

## A's News Clips, Thursday, March 31, 2011

### A's notebook: Andy LaRoche earns utility infielder role over Eric Sogard

By Joe Stiglich, Contra Costa Times

In a competition where defensive skill was supposed to trump all else, Andy LaRoche won a spot on the A's opening day roster with his bat.

The A's tapped LaRoche -- a former hot prospect of the Los Angeles Dodgers -- to be their utility infielder over Eric Sogard. It was one of the surprising developments Wednesday as Oakland trimmed to its final 25-man roster following a 2-1 loss to the Giants at AT&T Park.

Left-hander Bobby Cramer, despite allowing the Giants' two-run game-winning rally in the bottom of the ninth inning, claimed the final bullpen spot over Tyson Ross in the only other down-to-the-wire competition.

As expected, closer Andrew Bailey (right forearm strain) and pitcher Rich Harden (strained right shoulder) were placed on the 15-day disabled list, retroactive to March 22. Both can be activated April 6, though neither is expected to be ready by then.

A's manager Bob Geren had said defensive play -- particularly the ability to handle shortstop -- would loom large in picking his backup infielder. That seemed to favor Sogard, who is a better defender than LaRoche and was already on the 40-man roster.

But the A's picked LaRoche, who hit .333 this spring and led the A's with four homers and 13 RBIs.

"(Sogard) is naturally a second baseman and Andy's a natural third baseman, so neither of them is a natural shortstop," Geren said. "We just look for (LaRoche) to make the routine plays and bring something

offensively."

The Dodgers traded LaRoche, 27, to the Pittsburgh Pirates on July 31, 2008. He never panned out with Pittsburgh and was designated for assignment in November. He signed a minor league deal with the A's in January.

"I felt like I had a quality spring," LaRoche said before learning he'd made the team. "If I'm going to play four infield positions, there's a lot of work that needs to be done."

The A's placed infielder Adam Rosales, not expected to return from a right foot injury until May, on the 60-day disabled list to clear a 40-man roster spot for LaRoche.

The Giants erased a 1-0 deficit in the ninth as Cramer aided the rally with an errant pickoff throw. Chris Stewart's single scored Eli Whiteside with the winning run. Cramer gives the A's four left-handers in their seven-man bullpen. He joins Jerry Blevins, Craig Breslow and interim closer Brian Fuentes, along with right-handers Grant Balfour, Michael Wuertz and Brad Ziegler. "I didn't want to just be the story from last year," said Cramer, who began last season in the Mexican League but ended it in the A's rotation. "I've always believed in myself and thought I could get up here and stick, and this is the start of that."

Ross allowed just one run in 151/3 innings this spring. But the A's value him as a starter and want him in Triple-A Sacramento's rotation as insurance. "We're not going to get through a season with just five starters," assistant general manager David Forst said.

Dallas Braden, the A's No. 4 starter, was sharp in his final tuneup, throwing 52/3 shutout innings. Having grown up a Giants fan, he was pumped to pitch his first game at AT&T Park. "I grew up rooting for them out in the nose bleeds, and here I was today toeing rubber in the most hallowed ground in baseball, in my mind," he said.

### Chin Music: Andy LaRoche, Bobby Cramer make A's roster; Tyson Ross, Eric Sogard sent down

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 3/30/2011 5:00PM

A quick rundown on the A's final roster cuts (so much for my predictions from this morning!)

--Andy LaRoche was kept as the utility infielder over Eric Sogard. Score that a mild upset as Sogard is the stronger defensive player and was already on the 40-man roster. Obviously, the A's feel LaRoche is adequate enough with the glove to get by

whenever he's called upon. But this move was all about LaRoche's potential impact with the bat. He hit .333 this spring and led the team in homers (4) and RBIs (13). Adam Rosales, the projected backup infielder before he suffered a foot injury, was placed on the 60-day DL to clear a 40-man spot for LaRoche.

–Bobby Cramer was kept as the final reliever over Tyson Ross. That's despite a rough bottom of the ninth today in a 2-1 loss to the Giants, when Cramer had a throwing error that contributed to the Giants' winning two-run rally. That gives the A's four lefties in their seven-man bullpen. Jerry Blevins, Craig Breslow, Cramer and Brian Fuentes join right-handers Grant Balfour, Michael Wuertz and Brad Ziegler (Andrew Bailey was placed on the 15-day DL as expected). This was a surprising call to me. I like the idea of Ross getting Triple-A seasoning as a starter, and I think that's best for his future. But I still thought his relief experience from last year would trump any potential benefit of keeping Cramer. It's a great story for Cramer, who was playing in the Mexican League at this point last year and has never been on an Opening Day roster. He said that he was told to be ready for any relief role — one innings, two innings or long relief. A's manager Bob Geren classified Cramer as predominantly a long man.

–Landon Powell was kept as the backup catcher over Josh Donaldson, which was no surprise ...

More in tomorrow morning's A's notebook ...

## **Chin Music: Lots of A's regulars in Wednesday's lineup; no final cuts announcement yet**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 3/30/2011 12:38PM

Not a whole lot to report leading into the Bay Bridge Series finale, since the A's aren't announcing their final cuts until after the game. The only regulars not in the lineup are first baseman Daric Barton and right fielder David DeJesus.

I don't see much drama with the roster decisions. I'll be very surprised if Eric Sogard doesn't win the backup infielder spot, although neither he nor Andy LaRoche looked great defensively Tuesday night. I have Tyson Ross as the favorite over left-hander Bobby Cramer for the final bullpen spot. Ross has big league relief experience from last season, and I don't see the A's carrying four lefty relievers (that's assuming Jerry Blevins is kept, in which case he'd join southpaws Brian Fuentes and Craig Breslow).

The lineups:

A's: Crisp CF, Ellis 2B, Willingham LF, Jackson 1B, Matsui DH, Suzuki C, Kouzmanoff 3B, Sweeney RF, Pennington SS; Braden LHP.

Giants: Fontenot SS, Whiteside C, DeRosa 3B, Rowand CF, Schierholtz RF, Rohlinger 2B, Ishikawa 1B, Graham LF, Bumgarner LHP.

## **Facebook study of baseball fans: Philly fans most loyal, A's fans most social**

By Mike Swift, Mercury News, 3/31/2011

Philadelphia Phillies fans may be the most loyal. The St. Louis Cardinals appear most beloved by women. Fans of the Tampa Bay Rays may be the most devoted following a loss. But A's fans may be the most friendly and social, at least in terms of having the most friends on [Facebook](#).

And in a statistic that may cause Bay Area baseball fans to nod knowingly, fans of the Los Angeles teams, the Dodgers and Angels, are the most bereft of friendship among the 30 Major League teams.

On the eve of the 2011 baseball season, Facebook has taken an unprecedented look at the millions of members around the world who have hit the "Like" button for their Major League Baseball team, or who posted updates about their feelings about their team following a win or a loss. In findings that could provoke a bar room brawl from Cleveland to San Francisco, the Palo Alto social network even developed a "fair weather fan" index for fans who only follow their team when it is winning.

