prospect, Michael Taylor, really struggled last year in Triple-A. But I just can't believe that what he did in the Phillies system was a fluke. What happened with Taylor?

BEANE: Michael is a great athlete, and he's also very intelligent. But like many smart players, he overthinks things when something is wrong. There were also some injuries involved, and the combination of the injuries and a slow start just built up. But we don't judge him just on one season, we look over his whole career. There was a lot of focus and attention on him last year and I think he pressed over it. With less pressure this year he can do better. We still like him a lot.

SICKELS: Your starting four looks set with Trevor Cahill, Gio Gonzalez, Dallas Braden, and Brett Anderson. How is Anderson's arm?

BEANE: Brett finished strong and is ready to go, we aren't worried about his health at all.

SICKELS: Gonzalez really put it together last year. Even when he struggled in past seasons, he struck a lot of people out, but the rest of it came together.

BEANE: Yeah, with Gonzalez we were looking over his whole track record like I mentioned before. The strikeouts were always there and he just needed some time and patience to bring the rest of it together.

SICKELS: Who is the fifth starter? You have many candidates. ... [Tyson Ross](#), [Bobby Cramer](#), [Rich Harden](#), [Brandon McCarthy](#), maybe [Josh Outman](#).

BEANE: Yeah, we brought in several candidates and we fell like we have more depth than most teams do for the fifth starter job. We'll just have to see what happens in spring training, but any of those guys could get it. We know what Harden and McCarthy can do when they are healthy, but Cramer was really impressive late last year and will get a shot too. Anybody who pitches well in Mexico and the PCL needs to be looked at. Josh looked great in instructional league and looks fully recovered from surgery. We like our depth.

SICKELS: Any update on Pedro Figueroa's recovery from Tommy John? He was an intriguing prospect before he got hurt.

BEANE: Rehab is going well, no setbacks. We expect he will pitch in competition sometime in 2011, but recovery to full form can take two years so we won't rush it.

SICKELS: One final question. [Eric Sogard](#) looks like a nice sleeper prospect to me. Can he play shortstop?

BEANE: He will get the opportunity to do so in spring training. We like him a lot, he has a good mixture of skills.

## **Oakland A's 2011 spring training fan essentials**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 2/13/2011

### **A'S FAN ESSENTIALS**

**When:** Pitchers and catchers report Tuesday, with first workout Wednesday. Position players report Feb. 20. The first full-squad workout is Feb. 21.

**Where:** Home games will be played at Phoenix Municipal Stadium, 5999 E. Van Buren St., Phoenix, Ariz., 85008.

**Practices:** The A's will work out daily from Wednesday-Feb. 20 at Phoenix Municipal Stadium. On Feb. 21, practices shift to Papago Park Baseball Complex at 1802 N. 64th St. in Phoenix. Workouts usually begin at 9 a.m. and are open to the public.

## **Five questions for 2011 Oakland A's**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 2/13/2011

### **FIVE QUESTIONS**

#### **1. Will the A's be a better offensive team?**

The additions of Hideki Matsui, Josh Willingham and David DeJesus instantly make this a more formidable lineup on paper. Will it be reflected on the scoreboard? Kurt Suzuki and Kevin Kouzmanoff can drop down in the batting order, taking some pressure off their shoulders.

#### **2. Can they finally stay healthy?**

This story line gets old for fans, but the team has to find a way to avoid the disabled list. The A's depth is better than in past years, but even some of the players who provide that depth are injury-prone.

#### **3. Will the rotation be as good as last year?**

The "core four" of Trevor Cahill, Brett Anderson, Gio Gonzalez and Dallas Braden must pitch to their 2010 level. The A's should be able to score more runs, and if the starting pitchers can transfer a lead to their capable bullpen, this team will have something.

#### **4. Who will be the fifth starter?**

Team officials talk highly of Josh Outman, but he hasn't pitched since June 2009 because of elbow problems. Veterans Rich Harden and Brandon McCarthy were bargain signings who could have upside. Those who lose out here could help as relievers.

#### **5. Can Bob Geren pull the right strings?**

The fifth-year manager has his best team yet, one that some consider capable of winning the American League West. With better talent comes bigger expectations, and Geren might be managing in his first real pennant race come September.

### **Oakland A's 2011 key dates**

Mercury News

#### **KEY DATES**

**Pitchers and catchers report:** Tuesday.

Remainder of squad reports: Feb. 20.

**Exhibition opener:** Feb. 27 at Chicago Cubs, 12:05 p.m.

**Regular-season/home opener:** April 1 vs. Seattle, 7:05 p.m. on CSNCA.

### **Optimistic Oakland A's are creating a buzz**

By Joe Stiglich. [Oakland Tribune 2/13/2011](#)

Optimism rules the day for the A's, and their fans don't need binoculars to see it.

After requiring loads of patience and long-range vision from their faithful in recent years, the A's have built a squad that appears ready to contend in 2011.

Pitchers and catchers report to camp Tuesday in Phoenix, and a feeling exists inside and outside the organization that the American League West title is within the A's grasp.

That hasn't been a realistic notion since the 2007 season, after which Oakland general manager Billy Beane triggered a massive rebuilding by trading starting pitcher Dan Haren and fan-favorite outfielder Nick Swisher.

"I feel like it's the deepest, most talented team we've had," said A's manager Bob Geren, who's entering his fifth season. "The talent level we've had in the past has been very good, we've just been sidetracked by injuries. This year, if a few guys get hurt, we have some great options to fill in. In that respect, we're better."

The A's also seem to be repairing their image after years in which much attention has been focused on the club's stalled attempts to build a new stadium. A perception that winning no longer tops the A's agenda wasn't helped when the Giants won the World Series in November.

But the A's did more to improve their roster this winter than any other AL West club and seem to have created a buzz heading into this season. Season-ticket sales are up approximately 50 percent from this point last year, according to vice president of sales and marketing Jim Leahey.

That figure is significant, because the A's typically rely on walk-up crowds for a bulk of their attendance. Last season, Oakland's average home attendance of 17,511 was second-lowest in the majors, ahead of only Cleveland.

The A's have received high marks for their offseason moves. They signed designated hitter Hideki Matsui and traded for outfielders David DeJesus and Josh Willingham to jump-start an offense that was woeful in 2010. They also signed relievers Grant Balfour and Brian Fuentes, giving them a deep and versatile bullpen to back up one of the AL's top starting rotations.

One major league scout, who requested anonymity because he's not authorized to speak on the record, said he liked the hitters the A's added to support their young rotation. But he stopped short of anointing them the AL West favorites.

"With the pitching they already had in place from last year, I think it just strengthens their club and gives them a good chance to compete," the scout said. "I think the (Texas) Rangers are still the team to beat, but I think the A's can compete."

The rotation -- led by returning All-Star Trevor Cahill, Brett Anderson, Gio Gonzalez and Dallas Braden -- remains the team's backbone. A's starters led the majors last season with a 3.47 ERA.

Identifying a No. 5 starter is a primary task for Geren. Left-hander Josh Outman, healthy after missing the past 11/2 seasons while recovering from elbow surgery, is a leading candidate along with veteran Rich Harden, who is starting his second tour with Oakland.

Brandon McCarthy, Bobby Cramer and Cal product Tyson Ross also are in the mix.

No matter how good the pitching is, the A's won't improve on last year's 81-81 mark without more offense. They ranked 11th out of 14 AL teams in runs (663), 13th in homers (109), 13th in slugging percentage (.378) and 13th in hitting with runners in scoring position (.241).

Beane expects Matsui, a .290 career hitter who's averaged 20 homers and 85 RBIs over eight big-league seasons, to make an impact with men on base.

"He's such a multidimensional hitter," Beane said. "He makes contact, he'll drive a ball to the gap, hit a home run as well. In the past, when we've needed a sacrifice fly or even just a ground ball, sometimes that's been lacking."

Throughout the winter, Beane stressed that he was targeting good all-around hitters and not just sluggers. But the question remains whether Oakland will generate enough power.

Third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff's 16 homers led the team last season. Matsui has a proven track record but is 36. Willingham, likely to start in left field, had three 20-homer seasons with the Florida Marlins and Washington Nationals, but he's transitioning to a new league.

DeJesus, the new right fielder and a possible No. 3 hitter, has a career high of 13 homers.

But the perennial issue remains: Can the A's stay healthy? They've used the disabled list a staggering 87 times over the past four seasons.

Overall depth looks to be a strength, but several key players are coming off injury-marred seasons, including Anderson, closer Andrew Bailey and center fielder Coco Crisp, the likely leadoff man.

Nonetheless, there's a sense of excitement among players that's different from past years.

"The opportunity is there for this team," Willingham said. "Obviously it's all on paper at this point. Nothing's been proven. But anytime you have expectations coming into a season it's exciting."

## **On paper, A's look much improved**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer 2/13/2011

With seven additions this offseason - three bats, four arms - the A's enter this spring with designs on the AL West title.

Outfielders David DeJesus and Josh Willingham and DH Hideki Matsui should help improve what was a punchless offense last season, and Grant Balfour, Brian Fuentes, Rich Harden and Brandon McCarthy will give an already strong pitching staff added depth.

The less obvious impact of the newcomers: The returning regulars are likely to gain.

Second baseman Mark Ellis and catcher Kurt Suzuki are the best examples. Suzuki hit third or fourth the bulk of the year, and Ellis was in the second, third or fifth spot in more than 40 games. Both felt that in an ideal situation, with a top-notch lineup, they'd be hitting further down the order. This year they will, as will third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff.

"Mark and I talked about that a lot last year," Suzuki said. "We're confident players, we'd like to think we can handle those spots, but we're not going to hit 25 to 30 home runs and drive in 100 runs - that almost took us out of our game last year. To have guys in the middle of the order who can do that and redistribute us, we're going to be better lower in the order. We'll benefit."

Matsui is much better suited to the cleanup role or batting fifth, the spots he's filled much of his career. And when he plays close to a full season, Matsui typically is a 90 to 100 RBI man. Willingham also fits in well in one of those two spots, and Matsui is left-handed while Willingham is a righty, so expect them to be back-to-back in the middle.

DeJesus is a top-of-the order hitter, but then so is center fielder Coco Crisp, and with the Royals in 2009, Crisp batted leadoff while DeJesus hit second or third. That's a trend likely to continue with Oakland. Then the A's have a choice between left-handed hitting Daric Barton in the third spot behind DeJesus, also a lefty, or potentially going with Willingham there and bumping Barton down the line a bit. Two fine outfielders, Ryan Sweeney and Conor Jackson, move from being starters to being reserves, providing more good options.

The A's needed power in a big way, and while their three additions supply some, particularly Matsui if his knees are healthy, the main thing that the team has gained is a high-average guy in DeJesus; a strong RBI man in Matsui, a career .299 hitter with men on base (the A's hit .241 with runners in scoring position last year); and a good all-around hitter in Willingham.

DeJesus (thumb) and Willingham (knee) are coming off season-ending injuries, but both are healthy now.

These are words the A's hear every year about this time, of course - and then by the end of the spring, the training tables seem to be full. That's the concern with fifth-starter candidates Harden and McCarthy, who have extensive injury histories. And really, it's the biggest issue facing the team overall if Oakland plans to contend.

