

Inbox: G. Sizemore a fit for A's in center field?

Beat reporter Jane Lee answers questions from fans

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

**Since the A's seem to like injury-prone players on the cheap, any chance they sign Grady Sizemore?
-- George R., Los Banos, Calif.**

I definitely wouldn't rule it out, considering it's likely that not a single outfielder from the 2011 version of the A's will return. Though Sizemore has played in just 210 games over the past three seasons because of a laundry list of injuries, he was one of the best players in the game from 2005 through 2008. And if you can get past the risk factor -- any player, essentially, is a risk -- there's not much to dislike about him. A healthy Sizemore boasts excellent defensive skills, a threat on the basepaths and a good bat at the plate, and his presence would be huge for the younger cast of characters -- think Michael Taylor -- likely set to fill out Oakland's outfield next year. He'd be a good fit in center field and would also give manager Bob Melvin an option in both corners, too.

I'd think Sizemore is very much attainable because of his injury-prone ways, and the A's could afford to give him a good-sized one-year deal -- maybe around the \$4 million range -- and then send him on his way at season's end. Exactly how young the A's want to go hinges on the stadium situation, but they still have to bring in crowds in the meantime, and a Grady Sizemore in center field wouldn't hurt.

**First base looks bleak for the A's in 2012. Brandon Allen, Daric Barton, Chris Carter and Kila Ka'aihue are not great options. Do you think there's any chance the A's bring in anyone else?
-- Andrew B., Gilroy, Calif.**

Sure, there's always a chance. Derrek Lee is on the market again, and the A's could try to make a run at him for a second straight year. But, realistically, they're likely to stick with their in-house options rather than fight their way through a crowded scene -- it's fair to say half of the league could be in the market for first-base help this winter. I think the A's are eager to see what Allen can do in Spring Training, and they're not ready to give up hope yet on Carter, especially since they'd prefer to keep him away from the designated hitter role at such a young age.

**Next year for the A's, do you see Allen moving to left field, with Barton back at first base?
-- Armando M., Lockeford, Calif.**

My immediate response is no, but it might actually be something to think about in Spring Training. At the time the A's acquired Allen, Melvin noted his athleticism and versatility, namely his ability to potentially make a move to the outfield. And while I think such a scenario is something the team would like to avoid, if possible, it at least gives the A's options should Barton enjoy a standout Spring Training. Still, the presence of a power-hitting first baseman has been missing in Oakland since the 2001 version of Jason Giambi, and if the A's think Allen could soon be of that similar caliber, they'd be hard-pressed to give up on him so quickly.

**Which starting and relief pitchers do you think [general manager] Billy Beane would like to obtain for next season?
-- James D., Pinole, Calif.**

If anything, Beane is going to be selling, not buying, pitchers this winter. The A's are stocked in the pitching department, and should they get the green light to build a new stadium, which would force them into rebuilding mode, don't be surprised if they consider shopping an Andrew Bailey or even a Gio Gonzalez in an effort to reload a thin farm system. Plenty of trade rumors circulated around Bailey in July, and it's quite possible they'll begin escalating again here shortly. Once Jonathan Papelbon and Ryan Madson are off the market, Bailey's name will likely be at the top of the list for clubs looking for a closer. And Beane seems to be willing to listen to any and all offers that come his way.

**Any chance the A's look at Mark McGwire as their hitting coach? He lives in California, and with Tony La Russa not returning [to St. Louis], he would be a great option, especially with the work he did with young Cardinals hitters.
-- Fernando G., Tracy, Calif.**

A McGwire reunion in Oakland would surely be fun for the fans, but the A's already have their eyes set on Mike Aldrete, McGwire's assistant hitting coach in St. Louis. Aldrete is a friend of Melvin, who has repeatedly mentioned his desire to bring

aboard coaches with whom he's familiar and comfortable. So far, he's done just that, and he'll likely complete the task with the signing of Aldrete any day now.

I am baffled by the A's front office's reluctance to commit to the team and fans, financially. How is this offseason any different from last? Last year, we had no ruling from MLB on relocation, so why should this year be any different? Last year, we had no word and went out and made commitments to players through free agency and trade, so why can't we do the same this year?
-- Jonathan B., San Lorenzo, Calif.

