

A's News Clips, Sunday, March 27, 2011

A's notebook: Brandon McCarthy earns No. 5 spot in starting rotation

By Joe Stiglich, Contra Costa Times

PHOENIX -- The A's starting rotation came into focus Saturday as manager Bob Geren announced right-hander Brandon McCarthy as his fifth starter.

McCarthy, a 6-foot-7 right-hander, joins Trevor Cahill and left-handers Brett Anderson, Gio Gonzalez and Dallas Braden, who will precede McCarthy in that order.

Signed to a one-year, \$1 million deal in December, McCarthy is 1-1 with a 4.50 ERA in six appearances (three starts) in the Cactus League. His ERA inflated after a poor outing Friday against the Los Angeles Angels, when he allowed 10 hits and six earned runs.

But McCarthy, 27, strung together a series of strong performances before that while showing pinpoint control. He's struck out 20 and walked just one in 26 innings, a main factor in Geren's choosing him over right-hander Tyson Ross.

"He's got some previous experience and had a great spring," Geren said before a 4-1 loss to the Colorado Rockies. "It wasn't an easy decision and I'm happy it wasn't. That means guys are throwing the ball well."

McCarthy is 20-24 with a 4.56 ERA in 110 career games (56 starts) with the Chicago White Sox and Texas Rangers. But injuries have limited him to 45 appearances in the majors since 2007. He suffered stress fractures in his right shoulder in 2007 and 2009, and inflammation in his right forearm sidelined him for the first four months of 2008.

Given those setbacks, winning a rotation spot is an accomplishment. But McCarthy said he wouldn't spend much time celebrating.

"That's the trap you can fall into with spring," he said. "It's the beginning of a six-month journey. It's a nice accomplishment to leave here with that spot, but you want to keep earning that for the next six months."

Either Ross or Bobby Cramer, a lefty, is likely to make the seven-man bullpen.

Ross, who has allowed just one earned run in 15 1/3 innings, could have the inside track to a spot given the relief experience he gained last season as a rookie. Cramer was a reliever through parts of four minor league seasons but has never relieved in the majors.

The A's view Ross, ranked as their No. 4 prospect by Baseball America, as a potential starter. Is he more valuable as a major league reliever now, or should they let him gain seasoning as a Triple-A starter?

Six spots in the bullpen figure to go lefties Brian Fuentes, Craig Breslow and Jerry Blevins and right-handers Grant Balfour, Michael Wuertz and Brad Ziegler. With closer Andrew Bailey likely to start the season on the DL -- he's nursing a forearm strain and still isn't throwing -- a spot is open for either Cramer or Ross.

Joey Devine has been slow to round into form and likely requires time in the minors.

Geren penciled in a lineup Saturday night that he said will "more than likely" be his opening night lineup Friday against the Seattle Mariners. The lone exception was Andy LaRoche starting at third base for Kevin Kouzmanoff.

Center fielder Coco Crisp led off, followed by first baseman Daric Barton, right fielder David DeJesus, left fielder Josh Willingham, designated hitter Hideki Matsui, catcher Kurt Suzuki, second baseman Mark Ellis, La Roche and shortstop Cliff Pennington.

The A's radio situation remains hazy as a snag in the team's negotiations to buy flagship station KRTB 860-AM has left it unclear if its games will continue airing on the station. If a broadcasting agreement isn't reached, the A's could approach another station -- KFRC 1550-AM is one possibility -- to carry its games.

Interestingly, the A's issued a release Friday saying "radio broadcasts will resume Monday" with the start of the Bay Bridge Series but did not specify KTRB as the station that would carry them.

Willingham left the game in the bottom of the sixth with a bruised right foot after being hit by a pitch from Franklin Morales. No X-rays were planned but Geren said Willingham won't play in Sunday's Cactus League finale against the Rockies.

Chin Music: Brandon McCarthy named A's fifth starter; first game under the lights at Phoenix Muni

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 3/26/2011 5:08PM

Brandon McCarthy has won the A's fifth starter battle, manager Bob Geren said in his pregame media briefing. I'm not surprised by the decision, even after Friday's poor outing against the Angels. McCarthy has been very sharp the entire spring. His ERA inflated to 4.50 because of Friday's performance, but the guy struck out 20 and walked one in 26 innings. I don't think you make a snap judgement based on one bad late-spring start.

Geren said the other two fifth starter candidates — right-hander Tyson Ross and lefty Bobby Cramer — are candidates for a bullpen spot. I'd say it's pretty certain one will make the team. Right now, I'm penciling in Brian Fuentes, Grant Balfour, Craig Breslow, Michael Wuertz, Brad Ziegler and Jerry Blevins for six of the seven spots. Unless Andrew Bailey proves he's ready (he hasn't even started throwing) or Joey Devine convinces the front office he's sharp enough (also unlikely, though he's slated to pitch tonight), you figure Ross or Cramer will be kept. The issue is whether the A's want to use Ross — a highly regarded prospect as a starter — as a big league reliever or let him start at Triple-A.

"That's a decision we'll have to make at some point," Geren said. "I'm just happy with the way he's throwing."

Ross has been terrific this spring (0.59 ERA in five appearances, two starts), but something tells me he just needs more polishing in the minors. Having said that, I'm expecting the A's to keep him for the big league bullpen. He got relief experience last season, and he's more of a known quantity in the bullpen than Cramer. ...

—The first (and only) night game of the season at Phoenix Muni awaits us tonight. I think there's a little extra life for these, just because it feels like a regular-season game. Fittingly, Geren said his lineup tonight will likely be the opening day lineup Friday against the Seattle Mariners (except Kevin Kouzmanoff has tonight off, w/Andy LaRoche playing third base) ...

Crisp CFm Barton 1B, DeJesus RF, Willingham LF, Matsui DH, Suzuki C, Ellis 2B, LaRoche 3B, Pennington SS, Cahill RHP

—Let's hear some thoughts on this lineup (and the fifth starter decision) ...

Monte Poole: Dirty gossip percolating of possible Oakland A's, Tampa Bay Rays contraction

By Monte Poole. Bay Area News Group

As the A's vacate Arizona and head back to the home they want to abandon, their fans in the East Bay have moved past anxiety and settled into the drowsy fatigue that comes with two years awaiting reply to a simple question:

Is the future in Oakland or San Jose?

Meanwhile, there's a nasty whisper circulating about baseball that it might be neither, that the A's could be devoured by their associates.

The preferred term is "contraction," a cold concept in any business but especially so if you're among the multitude who have spent some or all of the last 43 years investing your hearts, throats and credit cards in the Oakland club.

Though the likelihood of contraction is about the same as that of A's manager Bob Geren being replaced by Shooty Babitt, any prolonged gestation period is bound to hatch innuendo and speculation. And, yes, it has been exactly 24 months since commissioner Bud Selig promised a "blue ribbon panel" would evaluate the team's future options.

This latest gossip comes with details juicy enough to quench the thirst of anyone seeking a tall glass of conspiracy.

According to veteran New York Post baseball columnist Joel Sherman, "a person involved with baseball labor" recently acknowledged that contraction, previously discussed in relation to the Montreal Expos and Minnesota Twins, has been refloated, with the A's and Tampa Bay Rays as candidates.

Why the A's and Rays? Because no two franchises have more frequent fantasies of fleeing their ballparks, Selig hates both yards and -- here's where it gets particularly delicious -- he could finagle a soft landing for two owners for whom he has an affinity.

In this scenario, A's co-owners Lew Wolff and John Fisher get the Los Angeles Dodgers, with Rays owner Stu Sternberg getting the New York Mets. It's kind of like Jeffrey Loria went from owning the Expos, making them disappear, and getting the Florida Marlins.