"Everyone says before the season starts that on paper we look great," Suzuki said. "But with us it's a matter of who stays healthy. Unfortunately, we've hit some bumps in that area the past few years and that's never a good thing. But as of now, this team looks great. I love the additions."

Balfour and Fuentes are set as right- and left-handed set-up men, joining Michael Wuertz and Craig Breslow in working behind closer Andrew Bailey. That pushes quality relievers such as Brad Ziegler, Joey Devine and Jerry Blevins into a battle for the two remaining spots in the bullpen, possibly along with former A's ace Harden or promising Josh Outman, depending on the fifth-starter competition.

"To have that many options, that many qualified pitchers, is a good thing," Suzuki said of the potential fifth starters. "Any one of those guys could be in the rotation for anyone in the major leagues, that's how good they are. It's a matter of who can stay healthy and help the team win. And the other four guys in the rotation - we know how good they are."

Can the improved offense, with the trickle-down effect on the returning players, provide adequate support for Trevor Cahill, Brett Anderson, Dallas Braden and Gio Gonzalez? Oakland is likely to hit for a higher average after a .256 mark last season, and the A's probably will top last year's meager homer total of 109 with ease. Good team speed, even with the loss of Rajai Davis, will help, too. The defense remains strong, and the pitching staff, the league's best last year, is a major plus.

"I feel really good," Suzuki said. "It will be a fun season."

### **New-look lineup**

#### **2010 Opening Day lineup**

Rajai Davis, CF

Daric Barton, 1B

Ryan Sweeney, RF

Kevin Kouzmanoff, 3B

Kurt Suzuki, C

Eric Chavez, DH

Mark Ellis, 2B

Travis Buck, LF

Cliff Pennington, SS

Note: Eventual starting outfielder Coco Crisp was on the DL. Eventual DH Jack Cust was in the minors.

#### **2011 Opening Day lineup\***

Coco Crisp, CF

David DeJesus, RF

Josh Willingham, LF

Hideki Matsui, DH

Kevin Kouzmanoff, 3B

Daric Barton, 1B

Kurt Suzuki, C

Mark Ellis, 2B

Cliff Pennington, SS

\*Projected lineup to start the season

### A's spring training roster

#	Pitchers	B/T	Ht	Wt	Age
49	Brett Anderson	L-L	6'4"	235	23
40	Andrew Bailey	R-R	6'3"	245	26
50	Grant Balfour	R-R	6'2"	195	33
13	Jerry Blevins	L-L	6'6"	180	27
51	Dallas Braden	L-L	6'1"	190	27
56	Craig Breslow	L-L	6'1"	180	30
53	Trevor Cahill	R-R	6'4"	220	22
26	Bobby Cramer	L-L	6'1"	210	31
60	Fautino De Los Santos	R-R	6'2"	220	24
33	Joey Devine	R-R	6'1"	225	27
65	Pedro Figueroa	L-L	6'1"	205	25
57	Brian Fuentes	L-L	6'4"	230	35
47	Gio Gonzalez	R-L	5'11"	205	35
18	Rich Harden	L-R	6'1"	195	29
64	Trystan Magnuson	L-R	6'7"	210	25
20	Brandon McCarthy	R-R	6'7"	200	27
74	Guillermo Moscoso	R-R	6'1"	200	27
88	Josh Outman	L-L	6'1"	200	26
66	Tyson Ross	R-R	6'6"	225	23
48	Michael Wuertz	R-R	6'3"	225	32
31	Brad Ziegler	R-R	6'4"	210	31
	Catchers				
29	Josh Donaldson	R-R	6'0"	215	25
35	Landon Powell	S-R	6'3"	255	28
8	Kurt Suzuki	R-R	5'11"	210	27
	Infielders				
10	Daric Barton	L-R	6'0"	215	25
6	Adrian Cardenas	L-R	6'0"	205	23
32	Sean Doolittle	L-L	6'3"	190	24
14	Mark Ellis	R-R	5'11"	195	33
5	Kevin Kouzmanoff	R-R	6'1"	210	29
2	Cliff Pennington	S-R	5'11"	200	26
7	Adam Rosales	R-R	6'2"	195	27
36	Eric Sogard	L-R	5'10"	185	24
	Outfielders				
22	Chris Carter	R-R	6'5"	230	24
4	Coco Crisp	S-R	6'0"	180	31
12	David DeJesus	L-L	5'11"	190	31
28	Conor Jackson	R-R	6'2"	215	28
15	Ryan Sweeney	L-L	6'4"	225	25
23	Michael Taylor	R-R	6'6"	260	25
16	Josh Willingham	R-R	6'2"	215	31
	Designated Hitter				



**Non-roster invitees**

**Bold** - at least 50 games major-league experience.

**Pitchers:** Joe Bateman, age 30; **Fernando Cabrera**, 29; **Vinnie Chulk**, 32; Gabe DeHoyos, 30; **Willie Eyre**, 32; Danny Farquhar, 23; Yadel Marti, 26.

**Catchers:** Anthony Recker, 27; Max Stassi, 19.

**Infielders:** Grant Green, 23; **Andy LaRoche**, 27; Wes Timmons, 31; Steve Tolleson, 27; Jemile Weeks, 24.

**Outfielders:** Matt Carson, 29; Michael Choice, 21; Jai Miller, 25.

**Baseball: Fresh starts for players; managers, too**

Associated Press 2/13/2011

The Super Bowl hit a deep freeze, NBA teams were stranded in blizzards, and an NHL game was iced by a snowstorm.

Most everywhere, the winter weather is wicked. Good thing the weekend forecast in Arizona and Florida calls for sunny skies and temperatures in the 70s.

Spring training is starting up. Let's trade ski masks for catcher's masks. And pitchers, take off your mittens and put on those gloves.

Just in time, right? "I would say there might be some of them from the Midwest or Northeast who might go to their respective spring training places and accelerate the real estate market," Colorado Rockies manager Jim Tracy said. "Unless they really like being behind a snow blower."

Even before the sunscreen mixes with pine tar, Bruce Bochy is eager.

World Series champions always want to get going. The Giants' manager and his players are among the many teams opening camp in the next few days.

"Especially some of them who have been in this harsh weather we've had this winter, they're looking forward to getting to spring training," Bochy said.

"I also think when you get two or three weeks off, you start getting a little bit itchy. Then when it gets to late January, you're ready. You're ready to get back and see your teammates, getting back on the field and getting ready for the season," he said.

In many places, that means new pals.

Cliff Lee, back in Philadelphia after a one-year absence. Manny Ramírez and Johnny Damon, taking their hair-raising antics to Tampa Bay. Carl Crawford and Adrian Gonzalez, now swinging for Boston. Vladimir Guerrero, Jayson Werth, Vernon Wells, Dan Uggla and World Series MVP Edgar Rentería, all switching uniforms.

"It makes you feel good to come here and know they wanted me to play there. It's awesome," said strikeout-prone slugger Mark Reynolds, traded from Arizona to Baltimore.

Shaun Marcum already is looking way ahead. Traded from Toronto to Milwaukee, he was part of the Brewers' busy winter – they also acquired former Cy Young Award winner Zack Greinke from Kansas City.

"Nothing against Toronto as an organization," Marcum said, "but this is the first time I've gone through the offseason working out and thinking that I'm going to be pitching in October and not ending my season Oct. 2.

"I'm working hard knowing that I'm going to be pitching Oct. 23, Oct. 24 – just throwing those dates out there."

But there's plenty of time until then. A lot to do, in fact, before the pitching-rich Phillies host Florida State on Feb. 24 in the first exhibition game of the year.

A host of new managers need to meet and greet their guys.

Don Mattingly with the Dodgers, Ron Roenicke of the Brewers and John Farrell of the Blue Jays will be managing for the first time. Twelve teams begin the season, which opens March 31, with a different skipper than they started with in 2010. Gone are four long-timers, each leaving with glittery rings – Joe Torre, Bobby Cox, Lou Piniella and Cito Gaston.

Also missing this spring, baseball's newest retirees: Postseason wins champ Andy Pettitte, career saves leader Trevor Hoffman and former World Series MVP Mike Lowell.

Still to be decided: Albert Pujols and his contract status. The three-time National League MVP set a deadline for the start of his spring training – either he gets a new deal with the St. Louis Cardinals or he'll cut off talks until he becomes a free agent after the season.

In the meantime, Cardinals newcomer Lance Berkman is looking forward to joining a lineup with the star slugger.

"I feel like this is a legitimate World Series contender. I really in my heart believe that.

"I'm not trying to do like Rex Ryan and put something out there and make everybody mad. I feel like we've got a great team."

Easy, Lance.

For now, we'll find out whether top rookies such as Tampa Bay outfielder Desmond Jennings, Atlanta first baseman Freddie Freeman, Toronto pitcher Kyle Drabek and Yankees catcher Jesus Montero are ready for the majors.

Or whether Jim Edmonds, Eric Chavez and Bartolo Colón, big names past their prime, can give it one more go.

## **GIANTS AT A GLANCE**

- Manager: Bruce Bochy (fifth season)
- 2010: 92-70, first place, World Series champions
- Park: Scottsdale Stadium, Scottsdale, Ariz.
- First workouts: Pitchers and catchers Tuesday; full squad Feb. 19.
- He's here: SS Miguel Tejada.
- They're outta here: INF Juan Uribe, SS Edgar Renteria.
- The skinny: The Giants, minus a superstar, made an improbable run to win their first World Series since 1954 and first since moving West in 1958. They retained much of their roster, a group Bochy has called "castoffs and misfits": outfielders Cody Ross and Pat Burrell, first baseman Aubrey Huff and others.

Tejada, who began his big league career across the Bay with the A's, steps in at shortstop to replace World Series MVP Renteria, who signed with Cincinnati. Third baseman Pablo Sandoval was told to shape up this winter if he wants to make the roster and keep his spot, and he spent the winter working out in Arizona.

Left-hander Barry Zito, left off the postseason roster, will look to bounce back from a 9-14 season. He begins the fifth year of his seven-year, \$126 million contract.

Can catcher Buster Posey, the Rookie of the Year, put together another strong showing?

Infielder-outfielder Mark DeRosa hopes to be back in the mix after playing in just 26 games because of wrist problems that eventually required season-ending surgery.

– Associated Press

## **A'S AT A GLANCE**

- Manager: Bob Geren (fifth season)
- 2010: 81-81, second place
- Park: Phoenix Municipal Stadium
- First workouts: Pitchers, catchers Wednesday; full squad Feb. 21.
- They're here: OF David DeJesus, DH Hideki Matsui, OF Josh Willingham, LHP Brian Fuentes, RHP Rich Harden, RHP Grant Balfour, RHP Brandon McCarthy.
- They're outta here: RHP Ben Sheets, OF Rajai Davis, OF Travis Buck.
- The skinny: General manager Billy Beane spent his busy winter trying to boost a lineup that that hit just 109 homers and scored 663 runs last season, the team's second fewest in the last 28 non-strike seasons.

The A's hope the additions of Hideki Matsui, Josh Willingham and David DeJesus in the middle of the order will bring an upgrade to better back a talented pitching staff featuring proven starters Dallas Braden – remember that perfect game against Tampa Bay last May 9? – Brett Anderson, Trevor Cahill and Gio Gonzalez.

