

## A's News Clips, Friday, November 18, 2011

### A's latest nightmare: Astros might move to AL West

Bruce Jenkins, San Francisco Chronicle

Firing up baseball's hot stove:

-- The sad state of the Oakland A's couldn't be better summarized than the realignment reportedly in place for 2013. They get no benefit whatsoever. They have to play in a legitimate division now, not one with just three other teams, and they get nine home games with the Houston Astros. That typical crowd of 8,913 just dwindled to 7,449.

-- Could the Astros ever be an attraction? Can't see how. In the franchise's entire history, dating back to 1962, they have *never* been a draw. Maybe on select nights, with J.R. Richard or Nolan Ryan pitching, but as a team - never.

-- The addition of two wild-card teams - perhaps to be in place as soon as next season - places a premium on winning the division. You don't want your season to come down to a one-game, loser-go-home playoff assignment. Still, fans deserve more than 162 games of devotion, then a single playoff game that might be on the road.

-- That could be fixed, with a best-of-three series, but not under Bud Selig's watch. Common sense cries out for an earlier start - next year, that would be right around March 28 - in order to end the season in late September and get the World Series done by the third week of October. Instead, MLB has moved to a *later* Opening Day (April 4) than last year's.

Unbelievable, Bud.

-- There has never been a weaker field of available managers in the offseason. Dale Sveum is a class act and a Bay Area guy (football and baseball star at Pinole Valley High), but to be the No. 1 choice (this week) of the Cubs *and* the Red Sox?

-- The Cardinals got the best man, Mike Matheny, who has the knowledge and emotional resolve to replace Tony La Russa. When Matheny played for the Giants, a lot of people wished he'd eventually become the manager here.

-- Cleverly timing his announcement around the signing of Matt Kemp and the sentimental unveiling of a refurbished field for youth baseball in the L.A. suburb of Compton, Frank McCourt apologized to the Dodgers' fans. Sorry, Frank. Apology not accepted - from L.A. fans or anyone who cares about the game. And when you say, "I just want to continue to make the right decisions for this franchise," wait a minute - *what?*

### Astros bring welcome change to AL West

#### Rivalry, balance among advantages of five-team division

By John Schlegel / MLB.com

Since 1994, the American League West has been baseball's only foursome. Come 2013, the division will become a party of five, adding the Houston Astros in an interleague move that puts all six divisions at five teams apiece.

For many on the teams awaiting the Astros' arrival year after next, the move is one that makes sense on a lot of levels. For one thing, already the sport's only division that includes a two-hour time difference between teams, at least the AL West will have more balance adding another team from the Central Time Zone.

The two-time defending division champion Rangers will gain an in-state division rival, one that ostensibly will make travel and varied game times a little less of a concern for Texas while the West Coast teams -- the Angels, A's and Mariners -- conceivably could take on both Texas teams in one trip.

"From our perspective, having them in our division, I like it, because it gives us another team in our time zone and we're at a disadvantage in our division that way because so many of our games start at 9 o'clock and it hurts our TV ratings," Rangers president Nolan Ryan said. "I think that if both teams are competitive in a given year, I think it will create a good rivalry within the state. I think there are a lot of pluses from our perspective about it."

Added Rangers infielder Michael Young: "For the players, it will be nice to finally have convenient travel for at least one division team."

The Rangers and Astros already have been competing annually in the Lone Star Series, with the Rangers holding a 37-29 edge in those Interleague matchups. The rest of the teams have scant experience against Houston, with the Mariners going 3-6, the A's going 5-1 and the Angels going 3-3 against the Astros since Interleague Play began in 1997.

For Mariners first baseman Justin Smoak, formerly of the Rangers, the prospect of having more of an opportunity to hit at Minute Maid Park is a good thing.

"I like the idea of playing in Houston a little more often," said Smoak, who played with the Rangers there shortly before being dealt in the July 2010 Cliff Lee deal. "The ball flies everywhere there, that's all I remember. It's the total opposite of Safeco Field."

Overall, it's a move that A's manager Bob Melvin says won't take long to take hold, once the Astros and their new division -- and league -- brethren spend some time together in 2013.

"Certainly, it makes sense, as far as the number of teams and the number of divisions," Melvin said. "You build up rivalries and you feel like you belong in a certain spot, but sometimes those things change. I remember in Milwaukee, when they went from the American League to the National League."

Indeed, Melvin was an assistant to the general manager for the Brewers in 1998 and bench coach the next year, so he saw such a transition first-hand.

"It's a different feeling, but once you play a year, you get used to it," Melvin said.

The AL West has proven to be one of the more competitive divisions over the course of the last 18 years, with the Rangers and Angels each claiming five division titles, the A's four and the Mariners three. (The Rangers finished with the best record in the strike-shortened '94 season.)

Adding the Astros to the AL West will change certain basic elements of how the division will play out and create a need for ongoing Interleague Play with the two 15-team leagues, but there's a lot it doesn't alter.

"I don't think it changes how we go about building the club to compete in our division," Rangers general manager Jon Daniels said. "But I'm interested to see what the impact is on Interleague Play, how many more games we'll play with NL rules and whether we need to factor that into how we put the roster together."

Of course, the simplest way to look at it for the current AL West teams is that there soon will be four teams to conquer to claim the division title, instead of just three.

"The percentages, your chance at winning the division, goes down. But I, for one, think it should be fair," Melvin said. "I agree with the decision to even out our division."

## **Many residents cry foul over San Jose's plan to give A's owner Lew Wolff option to buy land at greatly reduced price**

By Carol Rosen, Correspondent, San Jose Mercury News

The San Jose City Council voted 10-1 on Nov. 8 to option 5.5 acres of downtown land to A's baseball team owner Lew Wolff for three years. The measure, which was amended to include a residents' vote, offers Wolff a three-year option to purchase the land for \$6.9 million, less than a third of the \$25.1 million the Redevelopment Agency paid for the land.

