

## **A's News Clips, Thursday, February 24, 2011**

### **Co-owner Lew Wolff speaks on hopes for A's this season, Matsui's impact**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

PHOENIX — A's co-owner Lew Wolff made his first appearance at spring training Wednesday and didn't hold back his hopes and expectations for his team.

Wolff believes the A's have a better roster this year than they did in 2006, when Oakland won its last American League West championship.

"I think it's a better team," he said. "This one, I think, is much more balanced. We have a combination of youth -- especially with the pitching -- and maturity. And we've got some veterans who are athletic veterans, and not on the last legs of their career. I just think we have some balance."

Wolff referred to the rebuilding plan that general manager Billy Beane started before the 2008 season, when the A's began a youth movement by trading away several marquee veterans for prospects who improved the minor league system.

He thinks the team is in position to start reaping the benefits of those trades behind a young pitching foundation that's highlighted by Trevor Cahill, Gio Gonzalez and Brett Anderson.

"We either do it or not, that's the way I see it," Wolff said of 2011.

Wolff, who typically makes one or two trips to spring camp from his home in Southern California, had yet to meet some of the team's new players, including designated hitter Hideki Matsui. That's a main reason he showed up Wednesday.

He was asked whether he expected Matsui, who has mass international appeal due to his long career in Japan, to have a positive impact off the field with ticket sales and sponsorship opportunities.

"I think (his addition) is terrific," Wolff said. "But the game is on the field. I hear he's such a terrific guy. That's a plus." Wolff said he didn't have any new information on when he would hear back from the Major League Baseball-appointed committee that's studying where the A's should build their new ballpark.

He did say team officials have had talks with Phoenix city officials about renovating Phoenix Municipal Stadium, the A's spring training home which is looking quite outdated compared to the newer Cactus League ballparks sprouting up.

Wolff said he believes roughly \$30 million of renovations are needed between Phoenix Muni and Papago Park, where the A's hold workouts and their minor league operations are based.

### **A's: Woman pitches her cause during batting practice**

By Joe Stiglich, Contra Costa Times

PHOENIX -- Justine Siegal threw batting practice, pitched her cause and won the A's respect Wednesday.

Siegal, the first woman to throw batting practice at a major league camp, pitched to four hitters at the team's Papago Park practice facility, and the A's didn't cut her any slack.

She faced Daric Barton, Coco Crisp, David DeJesus and Landon Powell — the first three of whom figure to be in the team's opening night lineup.

Siegal, 36, admitted to feeling nervous early and had trouble locating the strike zone. But she accomplished her goal — raising awareness for her organization Baseball For All, which aims to increase women's opportunities in the national pastime.

"The whole point is to be who you want to be," Siegal said. "Look at me — I just threw batting practice to the A's. That's amazing."

Siegal, who had her 13-year-old daughter Jasmine with her, did what was expected. She got enough pitches over the plate for all four players to get their hacks in.

Landon Powell sent one pitch rocketing over the right-field wall, but that was the only homer off her. Siegal, a right-hander, even got Crisp to swing and miss once.

"She actually throws better than some batting practice coaches I've faced," Crisp joked.

Siegal played baseball in high school and has continued playing on organized teams. From 2007-10, she served as an assistant coach for the Springfield (Mass.) College baseball team.

There was a deeper meaning to her experience Wednesday. Siegal — who was decked out in a full A's practice uniform — wore a Little League patch on her left arm in honor of Christina Taylor Green — the 9-year-old granddaughter of former major league manager Dallas Green who was killed in last month's shootings in Tucson.

Green played baseball on a boys' team.

Siegal has corresponded with Green's parents, and on Wednesday morning she wrote a Facebook note to them, which read in part: "I will throw batting practice to the A's and think of your daughter." DeJesus had nothing but respect for Siegal after facing her.

"That's a lot of pressure to come in there and throw strikes," he said. "Who would have that she'd be on the field throwing batting practice? I think it shows everyone that anything's possible."

## **Cuban defector Yadel Marti has eye on making A's**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Yadel Marti left Cuba on a raft two years ago, but the right-hander, who signed with the A's last year, downplays any drama about his flight from his home country to Mexico along with two other players.

"I was happy," Marti said through teammate Gio Gonzalez, who served as translator. "I was about to participate in my dream." The dream for Marti, 31, was to play in the major leagues. He already had made a big splash in the United States in 2006, when he was the best pitcher in the inaugural World Baseball Classic, working 12 2/3 scoreless innings and allowing six hits and four walks while striking out 11.