The fifth starter job will be up for grabs during spring training, with Rich Harden back for a second stint with the club hoping to be in the mix.

The A's led the American League in ERA (3.56) and shutouts (17) while holding opponents to a .245 batting average but hope to have more balance this season.

The A's have depth in the outfield and in the bullpen with the additions of Brian Fuentes and Grant Balfour, which Geren sees as a plus considering his club used the disabled list 23 times in 2010 – two shy of the team record set in 2008.

## **Countdown of the 100 Names You Need to Know: Nos. 11-20**

By [Paul White](#), USA TODAY 2/13/2011

USA TODAY is counting down the 100 Names You Need to Know this upcoming season.

This is our yearly look at young players primed to make an impact during the upcoming big-league season. They aren't necessarily baseball's best prospects but

To qualify for our list, a player must have had more innings (for pitchers) or at-bats (for hitters) in the minor leagues in 2010 than he has had during all of his major league time. Players are ranked in order of their anticipated impact this season.

Check back each day as the next 10 names are released.

A 2010 season that could have been worthy of Rookie of the Year consideration ended far too early because of a knee injury, but early enough that he's back on this list. Remember, a year ago, Santana was ahead of San Francisco's Buster Posey in the catching-prospect pecking order. He's ready to go after surgery and should resume being one of the game's top young combinations of power, batting average and plate discipline. His time behind the plate might be slightly limited early in the season to be certain the knee holds up, but he'll quickly become the everyday guy. Santana, 24, will also play some first base to ease the wear and tear.

### **12. Alex Sanabia, RHP, Marlins:**

Sanabia, 22, was never high on prospects lists, but that was before his lanky 6-2 frame began to fill out. He's still not overpowering, but he's becoming increasingly difficult to hit while quickly progressing, allowing 157 hits in 202 innings the past two years over the three highest levels of the minors. He's still more of a fly-ball than ground-ball pitcher and, with a low strikeout rate, the concern is that he'll be prone to allowing home runs. He'll be first in line for an opening in the major league rotation.

### **13. Kyle Drabek, RHP, Blue Jays:**

The building plan continues in Toronto, but the Blue Jays can start patting themselves on the back for the return on the Roy Halladay trade. Drabek, 23, has a ways to go to match Halladay, but he could be the best pitcher in the Toronto rotation before this year is over. And he should be in that rotation from opening day. His curve is dominant, the perfect companion for a mid-90s fastball. He showed enough poise and maturity in his first taste of the majors last September to give the Blue Jays confidence he can handle a prominent role.

### **14. Jake McGee, LHP, Rays:**

He's a fireballer who's been groomed as a starter but could end up being Tampa Bay's ninth-inning savior - for this year, at least. McGee, 24, missed much of the 2009 season after Tommy John elbow surgery and pitched just over 110 innings last year. His low recent workload means he's not a candidate to crack the deep Rays rotation right now, but he got a taste of the majors last year in what is now a decimated bullpen. He'll probably start the season as a set-up man or long reliever, but, without an established closer in the Tampa Bay bullpen, he could pitch his way into that role.

### **15. Chris Carter, OF, Athletics:**

He got plenty of attention for starting his major league career 0-for-33 last year. Most of his future attention will come from offensive success, most notably his power. He's a typical A's prospect with above-average strike zone judgment, piling up walks as well as strikeouts. He can play first base or the outfield corners, giving him more routes to the majors. The winter additions of Hideki Matsui and Josh Willingham mean there's no obvious job available in Oakland for Carter, 24, to start the season, but his power will be difficult to ignore.

### **16. John Lamb, LHP, Royals:**

Not only is the Kansas City farm system loaded, but it is loaded with pitchers, especially left-handed pitchers. Lamb, 20, could be the best of the bunch, and he's the most advanced of the organization's elite-level prospects. His fastball-changeup combination is often overwhelming, and his curve is good, too. He'll start the season at Class AA but the only thing holding him back is that he's not on the 40-man roster. Once he's past the arbitration-clock threshold (usually about June 1), the Royals will have realized he's better than most of the guys in their major league rotation.

### **17. Jesus Montero, C, Yankees:**

Ask anyone around the Yankees about Montero, and they'll rave about his hitting. Ask them about his catching and they'll rave about his hitting. The dilemma is that the 21-year-old has a bat ready for the major leagues. But his defensive game hasn't quite developed enough that the Yankees are ready to turn him loose behind the plate. But general manager Brian Cashman says he's close. Then, look out. He hits for average, hits for power and can be an impact player.

### **18. Mitch Moreland, 1B, Rangers:**

Texas has spent the offseason entertaining several alternatives to Moreland, a key second-half contributor to their pennant drive last season. But he's a career .313 hitter in the minors and got 191 major league at-bats (including playoffs). Hitting .348 in the postseason allayed some concern about a September fade after Moreland, 25, hit .314 in his first 17 big-league games. Mike Napoli, Chris Davis and Mike Young are the others who could push the lefty for playing time.

### **19. Ernesto Frieri, RHP, Padres:**

The 25-year-old Colombian was the closer at Class AAA Portland (Ore.) and was nearly unhittable when inserted into the deep San Diego bullpen, allowing one hit in his first eight innings, no runs until his 11th appearance. He uses a fastball (low-90s)-curveball combination that provides plenty of swings and misses. His bullpen role should increase during the season as the Padres size up whether he could be a worthy successor to Heath Bell in the future.

### **20. J.P. Arencibia, C, Blue Jays:**

Arencibia got a scare for a few days when it looked like Mike Napoli would cut into his playing time. But Napoli, acquired from the Angels on Jan. 21, was quickly dealt to Texas, leaving 25-year-old Arencibia to compete with veteran Jose Molina for the Toronto starting job. Arencibia will fit right in with the homer-happy Blue Jays, but major league pitchers could exploit his tendency to also strike out. He's an average defender, so that could determine how much new manager John Farrell is willing to use him.

## **Pitching, added depth should make A's playoff contenders**

Glenn Dickey, San Francisco Examiner, 2/13/2011

Trying to get back to the playoffs for the first time since 2006, the A's have strengthened their pitching and improved their offense through free agency and trades. If that sounds familiar ... well, it worked for the Giants, didn't it?

To win the AL West, the A's have to win 10 more games than the 81 they managed last year. That's quite possible. The 2010 division-winning Texas Rangers are weaker, with the loss of pitcher Cliff Lee more than outweighing the addition of Adrian Beltre. The Los Angeles Angels have done nothing to improve.

Like the Giants, the A's have a strong rotation, and a young one. Dallas Braden, the No. 4 starter, is the oldest at 27. Brett

Anderson and Trevor Cahill are just 23, while Gio Gonzalez is 25.

The fifth starter could be Rich Harden, who came up with the A's. Though it seems that he's been around forever, he won't turn 30 until November.

Another possibility for the fifth starter, Brandon McCarthy, will be 28 in July.

The A's had a strong bullpen last year, but it should be much better and deeper this year, with the acquisitions of Grant Balfour and Brian Fuentes, either of whom could close or set up.

More likely, the closer will be Andrew Bailey, if he's healthy again. Joey Devine, who was looked at as a possible closer before he had arm trouble that led to Tommy John surgery, will also be in the mix.

The A's bullpen also has great flexibility with lefties like Jerry Blevins and Craig Breslow, submarining right-hander Brad Ziegler and Michael Wuertz, who can be a set-up man or closer. That bullpen versatility will allow manager Bob Geren to rest a reliever who has pitched frequently.

The A's lacked power last year but, again like the Giants, they didn't go after a 40-homer hitter like Adam Dunn, with his high price tag — and high strikeout total.

Instead, they brought in Hideki Matsui as a DH. Matsui is an upgrade over Jack Cust because he doesn't strike out as often. Because of his strikeouts, Cust couldn't be used in the middle of the lineup because he would have killed too many rallies. Matsui can be used there.

The A's also traded for David DeJesus, a good hitter though not a big power guy, and a good defensive outfielder. Then, they added free agent outfielder Josh Willingham, who has the advantage of being a right-handed hitter, a relative rarity for the A's.

The starting A's lineup as of now would have DeJesus in left, Coco Crisp in center and Willingham in right. Crisp has battled injuries throughout his career, including last year with the A's, but he plays outstanding defense in center and is also the key to the A's running game.

That lineup leaves former starters Ryan Sweeney and Conor Jackson on the bench, so the A's wouldn't have much of a falloff if one of their starters got hurt.

It also means that top prospect Chris Carter will probably start at Sacramento, unless he has a sensational spring training.

With great pitching, solid defense and hitting and much more depth, the A's could be the year's surprise ... just as the Giants were last year.

### ***A's at a glance***

**Manager:** Bob Geren (fifth season)

**2010:** 81-81, second place

**Key dates:** Pitchers-catchers first workout, Wednesday; full squad first workout, Feb. 21

**Training town:** Phoenix

**Stadium:** Phoenix Municipal Stadium (capacity 7,885)

**Ticket information:** (877) 493-2255                      (877) 493-2255                      , (510) 568-5600                      (510) 568-5600                      or  
[www.oaklandathletics.com](http://www.oaklandathletics.com)

### ***New faces***

#### **Josh Willingham**

The A's have lacked power for years and the addition of the former Nationals outfielder should help in that department. The 31-year-old Willingham has hit more than 21 homers three times in his career. Last season, he hit .268 with 16 home runs and 56 RBIs in 114 games. With Willingham and fellow newcomers Hideki Matsui and David DeJesus in the middle of the order, the A's offense should improve.

#### **Brian Fuentes**

The former Angels closer comes to Oakland where he will be part of a stacked bullpen. The left-handed Fuentes will provide a veteran presence for manager Bob Geren to use against opponents' top lefty sluggers late in games. He finished last season with a 2.81 ERA in 48 appearances. Fuentes, new addition Grant Balfour, Joey Devine, Brad Ziegler and closer Andrew Bailey will provide the backbone of a solid corps of relievers.

### ***Player to watch***

Raw talent While his big league career got off to a shaky start last season, **Chris Carter** has all the tools to be a special player for the A's. Carter went 0-for-33 before collecting his first hit in Oakland last year, but he did show some glimpses of the power he has displayed at the minor league level, finishing with three home runs. While the A's outfield is crowded, Carter could be tough to leave off the Opening Day roster if he tears it up in the desert.

## **10 story lines to watch in the Cactus League**

### **All 15 major league teams that train in Arizona will be playing in the Phoenix area, and Arizona and Colorado get to show off their new facility.**

By Bill Shaikin, Los Angeles Times, 2/12/2011

They are four ordinary words: "Pitchers and catchers report." To baseball fans, however, the words carry an almost magical connotation.

The spring comes alive, even in an otherwise unremarkable photograph of a pitcher playing catch. The season soon will be upon us, but not before six weeks of optimism among fans of even the weakest teams.

Pitchers and catchers begin reporting to training camps Sunday. That's when the Angels start up. The Dodgers are due in Wednesday.