The option itself is \$50,000 per year for the first two years and \$25,000 for the third year, in hopes that baseball commissioner Bud Selig will grant the A's permission to move to San Jose.

Prior to the vote, District 6 residents from the Shasta Hanchett and Willow Glen neighborhoods were burning up the electronic wires with letters to Mayor Chuck Reed and council members, letting them know they were against selling the land to at such a reduction.

Only a very few favored the transaction. Most suggested city officials look to the RDA's list of debits and the consequences to the city's general fund and the routine, but necessary services the city currently is finding it hard to meet financially, such as libraries and police officers.

One resident called the option "The Field of Schemes" and others noted that the HP Pavilion has been successful, but not as much to the city's coffers as to the Sharks. Another said the real estate market has dropped, but certainly not by \$16 million. Others said they were tired of providing their tax money for athletic events, when other areas need the money more.

"We can't afford to give that land away. In these difficult times, it just doesn't make sense," said Carol Myers of Willow Glen. "I want my libraries, community centers and parks to be open on a regular basis. There's no way the city will be able to cover the costs it will inevitably need to make [for the stadium]. The A's aren't doing that well, and what happens to the stadium when it's not baseball season and it's too cold or too rainy to offer events?"

"Why is the city giving land away to a billionaire?" asked Mark Sweiger, also from Willow Glen. "At least sell it for a price that kind of makes sense."

Sweiger also questioned why the city doesn't lease the land. Nearby cities of Santa Clara and Mountain View lease all the land north of Highway 101 and bring in a lot of money. "The city would be better leasing that land, which it shouldn't have bought in the first place. In that case, there would be more money. There are a lot of potential alternatives."

Sherman Oaks resident Steve Kline sent a letter to Mayor Chuck Reed and council members reminding them that city manager Debra Figone recently sent them a memo with a projected 2012-13 budget deficit of \$80 and rising.

"The citizens you surveyed in July are weary of the cuts that you have imposed. People are reeling from the increase in crime, both violent and property. The city staff's morale... is the lowest it has ever been. In the midst of this frustration, the city proposes to sell to Mr. Lew Wolff and his wealthy interests, an option for up to three years to buy properties for which the city paid \$25 million. The citizenry are rightfully outraged," Kline said in the letter he provided to the Resident.

He and several others interviewed question who will pay the interest on the \$25 million bond during the option years, and how will the city pay the remaining balance on the bond principal.

Kline, Sweiger, Marc Morris and several others also asked how the city plans to pay off the RDA debt. The RDA already owes the city's general fund \$52.7 million for the housing trust, \$11 million to the parks fund and \$6.8 million to the parking fund. Morris, who works on communications for a volunteer community group called Better Sense San Jose, calls the entire stadium idea "a vanity project we can't afford."

Morris thinks the tax revenues from the stadium won't begin to cover any increased expenses. He believes that "a lot of the defensive claims of supports are overblown."

Pierluigi Oliverio was the only council member voted against the land option. He told The Resident he voted against it because, "I believe the voters should decide, and that a ballot measure giving the city direction should be at the start of the process."

But the mayor says he's looking to raise money to provide for the libraries, community centers and parks. "The land isn't giving us any income at all right now," Mayor Chuck Reed said. "We're taking a piece of dirt and generating revenue for the city. We are trying to turn underperforming areas into money; I'd love to sell the Hayes Mansion. We've already sold the Fountain Alley parking lot, the parking lot between the Rep and Tower 88, and we're working on the lot across from city hall."

As for the claim that a completed stadium would only provide low-paying jobs, Reed said, "We have 60,000 unemployed in the city right now. People want to work, and there will be jobs for them."

He's hopeful that building a ballpark will encourage other new private building in the same area to help fill city coffers to pay for city services and help reduce or pay off the RDA's debt.

Matthew Mahood, CEO and president of the San Jose Silicon Valley Chamber of Commerce told city council members Nov. 8 that he expects Wolff's private investment in the ballpark to spur other private investment of nearly \$500 million including new restaurants, mixed use buildings and possibly a hotel.

"This is a great return on investment. Other cities like San Francisco, San Diego, Phoenix, Baltimore and Washington, D.C., saw huge amounts of private investment created with new baseball stadiums," he said.

Mahood also suggested that by adding baseball to the mix of the Earthquakes and Sharks along with the 49ers in Santa Clara, "will help us build our brand as a large, vibrant metropolitan city and region. This in turn helps us market and promote ourselves for economic development purposes."

Willow Glen resident Mike Jennett agreed with Mahood that a "major league ball park will give us worldwide exposure for television and bring in tourists and their money. I watched the Sharks turn San Jose into a community. By doing this we're investing in the future of the city," he said.

Most city council members accepted that the vote would go to citizens before the options are exercised and favored the option. "I think the investment on our side pales against the investment from the private side," said Don Rocha, District 9 council member. "The risk we're taking is minimal, and the reward we're getting is a new privately financed ball park.

"Keep in mind that a vote from the public would come before any approval is given," Rocha added.

District 10 Councilwoman Nancy Pyle also voted in favor of the option, saying that she initially didn't really like the idea. She said after going over the measure thoroughly, she decided it ultimately will be good for the city. "I was in real estate for 10 years. You sell what you can and hope for a profit. No one else is lining up to buy the property," Pyle said.

Prior to the council meeting, Reed and council members Sam Liccardo and Rose Herrera issued a memo recommending the council take positive action for the option issue.

