

A's News Clips, Saturday, September 24, 2011

Home runs by Jemile Weeks, David DeJesus give Oakland A's win over Los Angeles Angels and help Texas Rangers wrap up A.L. West

By Art Thompson III, Oakland Tribune

The A's helped the Texas Rangers clinch the American League West on Friday night, and Jemile Weeks helped them do it.

One day after hitting his first career home run, the 161-pound Weeks muscled up against Los Angeles Angels ace Jered Weaver, smacking a fastball into the right-field stands to lead off the game.

David DeJesus homered off Weaver in the ninth, and the 3-1 victory eliminated the Angels from the A.L. West race. They remain alive in the wild-card race.

"I'm just trying to be successful by working on my strengths," Weeks said before the game. "I'm trying to get better in what I do the best."

Although not credited with a run batted in, Weeks was responsible for producing Oakland's second run that snapped a 1-1 tie.

Kurt Suzuki led off the eighth inning with a single and was sacrificed to second by Scott Sizemore. Weaver then uncorked his second wild pitch of the night to move Suzuki to third.

With the infield in, Weeks hit a sharp grounder that caromed off third baseman Maicer Izturis' glove and into short left field, scoring Suzuki.

The Angels loaded the bases in the eighth on three walks, but with two outs, Howie Kendrick popped out in foul territory in right field.

Weaver (18-8) was the marquee pitcher heading into the game. He had won his previous three decisions, 12 of his previous 15 and six consecutive at home.

But through six innings he was being outdueled by the A's Gio Gonzalez (15-12). In what Oakland manager Bob Melvin called Gonzalez's best game of the year, the lefty went 7 1/3 innings and allowed only three hits. He struck out five and walked two. The lone run he allowed came on a seventh-inning home run by Torii Hunter. Otherwise, Gonzalez was in control.

"All of his pitches. Both sides of the plate," Melvin said. "He showed great composure. Gio's really been on a mission these last few (starts). He really wants to finish up strong."

□ Competition is a good thing, Melvin stated before the game, when the topic turned to Daric Barton, who underwent surgery Monday to repair a torn labrum of the right shoulder. Going into the 2011 season, Barton was slated to be Oakland's starting first baseman. But this has been a lost season for him. He was limited to 67 games and batted only .212, in 236 at-bats.

Barton likely will not be able to throw until January, but the hope is that he will be ready, if not for the beginning of spring training, shortly after it begins. His chief competition figures to be Brandon Allen, who has started 37 of the A's 38 games since being recalled Aug. 13, from Triple-A Sacramento. Allen has been mired in a slump of late but he hit .354 in his first 13 games with the A's.

"(Barton) was the guy that was on top," Melvin said. "Now, all of a sudden, there's another guy playing over there. You can't get caught up in that. You have to go out there and believe in yourself, and have in your conviction that you're going to be an everyday player. That's what I want him to think. So, we'll see how it goes in spring training."

□ Weeks is hitting .302. He is bidding to become only the second rookie in Oakland history to hit .300 for a season. Mitchell Page hit .307 in 1977.

"It would be nice. It would be a great accomplishment. But I'm not worried about my average," Weeks said before Friday's game.

Chin Music: This weekend's coverage

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 8/23/2011 2:05pm

Just a heads-up that I won't be in Anaheim to cover this weekend's A's-Angels series, but I'll pick the team back up in Seattle for the season-ending games. This year has flown by, let me tell you ...

I'll be updating the blog if there's any major news surrounding the team this weekend. If you missed it, here's today's story on Coco Crisp and the decision the A's face on whether to re-sign him.

Daric Barton looks to get healthy, compete for job

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Daric Barton, who had shoulder surgery Sept. 12, visited the clubhouse Friday and said he should be ready for spring training, perhaps just a bit behind the other position players.

Like starter **Dallas Braden**, who had a torn shoulder capsule repaired in July, Barton had less-invasive arthroscopic surgery to fix what he called a partial tear of the labrum in his right shoulder. Two anchors were inserted to staple the labrum to the bone, Barton said, and having arthroscopic surgery should shorten the recovery time.

Barton can resume throwing in January, according to manager **Bob Melvin**, who said that Barton remains in the mix at first base. That appeared to be a longshot a month or two ago, after Barton was demoted, the team acquired **Brandon Allen** and he got off to an extremely hot start.

Since then, Allen has cooled off - he is batting .138 over his past 24 games and .207 overall. If he were to have a dreadful spring or a tepid start to next season, Barton, the team's first baseman much of the past three years, might again be an option should he put up good numbers. The same is true of **Chris Carter**. Allen has the upper hand, but at this point, Melvin isn't ruling anything out at almost any position.

"I don't think there are too many spots going into next year where you could say, 'He's the guy,' " Melvin said.

As for Barton, he should be plenty motivated to try to regain his spot.

"He was the guy on top, and now there's another guy over there," Melvin said. "But you can't get caught up in that. You have to have conviction that you're an everyday major-league player and when you do well, you'll make some people move some players around."

Barton just wants to get back to full strength; he entered 2011 in the best shape of his life, but he believes his shoulder injury occurred the first week of the season and that he wasn't the same after that.

Barton is arbitration-eligible after the season, and there's always a chance the team might non-tender him.

"I'm not thinking about that at all," he said. "All I'm trying to do is get healthy and everything else will fall into place. This season was just a speed bump."

Melvin, who took over as manager on June 9, only had Barton for two weeks before he was sent down.

"I didn't see the real Daric Barton at all," Melvin said. "He was struggling with a lot of things, he wasn't swinging the bat the way he usually does, he was down on himself, and things mounted on him. ... Whether the injury was a part of that, probably so. I think he'll be in a better place next spring."

A's eliminate Angels in AL West
Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Jemile Weeks supplied the power for a second game in a row, and Gio Gonzalez added superb work on the mound into the eighth inning Friday to fuel Oakland's 3-1 victory and knock the Angels out of contention in the AL West.

"We came in and tried to do our best," Gonzalez said. "We knew this is very important for them. ... To do something like this is exciting."

Gonzalez has won each of his past three starts and has allowed four runs, total, in those 21 innings of work. He matched his career high with his 15th victory.

"That's the best I've seen him all year," manager Bob Melvin said. "And we've seen him plenty good. ... Gio has really been on a mission to finish strong, and the last three games, he's been on it."

Gonzalez allowed only one run in the first seven innings, a solo homer by Torii Hunter in the seventh, but he got into trouble in the eighth and reliever Grant Balfour got him out of it, tensions high with the Angels trying to stay in the postseason race and the crowd in Anaheim furiously loud.

Gonzalez issued his first walk with one out in the eighth, putting Erick Aybar aboard, and then he walked pinch hitter Alberto Callaspo. That prompted the switch to Balfour.

Balfour got Maicer Izturis to ground out, moving the runners up to second and third, then walked Peter Bourjos on four pitches. He fell behind Howie Kendrick before Kendrick flied out down the right-field line on a 3-2 pitch.

Weeks, who took 91 big-league games to hit his first major-league homer Thursday, added his second in no time at all. He hit one out to right to lead off Friday's game off All-Star Jered Weaver.

"That set a tone against a guy who isn't going to give up many runs," Melvin said. "You know runs are going to be at a premium."

After the Angels tied it on Hunter's homer in the seventh, the A's went ahead again in the eighth. Kurt Suzuki singled to lead off the inning, went to second on Scott Sizemore's bunt and to third on a wild pitch. With the infield in, Weeks hit a sharp chopper toward third that kicked off the heel of Izturis' glove, and Suzuki scored on the error.

David DeJesus added a solo homer off Weaver in the ninth. Andrew Bailey worked a 1-2-3 ninth for his 22nd save in 24 chances.

Leading off

K's all day: Gio Gonzalez recorded five strikeouts Friday night at Anaheim, giving the A's 1,124 for the season, tying the all-time franchise record set in 2009.