This year, Beane insists a stadium decision is coming soon. And while we've heard that before, including last year, he appears more certain this time. The hope is that final word will come by January, and the A's are choosing to believe such a notion, so in the meantime fans will have to trust in it.

A's take another step toward new stadium

San Jose City Council gives team land-purchase option

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

The A's quietly moved forward in their quest for a new stadium in San Jose this week, as the San Jose City Council agreed to give the team a land-purchase option.

The resolution, decided by a 10-1 vote on Tuesday, extends to the A's exclusive rights to buy nearly five acres of downtown land near the San Jose Sharks' HP Pavilion for \$6.9 million that are only to be utilized to build a ballpark.

The two-year option will cost the A's \$50,000, with a possible third-year extension going for \$25,000. It is within that time period the team can purchase the land, which won't happen until official word comes from Major League Baseball regarding the team's relocation request. Even then, the sale of the land for a ballpark must go to a public vote.

The A's have not commented on the arrangement with San Jose.

Commissioner Bud Selig's blue-ribbon panel has been at work analyzing the A's stadium options for nearly three years with no public recommendation. Though no recommendation has been made, general manager Billy Beane has said that he expects word "soon."

It's possible, though, that attention won't be on the A's situation until work on the sale of the Dodgers is completed. The issue potentially could be raised at January's owners' meetings.

The time has come for Selig to let the A's move to San Jose

By Sam McPherson, Oakland A's Examiner

Yesterday, the San Jose Mercury News ran an editorial on the Oakland Athletics' potential move to the city of San Jose -- which the city itself seems to want:

"We continue to be amazed that Major League Baseball is supporting the San Francisco Giants' claim on the South Bay as its territory -- a designation the team received only when it tried to move to San Jose in the 1990s. And we continue to believe baseball would be good for San Jose in ways both tangible and intangible."

And it's time for Major League Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig to get his act together, after twisting in the wind for more than two years now on the issue.

San Jose wants the A's, and the A's want San Jose.

So what's the problem?

The Giants never moved to Santa Clara County, after multiple public votes rejected funding for such a move. Furthermore, the San Francisco franchise is doing fine in their new ballpark.

Why do they cling so hard to San Jose?

The Giants fear losing some of their fan base in the South Bay, of course, as many San Jose residents will surely choose their own team over one miles away in San Francisco.

Yet the San Francisco franchise itself hasn't had any issues about taking East Bay fans away from the A's in recent years.

The hypocrisy of the Giants franchise on these issues is amusing, as they don't want the A's to do what they've done -- clearly believing the greater S.F. area can't support two MLB teams.

But it has since 1968, and it will do so more in this era where the population of the Bay Area is dramatically increased from it was when the Giants moved here in 1958 and the A's joined them ten years later.

There's plenty to go around, of course, but the San Francisco franchise doesn't believe in sharing or equity -- even when sharing and equity from the A's helped the Giants in the past.

And why Selig -- who is a close friend of A's owner Lew Wolff -- continues to stonewall the interests of both San Jose and the Oakland franchise is perhaps the greatest issue.

The commissioner needs to act in the best interests of baseball, so Selig must believe the A's move to San Jose is not in the best interests of baseball. And if that's the case, he better outline what he does think is right ... and soon.

For the A's organization has won the second-most World Series in American League history -- and the third-most in major-league history. Continuing to let the franchise twist in the wind is surely not in the best interests of baseball.

So step up to the plate, Bud, and let the A's move to San Jose: it's a good thing for the greater good, as the needs of the many always outweigh the needs of the few -- or the one.

SJ extends land purchase option to A's for stadium

The Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. -- San Jose is giving the Oakland Athletics up to two years to buy 5 acres of land downtown for a new stadium.

The City Council voted 10-1 on Tuesday to approve extending the land-purchase option to the team. Under the deal, the A's would pay \$50,000 to lock in a \$6.98 million price tag for the 5-acre plot for the next two years.

The team could pay an additional \$25,000 to extend the purchase option for a third year.

The A's hope to build a new ballpark in San Jose, which is about 40 miles south of their current home.

But they need Major League Baseball's approval since the San Francisco Giants currently hold territorial rights to the San Jose area.

2011 Year In Review: Stockton Hitters

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Nov 10, 2011

Our "2011 Year In Review" series continues with a look at the hitters on the Oakland A's High-A affiliate.