According to that memo, the city would gain a \$50,000 nonrefundable option, providing payment for land, which currently is lying fallow. In addition, once a ball park is built, it would generate \$1.5 million per year in general fund revenues; \$1.5 million annually for other fund revenues; \$6.9 million in one-time funds to the RDA; 1,000 permanent jobs; and a baseball team that would produce "hundreds of millions of dollars in economic activity."

In addition, the memo estimates the county and public schools would receive \$1.5 million in tax revenues annually, along with encouraging future private investment in the area to "enhance public infrastructure, increase ridership of public transit systems and strengthen downtown as Silicon Valley's urban center."

## **Talking Points: Could we see yet another A's sell-off? Of course, since that's who they are**

by [Tim Kawakami](#) on November 17th, 2011 at 9:31 am

*\* One over-arching point to remember in all this, that probably does not please the rest of the MLB owners: **The A's received upwards of \$30M in the last round of revenue-sharing, I'm told.***

*The revenue-sharing gift might help their drive to San Jose (since the other teams would love to get them off the dole) but it also might serve to aggravate your NYY, Bos, Philly top-dog conglomerate, which does love to hear financial yelping from a franchise that is making money largely by taking it from the teams that have marketed themselves correctly*

*Side note: My understanding is that the Giants PAID roughly \$40M in revenue-sharing in the most recent go-round*

*. That's a \$70M+ revenue-sharing gap, right here in the Bay Area.*

Let's get the scenario mapped out here...

1) The A's are eagerly awaiting MLB approval for their proposed move to San Jose and seem to believe they will get such word sooner rather than later.

(Even though it has already taken Bud Selig's blue-ribbon panel three years to... come up with nothing so far.)

I hope the A's are hearing it right. They deserve an up/down answer at some point.

More importantly, their fans really deserve it. The holding pattern is fine for the A's ownership financial state (REVENUE-SHARING!) but not so good for loyal fans who just want to see their team compete.

2) If the A's get approval, they are signalling that they will tailor the roster for when the stadium is built—which is at least two and probably three or more years down the road—so they will **cut payroll now**

Logical. But that's a long wait for money to be put back into the product.

Still, even if the A's get the OK for San Jose, the A's are cutting payroll *more than usual* until they get into the theoretical new park.

Everything will point to the park. Not to now

3) If the A's get officially shot down, they are stuck in a ballpark they hate with rich owners who have already decided to **keep payroll way, way down** in such an instance.

You don't think they'd go way up in payroll if their stadium dreams are kaput, do you? No chance. Fisher and Wolff decided that a long time ago.

4) If the panel continues to stall, the A's will remain in the same limbo they've been in for years, **alternately adding a bit of payroll briefly or dropping it**, depending on their owners' desires to look/get competitive for the short-term.

Basically: The way it's been for at least 5 years, none of them great ones for the A's.

This does not look good for the A's to hold onto everybody heading into 2012.

I'm not saying Billy Beane absolutely will trade Gio Gonzalez, Andrew Bailey and any of the other young pitchers that make up what they've been calling their long-term centerpieces...

They're not shopping these guys. They're listening.

But we never heard that Beane was shopping Dan Haren or Tim Hudson before he moved them, and he still moved them—the whole point of Beane's genius is to do things unexpectedly.

(OK, I don't know what he'll do if it's being pointed out now that this would be the time he would normally start selling off. Beane might go violently in another direction if he thinks he's being predictable. But I don't know that he has a choice this time.)

The A's have had long-term centerpieces in the recent past—guys who were supposed to lead the team into the new ballpark—and over time, they've traded all or most of them away as the park got pushed back and back.

And there's absolutely no way this A's ownership is sinking any extra money into keeping Josh Willingham or adding new players who might ask for more money than would fit a small, tiny payroll.

—Really, there's no short-term scenario in which the A's will add payroll, and the situation seems very much like the situations in:

-2001/2002: Lose Giambi, Damon and Istringhausen to free agency, set up "MoneyBall" the book, the movie, the Broadway dance sensation;

-2004/2005: Trade Mulder and Hudson;

-2007/2008/2009: Trade Dan Haren, Nick Swisher, Huston Street.

With or without the stadium settled, how is 2011/2012 going to be any different than those previous time-periods for the A's?

(BANG's **Joe Stiglich gives the overview.**)

Clearly, since John Fisher and Lew Wolff have decided that they will not operate as competitive owners unless they get a park in San Jose (and who knows what they'll do even then), this is the SAME SITUATION, only starting with less talent.

The more the cycle continues, the less the A's have to work with.

This was true last year (**column talking to Billy Beane in 2010.**)

It's true now. There might not be a fire-sale, but just go over it in your mind.

The A's at best will be in a new SJ ballpark by 2015, probably.

Any current player who starts making too much money before then, via arbitration or free agency, is going to be on the shopping/must-go list.

That's almost every player on this current roster who is any good (except Jemile Weeks).

That's the cycle. It happened many times in the past, it will eventually happen again.

## **Phelps strong as Phoenix, Peoria tie**

### **Yankees right-hander allows two runs on five hits in five innings**

By David Heck / Special to MLB.com

Heading into Thursday's Arizona Fall League game, David Phelps had won back-to-back starts, while the opposing Javelinas had taken three straight games. At the end of the seven-inning contest, both streaks had ended.

Phelps allowed two runs on five hits over five innings, but did not factor into the decision as the Phoenix Desert Dogs and Peoria Javelinas played to a 2-2 tie.

Coming off picking up the AFL Pitcher of Week award, the 25-year-old Yankees right-hander finished the game with a season-high six strikeouts and did not walk a batter.

Phelps started off with four shutout innings before yielding the first two runs of the game in the fifth. Adam Moore (Mariners) and Oscar Taveras (Cardinals) recorded consecutive one-out singles, and Wilfredo Tovar (Mets) grounded out to move the runners over. Scooter Gennett (Brewers) delivered a ground-ball single up the middle to plate both runs. Fellow Milwaukee prospect Kentrail Davis followed with a groundout to second to end the frame.