"Everyone remembers watching him pitch in that first WBC," said Triple-A Sacramento pitching coach Scott Emerson, who is likely to be working with Marti some this year. "I always wondered what he was going to do after that, and then I saw the rosters for spring training and I said, 'Marti? The WBC guy?' I think a lot of people said the same thing."

Three years later, Marti was expected to again be a force for Cuba, but he was kicked off the national team with a teammate after one unsuccessful attempt to defect. He wasn't going to miss on his second chance, and after establishing brief residency in Mexico, he was declared a free agent.

He went to play winter ball in the Dominican Republic, and the A's, familiar with him from his international play as well as Cuba's Serie Nacional league, saw him work out there. It was a long road before Marti could be signed, however; Cuban players must go through all sorts of additional checks before any approval is granted.

Marti's wife, Leizer, and a daughter are with him in Miami, but he had to leave another daughter behind in Cuba. He talks to her on the phone, and he hopes one day that the entire family can be reunited, but, he said, "I can't ever enter back into Cuba."

He tries not to think about it too much. "I have a lot on my mind already, with a new organization, trying to learn everything," he said.

Those around him, however, know what Marti has gone through.

"Personally, I'm very impressed," said Dan Kantrovitz, the A's coordinator of international operations. "What he's overcome, at his age, to make the sacrifice he has, to follow his dream, speaks volumes. And I have a ton of respect for what he's done in Cuba - he's almost a legend in his home country."

Life in the United States was an adjustment for Marti, who said, "It's very different from Cuba. In Cuba, nobody makes very much. Everyone makes the same thing, minimum wage. Everything in life is the same."

Helping to ease the transition, Marti has found a very welcoming Cuban community in Miami, including high-profile Cuban defector Kendry Morales, the Angels' first baseman, and Gonzalez, who is of Cuban descent. Marti worked out with Gonzalez this winter, they flew to Phoenix together, and Gonzalez drives Marti to the park every day.

"Yadel is like my alarm clock," Gonzalez said with a grin. "He's always ready to go on time. And he's a great guy, very humble, very polite. He's got a big heart."

"For me, having a full-blown Cuban here is exciting. He tells me about the country and how hard it is - and when he came here, he had so many options. He's free. He's enjoying it. It's fun to see."

It's unlikely that Marti will make the team out of camp. He's probably ticketed for Double-A initially, but the A's like what he brings, particularly when it comes to location and savvy.

"Yadel's not going to throw 95, but he'll throw the kitchen sink at you," Kantrovitz said. "He'll come at you with different arm angles, add and subtract from the fastball, and he doesn't give many free passes. He'll make hitters earn it."

"Pinpoint control," Gonzalez said. "He's not trying to rocket-fire it. He takes his time, and he's very, very accurate."

Marti knows he has a ways to go before he makes it to Oakland, and, he said, "I'm going to do my part. I will work hard, show them I'm healthy and strong, show them what I've got."

"There is no rush. I will do whatever I need to do."

**Briefly:** Manager Bob Geren said that Rich Harden is making good progress in returning from lat stiffness and that reliever Michael Wuertz (shoulder tendinitis) is likely to throw this weekend. ... Geren was impressed with Fautino De Los Santos' session Wednesday, saying that the right-hander, acquired in the Nick Swisher deal, was throwing "really hard."

## **Wolff would like resolution to San Jose situation**

By Barry M. Bloom / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- A's managing partner Lew Wolff made his first appearance at camp this spring on Wednesday morning and he sounded quite bullish about the upcoming season, the work being done by a Major League Baseball committee studying relocation of his ballclub and a pending \$30 million upgrade to its Spring Training facility.

Standing in the sunshine at the Papago Park practice facility as the A's worked out, Wolff, 75, spoke eloquently with three members of the media about the near and not-too-distant future.

About the upcoming season, Wolff said he is "as elated as I can possibly be," coming off a year during which the A's finished in second place, nine games behind Texas in the American League West.

"The plan that was set out to me in 2008 by [general manager] Billy [Beane] and his guys is here," Wolff added. "We have depth. We have youth and age in the right spots. We have guys who can make contact with the ball. We either do it or not is the way I see it."

About the committee that for three years has been studying the A's relocation options, Wolff said that he is satisfied "they are putting their arms around this."