If there is an owner Selig wants to dump, it's Frank McCourt, whose stewardship of the Dodgers has been by turns bizarre and inept, and whose messy divorce is both a financial beehive and an ongoing embarrassment to the, ahem, sanctity of the sport.

If there is an owner whose predicament gnaws at Bud, it's Fred Wilpon of the Mets. The Wilpon family has acute financial losses related to its involvement with the infamous Bernie Madoff, serving a 150-year term for running the granddaddy of all Ponzi schemes.

With McCourt as the tack in Bud's loafers and the Wilpons as a constant case of heartburn, it's easy to imagine Selig nudging them toward the same door through which the minority owners of the old Expos were tossed. Bud would be happier, healthier and more willing to embrace retirement when his term ends after the 2012 season.

It would be a win for Selig, a win for his old frat brother Wolff -- or as Bud refers to him, "Lewie" -- and a win for Sternberg.

Furthermore, this would complete a rout by the Giants, who stridently and consistently have defended San Jose as their turf and surely would recognize and exploit the advantages of a local baseball monopoly.

It's victories all around -- except for baseball fans in the Bay Area, A's fans in particular, and fans in the Tampa-St. Petersburg metro area. Has there ever been the slightest indication Selig gives a hoot about them?

There is this view among certain owners outside Oakland and Tampa Bay that through revenue sharing they are subsidizing the A's, Rays and several other franchises where too many seats sit vacant.

"The A's are hamstrung by the situation," one source told AOL FanHouse during the winter meetings. "They are always going to be a small-money, small-market team while they are playing in the Coliseum."

This conveniently ignores local response to captivating, contending teams at the Oakland Coliseum. Attendance thrived under the Haas ownership and had its moments under Steve Schott and Ken Hofmann before being systematically sheared off by Wolff.

The point, however, is Selig and the owners want the A's out of the Coliseum, the Rays out of that homely dome in St. Pete, McCourt out of L.A. and Wilpon out of New York. It's a solution for Bud, pending other considerations.

Thankfully for both Bay Areas, other considerations exist. No union in the world is stronger than the MLB Players Association, which wouldn't stand for a proposal eliminating 50 jobs, 25 players from each contracted team.

This is not the kind of road down which Selig, monitoring labor strife in the NFL and perhaps the NBA, dares to travel.

So we're back to the blue-ribbon committee snoozing indefinitely, San Jose remaining on hold and the A's in Oakland. It's still home, at least for now, perhaps for as long as they exist.

Oakland A's news, March 27

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Brandon McCarthy has dealt with stress fractures in his right shoulder much of the past four years, so making the A's rotation Saturday was a good moment for the free-agent acquisition - but nothing more than that.

"It's only the start of things," McCarthy said. "It's a nice accomplishment, but I know I want to keep earning that over the next six months."

When officially naming McCarthy to the fifth spot, manager **Bob Geren** pointed to McCarthy's experience and most notable spring numbers: one walk and 20 strikeouts.

Those were the types of walk-to-strikeout numbers that McCarthy once put up in the minors, he said, but he didn't match that in his big-league seasons because he didn't have the same confidence at the time. Since changing his style of pitching from power arm to relying more on movement, McCarthy said, he's better able to get back to that emphasis on control.

"Keeping walks down is essential," he said. "The most successful guys in the league are pretty consistent doing that."

Fifth-starter candidates **Tyson Ross** and **Bobby Cramer** are possibilities for the bullpen, but the A's might decide to keep Ross in the rotation at Triple-A Sacramento in the event that they need an emergency starter.

Bailey pain-free, does 'sock throwing': Closer **Andrew Bailey** might play catch today for the first time since tearing scar tissue in his surgically repaired right elbow nearly two weeks ago.

Deemed pain free and without tightness in the right forearm area he'd strained, Bailey threw a baseball 25 times Saturday - inside a sock attached to his arm, allowing for full range of motion in a controlled environment.

"You can concentrate more on the feel than on throwing," Bailey said. "It went well, everything is smooth in there."

Radio silence: Saturday night's broadcast did not air on KTRB (860 AM), nor will today's, and the A's cited technical difficulties outside the team's control.

One source said that the broadcasts will resume Monday, and team owner **Lew Wolff** said in an e-mail to The Chronicle that the club will be "ready to broadcast all our 2011 games," though he did not specify that that meant on 860 AM. (All broadcasts remained on non-KTRB affiliates this weekend.)

The A's are trying to purchase the station, which is in receivership, and they are the only known bidder.

This winter, the station signed off at sundown so the receiver could avoid the costs of powering the night-time transmitter, which is gas-fueled. The A's pay for the transmitter costs for their broadcasts.

Briefly: **Rich Harden** said he believes he's close to throwing off the front of the mound. ... **Joey Devine** will throw in the A's game today. ... Oakland won't have the DH today.

Drumbeat: Strangeness under lights, Geren and Barton tossed, Willingham hit on foot

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Phoenix Muni 3/26/2011 10:14PM

With a late one here and the A's beat already packed full, all of the wacky events of tonight are going into tomorrow's paper in the little recap area without much explanation, so here goes:

Josh Willingham, hit on the right foot by a pitch from Franklin Morales in the sixth, didn't get X-rays but he said he won't play tomorrow in the Cactus League finale. It sounds as if he's pointing toward the Bay Bridge series opener on Monday if possible. He's been hit a team-high four times this spring.

Manager Bob Geren and Daric Barton were both ejected in seventh after a play at first base in which minor-league umpire Chris Ward called Ian Stewart safe when the ball came out of Barton's glove. Barton argued that he'd gotten the out, and the ball came out only as he was transferring it - he pointed out that the play was on one side of the line and the ball came out well on the other, and the only way that could happen would be on the transfer.

Geren came out to ask Ward to ask the other umpires for help on the play, and after some jawing back and forth, Geren was tossed. After the inning, Barton was leaving the field, got run by Ward, and he ran back onto the field to confront Ward, then was hauled backward by teammates. Barton said that as he was leaving the field, he told Ward that all he'd wanted was for Ward to check with the rest of the crew. Ward asked Barton if he was done, Barton said, "No..." and was going to restate his position, but upon hearing "No," Ward had had enough.

"I know I was right," Barton said. "It's spring training, but I feel strong about my beliefs."

Starter Trevor Cahill (who was charged with an error on the play) liked the strong emotions demonstrated with the ejections, and he thought that playing at night might have contributed.

"I think it's good to see guys take these games seriously," he said. "Not that they don't, anyway, but it seemed like there was that extra level of intensity. I think that at night, there's a little bit of a different feel. The spring (day) games have a resort feel almost."

Cahill was happy he worked into the seventh two starts in a row as he gears up for Opening Night. He allowed seven hits and three runs, two earned (the A's made four errors in all) and he struck out five. Carlos Gonzalez (remember him?) homered off Cahill in the sixth.

Hideki Matsui ended a string of 20 plate appearances without a hit with a ninth-inning single over third, a jam shot. I asked him if that's the sort of hit - sort of a cheapy - that hitters always say are the ones that get them turned around, and Matsui responded in English, "I hope so," with a big smile.

Geren thought that Matsui's bat speed was good tonight and he liked his at-bats. "He's going to be fine," Geren said.

Other items of note: Grant Balfour gave up a hit and a run, but it was unearned, and he struck out two men in his one inning of work. Michael Wuertz had his best outing, pitching a scoreless ninth and hitting one batter.

Geren said after the game that the A's starters for the Bay Bridge series will be Brett Anderson, Gio Gonzalez and Dallas Braden.

I know that Willie Eyre, brother of former Giants pitcher Scott Eyre, will be among the players the A's are borrowing from the minors for the series.

Hideki Matsui

Gentle, gracious Godzilla arrives in the Bay Area

By Susan Slusser, CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

PHOENIX — When Japanese sports hero Hideki Matsui joined the Yankees in 2003, the team's stadium facilities couldn't accommodate the onslaught of media interest. Instead, the slugger was introduced in a huge hotel ballroom in Manhattan.