The first spring training games are less than two weeks away. In the meantime, here are 10 Cactus League story lines to get you started:

1. For the first time since 1945, no major league team will train in Tucson. The greater Phoenix area is now baseball's wonderland, with all 15 Cactus League teams training within 40 miles of one another.
2. Salt River Fields at Talking Stick is the full name of the newest Cactus League complex, located in Scottsdale and shared by the Arizona Diamondbacks and Colorado Rockies. The facility is in the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, and a talking stick is a ceremonial item used by some Native American tribes.
3. The Chicago Cubs usually lead the Cactus League in attendance, but the Giants might be the toughest ticket this spring, with San Francisco coming off the World Series championship and a fan festival so crowded that the Giants had to shut the ballpark gates. Bonus points for fans who can pilfer Aubrey Huff's rally thong or Brian Wilson's hair dye.
4. For the first time since 2005, the Cactus League is home to the reigning most valuable player in each league — Josh Hamilton of the Texas Rangers and Joey Votto of the Cincinnati Reds. The MVP winners in 2004: Vladimir Guerrero of the Angels and Barry Bonds of the Giants.
5. Take a side trip to Las Vegas and bet on whether the Oakland Athletics will post their first winning record in five years. The "Moneyball" movie, starring Brad Pitt as Billy Beane and based on the book that illuminated Oakland's success a decade ago, is scheduled to arrive in theaters in September.
6. Show him the money? The Rockies did, to Troy Tulowitzki. No free agent this off-season — not Carl Crawford, not Cliff Lee, not Jayson Werth — got as much money as the \$158 million that Colorado guaranteed its shortstop in a contract extension that carries him through age 35. He will be 26 on opening day, same as the Angels' Brandon Wood.
7. The Angels and Dodgers each finished 80-82 last season, then went shopping. The Angels committed \$93 million to three players (Vernon Wells, Scott Downs, Hisanori Takahashi). The Dodgers committed \$91 million to 10 players (Ted Lilly, Juan Uribe, Hiroki Kuroda, Matt Guerrier, Jon Garland, Rod Barajas, Vicente Padilla, Dioner Navarro, Marcus Thames and Tony Gwynn Jr.).
8. The San Diego Padres won 90 games last season, and they were not eliminated until the final day. They tore up the team anyway, because they couldn't afford Adrian Gonzalez or such an otherwise poor offense. Now playing: Brad Hawpe at first base, Orlando Hudson at second, Jason Bartlett at shortstop, Cameron Maybin in center field. The Florida Marlins got Maybin

for Miguel Cabrera; the Padres got Maybin from Florida for Edward Mujica and Ryan Webb.

9. As Prince Fielder takes what will almost certainly be his final spring swings with the Milwaukee Brewers, he has to be rooting for Albert Pujols to sign a contract extension with the St. Louis Cardinals rather than head into free agency with him next fall. The market for Fielder could be surprisingly limited, with several big-bucks teams probably unavailable to drive up the market. The Boston Red Sox have Gonzalez at first base; the New York Yankees have Mark Teixeira; the Philadelphia Phillies have Ryan Howard; and the Detroit Tigers have Cabrera. Also, Angels owner Arte Moreno prefers to avoid Scott Boras, the agent for Fielder.

10. Kirk Gibson, entering his first full season as the Diamondbacks' manager, and Mike Scioscia, entering his 12th season as the Angels' manager, are two of the heroes from the Dodgers' last World Series team, in 1988. Don Mattingly, the Dodgers' first-year manager, played 14 seasons with the New York Yankees and never reached the playoffs.

## **Wait Till Next Year Will Soon Be Over for Baseball Fans**

By [TYLER KEPNER](#), New York Times, 2/12/2011

Spring training camps open this week in Arizona and Florida, meaning 30 temporary tourist attractions are sprouting in the sunshine. So if the Ostrich Festival in Chandler, Ariz., isn't your thing, or if you're planning to skip the Strawberry Festival in Plant City, Fla., you still have plenty of options.

**GOODYEAR, ARIZ.** For the second year in a row, you'll find the most valuable player of the previous World Series suiting up for a new team. The former Giants shortstop Edgar Renteria joins the Cincinnati Reds, following [Hideki Matsui](#) as a legend of the fall slipping on a new jersey the next spring.

**LAKE BUENA VISTA, FLA.** Can a man who turns 39 in April and is coming off a torn anterior cruciate ligament still be very Chipper? Find out at [Atlanta Braves](#) camp, where Larry Wayne Jones is the last link to the championship years, now that Fredi Gonzalez takes over in the dugout for Bobby Cox.

**SCOTTSDALE, ARIZ.** The [Colorado Rockies](#) are newcomers to greater Phoenix, opening the Salt River Fields complex with the [Diamondbacks](#) this spring in the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community. The teams had trained in Tucson, and their move puts all 15 Arizona camps in the Phoenix metropolitan area.

**LAKELAND, FLA.** At Joker Marchant Stadium, you might expect clowns and balloons and water fountains that spray seltzer. Actually, Joker Marchant was the former parks and recreation director in Lakeland, the quaint home of the [Detroit Tigers](#) for 75 years.

**TEMPE, ARIZ.** It is like a management training seminar at [Los Angeles Angels](#) camp, where [Mike Scioscia](#) imparts leadership essentials to his coaching staff. Three of Scioscia's former coaches now manage other teams: Joe Maddon of the [Rays](#), Bud Black of the [Padres](#) and now Ron Roenicke of the [Brewers](#). Shadow Scioscia to see how it is done.

**TAMPA, FLA.** Juice up your flux capacitors, rev your DeLorean to 88 miles per hour and travel to the spring of 2006. [Andruw Jones](#) has just hit 51 home runs, Eric Chavez has just played a full season, [Bartolo Colon](#) has just won the Cy Young Award, and Freddy Garcia has just won the World Series clincher. Now they're all [Yankees](#). Just don't go back to the future.

**PEORIA, ARIZ.** If you want to gaze at a person with 600 career saves (or 601, to be precise), this is the only place to do it. Trevor Hoffman, who retired last month, will be a uniformed instructor at San Diego Padres camp.

**JUPITER, FLA.** Bring your radar gun and point it at [Javier Vazquez](#) of the [Florida Marlins](#). As a Yankee last season, Vazquez's fastball averaged 89 m.p.h., a drop of 2 m.p.h. from 2009, and his performance suffered greatly. Will returning to the National League somehow make him throw faster?

**SCOTTSDALE, ARIZ.** Dig out your old baseball cards, grab a Sharpie and stake out the coaches. Manager Kirk Gibson has five former All-Stars on his Arizona Diamondbacks staff: [Don Baylor](#), Charles Nagy, Alan Trammell, Matt Williams and Eric Young.

**BRADENTON, FLA.** If you know how to pitch, ask for a tryout at [Pittsburgh Pirates](#) camp. The only 10-game winner here is Kevin Correia, who was 10-10 for the 90-win Padres last season. Pittsburgh signed him to a two-year, \$8 million contract, despite a minus-1.8 wins above replacement value. Even if you don't know advanced metrics, you can probably tell that's bad.

**SURPRISE, ARIZ.** There's a special treat here for fans of both New York baseball teams: well-liked outfielders recently nudged aside by the Yankees and the [Mets](#). Go to [Kansas City Royals](#) camp and see [Melky Cabrera](#) and Jeff Francoeur fill spots until prospects start to graduate from baseball's best farm system.

**FORT MYERS, FLA.** Who's faster, Carl Crawford or Jacoby Ellsbury, who have six stolen-base crowns between them? If they're ever going to race side by side, it will be at spring training for the [Boston Red Sox](#).

**SCOTTSDALE, ARIZ.** While you're chomping on hot dogs and nachos, remember the rules: do not feed the Panda. Pablo Sandoval, the rotund third baseman, was an afterthought on the [San Francisco Giants'](#) postseason joy ride. He was ordered to slim down to save his job and has been working with one of [Barry Bonds's](#) trainers (gulp).

**KISSIMMEE, FLA.** The [Houston Astros](#) are for sale — and not just 25 percent, with no slice of the regional sports network. So if you're hungry for a baseball team, and you really like guys who once played for the [Phillies](#), find Drayton McLane and make a bid.

**PEORIA, ARIZ.** Block out everything at [Seattle Mariners](#) camp except this: a master craftsman, [Ichiro Suzuki](#), working on his trade in the field, on the bases and at bat. And hope that Felix Hernandez is pitching when you go.

**JUPITER, FLA.** Train your eyes on the batting cage when the [St. Louis Cardinals](#) practice. You can see [Mark McGwire](#) coaching Albert Pujols, and calculate the miles of home runs that have flown off their bats. You might also catch coaching royalty ([Bob Knight](#), [Bill Parcells](#)) hanging out with Cardinals Manager [Tony La Russa](#).

**PHOENIX** Try to find [Oakland Athletics](#) pitchers Josh Outman and Grant Balfour standing side by side. Then snap a gag photograph of the names on the backs of their uniforms. Every pitcher wants to be the out man; nobody wants to grant ball four.

**FORT MYERS, FLA.** It took them a while, but the [Minnesota Twins](#) have finally signed a player from Japan: Tsuyoshi Nishioka, 26, a switch-hitting middle infielder who won the Pacific League batting title last season at .346. He should be easy to spot; just follow the flock of photographers.

**GOODYEAR, ARIZ.** Stop by and make a donation to the Bob Feller Museum in Van Meter, Iowa. Its founder, who died in December at 92, was a fixture at [Cleveland Indians](#) camp, signing autographs and chatting with fans for a nominal gift to the museum.

**DUNEDIN, FLA.** Are bills dragging down your budget? Do you worry you'll never find financial freedom? Go to [Toronto Blue Jays](#) camp and ask General Manager Alex Anthopoulos for tips. After pulling off the impossible — shedding the \$86 million remaining on Vernon Wells's contract in a trade with the Angels — maybe he can help.

**GLENDALE, ARIZ.** Park yourself beyond the right-field fence (way, way beyond) when Adam Dunn takes batting practice for the [Chicago White Sox](#). Bring a glove.

**PORT CHARLOTTE, FLA.** Casual [Tampa Bay Rays](#) fans will enjoy the antics of the former Red Sox Johnny Damon and [Manny Ramirez](#). Serious fans will focus on starter Jeremy Hellickson and left fielder Desmond Jennings, the long-term replacements for Matt Garza and Carl Crawford.

**GLENDALE, ARIZ.** If you see Vin Scully at [Los Angeles Dodgers](#) camp, say hello to a treasure of the game. Baseball's richest voice is also one of its true gentlemen.



**SARASOTA, FLA.** Buck Showalter jolted the Baltimore Orioles to a 34-23 finish last season, and now they're bringing the sluggers Vladimir Guerrero, Derrek Lee and Mark Reynolds to a renovated camp. Unfortunately for the Orioles, their best new starter, Justin Duchschere, has worked five games in the past two seasons.

**SURPRISE, ARIZ.** Sit in the senior citizens' section at a Texas Rangers game and cheer for relievers Darren Oliver and Arthur Rhodes. They're the only left-handers in the majors who will be active and older than 40 on opening day.

**CLEARWATER, FLA.** Spring is the time to dream big, so bask in the brilliance of Roy Halladay, Cliff Lee, Cole Hamels and Roy Oswalt for the Philadelphia Phillies. You have all season to fret about right field and the bullpen.

**PHOENIX** Whatever you do at Milwaukee Brewers camp, wear the retro caps from the Robin Yount era, with the lowercase m and b forming a baseball glove. We've got to start a movement to make this the Brewers' official logo again.