"Baseball is a sport that is particularly about statistics, but you never really see statistics about fans," said Jonathan Chang, the Facebook data scientist who led the Palo Alto-based social network's anonymous study of baseball fans. "Statistics about fans are just so much more rare to see."

Facebook's study is not based on a random sample, and the findings are limited by being based on information people chose to share. And while estimates of Facebook's U.S. membership are approaching half the total population, the findings are also

limited to the social network's membership -- which tends to be somewhat younger than the general population, but also omits everyone under 13, according to Facebook's rules.

But by incorporating items like relationships with other fans of the same team, along with age, marital status and physical location, Chang said the Facebook data provides unique insights into a nation divided up not just by Red and Blue political allegiances but fan communities tied to the 30 Major League baseball clubs.

Some of the Facebook findings echo common perceptions of the teams, but there are also some unique insights into how people connect around their favorite teams. Facebook is releasing the findings Thursday at: <http://www.facebook.com/data>.

There is a wide team-by-team range, for example, in the appeal of teams by gender. Nearly 50 percent of fans of the Cardinals and the Minnesota Twins are women, while just over a quarter of Toronto Blue Jays fans were female. One possible explanation, Chang said, is that baseball has a more universal appeal in U.S. cities than in Canada, where the appeal is more limited to a segment of the population -- men.

Other findings were less surprising. The New York Yankees and the Boston Red Sox have the most extensive "fan diaspora," as measured by the median distance their fans live from Yankee Stadium or Fenway Park. That's not a surprise to anyone familiar with the "Red Sox Nation" or "Yankees Nation."

Athletics' fans were also among the most scattered across the country and around the world, but Chang said that finding was blunted by the fact that a very high share of fans who "Liked" the A's on Facebook also liked another team. In short, he said, the A's may be the second or third-choice team of many other baseball fans across the country.

Whether or not the A's ever move to the new stadium in San Jose that owner Lew Wolff would like to build, the team's fans stand out as being among the youngest, most likely to be single, and most male-centric fan base in the Major Leagues.

And while the average Facebook user has about 150 friends, Athletics' fans were the only fan community to average more than 500 friends on Facebook. At the other end of the scale, fans of the Angels and the Dodgers have the fewest friends on Facebook, averaging 350 or less.

Philadelphia fans, renowned for their bellicose affection for the Phillies, were least likely to hit the "Like" button for any other team. Well over 60 percent of Phillies fans "Liked" no other team, compared to less than 5 percent of Washington Nationals fans. In that sense, Chang said, Philadelphia fans might be the most "loyal."

Phillies fans were also the most "provincial," Facebook found, with the highest proportion of their Facebook friends also being fans of the team.

To try to figure out which fans were most loyal to their teams, win or lose, Facebook tracked whether fans posted on Facebook anything about their team on days following a loss or a win. "There is a general tendency to like a winning team," Chang said. "If they are supportive even when their team loses, and they are still posting, then we think they are a stronger fan community."

To incorporate the fact that it's easier to support a winning team, Facebook factored in the winning percentage of teams during the 2010 season. By that index, the least "fair-weather fans" were supporters of the Rays, the Mets and the Reds. The most fair-weather were fans of the Indians, Yankees and Blue Jays -- an observation that might earn you a punch in the nose in Cleveland, where no team has won a championship since 1964.

Perhaps Clevelanders are too depressed about that championship drought to say anything about it on Facebook.

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## How Bay Area Baseball Fans Stack up

### Most Facebook fans:

The Giants are fourth in the Majors with nearly 600,000 fans on Facebook, trailing the Yankees, Red Sox and Cubs. The A's rank 21st of 30 teams, with about 250,000 fans.

### Most "friendly" fans:

A's fans have the most Facebook friends among Major League teams, averaging more than 500 friends per fan. The Giants ranked 16th, with about 400 Facebook friends per fan.

### 2010 season Bandwagon/Hangover:

The Giants, with about 12 percent of fans joining during the playoffs, trailed only World Series foe Texas Rangers in adding fans on Facebook during the post season.

A's fans were least likely of any Major League team gain fans on on Facebook during the playoffs.

Source: Facebook

## **Oakland A's have raised \$50,000 for Japanese relief efforts**

By Kristin Bender, Oakland Tribune

OAKLAND -- The Oakland A's have already raised more than \$50,000 for Japanese earthquake and tsunami victims but Japanese superstar Hideki Matsui knows his countrymen are counting on him to raise their spirits as the team heads into Friday's season opener against the Seattle Mariners.

One dollar from each ticket sold to Sunday's 1 p.m. game, also against the Mariners, will be donated to the Red Cross for relief efforts.

The A's also set up a website, [www.oaklandathletics.com/japan](http://www.oaklandathletics.com/japan), which allows fans to make tax-deductible donations to the A's Community Fund, with all proceeds going to the Red Cross. Corporate sponsors Capcom, NetSuit and Fujitsu have also contributed thousands to the cause, team officials said.

"Through my performance here on the field, I hope the message I can portray to the people is to hang in there and give it your best. That is what I can do," said Matsui through an interpreter at a news conference before the A's hosted the San Francisco Giants in an exhibition game Tuesday night.

The magnitude 9.0 earthquake on March 11 has left more than 11,000 people dead and nearly 17,000 missing, although it is not known if there is overlap between those two groups, according to published reports.

"It's been a very sad story so far and all I can say is I wish for their safety," said Matsui, 36. "The A's are working together to help as many people as possible. This is my first year with the A's and through my performance, this could provide some good news for the people of Japan."

Athletics' President Mike Crowley said they are expecting at least 20,000 fans at Sunday's "Japanese Heritage Day," which will include pre-game ceremonies, taiko drummers and free Matsui jersey T-shirts to 10,000 fans. Japanese Consul-General Hiroshi Inomata, team officials, sponsors and Matsui will be on the field before the first pitch at the Oakland Coliseum.

At least two dozen Japanese reporters, photographers and television news people, who have shadowed Matsui's since he signed a \$4.25 million, 2011 season contract with the A's in December, were at the Coliseum for a news conference before Monday's game. The Japanese media were ready with questions and were clearly anxious to relay the good news about the A's fundraising efforts back to the Japanese people. The A's are popular with Japanese people and traveled there in 2008 to play against the Red Sox.

"We certainly hope to raise more (money) on Sunday through various memorabilia sales and other things," Crowley said.

The uniforms worn by Matsui and Seattle Mariners right fielder Ichiro Suzuki during Friday's opener in Oakland will be framed and auctioned off Sunday. Autographed color photos of Matsui will also be sold for \$50 each.

Crowley said the A's have also been in discussion with Major League Baseball about other ways to raise money for Japanese relief. "I think they'll be announcing something soon," he said.

Last week, Matsui confirmed that he had personally donated 50 million yen (\$620,000) to the Japanese Red Cross for disaster relief. Suzuki has donated 100 million yen (\$1.25 million) to the Japanese Red Cross.