"I know that we're all -- especially me -- frustrated," Wolff said. "But it's important that when a decision is made, that it's a comprehensive decision. A patient account. It makes the path going forward to a new ballpark as easy for us as possible. As much as I'm the one who's bugging everybody, I understand the patience I have to have. Baseball has a different time clock than I have."

Regarding ongoing talks with Phoenix mayor Phil Gordon about upgrading Phoenix Municipal Stadium and the practice facility, Wolff said, "We want to stay here. We actually don't threaten anybody when it comes to moving to other cities or anything."

"I think we'll work it out with the city, although cities are strapped these days," he said. "We've made an analysis of what we need. We don't need to spend \$100 million. We like it here. I like the fact that the facilities are separate, so that some guys can train here and others can go over to the main field. There's something peaceful and wide open about all this."

It's interesting that the A's find themselves in a similar predicament both in the Bay Area and in Spring Training. With all the improvements and the new complexes that have opened in the Valley, the A's train in the oldest facility. At home, the Coliseum is the third oldest ballpark in the AL, having opened for football in September 1966, only six months after what was then called Anaheim Stadium, but it's the only one that hasn't been renovated for baseball.

Wolff asked MLB in 2008 for permission to move from Oakland 35 miles south to San Jose and Commissioner Bud Selig put together a committee to review the A's relocation options inside and outside the Bay Area. The Giants have opposed the A's request to move to San Jose.

Wolff, a fraternity brother of Selig's at the University of Wisconsin, led a group that purchased the A's in 2005. Recently, Selig has declined to discuss the progress of the committee and Wolff said at a recent owners' meeting that he'd rather have a "no" at this point just so he can get on with life. Wolff said on Wednesday that he's not getting any younger.

"At my age, I don't have a lot of time to contemplate," he said. "They're supposed to make me a couple of workout shirts with a number on it and it's 75 squared. They were doing it as a joke. So we'll see."

The A's talks with cash-strapped Phoenix have been ongoing for more than a year with a number of proposals changing hands. The latest new complex -- Salt River Fields at Talking Stick -- cost about \$120 million and was funded in total for the D-backs and Rockies by the Salt River-Maricopa Indian Community. A new \$80 million facility in Mesa, Ariz., on tap for the Cubs is being funded through a bond issue approved last fall by voters in that community.

Wolff, though, said he's hardly looking for a total reconstruction of the A's current Spring Training site. He'd like to tear down and rebuild the blockhouse of an office and clubhouse building at Papago Park and make significant upgrades to Phoenix Muni, which was opened in 1964. The infrastructure of that yard is crumbling as evidenced by a water pipe break this week that flooded some of the A's clubhouse offices.

Wolff said the estimated improvements of \$30 million will be staged over time. But right now, Phoenix is searching for a funding mechanism with Gordon's term as mayor about to expire.

"That's chump change," Wolff said about the investment, "unless you go to the Indians and they build you a beautiful facility, which are gorgeous. The one that's opening now is just fantastic. But we don't want to do that. [The investment] isn't huge, but we have to do it."

## **Female pitcher honors victim of Tucson shooting**

## **Siegal tosses BP against A's, wears patch for Green**

By Barry M. Bloom / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Donning a green A's cap and jersey, Justine Siegal tossed a round of batting practice to a bevy of Oakland hitters on Wednesday as the team finished its morning workout at Papago Park.

On her left sleeve was a patch honoring Christina Taylor Green, the 9-year-old who was killed last month along with five others during a shooting rampage in Tucson at an event where U.S. Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords was also severely wounded.

Christina Taylor, the daughter of Dodgers scout John Green and granddaughter of Phillies icon Dallas Green, wanted to be the first woman to play in the Major Leagues. That goal is near and dear to Siegal, who became the first woman this week ever to throw batting practice to big league hitters. The patch on her sleeve represented Christina Taylor's Tucson Little League.

"There are teams all over the country wearing this patch," Siegal said after the approximately 15-minute session. "She was the only girl on her Little League team. When I was sitting there on the bench, I knew if Christina was here, she'd say, 'Let's have some fun.' She wanted to be the first woman Major League player. I give part of my dream to her family."

Siegal said she actually posted the fact that she was wearing the patch Wednesday on the Green family Facebook page. She told them that Christina Taylor's spirit would be with her. The Greens responded to Siegal by saying they were proud of her.

"That's the best thing that could have happened to me," she said.