"People were falling out of the rafters," WFAN reporter Sweeny Murti said. "It was a frenzied scene. I remember going around asking, 'Hey, can you tell me which one is Ringo?' " The Beatles' 1964 splash in America was a popular reference point that day, but for Matsui, it was business as usual. He was the most popular player for the most popular team in his baseball-mad country.

Eight years later, he's still treated like royalty, and beginning this week he presides in Oakland. Matsui, 36, has brought his prodigious star power and home run total to the A's. He is the most prominent native Japanese athlete ever to be based in the Bay Area, and he brings Oakland, the secondary team in a twoteam market, instant international recognition.

Matsui comes with his own translator, Roger Kahlon, and his own press corps — dozens of reporters and photographers from the Japanese media. Most of Oakland's games will be broadcast on TV in Japan.

A true superstar

In the spotlight, Matsui shrugs. “This is normal for me,” he said recently. Unfailingly polite and friendly, Matsui is an accessible and unassuming celebrity — though he does maintain strict privacy about his family. He accepts his role as a hero in his home country and has stepped up during the earthquake and tsunami disaster by donating more than \$600,000 to the relief effort.

The A’s players and management got a sense of Matsui’s stardom when they opened the major-league season in Tokyo three years ago. Having starred for Japan’s dominant sports franchise, Tokyo’s Yomiuri Giants, he remained the nation’s most visible pitcher even after taking his bat to the United States.

“I want to be like Matsui,” Oakland starter Dallas Braden said, remembering the crossocean road trip. “Over there, he’s on a building changing diapers. On the building across the street, he’s doing laundry.

On the next corner, he’s drinking a beer. He’s everywhere. I’d be happy if I’m in the background behind him, waving.”

For this season, the A’s have picked up some major Japanese corporate sponsors, including Capcom, Fujitsu and Komatsu.

(Other possible deals are on hold because of the catastrophes in Japan.) The team saw an immediate increase in ticket sales when Matsui signed, Japanese tour groups have reserved ballpark suites, and the A’s sold out of Matsui jerseys at spring training.

Big man in Japan

Matsui isn’t just a big star, he is physically large, too, especially in comparison with most of his countrymen. He was given the name “Godzilla” while still a teenager, as much for his muscular 6-foot-2 frame as for his frightening power when hitting a baseball.

Matsui’s father, Masao, said that his son stood out among his peers, even as a young child in Nomi, on the west coast of central Japan.

“We have a summer festival each year with lots of street vendors, and one of them saw Hideki walking by and thought he was an adult, so he asked Hideki to take over the stall for a few minutes because the vendor was so busy,” Masao Matsui said through translator Yuko Inatsuki. “I walked by the stand and thought, ‘There’s a guy selling stuff.’ Then I realized it was my son. He was about 10.”

Matsui was head and shoulders above the other kids when it came to baseball, so much so that he decided to hit left-handed, even though he is naturally a right-handed hitter. Matsui’s explanation for hitting lefty is that his older brother, Toshiki, hit left-handed and he wanted to follow suit, but it is well accepted in Japan’s Matsui lore that Hideki hit such long homers right-handed that he turned around in the batter’s box so he wouldn’t outshine his brother and the other children.

That didn’t work. Matsui was so superior that he spent most of his high-school career getting walked intentionally, a teenage Barry Bonds. When he was intentionally walked five times in a row in the top high school tournament — one of the premier sporting events in Japan — it caused a national uproar.

“I wasn’t really frustrated by getting walked five times, it’s more that our team lost the game,” said Matsui, who typically downplays any individual achievement.

Landing in New York

Matsui went on to fame and fortune with Yomiuri, and he hit 332 home runs in 10 seasons in Japan, where he was named the league’s most valuable player three times. Leaving to join the Yankees in 2003 at age 29 wasn’t easy, according to Matsui, who said, “The Giants have a huge fan base, so it was a difficult decision, thinking about the fans who had cheered for me and supported me for so long.”

After the Beatles-like ballroom debut, Matsui struggled to adjust to major-league pitching. But Yankees manager Joe Torre remained impressed.

“That spring, I remember standing behind the cage talking about how well Hideki hit the ball the other way, and I wanted to know if he’d be comfortable if I used him to hit and- run, but I didn’t want to offend him — I mean, he’s a 50 home-run hitter,” said Torre, who won four World Series in 11 seasons as the Yankees’ manager. “But Hideki said, ‘Whatever you want.’ Well, you had to like him right away.”

Matsui figured out the pitching and became a key part of the New York lineup. He was twice an All-Star, but his finest hour was the 2009 World Series, when he hit .615 with three homers and eight RBIs and won the Series MVP award.

Matsui was just as reliable inside the clubhouse, where he picked up enough English to get by in conversations with teammates. What impressed the Yankees the most was his ability to deal with constant demands from Japanese and American reporters.

"Hideki was incredibly gracious," Yankees teammate Jason Giambi said. "He always apologized about how much media there was, but he made it easy for us. He didn't need to apologize. The media was already crazy in New York anyway."

Respect from reporters

The hard-bitten New York press swooned for Matsui.

"That first year, he had Japanese and U.S. reporters asking him before and after every game, 'Why aren't you hitting home runs?' Four times a day," longtime Yankees broadcaster Suzyn Waldman said. "And he never lost his patience once.

Such dignity."

The Japanese media reveres Matsui, too, so much so that when he got married in 2008, they honored his request to keep his personal life private.

His wife's name is not listed in the A's media guide, unlike other players, and Matsui declined to give her name to New York reporters when he announced his nuptials — although he did hold up a line drawing of his bride that he had sketched. He said only that she was 25, Japanese and had worked for a reputable Japanese company.

One aspect of his life he's happy to share is his love of fine dining. A major reason Matsui decided to make San Francisco his Bay Area home is because of its cuisine. After sharing with a reporter his plans, he had a follow-up request: "You need to tell me some good restaurants."

Matsui occasionally mixes business with pleasure by going out to eat with the Japanese reporters who otherwise would respect his privacy. His warm relationship with them is cited as a major reason for his popularity.

Shaped early in life

Matsui pegs an incident during his teen years as a way to understand his demeanor today. In the one time that anyone remembers him letting his temper show, he threw a bat after an intentional walk.

He was sharply reprimanded by his manager and took the lesson to heart. "You are trained from a young age to respect your equipment," Matsui said. "It was something that probably contributed to my personality, along with my parents and my schooling."

Masao Matsui said he never has become used to seeing his son's picture all over Tokyo, but it gladdens his heart that his son has such a sterling reputation.

"As a parent, it is a great pleasure to know that people like Hideki not just as a baseball player, but as a person," Masao Matsui said. "I feel lucky to have a son that people love for who he is, not just what he does."

A's tab McCarthy to be their fifth starter

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- A's manager Bob Geren filled out his rotation on Saturday afternoon by naming offseason acquisition Brandon McCarthy as the team's fifth starter.

The right-hander, who beat out Tyson Ross and Bobby Cramer in the competition, will follow fellow righty Trevor Cahill and lefties Brett Anderson, Gio Gonzalez and Dallas Braden in an elite Oakland rotation that is expected to be one of the league's best.

"I'm happy," McCarthy said. "It's a great opportunity. I'm just excited to be a part of those four guys that they already have running out there. It's a pretty solid rotation I'm joining, and it's exciting to know I have to do my part to hold up my end of the bargain."

"He obviously has a little bit of previous experience, and he's had a great spring," Geren said. "He's only had one walk and 20 strikeouts, which is obviously a good indicator of how well he's throwing."