Inomata said Japan and the United States have over the past 20 years aided one another following massive earthquakes in both countries. "I am very grateful for the support provided by the United States," he said at Monday's news conference.

## **Dallas Braden sharp in A's exhibition finale**

David White, Chronicle Staff Writer

A's left-hander Dallas Braden doesn't think of the rotation as the Fantastic Four, though his perfect game last season was most fantastic of all.

Braden prefers to go with the "Baby Three," but he just might pitch his way into the nickname alongside Trevor Cahill, Gio Gonzalez and Brett Anderson once the season starts Friday.

"I'm riding their coat tails," Braden said. "They're throwing around the Fantastic Four. I told them Baby 3.5 and I'll be the decimal."

Braden was nothing short of the exclamation point in Wednesday's exhibition finale against the Giants, a 2-1 loss at AT&T Park.

The No. 4 starter threw 5 2/3 shutout innings with five strikeouts to drop his springtime ERA from 7.02 to 5.24.

So what if he is no longer the No. 2 starter, as he was last season, or the Opening Night starter, as he was in 2009?

Braden loves his spot near the back of the rotation line. It speaks volumes to the depth on the pitching staff, and gives him more than a fighting chance to improve on last year's 11-14 mark by virtue of lesser competition.

"I'm fully embracing the 4 slot," Braden said. "You always want to be the surprise ... especially on the back end of the rotation. You want them to look up on and say, 'Dang, that just happened? This guy hung around?'"

"You're pitching against their back end of the rotation, so runs are a little easier to come by. You're not staring down guys like Felix (Hernandez) or a (Roy) Halladay on Day 1."

That job now belongs to Cahill, the 23-year-old All-Star, though Braden thinks it just the same could belong to left-handers Gonzalez, 25, or Anderson, 23.

Braden believes Gonzalez and Anderson have the game's best two breaking balls coming from the left side, and says "good luck" to anyone trying to hit Cahill's "20-pound bowling ball" that sinks.

Is the A's pitching as good as the Giants', Braden was asked?

"Yeah, I think we have the ability to," he said. "You have to give them their respect. That's a championship rotation. If we can fall in line and maintain a level of health, we can compete."

Braden showed he still can compete, even though he's the old one at age 27. Wednesday's start was his best after an awful beginning to spring training (12 earned runs in his first 12 2/3 innings).

The difference?

"It's called a breaking ball," Braden said. "I didn't really know what one of those was. Then I threw a curveball for all of seven minutes and bagged that one. It's definitely been a work in progress, refining the breaking ball, locating and setting up with it. That really came to a head today."

"That's why I feel confident with what I've been working on."

That's also why A's manager Bob Geren gets all touchy when mentioning Braden's place at the back end of the rotation.

"We don't have a back end or a front end of the rotation, we really don't," Geren said. "Every one of our guys is capable of pitching Opening Day. When they're on, they're all good."

## **Bobby Cramer makes A's roster**

David White, John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writers

A's manager **Bob Geren** called in left-hander **Bobby Cramer** for a long talk before announcing roster cuts Wednesday.

Don't try a pickoff throw with two outs in the ninth inning with a 1-0 lead, especially on the road. And certainly don't throw the ball into right field to set up the tying run.

Oh, and one more thing:

"I told him he made the team," Geren said after Cramer blew a save opportunity and took the loss in a 2-1 decision to the Giants at AT&T Park.

Cramer's throwing error allowed **Mike Fontenot** to move to second. He then scored on **Eli Whiteside's** single. Whiteside advanced to second on the throw to the plate and he scored the winning run on **Chris Stewart's** base hit.

Cramer still made his first Opening Night roster.

Imagine Cramer's sigh of relief. He spent three years out of baseball, teaching algebra and working utility lines. He started last year in the Mexican League, throwing breaking balls in Cancun.

Now, he is the long reliever on a pitching staff not expected to need much long relief. Not that Cramer cares after all he has endured in 10 years just to get here.

"I've been through hell and back in this game," Cramer said. "To come where I've come from, this is pretty special."

Cramer made the team because the A's wanted **Tyson Ross**, the other bullpen candidate, to get work as a starter. Ross was sent to Triple-A Sacramento with infielder **Wes Timmons**, outfielder **Matt Carson**, catcher **Josh Donaldson** and infielder **Eric Sogard**.

Sogard lost the backup-infield job to **Andy LaRoche**, who hit .333 this spring.

**Kroon's future:** After **Marc Kroon** threw a perfect ninth inning, earned his second win and lowered his ERA to 1.69, the Giants sent the 37-year-old reliever to Triple-A Fresno. He said he'll speak with his family before deciding whether to accept the assignment.

Manager **Bruce Bochy** urged him to stick in the organization.

"It could help the decision a little bit," Kroon said. "To go to another organization and try to prove myself again is tough to do. But you never know what's going to happen. The guys were wonderful here, and the organization treated me great."

Kroon also might get calls from Japan, where he spent the past six seasons and collected 277 saves. On Wednesday, he faced **Hideki Matsui** for the first time, and they acknowledged each other with a tip of the cap. Matsui flied out, and Kroon struck out the next two batters.

**Other Giants' moves:** The bullpen was solidified with **Guillermo Mota** and lefty **Dan Runzler** winning jobs. Like Kroon, **Ryan Vogelsong** was sent to Fresno, as were reliever **Steve Edlefsen**, infielder **Ryan Rohlinger** and Stewart, a catcher.

Closer **Brian Wilson** (oblique) is joining outfielder **Cody Ross** (calf) on the disabled list.

**Other A's moves:** A's pitchers **Andrew Bailey** (forearm) and **Rich Harden** (shoulder) were placed on the 15-day disabled list retroactive to March 22. Both felt fine after throwing Thursday, Geren said. ... Infielder **Adam Rosales** (foot) was put on the 60-day DL.

## **A's could contend with potential top rotation**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Equipped with a revamped lineup and a progressive rotation that is shaping up to be one of the Majors' best, the A's have positioned themselves for what could be their first playoff appearance since 2006.

The thought may be premature, but the necessary components are already in place following an active winter and a relatively quiet spring. Moving forward, many things have to go right for this ideal ending to unfold as planned following a 2010 season that culminated with an 81-81 record.

Health, not surprisingly, sits atop the list. The notion is a popular one in all sports, and the reasoning rather simple -- injured players don't equate to productive teams. In Oakland, however, it's even more imperative given the fact that a small budget lends the A's less room for error.

General manager Billy Beane stocked up on depth this winter, and while it's evident in the makeup of the bullpen and the large quantity of outfield help, the reality is that more than a couple of key injuries will still greatly affect this team's standing.

The offseason acquisitions of 3-4-5 hitters David DeJesus, Josh Willingham and Hideki Matsui are notable, no doubt, and should stand to create a ripple that makes the other spots -- Kurt Suzuki and Kevin Kouzmanoff in the sixth and eighth holes, respectively -- much better than last year. But all three have a recent and well-documented injury history.