Drum beat: Daric Barton visits clubhouse; his future with A's

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Anaheim 9/23/2011 6:35pm

Daric Barton, who had shoulder surgery two weeks ago, visited the clubhouse today in Anaheim and he said he should be ready for spring training, perhaps just a bit behind the other position players. Manager Bob Melvin said Barton can resume throwing in January, and Melvin said that Barton remains in the potential mix at first base.

That was looking like a longshot a month or two ago, after Barton was demoted and then the team acquired Brandon Allen and he got off to an extremely hot start. Since then, Allen has cooled off considerably – he's batting .221 – and Barton, the team's first baseman much of the past three years, could again be an option, should he prove he's healthy and puts up good numbers. The same is true of Chris Carter. Allen has the upper hand, but at this point, Melvin isn't ruling anything out at almost any position.

"I don't think there are too many spots going into next year where you could say, 'He's the guy,' " Melvin said.

As for Barton, he should be plenty motivated to try to regain his spot.

"He was the guy on top, and now there's another guy over there," Melvin said. "But you can't get caught up in that. You have to have conviction that you're an everyday major-league play and when you do well, you'll make some people move some players around."

Barton just wants to get back to full strength; he entered 2011 in the best shape of his life, but he believes his shoulder injury occurred the first week of the season and he wasn't the same after that.

"All I'm trying to do is get healthy," he said, "and everything else will fall into place. This season was just a speed bump."

Here's the lineup tonight, and Gio Gonzalez is on the mound for the A's against Jered Weaver and the desperate Angels, trying to cling to their last remaining shred of playoff hopes: Weeks 2b, Crisp cf, Matsui dh, Willingham lf, DeJesus rf, Pennington ss, Allen 1b, Suzuki c, Sizemore 3b.

A lot of scouts are here from contenders, watching the Angels, and from out-of-contention clubs looking at the A's many free agents. They all universally say one thing when they see me: "I'm not going to go see 'Moneyball.' "

Scouts were not portrayed in glowing fashion in the book or in the movie, so I can see why they might not want to go to the film. Scouts are pretty much my favorite people in baseball, as I've mentioned before – they travel more than anyone, basically non-stop; they're not well paid, for the most part; and they get very little credit for anything. They do this because they really love baseball. It's great for any baseball reporter or fan to get a chance to talk to these guys – they are passionate about the game, and they are entertaining, always, because they have opinions on everything. And right now, they have a definite opinion on "Moneyball." I'm told one prominent scout got the book as a gift from his wife – and he made her take it back.

On a personal level, my biggest issue with "Moneyball" – which I enjoyed overall, particularly Brad Pitt's portrayal of Billy Beane and Stephen Bishop's portrayal of David Justice – is that Art Howe is the villain of the thing. Now, the movie needs a villain for dramatic purposes, I understand that, and Howe and Beane did clash occasionally. But you can't find a nicer, better man than Art Howe, the real Art Howe. He's a gentleman in real life, and the movie version is definitely not.

I heard that Howe expressed strong displeasure with his depiction when he spoke on XM today, and I don't blame him a bit. It's not even an exaggerated role, it's a flat-out different person altogether. It's a shame his name couldn't have been changed the way Paul DePodesta's was. It's essentially character assassination of a man who is well-liked all over the sport.

Gio tops Weaver as A's settle AL West race **By Jane Lee / MLB.com**

ANAHEIM -- The A's were being watched closely Friday, their play dictating whether the Rangers clinched their second straight American League West title.

By night's end, they gave their division foes just that by way of a 3-1 victory over an equally familiar Angels team, which slipped 3 1/2 games back in the AL Wild Card standings after suffering their second straight loss.

From the outside, it would appear the A's aren't involved in any such race, as they exited the night 15 games below the .500 mark. Yet they are intertwined in others, and they surely don't mind toying with the contending, though it meant settling a division whose crown went elsewhere.

At the forefront of such an effort Friday was Gio Gonzalez, who continued his September dominance with a 7 1/3-inning outing, allowing just one run on three hits with one walk and five strikeouts to pick up his career-high-tying 15th win of the season.

"I've seen him plenty good," manager Bob Melvin said, "but I think that's the best I've seen him all year."

The A's lefty, who upped the pitching staff's season strikeout total to 1,124 -- tying for most in club history -- improved to 4-1 with a 2.73 ERA this month with one start remaining on his 2011 calendar.

Expect him to go at it with the same fervent attitude he brought into Friday's affair.

"I'm extremely focused," said Gonzalez, who has allowed just four runs over his last three starts. "I want to go out there, continue to pound the strike zone, continue to get my innings up and try to work and see if I can go the distance more and more. It's definitely a learning process every time I grab that ball."

"You want these guys going home with a good feeling," Melvin said. "Gio's really been on a mission here these last several games. He's really wanted to finish strong, and his last three games he's been on it, culminating with tonight being his best. He's really focused and has a goal of finishing strong."

Before even taking the mound, Gonzalez was awarded a 1-0 lead courtesy of Jemile Weeks' second homer in as many days, which follows a 90-game homerless streak. The solo shot, which quickly found its way from Jered Weaver's glove to the right-field bleachers, marked the surging Weeks' first career leadoff home run.

"It might have gotten more of the plate than I wanted it to," Weaver said. "Maybe he was looking for it there. But it wasn't that bad of a pitch, I hadn't thrown anything in in a while and he did a good job of getting his hands through and putting good wood on it."

Melvin, who after Thursday's homer assured Weeks he didn't need to be searching for long ball No. 2, insisted his rookie "wasn't swinging for the fences."

"But that really set the tone for the game, gave us some energy right away," Melvin said. "Against a guy like that, you know runs are going to be at a premium, so to get the lead right away like that and then watch Gio go out there with his good stuff, you knew it was probably going to be a close game and there weren't going to be too many runs scored."

Gonzalez proceeded to keep the narrow lead intact through six innings, giving up just one hit along the way, before offering up a game-tying homer to Torii Hunter with one out in the seventh.

The score remained that way for all of a few minutes, though, as Kurt Suzuki led off the top of the eighth inning with a base hit and, after advancing to second on Scott Sizemore's sacrifice bunt and moving to third on a wild pitch from Weaver, found his way home on Weeks' sharp grounder to third baseman Maicer Izturis that bounced off the infielder's glove into the outfield.

The Angels made it interesting in the bottom half of the frame in front of a deafening crowd against righty Grant Balfour, who relieved Gonzalez after one out with a runner on first base and walked the bases loaded. But the right-hander escaped the jam, forcing Peter Bourjos to fly out to right field.

Needing some breathing room, the A's got just that from David DeJesus, who collected his 10th homer of the year in the ninth, chasing Weaver.

A's closer Andrew Bailey secured the victory by pitching a scoreless ninth for his 22nd save of the season, making Gonzalez just the seventh pitcher in baseball to win 15 both this year and last. He joins the ranks of C.J. Wilson, Tim Hudson, Roy Halladay, Justin Verlander, CC Sabathia and Jon Lester.

"We came in here and tried to do our best," the always humble Gonzalez said. "We knew it was very important for them, but at the same time this is definitely a step in the right direction for us. We're staying alive, especially against Weaver, who is basically untouchable. So to do something like this is exciting for all of us. It was a great team effort."

Wild Card-hopeful Angels send Williams vs. A's
By Quinn Roberts / MLB.com

Fighting for their playoff life after losing crucial ground with Friday's loss to the A's, the Angels understand the reality they are in.

"We're probably gonna have to win pretty much every game from here on out," first baseman Mark Trumbo said. "But the fact that there's still a chance, and that gives us hope."

With a 3-1 loss to Oakland, the Angels were knocked out of contention in the American League West and sit 3 1/2 games back of the Red Sox in the Wild Card race with five games left to play.

"We still have a shot at the Wild Card," Torii Hunter said. "All you want to do is have a chance just to get in. You want to get in, and then you have a chance to win the World Series. We still have a shot .. there's still life left."

They'll turn to Jerome Williams Saturday at home in a must-win game.