**VIERA, FLA.** That's not a misprint on your Washington Nationals program: Bryce Harper really was born in 1992. The top pick in last year's draft, Harper received a 40-man roster spot as part of his five-year, \$9.9 million contract, so he'll be there when things get going at Space Coast Stadium.

**MESA, ARIZ.** When you see Mike Quade, the new Chicago Cubs manager, remember his name is pronounced KWAH-dee, not kwaid. He's friendly and would probably be happy to shake hands or wave hello. Just leave the Ryne Sandberg jersey at home.

**PORT ST. LUCIE, FLA.** If you find any loose change on the ground at Mets camp, kindly donate to the nearest ownership representative. Thank you.

## **Before there was Billyball, the A's ran wild under Chuck Tanner in 1976**

Sam McPherson, [examiner.com](http://examiner.com), 2/12/2011

Nineteen-hundred and seventy-six was a good year.

Not only did the United States of America turn 200 with a bicentennial celebration to remember, but the Oakland Athletics set the modern-day major-league baseball record for most stolen bases in a season -- 341.

The Oakland manager that year was Chuck Tanner, who passed away Friday at age 91.

So while "Billyball" -- the aggressive base-running play of the A's under manager Billy Martin's tutelage from 1980-82 -- may have gotten a lot of attention, it was really Tanner's guidance that let the Oakland team run wild years earlier -- to record-setting levels.

Yes, Rickey Henderson did steal his MLB individual-record 130 bases while playing for Martin in 1982, but the team as a whole managed a mere 232 SBs against 87 caught-stealing attempts.

Under Tanner, the A's attempted a staggering 464 steals in 1976 -- averaging 2.86 attempts per game.

Tanner only managed the A's for that one season before being famously traded to the Pittsburgh Pirates for fading catcher Manny Sanguillen, as then-owner Charles O. Finley continued to dismantle the championship Swinging A's. From 1972-1974, Oakland became only the second major-league team to win three straight World Series, but the advent of free agency in mid-1970s brought a new financial reality to baseball that Finley had no intention of working within.

Tanner went on to win the 1979 World Series with the Pirates -- a team that featured local Alameda product Willie Stargell, who attended Encinal High School, coincidentally.

But those 341 stolen bases for the 1976 A's remain an interesting testament to Tanner's abilities, leadership and strategic flexibility.

The Oakland 1976 squad was very different than the team that won five straight American League West division titles from 1971-1975 and the three straight World Series in the middle. Reggie Jackson was gone, Catfish Hunter was gone, and only a

handful of regulars remained from the championship teams: Vida Blue, Rollie Fingers, Gene Tenace, Bert Campaneris, Sal Bando and Joe Rudi.

Tanner did the best he could with a strange roster mix, pushing the A's to an 87-74 record -- and a second-place finish behind the Kansas City Royals, the new power in the AL West that would win six of the ten division titles from 1976-1985 while finishing second the other four times and winning it all in 1985.

So in the face of adversity and challenge, running became Tanner's plan, and it worked pretty crazily.

Centerfielder Billy North led the team with 75 steals, while shortstop Campaneris stole 54 bases. Utility player Don Baylor contributed 52 steals, and rightfielder Claudell Washington stole 37 bases. Second baseman Phil Garner added 35 steals, and third baseman Sal Bando tossed in 20 thefts.

What's interesting about these numbers is what they represent in the full careers of some of the players. North averaged 55 steals every 162 games he played, and Campy averaged 45, so they weren't too much out of their range in 1976. But Don Baylor, for example, never stole more than 32 bases in any other season in his career -- and never stole more than 26 in a single year after 1976.

In fact, when Baylor won the 1979 AL MVP award playing for the California Angels, he hit 36 home runs and drove in 139 runs. That's some flexibility Tanner was able to milk out of Baylor in 1976.

And in his 16-year career, Bando stole 75 bases *total*. So more than 25% of his career SBs came in this one season.

Perhaps the run-run-run strategy wasn't all Tanner's idea, however, as Finley himself had overseen the advent of the "designated runner" in 1974 with Herb Washington: the speedster's official stat line that season featured 29 stolen bases and zero at-bats.

And, in 1976 under Tanner, the weirdest contributions to the MLB-record 341 steals came from *two* designated runners (or hitters, if you demand a real position classification): Larry Lintz had one official at-bat in 1976, but he stole 31 bases as a pinch runner. Likewise, Matt Alexander had 30 at-bats and stole 20 bases. Combined these two players went 1-for-31 at the plate as hitters, but they stole 51 bases.

But all this running may not paid off, as the A's actually underperformed in 1976, winning four fewer games than their Pythagorean projection suggests. But they certainly were a lively group and fun to watch. The team also featured two fading veterans who would see the Hall of Fame someday: Willie McCovey and Billy Williams.

(Williams had four steals, and McCovey had none, by the way.)

And no, the rest of the league wasn't running wild, either, which makes the A's accomplishments even more fun to ponder. The Royals stole 218 bases themselves on the way to their division title, and the New York Yankees stole 163 on their way to the AL East crown. No other team in the league stole more than 150 bases that year.

And today, the game has changed, of course. Power is valued more than speed. To wit, the AL team average for steals was 108 in 2010, with the AL East-winning Tampa Bay Rays stealing 172 bases to lead the circuit. Meanwhile, the Toronto Blue Jays finished with 58 steals at the bottom of the pack.

So no one will be able to impugn Tanner's managerial legacy, not only in terms of his 1979 World Series champions from Pittsburgh, but especially his Running Wild A's of Oakland in the bicentennial year of 1976.

## **Spring training is around the corner, and the A's are ready for 2011**

Sam McPherson, examiner.com, 2/11/2011

After a busy offseason, it's almost time for the Major League Baseball annual ritual known as Spring Training to commence, and the Oakland Athletics should feel good about themselves and their winter efforts to improve the team.

Sure, hope springs eternal, even for the Pittsburgh Pirates, but the A's have a solid pitching staff in place -- it's deep and likely to withstand inevitable injuries that come calling over a six-month, grinding regular season chase for the pennant.

The offense is still not going to scare anyone, but it should be vastly improved from the ugliness of 2010. And as the neighboring San Francisco Giants showed in the final two months of last season, anything is possible with pitching and a scrappy offense.

No one should be predicting a World Series for the A's, either, just as no one expected the Giants to win it all last year. It would take a lot of good fortune and strange plot twists for Oakland to find itself winning its fifth World Series title -- and the franchise's 10th overall -- come autumn.

But obviously, stranger things have happened on the baseball diamond in recent years, so anything is possible.

What the A's know is they need to stay healthy in 2011. The team has suffered too many injuries in recent years, and with a new head trainer, hope is high Oakland can avoid the damage done by injuries. Yes, injuries happen to every team -- remember how devastating it seemed to the Giants last year when Mark DeRosa was lost for the season? -- but clubs must be survivors.

Look at the Green Bay Packers, for example -- in a sport a lot more conducive to injuries than baseball, the Packers suffered catastrophic injuries from the first moment of the season and still managed to win the Super Bowl.

That may be an apples-and-oranges comparison, but the lesson is still the same: depth and perseverance are key components to winning a championship. Take the Coco Crisp example: he played so well in his half-season, and if he can stay healthy for a full year, the Oakland offense can fly.

The A's also know they need a rebound season from third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff. The club made no secret of its desire to upgrade the position after Kouz' disappointing 2010 season, but they were unable to come up with any moves to cure what ailed them at the hot corner last year.

So it's up to Kouzmanoff to step up in 2011 -- even a return to his rookie-year level of 2007 (.275 batting average, .329 on-base percentage, .457 slugging percentage) would significantly improve the A's lineup and offensive production. Add a rebound to his 2009 defensive performance, and Oakland won't be looking to upgrade at the position.

Even these hopes for 2011 stand on the shoulders of the expectation that the starting rotation can replicate its 2010 brilliance. And baseball has shown itself to be a cruel sport over a century of professional play if one starts expecting a repeat performance.

That's why only two teams have ever managed to win three straight World Series -- it's just so darn difficult to stay at the top of your game year after year.

So for the A's to win in 2011, they're going to need to maintain, improve and get lucky.

What more could any team ask for heading into Spring Training?

## **Baseball: Ex-Oakland A's manager Chuck Tanner dies**

Oakland Tribune 2/12/2011

Former A's manager Chuck Tanner, who became the first manager in major league history to be traded for a player, died Friday. He was 82.

Tanner was traded to Pittsburgh for catcher Manny Sanguillen after the 1976 season and later led the Pirates to the 1979 World Series title. The Pirates said Tanner's family informed them of his death on Friday at his home in New Castle, Pa., after a long illness.

Tanner managed the A's in 1976, when Oakland set a major league record with 341 stolen bases while finishing second in the American League West to the Kansas City Royals. He also managed the Chicago White Sox and Atlanta Braves during his 17-year career, winning 1,352 games. His crowning achievement came in 1979, when his "We Are Family" Pirates rallied from a 3-1 series deficit to beat the Baltimore Orioles for the World Series championship.

Tanner awoke the morning of Game 5 to learn his mother had died in a nursing home. He remained with the team, made all the right moves, and the Pirates outscored the Orioles 15-2 in sweeping the final three games.

Tanner is the second former Oakland A's manager to pass away in the past two months. Steve Boros, who managed the A's from 1983-84, died on Dec. 29 at age 74.

Yankees: Longtime A's third baseman Eric Chavez said he feels healthy and is ready to compete for a part-time role. "The back is stable. Shoulder's really progressing over the last few weeks," Chavez said Friday. "Swinging the bat has been going really well for me, which really has been my downfall the last few years."

Chavez ranks seventh in Oakland A's history with 1,320 games played, and only Sal Bando played more games at third base. Injuries have limited him to 64 games over the past three seasons.

"It's more realistic to think that I can play two or three ballgames a week than five or six," Chavez said. "So, I'm just going to try and keep myself healthy and show them I can swing the bat a little bit, and see what happens."

White Sox: Former scouting executive David Wilder, 50, of San Francisco, pleaded guilty to one count of mail fraud in a kickback scheme targeting players from impoverished parts of Latin America hungry to play in the United States. Prosecutors said Wilder and two others were supposed to pay signing bonuses matching each player's skills but instead fraudulently inflated the amounts and took the additional money for themselves. He faces up to 20 years in prison, but his plea is expected to bring a lighter sentence.

Signings: Right-hander Jeremy Guthrie, a Stanford product, and the Baltimore Orioles agreed to a \$5.75 million, one-year contract that avoided salary arbitration. "... James Loney and the Los Angeles Dodgers avoided arbitration, agreeing to a one-year, \$4,875,000 deal.

## **Healthy, restocked A's have great expectations**

### **Players excited to descend on Phoenix, begin preparation**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Heightened expectations will greet a 2011 A's team hoping to put to rest its rebuilding past and, instead, focus on a contending-worthy present.

Those days essentially begin now, as an abundance of anticipation, along with a measured dosage of cautious optimism, will begin filling the confines of the A's Spring Training workout facilities in the coming week, when the first batch of players is expected to arrive.

Pitchers and catchers report to camp Tuesday, and the fifth year of manager Bob Geren's tenure begins the following day at Papago Park Sports Complex in Phoenix. It's there where workouts begin for 28 pitchers and five catchers -- many of whom are already present, including Andrew Bailey and Rich Harden. There are seven non-roster pitchers and two non-roster catchers among the early participants.