Perhaps even more of a risk is Coco Crisp, who last season proved to be a sparkplug from the leadoff spot -- but only for 75 games because of multiple disabled list trips. The A's center fielder, who experienced hamstring tightness during Spring Training, is a must-have for consistent wins, as his above-average speed and defense, along with his occasional power, offer the club an unmatched presence.

While an unhealthy lineup could automatically make an exceptional pitching staff irrelevant, the A's also know that the reverse scenario could prove all the more damaging to any playoff hopes, as this team is built around its youthful starting staff -- a strong facet that gives Oakland an edge over its American League West counterparts, whose offseasons weren't nearly as busy.

"We're sick of being the pushover in the division, and I think the last or three years have really gotten guys fired up," Dallas Braden said. "The front office went out and made some moves to hopefully make us better. If we can stay healthy, we should definitely be better."

Opening Night starter and 2010 All-Star Trevor Cahill, fellow baby faces Brett Anderson and Gio Gonzalez along with the gritty Braden will look to duplicate last year's success, which came in the form of a 3.47 ERA, the best mark by any AL staff since Boston compiled a 3.32 ERA in 1990. The A's rotation also led the league in opponents' batting average (.243) and ranked second in on-base percentage (.307).

## **Cahill won't put too much weight on opener**

### **A's right-hander more focused on getting results in every start**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- During Trevor Cahill's first pair of Major League seasons, the A's right-hander was constantly asking himself one question.

"The last two years," he said, "I thought, 'Am I good enough?'"

Now, Cahill said, it's simply about *how* good he can be.

"I have that feeling of belonging," he said.

A's manager Bob Geren confirmed that notion by awarding the 23-year-old Cahill his first Opening Night start, which puts him in line to man the No. 1 spot in a stacked rotation that has lefties Brett Anderson, Gio Gonzalez and Dallas Braden and right-hander Brandon McCarthy filling out the Nos. 2-5 slots, respectively.

Cahill doesn't feel any added pressure in the role. In his mind, it's just another start, one he hopes will be the first of many that results in improved strike percentage with his fastball, along with continued progression with his sinker location and overall feel for a curveball that replaced a slider last year.

The young righty pitched to a 2.97 ERA and 18-8 record in 30 starts, which ranked him fourth in the American League in wins. That number represented the most by an A's starter since Mark Mulder captured 17 in 2004, and it marked the first time a pitcher age 22 years or younger won 18 games since Bret Saberhagen went 20-6 for Kansas City as a 21-year-old in 1985.

"You want to talk about coming into your own?" Dallas Braden said. "Cahill proved to be one of the dirtiest guys in the league last year, and it's not by a fluke."

## **Braden shines in final spring outing**

By Eric Gilmore / Special to MLB.com

SAN FRANCISCO -- After a pitching duel between Oakland's Dallas Braden and San Francisco's Madison Bumgarner, the Giants scored twice in the bottom of the ninth to complete a sweep of the three-game Bay Bridge Series with a 2-1 win on Wednesday afternoon at AT&T Park.

With the Giants down to their last out, Mike Fontenot singled and went to second on an errant pickoff throw by losing pitcher Bobby Cramer. Eli Whiteside singled him home and went to second on the throw. Pinch-hitter Chris Stewart singled home the game-winner, giving the Giants a victory in their finale spring tuneup before beginning defense of their World Series championship.

The starting left-handers, Braden and Bumgarner, were both sharp.

Braden faced a makeshift Giants lineup, missing all eight regulars, who were resting before Thursday's season opener against the Dodgers in Los Angeles. He gave up five hits, walked two and struck out five in 5 2/3 innings.

Braden entered the game with an 0-3 spring record and 7.02 ERA, but he gave up just one earned run over six innings against Arizona in his previous start before his strong effort against the Giants.

Bumgarner got back on track after a rough outing against the Royals, who rocked him for a spring-high eight runs and 10 innings in just 4 1/3 innings.

Bumgarner, who entered Wednesday's game with a 1-4 record and 7.17 ERA, gave up four hits and one earned run over six innings. He struck out six and walked three.

The A's don't open until Friday at home against Seattle and used most of their regulars, although first baseman Daric Barton and right fielder David DeJesus got the day off.



In the third, Ryan Sweeney led off with a double to right-center off Bumgarner and stole third with one out. After Coco Crisp walked and stole second, Sweeney scored on Mark Ellis' sacrifice fly to center.

The Giants put together a serious threat in the bottom of the sixth. Mark DeRosa led off with a walk and, after Aaron Rowand struck out, moved to third on Nate Schierholtz's bloop single to center.

After Braden got Ryan Rohlinger to pop out, left-hander Craig Breslow relieved him. Schierholtz stole second, but Breslow fanned Travis Ishikawa looking to end the inning.

## **Bailey, Harden both throw, 'looking good'**

By Eric Gilmore / Special to MLB.com

SAN FRANCISCO -- Another day, another positive report on A's closer Andrew Bailey and right-hander Rich Harden as they continue to recover from injuries to their throwing arms.

"Both went today, both threw well," A's manager Bob Geren said before Wednesday's Bay Bridge Series finale against the San Francisco Giants. "Looking good. No worries there. Looking good. ... Following the schedule, and they'll keep going till they're ready."

Bailey is recovering from a strained right forearm, Harden a strained right lat. Both will start the season on the disabled list.

On Tuesday, Harden threw off a mound for the first time in six weeks, while Bailey made 30 throws from 80 feet. Both are expected to throw again Thursday, when the A's hold their final workout before Friday's season opener in Oakland against Seattle, Geren said. He said he did not have specifics of what each pitcher did on Wednesday.

## **LaRoche beats out Sogard for roster spot**

## **A's pick Cramer over Ross in bullpen; Bailey, Harden to DL**

By Eric Gilmore / Special to MLB.com

SAN FRANCISCO -- The A's set their 25-man roster after Wednesday's exhibition finale against the San Francisco Giants, and in a minor surprise, non-roster invitee Andy LaRoche beat out Eric Sogard for a utility infielder's job.

Sogard, catcher Josh Donaldson and right-hander Tyson Ross were sent to Triple-A Sacramento. LaRoche, catcher Landon Powell and left-hander Bobby Cramer survived, grabbing the final three available roster spots.

Sogard had the edge defensively, but LaRoche, a right-handed hitter, had a huge advantage offensively during the spring. He hit .333 with 13 RBIs and four home runs -- both team highs -- to Sogard's .209 average, four RBIs and zero homers.

"Each one of them had strengths over the other one in certain areas, or weaknesses over certain areas," A's manager Bob Geren said. "One's a right-handed hitter, one's a left-handed hitter, one's a contact kind of guy, one's more a power hitter. There were a lot of variables involved to try and make that decision. We felt like Andy could do it. He's had some big league experience. We're going to go with him. He played well. He had a good spring."

To clear a spot on the 40-man roster for LaRoche, the A's placed infielder Adam Rosales on the 60-day disabled list retroactive to March 22. He is still recovering from a fractured right foot and offseason surgery.

Sogard took his demotion in stride.