A boost to the Angels' rotation in his five starts this season, the right-hander has used a sinking fastball and cutter/curveball combination to go 3-0 with a 3.22 ERA.

In his last start against the Blue Jays, Williams surrendered only two runs (none earned) on six hits for a no-decision.

Meanwhile, Guillermo Moscoso (8-9, 3.35 ERA) will be on the hill for the A's as they try and play spoiler for the second night in a row.

Allowing two earned runs or fewer in six of his last eight starts, the right-hander dazzled Sunday against the Tigers.

Moscoso allowed just one hit -- a home run to Austin Jackson -- in six innings, but took the hard-luck loss against Justin Verlander in a 3-0 defeat.

"He threw the ball really well," manager Bob Melvin said of Moscoso. "The one hit he gives up is a home run, and you know when you go out there against a guy like Verlander, you're going to have to pitch well and keep runs to a minimum, and he did, but his pitch count got up there a little bit. They fouled off a lot of balls, and that's the way they were able to do that."

A's: Last chance to cure road woes

Finishing their season with a six game road trip, Oakland has lost seven of its last 10 road games and is 28-48 (.368) on the road this season. That is the worst record in the AL and second-worst in the Majors.

It also marks the fifth consecutive season the A's will finish with a losing record on the road.

- Andrew Bailey has converted all 14 of his save opportunities since the All-Star break and is a perfect 76-for-76 after the break in his career.

Angels: Scioscia not fan of scheduling

While manager Mike Scioscia has taken the you've-got-to-win-no-matter-what approach, the Angels manager is still in favor of changing September schedules to include more division games or games closer to home.

He especially felt this way after going to bed after 4 a.m. Friday when the Angels returned home from Toronto.

"We know there needs to be schedule reform ... where you play a more balanced and equitable schedule of not having to go back East during the last 10 games of your season," he said.

Worth noting

- The Angels are 13-3 in their last 16 home games.
- Saturday night, the Angels will surpass 3 million fans for the ninth consecutive season to extend the club record.
- The A's, who have not finished a season more than 14 games under .500 since 1997, stand 15 games under with a record of 71-86.

A's knock Angels out of AL West race

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ANAHEIM — Gio Gonzalez outdueled Jered Weaver and the A's scored the go-ahead run on an eighth-inning error, beating the Los Angeles Angels 3-1 Friday night and eliminating them from the AL West race.

The Angels' defeat clinched the division for Texas. The loss also dropped Los Angeles 3½ games behind Boston in the AL wild-card race.

Los Angeles lost for the fifth time in eight games, blunting its charge toward a playoff spot. The Angels have only five games left to catch the Red Sox.

Gonzalez (15-12) matched his win total of last season, allowing a run and three hits in 7 1-3 innings. The left-hander is 6-1 with a 2.89 ERA in seven starts after going 0-5 with a 7.90 ERA in his previous five.

Jemile Weeks and David DeJesus homered for the Athletics.

It was 1-all in the eighth when Kurt Suzuki led off with a single against Weaver (18-8). Suzuki moved up on a sacrifice by Scott Sizemore, took third on a wild pitch and scored on a fielding error by third baseman Maicer Izturis on Weeks' grounder.

Gonzalez, who leads the AL with 88 walks, departed in the bottom half after one-out walks to Erick Aybar and pinch-hitter Alberto Callaspo. Izturis grounded out against Grant Balfour, and another walk to Peter Bourjos loaded the bases.

The Angels' threat ended when Howie Kendrick hit a foul fly to right field that was caught by DeJesus.

DeJesus chased Weaver in the ninth with his 10th home run.

Andrew Bailey pitched a perfect ninth for his 22nd save in 24 chances.

Weaver gave up with three runs — two earned — and six hits while striking out eight and walking none. The right-hander, who led the majors last season with 233 strikeouts, needs two more to become only the second Angels right-hander with consecutive 200-strikeout seasons. Nolan Ryan fanned 200 or more seven times in an eight-year span between 1972 and 1979 and set a modern major league-record with 383 in 1973, a mark that still stands.

The loss made Weaver 14-1 with a 1.36 ERA in the last 24 starts in which he has pitched at least seven innings. It was his first defeat under those circumstances since Sept.

4, 2010, when he dropped a 3-1 decision at Oakland against Trevor Cahill.

Rookie Mark Trumbo's one-out single in the second inning was the Angels' only hit off Gonzalez until the seventh, when Torii Hunter tied the score 1-all with a one-out homer on the first pitch. It was his 22nd of the season and 79th RBI for the four-time All-Star, who had only four hits in 24 career at-bats against Gonzalez before that at-bat.

One night after hitting his first major league home run in Oakland's 4-3 win over Texas, Weeks got his second one when he drove Weaver's third pitch of the game into the seats above the 18-foot wall in right-center.

NOTES: The crowd of 39,217 increased the Angels' home attendance figure to 2,965,557, guaranteeing them that they will finish with a higher total than the Dodgers for the first time in the franchise's 50-year history. The Dodgers completed their home schedule Thursday night with a total of 2,935,139. ... This was the eighth time in Weaver's 177 career starts that he has given up a home run to the first batter he faced (2-3 with three no-decisions). The other leadoff batters who did it to him were Ichiro Suzuki, Curtis Granderson (twice), Shannon Stewart, Jacoby Ellsbury, Grady Sizemore and Rafael Furcal. ... Oakland SS Cliff Pennington's two-base throwing error on Vernon Wells' routine grounder in the fifth was his 22nd of the season, the second most in the league behind Elvis Andrus' 25 with the Rangers.

THE ART OF WINNING AN (EVEN MORE) UNFAIR GAME

Eight years after it forever shifted baseball's tectonic plates, Moneyball is a Brad Pitt movie, but its ethos has changed. Intellectual firepower is mandatory, but no guarantee of success now that the game's financial giants have cracked the code. Competitive advantage: Red Sox

By Tom Verducci, Sports Illustrated 9/26/2011

THE NEW MONEYBALL

One floor below street level on Yawkey Way, in his windowless corner office which looks out upon a bank of cubicles that could pass for a telemarketing firm, Red Sox general manager Theo Epstein is deep in consultation with a trusted adviser he identifies only as Carmine. Adrian Gonzalez may be the team's most valuable player and the object of an 11-year Ahab-like pursuit by Epstein, but the G.M. never makes a move without consulting Carmine, a five-year-old proprietary computer program that is the virtual brains of the Boston operation.

Epstein fell for Gonzalez long before he had Carmine. He first saw the All-Star first baseman in 2000, smashing what appeared to be long home runs far over the unmarked wall in left centerfield at Eastlake High, 30 minutes from where Epstein worked as director of baseball operations for the San Diego Padres. Epstein fell in love with that stroke the way baseball men, connoisseurs of kinetics, swoon over the arc of a pitcher's arm or a shortstop's sleight of hand. "I fooled you," Gonzalez revealed to Epstein this spring, a few months after Epstein at last fulfilled his quest by trading three of his top six prospects to the Padres for Gonzalez. "It was only 270 feet to left center."

What Epstein did know back then was that an information revolution was coming to the hidebound world of baseball. A Yale grad and law student in his late 20s, he was too young and too curious to be content with the status quo. Two years earlier, for instance, the Padres did not have any college statistics to prepare for the draft: The club didn't know something as basic as whether a player it was considering hit .250 or .350. Days before the draft, Epstein asked an intern to call college sports information directors across the country to get team statistics faxed to the office. Armed with at least some rudimentary data, Epstein ventured that a college pitcher with more walks than strikeouts, for instance, might not be the best use of a first-round pick.

In 2002, with the Red Sox under the new ownership team of John Henry, Tom Werner and Larry Lucchino, his former boss in San Diego, Epstein was hired as an assistant to Boston general manager Mike Port. The club's operations were so archaic that you could still hear the clackety-clack of Port tapping out memos and reports on his typewriter and, upon completion, the thwack of his stapler. In another part of the office, however, the future of the game was incubating among bright young minds not long out of elite colleges, including Epstein, Jed Hoyer (Wesleyan), Ben Cherington (Amherst) and, upon joining them in December of that year, Josh Byrnes (Haverford). They understood that statistics represented a reservoir of information-and a potential competitive advantage.