Stockton Ports Offense At A Glance

Team BA: .261 (last out of 10 teams)

Runs Scored: 739 (last)

Team OPS: 755 (last)

Team Stolen Bases: 109 (seventh out of 10 teams)

Team Slugging Percentage: .411 (last)

Note: this article covers all hitters who had at least 95 at-bats for the Ports this season.

The nature of the California League is such that even though the Ports' overall offensive numbers weren't terrible on their face, they paled in comparison to the rest of the hard-hitting California League. Nonetheless, the Ports got enough offense to make the league finals.

The Stockton roster was remarkably stable in 2011, especially on the position player side of the roster. The Ports had seven players with more than 400 at-bats and three more with more than 300. Six players would reach double-digits in homeruns and six players had more than 50 RBIs.

No player contributed more to the Stockton line-up than centerfielder Michael Choice. The A's first-round pick from the previous year, Choice had a stellar first full professional season after a strong showing with short-season Vancouver in 2010. In 2011, Choice led the California League in homeruns with 30 and he also hit .285 with a 918 OPS. He finished among the top-10 in the league in homeruns, OPS and SLG. His overall numbers would likely have been much better, but he suffered an injured quad on July 24 and missed two weeks and played at less than 100 percent for several weeks after that. Choice was healthy by playoff time and it showed. He hit three homeruns and drove-in 11 in 11 games while posting a .426 average and a 1183 OPS. Strike-outs were an issue for Choice, but his overall production minimized that weakness and he improved his contact rate as the season progressed. Choice is currently playing well in the Arizona Fall League and will enter next season as the A's top position player prospect.

Catcher Ryan Ortiz, who is also participating in the Arizona Fall League, was only with the Ports for a little more than a month, but he made a big impact. In 28 games, he hit .340 with four homers and a 970 OPS. He walked 21 times against 22 strike-outs and had a .455 OBP. Ortiz began the year at the A's extended spring training camp rehabbing a right shoulder injury, but joined the Ports when Max Stassi, who was expected on Opening Day to be the Ports' everyday catcher, was shutdown for the season for surgery on his right shoulder. Ortiz was promoted to Double-A Midland after only those 28 games and spent the rest of the season with the Rockhounds. His throwing was never 100 percent during the season, but his arm strength has continued to improve as the year has gone on and the hope is that he will be 100 percent from a throwing perspective next season.

Stassi was expected to be one of the Ports' top position players at the start of the year, but his shoulder injury never allowed him to get on-track at the plate. At the beginning of the year, Stassi was the Ports' everyday DH as he attempted to rehab his right shoulder before and after games. After a little more than a month, it was clear that rehab wasn't going to fix the issue and the A's and Stassi opted for surgery. The surgery cost him the rest of the season, but he was able to participate in the A's fall Instructional League camp and he is expected to be ready for spring training. As a hitter, Stassi never got on-track with the Ports, perhaps due to that shoulder issue. He hit .231 with a 662 OPS in 121 at-bats. On the plus side, his BB:K ratio was a solid 16:22, a big improvement over his 45:141 ratio in 2010. Stassi is likely to return to Stockton next season and he should spend most, if not all, of the year with the Ports. He will only be 21 next year despite the lost 2011 season.

No other Ports' regular besides Choice and Ortiz would post an OPS above 800 this season. Two Ports' hitters would reach base at a better than .390 clip, however: Conner Crumbliss and Anthony Aliotti. Crumbliss finished the year leading the California League in walks with 96. He also posted a line of .268/.404/.378. While those numbers may not jump off of the page, they are impressive when one considers that he hit only .136 with a 473 OPS in April. Crumbliss improved dramatically after that slow start and was one of Stockton's top performers down the stretch. In August, he hit .333/.459/.556 in 29 games and his overall post-All Star break line was .290/.411/.463. He stole 24 bases in 31 chances in 2011 – matching his 2010 total – and set a career-high in homeruns with seven. Crumbliss is a valuable player both for his ability to reach base and his ability to play both the infield and the outfield. He is a virtual lock to move up to Double-A next season.