"I knew it was going to be a close call," he said. "It was a coin flip. That's what they said, between me and LaRoche there. I came to Spring Training and did what I wanted to do, proved to them I can play defense, shortstop, second base. Still working on the third-base position, but I'm happy with the spring. I didn't hit as well as I can, but my main focus was defense, and I did what I wanted to do there."

"I'm happy to have this opportunity. I think it's a good thing for me. I'll be able to get down in Triple-A and play every day and get back in the swing of things. I think I'm more of an everyday player. The way I compete every day helps me out more than playing once every week, so that'll be nice."

As expected, the A's also placed closer Andrew Bailey (strained right forearm) and right-hander Rich Harden (strained right shoulder) on the 15-day disabled list.

In other moves, infielder Wes Timmons and outfielder Matt Carson, two non-roster invitees, were sent to the team's Minor League camp.

Cramer and Ross competed for the fifth-starter's role that went to Brandon McCarthy. Ross went 1-0 in the spring with a 0.59 ERA, while Cramer went 0-2 with a 7.16 ERA.

Geren, though, made it clear that he was impressed by Ross' spring performance and wants him to continue getting work.

"He's their best young Minor League pitcher without a doubt," the manager said, referring to the A's organization, "and he's going to go down there and pitch well, and he's going to create a spot here one way or another, through competition or any injury, any bumps or bruises. Ideally, he goes down there and starts off the way he pitched in the spring and just creates a spot. He has that type of ability."

And Cramer?

"He had a couple, three good outings for us last year," Geren said. "You look at that. He pitched pretty well this spring. He had one rough outing against the White Sox, but other than that he threw pretty well. He'll be able to be a long guy, middle guy, pitch in different situations with a little flexibility."

Cramer made an Opening Day roster for the first time in his career.

"My biggest goal coming into camp was to make the team, and I made it," said Cramer. "I always believe in myself and thought I could get up here and stick, and this is the start of that. I'm going to do everything I can to stay up here and not get sent back down and help the team and try to make a career out of it."

## **Leading Off: Baseball on the radio - who needs hi-def?**

Jeff Caraska, Sacramento Bee, 3/31/2011

After far too many baseball seasons to count, this will be the first one possible for me to follow through the wonders of high-def TV. A big deal? Not really.

For years, TV has been a supplement to the baseball season, a sort of Cliffs Notes to the textbook that takes 162 games to finish.

The primary means to following the season – besides the daily helping of box scores and standings, of course – has been and will continue to be the radio.

Whether it's the scratchy little throwback portable radio (yes, they still exist) or the one in my car with the predictable preset stations, the game is at its best for me when it's a welcome exercise in imagination.

A home run call on the radio, whether from the Giants' Jon Miller or the A's Ken Korach, beats the "back-back-back" redundancy of ESPN's nightly all-you-can-eat helpings. What does the listener miss that the viewer sees? Certainly not enough to ditch the radio in favor of that widescreen marvel.

Not saying there won't be occasions to sprawl in front of the TV and see how baseball looks in high definition.

But baseball on the radio still has the feel of an old friend moving back into the neighborhood. It's there nearly every night, and is there a better guilty pleasure than flipping on a mid-morning, midweek game when the A's or Giants are on the East Coast?

The Giants open their season today, the A's on Friday. There are fresh batteries in the radio. *Now* it's spring.

### **What to watch**

**Baseball, Giants at Dodgers, 5 p.m., ESPN:** If there's no radio available, go ahead, enjoy.

### **What to watch II**

**NBA, Boston at San Antonio, 5 p.m., TNT:** Can the Celtics take advantage of the banged-up Spurs?

### Today's poll

#### What's the best way to enjoy baseball?

- Radio
- TV
- In person

Vote in the poll above or go to [www.sacbee.com/sports](http://www.sacbee.com/sports)

### Wednesday's results

**How has Barry Bonds' perjury trial affected your opinion of him?** • Now feel sorry for him: 6%

- Never liked him, like him less: 55%
- Was a fan, now am not: 7%
- Was a fan, still a fan: 32%

**Total votes:** 213

## **Editorial: Welcome back to the boys of summer**

Sacramento Bee, 3/31/2011

It's Opening Day for Major League Baseball: The fields are pristine, the uniforms are crisp, and fans of most every team can at least dream of the World Series.

What's not to like?

It's the season of hope, and nowhere more so than in Northern California.

The San Francisco Giants appear primed to try to reprise their magical run last year that culminated in their first title since moving West in 1958. Nearly all the key players are back (though a few are hurt) as they open their season today in Los Angeles against their archrivals, the Dodgers.

Pablo Sandoval is slimmed down and almost nimble at third base. Just maybe, rookie Brandon Belt could be this season's Buster Posey.

Across the Bay, the Oakland A's have beefed up their lineup and could be contenders as well as they open their season Friday at home against Seattle.

Do fans dare even imagine another Bay Bridge Series, like in 1989, only without the earthquake?

And let's not forget Sacramento's own River Cats, who have won four Pacific Coast League championships in 11 years and made the playoffs again last year. They open the season next Thursday against Tacoma at Raley Field.

Compared to other major pro sports, baseball is in much better shape.

For one thing, it's more competitive, despite the disparity in payrolls between bigger and smaller markets. Over the last decade, nine different teams have won the World Series. No team has repeated since the Yankees, who won three in a row ending in 2000.

The NFL is in a lockout, the coming season in jeopardy because greedy players and even greedier owners can't agree how to divvy up all those billions.

The NBA has labor strife – and fans around here are depressed, angry or both with the prospect that the Kings could play their final game in Sacramento in less than three weeks.

Yes, baseball is still overcoming the stigma of the steroid era – the ongoing Barry Bonds perjury trial is a daily reminder of that.

But most fans have moved on. For them, today is about excitement and expectation and renewing their devotion to America's pastime.

Play ball!

## **Braden pitches another gem, but A's fall to Giants**

By ANTONIO GONZALEZ AP Sports Writer

SAN FRANCISCO—Dallas Braden is ready to make this season memorable for more than just one start.

The fiery lefty with the big breaking ball pitched 5 2-3 scoreless innings before the San Francisco Giants rallied in the ninth to beat the Oakland Athletics 2-1 on Wednesday in the final tuneup before opening day.

A year after pitching a perfect game and making headlines for his infamous mound confrontation with Yankees slugger Alex Rodriguez, Braden is out to prove his often stunning performances were no fluke. He wants to be more consistent this season—and injury free—with hopes of helping the A's to an AL West title and possibly more.

"I was ready to be done with spring training on day two of spring training, so I'm definitely ready to get going now," he said.

Braden struck out five and allowed five hits and two walks against the World Series champions, who played mostly reserves in the finale of the annual preseason Bay Bridge Series. The Giants swept the series.

San Francisco starter Madison Bumgarner also had a solid performance, giving up one run in six innings. He struck out six and walked three.

The Giants begin their title defense Thursday at the rival Los Angeles Dodgers. Oakland opens the regular season at home against the Seattle Mariners on Friday night, and Braden believes the A's might surprise some people if they can stay healthy.