The score remained 2-0 until the seventh, when the Desert Dogs got to Cardinals reliever David Kopp. Ronnier Mustelier (Yankees) led off the inning with a double, and Yan Gomes (Blue Jays) drove him in with another double two batters later. With two outs, Kevin Ahrens (Blue Jays) singled up the middle to bring Gomes in and tie the game.

Phelps ended his AFL season with a 2-2 record, totaling 28 strikeouts and nine walks in 32 2/3 innings. After posting a 9.00 ERA through his first two starts, he lowered it with each of his subsequent five outings to end at 4.41.

Selected in the 14th round of the 2008 Draft, the University of Notre Dame product put together a 3.19 ERA in 107 1/3 innings for Triple-A Scranton/Wilkes Barres this season, a mark that would have ranked sixth in the International League if he had enough innings to qualify. That is the highest ERA Phelps has compiled at any of his seven stops during his Minor League career.

With Thursday's game in the books, Peoria officially finished the season at 16-19, while Phoenix went 14-22. Both squads finished well behind the Surprise Saguaros (26-10) for first place in the West Division.

## **Harper heads list of top 25 AFL prospects**

By Jonathan Mayo / MLB.com

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- The Arizona Fall League has long had a reputation as a hitter-friendly circuit, and the 2011 season confirmed that, almost to an extreme. Three teams hit .300 and the league as a whole hit .286. It slugged .454.

Conversely, the pitching numbers aren't pretty. No team finished the year with an ERA under 5.00. The league? A robust 5.53. So it should come as little surprise that this year's top AFL prospects list would be very hitter-heavy. The following list of 25 prospects was chosen not solely based on performance during the AFL, but with more of an eye toward upside. Performance was taken in to account, obviously, with some players definitely raising their stock with how they played this fall.

The list was made after several conversations with scouts who spent a considerable amount of time watching Fall League action. And they agreed: The batter's box was the place to look for talent. The end result is a list with 21 hitters and just four pitchers.

- 1. Bryce Harper, OF, Nationals:** After starting the AFL season 1-for-16 and not picking up an extra-base hit until his seventh game, Harper reeled off a 16-game hitting streak and hit safely in 18 of the next 19 games to put him in the top 10 in slugging, OPS, homers and RBIs.
- 2. Danny Hultzen, LHP, Mariners:** One of several 2011 first-rounders getting their feet wet in Arizona, the No. 2 overall pick certainly held his own. The lefty was the only starting pitcher to finish in the top 5 in ERA (1.40). He held hitters to a .225 average and struck out 18 in 19 1/3 IP.
- 3. Mike Trout, OF, Angels:** There was no question MLB.com's No. 1 prospect was out of gas by the time he got to the AFL, so he gets a bit of a mulligan. He didn't perform here like he did during the 2011 season in the Minors, but the tools are all still there.
- 4. Gerrit Cole, RHP, Pirates:** Cole was the third straight No. 1 overall pick to come make his unofficial debut in the AFL. The right-hander tossed 15 innings before calling it a season. After a tough first outing -- and getting roughed up a bit in the Rising Stars game -- he threw well and his plus stuff was readily apparent. He struck out better than a batter an inning and held hitters to a .179 average against.
- 5. Christian Bethancourt, C, Braves:** Scouts raved about Betancourt's athleticism behind the plate to go along with a plus arm. He still needs work defensively, but he has all the tools to be a very good all-around catcher (he hit .306 and slugged .556).
- 6. Mike Olt, 3B, Rangers:** Olt gave both the home run and RBI records a serious run, easily leading the league with 13 homers and 43 RBIs. He also received good reports on his defensive acumen at third.
- 7. Wil Myers, OF, Royals:** The top Royals prospect shook off a rough regular season to reclaim some of his status as one of the more intriguing young hitting prospects in the game. Myers showed tremendous plate discipline, walking more than he struck out, finishing in the top three in OBP, SLG and OPS.
- 8. Nolan Arenado, 3B, Rockies:** Arenado was right there with Olt in terms of his run-producing ability, finishing third in batting average and second in RBIs, all without many strikeouts. His pure hitting ability was on display and it's clear his 2011 season was not a California League mirage.
- 9. Michael Choice, OF, A's:** Choice hit 30 homers during the regular season, but it was in Class A and in the California League. The power is legit -- he hit six homers in just 66 at-bats here -- showing the ability to draw walks as well.
- 10. Jedd Gyorko, 3B, Padres:** One scout said of Gyorko that he was as sure of him being a big league hitter as anyone in the league. His .437 average led the league and he showed plenty of extra-base pop and run-producing activity. There might be concern over his ultimate defensive home, but there are none about the bat.
- 11. Oscar Taveras, OF, Cardinals:** Only Harper was younger among the position players and Taveras held his own coming from the Midwest League. He didn't walk in the AFL, but he also showed the ability to make consistent contact. The power will continue to come as he matures.
- 12. Mikie Mahtook, OF, Rays:** The No. 31 overall pick in the Draft, it took a little while for the LSU product to shake off some rust and catch up to the speed of the game at this level. Once he did, he had an 11-game hitting streak that included six multihit games to put him firmly among the league leaders in a host of categories.
- 13. Will Middlebrooks, 3B, Red Sox:** Middlebrooks followed up a breakout regular season with just 56 at-bats here, but showed more of the power and defensive ability to make him one of the better third-base prospects in the game.
- 14. Nick Franklin, SS, Mariners:** Franklin made up for some lost time in Arizona and came on strong, hitting .306 in November. As one scout put it, prospects who can play the middle infield like Franklin can perhaps should be valued more than others.