Aliotti also had an impressive season. The first-baseman posted a .392 OBP, second-best on the team to Crumbliss. His overall line was .276/.392/.396. Like Crumbliss, he improved during the second half of the season, posting an 802 OPS after the break and a 772 OPS before the break. Although Aliotti has yet to put up the power numbers one would like to see from a first-baseman, he did establish career-highs in homeruns (11) and slugging percentage. Aliotti had an 843 OPS versus right-handers, but really struggled against southpaws (568 OPS and a .198 BA). He is arguably the top defensive first-baseman in the A's system now that Sean Doolittle is a pitcher. Aliotti will need to continue to improve those power numbers and hit better versus left-handers to have a chance to play regularly in the major leagues, but his ability to get on-base and his skills on defense make him an intriguing player.

Outfielder Myrio Richard led the team in batting amongst players with more than 300 at-bats. The right-handed hitter batted .292 with a 782 OPS in 432 at-bats. He overcame an early-season oblique strain that cost him the first few weeks of the season and limited his ability at the plate for awhile after that. He hit .302 with an 819 OPS after the break. Richard's numbers were improved across the board over the numbers he posted in Low-A with Kane County in 2010. He upped his average by 11 points, his OBP by four points and his SLG by 35 points. Richard established career-highs in homeruns (8), doubles (29), walks (43) and stolen bases (27). He has above-average speed and a solid understanding of the strike-zone

and he doesn't strike-out a lot (69 strike-outs in 432 at-bats), all excellent skills for a top-of-the-order hitter. Richard has some pop, as well, and if his power continues to develop along with the rest of his game, he could open some eyes at Double-A next season.

Infielder Michael Gilmartin was the Ports sole representative on the mid-season Cal League All-Star team. The A's 2009 27th-round pick got off to a good start to his season, batting .280 with a 791 OPS before the break. His numbers dipped some after the break (.252 BA/761 OPS), but overall it was promising year for Gilmartin, who improved his OPS nearly 80 points over his 2010 mark. He showed impressive power for a middle infielder, hitting a career-high 14 homeruns and posting a .437 SLG. He also had nine triples and 25 doubles. He was one of the Ports' most consistent players. He posted an OPS of 814 or higher in May, June and August and had only one poor month (July, when he had a 682 OPS). Like Aliotti, the left-handed hitting Gilmartin hit right-handed pitching hard (865 OPS) but struggled against lefties (486 OPS). Improving versus southpaws and cutting down on his strike-outs (124 in 492 at-bats) would go along way to bringing Gilmartin to that next level as a prospect. He should get an opportunity in Double-A next season.

Outfielder Rashun Dixon had an up-and-down year in his first season in the California League. The former two-sport star in high school posted a 749 OPS before the All-Star break, but struggled down-the-stretch for Stockton, putting up a 650 OPS after the break. He finished the year on a bit of a hot streak, however, and hit well in the post-season. Dixon was one of the youngest players on the Ports' roster and he didn't turn 21 until the final week of the regular season. He is an outstanding athlete with excellent tools across the board, but he has yet to put them together for a full season. Dixon hit well during the A's fall Instructional League. He could probably use another year in the Cal League, but the A's have never been shy about challenging Dixon at higher levels. How he plays this spring will likely determine whether he starts the 2012 season in Stockton or Midland.

After missing all of the 2010 season recovering from a broken wrist, shortstop Dusty Coleman was a durable everyday presence in the Stockton Ports' line-up. He played in 120 games for Stockton, amassing 462 at-bats. He also appeared in 10 games for Triple-A Sacramento. Coleman was arguably the Ports' top defensive infielder in 2011, making numerous spectacular plays and showing off a strong throwing arm. Offensively, he did some things very well and struggled in other areas. Coleman hit 15 homeruns for Stockton and posted a .413 SLG. He also stole 21 bases in 25 chances. But his command of the strike-zone was suspect all season. He struck-out a team-high 171 times against only 46 walks. Those contact problems have continued for Coleman into the Arizona Fall League, where he has struck-out in nearly half of his at-bats. He is a talented player, but for him to find sustained success at Double-A and beyond, he will need to cut his strike-out totals dramatically.