Position players will join the mix on Feb. 20, and the club's first full-squad workout is slated for Feb. 21. At that time, a total of 58 players -- including 18 non-roster invitees -- will be found in uniform. Among them will be players that came out of the numerous moves general manager Billy Beane orchestrated during an overly productive offseason.

The arrival of big-name acquisitions, including Hideki Matsui, Josh Willingham and David DeJesus, make for a revamped Oakland team looking to better its 2010 second-place finish and 81-81 mark in the American League West.

The latter two came via trade, as Willingham was shipped to Oakland for reliever Henry Rodriguez and Minor League outfielder Corey Brown, while DeJesus came at the cost of hurler Vin Mazzaro and ultimately allowed the A's to trade away Rajai Davis. Matsui, on the other hand, found his new home via free agency and is expected to bring a potent bat to the lineup despite being an elder statesman.

"The opportunity is there for this team," Willingham said. "Obviously it's all on paper at this point. Nothing's been proven. But any time you have expectations coming into a season it's exciting."

Nine players on the A's current 40-man roster -- Bailey, Jerry Blevins, Joey Devine, Conor Jackson, Josh Outman, Cliff Pennington, Adam Rosales, Ryan Sweeney and Willingham -- are coming back from surgery. Aside from Rosales, whose return date is nothing more than a question mark at this point, all are expected to be injury-free and contribute by season's start. Ditto DeJesus, who missed the final two months of the season after undergoing right thumb surgery.

Health, though, will once again require a keen eye, as the A's have made use of the disabled list 65 times in the last three years. Still, the depth that has been acquired to offset that trend has Geren and Co. in prime position to ward off the club's division rivals, none of whom proved nearly as busy as the A's this winter.

"We're pretty excited about what we have," Geren said. "Our talent level has gone up and our depth has gone up."

## **Barfield motors through offseason**

By Benjamin Hill / MLB.com

Jeremy Barfield has gone from driving a baseball to driving a limo.

The 22-year-old Oakland outfield prospect suited up for the Class A Advanced Stockton Ports in 2010, hitting .292 with 17 home runs and 92 RBIs. He underwent knee surgery immediately following the season, however, and needed to find offseason employment that wouldn't be too physically demanding.

As it turned out, the answer to this conundrum was just a few mouse clicks away.

"My brother [Phillies infielder Josh Barfield] and I are living here in Arizona, and one day he was looking for something on Craigslist and found a 'Driver Wanted' posting," recalled Barfield. "At first I didn't know if it was a scam, but I checked it out and talked to the owner of the company. ... It's turned out to be a perfect fit. The hours are real flexible, and I needed to switch things up a bit following my surgery."

Indeed, the job seems tailor-made for a rehabbing baseball professional.

"Nearly every single day I've been able to get some work in, and I've had some of the longest days you can imagine," said Barfield. "On some days I've been up at 4:30 or 5 to take someone to the airport, and then come back to take someone else, then physical therapy for my knee, then go hit, run and throw, then go back to the limo to drive more people. It's busy, but that's how I like it."

It's also a very social job, and the easygoing Barfield says when he's driving, "the privacy shade is never up."

"Every single time it comes out that I'm a baseball player. Every single time," he laughed. "I don't advertise it, but as I'm helping them get in [to the limo] they'll see I'm a big tall guy, and then it's like 'Do you play basketball? No? Well, you've got to play something!' And that's how it starts."

It usually ends with the customer receiving a quick tutorial on Minor League Baseball.

"People are absolutely clueless about how Minor League Baseball works," he said. "I'll tell them I play in the Minors for Oakland, and they'll then ask 'Well, when are you getting drafted?' So many [of my customers] seem to think that the Minors are some sort of semi-pro league."

These customers generally fall into one of two categories -- business traveler or partygoer. The former demographic is comprised of some of Phoenix's more formidable movers and shakers, but the latter is a bit more colorful.

"You do see a lot of drunk people, but it's a lot of fun," said Barfield. "Even though it's often more of an older crowd, they can still get rowdy. ... One night I took some people to the BCS National Championship Game, Auburn fans, and -- oh, my goodness -- afterwards they were in just about the best mood ever. They even tried to put a tiger tail on the limo. ... Absolutely, things like that are what make this such a great gig. It definitely beats sitting at a desk all day."

The job is not without its challenges, of course. In particular, maneuvering what Barfield calls a "Mafia-style" stretch limo can be tricky.

"After I got hired, the owner of the company took me through a crash course. Not literally, fortunately," he said. "You've just got to take everything wide, and good luck with the rear view mirror. There's a rear view camera, and that helps, but it all takes some getting used to."

Barfield will be reporting to Spring Training in just a few weeks but is more than willing to return to limo driving following the 2011 campaign.

"Oh, definitely," he said. "This has worked out perfectly."

Nonetheless, Barfield has no plans to brag about his good fortune to his teammates. To do so could earn him the nickname of "Lloyd Christmas," in homage to a limo driving imbecile memorably played by Jim Carrey in the 1994 film.

"I don't want this secret to get out there too much, but guys are always telling stories about what they did [in the offseason] and I'm sure mine will come out eventually," said Barfield. "They're probably going to start thinking I was in *Dumb and Dumber*."

## **Time to look back and spring ahead**

By Jayson Stark, ESPN.com 2/11/2011

No more huddling by the space heaters. No more treks to the hardware store to see if the new shipment of ice-chopping implements has finally hit the shelves.

No more loading up the entire thermos arsenal with hot chocolate. No more gathering around the fireside to watch the Weather Channel for 14 consecutive hours.

That's what winter was like where I reside, in a Pennsylvania town that apparently was secretly annexed by Iceland when we weren't looking. But all that frostbitten wind-chill garbage is about to become officially irrelevant, thanks to the greatest invention since the iPad. And by that, of course, I can only be referring to ...

Spring training.

So as pitchers, catchers and sleet-riddled Northerners get ready to stampede through the gates of exotic Joker Marchant Stadium and HoHoKam Park, it's time to look ahead to the people and storylines you'll be monitoring this spring, with the help of two dozen baseball sages who took part in our annual spring-preview survey:

### **Most Intriguing Spring Stories (AL)**

**1. YANKEE PANKY:** The Yankees will play 162 games this season. I guarantee some pitcher or other will start all 162 of them. But once we get past [CC Sabathia](#) and [Phil Hughes](#), the mystery of who starts all those other games is one of those sagas that makes spring training media-expense accounts worth computing. Can [A.J. Burnett](#) be salvaged? Can [Bartolo Colon](#) and [Freddy Garcia](#) be hypnotized into believing it's still 2005? Can Cameron Diaz command a slider anywhere near as well as she commanded a piece of popcorn on Super Bowl Sunday? Can't wait to find out.

**2. FOREVER YOUNG?** When last we saw those [Texas Rangers](#), they were still playing baseball in November, [Cliff Lee](#) was on the mound and [Michael Young](#) was Mr. Ranger. Amazing how much can change in a few months, huh? While the Rangers remain poised to contend, we know they'll be doing it without Lee, who bolted for Philly. But will they be able to find a taker for Young -- their disgruntled shortstop-turned-second baseman-turned-third baseman-turned-super-utility DH -- in the next week? And if not, can they all make peace this spring, find this guy 600 at-bats and get back aboard the World Series Express? Bigggg questions.

**3. WHO KIDNAPPED THE RAYS?** Speaking of how much can change in a few months, who are these mystery men about to slip on those [Tampa Bay Rays](#) uniforms this spring? We knew [Carl Crawford](#) and [Carlos Pena](#) wouldn't be working here anymore come spring. We just didn't get the memo that the Rays would also be trying to replace [Matt Garza](#), [Jason Bartlett](#) and pretty much everyone who ever hung out in their bullpen -- or that we'd find the [Johnny Damon/Manny Ramirez](#) Idiots Reunion tour passing through Port Charlotte, either. But here's the best-kept secret that folks might very well discover by the end of this spring: Incognito as they may be, these Rays are not about to go all Wayne Huizenga-ish on you and win like 59 games. They're way too talented for that. But how high is their upside? We'll start finding out under the palm trees.

**4. ALL A'S:** Looking for a dark-horse pick to be this year's Giants? How 'bout those Oakland A's? Bet you didn't know they led the whole darned sport in quality starts last year. (They threw 103 of them -- seven more than the next-closest rotation.) Then Billy Beane and his brain trust spent the winter stocking up on bats ([Hideki Matsui](#), [Josh Willingham](#), [David DeJesus](#)) and bullpen depth ([Brian Fuentes](#), [Grant Balfour](#), [Rich Harden](#)). And if all those pieces fit together this spring, look out. The next Bay Area World Series might be coming right up -- but not on the shores of McCovey Cove.

**5. "O" HAPPY DAY:** How 'bout this for a concept: actual hope in Baltimore. And it doesn't even involve Joe Flacco. I'm not sure about the last time an Orioles spring training was a source of this much positivity, but I'm fairly certain Earl Weaver was still smoking cigars in the manager's office, whenever it was. Well, just goes to show you what a couple of big-name free agents ([Vlad Guerrero](#) and [Derrek Lee](#)), two intriguing trades (for [J.J. Hardy](#) and [Mark Reynolds](#)), a major bullpen pickup ([Kevin Gregg](#)) and an injection of genuine managerial know-how (from the great Buck Showalter) can do for a team. The Orioles haven't had a winning season since Jeffrey Maier hit puberty. But this just might be the year. And if it is, that crazy AL East is about to get even more nuts.

### **Most Intriguing Spring Stories (NL)**

**1. CUT THE CARDS:** [Albert Pujols](#) says he doesn't want to be a distraction. OK, great. So let's say he DOESN'T sign an extension with the Cardinals before he buttons his jersey and cuts off negotiations next week. Can't imagine anybody would want to talk about that over the next seven weeks or months. Heck, no. We'd much rather focus on the maturation of John Jay, or ask profound questions like "Is there life after [Blake Hawksworth](#)?" Who'd want to get distracted by a subject as trivial as the impending free agency of One of the Greatest Players of All Time? No sane person would let that happen. But on the off chance that most of the hemisphere can't get Sir Albert's contract status out of its head, the Cardinals had better get this deal done. Or it's tough to like their chances of spending another serene spring in Jupiter.

**2. ACES HIGH:** Whatever happened to the theory that no big-time pitchers would ever want to pitch in Citizens Bank Park, huh? The Phillies are turning that one into a bigger myth than Charlie Sheen's "laugh-induced abdominal pain." This spring, the Phillies will assemble a rotation that has combined for three Cy Youngs, 10 other top-five Cy Young finishes, a World Series MVP award, two LCS MVP awards, 18 Opening Day starts (by four different pitchers), six 20-win seasons and 13 trips

to the All-Star Game. So can they all make it through spring training without Tommy John surgery? If so, this team should be departing scenic Clearwater, Fla., as your official NL favorite.

**3. LAND OF THE GIANTS:** The good news for the team that won the World Series is that it became the first juggernaut in history to ride four starting pitchers 27 and younger to the parade floats. But the bad news for the Giants is that those four young starters had to work an extra 99 high-octane postseason innings to carry all those waiver-wire all-stars around them into the winner's circle. Those innings rarely come without a price. So since this team added virtually no offense over the winter, the Year After bounceability of its rotation will be a, well, "Giant" story to eyeball this spring.