It was her second such foray of the week after a historic Monday session against the Indians in Goodyear, Ariz., and this time, she had to tough it out. Siegal said she'd been nursing a groin injury for several weeks, but felt the injury really give way as she took the mound. Though Coco Crisp, Daric Barton and David DeJesus were in the group waiting to take their hacks, she remained undaunted and threw strikes.

"She did fine," said A's manager Bob Geren, who watched her closely from behind the cage. "I thought she was a little nervous at first, but she settled in and did a good job."

It's no wonder. Siegal had nurtured the dream of playing in the Major Leagues since she began pitching when she was 10 years old. A PhD candidate in sports psychology at Springfield College in Springfield, Mass., she's been an assistant coach on its baseball team and has been throwing BP to colleges and universities for the past three years.

This past December, she traveled to baseball's Winter Meetings in Orlando, Fla., to try and line up a few Spring Training batting practice gigs. The Indians and A's both bit. She hopes a few others will follow their lead. Her discussion with Oakland general manager Billy Beane lasted all of about "six seconds" before he said yes. She made her mini tour this week with her 13-year-old daughter, Jasmine, who is not a big baseball fan. No matter. As the great philosopher Joseph Campbell once said, "Follow your bliss." Whatever that may be.

"What I want kids to know is that they should believe in who they are," she said. "The whole point is to be who you want to be and believe you can do anything. Look at me. I just threw BP to the A's. That's amazing. Forty percent of baseball fans are women. So there's a definite connection to this game and that's what throwing BP was all about. Sure, it was a dream come true for me. But it's much more important to see the big picture."

## **What role will DeJesus fill for A's?**

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

For a guy who appears to have a spot locked down in the Oakland Athletics' lineup, David DeJesus' exact role is hard to define.

Is he a rally-starter who best fits near the top of the lineup, or a run producer who will earn his paycheck clearing the bases?

All that's known is DeJesus, obtained via trade from Kansas City in November, is targeted for rightfield. If the Athletics wind up showing improvement offensively this season, figure DeJesus will be central to the effort in one way or another.

"He's an all-around hitter who uses the whole field," A's manager Bob Geren said. "There are guys that hit more home runs, but when you put the numbers together, he's one of the best hitters in baseball."

While DeJesus, 31, won't get mentioned in the same breath as Carl Crawford, his resume suggests he's one of the major leagues' steadiest players.

A .289 career hitter over seven-plus seasons, DeJesus has collected as many as 73 RBIs in a season (2008) and scored as many as 101 runs (2007).

One notable stat for fans tired of watching A's hitters make the slow walk back to the dugout: DeJesus led the majors last season with a .287 average in two-strike counts.

There's a strong chance he'll wind up as the No.3 hitter by default — sandwiched between table-setters Coco Crisp and Daric Barton and sluggers Josh Willingham and Hideki Matsui.

Therein lies the problem that exists for the A's in the eyes of some.

The No. 3 hitter traditionally is the best (read: most complete) hitter in a lineup. DeJesus doesn't offer much power — his career high in homers is 13, which he achieved in 2009.

"They've got three 2-hole hitters in the lineup — DeJesus, (Mark) Ellis and Barton," said one major league scout who requested anonymity. "And two play positions where you want power," in reference to Barton at first base and DeJesus in right field.

It's an argument DeJesus is familiar with.

He batted leadoff in 636 of his 843 starts with the Royals, but when he wasn't leading off, he saw considerable time as the No. 3 hitter.

"I'm going to go out there and do what got me here," DeJesus said. "That's my game, stay up the middle, take the ball the other way and try to drive the ball in the gaps. I'm not a home-run hitter, but I'll find the gaps."

Crisp, who played alongside DeJesus during Crisp's injury-shortened season with the Royals in 2009, said DeJesus can handle the No.3 spot.

"He has the ability, with his good hands, to hit third," Crisp said. "He's a guy that normally doesn't go into long slumps. He doesn't try to drastically change anything."

The A's acquired DeJesus in exchange for pitchers Vin Mazzaro and Justin Marks, but DeJesus was a hot commodity during last season's trade deadline.

That ended when DeJesus tore a tendon in his right thumb in late July, crashing into the outfield wall at Yankee Stadium while trying to haul in a Derek Jeter drive.

DeJesus underwent surgery and missed the rest of the season, but he said his thumb is completely healed.

He's pleased to be with the A's — whom many view as American League West contenders — after spending his entire career with the Royals, who spent much of that time in the AL Central cellar.