**15. Anthony Gose, OF, Blue Jays:** While concern does persist about Gose's penchant for swinging and missing, he continued to impress with his other tools, namely his plus speed, his developing power and his excellent defensive skills, particularly his arm.

**16. Jed Bradley, LHP, Brewers:** The No. 15 overall pick in June's Draft joined Hultzen in Peoria here and there was a little bit of a split about this southpaw. He might have slightly better pure stuff than Hultzen, but not as much polish. He didn't pitch much -- he had a groin issue early -- but he did show hints of the repertoire that made him one of the better college arms in the Draft class.

**17. Gary Brown, OF, Giants:** Scouts didn't get a real long look at the outfield prospect as he appeared in just 11 games before shutting it down on Oct. 22 due to illness. There's still a lot to be excited about his potential as a leadoff hitter and the speed that can change the game on both sides of the ball.

**18. Jean Segura, SS, Angels:** Segura missed a lot of time during the regular season with hamstring issues, keeping him from getting enough time at shortstop. That's where he played here, and he played it well, showing off his outstanding arm, hitting for average and some good wheels.

**19. Joe Panik, INF, Giants:** A bit of a surprise first-round pick for many, Panik went out and hit very well in the Northwest League. He continued to do so here against more advanced competition, hitting for average and getting on base. He also played second base exclusively, perhaps a sign of a permanent position switch from shortstop.

**20. Sean Gilmartin, LHP, Braves:** One more first-round left-hander. Gilmartin signed earlier than the two higher on the list and made his pro debut. He showed an outstanding changeup and ability to throw strikes. He was particularly tough against lefties, holding them to a .154 batting average.

Nos. 21-25

21. Tim Wheeler, OF, Rockies

22. Robbie Grossman, OF, Pirates

23. Junior Lake, SS, Cubs

24. Scooter Gennett, 2B, Brewers

25. Adam Eaton, OF, Diamondbacks

## **Oakland A's 2012 Outlook by Position: Outfield / DH**

By [Brandon McClintock](#), Fowler News 11/15/2011

The A's entered the offseason with few parts of their roster for 2012 more undecided than the three outfield spots and the designated hitter position.

The 2011 version of the four spots (and backup roles) consisted of Josh Willingham, Coco Crisp, David DeJesus and Hideki Matsui in the starting roles. All figure to be gone via free agency within the next two months or so.

Conor Jackson, the primary backup in the outfield, was traded midway through the season to the Boston Red Sox.

The only returning member from opening day 2011 is Ryan Sweeney.

Chris Carter, who we looked at in our first base preview, has some outfield experience, but is not necessarily the defensive fit the A's would be looking for behind their pitching staff.

Grant Green, [previewed in our shortstop piece last week](#), was converted to center field this past season and could figure into the plans around midseason or as a September call-up if the A's decide he needs a full season in Triple-A and he doesn't make a return to the infield.

Michael Taylor, Jai Miller, Sweeney and Jermain Mitchell seem the most likely occupants of the outfield roster spots to open the season, with the designated hitter role likely being some combination of the above mentioned players.

The only thing that remains certain, it will definitely be a different look than the 2011 outfield.

### **Ryan Sweeney**

Sweeney found himself in a backup role in 2011 and could find himself there again if the A's make any offseason moves to upgrade the roster in the outfield in 2012.



His power has never developed to a level the A's had hoped it would, but he has remained consistent with his batting average and on-base percentage.

Sweeney's real value to the A's has always been his plus-defensive skills in the outfield.

He probably does not possess the offensive capabilities to be counted on as an everyday starter for Oakland, given their struggles scoring runs the past few seasons.

Then again, he might be given the opportunity to prove that assessment wrong if no further bats are brought in before the start of spring training.

### **Michael Taylor**

Michael Taylor finally got his first taste of the Big Leagues in September of this past season.

He wasn't overly impressive in his 11 games, batting just .200, but he did display some of the power the A's were hoping for when they acquired him for Brett Wallace hitting his first career homer in his brief stint with the A's.

His minor league stats were considerably better, batting .272 with 16 homers in 93 games for the River Cats.

He was likely slotted as the A's top choice in right field heading into 2012 anyway, but the lack of depth at the position all but guarantees it.

At 26-years old, he won't be your typical rookie, but I, for one, will be looking forward to watching his rookie season.

### **Jai Miller**

Jai Miller went on an absolute tear in Triple-A for the Sacramento River Cats in 2011, earning his September call-up to the A's and the Majors.

He batted .250 with Oakland in seven games, but continued to flash the power he displayed all season in Sacramento with his second Major League homer in his brief stint.

In the minors, he batted .276 and slugged 32 homers and 88 RBI.

Miller was also a perfect 16-for-16 in steal attempts in the minors.

A center fielder, Miller could fill the role until the A's decide either Grant Green or Michael Choice are ready to take over, or he could slide over to left field if Oakland decides to go with Ryan Sweeney in center field.

### **Jermaine Mitchell**

Jermaine Mitchell is another A's minor leaguer that made an impression in 2011.

He began the year in Double-A, where he batted .355 with 15 doubles, 13 triples, 10 homers and 14 stolen bases (in 27 attempts).

After his promotion to Triple-A, he batted .302 with 14 doubles, three triples, five homers and 13 stolen bases (in 18 attempts).

He should get a long look in spring training for a backup role or perhaps even a shot at one of the starting jobs if any of the other candidates gets off to a slow start.

At 27-years old, Mitchell is not considered a prospect anymore, but he could prove to be a very effective stop-gap for the A's.

### **Cedric Hunter**

The A's acquired a young center fielder that should also get a long look for a starting position this spring.

Cedric Hunter is just 23-years old, and is considered very athletic.