**4. WHO'S THE BOSS?** There's nothing more impossible in life than following a legend. And you don't even have to consult Aaron Rodgers about that. You can spend all spring asking Don Mattingly and Fredi Gonzalez. All they have to do is walk in the tracks of two managers who won nearly 5,000 games between them: Joe Torre and Bobby Cox. Is Mattingly ready to do what the Yankees weren't so sure he was up to doing -- running the show of one of baseball's most storied franchises (in this case, the Dodgers)? And is Gonzalez -- hand-anointed by Cox himself as The Successor in Atlanta -- really the perfect, easy, no-worries choice to carry on the legacy of one of the only five men in history to manage the same team for 20 consecutive seasons? Spring training won't answer those questions definitively. But it will sure give both these guys a chance to rehearse their follow-the-legend lines.

**5. OWNING UP:** We don't normally spend a lot of time dissecting owners in spring training. But this spring, we might have to make an exception. Will the Mets' legal bills be higher than their payroll by Opening Day? Is there an astrologer someplace who can extricate the Dodgers from the McCourt family civil war? And when will one of those Texas oil zillionaires finally step up to convince Drayton McLane he wants the Astros to be a champion, too, gul-darnit? We're talking three once-premier NL franchises, all of which have played in an NLCS over the past six Octobers, now virtually frozen in ownership limbo. Isn't this spring fun at its very finest?

### **Most Improved Teams (AL)**

#### **1. Red Sox**

#### **2. A's**

#### **3. Orioles**

The blueprint for this defining offseason was one the Red Sox had sketched on their chalkboards for a long, long time. So when the first pitch was thrown, they were ready. Yeah, we'd all been speculating for like two years that they'd trade for Adrian Gonzalez someday. But they actually made it happen -- and then essentially hammered out the parameters of an extension that was both fair and Pujols-proof. Then, in the same December week, they zeroed in on Carl Crawford and lured him away from what seemed like an inevitable rendezvous with the Angels. Add in a couple of good-fit bullpen imports (Bobby Jenks and Dan Wheeler) and a little upbeat news on the health front (Kevin Youkilis, Dustin Pedroia, Jacoby Ellsbury). And this shapes up as the best team out there on anybody's spreadsheet. Of course, it helps to have a few hundred million dollars sitting around to plow into the renovations. But the Red Sox continue to remind us they can splice together brains and bucks as purposefully as any franchise in the sport.

**FUN POLL FACT:** While the Red Sox (18), A's (9) and Orioles (6) monopolized the *most-improved* votes, the surprise entry was the Blue Jays, who parlayed the stunning Vernon Wells deal into mentions from three voters who were mega-bullish on their long-term future now that they don't have Wells' \$86 million cluttering up their debt sheet.

### **Most Improved Teams (NL)**

#### **1. Brewers**

#### **2. Phillies**

#### **3. Dodgers**

As I mentioned in a blog post this week, nobody will ever confuse Brewers history with Packers history. The Packers now have won 13 NFL titles in their history -- while the Brewers haven't even won 13 postseason GAMES in theirs. But this is The Year cheeseheads have been waiting for since Harvey's Wallbangers boarded up the old trot shop nearly 30 years ago. GM Doug Melvin's marching orders were to go all-in to win. And the GM apparently knew what that meant. He sure wasn't going to win with a rotation that had a worse ERA than any team in his league not known as "The Pirates." So Melvin did what he had to do, wiping out his top-prospects list to deal for Zack Greinke and Shaun Marcum. And the folks who responded to this poll clearly liked the GM's work, since the Brewers got more most-improved votes (15) than the next three NL teams (Phillies, Dodgers, Marlins) put together (12). But here's the bad news: This had better be The Year, because it looks as if Prince Fielder and Rickie Weeks will both bolt through the free-agent emergency exit next winter. All this reminds one scout of the year when the Brewers traded for CC Sabathia (in 2008): "They have a hell of a team this year," he said. "But they can't keep their team together next year. So they'd better get off to a good start."

**FUN POLL FACT:** Eight different NL teams got at least one *most-improved* vote (including the Pirates). But the only team besides the Brewers to get more than three votes was the Phillies (seven).

### **Most Unimproved Teams (AL)**

#### **1. Angels**

#### **2. Yankees**

#### **3. Mariners**

For eight years (2002-09), the Angels dominated the AL West by such a ridiculous margin, there was only one team within 100 wins of them. And that was Oakland, which was 46 wins back. But all of a sudden, things ain't going so hot in Orange County. After his team staggered to a sub-.500 finish for the first time in seven years, owner Arte Moreno plunged into the offseason vowing to do and spend what it took to get the mother ship back on course. So how'd that work out? Hoo boy. One of our poll participants used the word "disaster" to describe the Angels' train wreck of a winter. And that was one of the gentler descriptions. They took such a hard line on the two free agents who fit their needs most -- Carl Crawford and Adrian

**Beltre** -- that they lost both of them. Then they reacted, in the words of one AL exec, with a "total panic move," by trading for Vernon Wells without even getting the Blue Jays to eat a major chunk of his money. When you consider that the Angels got almost twice as many most-unimproved votes (10) as two teams that did just about zilch this winter -- Cleveland and Seattle -- it tells you exactly how many people in this sport have spent the past few weeks asking: "What the heck were they thinking?"

**FUN POLL FACTS:** A sure sign of how good a winter the A's had was that the other three AL West teams got a combined 18 *most-unimproved* votes -- while Oakland was piling up nine most-improved votes.

### **Most Unimproved teams (NL)**

1. Mets
2. Astros
3. Pirates

Before he took the Mets job, Sandy Alderson probably thought a Ponzi scheme was something that went down in a "Happy Days" episode he once saw on Nick At Nite. But this is one GM who has been getting an education this winter in all kinds of stuff that doesn't involve trolling for somebody who might hit more than six home runs a year in Citi Field. It sure isn't the new GM's fault that he had no money to spend and no hope of moving the Oliver Perezes and Luis Castillos who are cluttering up his roster. But the bottom line is that the Mets had a laugh track of an offseason. A two-year contract to D.J. Carrasco, after he got non-tendered? A major league deal for Ronny Paulino while he was still serving a PED suspension? A bargain bin full of Boof Bonsters and Willie Harrises and Taylor Tankersleys? A hunt for inning-eating starters that led to the signings of Chris Capuano and Chris Young, two guys who have spent a combined 720 days on the disabled list over the past three seasons? Someday, when the Madoff Mess gets sorted out and the bloated contracts disappear off the payroll, the sharp minds the Mets brought in to salvage this operation will be able to make an impact. But they had no shot this winter.

**FUN POLL FACT:** Although the Mets blew away the field, quite a field it was. Nine of the 16 teams in the NL got at least one *most-unimproved* vote -- the three above, plus the Cardinals, Padres, Dodgers, Reds, Braves and your defending World Series champs, the Giants.

### **Least Recognizable Team**

1. Pirates
2. Astros
3. Royals

I might as well retire this category. What's the point? The Pirates seem to win it every year, anyway. Here's how I know exactly how faceless this team is: I cover baseball for a living. I kept a daily log book on every team's transactions all winter. And even I couldn't correctly identify the Pirates' entire prospective Opening Day lineup this week. So there's no telling how much money you could win if you walked into any tavern not located in the 412 area code and challenged your buddies to do it -- even if you gave them Andrew McCutchen and Pedro Alvarez free of charge. It's not a good sign when more Americans can name the lineup of the 1979 Pirates than the 2011 Pirates. But I'm betting that if I commissioned a Gallup poll, that's exactly how it would turn out.

**FUN POLL FACT:** You know it was an action-packed offseason when eight teams get more than one vote in this competition -- our top three, plus the Indians, Padres, Mariners, A's and Rays.

### **Checkbook Champs**

**1. RED SOX:** The Red Sox really made life tricky for us checkbook-champ judges. Technically, they laid out "only" \$161.63 million for Carl Crawford, Bobby Jenks and their surrounding free-agent cast this winter. (Don't forget Matt Albers!) But you know, I know and Bud Selig's luxury-tax pinto-bean counters know that one of these weeks, as soon as it's clear Adrian Gonzalez's shoulder is still attached to his clavicle and as soon as the accountants give the thumbs-up, the Red Sox also will drop an extension on their new first baseman in the neighborhood of seven years and 150 million bucks. So we're going to ring the cash register early and award them this prestigious checkbook-champ title for approximately \$311 million. But hey, if they change their minds, they should know they could have scarfed up nearly 15.6 million servings of Anna's Baked Boston Scrod down at the Long Wharf outpost of Legal Sea Foods if they wanted to lay out that kind of change.

**2. ROCKIES:** Here's a team that never looks in the mirror and sees a big spender staring back. But our motto here is: Follow the money. So we followed along this winter as the Rockies added six years and \$119 million to Troy Tulowitzki's equity pool, and another \$80 million to the Carlos Gonzalez kid, grandkid and great-grandkid scholarship fund. And yeah, it's true they were only "extensions" to players who weren't going anywhere for years. But tell it to the accounting department. Now add another \$40 million for the Rockies' two big league free agents, Jorge De La Rosa and Ty Wigginton. And that's \$239 million in bills that are going to land on somebody's desk over the next 10 years. That doesn't quite make this team the Yankees. But we won't be confusing the Rockies with the Pirates any time soon, either.

**3. NATIONALS:** Even though the Reds followed the Rockies' path and locked up \$151 million worth of extensions with four of their favorite local heroes this winter, I'm making an arbitrary decision to elevate the Nationals (\$145.85 million spent) onto the bronze-medal podium on this stage. Yeah, that's pretty much based on the Jayson Werth signing alone. (More on that later.) But if any team tried to make a statement with the sheer muscle of its checking account this winter, this was the team. You can quarrel with the length and magnitude of that seven-year, \$126 million Christmas gift the Nats laid on Werth. And trust me, pretty much everybody who participated in this poll did exactly that. But it was still a signing the Nationals utilized to announce to the world: "We're no longer the Artist Formerly Known as the Expos. We're planning to be good. And we've got the money to make it happen." So this is Spring Preview's way of saying: We heard you!

**FUN POLL FACTS:** Bet you didn't know that EIGHT different teams (these three, plus the Reds, Phillies, White Sox, Tigers and -- shocker alert! -- the Yankees) committed at least \$100 million each in free-agent deals and/or whoppo contract



extensions this winter. That doesn't even count the Dodgers, who spent \$91.825 million on their 11 big league free agents and will top \$100 million easy if a few of their 15 minor league free agents make the team. And it doesn't count the Angels, who spent \$23 million on free agents and also took on -- stop us if you've heard this somewhere before -- another \$86 million worth of Vernon Wells via trade. But the Angels subtracted just enough in salaries in that deal to slip under the magical \$100 million threshold. Phew. Meanwhile, who was the biggest non-spender this winter? Gotta love those Indians. Who out there can identify their only free-agent signing this winter (at least so far)? Yessiree, that would be good old Austin Kearns, for 1.3 million big ones. Hey, you were expecting maybe Manny Ramirez?