Those numbers spanned six games -- three starts -- and 26 innings, the most by any A's pitcher this spring. McCarthy's lone walk came in Friday's shaky outing against the Angels, against whom he endured his worst start of the spring and allowed six earned runs in 5 1/3 frames. Four came in a messy third inning.

"He really only had one rough inning all spring," Geren said. "Other than that, he's been very good."

The announcement follows several injury-prone years for the 27-year-old McCarthy, who has been limited to 22 Major League starts over the last three seasons because of shoulder problems. He was 4-2 with a 3.36 ERA in 11 appearances for Triple-A Oklahoma City in the Rangers' organization last year before signing with the A's as a free agent.

Those experiences have lent McCarthy a welcoming perspective on his role with a new team.

"It's nice, but it's only the start of things," he said. "The trap you fall into in the spring is that you set so many goals to make the team and to get through healthy, but it's only the beginning of a six-month journey. It's a nice accomplishment to get, to leave here with that spot, but I know that I want to keep earning it the next six months."

McCarthy, a 17th-round Draft pick by the White Sox in 2002, has compiled 56 starts in parts of five Major League seasons. He owns a career 17-18 mark as a starter with a 4.58 ERA and has averaged 5.8 strikeouts and 1.7 walks per nine innings.

With the rotation set, Geren will continue to closely watch Ross and Cramer as he looks to round out the bullpen with a long-relief option. Ross has posted a 0.59 ERA through 15 1/3 Cactus League innings while Cramer, scheduled to pitch Sunday, has pitched to a 7.24 ERA in 13 2/3 frames. Cramer's dismal numbers are partially a result of one forgettable outing against the White Sox on March 18, when he allowed eight runs in just three innings.

"The other guys have been going good, too, and it wasn't an easy decision, but I'm happy it was a difficult decision," Geren said. "That means everyone was throwing the ball well. The other two guys are still candidates to make the team in a different role, and I let them both know that. Everybody will keep pushing on, keep pitching."

Ross, who was a surprise roster pick out of camp last year, made 26 appearances with the A's before being sent to Triple-A Sacramento at the beginning of July to get stretched out as a starter. The hard-throwing right-hander was shut down in August because of a strained right elbow, but his regained health has allowed him to resume starting duties again.

Starting is his preferred role, but he's made it clear he'd be just as satisfied breaking camp in a relief role. Whether the A's allow him to return to bullpen duties or keep him as a starter in Sacramento to begin the season has yet to be determined.

"That's a decision we'll have to make at some point," Geren said. "I'm mostly encouraged about Tyson and his development this spring. He's been pounding the strike zone with good fastball command. He's got such a high ceiling, such big potential in whatever he does."

Cahill tosses seven solid innings in A's loss

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Outfielder Carlos Gonzalez belted his first home run of the spring on Saturday and helped the Rockies to a 4-1 victory over righty Trevor Cahill and the A's at Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

Gonzalez, facing his former Oakland club, launched a 2-1 pitch off Cahill to deep right field in the top of the sixth inning. It represented the second run of the night for the Rockies, who scored their first run in the fifth when Ty Wigginton reached first on a throwing error from Cliff Pennington and advanced to third on an Ian Stewart single before making his way home on a throwing miscue by Cahill.

The A's right-hander, who was named the club's Opening Night starter this week, went seven innings, giving up three runs (two earned) on seven hits while striking out five and walking none in his final spring start.

For Colorado, right-handed starter Jason Hammel compiled 5 1/3 shutout innings, offering up just four hits with three strikeouts and one walk.

Oakland third baseman Andy LaRoche, who is making his last push for a roster spot as a backup infielder, collected two hits. The Rockies' Chris Iannetta tallied three hits.

Up next for the A's: Lefty Bobby Cramer, in the mix for a long-relief spot, will start Sunday's road contest against the Rockies at Salt River Fields at Talking Stick in Scottsdale, Ariz., beginning at 1:05 p.m. PT on Gameday Audio. It marks the final Cactus League game for the A's, who return to the Bay Area on Monday to begin a set of three exhibition games against the Giants.

Up next for the Rockies: Rockies Opening Day pitcher Ubaldo Jimenez will make his final spring appearance in a split-squad game at Salt River Fields at Talking Stick against the A's at 1:05 p.m. on Sunday on Gameday Audio. The rest of the Rockies will play the Cubs in Mesa, Ariz., at 1:05 p.m. with Clayton Mortensen pitching on MLB.TV. Relievers Matt Daley and Eric Stults, who are in the mix for a relief spot, will pitch against the Cubs.

Bolstered lineup, pitching depth make A's contenders

Art Spander, San Francisco Examiner, 3/27/2011

So the Giants finally have their World Series win. As A's loyalists like to point out, that leaves San Francisco three behind the team from Oakland — a team suddenly more relevant than Lew Wolff's desperate attempts to move to San Jose or the whispered hints of Major League Baseball to contract the franchise into oblivion.

One remembers that slogan on the billboard at the eastern section of the Bay Bridge put up by the A's: "While they were building a ballpark, we were building a team." Also that other little zinger, "No splash hits, four world championships."

The Giants eventually built their team, along with their park, splashing their way to a championship.

For 2011, although still in the Coliseum, the A's have rebuilt their team, or at least they added pieces they lacked last season when Oakland, almost unnoticed because of what was going on at AT&T Park, finished with an 81-81 record.

With virtually no hitting.

Oakland signed Hideki Matsui, Josh Willingham and David DeJesus in the offseason, players intended to bring offense to a franchise that — because of a pitching staff many believe is the best in the American League — already had defense.

It's a formula that worked across the Bay.

If the other team doesn't score, you can't lose. Then again, if you don't score, you can't win.

Thus Billy Beane, Mr. Moneyball himself, got DeJesus, a career .289 hitter who — as the baseball maven Joe Sheehan pointed out — "usually is good for 45 extra-base hits a season."

Beane (who is comfortable with manager Bob Geren, and that is where the building process begins) acquired Willingham, who has a career .475 slugging percentage. Beane lured Matsui, who has a .479 slugging percentage and, much like Willingham, usually delivers no fewer than 20 homers. When he's not hurt.

Oh, the dreaded disabled list, the A's personal Hades, the place you could find such former stars as Bobby Crosby and Eric Chavez, along with numerous pitchers.

Indeed, when All-Star closer Andrew Bailey was forced to see a doctor in mid-March because of tightness in his elbow, the thought was, "Oh no, there they go again."

The prognosis for Bailey was encouraging. Still, his problem was a reminder the A's for once must avoid sore arms, stiff backs and other diverse and Sunday ailments if they are to win.

Yes, win — a word permissible in conversations about the '11 A's.

Oakland finished nine games back of the Texas Rangers, who of course made it to the World Series, to be beaten by the Giants. But Cliff Lee is gone from the Rangers, and pitchers Brian Fuentes and Grant Balfour have come to the A's.

"I feel this is a team that could be really near the front from the beginning," A's reliever Brad Ziegler said. "We're sick of being the pushover in the division."

The pushover was the Seattle Mariners. The A's were merely break-even, at worst mediocre. The question is, will they be able to break out? And can they do it quickly enough to bring enough fans to their stadium so Wolff's follies are ignored?

There's nothing like having a team in the race to keep people attentive.

So the Coliseum is a stadium, not a ballpark. So A's management irritatingly puts tarps on seats in the upper deck, sort of an ostrich-in-the-sand philosophy that what isn't seen is out of sight.

Those issues become trivial if Dallas Braden throws strikes and Matsui drives a few into the bleachers.

"The front office went out and made some moves to hopefully make us better," was the statement to MLB.com from Ziegler,

who then offered the eternal A's caveat.

"If we can stay healthy," he said, "we should definitely be better."

Cross your fingers, but not to the point where you can injure them.