He hasn't posted overly impressive stats at any level of the minors, but he did manage a .308 batting average in 71 Double-A games in 2010.

He earned his Major League debut this season with the San Diego Padres and batted .250 in his six games (1-for-4).

I don't know enough about him to offer a full evaluation. We'll learn together this spring what he truly can bring to the team.

### **Michael Choice**

Michael Choice likely won't be in the A's Major League plans in 2012. With the team looking like they are entering a rebuilding phase, there is no need to rush his development.

If he repeats his 2011 success from Single-A Stockton, he should work his way through Double-A and Triple-A quickly though.

He batted .285 with 30 homers and 82 RBI.

A September call-up isn't entirely out of the question, but I'd look for him to be contending for a starting position in 2013 instead.

He's certainly the prospect whose arrival A's fans will be anticipating the most, myself included.

### **Offseason Need: Trade for Young Talent to Build Around**

The A's may decide that they can build around Michael Taylor, Grant Green and Michael Choice, but there until the latter two reach the Majors they will still have to gamble on some of their farmhands to get them through the 2012 season unless they make a move or two to bring in some young talent.

Since the A's future appears to be headed towards a rebuild in hopes of moving to San Jose and fielding a competitive team timed with the opening of their new stadium, we can assume that any talent they bring in will be young and under club control for several seasons.

They likely won't be making any deals for a Josh Willingham or David DeJesus type player this offseason.

That means Andre Ethier is probably off the table, even if the Dodgers can't afford him after their massive commitment to Matt Kemp.

Logan Morrison of the Miami Marlins is probably an attainable outfield bat though if the A's are willing to part with one of their pitchers. If that pitcher winds up being either Gio Gonzalez or Trevor Cahill, Morrison would certainly not be the only piece headed back to Oakland either.

I'm certainly not in favor of trading either pitcher, but a glance back through history should suggest that the A's won't take it off the table if the right deal presents itself.

My vote would be another one-year rental player or two to bridge the gap to Choice and Green while utilizing the current crop of outfielders as platoon and backup players.

I have to admit I wouldn't mind seeing Morrison in green and gold either though.

### **Oakland A's 2012 Outlook by Position: Shortstop**

By [Brandon McClintock](#), Fowler News, 11/6/2011

Fortunately for the A's, Cliff Pennington has managed to hold his own at shortstop the past two seasons.

Originally, the A's figured Pennington would bridge the gap between former Rookie of the Year winner Bobby Crosby and their shortstop of the future, Grant Green.

Green's path to the Majors has been stalled and perhaps detoured by a position change to center field in the middle of this past season.

The A's may still convert him back to the middle infield if they feel his defense is improved enough to justify keeping taking over for Pennington.

On the Major League level the A's have Adam Rosales and Eric Sogard (both profiled last week with the third basemen) as the primary backups and utility players. Adrian Cardenas is another option as a backup and utility in the near future in Oakland.

### **Cliff Pennington**

Cliff Pennington just finished his second season as the everyday shortstop for the Athletics.

He raised his batting average from .250 in 2010 to .264 in 2011. His on-base percentage and slugging percentages remained identical from year-to-year, but his homer total did increase slightly, as did his RBI production.

Defensively Pennington still makes a lot of errors, but he also has good range that allows him to get a lot of balls other shortstops do not reach.

His UZR rating went from 9.9 in 2010 to -5.2 in 2011, a trend of defensive struggles that seemed to effect practically the entire Oakland infield in 2011.

Oakland doesn't figure to be players for either Jose Reyes or Jimmy Rollins and there are not any other top free agent shortstops that would represent a drastic upgrade over Pennington on the market this year.

Barring a trade for a replacement, he figures to be Oakland's starting shortstop in 2012.

### **Grant Green**

The heir-apparent at shortstop, Grant Green saw his path to the Majors slightly delay this season when his own defensive struggles lead to a position change to center field.

Despite the defensive change of scenery, Green still could find himself back at short for the A's before he reaches the Major Leagues.

The A's primary shortstop in Triple-A in 2011, Eric Sogard, is a top candidate for the utility role with the A's in 2012, leaving the spot wide open for Green to resume and work his way up to Oakland in the role he was drafted to fill.

He batted .291 in Double-A before a brief promotion to Triple-A to help with the River Cats playoff run.

It will be interesting to see where the A's use him during spring training and see how glove looks, his bat was never a major concern for the Athletics' player development department.

### **Yordy Cabrera**

Yordy Cabrera, the A's second round pick in the 2010 amateur draft, struggled in his first full season of professional baseball.

The 21-year old shortstop played the entire 2011 season with the Class-A Burlington Bees and managed just a .231 batting average and six homers.

The A's drafted him because of his power, so they'd like to see his power return and his average rise.

He's likely headed to Stockton in 2011 and doesn't figure to be an option in Oakland for at least another two seasons. Even when he does work his way through the system, he's a candidate for a position change to third base.

### **Offseason Need: Add Depth at the Minor League Level**

The A's farm system is incredibly thin at the shortstop position.

One of their top offseason priorities should be to add some depth in the minor leagues through any trades they may be involved in this winter.

The news, as reported by Ken Rosenthal of Fox Sports, that the A's are willing to listen to offers on any of their players with the exception of Jemile Weeks, implies strongly that the A's could be involved in a number of trades this winter to rebuild their farm system.

The A's could target a young player such as 22-year old Starlin Castro of the Chicago Cubs to build around for the future. Such a trade would cost the A's one of their top pitchers and limit their return to little more than Castro though. Although Castro could become a valuable trade commodity down the road himself.

It seems more likely, if the A's do make any trades, they will take a similar approach to when they dealt Mark Mulder and later Dan Haren, and maximize their return through several high-level prospects not yet in the Major Leagues.