## Best Free-Agent Signings

1. **Cliff Lee, Phillies (5 years, \$120 million)**
2. **Carl Crawford, Red Sox (7 years, \$142 million)**
3. **Adrian Beltre, Rangers (5 years, \$80 million)**

It's actually kind of amusing that people look at the Lee signing and think the Phillies got some kind of "bargain." Uh, has anyone mentioned lately that this man will collect more dollars per season (an average of \$24 million) than any pitcher has ever raked in during any multiyear contract in history? Nevertheless, the Phillies played this so coyly, so quietly, so ingeniously that not even the Yankees and Rangers saw them coming until it was too late. And now this team heads for spring training with one of the greatest, October-ready rotations ever assembled. It's STILL hard to believe this really happened -- and not just for the Yankees.

**FUN POLL FACT:** Would you believe 27 different free agents got at least one vote -- including (gasp) Vicente Padilla? No kidding.

## Worst Free-Agent Signings

1. **Jayson Werth, Nationals (7 years, \$126 million)**
2. **Juan Uribe, Dodgers (3 years, \$21 million)**
3. **Joaquin Benoit, Tigers (3 years, \$16.5 million)**

Werth got more votes in this category (18) than any other player got in any other department, so I guess the voters have spoken. But I'm not sure I agree with them. At least Werth has proved he can play. There isn't much chance he'll live up to his contract, since it will carry him through age 38. But there's a difference, to me, between a "bad signing" and a contract that's just flat-out too long. So I'd have voted for Benoit (whose great year literally came out of nowhere), Uribe (who couldn't even find a job until January the previous two winters), or any one of about seven setup men (whose multiyear deals boggled many a mind) before I'd have picked Werth. But as I said, the voters have spoken. And I'm the one who asked them to vote.

**FUN POLL FACT:** Six different players got votes in the best and worst free-agent columns -- Benoit, Rafael Soriano, Carl Pavano, Brian Fuentes, Aaron Harang and Adrian Beltre, whose magnetism in racking up big vote totals for both best and worst signing was unprecedented in the history of this poll.

## Best Trades

1. The Red Sox get Adrian Gonzalez from San Diego for three guys (Casey Kelly, Anthony Rizzo and Raymond Fuentes) talented enough to rank as the Padres' best, second-best and seventh-best prospects, according to the Keith Law prospect-rating machine. So I'm not buying one scout's assessment that the Red Sox "stole" this man. Nevertheless, was Gonzalez born to hit in the shadow of the Green Monster or what? (And if you answered "what," boy would that be incorrect!) This guy slugged .810 on balls hit to left field last year, according to Inside Edge. He hit 42 percent of his homers to the opposite field. And ESPN Stats & Info's Justin Havens estimates that Gonzalez would have hit 18 more home runs at Fenway these past three years than he hit at Out-co Park (oops, make that Petco). So the only remaining critical question: Can Gonzalez learn to properly pronounce "chowdah"?

2. The Blue Jays find a team (your perplexing L.A. Angels of Anaheim) willing to take on pretty much all \$86 million of Vernon Wells' theoretically immovable contract, then turn around and flip one of the players they got back (Mike Napoli) for their new closer (Frank Francisco). As one exec said, this might not have been "the best pure baseball trade" made this winter -- but holy schmol. They MOVED VERNON WELLS' MONEY. One assistant GM called it "the least tradable contract in baseball." (OK, guess not.) And as another put it, by dumping so many of those dollars, what the Blue Jays really acquired was "a chance to change the mid/long-term fate of an organization." And that's a much more impactful acquisition than any prospect, any star or (for sure) any player to be named later.

3. The Brewers get the great Zack Greinke (and, of course, the not-so-great Yuniesky Betancourt) for a shortstop who had a .288 OBP (Alcides Escobar), a fireballer with two marijuana suspensions (Jeremy Jeffress) and two other good-but-not-star-caliber young players (Lorenzo Cain and Jake Odorizzi). OK, so they essentially blew out their whole system to do this. But when you're in go-for-it mode (and they clearly are), no point in going for it halfway. Right?

**FUN POLL FACTS:** If a good baseball trade is one that works for both teams, we might have set a record this winter. The votes rolled in for both sides of the Gonzalez, Greinke, Matt Garza, Shaun Marcum and Dan Uggla deals. So how 'bout for the Angels' side of the Wells extravaganza? Ehhhh, still haven't found anyone willing to endorse that one.

## Best Free-Agent Bargains

**BEST FREE AGENTS SIGNED TO ONE-YEAR DEALS:** 1. The Cubs get Kerry Wood back for a lower base (\$1.5 million) than the Pirates will pay Ross Ohlendorf (\$2.3 million) for going 1-11.  
2. The Twins re-sign their home run leader (Jim Thome) for less money (\$3 million) than they paid Nick Punto to hit ONE homer last year.  
3. For one year and \$7 million, the Marlins bring Javier Vazquez back to the National League, where he was last seen two years ago nearly leading the league in strikeouts.

**BEST FREE AGENTS \$2 MILLION AND UNDER:** 1. Have we mentioned the Cubs are getting the bargain of the century from a setup force (Wood) who had an 0.69 ERA for the Yankees last year?  
2. The Brewers take a \$1.75 million shot at a reliever (Takashi Saito) who has NEVER had an ERA higher than 2.83 on this side of the Pacific.  
3. The Rays hold their breath and give \$2 million (i.e., \$140 million less than Carl Crawford got) to everyone's favorite baseball role model, Manny Ramirez.

**BEST FREE AGENTS SIGNED TO MINOR LEAGUE DEALS:** 1. Who needs Andy Pettitte or Cliff Lee? Without having to guarantee a whole lot more than meal money, the Yankees get to take a flier on Freddy Garcia, a pitcher who won more games last year (12) than Pettitte and had as many quality starts (18) as Lee.  
2. The Pirates drop down and fire a sidearm minor league deal at left-on-left specialist Joe Beimel, a fellow one scout called the "Paul Assenmacher of his generation."  
3. It's a tie between the let-it-fly bench-king champions of the non-roster-invitee world, Matt Stairs (Nationals) and Jason Giambi (Rockies) -- two entertaining, life-loving, free-swinging mashers whose combined six pinch homers last year somehow earned them zero guaranteed dollars.

### Three Most Outrageous Contracts (Free-Agent Or Otherwise)

1. Even the panelists who didn't agree that Jayson Werth was the "worst signing" of the winter couldn't help voting for him in the "outrageous contract" competition. Look, the guy's a good player. But more millions (126) than homers (120)? A \$126 million deal for a fellow who has had only two 500-at-bat seasons? A seven-year guarantee for a guy who turns 32 in May? Even an NL exec who said he "loves the player" concluded that this is "almost sure to be an albatross contract at some point in the next seven years." Then again, maybe he just likes saying "albatross."

2. Ever wondered what a \$35 million setup man looks like? Now we know. He looks exactly like Rafael Soriano, the Yankees' new special assistant to Mariano Rivera. Hey, we all understand this dude can pitch (when healthy). He's held opposing hitters to an average beneath the Mendoza Line four years in a row. But did he deserve a deal that pays him almost \$12 million a year to pitch the eighth inning -- and throws in two opt-out clauses? Boy, did that ever bug some of the folks we polled. "Well, there's one thing we know," said one of them. "He's not opting out. If he got this kind of money for 45 saves, what's he going to get for NO saves?"

3. Adrian Beltre is another guy who sure confuses people. He got lots of votes for best signing, AND worst signing, AND most outrageous contract. So what's up with that? Well, on his previous five-year contract (with Seattle), he produced an adjusted OPS-plus above 112 in NONE of those years. And the only two seasons of his career in which he made the top 10 in any significant offensive categories just happened to be the two contract-drive years before he locked up those five-year deals. So there ya go.

**FUN POLL FACTS:** So which non-free-agent deals got votes? Extensions to Dan Uggla, Troy Tulowitzki and Joey Votto. And the voters kept piling on the Angels just for trading for Vernon Wells, even though they didn't sign the guy to this contract. They just assumed what was left of it. So if you hadn't caught onto the fact that people in this sport HATED that trade, that oughta do it. Right?

### Most Important Injury Comebacks

1. Brandon Webb (Rangers)
2. Justin Morneau/Joe Nathan (Twins)
3. Kevin Youkilis/Dustin Pedroia/Jacoby Ellsbury/Adrian Gonzalez (Red Sox)

### Rookies To Watch (AL)

1. Jeremy Hellickson (Rays RHP)
2. Mike Moustakas (Royals 3B)
3. Kyle Drabek (Blue Jays RHP)

### Rookies To Watch (NL)

1. Domonic Brown (Phillies RF)
2. Freddie Freeman (Braves 1B)
3. Aroldis Chapman (Reds LHP)

## Most Unlikely Names On Spring Training Rosters

1. **MATT ANDERSON (Phillies)**: He was the very first player taken in the entire 1997 draft (which would be 184 picks before the A's took Tim Hudson, incidentally). So it's safe to say that if you'd told folks back then that Anderson would still be hanging out in spring training 14 years later, nobody would have been shocked. But if you'd told them how he'd get here, well, they'd have just about passed out. Anderson hasn't pitched in the big leagues since 2005, hasn't even been able to hook on in an independent league since 2006 and hasn't pitched anywhere since 2008. But he hit 97 mph on the gun last December with Phillies scout Del Unser watching. So the Phillies scarfed him right up. And it was worth it just so he could shoot down the long-standing rumor that he once blew out his shoulder throwing an octopus, a tale he refuted in Jerry Crasnick's must-read profile of him last month.

2. **NICK BIERBRODT (Orioles)**: Exactly 1,300 men have shown up on a pitcher's mound in the big leagues at least once over the past six seasons. But not one of them was named Nick Bierbrodt. Last time he was sighted on a big league mound? How about July 6, 2004 -- which was so long ago, Ichiro has had nearly 1,500 hits since then. Meanwhile, Bierbrodt's path back has taken him to Taiwan -- where he got to pitch for one of the storied franchises in sports, the Brother Elephants -- not to mention the Atlantic League, the Golden League, the Texas League and the Pacific Coast League. And now, 15 years after the Diamondbacks drafted him in the first round (10 picks ahead of Milton Bradley), Bierbrodt's old manager in Arizona, Buck Showalter, is giving him one last chance. Is spring training an awesome invention, or what?

3. **SEAN BURROUGHS (Diamondbacks)**: Well, we've got the first round of the 1996 and 1997 drafts covered in this section. So why not the '98 draft? Burroughs was the ninth overall pick that year, taken ahead of Carlos Pena, CC Sabathia, Brad Lidge and about 1,000 other guys. And whatever happened to THEM, anyhow? As for Burroughs, he last hit a major league home run on April 30, 2005. He hasn't even shown up in a minor league box score since 2007. And the most interesting tidbit I was able to find on his Facebook community page was that he once told David Letterman he wanted to be a gynecologist when he grew up. Well, he just turned 30, so you'd think he'd have finished med school by now. Instead, he convinced his former GM in San Diego, Kevin Towers, to slip him an invite to spring training with the D-backs. Beautiful.

## No. 1 Story That Summed Up The Offseason

As one AL executive quipped, history was truly made this winter, with that Cliff Lee signing -- but not how you think. "The mystery team," he joked, "finally signed a player."