The young men had heaps of fun, working crazy hours and, to blow off steam, knocking golf balls around the office, playing football among the cubicles and celebrating big wins with postgame refreshments at Boston watering holes. Then one day in 2002, a best-selling writer by the name of Michael Lewis walked into the Red Sox offices and knocked the smile right off Epstein's face. Lewis was working on a book about baseball's nascent information age, but Epstein wanted nothing to do with him.

"I can't believe Billy is letting him write this book," he told his colleagues.

Billy Beane, Oakland's general manager, had granted Lewis access to his front-office operations, which meant revealing how the A's were mining information from statistical analysis, a tool used extensively at the time by only the Athletics, Indians, Blue Jays and Red Sox. "He's handing out the blueprint," Epstein told Hoyer.

Explains Epstein now, "It just seemed that [the book] would take a nuanced idea-while not a great secret, because Branch Rickey was using a lot of it a half century ago and Bill James had been writing about it for decades-and make it mainstream pretty quickly.

"The book hit The New York Times best-seller list. People who own baseball teams read The New York Times best-seller list. So they started asking questions about the processes their front offices were using, and it changed things really quickly."

Today, eight years after Moneyball roared and Port's typewriter was silenced (Epstein took his place after the 2002 season), all 30 clubs incorporate statistical analysis in their baseball operations, with 15 to 20 of them relying on it heavily.

The advantage of the early adopters is gone. In his first winter as G.M., for instance, Epstein was able to scoop up Kevin Millar, Bill Mueller, David Ortiz, Todd Walker and Jeremy Giambi on the cheap because he understood that on-base percentage was a far better tool to evaluate a hitter than batting average, which was still the industry standard for rating-and paying-players. Epstein immediately built a team that broke the alltime slugging record set by the famed 1927 Yankees and set franchise records for OPS and home runs-and he did it while cutting the payroll by \$8.4 million. But now "teams are looking at similar metrics," Epstein says. "So players are valued pretty closely by 30 clubs."

As Moneyball, the movie, hits screens this week, Beane and the Athletics have been trampled by their own revolution. They haven't had a winning season since 2006, and even amid great regular-season success in the aftermath of the book's publication, they never did win a playoff game beyond the first round. Playing in an antiquated multipurpose stadium with the worst attendance in baseball, Oakland is unable to compete with clubs that caught up to it intellectually and blow it away financially.

No team better defines the state of the art than the Red Sox, host to more than 700 straight sellouts at Fenway Park, a \$163 million payroll and Carmine, which Epstein commissioned in 2006 to catch up to Cleveland, which had its own proprietary software called DiamondView. Under Epstein, the Red Sox have won two World Series, fielded more 95-win teams in nine years (six) than the franchise had in the previous 53 (four) and been judged by Baseball America as the team of the decade (2000-09) when it came to the amateur draft. "I'm proud of the people and the processes here," Epstein says, "but just about everything we're doing here is being done elsewhere, and a lot of it better. We have a pretty big cushion with our resources. We can take sixth-rounders and pay them third-round money without thinking twice about it."

When Epstein took over as general manager he developed a mantra, the clean version of which is, "We don't know spit." The quest for as much information as possible is at the heart of the Red Sox Way, especially now that the Moneyball blueprint has gone mainstream. Information is the game's currency-though the one issued by the Federal Reserve is also quite nice, thank you. "The field has been leveled [since Moneyball]," says one NL executive. "The fact that the Red Sox have the resources gives them an edge. [This year] they paid [lefthander] Andrew Miller a million dollars to pitch in Triple A. That's an entire Triple A payroll for most teams. But give those guys credit. They took that organization from a steam engine to a motorized gas engine. Why shouldn't they take advantage of their resources?"

The story of how Gonzalez became a Red Sox player is the nexus of Boston's intellectual and financial might in a post-Moneyball world. It is also the story of lesser names: first baseman Anthony Rizzo, whom the Red Sox drafted in 2007; pitcher Casey Kelly, an '08 pick; and outfielder Reymond Fuentes, an '09 pick-the three key prospects they traded for Gonzalez. It is the story of searching for any edge through information.

Now I can click on the screen... ." Epstein says as he executes a few keystrokes, "... and call up ... there's [Jacoby] Ellsbury."

A trove of information pops up about the Boston centerfielder. It includes some proprietary statistical data, including Boston's in-house defensive metrics (the popular ones cannot be trusted, especially in one-year samples) and an overall empirical valuation that combines offense, defense and baserunning metrics. Carmine automatically updates the numbers, including projections, every day for every player in professional baseball.

Carmine also guards less quantifiable data, including the first report filed on Ellsbury in 2003, two years before he was drafted, as well as eight follow-up reports chock-full of anecdotes culled from interviews with his coaches, trainers, college SID, opposing coaches, summer league coach and others. There is a story about a foot injury "no one knew

about" that explained a brief slump in the Cape Cod League in '04. There is the story of the day in '05 when two cross-checkers worked out Ellsbury in a San Diego gym because of rain: The 21-year-old picked up a stray basketball and threw down a monster dunk, confirming their reports on his athleticism. All those notations-which a decade ago would have consumed just two or three sentences under "makeup" in most teams' player files-are separate from the actual nuts-and-bolts scouting report on his skills.

Each spring the typical area scout for the Red Sox will follow about 50 players on his watch list. Cross-checkers will see about 100 players each. They all file background reports with Carmine every time they see a player. "That's a lot of information," Epstein says. "But that's where you get the edge. You're not going to have the most success with the most obvious, readily available information."

Epstein understood early that draft picks, like information, are a form of currency-so why not hoard them? During the 2002 season Port traded for lefthanded-hitting slugger Cliff Floyd, whom Epstein had no interest in re-signing. Epstein knew he could replace Floyd with a free agent-it turned out to be Ortiz, who worked out quite nicely-and get two compensatory draft picks after Floyd signed with another team. The Red Sox wound up with three of the first 49 picks in the '03 draft, each of which produced a future big leaguer (outfielders David Murphy and Matt Murton and pitcher Abe Alvarez). One player leaves, and you wind up with a net gain of two.

The industry narrative at the time regarding players in their free-agent walk years was, "I can't let him walk and get nothing but draft picks in return," a conviction that drove the trade market. But Epstein understood that the counter argument made more sense: "I'll let him walk and get the draft picks." As happened with on-base percentage, the rest of the industry has caught on and draft picks are cherished to the point where one of the hottest names in this year's trade market, San Diego closer and free-agent-to-be Heath Bell, went nowhere because the value of draft picks outweighed the players being offered in return.

In his early years as G.M., Epstein, like Beane, was more apt to use those picks on college players because statistical models indicated they were better bets to succeed than those out of high school. From 2003 to '06, the Red Sox used only a third of their picks on high school players. But by 2006, three years after Moneyball had spelled out Oakland's college-centric draft strategy, Epstein noticed the industry was focusing disproportionately on college players. High school players who would have gone in the second or third round before Moneyball were still on the board in the fifth or sixth.

So the Red Sox switched gears in 2007, the first year under Epstein in which they drafted more players out of high school than from four-year colleges. (They used 56% of their picks on high schoolers from 2007 to '11, nearly doubling their early rate.) One of those picks was Rizzo, a lefthanded-hitting first baseman out of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High in Parkland, Fla. Rizzo wasn't even the best prospect on his team; most scouts went to Douglas to see a catcher, Daniel Elorriaga-Matra. But when Laz Gutierrez, a Boston scout in the area, watched the team early in the season, he liked Rizzo. Rizzo did not run well and had a soft body-faults that turned off some scouts-but Gutierrez filed reports enthusing about the way the ball jumped off his bat to all fields and how smooth his hands and footwork were around the bag. Team cross-checkers Dave Finley, Mike Rikard and Marc Delpiano all concurred with Gutierrez.