Story lines for Baseball 2011

By Bob Klapisch / The Record

There are a million precious nuggets woven into the fabric of the 2011 season _ including the surprises waiting to happen (the A's), emerging powerhouses (**Red Sox [team stats]**), the rich (**Yankees**), the poor (Mets), the beautiful (the Phillies' rotation) and the hopeless (Mariners).

So how does it all shake out? It's not hard to imagine a Red Sox-Phillies World Series, but, granted, it's a long road to October, detours everywhere.

Here are 11 signposts along the way:

- The effect of the 2010 workload on the Giants' rotation.

Tim Lincecum, Matt Cain and Jonathan Sanchez, all in their 20s, pitched to career-highs in innings last year, including the postseason. That's a modern-day formula for year-after fatigue, if not breakdown. The Giants have the National League's second-best rotation after the Phillies, good enough to win the West. But that's only if everyone stays healthy, notably the 170-pound Lincecum, who's thrown over 700 innings since 2008 and has led the NL in strikeouts three years in a row.

- Chase Utley's long-term health.

We might as well add Brad Lidge's shoulder, and Domonic Brown's fractured hand as reasons why the Phillies' might not be the NL East monolith everyone predicted. The Braves, younger and potentially more explosive, might be the better bet over 162 games. But the Phillies' rotation still makes them deadly in October. Utley's stay on the DL has no expiration date, however - he's suffering from patella tendinitis - which is worrisome to team officials.

- Robinson Cano's April.

Another clarification. We really meant Mark Teixeira's first month and a half, when he'll either solidify his hold on the No. 3 spot or else abdicate to Cano. The fulcrum, of course, is Alex Rodriguez, who needs lineup protection to hit 40-plus homers. If he does, the Yankees could score 900 runs, which they failed to do last year (859). Cano is dying to hit third, but doesn't want to embarrass or disrespect Teixeira by asking too loudly.

- Hideki Matsui's home run production.

The A's would've preferred Adrian Beltre _ he turned down a five-year, \$64 million offer to sign with Texas _ but think they found a suitable Door No. 2 in the former Yankee slugger. If Matsui hits even a little, Oakland might score enough runs to support its impressive starting rotation, which had the AL's lowest ERA (3.47) in 2010. The only thing that might suppress Matsui's power is the Coliseum, which was 28th in the majors last year in home run park factor.

- Carlos Beltran's knee, Jose Reyes' on-base percentage.

Sorry, Met fans, but the sooner Beltran heals and the more disciplined Reyes becomes at the plate, the faster they'll be traded. The Wilpons desperately need the cash relief, and have to move both contracts as soon as possible. That, of course, presumes they even hold on to the team. As the **New York Times [NYT]** reported the other day, the Mets lost \$50 million last year. It appears ownership has little or no liquidity to go along with negative cash flow as it tries to fend off Irving Picard's \$1 billion claw-back lawsuit from the Bernie Madoff scandal.

- The Red Sox' disabled list (crowded or not?)

The Sox were likely the AL's best team in 2010 had it not been for injuries. They led the league in total trips to the DL (23) and finished fourth with more than 1,050 games lost to disablement. In all, Boston lost (paid) more than \$20 million to players who were injured. So it's worth watching to see how last year's wounded _ **Dustin Pedroia [stats]**, **Jacoby Ellsbury [stats]**, **Josh Beckett [stats]**, **Kevin Youkilis [stats]**, among others _ rebound this year.

- Miguel Cabrera's off-field issues.

The Tigers are the longest of long shots, a vault of potential that could self-destruct at any moment. Still, the talent is enviable enough to foresee an upset of the Twins in the Central - but only if manager Jim Leyland can influence the troubled Cabrera to focus on baseball and continue to get help for an admitted alcohol problem. In addition, Leyland will have to assert his authority over right-hander Brad Penny, another talented rogue who could lead the Tigers into a successful summer. Either that, or the 66-year-old Leyland will be on the bullet train to retirement.

- Scott Rolen's durability.

The Reds are the slight favorites in the NL Central, now that the Cardinals have lost their ace, Adam Wainwright. Cincinnati was the league leader in runs, HRs and OPS last year, and figures to hold on to that crown in '11 _ assuming Rolen, one of the offense's most important cogs, can stay healthy. He has chronic back issues that've limited him to 128 and 133 games in the last two seasons, respectively. This spring, Rolen only played every other day, as Dusty Baker is trying to preserve an important asset. Last year Rolen still hit 20 HRs in 471 at-bats.

- **Barry Bonds'** perjury trial.

It'll be bad news for Roger Clemens if Bonds is found guilty in the trial that's currently taking place in San Francisco. Most everyone is sick of steroids, the feds' pursuit of a conviction and, certainly, Bonds himself. But this trial isn't really about juicing or even baseball - it's about lying under oath. Clemens should've never gone on "60 Minutes" to broadcast his innocence. His lawyers have been in the courtroom during Bonds' trial, ostensibly taking notes, but no doubt, sweating.

- Freddie Freeman's initiation in Atlanta.

The Braves think Freeman, a left-handed hitting first baseman, will be a notch better than Ike Davis, which is no small endorsement. Davis was a pleasant surprise for the Mets, hitting 19 homers in his rookie season. Freeman joins the Braves after hitting .319 with 18 HRs and 87 RBI in Class AAA last year, winning the International League Rookie of the Year award. The Braves could use the boost at first base, where in 2010 they finished 10th or lower in batting average, slugging percentage, total bases, runs scored and extra base hits. Freeman will be a nice gift to manager Fredi Gonzalez, who is looking to capture some of last year's leftover momentum. In Bobby Cox' final season, the Braves won 25 games in their final at-bat.

- Don Mattingly's communication skills.

Will Donnie Baseball copy Joe Torre's laid-back demeanor? Will he take on any of coach Larry Bowa's in-your-face qualities? Or has Mattingly distilled his mentors' traits into his own, unique style? The Dodgers' success depends on how well Mattingly transitions from former Yankee great, to astute hitting instructor, bench coach and now, finally, big league manager. The Dodgers were a sulking, underachieving team in the second half of 2010, finishing 31-43, as Torre lost his touch, if not his control of the clubhouse. It's up to Mattingly to prove he's his own man.

Athletics and Rays Build What They're Able To

By TYLER KEPNER, NY Times, 3/27/2011

The great stadium building boom began in the American League, with a flurry of grass-and-dirt ballparks sprouting in the early 1990s. From the South Side of Chicago to the railyards in Baltimore to the heart of downtown Cleveland and a parking lot in Arlington, Tex., nearly everyone was moving out and moving up — or, at least, remodeling their existing homes.

Some 20 years later, two A.L. teams are stuck with no escape hatch from their outdated buildings. The Oakland Athletics and the Tampa Bay Rays used to trumpet new stadium designs — a tech-savvy park for the A's in Fremont, Calif., and a palace for the Rays on the St. Petersburg, Fla., waterfront, with a retractable roof that looked like a giant sail. But those plans have been scrapped.

Two years ago, Commissioner Bud Selig formed a committee to study a new Athletics ballpark, but it has produced no answers. Last month, Selig said there was no timetable for a resolution. "I'm confident we'll work our way through it," he said. In the meantime, the Athletics and the Rays do the best they can — and, even without the revenue a new stadium could generate, they have reason for hope.

Oakland lost its top free-agent target, third baseman Adrian Beltre, to the West division-rival Texas Rangers, who won their first American League pennant last October. The Rangers are very good, but they will miss Cliff Lee and rely heavily on C. J. Wilson and Colby Lewis, who have just one year of success as major league starters and last season logged far more innings than ever before.

Neftali Feliz, the rookie of the year as a closer last season, prepared as a starter in spring training but will return to the bullpen for the regular season.

"We're going to go as far as our pitching," Rangers General Manager Jon Daniels said. "We have talent there, we have guys that performed there last year and talented guys coming up behind them. But you can't take anything for granted."