## **Oakland A's 2012 Outlook By Position: Third Base**

By Brandon McClintock, Fowler News, 10/30/2011

The A's have spent the last two offseasons attempting to address the third base position in Oakland.

The first attempt, trading for Kevin Kouzmanoff before the 2010 season, brought mixed results. Although he was not a disaster for the A's, he failed to live up to the expectations the front office and coaching staff had for him.

Last offseason was spent attempting to woo Adrian Beltre to Oakland for a consecutive offseason, only to be shot down, for a second straight offseason.

Edwin Encarnacion was briefly a member of the A's, being claimed off waivers from the Toronto Blue Jays, before he was non-tendered and chose to re-sign with the Blue Jays.

The failed attempts to bring in an adequate replacement left Oakland little choice but to start the season with Kouzmanoff at the hot corner.

A complete ineptitude with both his bat and glove lead to his demotion to Sacramento. Andy LaRoche filled in temporarily before the A's went outside their organization and acquired Scott Sizemore from the Detroit Tigers.

Sizemore was a pleasant surprise as he learned the position on the fly, but will the A's choose to stick with him as the primary third baseman in 2012?

### **Scott Sizemore**

Following his trade from the Detroit Tigers, Scott Sizemore came over to a new organization and a new position.

Originally a second baseman, Sizemore made his share of errors at third as he learned the position (13 errors in 91 games). He showed enough promise, though, that the A's seemed willing to enter spring training with Sizemore as the starter if they don't find an upgrade that fits the budget this offseason.

Offensively, Sizemore provided the A's with some pop in the lineup, hitting 11 homers and driving in 52 runs during his half season in Oakland.

At just 26-years old, he is still young enough to expect that he can make the position switch and become an above-average player at the position.

If he is given the opportunity...

### **Adam Rosales**

2011 was a forgettable season for Adam Rosales.

After missing all of spring training and most of the first half of the season, Rosales finally made his season debut June 6th against the Baltimore Orioles and hit a homer in his first game back.

Seemed promising, but he would struggle the rest of the season and bounce back and forth between Oakland and Sacramento.

Rosales played in just 24 games in the Majors in 2011 and had a microscopic .098 batting average.

He could wind up non-tendered this offseason, meaning the A's would likely head into spring training with Eric Sogard as the primary utility player and backup.

Sizemore is another option as the primary utility, super-sub type player if the A's find a free agent third baseman or target another player in a trade.

Otherwise, Rosales will be in spring training competing for a roster spot with Sogard and perhaps Adrian Cardenas for the primary backup role.

### **Stephen Parker**

Stephen Parker began the 2011 season in Double-A before being called up to make a handful of appearances at Triple-A to end the 2011 season.

He batted .286 with 10 homers and 74 RBI for the Midland Rockhounds in 132 games and .320 with two RBI in five games for the Sacramento River Cats.

He struggled with the glove in Double-A this season, committing 20 errors at third base.

A full spring of infield work with A's manager Bob Melvin should help his fielding, but not enough to earn a roster spot out of spring training.

Parker may wind up being a late season September call-up for the A's in 2012 unless he is needed earlier due to injury.

I'd expect to see him play the entire season in Sacramento though as he looks to refine his defensive skills and better prepare for life as a Big Leaguer.

The A's will need to at least consider bringing in a veteran to push Scott Sizemore for the starting position entering the 2012 season.

Some free agent names that could be considered by the A's include: Wilson Betemit, Mark DeRosa and Edwin Encarnacion (who could also fill the role as designated hitter).

If the A's want to make a bigger splash and add a proven contributor to their lineup and relegate Sizemore to the utility role, then pursuing Aramis Ramirez would seem a likely fit, albeit a bit more on the expensive side than the above mentioned free agents.

Looking at the trade market, David Wright is the top candidate that could be moved this offseason, and is still young enough to be a core piece of the A's offense that they could choose to build around.

## **Oakland A's 2012 Outlook by Position: Second Base**

By [Brandon McClintock](#), Fowler News, 10/23/2011

This is our third week of reviewing the Oakland A's 2012 roster by position. This week's position is second base.

The A's entered 2010 with the understanding that it would be Mark Ellis' final season with Oakland. A difficult decision given his loyalty to the organization and status as the longest tenured player currently on the roster.

Ellis was injured midway through the season and former first round draft pick Jemile Weeks was promoted from Triple-A Sacramento. As they say, the rest is history.

Ellis was traded to the Colorado Rockies to free up the position for Weeks, and he responded by becoming one of the most dynamic hitters on the team this season.

The A's have a couple of utility infielders who are capable backups behind Weeks.

Let's take a look at the position and what, if anything, the A's need to do before the beginning of the 2012 season.

## **Jemile Weeks**

Jemile Weeks began the 2011 season with the Triple-A Sacramento River Cats.

In 45 games he batted .321/.417/.446 with six doubles, four triples, three homers, 22 RBI, 30 runs and 10 stolen bases.

Following the injury to Mark Ellis and Weeks' promotion to the Majors, he stepped his game up and locked down the position heading into the offseason and spring training 2012.

In 97 games for the A's, Weeks batted .303/.340/.421 with 26 doubles, eight triples, two homers, 36 RBI, 50 runs and 22 stolen bases.

He appears to be the dynamic lead-off hitter the A's were hoping he would become.

He will need to work on his defense during the offseason and in spring training though. [Fangraphs.com](http://Fangraphs.com) listed his UZR at -6.1 for the 2011 season. In fact, Weeks committed more errors than any other American League second baseman (fourth overall in the Majors).

A full spring training of defensive drills with Bob Melvin and Phil Garner should help improve his defense.

## **Eric Sogard**

Eric Sogard split time this season with the Oakland A's at second base, shortstop and third base.

He struggled offensively in the Majors, batting just .200 with a .243 on-base percentage.