The Red Sox, thinking they might have found a rare hidden gem, had Gutierrez lie low on Rizzo, which meant showing up only at big games when his attendance would not be construed as unusual. By the sixth round of the '07 draft, Rizzo was still available. Boston took him and paid him \$325,000, a bonus generally reserved for a third-round pick.

Rizzo worked hard to transform his body. But the next year, at age 18, he was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma. After six months of treatments, including chemotherapy, Rizzo's cancer went into remission and he became one of the most liked and talented prospects in the Boston system. Last year he was named the organization's minor league player of the year. "He was an unbelievable inspiration, and everybody rallied around him," Epstein says. "We were just blown away with how this kid handled everything."

Under Epstein, the Red Sox have made 43 picks in the top three rounds of nine drafts. They have used only four of those picks on high school pitchers-five if you count Kelly, who wanted to be drafted as a shortstop and was prepared to play quarterback at Tennessee if he wasn't.

High school pitchers represent the biggest investment risk in the draft because pitching skills are harder to predict than hitting skills. The Red Sox won't take a high school pitcher high in the draft unless he is extremely polished. For Boston, that means the pitcher must have very clean arm action; a repeatable delivery; a natural feel for spinning the ball; a fastball that has not just velocity but also finish, deception or command; exceptional athleticism and great makeup. Kelly was the rare high school pitcher who met every criteria.

The area scout for Boston on Kelly was Anthony Turco, who had attended the same high school as the prospect, Sarasota High on Florida's Gulf coast. To keep Kelly from playing college football, Turco learned, a club would have to draft him as a shortstop and pay him first-round money. The problem for the Red Sox was that they considered Kelly a first-round pitcher but a third- or fourth-round shortstop.

Holding the 30th pick in the 2008 draft, the Red Sox had resolved to take Lonnie Chisenhall, a junior college third baseman-until Cleveland took him with the pick immediately before Boston's. The Red Sox scrambled. They got Kelly on the phone and cut a deal: They would give him a \$3 million bonus and allow him to play shortstop and pitch. In his first two years in pro ball Kelly hit .219 with a .281 OBP and a .336 slugging percentage; he didn't pitch in 2008, but in '09 he had a 2.08 ERA and more than four times as many walks as strikeouts. After that season the Red Sox flew Kelly and his dad to their spring training complex in Fort Myers and explained that he could be the next Zack Greinke if he devoted himself full time to pitching. Three days later, Kelly called back and said, "O.K., I'll pitch." In 2010 he made the jump to Double A at age 20, and despite a 5.31 ERA, he was picked as the No. 1 prospect in the Boston system.

Though Epstein is known as a new-age baseball thinker, one of his most trusted early advisers was Bill Lajoie, who was 39 years older and cut from the old school scouting cloth that Moneyball virtually mocked. Lajoie, the former general manager of the Tigers who passed away last December, helped Epstein learn how to approach a draft.

In San Diego, Epstein noticed that the Padres tried to arrange the top 200 players in order, which invited the difficulty of trying to draw fine distinctions between player 156 and 157, for instance. The top 200 invariably included players the team's scouts didn't necessarily recommend but were considered to have early-round talent by industry consensus.

Epstein asked Lajoie, "How many guys would you have on your board?"

"Screw it," Lajoie replied. "Just focus on guys you're really excited about. Go with the guys you're on early and have the most history on and screw the guys who pop up late and you don't know anything about. The guys you can't get excited about? Don't spend time with them. You're not going to take them.

"We would rank 20 guys," Lajoie said. "And we'd get 12 of our 20."

With time running out before the start of the 2009 draft, the Red Sox were uncertain about the order of the top four players on their board, the ones they thought might be available when they picked at No. 28. Epstein, his assistant Allard Baird and scouting director Jason McLeod wanted one more firsthand look at all four players, but they were scattered from Puerto Rico to the West Coast.

What to do? Epstein approached Henry, the team's owner, and essentially asked, "Can we borrow the jet?"

Henry understood the power of mining information from statistical analysis: It had made him a rich man. He had applied proprietary formulas to his money-management firm. He so believed in applying the same principles to running the Red Sox that after the '02 season he first tried to hire Beane to replace Port. Beane accepted the job one day, changed his mind the next and recommended the like-minded Epstein. Henry threw his full support behind Epstein, which sometimes includes his private aircraft.

Epstein, Baird and McLeod saw four players in three days. They jetted to Puerto Rico to see Reymond Fuentes, an 18-year-old player recommended by area scout Edgar Perez. They weren't sure if Fuentes was a first-rounder or a second-rounder, but watching him play a doubleheader convinced them that his speed, defense and swing gave him the makings of an Ellsbury- or Johnny Damon--type player. They drafted Fuentes in the first round and signed him with a \$1.13 million bonus.

Over the past five years, the Red Sox have spent \$44 million on the draft without picking higher than 19th. The only teams to invest more in those drafts are perennial losers with expensive picks every year: the Pirates, the Nationals and the Royals. Tampa Bay, at \$40 million, is the only winning organization that has approached Boston's spending during those five years. Thanks in large part to their deep farm system, the small-market Rays are chasing Boston in the AL wild-card race, trying to steal their third postseason appearance in four years.

The Red Sox pay more than the recommended signing bonuses of the commissioner's office-so-called "slot money"-but their draft costs are also high because they hoard picks by letting free agents leave. In the past five years, for instance, Boston has had 12 first-round picks. (The Yankees have had half as many.) Moneyball ended the hidden value of OBP, what Beane called a market inefficiency. "I've been giving the same answer for years," Epstein says of the next inefficiency. "It's keeping pitchers healthy, and it's better drafting."

Epstein tried to trade for Adrian Gonzalez as far back as 2005, when the first baseman played for Texas, only to lose out to Epstein's old team, the Padres. He tried to trade for Gonzalez at the trade deadline in '09; in fact, Epstein went to sleep on the night of July 30 with possible deals in the works for Gonzalez and Seattle ace Felix Hernandez. Epstein considered trading a total of 10 prospects, virtually wiping out the upper end of his farm system, but both deals fell through. He tried to trade for Gonzalez after the '09 season, but his good friend Hoyer, who had just been named general manager of the Padres, wasn't about to deal a franchise player immediately after taking over.

Finally, after the 2010 season, with Gonzalez entering the final year of his contract, Epstein saw an opening. While the Cubs, White Sox and Mariners all made preliminary calls on Gonzalez, Epstein pushed Hoyer relentlessly. He wanted to close a deal before the December winter meetings, where he knew an auction atmosphere would develop.

When the Red Sox lost out on free agent Mark Teixeira after the 2008 season (the first baseman signed with the Yankees) they knew they had to put themselves in position to get one of the Big 3 first basemen scheduled to reach free agency after the 2011 season: Gonzalez, Albert Pujols and Prince Fielder. Epstein is a big believer in park effects, the impact of a player's home stadium on his statistics. Spacious Petco Park in San Diego muted the greatness of Gonzalez. Epstein considered Gonzalez not a .904 OPS hitter-his overall mark last year-but a .980 OPS hitter, his rate on the road in 2010. (Gonzalez's OPS this year is .953.)

Epstein, however, had one disadvantage when it came to cutting a deal with Hoyer: The guy across the table knew his system as well as he did. Hoyer-who had brought McLeod to San Diego with him-knew what Carmine knew about Rizzo, Kelly and Fuentes. "When you make a trade," Hoyer says, "you hope a team asks about players you don't like. The knowledge we had made it more difficult, but it also made it more transparent. There was no b.s. For us, the comfort was in knowing the prospects and their makeup. Taking prospects is very difficult when you don't know their makeup. Every G.M. says that's the scariest part of a deal. In this case [McLeod] drafted all three players."