Braden will shore up the back end of a deep and talented rotation at the fourth spot. Along with Trevor Cahill, Brett Anderson and Gio Gonzalez, the A's rotation—which led the AL in ERA (3.56) and shutouts (17) last season—could be as good as any in the majors.

"I'm riding around on their coattails," Braden joked. "They're throwing around the 'Fantastic Four' name. I told them, 'Big 3.5, and I'll be the decimal.'"

The only run the A's gave Braden came in the third inning when Ryan Sweeney doubled and Mark Ellis drove him in two batters later. The Giants had a two-out rally in the ninth, with Eli Whiteside and Mark DeRosa hitting RBI singles off Bobby Cramer.

While the Giants were more than pleased to close spring with a sweep of their Bay Area rival, the real emotions came later in the clubhouse. Promising prospect Brandon Belt made the 25-man roster, crying tears of joy when he received the news from manager Bruce Bochy, and teammates congratulated the rookie as he choked up speaking to reporters.

"I'm not sure if I'm going to have a heart attack or cry," Belt said. "This is pretty much the most exciting day of my life."

Bochy said Belt deserved to make the team because he was the best player at his position. Belt will start at first base for the Giants, moving veteran Aubrey Huff—who was among the first to congratulate the rookie—to right field.

"I think Huff was crying more than Brandon," Bochy joked.

On a picturesque day in San Francisco's cozy waterfront ballpark, Braden soaked up every moment against the team he rooted for as a kid. He called AT&T Park "the most hallowed ground in baseball" and had never pitched in the ballpark across the Bay from the Oakland Coliseum.

While Braden cherished the opportunity, he quickly moved past his performance.

He was only 11-14 last season, had a 3.50 ERA but pitched five complete games, including his Mother's Day's masterpiece against the Tampa Bay Rays on May 9. But he went 0-5 in nine starts and dealt with an elbow injury after his perfect game before finally winning again, and he still has plenty to prove after an otherwise forgettable spring.

Braden allowed more runs than innings pitched in his first four outings this spring but did close strong. He allowed one run in just six innings in his previous start before holding the Giants scoreless.

Braden said he's more than ready for the regular season and relishes his role in the A's rotation.

"At the back end of the rotation, you want to be a surprise," Braden said. "You want them to look up on that Sunday day game and be like, "Dang, that just happened? I'm fully embracing the fourth spot."

NOTES: A's closer Andrew Bailey (strained forearm) and RHP Rich Harden (strained lat muscle below his shoulder) both had light throwing sessions. ... Giants outfielder Cody Ross (strained right calf) said he will likely resume baseball activity over the weekend. He will start the season on the DL and likely miss at least another two weeks. ... San Francisco allowed the A's to use the designated hitter for the final preseason game but the Giants choose not to use the DH themselves.

## **Bateman still in search of dream**

By Brian Sullivan, Berkshire Eagle Staff

Joey Bateman was there. He saw Oakland Athletics manager Bob Geren look at pitching coach Ron Romanick and tell him to "get Bateman up."

It was a spring-training game in Phoenix, in the middle of this month, and the Athletics were hosting the defending American League champion Texas Rangers. Oakland trailed in the ninth inning, and Geren wanted reliever Bateman ready for the 10th in case the A's tied the score.

Oakland never caught up, and Bateman never got the call.

It was a feeling he knows too well. The former pitching standout at Pittsfield High School and the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts has been knocking on the major-league door for so long that his knuckles are nearly raw.

Bateman, 30, is still waiting for his big chance.

Talented enough to have stayed in professional ball since being a 32nd-round selection by the San Francisco Giants in the 2002 draft and coming off perhaps his best year in the minors, Bateman chose to leave the Tampa Bay Rays' organization after two seasons and take a shot with Oakland this year.

A non-roster invitee to spring training, Bateman wasn't on the A's 40-man roster when camp opened. And, with the 2011 major-league season starting today, he's likely to start his year with the Class AAA Sacramento River Cats.

Still, it was the A's organization that wanted him during the offseason and promised a little more money than Tampa

Bay was paying.

With that optimism, the heart of Bateman's major-league dream continues to pump, and he hasn't tired from the quest.

"[Other players] talk about chasing the dream," Bateman said. "I always tell people that I'm living the dream."

Bateman was in the San Francisco Giants' minor-league system for six years, the Milwaukee Brewers' for one, and the Rays' for the past two. He was 7-0 with a 1.66 earned-run average with the Class AAA Durham Bulls in 2010. He walked 25 and struck out 66 in 76 innings.

"After the 2009 season I signed as quickly as I could with Tampa for 2010 because I wanted to have a job somewhere," said Bateman, a side-arming right-hander. "This past offseason I was more patient, and it was Oakland which contacted my agent."

"I've been in situations where I've been pitching really well but haven't gotten the call," he said. "I've seen guys who weren't pitching well get the call to the majors simply because they were on the 40-man roster. The A's have told me that isn't always their practice."

Bateman said he's heard that promise before.

"We'll see," he said.

Billy Bateman knew his son had a chance for a future in baseball when scouts would seek him out at MCLA games during Joey's senior year.

"Until that year I don't think I ever considered that Joey might keep his career going," Billy said.

Joey, who lives in Morrisville, Pa., with his girlfriend during the offseason, still calls his parents nearly every day.

"I just tell him to keep that fastball on the inside of the plate," Billy said with a laugh. "But all Joey has ever wanted was a shot at the majors. If it didn't work out, then I think he could accept that. He just wants a shot."

That opportunity will have to be earned with a pitching arsenal that includes a fastball that can reach the low 90s and a sweeping curve that neutralizes right-handers.

Getting a shot is how Joey felt in 2002, when he looked in the mirror and saw a young man who was about to wrap up his baseball career.

"Before I was drafted, I was very unsure about what was going to be next," Bateman said. "I knew after Little League there was Babe Ruth, and that after Babe Ruth there was high school, and then college.

"I felt sad at that point. I didn't feel like I was done. All I wanted was a chance to keep playing."

It was the second day of the draft when Joey's mother, Nancy, took the call.

"She told me that some team called the San Francisco Giants called," Joey said. "The scout came to my house to sign me. It was only for \$2,000, but I'll tell you -- I felt like a first-round pick. I'd never seen that kind of money."

The life of a minor-leaguer isn't so bad, Bateman said. The trains, planes and buses haven't diluted his desire.

"I love the travel," said Bateman, who has played winter ball in Venezuela and the Dominican Republic during the past three years. "When I was a kid I loved to get on my bike and check out other neighborhoods. I'm like that now. I can go where I want and when I want. I've always been like that."

But Venezuela?

"Well, they have some sort of statistic that shows that area as one with a very high murder rate," Bateman said. "But they take care of the ballplayers. We stay at a Best Western, and there's a mall right under the hotel.

"It's OK. I took Spanish in high school and have learned some more along the way. I've been able to survive."

Pittsfield High baseball coach Bob Moynihan recalls Bateman as a scrawny freshman and sophomore. (He's now a lean 6 feet, 2 inches and 185 pounds). Moynihan looked at him for second base because he didn't think Bateman had the arm to play the left side of the infield.