"It's awesome. I'm tired of losing," DeJesus said. "We've got to go out and prove that the expectations are right."

## **A's owner talks renovations**

PHOENIX (AP) — Oakland Athletics owner Lew Wolff is in talks with Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon over a \$30 million renovation project for the A's spring training facilities. Wolff, in Phoenix for a couple of days "to put everything in shape," talked about the plans to upgrade the facilities on Wednesday at the A's minor league camp at Papago Park.

He says the team wants to stay in Phoenix for spring training and that he believes the A's will work it out with the city. Wolff says the structure at Papago Park needs to be torn down and rebuilt to accommodate the growing needs of the organization. Phoenix Municipal Stadium needs modernized infrastructure.

Municipal Stadium was built in 1964.

## Urban: Bay Ball from the desert (2/23/2011)

Mychael Urban, CSNBayArea.com

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- From Papago Park to Scottsdale Stadium to Phoenix Municipal we go, dodging the omnipresent Japanese media at A's camp, still marveling at Pablo Sandoval's re-invention at Giants camp.

It's Bay Ball in the desert, and it's starting to get awfully exciting. Let's bounce ...

... Less than two weeks into spring training, the Giants and A's will be opening Cactus League play this weekend. The Giants are taking on the Diamondbacks at home Friday, and the A's travel to nearby Mesa to face the Cubs. Both games likely will be sellouts; the Giants are the defending champs, the D-Backs curry local favor everywhere they go here, and the Cubs are the Cubs on Sunday -- they *always* draw big crowds of both transplant retirees and Midwesterners looking to escape the cold snaps of home.

It's a brilliant way for both of the Bay Area's teams to kick off a season marked by heightened expectations, and if that first pitch doesn't stir inside of you some visceral reaction that can't be fully explained but can be simply labeled as a deep and passionate connection with the game and your favorite team, you're in the wrong place.

... Bruce Bochy has named Tim Lincecum as his starter for the Giants' Cactus League opener, and Bob Geren has named Trevor Cahill as his starter for Oakland's Cactus League opener. In related news, Mother Nature announced that rain is wet and wind generally sucks if you aren't a big fan of hair gel.

... What Hideki Matsui brings to the A's is a legitimacy that even Mark Mulder, Tim Hudson, Barry Zito, Miguel Tejada, Jason Giambi, Eric Chavez and the rest of the elite-level A's of the early to mid-2000's didn't bring. The man is a god in Japan, and his several successful years in pinstripes only added to a legend absorbed not just in his home country, but in the minds of many of his young new teammates.

If you're under 28 and you play for the A's, you were a teenager when he came to the United States in 2003 amid much fanfare, and now that he's your teammate you're a little freaked out -- in a good way. "It adds even more excitement," reliever Jerry Blevins told me this week. Granted, several players have suggested, the massive Matsui media throng is here just for him. But they're going to be covering the A's, too, and if they're as good as they think they're going to be, Japan's favorite team is going to be Oakland by the end of the year.

... There he is, leading the way during base running drills. There he is, asking for more ground balls. There he is, pounding balls off the wall from both sides of the plate. There he is, heading to the weight room after a grueling workout. This is the New Panda, and the Giants are borderline giddy about it. Sure, it's awfully early, so pronouncing him an entirely changed man isn't something we're ready to do just yet. But he's making it impossible to take your eyes off him, and that's how it generally goes with the great ones. But with fingers crossed, the Giants and their fans can afford to dream of greatness, and that's yet another gift from 2010.

... So David DeJesus isn't an ideal No. 3 hitter. Big deal. Since when have the A's have a prototypical lineup? Almost never, at least in recent memory. This is a team that used Jeremy Giambi as its leadoff man, with a totally straight face, and pulled it off for a while. Comparatively, DeJesus batting third makes all the sense in the world.

... The top of the Giants' lineup is going to go a little something like this: Torres, Sanchez, Posey, Huff, Tejada. The rest is largely unknown, depending on who wins the job in left and what Sandoval does this spring. No matter what happens, though, anyone doubting that this team will be significantly better than the 2010 team is a bonehead. Sanchez, Posey, Cody Ross and Pat Burrell will be available for the full season (barring injuries), and I have Tejada pegged for a surprisingly strong season at the plate. Bottom line: If Ross is batting eighth, you've got a pretty good offense.