The trade was announced on Dec. 6. Five days later, to considerably more shock, the Red Sox signed free-agent outfielder Carl Crawford to a seven-year, \$142 million deal. (Gonzalez would sign a seven-year, \$154 million extension in April.) The Crawford signing underscored how the team's "We don't know spit" mentality applied to major leaguers as well as the draft. Baird, for instance, had compiled a 40-page background report on Crawford. (The Red Sox prepared a similar one on Jayson Werth, another free-agent outfielder.) But the Crawford deal, on the heels of an 89-win season that left the Red Sox out of the playoffs, also signaled how high the stakes have been raised in Boston since 2003. Epstein is less an architect now than he is the supervisor of a factory that must operate continuously at peak load. One step back to take two forward-or heaven forbid, a second straight nonplayoff season-cannot be tolerated.

"We felt this [pressure] a lot my last two or three years in Boston," Hoyer says. "We missed being able to go after the cheap, undervalued player. The intellectual reward with star players is not the same.

"Boston's advantage now is-and Billy said this-Boston can do what Oakland did but they can do it at a bigger, stronger level. They can see a player like Adrian and sign him to \$154 million. They can go after Crawford. They can go after players they want and retain the ones they want."

Like Beane, Epstein made his mark in baseball by understanding what numbers could reveal about the value of ballplayers. But the more Epstein learns, the more he values the human side of the game, in part because it is much

more difficult to understand. His trust in his scouts often trumps his trust in numbers. Epstein, for instance, won't acquire a player, professional or amateur, with good numbers unless his scouts like him.

Boston's track record in free agency, Epstein admits, is checkered. Edgar Renteria, Matt Clement, Julio Lugo, J.D. Drew, Daisuke Matsuzaka and Brad Penny all brought little bang for the \$261 million outlay. (Interestingly, Epstein chose none of the above when asked to identify the mistake that most gnaws at him. He instead offered a 2006 trade for backup catcher Doug Mirabelli. Epstein was on the road with the club when catcher Josh Bard was having trouble catching knuckleballer Tim Wakefield. Instead of returning to the office and convening his assistants to assess the club's options, he adopted the fix-it-now mentality of the clubhouse and rashly traded Cla Meredith, a valuable low-cost reliever who would thrive in San Diego, along with Bard to get Mirabelli. What bothers Epstein is not the result of the trade but the knowledge that he short-circuited the process.)

"The biggest surprise for me as a G.M.," Epstein says, "is you spend more time as a psychologist than you think. A latent injury or a latent psychological injury is behind almost every underperforming player. If you can find it and address it, it's a huge advantage.

"That's the Number 1 competitive advantage-the human resource, the instructors and coaches. They get it. They bond with the kids. They care about them. They put themselves last. It's the exact same thing with teachers when it comes to education.

"That's why trading Rizzo, Kelly and Fuentes hurts. You're breaking the kid's heart. But if you're doing your job right, you're breaking 20 hearts-everyone who's touched this kid along the way."

Epstein personally called Rizzo, Kelly and Fuentes to inform them of the trade. The call to Rizzo, the cancer survivor, was especially difficult; Rizzo at first was so taken aback that he didn't talk. But he quickly found that same brave voice. "I'll always appreciate what you did for me," he said. "I'll always be a Red Sox."

Kelly was also stunned. The Red Sox had invested \$3 million in him. They allowed him to play shortstop and pitch, a rare courtesy, before convincing him to give up hitting. But Kelly, whose father, Pat, has been a major league player and minor league coach, understood the thinness of the bonds of loyalty in the business of baseball.

When Epstein called Fuentes, he found excitement in the player's voice.

"We just made a trade," Epstein said.

"Oh, yeah? Who?" Fuentes replied.

"We're getting Adrian Gonzalez."

"Cool!"

"Yeah-and you're in it."

"Oh. Really?"

Rizzo, 22, hit .331 for Triple A Tucson this season with a whopping 1.056 OPS. (He has appeared in 44 games for the Padres, hitting .130.) Kelly, 21, was 11-6 with a 3.98 ERA in Double A. Fuentes, 20, hit .275 in Class A ball with a .342 OBP and 41 stolen bases. They are among the most important assets for the future of the Padres. But as general manager of small-market San Diego, Hoyer knows a run as long as Beane's Athletics put together-eight straight winning seasons, averaging 94 wins per year-might not be possible for such teams today. Market inefficiencies are harder to find and are more fleeting, especially because the teams with money added intellectual muscle. "The joke on Moneyball was, Where was the chapter on having three of the five or six best pitchers in the game?" Hoyer says, referring to Oakland's young aces Tim Hudson, Mark Mulder and Barry Zito. "But I don't think people give [the A's] enough credit. You're not going to have that long a leash anymore.

"Look at the Red Sox. They had 15 All-Stars on the team Opening Day. They've been the best team in baseball hands down acquiring draft picks. They are a very stable organization with very good coaches and not a lot of churn. What Theo does better than anyone is constantly push you to think in different directions. He wants as much background stuff and makeup information as anyone. Always asking for more is probably his best quality."

Back in 2002, as Lewis and Beane were collaborating, Epstein worked with Cherington, Craig Shipley, now the senior vice president of player personnel and international scouting, and their fellow whiz kids in the basement of Fenway on a project of their own. There was no established Red Sox Way, so they set out to define it: They began writing a player-development manual. "Everything from bunt plays to how we want our hitters to be selectively aggressive at the plate," Epstein says, "to what requirements we have to be a starting pitcher to how you throw your bullpens-every fundamental and every philosophical idea." They also wrote a companion manual, on scouting, because "what the scouts look for has to match up with your development philosophy."

Those manuals became the foundation for the Red Sox Way. No book or movie is in the works.

BRAD PITT DEALS

Moneyball began as an idea that became a best-selling book that became a revolution that became a movie. So, how did the numbers become sex symbols?

By Austin Murphy, Sports Illustrated, 9/26/2011

One of the many pleasant surprises about Moneyball, a movie based on a book based on an idea, is how much humor director Bennett Miller smuggles into the picture. There is the moment, for instance, when Oakland A's general manager Billy Beane, played by Brad Pitt with a bravado tinged with desperation, sits in the living room of Scott Hatteberg, a 32-year-old, rag-armed catcher whom Beane nonetheless wants to sign as a free agent. He is smitten by Hatteberg's plate discipline, which will yield the on-base percentage that stamps the player as an undervalued asset, as a market efficiency, the central idea around which the book revolves. The catch: The A's want to turn Hatteberg into a first baseman.

"I've only ever played catcher," he objects.

"It's not that hard, Scott. Tell him, Wash," says Beane to infield coach Ron Washington, now the Rangers' manager, who is seated beside him.

"It's incredibly hard," replies Washington, not missing a beat.

The film is so crisp and clean, Miller's pace and storytelling so seamless, that it's fair to assume that the transplanting of Michael Lewis's best-selling book to the big screen was a facile operation. In this case, as in the cases of many of the bad-body players drafted by Beane through the years, appearances deceive. Even by the sclerotic standards of Hollywood's studio system, the making of Moneyball was tortured, halting, incredibly hard.

"It seemed like a shoot-the-moon project," recalls Miller, the movie's third director, "because it was complex and messed up in a thousand different ways." Eight years after it first went into development and two years after The New York Times carried its obituary (MONEY WORRIES KILL A-LIST FILM AT LAST MINUTE), Moneyball will open in theaters nationwide on Friday.

It was worth the wait. Like all enduring sports movies, this one transcends its genre. Moneyball is a movie about baseball the way The Sopranos was a series about the waste-management business. "What we were trying to do is tell an unconventional story in the Trojan horse of a conventional baseball movie," says Pitt, who clearly has a blast playing Beane, the wisecracking, furniture-hurling executive who is forced by events beyond his control to "adapt or die." With his fresh-out-of-Yale sidekick, Peter Brand (based on Paul DePodesta, Beane's former fresh-out-of-Harvard assistant, and played with delicious restraint by a contemplative, buttoned-down Jonah Hill), this odd couple takes on the baseball establishment. Armed with Brand's spreadsheets and rote memory, Beane's gallows humor and the courage of their convictions, they march against the grain of a century and a half of baseball orthodoxy. And in the end, they win.