"He was a good little player," Moynihan said. "But he was still small his sophomore year. He did some pitching for us, but nothing overpowering."

Even Bateman's junior year at PHS didn't start well.

"He got lit up by Agawam early in the year; I think we lost 12-4," Moynihan said. "Joey's fastball was only in the high 70s."

But later in the year?

"Joey was in the high 80s and had a curve that buckled your knees," Moynihan said. "He was blowing people away. And he hit pretty well, too."

Joey's father attributed the surge in velocity to warmer weather and a growth spurt.

"He really blossomed as a pitcher his senior year," Billy Bateman said. "He was efficient and consistent, and I didn't do much to change him."

Billy Owens, the Athletics' director of player personnel, said that having Bateman in camp was good for the organization. Quality pitchers, Owens said, are worth plenty no matter what age they are.

"If you can get outs, it doesn't matter whether you're 24 or 35," Owens said. "There's going to be a spot for you."

Bateman has put together "an attractive minor-league career," Owens said, and as a minor-league free agent was on the A's radar.

"Joey has dominated at the Triple-A level at times, has a low earned-run average and keeps the ball on the ground," he said. "Because of his pitching angle, coming from the third-base side, he's been able to nullify right-handed hitters. He just needs to come up with something to get left-handers out on a more consistent basis.

"But Joey has put himself in a position where he's a viable option, and if you look at the A's over the past 10 years, you'll see that we've given these kind of players a chance."

Bateman isn't as whacky as former Red Sox legend Bill "Spaceman" Lee. Nor is he as quirky as Dalton's favorite son and former major-leaguer Turk Wendell. But Bateman is both introspective and a little out there.

One of his favorite books is "Way of the Peaceful Warrior," a story that surrounds the life of an aspiring gymnast who wants to be a world champion.

It reads, in part: "To survive the lessons ahead, you're going to need far more energy than ever before. You must cleanse your body of tension, free your mind of stagnant knowledge, and open your heart to the energy of true emotion."

Bateman follows that mantra closely.

"I use the word love," he said. "I love my folks, I love to be confident, and I love to be what I call peacefully aggressive. It's a state of mind in which I put myself. I try to be the peaceful warrior."

With that in mind, Bateman said he's neither hanging on nor ready to hang it up.

"I was very proud of what I did last year," he said. "I'm sure if I get a chance in the majors, I'll be successful. I am determined. But I'm still playing, and that's a blessing in itself."

## **American League preview: West Division**

By [Phil Rogers](#), Chicago Tribune

1. Rangers, 87-75
2. Angels, 86-76
3. Athletics, 78-84
4. Mariners, 61-101

**Pennants, wild cards since 1995:** 2, 3

**Average payroll:** \$99.3 million (3rd of 6 divisions)

Managers with World Series rings: Mike Scioscia

**Players with MVP trophies:** Josh Hamilton ('10), Ichiro Suzuki ('01).

**Pitchers with Cy Young awards:** Felix Hernandez ('10)

**Possible high fantasy picks:** Hamilton, Hernandez, Ian Kinsler, Trevor Cahill,

### 2011 awards

**MVP:** Adrian Beltre, Rangers. Just try to get a grounder past Beltre and shortstop Elvis Andrus – and he could drive in 100. His decision to join Texas after turning down the Angels will swing the balance of power just as surely as Vladimir Guerrero's defection from Anaheim to the Rangers did in 2010. Worth considering: Hamilton, Nelson Cruz, Vernon Wells.

**Cy Young:** Hernandez, Mariners. When he's on, hitting is out of the question. Worth considering: Jered Weaver, Ervin Santana, C.J. Wilson, Gio Gonzalez.

**Rookie of the Year:** Michael Pineda, Mariners. Won a rotation spot in spring training. Will benefit from Safeco Field. Worth considering: Mark Trumbo, Michael Kirkman, Dustin Ackley.

**Manager of the Year:** Mike Scioscia, Angels. He doesn't have the horses he did through 2009 but he and his staff will find a way to stay neck and neck with the loaded Rangers.

### Nine questions

**1. Why didn't Cliff Lee want to come back to Texas?** That's a great question, as it seemed a good fit and the Rangers went the extra mile to try to keep him. Most think he didn't like pitching at Rangers Ballpark in Arlington, where his ERA suffered.

**2. Why didn't the Rangers replace him?** They explored trades for Zack Greinke and Matt Garza but were reluctant to give up top prospects, so settled for trying to improve the fielding with the acquisition of Beltre.

**3. Why aren't the Angels trying?** Yes, but Arte Moreno might be the only owner in baseball trying to keep down ticket prices. He lost out on free-agent bids for Carl Crawford and Beltre before reluctantly trading for Vernon Wells.

**4. Is there really going to be a Billy Beane movie?** Amazingly, yes. The "Moneyball" story will be coming to a theater near you soon, even if the punchless A's are still a small tree on the baseball landscape at this point.

**5. Does Ichiro Suzuki matter?** Not really. He's a Hall of Famer, for sure, and always a pleasure to watch but his loyalty toward the Mariners has kept us from seeing if he's still a competitor.

**6. Who's the most underrated player?** It's a four-way tie between the Angels' top three starters – Jered Weaver, Ervin Santana and Dan Haren, and Joel Pineiro is a very good No. 4. Weaver might have a Cy Young run in him this season, and the Angels' rotation could be strong enough to lift an otherwise average team into the playoffs.

**7. Did Nolan Ryan reject Chuck Greenberg's friend request?** You could say that. The Greenberg era in Rangers' ownership lasted only seven months as Greenberg too often left Ryan scratching his head. But the bad marriage sure bore fruit last September and October.

**8. Antlers or Claws?** Hopefully neither. Opposing teams are going to start retaliating if the Rangers' players continue to make like kindergartners after clutch hits and bits of aggressive base-running?

**9. Can the A's be this year's Rangers?** Absolutely. They have the pitching to win and could get help from newcomers David DeJesus, Josh Willingham and Hideki Matsui. They still need another lift, which could come from power-hitting prospect Chris Carter or a mid-season trade.

## AL West: A's will be this year's surprise

Hamilton Spectator, 3/30/2011

Due to our early bedtimes and admitted East Coast bias, we hadn't seen much of the 2010 Texas Rangers until they showed up in the World Series. What a revelation! "Hey, isn't that Nolan Ryan behind home plate?" "That Josh Hamilton — he's pretty good, eh?" "Oh, wait — when did they get Cliff Lee?"

The Western stealth attack worked so well in 2010, we're going with it again in 2011.



This year's surprise out west will be the Athletics. They already possessed one of the best young pitching staffs in baseball, and this winter GM Billy Beane made some smart, low-cost pickups — in the persons of David DeJesus, Josh Willingham and Hideki Matsui — to boost their drooping offence.

They'll need some things to go right — a return to health for Coco Crisp, no recurrence of closer Andrew Bailey's elbow issues this spring, continued production out of the 36-year-old Matsui — but if they do, the A's could go a long way.