... Coco Crisp might be the X-Factor for the A's this year He *is* a prototypical leadoff hitter, and with Rajai Davis gone, Crisp is the only legitimate threat on the bases. DeJesus can get you a bag or two here and there, but Crisp is on another level in terms of being a dynamic presence who commands the attention of pitchers when he's dancing off this base or that. The issue with Crisp is, no surprise, his health. He's had a hard time staying off the DL over the past several years. But if he plays in, say, 140 games this year, he's going to make the additions of DeJesus, Josh Willingham and Matsui all the more impactful.

... Jonathan Sanchez might be the most underrated pitcher in the game, but it's understandable why he doesn't get more love. No matter how good he is for long stretches at a time, he's forever going to be defined by his occasional struggles because the perception is that they're all born in his head. There's nothing worse in baseball than to be labeled a mental midget, and that's the way Sanchez is viewed by some. It's totally unfair, of course, but that's the way it is. Only a 15-win

season with a sub-3.00 ERA is going to change that, and it's a shame. Sanchez is a damn good pitcher, and I've been told by many people in the Giants' clubhouse that he's a great teammate, too. Players don't say that about mental midgets.

... A's owner Lew Wolff wants resolution to the San Jose situation, he told reporters Wednesday. Hours later, I called a press conference announcing I wanted to have coffee with Beyonce in Paris. I like my chances -- at least in relation to those of Wolff, whose wishes are dependent on Bud Selig's blue-ribbon panel acting with something more than the urgency of a garden gnome.

... Freddy Sanchez went deep in batting practice on Wednesday, so everyone take a deep breath. He's going to be ready for Opening Day.

... Josh Outman, the top candidate for Oakland's fifth spot in the rotation, is wearing uniform No. 88, and his reason reminds us that he's a classic lefty. He's worn No. 8 for two other teams, so hey, No. 88 makes all the sense in the world.

... On the topic of uniform numbers, have you noticed that Giants super-prospect Brandon Belt was assigned No. 9? That alone tell you how the team feels about his chances of breaking camp with the club. Most guys without a minute of big-league service time are thrown something like No. 67, a non-verbal communicator that says, "No shot, kid." No. 9 says, "We're counting on you, kid."

... And finally, a thumbs-up to the fans who have flown in from the Bay Area before the games start. They are small in number, but huge in passion, and they've been rewarded with workouts -- at both camps -- that have carried a current of electricity not often felt this early in the year. Many I've met say they're heading home Friday to beat the crowds, and they're all going home happy.

To those of you on your way down soon, don't forget an umbrella and a couple of warm layers of clothes. It's expected to be soggy this weekend. Until then, peace, ballpark dogs and Linkin Park's "In The End" to all.

### **Ratto: Beane getting first taste of big-market A's camp**

Ray Ratto, CSNBayArea.com

PHOENIX, Ariz -- Far away from Hank Steinbrenner's cry that baseball's lesser team should eat cake, Billy Beane was inundated by media and fans at Papago Park.

It is the closest Beane has been to being part of a large revenue team in his 14 years on the job in Oakland, and while much of the media and some of the fans were there to see Hideki Matsui's first workout as an Elephant, there was still more than he's seen here in years.

"It is pretty crowded for a change," he said as he squinted in a game but underpowered sun. "Like to see that."

Then again, it's the first time the A's have seen expectations in the flesh in some years -- even the 2006 team that reached the ALCS operated largely on in-season stealth rather than spring training fanfare. If nothing else, the A's in Beane's time have been built on the element of surprise.

That comes, of course, with being built on the element of cheap, which has also been a staple in these parts in the post-Haasian era. The A's go through their seasons, subsisting on low-hanging foliage and the kindnesses of revenue sharing, which of course is right in George 2.0's wheelhouse.

"We've got to do a little something about that, and I know Bud wants to correct it in some way," Steinbrenner said from the Yankees' spring training home in Tampa. "Obviously, we're very much allies with the Red Sox and the Mets, the Dodgers, the Cubs, whoever in that area."

Then he dropped the gauntlet, which is Renaissance Fair for "started the process of picking a fight."

"At some point, if you don't want to worry about teams in minor markets, don't put teams in minor markets, or don't leave teams in minor markets if they're truly minor," he said. "Socialism, communism, whatever you want to call it, is never the answer."

Even though it's been the answer in baseball for 10 years and football for 50, is how he meant to say.

Beane hadn't heard that message in the morning, and would have deferred if he had. That's why John Fisher and Lew Wolff gets paid the big money -- to see to it that Wolff answers and all questions about the Steinbrenners.