Another player who hit for power but struggled with the other aspects of his offensive game was outfielder Mitchell LeVier. LeVier missed the majority of the 2009 and 2010 seasons after undergoing Tommy John surgery, but he appeared in 99 games in 2011 for the Ports. He tied Coleman for the team's second-most homeruns with 15, but the rest of his numbers were poor. He hit only .218 and struck-out 102 times against only 22 walks. His off-season began on a sour note, as well, when he was suspended for 50 games for a second violation of MLB's policy against drugs of abuse. He will serve that suspension next season.

At the start of spring training, the A's had forecasted Max Stassi and Ryan Ortiz as the regular catchers for the Ports in 2011. However, with Stassi's injury ending his season early and Ortiz's hot bat forcing a promotion to Double-A, it was Ryan Lipkin who wound-up receiving the most playing time behind the plate for Stockton. Lipkin hit around .255 for much of the season, but had one month in which he hit .359 (June) and one month in which he hit .192 (July). He finished the year with a .248/.288/.376 line. Lipkin was solid defensively and he hit left-handers fairly well (.263/.306/.425). This was only his first full professional season, so he has time to continue improve offensively. Lipkin will likely return to Stockton for the start of the 2012 campaign, although the A's catching situation could get crowded in the lower levels with Ortiz slated to get most of the at-bats in Double-A, Stassi in High-A and 2011 draft picks Nick Rickles and Beau Taylor needing at-bats either in High-A or Low-A.

For much of the season, Leonardo Gil was the Ports' everyday third baseman. He joined Stockton after hitting a career-high 13 homeruns for Kane County in 2010. Gil managed only six homeruns for Stockton, but improved his average from .252 to .256 and his OBP from .296 to .313. Both of those numbers will need to improve for Gil to continue to move up the A's system. He could return to Stockton in 2012.

Infielder Jason Christian and catcher Petey Paramore split their 2011 seasons between Stockton and Midland. Christian appeared in 40 games for the Ports and hit .259/.308/.364 for Stockton. He hit better in 36 games for the Rockhounds, posting a .273/.324/.375 line. Shoulder injuries have impacted Christian's once-promising career path. He is a versatile player with the glove and can work a walk and steal a base, making him a useful player on any roster. He finished the year on a hot streak for Midland and could see more playing time with the Rockhounds in 2012.

Catcher Petey Paramore began the year as the Rockhounds' starting catcher, but he lost his hold on that position when he hit .192 in 45 games. He returned to Stockton for the final two months of the season and hit .235 with seven homers in 119 at-bats. Paramore, a third-round pick of the A's in 2008, has yet to live up to his draft-billing, at least offensively. Defensively, he is a solid receiver, but he will need to show improvement at the plate to get another chance in Double-A.

Oakland A's Prospect Q&A: Blake Hassebrock

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

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The early returns on the Oakland A's 2010 draft class have been positive, especially in the area of starting pitching. One of those 2010 draftees who stood out this season was right-hander Blake Hassebrock, who posted a sub-3.00 ERA for the Low-A Burlington Bees. We spoke with Hassebrock about his season, his unusual off-season training regime, his newly improved secondary offering and more...

Right-hander [Blake Hassebrock](#) put together one of the best seasons of any starter in the Oakland A's minor league system in 2011. The A's 2010 eighth-round pick posted a 2.64 ERA over 139.2 innings in his first full professional season. He struck-out 110 and walked 46 and held opposing batters to a .249 average. His 2011 campaign was a significant improvement over his 2010 stint playing for the A's short-season affiliates, during which he had a 5.96 ERA in 22.2 relief innings.

Hassebrock, a native of North Carolina, is a product of the UNC-Greensboro baseball program. The A's have dipped into the UNC-G talent pool on several occasions over the past few years. Since 2006, the A's have selected five Spartans in the amateur draft: Hassebrock in 2010, [Robert Gilliam](#) in 2009, [Lee Land](#) in 2007 and [Jermaine Mitchell](#) and Patrick Currin in 2006. A's area scout Neil Avent is a former assistant coach of the UNC-G program. He, along with fellow A's scout Michael Holmes, signed Hassebrock in 2010.

Coming out of college, Hassebrock was a hard-thrower, but he added more movement to his sinking fastball in 2011, something that keyed his big season with the Low-A Burlington Bees. He also pounded the lower-half of the strike-zone, inducing nearly two groundouts for every flyout and allowing only nine homeruns all season. Hassebrock was a mid-season Midwest League All-Star and he finished fourth in the league in ERA.