The Rangers already had a stranglehold on the division title when Lee arrived. With him, their late-season rotation slotted into place with ferocity. C.J. Wilson was a superb No. 2 starter; without Lee, he's a questionable No. 1. Likewise, Colby Lewis excelled as a No. 3 starter; as a No. 2, he's lacking. As for rehab project Brandon Webb? Wake us when he's getting big league hitters out again.

Also, three cornerstone pieces of their lineup — Hamilton, Ian Kinsler and Nelson Cruz are injury-prone. True, third baseman Adrian Beltre was a nice pickup, but he doesn't add quite as much as they lost when Lee walked away.

The Angels once owned the division, but they suffered a 17-win decline in 2010, finishing 80-82, then endured a winter of failed free-agent runs (losing Carl Crawford to Boston) and curious countermoves (trading for Vernon Wells). They have a nice rotation, headed by Jered Weaver, and could get a boost from the return of first baseman Kendry Morales. But this season could be nothing more than a countdown to the day uber-prospect Mike Trout arrives.

A year ago, the Mariners became the first team with a payroll of at least \$100 million to lose at least 100 games. And things don't look a whole lot better in 2011 — unless you believe Jason Vargas replacing Lee as the No. 2 starter represents an upgrade, or that the big Miguel Olivo signing this winter is going to push them over the top. The only way the Mariners will matter this year is if they decide to put Felix Hernandez on the trade market.

## **How they'll finish, and how they'll close games:**

### **1. Athletics**

**Closer of the present:** Andrew Bailey, age 26. Converted to relief in 2008, he was tabbed to close in the majors in 2009 and became AL rookie of the year. A late-spring elbow injury sidelined him, but it doesn't appear serious.

**Closer of the future:** Fautino De Los Santos, 25. Flame-thrower and one-time top prospect is now two-plus years removed from elbow surgery and on the rise again.

### **2. Rangers**

**Closer of the present:** Manager Ron Washington considered moving 2010 rookie sensation Neftali Feliz to the rotation, but he will remain as closer after converting 40 of 43 save opportunities last season.

**Closer of the future:** Alexi Ogando, 27. This late bloomer with swing-and-miss stuff (12.6 Ks per 9 innings in the minors) could take over the ninth by if at any point Washington decides to make Feliz a starter.

### **3. Angels**

**Closer of the present:** Fernando Rodney, 34. A high career walk rate (4.6 per 9 innings) and WHIP (1.445) make him a dicey proposition in the ninth inning, and the guess here is his ownership of it is short-lived, given the Angels' other options.

**Closer of the future:** Jordan Walden, 23. Converted to relief in the minors last spring, he was pitching the eighth inning (and touching 100 mph on the gun) in Anaheim by September.

### **4. Mariners**

**Closer of the present:** David Aardsma, 29. His hold on the job was already tenuous before undergoing hip surgery in January. As he works his way back, Brandon League will handle the ninth.

**Closer of the future:** Dan Cortes, 24. His career took off when the M's converted him to a reliever last season in Class AAA, and he could be an integral part of their bullpen this year.

## **Ten things to keep an eye on in the American League**

Ben Steele, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 3/29/2011

### **Head games**

Concussions have been the focus of professional sports in recent years, and baseball is not immune. The poster boy for the issue is Minnesota Twins first baseman Justin Morneau, the 2006 AL MVP who never returned last season after his head collided with an opponent's knee on July 7. The Twins are taking every precaution with Morneau, including an extra-padded helmet.

### **Feeling spurned**

It's really hard to feel bad for the New York Yankees. They had a clear goal in the off-season: Sign one or two quality starting pitchers. But Andy Pettitte retired, the Royals traded Zack Greinke to Milwaukee and Cliff Lee took less money to sign with Philadelphia. Now the Yankees are forced to use the likes of Ivan Nova and Freddy Garcia at the back end of the rotation. It's almost enough to make you feel sorry for the jilted Bronx Bombers. Almost.

### **Scoreboards beware**

Like their rival Yankees, the Boston Red Sox needed to upgrade their staff. But their two biggest acquisitions, first baseman Adrian Gonzalez and outfielder Carl Crawford, bolstered an already potent lineup. The Red Sox did get Bobby Jenks and Dan Wheeler to fortify the bullpen, but if Boston can't lower its 4.20 ERA from last season, the team's scorekeepers might be in for a busy season.

### **Familiar faces**

The Tampa Bay Rays have been fighting to keep up with the Red Sox and Yankees for years. So it should come as no surprise that Tampa Bay signed a couple of AL East legends, Manny Ramirez and Johnny Damon, to help the Rays defend the division crown. Those veteran additions still might not be enough to overcome the loss of Crawford, first baseman Carlos Pena, right-hander Matt Garza and closer Rafael Soriano.

### **Farm fresh**

Don't fret, Kansas City Royals fans, help is on the way. Only nobody knows when. The team's farm system is teeming with prospects and, as usual, the Royals won't be playing for much of anything this season. So look for minor-league stars to get called up throughout the year to learn under the watchful eye of manager Ned Yost.

### **Moneyball redux**

The film version of "Moneyball" is slated for release in September, so the timing is perfect for the Oakland Athletics and general manager Billy Beane to make a comeback. Beane is betting that the additions of proven bats like Hideki Matsui and Josh Willingham will provide support to a young pitching staff and help the Athletics get back to the playoffs for the first time since 2006.

### **Pitching in**

Quick, what team does Jake Peavy pitch for? It is easy to forget that the right-hander toes the slab for the White Sox, since he was shut down for the season after detaching his latissimus dorsi muscle near his right shoulder on July 6. Peavy experienced some soreness in the shoulder during spring training and is not expected to make his first start until late April. Manager Ozzie Guillen needs Peavy back as soon as possible if the White Sox are going to avoid the slow start that doomed them last year.

### **Law and order**

Detroit Tigers first baseman Miguel Cabrera's list of accomplishments include five all-star teams in seven years and an AL-leading 37 homers in 2008. Cabrera's rap sheet is getting almost as lengthy. His latest alcohol-related arrest came in February on suspicion of drunken driving. Many attributed Cabrera's off-field issues to his slump at the beginning of spring training. He eventually heated up, a good sign because the Tigers need Cabrera focused solely on baseball if they are going to compete in a division that's up for grabs.

## **Bucking the odds**

When Buck Showalter took over as Baltimore's manager last season, the Orioles were in the major-league basement at 32-73. Under Showalter's stewardship, the team finished on a 34-23 run. The Orioles are in position to be a surprising team after adding solid veterans Derrek Lee, Mark Reynolds and J.J. Hardy.

## **The Lone Ranger**

The Texas Rangers went to their first World Series last year, but the off-season wasn't free of drama. Michael Young asked for a trade after the club million contract. The signed third baseman Adrian Beltre to a six-year, \$96 million contract. Rangers couldn't swing a deal and Young has quietly gone about his business. So the issue is still festering and could disrupt clubhouse chemistry. Or Young could be packaged for a piece that will help Texas find postseason success again.