Meanwhile, though, back in the new wasp hive of activity that is A's camp, Beane watched the expectations for his 15th team taking wing, and tried to pretend that he didn't pay attention to expectations.

"I wouldn't put a number on it," he said, "but I think if we stay healthy, we ought to be in the conversation all of September. I'm not one of those people who think Texas has fallen off -- they lost Cliff Lee, sure, but Adrian Beltre was a great get for them, and they've got some very good young pitchers like (Michael) Kirtman and Derek Holland, and I don't think Colby Lewis and C.J. Wilson are going away.

"But I think if we stay healthy, we ought to be contenders."

That, by necessity, means there ought to be actual pressure on manager Bob Geren to help make the A's a player viz. Beane's vision. He has one .500 season in four years as a manager, and the only person to go longer without a winning record in the last 35 years is Lloyd McClendon, who had the excuse of managing the Pittsburgh Pirates.

Beane, though, defends him as he has throughout.

"You could say that if we hadn't lost 40 percent of our payroll to injury a year ago," Beane said, excuse-ifying at a spectacular pace. "But we haven't given him enough tools for him to have expectations in his four years, either."

But there are tools now, at least enough to make the A's look like a six-month team if nothing else. The bullpen is stocked with arms and characters, although Grant Balfour has so far resisted the impulse to see what Charlie Sheen thinks of the Australian brewing industry. There are more hitters than last year, though with the notable exception of Matsui they still don't have a bomber.

Truth is, though, the A's would still be a surprise. There are some folks trying to make them the fashionable darkhorse pick in the AL West, which Beane rejected with a bemused smile. But darkhorses don't run very well for very long, and even the Giants, who darkhorsed their way right into the postseason and the perfect format with a team with four good starters, are the exception that proves the rule.

"People want to compare us, naturally, but I think this is the year where you'll see that we really are truly two very separate and distinct entities," Beane said. "Yeah, we have starting pitching if it stays healthy, and I think we've made our bullpen much better, but we and they are really two very different animals."

He then went into a brief soliloquy about the A's, the Giants and the difference in their media coverage and ballpark prospects, but we glazed over that point.

Besides, ballpark or no, the A's have a bigger problem on the horizon than where the lockers are.

It's Hank Steinbrenner and his move to thin out the herd. Nothing may come of it, but the NFL owners' battles are leaking into baseball consciousness, and that may mean that the A's could become an endangered species before they realize the grass-roots support they seem to be attracting this week.

## **Woman pitches to MLB players during spring-training workouts**

by Jaimee Rose, Arizona Republic - Feb. 24, 2011

The pitcher's moment didn't look like much, just 15 minutes of baseballs whizzing and bats cracking and a cheeky center fielder named Coco Crisp saying, "Go on, 'Ponytails,' give it to me," to the blonde on the mound.

But Justine Siegal's 13-year-old daughter sat watching in the dugout, and Siegal thought of all the other daughters across the country who love baseball, too. And, this week, in their honor, Siegal likely became the first woman to throw batting practice in the major leagues.

On Monday, she threw to her hometown team, the Cleveland Indians, at their spring-training camp in Goodyear, freaking out over her jersey and at finally having her beloved team's logo on her chest. On Wednesday in Phoenix, Siegal took a turn with the Oakland Athletics, slinging strikes from a mound where a pitching machine had been 20 minutes before.

She pulled her green socks high and tugged her new A's hat low and threw a long stream of right-handed, four-seam fastballs - even better than some of the men, the players said. On her left sleeve was a duct-taped patch in honor of Christina-Taylor Green, the Little Leaguer killed in the Jan. 8 shooting near Tucson. Christina-Taylor, 9, was the only girl on her team and wanted to be the first woman to play in the major leagues. She would have loved everything Siegal stands for, said her mother, Roxanna Green.

"They're both inspirations to those who choose to follow their dreams," said Roxanna, who hasn't met Siegal. "We're so proud of Justine."

And, on Wednesday, when 36-year-old Siegal found herself surrounded by cameras and reporters and the A's starting lineup, she got nervous and took refuge on a bench, lying back and thinking about that little girl and all the thousands of girls playing in amateur leagues across the country and what she hopes that this week will mean.

"I would tell any girl who wants to play with the boys, just go ahead and do it," she said. "Look at me. I'm throwing BP to the A's."

"We can do anything, us girls."