But it's not a Hollywood sort of victory. The 2002 Oakland A's did not win the World Series, or even a round of the playoffs. But with a lineup full of cast-offs and undervalued players—"like an island of misfit toys," as Brand proclaims—they did win 103 games, including 20 in a row, the longest streak in American League history. And however many times his many detractors might point to World Series titles as the only totems of success, Beane was vindicated.

There is no floodlight-exploding, walk-off Roy Hobbs homer to win the pennant—none of the treacle and sentimentality to which the directors of baseball movies have long been susceptible. There is an abiding faith in the material at hand, which is very strong.

There was no need to tart up reality because "the real story gave us more than enough," says Michael De Luca, one of the film's producers. "Especially when there are moments that, frankly, a Hollywood screenwriter wouldn't have the imagination to make up." Case in point: Hatteberg hitting the pinch-hit walk-off home run that wins the 20th game in the streak, but only after the A's had blown an 11-run lead against the Royals. Says De Luca, "That's the kind of plot point that literally would get laughed out of a room."

It's been nearly a decade since Lewis spent the 2002 season shadowing Beane, chronicling his then revolutionary approach to evaluating baseball talent. "When he first came here," the G.M. recalls, "we didn't know he was going to write a book. But he's a great storyteller, and just an interesting person. And really, that's how he ended up getting the access he did. He sort of hypnotized us."

The G.M. of a low-payroll team accustomed to seeing his best players poached by more affluent organizations ("We're organ donors for the rich," as Pitt puts it in the movie), Beane fought back by conducting an audacious experiment. "At the bottom of the Oakland experiment," Lewis wrote, "was a willingness to rethink baseball: how it is managed, how it is played, who is best suited to play it, and why." Beane's search for "inefficiencies in the game" and the embrace of new metrics that solved those inefficiencies in essence "amounted to a systematic scientific investigation" of his sport.

Experiments! Systematic scientific investigations! Not exactly catnip to studio executives. Moneyball is a terrific book that has sold more than a million copies and is required reading at the nation's leading business schools and executive training seminars everywhere. But was there a motion picture in it?

The author didn't think so. "The Blind Side was a movie," says Lewis of his 2006 book on Michael Oher, who grew up in poverty in Memphis and is adopted by an affluent Tennessee family and makes his way into the first round of the NFL draft. "The problem [with Moneyball] was, I always thought of it as a biography of an idea," he says. "And I wrote it as a biography of an idea. And you can't make a movie of an idea."

You can, however, make a movie about a man at a crossroads, a onetime baseball wunderkind whose major league career had been a major bust; a man "whose life was turned upside down by professional baseball," as Lewis put it, "and who, miraculously, found a way to return the favor."

That, at least, was Rachael Horovitz's hunch. After nearly 12 years of working for Hollywood studios, she'd just ventured out on her own as a freelance producer when she picked up Moneyball in 2003. Its themes—taking a new path, having the belief in one's self to take a risk and move forward—"sang to me," she recalls. "Thirty-five minutes into the book, I knew it was a movie."

Studio after studio disagreed. "I felt like Billy," she says, "trying to convince people to see something that didn't look like a movie to them."

Finally, Sony bit, eight years and countless setbacks later. Yes, things did look grim for a while. But Lewis makes a good point: "As long as Brad Pitt wanted to make this movie, it was going to get made."

The batter made contact, launching a high pop fly to centerfield, patrolled on this muggy Missouri afternoon by a 12-year-old Brad Pitt, who lost the ball in the sun. It bounced off one of his storied cheekbones, opening a gash that would take 18 stitches to close and reduce his mother to tears. (Jane Pitt had no way of knowing it at the time, but she wept on behalf of women all over the planet.) While Pitt was charming, grounded and self-deprecating throughout

a recent, lengthy interview-"It's shameful how little I know about baseball... I'm amazed they let me do this movie"-he could not resist adding that he did pick up that ball and throw the runner out at second.

For the most part, he says, "Baseball and I didn't get along that well." At Springfield (Mo.) Kickapoo High, he gave football a shot. "I wrestled one year. I dove one year. Everything but baseball."

This uneasy relationship with the national pastime didn't prevent him from falling for Moneyball. After reviewing the script and agreeing to play Beane four years ago, Pitt devoured the book, which he basically memorized, says De Luca. During meetings questions would arise, "and Brad would say, 'Oh, wait-Michael Lewis writes about that on page 272.'"

Pitt admits making a dramatic movie based on a book "with math and science and sabermetrics at its forefront ... was a huge question for us. But somehow it didn't feel like a risk. I was just so taken with the book. It had these universal themes."

A small-market G.M. with a small-market budget, Beane is a decided underdog. "And I'm a sucker for the underdog story," says Pitt. He's also a connoisseur of '70s films, which, to his mind, Moneyball evoked. Beane's and Brand's compulsive number-crunching-their sabermetrician's geekiness-reminded Pitt of the obsessiveness of Gene Hackman's Popeye Doyle in The French Connection. Like Jack Nicholson's R.P. McMurphy in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Beane is "the voice of reason," says Pitt, an antihero "speaking against establishment." In the banter and byplay between the jaded G.M. and his ambitious assistant, Pitt was looking for a Woodward-and-Bernstein kind of chemistry from All the President's Men.

"In scripts today," he explains, "someone has a big epiphany, learns a lesson, then comes out the other side different. In these older films I'm talking about, the beast at the end of the movie was the same beast in the beginning of the movie. What changed was the world around them, by just a couple of degrees. Nothing monumental. I think that's true about us. We fine-tune ourselves, but big change is not real."

Beane will argue that he has changed since '02, in at least one regard. "I'm almost 50 years old. There are very few desks I can flip anymore." Lewis details the bat-breaking tantrums for which Beane was notorious as a player. If the movie is to be believed (it is), he has continued to lash out at inanimate objects as a G.M. "Have I tossed some things in my career? Sure," he admits. "But that's along with every other G.M. you've ever interviewed."

The chairs, desks and coolers at the Oakland Coliseum are safer now: Beane had partial shoulder-replacement surgery in the spring. "They put a titanium cap on the humerus," he explains. "I had no cartilage in there-it was bone on bone. I won't be surfing Mavericks anytime soon, but at least I can put my hands over my head when I go through airport security."

Beane remembers a morning last year when his wife, Tara, rose unusually early. "She was up at six in the morning, blow-drying her hair." Later, when the nanny arrived-the Beanes have young twins-Billy noticed that she was wearing a skirt. "I'd never seen her in anything but jeans."

As it happened, they were having company that day: Pitt was stopping by for a combination social call and role research. As Beane said to his wife and nanny, "Who are you guys kidding?"

Another time Pitt visited with Angelina Jolie and two of their six children. After sending out a decoy car from the Claremont hotel in Berkeley, where they were staying, they pulled out, unnoticed, in a regular rental car-"just like any other family," Beane recalls. Pitt called Beane from the road to give him a heads-up. "I'm not sure I lost 'em," said the cinematic Beane to the real-life Beane. "Some paparazzi might show up at your doorstep."

"But they didn't," says the real-life Beane. "He'd lost them."

Yes, it was a tad surreal, Beane allows, hanging with Pitt, whom the G.M. describes as "a really good guy" with a gift for putting people at ease and for engaging in the banter that goes on in the clubhouse. "He just jumped right in."

Nor did it hurt, while steeping himself in the culture of baseball, that Pitt knows his way around a tin of chewing tobacco. "I'm an Oklahoma-Missouri boy," he notes, "so I'm no stranger to a bit of dip. We start early with that, so really, I was just revisiting my roots."

In one of the movie's strongest scenes, Pitt sits at a large table with 10 or so veteran scouts who speak to each other in a tongue understood only by them. The clash of old and new thinking is on stark display. Creased and weather-beaten, they effuse about the purity of a prospect's swing, the sound made by the ball coming off his bat. It is left to Beane to puncture the reveries.

"If this guy's such a good hitter," he says, "why can't he hit good?"