We caught-up with Hassebrock this week and discussed his stellar 2011 campaign, his work at the A's Instructional League camp, his unusual off-season training program and more...

OaklandClubhouse: How has your off-season gone thus far? Has it been a different recovery process after playing a full season this year as opposed to short-season last year?

Blake Hassebrock: I went to Instructs last year and this year, so that cuts your off-season about a month short. Both Instructs were great. They gave us a few weeks off to recover and then we start lifting and getting back into shape. It has been going great so far. I have been doing as much as I can.

OC: What did you work on this year in Instructs?

BH: My change-up. I had a ton of innings this year compared to my past, so they were a little hesitant to bring me to Instructs because usually if you throw a lot of innings as a starter, they want to cut you off and go ahead and get your arm rested. But they wanted me to develop a change-up. I think – and they think – that that can really change my game. It was good. I went down there and worked on that pretty much the whole time. It went well.

OC: How do you feel like it is coming along now?

BH: I think it is coming along great. By the end, I was able to throw a change-up that was somewhat effective, which I hadn't been able to do before. They gave me a funky grip and I learned it. It was really coming along by the end of Instructs. I'm excited about it.

OC: Was it a pitch that you used at all during the Burlington season, or was it nothing that you had had a chance to rely on before?

BH: I did use it in Burlington. But I never really had a grip that I was comfortable with. It was always a shaky pitch that I would throw. I was never able to get consistent with it. That was the goal of Instructs, to find something that I can repeat and actually use as a tool.

OC: Do you think that will help you most against left-handed hitters?

BH: Yeah, I'd say so. I think probably the second and third time through the order it will help a lot. When you are only

throwing two pitches, the guessing game is much less complicated for the hitters.

OC: What do you feel is your best pitch right now?

BH: Definitely my fastball, my sinker. Actually, I kind of attribute it to my training in the off-season. I do rock climbing and I just started that last year. It really strengthens your hands and gives you more fingertip strength. It sounds kind of outlandish, but I think that helped my ball have movement this year. It's not really something that I concentrated on and all of a sudden it was just there.

OC: Was that movement a big difference for you as compared to when you were pitching in Vancouver last year?

BH: Yeah, it really did because I never really had movement before. I threw hard, but never with movement. But that changed for me this year.

OC: What was it like pitching a full season as opposed to pitching on weekends in college and then in the short-season schedule?

BH: It was definitely a different feeling. While it ended up being a lot more innings, I felt like it was healthier for me overall because I was able to get into a routine and, for the first time in my career, really get into a groove of a schedule where you know you are doing the same thing every week and you can prepare yourself and improve on the last outing each time.

OC: You had a great staff this year in Burlington. Was there any competition between the starters to see who could one-up the other from start-to-start?

BH: Yeah, definitely. There was a friendly competition. We all got along great. When you have a couple of guys who are doing so well as we all were at the beginning of the year, you can't help but compete and try to one-up the other guy's last start. It definitely helps the team chemistry.

OC: Was it good for you to spend the entire season in one league? Did you feel like you had a chance to really get to know the Midwest League?

BH: Yeah. I do. A couple of those other guys, they got moved up during the first half, but, for me, I think it was good that I got a chance to stay there the whole year. It was really the first time that I, like I said, had been able to get into a routine. I think the A's probably didn't want to rock the boat with that because I really hadn't been a starter before. It was good for me to experience a full season in one place to see how to better prepare myself for this next year and kind of learn a lot of things about my body and how to stay in shape through the year. I think it was definitely a life-changing experience.

OC: Did you like the routine of being a starter better than being a reliever?

BH: I love starting actually. Like I said, you can prepare so much better. I feel like that helps you to have a routine and carry over what you did the last time and helps you build on it throughout the whole year.

OC: Do you have a particular philosophy when you are on the mound? Are you looking to get through hitters as quickly as possible and pitch to contact or are you looking for strike-outs?

BH: Really my philosophy is to simplify everything as much as I can and stay in the moment as much as I can – that moment when you are throwing the pitch. Whatever happens [with that pitch] good or bad, you have to forget about it and move on to the next pitch. If you separate each of them like that, it allows you to focus everything on the task that you are trying to complete.

OC: There are a couple of other UNC-Greensboro alums in the A's system. Did you know any of them before signing with the A's?