Being probably the first woman to throw on a major-league field means the following things: Men watching on the sidelines will wonder out loud if you're a "serious contender" or just there for a diversity show. A radio-station interviewer will ask if you are lesbian and then ask you to talk about your breasts, Siegal said. You have to come to practice already dressed or change in the umpires' locker room because there isn't a changing room for ladies.

You will have to fight hard to get general managers to pay attention to you, even if you were a college-baseball coach and an International Baseball Federation coach and even the first woman to coach men's professional baseball in the minor leagues - and Siegal is all those things. She approached every major-league team about throwing batting practice because she had calculated that this was her best in.

"There's no reason why a woman can't throw BP," she said. "The strength is there. It's about location. It's about consistency. The point of BP is to throw firm, hard strikes, over and over - four-seam fastballs right over the plate so the hitters can get their work in."

Still, most of the managers ignored her. One team said no. A few were interested. The Indians said yes. A's General Manager Billy Beane said yes four seconds after she asked.

There is also the challenge of baseball pants, which are cut for men alone.

The Indians asked Siegal to bring her own. The A's dressed her in their trademark gray. She went through four pairs of their smallest pants until she settled on her pick - and they were a little roomy in the groin, Siegal said.

She has to wear low pigtailed with the hat because there isn't a hole in the back for a ponytail, she said.

But being first also means people will want your autograph, just for throwing batting practice, including an 8-year-old boy who was so nervous to talk to Siegal that he had to walk up and back three times, and a woman who approached talking about watching history unfold. "This is a day we'll never forget," whispered Diane Nutter, 68, an A's fan from Alameda, Calif. "We're proud of you."

For Siegal, it means that while you stretch on the grass, your daughter will be sitting in the dugout playing on her iPhone, stressing. In the beginning, this fight was about her.

Jasmine Siegal was born in 1998, and that year, her mother started an organization to promote baseball for girls, hoping to make the sport easier for her daughter.

Baseball for All offers camps and coaching to young girls across the country, even helping them fight if a [school](#) team pulls the "girls can't play" card.

Justine Siegal knew how hard it could be. She started playing baseball when she was 5, raised by her father and grandfather on the doctrines of the Indians, Orel Hershiser and Nolan Ryan. In the early days, it didn't matter that she was a girl.

"I was better than the boys," she said. "I was picked first."

She was 13 when "my coach told me 'I don't want you on my team because you're a girl,'" Siegal remembers. "But I wouldn't quit. I loved baseball, and the love mixed in with some genuine stubbornness kept me in the game."

She cold-called coaches, trying to find a team that would take her.

"You sound like a chick," one told her. "I am," she replied.

After all that, it was a tough day when Jasmine had to tell her mother that baseball wasn't quite her thing. She was in second grade, and she was scared.

"She said, 'I know, but that's OK,'" Jasmine remembers. "She said to always follow your dreams, and she will always be there to support me."

She is proud of her mom, and her mom is proud of her. "She'll say, 'I like who I am,' " Siegal said, "and what 13-year-old girl you know says that?"

"We have to let our children choose, and let them become who they want to be."

The whole point of her throwing BP this week, she said, was to help make baseball a choice for girls, too.

On Wednesday, as Siegal removed a body microphone with one hand and fielded a phone call from National Public Radio's "All Things Considered" with the other, she kept her mission in mind. She had a [job](#) to do: four-seam fastballs right over the plate, and she had to ace it for the sake of womankind. No one offered advice. "If they would have given me pointers, that would have been insulting," she said.

She warmed up her arm throwing to A's manager Bob Geren.

"Perfect," he told her more than once. "Ready?" Geren asked.

"Yeah, I'm ready," Siegal said, and walked up to the mound, facing four A's starters: Crisp, Landon Powell, Daric Barton and David DeJesus. She threw a couple of strikes, then four balls in a row, which is as bad as it can get for a pitcher.

"There ain't no BP here," called DeJesus.

Siegal raised her shoulders, took a deep breath and another.

Others were gentler: "Just like you're in the backyard," a player called to her.

She found her stride: strike after strike. Powell hit a [home](#) run. Another ball hit the wall. Coaches whistled. Crisp gave her the compliment of sass, of her own major -league nickname: Ponytails, the only thing different about her that the men could see.

While she threw, Beane leaned against the back of the bullpen, jawing with the other men.

"That's pretty good BP right there," he said to Geren.

"She got a little nervous at first," Geren replied.

"She's better than some of the guys," Beane said.

Geren nodded. "Mmm-hmm."