The Rangers will hit, much more than the [Seattle Mariners](#) and more than the [Los Angeles Angels](#), whose first baseman, Kendrys Morales, will start the season on the disabled list after surgery last June to repair the leg he broke by [leaping on home plate](#) after a game-winning home run.

The Rangers will also outslug the Athletics, but if pitching matters most, expect Oakland to take the division. The A's boast a rotation led by Dallas Braden, 27, and three starters 25 or younger: Brett Anderson, Trevor Cahill and Gio Gonzalez. The veterans Brian Fuentes and Grant Balfour strengthen a deep bullpen.

"The starting pitching and the closing relief, those are the two areas that definitely stand out with this team," designated hitter [Hideki Matsui](#), who left the Angels to sign with Oakland, said through an interpreter. "Whenever I faced them, I just never had that many opportunities to score runs."

Matsui, David DeJesus and Josh Willingham should help the Athletics' offense, and the team needs more from Coco Crisp, Kurt Suzuki and Kevin Kouzmanoff. That lineup will remind nobody of the [Bash Brothers](#)' chemically enhanced heyday, but when the A's have talented young pitchers in bulk — Tim Hudson, Mark Mulder and [Barry Zito](#) in the early 2000s; Dan Haren, Joe Blanton and Zito in 2006 — they tend to win.

The road to October will be tougher for the Rays, and they seem likely to fall short. But give them credit for trying. After losing Carl Crawford to the [Boston Red Sox](#) and [Carlos Pena](#) to the [Chicago Cubs](#), the Rays signed Johnny Damon and [Manny Ramirez](#) to one-year contracts. Both are past their primes but can still hit, and symbolize that Joe Maddon's Rays will not concede a division they have won in two of the last three seasons.

"Joe put it best when he said our demise has been greatly exaggerated," pitcher Andy Sonnanstine said. "That's a great way to put it. We are not timid right now. As of right now, we have the American League East until somebody takes it. When I get questions about whether we feel threatened by the [Yankees](#), we look at that the other way around."

Sonnanstine started a World Series game in 2008, but the depth of the Rays' rotation has since shuffled him to long relief. Tampa Bay has serious [bullpen questions](#) but five legitimate starters, with David Price, James Shields, Jeff Niemann, Wade Davis and Jeremy Hellickson.

"I like the five guys we have," Price said. "I feel like it matches up against anybody. We're very confident. If you can run out five quality guys every night, that give you a chance to win, that's what you need."

Alas, for the Rays, the [Toronto Blue Jays](#) and the [Baltimore Orioles](#), the Yankees and the Red Sox are always the bullies on the block. The Red Sox missed the playoffs last season and reacted with a spending bonanza, just as the Yankees did after sitting out October in 2008.

Crawford, Adrian Gonzalez, Bobby Jenks and Dan Wheeler will fortify the lineup and bullpen of a team that has a strong rotation. [Buck Showalter](#), the Orioles' manager, ranted about Red Sox General Manager Theo Epstein in Men's Journal — "You got Carl Crawford 'cause you paid more than anyone else, and that's what makes you smarter?" — showing, if nothing else, that he knows how to appeal to his new fans in Baltimore.

With more spicy comments like that, Showalter could rival the [Chicago White Sox](#)' Ozzie Guillen as the most entertaining manager in baseball. Guillen has a chance to dazzle the national news media again this fall after the White Sox added Adam Dunn to the middle of their lineup. A healthy Jake Peavy would put Chicago's rotation among the game's elite, but the A.L. Central still belongs to the [Minnesota Twins](#).

First baseman Justin Morneau and closer Joe Nathan should be healthy. The Twins have a diverse offense, their usual pitching staff of strike-throwers and depth all around. A stronger overall roster separates them from the top-heavy Detroit Tigers, who may be the A.L. version of the St. Louis Cardinals — a few elite players (in this case, Miguel Cabrera, Justin Verlander, Victor Martinez and perhaps Max Scherzer) and a lot of dead spots. The Tigers' power bullpen, at least, should give them a chance.

The Cleveland Indians and the Kansas City Royals round out the division, but they insist they see better days ahead.

"I'd like to think that we're at a point collectively, as a team, that we're ready to take the next step," Indians General Manager Chris Antonetti said. "We feel like we've infused a lot of talent into the organization, and provided an opportunity for that talent to develop and mature."

The question is how good that talent really is. Catcher Carlos Santana seems like a future star, but now is the time for others acquired in recent trades to prove they belong, especially starters Justin Masterson and Carlos Carrasco, left fielder Michael Brantley and first baseman Matt LaPorta.

The Royals do not expect to contend this season; their official slogan is Major League Moments, which would seem to occur every night at a major league baseball game. In any case, the real action for the Royals will be at the high levels of the farm system, where a robust crop of prospects is almost ready to break through.

"Our main goal was by 2012 and 2013, the majority of our team needs to reflect homegrown talent," Royals General Manager Dayton Moore said. "Doesn't mean we're going to be good. Just means we're going to be young. And then we need to have another wave coming behind them. That needs to be the mind-set of everything we do: homegrown guys, we're going with our players."

Even the Yankees, Moore said, did not become a consistent power until they committed to harvesting homegrown talent in the early 1990s.

"It can be done," he said. "Teams have proved it. But it takes time."

For the Red Sox, the Yankees, the Twins and the Athletics, the time is now.

One season, one million decisions

By Buster Olney, ESPN The Magazine 3/25/2011

This story appears in the April 4 edition of ESPN The Magazine.

On the first day of spring training this year, a Phillies pitcher ambled into the clubhouse for the first time and glanced around the room, looking for the locker with his nameplate over it. Once he found it, he dropped his backpack inside, changed into the shorts and T-shirt that hung in front of him and headed into the serving area for a bowl of cereal. He sat down and munched wearily, like a sheep chewing cud.

The player probably didn't know how his locker location was chosen or where the food he was eating came from. Most guys don't ask those kinds of questions. There are millions of decisions made over the course of a season that affect players, but most of those choices are made by others -- out of sight and out of mind. "Ignorance is bliss," says one general manager. Like a lot of executives, he wouldn't be quoted on the record for this story because he didn't want players to think he was demeaning them.

At a time when NFL players are engaged in a fierce labor war and their NBA counterparts might be on the verge of one, the stars of major league baseball are free to focus on the game between the lines. And they don't seem all that interested in much else.

Players don't think about how the early-season schedule might factor into a decision to trade them. They don't know why the pitcher with ugly stats made the team instead of the guy throwing up zeroes. They see their names on the lineup card on the clubhouse bulletin board but don't realize a statistic found by a math wiz in the front office has suggested their place in the batting order. One American League general manager tells this story of an evaluation meeting with a player he

thought had a high level of on-field awareness: "We asked him: 'Do you consider yourself a high-ball hitter or a low-ball hitter?' He gave exactly the wrong answer." So much for awareness.

Failure is embedded into baseball, taking form daily as hitless at-bats, fumbled ground balls and hanging sliders. As a result, many players learn through experience that emotional consistency is crucial and that it's important to ignore uncontrollable forces, such as the blog postings of an angry fan, rain delays or the composition of the next road trip. "I really haven't thought about the schedule," says Tigers centerfielder [Austin Jackson](#), sitting in front of his locker in Lakeland, Fla., during spring training. "I'm more concerned with getting ready for the next game."

So, while players concentrate on playing, the rest of the organization takes care of big-picture stuff. Like locker assignments. Officials for one team describe the factors influencing locker room logistics, and they're glad that players are oblivious to the process. For example:

- Two teammates from countries with a long history of warfare are separated, in case tensions linger.
- A player with a reputation for being dour is bracketed by two guys who can't wait for the next sunrise.
- A quiet, introspective vet is given the locker next to a cocky, young player, to mentor the kid and dull his edge.
- English-speaking and Spanish-speaking team-mates are mixed together because, as one exec notes, "you don't want cliques to develop."