For these scenes, Miller used actual major league scouts—some of whom no doubt butted heads with Beane—and encouraged them to put things in their own words. Those sessions yielded a trove of unscripted lines that ended up in the movie. The funniest ad-lib, Pitt recalls, came from a scout who pointed out that a prospect had an ugly girlfriend. "Ugly girlfriend means bad eyesight," warned the scout.

Says Pitt, "We put a version of that line in the script, 'Ugly girlfriend means no confidence.' But what he really said was 'bad eyesight.'"

In that scene with the scouts, Beane poses a question to his bespectacled assistant, the newly hired Brand, who doesn't answer right away. "You want me to speak?" Jonah Hill finally says.

"When I point at you, yeah," Pitt replies.

Hill would not be in the picture had the film's second director, Steven Soderbergh, not left the project in the summer of '09. Soderbergh's art-house vision for the film entailed on-screen interviews with ex-players, a kind of "documentary enhancement" that set off alarms in the offices of studio execs, who pulled the plug on production.

But *Moneyball* was not dead. It was, to quote *The Princess Bride*'s Miracle Max (played by Billy Crystal), "only mostly dead." The film was resurrected when Sony hired a third director, Miller, who hadn't made a movie since his Oscar-nominated *Capote* in 2005. He and Pitt clicked, their visions for the film dovetailing nicely. "Both of us were drawn to some of the same films from the '70s," says Miller, "where you don't have to have a character that stops the asteroid from hitting the earth."

Miller brought in Philip Seymour Hoffman, who won an Academy Award for his performance as Truman Capote, to play A's manager Art Howe. (Hoffman's obstinate, dyspeptic take on the obstinate, dyspeptic Howe is a darkly comic gem.) For the role of Brand—for which DePodesta, uncomfortable with the script's portrayal of him, refused to lend his name—he pulled a Billy Beane, going way off the board to cast Hill, best known for his comedic roles in such movies as *Superbad* and *Get Him to the Greek*. But the 27-year-old Hill was ready to spread his wings, try something new. His depiction of Brand, the savant Yalie, is a masterpiece of understatement. "As an actor, the willingness to sit in a pregnant pause shows a certain confidence," says Hill. "You don't have to make a meal out of every moment, you can sit and think like you would in real life."

To find the "in" to his character, all Hill had to do was look around. With veteran A-list actors such as Pitt and Hoffman, heavyweight producers like De Luca and Scott Rudin, top-shelf screenwriters Steven Zaillian and Aaron Sorkin, "I kind of felt just like Peter Brand," he recalls, "the youngest person in the room with all these revered professionals."

In Boston in the spring of 2010 to promote *Get Him to the Greek*, Hill agreed to throw out the first pitch at a Red Sox game. While at Fenway, as part of his prep for *Moneyball*, he visited Sox G.M. Theo Epstein. "Him and his guy were there, working hard, but having a lot of fun. They were younger guys, and they seemed like they were really good buddies. It seemed like me and my friends, if we had run a baseball team."

How did the first pitch go, he is asked.

"I was proud of my pitch," he says.

Windup or stretch?

"I went for a Hideo-style windup, but it didn't really work."

"Straight fastball?"

"F----- heater right down the middle. Broke the catcher's hand."

"I heard the Jugs clocked you in the mid-90s."

"All I know is the catcher's mitt exploded like a pinata."

True, Peter Brand gets more straight lines than wisecracks. But it's nice to see that Hill is still ... funny.

Hill threw out the first pitch at the A's-Tigers game on Sunday, the day before the movie premiered in Oakland. Lewis was also slated to be at the premiere. The writer knew from his experience with *The Blind Side* that once they start making the movie, the author of the book on which the movie is based is of no particular relevance to anyone.

"Nobody really gives a s--- what I think," he says. "And I don't either!"

The problem, he says, is that the movie people become uncomfortable "with the writer of the book being that detached. So there's this phony social interaction that goes on where they pretend to be interested in what I have to say." He was invited to read the drafts of the scripts and visit the set and talk to the director, "all the while knowing that nothing I said made one whit of difference.

"And you know what? They shouldn't care. I'm glad they don't care. It suggests a certain level of initiative on their part."

"Having said all that," he goes on, "I'd say they got my book on the screen about as well as you can get my book on the screen."

It is done without pathos and sentimentality, which is not to say *Moneyball* won't awaken in A's fans-whose team will miss the playoffs for the fifth straight season-an acute nostalgia. Lewis recently watched a final cut of the movie with Beane, who leaned over at one point and whispered: "Damn, we were good."

'Moneyball' a Reminder of A's Better Days

BY **ART SPANDER** - SEPTEMBER 22, 2011

The arrival of "Moneyball," the movie "based on a true story," has brought the anticipated reaction: Like so many other unconventional concepts, it no longer is applicable and can be dismissed as an accident in time.

But that misses the entire point.

Which is it that was applicable and also brilliant.

What general manager Billy Beane, what then-exec Paul DePodesta, what the Oakland Athletics accomplished when, in author Michael Lewis' words, they were "winning an unfair game" was to turn flax into gold.

Or, more accurately, turn the A's into contenders.

What does it matter if the game has changed and the theory is no longer pertinent? If the A's keep losing players to injuries and free agency and losing too many games? If finding slow, unwanted ballplayers willing to extend the count to 3-2 every at-bat has become irrelevant in 2011?

It was very relevant not long ago. The A's made the postseason in 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2006. They haven't been since. And now, despite beating Texas on Thursday in their final home game of 2011, the situation is particularly grim.

The owner wants to move the team to San Jose, 45 miles down Interstate 880, insisting the Athletics can't be competitive staying in the O.co Coliseum (yes, a new name), where seats in the upper deck are covered with tarps for esthetic purposes. It's all about money, or lack of same. In Hollywood and sports.

The film properly had its red-carpet premiere Monday in Oakland, the town the A's hope to flee. It features Brad Pitt, who plays Beane; Jonah Hill, who plays a Podesta-like individual because DePodesta wouldn't allow use of his name; and Philip Seymour Hoffman, who plays A's manager Art Howe.

There are a few script inventions that prevent it from being a pure documentary, but when you have a movie constructed on baseball stats and dialogue, a little poetic license is allowed.

Lewis' book deals with the 2002 season, when Oakland won 103 games, 20 of those in a row. And even though it's ostensibly about baseball, as one observer reminded, "It is really a book about business and life," with a useful message.

You can march to a different drummer.

The A's marched right to the playoffs, but then they halted. Beane, with his plans undone every October, called the postseason a "crapshoot" because one great pitcher or one surprising play changes everything. Moneyball becomes Funnyball.

One year - probably 2003, when the A's were beaten by the Red Sox three games to two in the division series - Beane the realist could be heard saying something like, "If we only had \$50,000 more, we would have beaten these guys."

But they didn't. And they didn't.

Yet it was what they did that ought to be respected.

In 2002, the Yankees had a payroll of \$126 million, the A's \$40 million. Oakland created a bargain ballclub from numbers in a computer rather than advice from scouts on the scene because there was no other option. So Beane and DePodesta went by what they determined from the screen, qualities they thought would convert into wins.

Beane found the right ones. A 102-win season is one for the ages, or the Yankees. But in the playoffs, the strengths became weaknesses. One advantage you get in an \$8 million player you don't get in a \$1 million player is an intangible quality to produce under pressure.

Oakland was good. It needed to be great.

What it also turned out to be was fascinating.

"I wrote this book because I fell in love with the story ... a small group of undervalued professional baseball players and executives, many of whom had been rejected as unfit for the big leagues, who had turned themselves into one of the most successful franchises in Major League Baseball," Lewis said.

Lewis wanted to know how the A's, a team without a big budget, could win so many games. His research led to the book, which in turn led to the movie.

The A's had a few wonderful years, with fine pitching - Barry Zito, Mark Mulder and Tim Hudson were hardly rejects, as their contracts proved when they left Oakland - and timely hitting.

If now they're not much, that has no bearing on what they were, a team that found a new way to become a winner.