BH: Rob Gilliam, he was a year older than me in college. We are actually really good friends. He lives near here so we train together in the off-season sometimes. Then there is Jermaine Mitchell. He was a lot older than me, so I never met him [during college], but our college coach told stories and so it was cool to see him and he's a good guy.

OC: What was the Midwest League All-Star experience like this year?

BH: That was awesome. That was great. It was out in Davenport and it was really cool to go out there with other guys who have had success and pick their brains a little bit. It's always good to be around other people who have had success. You learn a lot. I learned a lot of what it took because a lot of those guys had repeated the league and then there were other guys who were only 19-years-old. It was a good mix of guys. You got to see what those players have in common that leads

to their success.

OC: What are your goals going into next year?

BH: Really right now, I'm just trying to get into the best shape that I can be in. I'm doing pilates and hot yoga and rock climbing. Trying to break out of the box when it comes to preparing and try to do as much as I can. Like I said, with my philosophy with pitching, if I concentrate on the moment, then everything will fall into place. Everyday here in the off-season I'm trying to focus on what I am doing and hopefully that will build me up to where I am in the best position I can be in come spring training.

SACRAMENTO RIVER CATS OUTFIELDER MILLER NAMED TO TOPPS TRIPLE-A ALL-STAR TEAM

WEST SACRAMENTO, Calif., November 8, 2011 — Sacramento River Cats outfielder Jai Miller, who became only the third player in franchise history to hit 30 or more home runs in a season, is among the nine players selected to the Topps Triple-A All-Star Team. The best performances in all Minor League Baseball classifications are again being honored by the Topps Company of New York, N.Y., in conjunction with Minor League Baseball.

Miller (26) of Selma, Ala., led Triple-A outfielders in slugging percentage (.588). The center fielder's 32 homers were second best in Triple-A and his .956 on-base-plus-slugging percentage ranked third among Triple-A outfielders. Miller's 12 homers in July matched a River Cats record for homers in a month. He earned Pacific Coast League Player of the Week honors for the week of April 18-24.

Here are the other members of the Topps Triple-A All-Star Team:

Bryan LaHair (29) of Surprise, Ariz., captured the Joe Bauman Award for leading MiLB with 38 regular season homers. The Iowa Cubs first baseman and PCL Most Valuable Player also topped MiLB with a .664 slugging percentage and a 1.070 OPS. ... **Johnny Giavotella** (24) of Harahan, La., led Triple-A second baseman with a .338 average, 34 doubles, .390 on-base percentage and a .481 slugging percentage. His 158 hits with the Omaha Storm Chasers tied for the classification lead among those at his position. ... **Gil Velazquez** (32) of Las Vegas, Nev., paced classification shortstops with a .328 average and 78 runs. He had eight homers, 25 doubles, and 17 stolen bases with the Salt Lake Bees. After going hitless in his first game, Velazquez put together an 18-game hit streak. He also had hit streaks stretching nine and 11 games. ... **Russ Canzler** (25) of Hazleton, Pa., led International League hitters with 40 doubles, 62 extra-base hits and a .530 slugging percentage. The Durham Bulls third baseman also ranked in the top five in his league in average (.314), walks (67), hits (154), on-base percentage (.401), runs (78) and RBIs (83) in winning IL MVP honors. ... **Devin Mesoraco** (23) of Lakeland, Fla., led Triple-A catchers with a .289 average, 36 doubles and 71 runs batted in. His slugging percentage (.484) and OPS (.855) with the Louisville Bats were best among IL backstops. ... **Collin Cowgill** (25) of Lexington, Ky., ranked second in the classification with a .354 average and third with a .430 on-base percentage. The Reno Aces outfielder was also among the PCL leaders in slugging (.554) and OPS (.984). ... **Alejandro De Aza** (27) La Romana, D.R., led the IL with a .322 average. The Charlotte Knights outfielder finished among the circuit's best in OPS (.871), on-base percentage (.378), stolen bases (22), slugging (.494) and triples (5). ... **Julio Teheran** (20) of Cartagena, Columbia, led Triple-A with 15 wins. The Gwinnett Braves right-hander tied for second in the classification with his 2.55 ERA and .232 average against in earning IL Most Valuable Pitcher and Rookie of the Year honors.