It's hard to quantify locker placement, because the value of who-dresses-where is intangible. Not so with a team's schedule. Players such as Austin Jackson might not think about the order of upcoming games, and how it might alter careers, but executives turn analytics loose on schedules, believing order of opponents will predict success or failure.

In 2008, the Orioles won 25 of their first 45 games, staying within shooting distance of first place. But team execs weren't buying the numbers: They determined the record was the result of a weak schedule and decided to hold off on making trades until after Baltimore faced higher-caliber opponents. Sure enough, the O's lost nine of their next 11 against the Rays, Red Sox and Yanks, and were out of the race by the trade deadline. So Baltimore brass never had to consider trading pitching prospects such as Zach Britton and [Chris Tillman](#) for stretch-run reinforcements. Now, three years later, Britton and Tillman are a big part of the reason Orioles fans are excited for the first time in years about the team's future.

When National League execs examined the Diamondbacks' 2010 schedule, they noted that after a relatively soft opening slate, the team would walk into a six-week gauntlet. "The toughest schedule I have ever seen," says one GM. Adds another: "It's the type of schedule that gets someone fired. Unless they started five games over .500, or somehow played .500 in that tough stretch, you knew there was no way the manager could survive."

So what happened? The Diamondbacks were 16-24 entering the daunting portion of their schedule, which included interleague series against the Yankees, Rays and Red Sox. And sure enough, after the team fell 17 games under .500 on July 1, GM Josh Byrnes and manager A.J. Hinch were canned.

This spring, the Phillies have no idea what to expect of All-Star second baseman [Chase Utley](#), because of lingering patella tendinitis in his right knee. But thanks to the combination of the club's strong rotation and stunningly weak early schedule, Utley's absence may not be a problem. Of the Phillies' first 31 games, only seven are against teams that were better than .500 in 2010. On the flip side, the Orioles have a brutal early schedule, but no one is worrying about that at the moment. In fact, O's camp has been buzzing with excitement now that [Vladimir Guerrero](#), [J.J. Hardy](#) and [Mark Reynolds](#) are joining the emerging core of [Brian Matusz](#), [Nick Markakis](#), [Adam Jones](#) and [Matt Wieters](#). Baltimore plays 16 April games against 2010 playoff teams, and the front office knows that if the team gets through the first quarter of the season with a .500 record, it might be able to start thinking about finishing with a winning record for the first time since 1997.

MOST PLAYERS have a sense of how decisions are made on the field. For example, it's obvious why a lefthanded reliever is brought on to face [Ryan Howard](#) in the eighth inning of a close game. Oakland GM Billy Beane recalls that former A's [Jeremy Giambi](#) and [Mark Kotsay](#) used to pick his brain about player evaluation. But they're the exceptions. When it comes to thinking about the game on a more analytical level, most players tune out. "I think it's easier not knowing, for some of them," Beane says. As Crash Davis famously said to Nuke LaLoosh in Bull Durham, "Don't think -- it can only hurt the ball club."

Service Time

Steve Vucinich has worked for the Oakland A's since 1968 and has been the equipment and clubhouse manager for the past 17 years. He knows the grind of a season and has a plan to ease the sting for players. Vucinich reveals his routine for a typical 7 p.m. home game:

8 a.m: Wake up, shower, breakfast

9:30: Trip to Costco for clubhouse groceries. Price: roughly \$400

10:30: Safeway for smaller items, then stop at a tailor to mend a ripped uniform.

11:30: Arrive at the ballpark.

11:45: Bring groceries to caterer. We mostly use an in-house caterer, but we outsource team meals a couple times each home stand.

12 p.m.: Place equipment orders. Majestic, our uniform supplier, is based on Pennsylvania, so I can't call much later or I might miss them.

1:00: Players begin arriving. They snack on cold cuts put out by the staff. Uniforms, washed and hung to dry the night before, have already been placed in lockers by someone on my staff.

1:30: Handle apparel orders for my players. Nike supplies roughly eight different kinds of shirts in all different sizes, so there are lots of choices.

4:00: Players take the field for batting practice. My staff begins preparing for the pre-game meal.

5:00: I hit a wall; time for a coffee.

5:30: Players return from BP and hit the pregame spread. I hang out in my office. Coaches, and often GM Billy Beane, stop by to chat. As the A's late announcer Bill King used to say, "You walk by Vuc's office and ask, 'Who's in there today?'"

7:00: Game time, a lull for me. I catch up on paperwork, keeping my eye on the action on my TV.

7:30: Begin prepping for the postgame meal; put out utensils, condiments, napkins, etc.

8:30: Outside caterers deliver food 90 minutes after the first pitch. Our caterer is upstairs, so they deliver in the top of the 9th.

10:00: Game ends. Postgame meal is served. In the past, visitors weren't allowed in the clubhouse after a loss, but now we have players' kids coming in no matter the result. Some guys hang out and eat, others take a to-go box. Next up: laundry. I have an 86-year-old retired civil servant on staff, and this is his main job. We do up to 40 loads per day.

11:30: Finish cleanup, hang uniforms out to dry, head home for the night.

A lot of times, teams promote a pitcher who is struggling in the minors over a pitcher who has performed better. The decisive factor often isn't ERA, which players use as a measure of value, but whether the pitcher has options remaining and can be sent to the minors without passing through waivers. (Every player can be optioned to the minors in three separate seasons without being subjected to waivers.) "Say you go into Boston, and your starting pitcher gets knocked out early in the first game of a series," says a longtime manager. "You have to use your bullpen, and all of a sudden your pitching staff is exhausted. You need at least three guys on your staff who have options to go back to the minors, in case you have to call up fresh pitchers. You can't exist with a bullpen full of pitchers who are out of options. You need that roster flexibility."

And even when they have a stable bullpen, managers must know how to use it. In many seasons, the Rays haven't identified a closer; instead, they inform all relievers to be ready for any situation. Before games, manager Joe Maddon, pitching coach Jim Hickey and members of the front office discuss matchups that might develop in later innings. They also discuss how different relievers might be used for a sequence of hitters. After going through this process in October 2008, the Rays asked rookie lefthander [David Price](#) to close out Game 7 of the ALCS against the Red Sox. "I didn't ask why," Price said after earning his first major league save.

When it comes to offense, tactical decisions are often more subtle. Last June 5, Rays catcher John Jaso arrived at the ballpark for a game against the Rangers and didn't see his name at its usual spot near the bottom of the lineup card. He figured he wasn't playing. Then a teammate pointed out that Jaso was leading off, a first for him at any level and a spot not usually occupied by a backstop.

What Jaso didn't know was that club officials had determined -- and Tampa Bay is renowned for having one of the most advanced analytics departments in baseball -- that he was among the most efficient baserunners in the majors. Not only is he opportunistic about taking extra bases, but he's rarely thrown out. Factor in his high on-base percentage (.372 in 2010), and he's actually a good fit atop the lineup.

Pitching changes and lineup choices are just the tip of the iceberg of the seemingly endless flow of decisions made over the course of the year. Travel issues during the season can have a huge influence on team performance. Players ask questions about accommodations, but few understand that road trips are usually arranged to give them the best chance to acclimate to new time zones. If Oakland is flying on an off-day to get to the East Coast, the team's charter departs at 11 a.m.; for a flight to the Central time zone, 1 p.m.; for trips on the West Coast, 3 p.m. Some teams travel immediately after a Sunday home game even if the series starts on a Tuesday, giving players an off-day in another city. The Yankees don't do this. "When we go to California, some players complain that they want their off-day in California," says a Yankees executive. "But we would have to pay for an extra night in a hotel for the whole traveling party. What sense does that make?"

When players get to the ballpark, almost every concern is taken care of for them. In Oakland, clubhouse manager Steve Vucnich, who has been with the team for more than 40 years, oversees four full-time and nine part-time employees. His typical work day lasts roughly 14 hours (see sidebar below) and involves countless decisions that affect the team. When the A's added an alternate uniform in the Tony La Russa era, Vucnich would let the starting pitcher choose which jersey the team would wear. But these days, while the starter still often gets his choice, Vucnich also influences the decision. "We play a lot of home day games," Vuc says, "so we encourage them to wear the white uniforms so they'll be cooler." And because he controls the uniforms, he's often the first outside the front office to know when a transaction has been made -- because he needs to get the new player's name stitched onto a jersey.

Vucnich's most demanding task is organizing food. He plans the menu for pregame (lighter fare) and postgame spreads, which can be tricky on a long home stand because he doesn't want to serve the same meal twice. "The visiting clubhouse manager has it easier; he has the same guys for only three or four days," Vuc says. "You have to be more creative in the home clubhouse." That means mixing in outside caterers, such as Guillermo Muniz, who does Sonora-style Mexican food and was introduced to Vucnich by former A's pitcher Mike Torrez in the 1970s. Muniz's menu is typically served once per home stand. If the A's have a day game after a night game, Vuc makes sure pasta is the focal point of the late postgame spread: "We like to carb them up like a runner."

The Athletics are among the teams that hold an off-season fantasy camp, where middle-aged folks shed their skins as lawyers or techies and wear the uniforms they worship, alongside players for whom they used to cheer. When A's campers walk into the clubhouse, they are treated like big leaguers: Their spikes are gleaming clean at the bottom of their locker while jerseys and jocks are hung neatly.

Someone at camp always asks Vucnich why players are treated like kings, and he always replies: "Considering the investment made in the players, nobody wants them thinking about anything other than playing baseball."

Convenient for the players too. Because that's all most of them want to focus on anyway.

From Barry Bonds to Mike Scioscia, this 2011 season preview is strictly by the numbers

In a sport fixated on statistics, here are some numerical milestones and oddities to look for this season.

By Bill Shaikin, LA Times, 3/26/2011

The split-screen image could be jarring.

Barry Bonds, perhaps the greatest hitter of his generation, could walk out of a San Francisco courtroom Thursday afternoon, out of another day of his perjury trial, about the same time the San Francisco Giants open the defense of their World Series championship at Dodger Stadium.

The Giants won their first World Series in 56 years not with Bonds, their star attraction for a decade and a half, but with an ace nicknamed "The Freak," a closer with an alter ego of "The Machine," a phenom who answers to Buster and a first baseman whose contribution to baseball lore was a rally thong.

Baseball comes together to take care of its own in Tucson

Bonds still has the numbers — 73, his single-season home-run record, and 762, his career home-run record. In the sport where numbers matter most, we welcome the new season with a parade of numbers:

11: Years since a major league team won back-to-back World Series championships (New York Yankees, starring Derek Jeter, Mariano Rivera and Bernie Williams).

35: Years since a National League team won back-to-back World Series championships (Cincinnati Reds, starring Johnny Bench, Joe Morgan and Pete Rose).

89: Years since the Giants won back-to-back World Series championships (in New York, starring Frankie Frisch and George "High Pockets" Kelly).

20: Victories shy of 1,000 for Angels Manager Mike Scioscia. He ranks fifth among active managers, behind Tony La Russa, Jim Leyland, Dusty Baker and Bruce Bochy.

4: Bobblehead giveaways for the Oakland Athletics and San Diego Padres this season, combined.

0: Bobblehead giveaways for the A's and Padres that feature active players. The A's are handing out bobblehead dolls of Hall of Famer Rickey Henderson, team broadcaster and former catcher Ray Fosse and rapper and former A's batboy MC Hammer. The Padres are giving out bobblehead dolls of Manager Bud Black.

92: Millions of dollars CC Sabathia would forfeit if he opts out of his Yankees contract at the end of the season, when he will be 31. The Yankees offered Cliff Lee a reported \$148 million last winter, when he was 32. The best pitchers on the market next winter could be Mark Buehrle, Joel Pineiro and C.J. Wilson, so the Yankees might very well tear up Sabathia's big contract and replace it with a bigger one.

3: Seasons in which new Angels outfielder Vernon Wells has hit at least 30 home runs. Wells hit 31 last season.

3: Seasons in which anyone else in the Angels' projected opening-day lineup has hit at least 30 home runs, none within the past four years. Bobby Abreu hit 31 in 2001 and 30 in '04; Torii Hunter hit 31 in '06.

1: Season in which anyone in the Dodgers' projected opening-day lineup has hit at least 30 home runs. Andre Ethier hit 31 in 2009.

52: Millions of dollars coming off the Chicago Cubs' payroll after this season, as the contracts of Kosuke Fukudome, Carlos Pena, Aramis Ramirez and Carlos Silva expire. That could make the Cubs big players in the Albert Pujols sweepstakes next winter — and the rivalry between the Cubs and St. Louis Cardinals is every bit as bitter as the one between the Yankees and Boston Red Sox, just less hyped.

631: Consecutive sellouts for the Red Sox at Fenway Park. The last game that failed to sell out: May 14, 2003, against the Texas Rangers, with Alex Rodriguez playing shortstop and Mark Teixeira in left field.

12: Years since Jorge Posada has not been the Yankees' catcher on opening day. Joe Girardi, now the Yankees' manager, was their opening-day catcher in 1999. Russell Martin is expected to be the Yankees' starting catcher this year, with Posada at designated hitter.

5: Years since Martin has not been the Dodgers' catcher on opening day. Sandy Alomar Jr. was their opening-day catcher in 2006. Rod Barajas is expected to be the Dodgers' starting catcher this year.

168: Millions of dollars on the Philadelphia Phillies' payroll, the largest in National League history.

0: Innings played this spring by injured Phillies second baseman Chase Utley, an All-Star five years running. One possible replacement: Wilson Valdez, who started fewer games at second base than Tony Abreu or Ramon Martinez for the 2007 Dodgers.

1: Players under 30 expected to be in the Phillies' opening-day lineup.

20: Millions of dollars listed as the salary paid by the Dodgers to Manny Ramirez last year.

10: Millions of dollars actually paid by the Dodgers to Ramirez last year.

8.3: Millions of dollars the Dodgers will pay Ramirez this year, in deferred salaries.

2: Millions of dollars the Tampa Bay Rays will pay Ramirez this year. Ramirez signed with the Rays as a free agent.

7: Most valuable player awards won by Bonds, the most of any player. Bonds is currently on trial, charged with lying under oath when he denied using steroids.

7: Cy Young awards won by Roger Clemens, the most of any player. Clemens is scheduled to go to trial in July, charged with lying under oath when he denied using steroids.

623: Days it took Sen. George Mitchell and his investigators to complete a detailed probe of baseball's steroid era, including the preparation and publication of the 311-page Mitchell Report.

727: Days since Commissioner Bud Selig appointed a committee to shepherd the A's into a new stadium, in San Jose or elsewhere. In the news release announcing the committee, Selig was quoted as saying: "The A's cannot and will not continue indefinitely in their current situation."

945,942: Population of San Jose, according to the 2010 U.S. Census.

390,724: Population of Oakland, according to the 2010 U.S. Census.

3: Players from Angels' the 2002 World Series championship team still active. Francisco Rodriguez is the closer for the New York Mets, Chone Figgins is the third baseman for the Seattle Mariners, and Adam Kennedy is expected to be Figgins' backup.

23: The number on Kirk Gibson's back, and the number of years since his legendary home run led the Dodgers to their last World Series championship.