He saw most of his playing time at third base (10 games) and shortstop (14 games), and just three games at second base this season.

In the minors, he spent 73 of his 79 games at shortstop. His hitting was far better in Triple-A, where he posted a .298 average with a .381 on-base percentage.

Depending on what decision the A's make with Adam Rosales this offseason (who will be featured with the third basemen next week), Sogard should enter spring training competing for the utility infielder role.

## **Adrian Cardenas**

Adrian Cardenas became a man without a set position this season in Triple-A.

He began his career as a second baseman but spent the majority of his 2011 season occupying the designated hitter role in Sacramento before Jemile Weeks promotion.

Following Weeks call-up, Cardenas spent 35 games at second base (13 at third base, 44 in the outfield, three at shortstop and 34 at DH).

His .314 batting average and .374 on-base percentage, as long expected, suggest that he has the ability to become a quality Major League hitter.

Cardenas should see plenty of reps at various infield positions this coming spring training and be one of the leading candidates for a utility role with the A's.

## **Tyler Ladendorf**

Tyler Ladendorf spent the majority of the 2011 season in Double-A Midland before experiencing a brief four game promotion to Triple-A Sacramento.

He struggled mightily with his bat at both levels of the minors in 2011. His batting average with Midland was just .225 through 125 games. His four games in Sacramento, an incredibly small sample size, only produced a .211 average.

Depending on where Adrian Cardenas starts the 2012 season, Ladendorf could find himself the starting second baseman in Sacramento to open 2012.

He'd fall pretty far down the depth chart at second base for the Big League club though, and likely won't see any Major League time in 2012.

He'll see a little time in spring training before being reassigned to minor league camp where he will need to continue working on both his offensive and defensive game.

### **Offseason Needs: None**

The A's are pretty well set at second base heading into 2012.

There's no position battle for the starting position, that belongs to Jemile Weeks. There will be a bit of a battle in spring training for the backup role, though.

Eric Sogard and Adam Rosales (reviewed next week) look like the top two candidates heading into spring training, although Adrian Cardenas should give them both at least a challenge if he can put together a solid spring.

Scott Sizemore, originally a second baseman in the Detroit Tigers organization, could also be in play as the utility infielder and primary backup at second base if the A's search for a new third baseman this offseason in free agency or via trade.

The A's outlook at second base is very promising for the next few years as Weeks progresses and improves at the position. He has the ability and upside to become the first A's position player to make an All-Star team since Ramon Hernandez earned the honor in 2003.

## **Oakland A's 2012 Outlook by Position: First Base**

By [Brandon McClintock](#), Fowler News 10/16/2011

Welcome to week 2 of the A's position break down analysis.

Last week we took a look at the catcher position, this week we will take a look at the A's first base depth moving into to 2012.

It was a bit of a revolving door in Oakland at the position in 2011, beginning with Daric Barton as our opening day starter.

Barton of course got off to a slow start both offensively and defensively and eventually saw himself demoted to Triple-A.

Conor Jackson took over the starting role at first base before he was eventually traded to the Boston Red Sox following the emergence of Brandon Allen, who was acquired in a trade deadline deal, as the new every day first baseman.

The A's, of course, have Chris Carter in the system as well and made a trade for another first baseman to give a look in spring training.

We'll see if they stick with this current group of first basemen or add a veteran to push the youngsters before the season begins.

Without further ado...

### **Daric Barton**

Entering the 2011 season, the A's had publicly committed to Daric Barton as their starter moving forward.

He entered spring training having slimmed down and added lean muscle, appearing to be in the best shape of his professional career. He had a solid spring training and several reporters, myself included, believed he was headed to a breakout year.

That simply never happened as he got off to a slow start at the plate and his gold glove caliber defense turned into more of the "iron glove" variety.

Following his demotion to Triple-A Sacramento and further struggles against minor league pitching, we learned that he had a shoulder injury he had been playing with throughout the entire season.

His season finally ended with surgery to repair his shoulder and hopefully see him enter spring training fully recovered and ready to compete for his job back.

Barton may not be afforded that opportunity though with the depth the A's have been adding at the position since his struggles began.

Rather, my belief is that Barton will wind up packaged with another player and be granted a change of scenery and a fresh start with a new organization.

If he does return to the A's, it will likely be in a backup capacity and he will need to learn to fill-in as an outfielder on occasion as well in a role similar to that occupied by Conor Jackson this season.

### **Chris Carter**

I believe it is still too early to give up on Chris Carter as a Major League capable player, but that time is approaching quickly and he will need to make an impression fast in spring training or find himself looking for a fresh start elsewhere.

Carter's 2010 0-for-30 streak has been highly publicized, although he did come back up following that and have a decent stretch to end the season.

Unfortunately, he could not repeat that success in his opportunities in 2011.

He had a decent season in Triple-A, although not overly impressive, but had zero success in Oakland.

Add into that his complete ineptitude with the leather at first base and he seems destined to become a full time designated hitter. Of course, in order to occupy that role, he will need to learn to hit Major League pitching and show that he can make the necessary adjustments.

If he makes the club out of spring training, it will most likely be in a DH platoon role and backup at first base.

### **Kila Ka'aihue**

The Kila Ka'aihue acquisition screams of a depth-only move to me.

He has been a solid minor league player throughout his time in the Kansas City Royals system, batting .272 with 11 homers for Omaha this season and .319 with 24 homers in 2010.

His successes in the Majors have been practically non-existent though.

He showed a little pop in 2010, hitting eight homers in just 52 games, but he batted just .217. This season his stats dropped as he batted just .195 with a pair of homers in 23 games at the Big League level.

He has proven to be solid defensively though and should fit nicely with Sacramento. His familiarity with the Pacific Coast League pitching should help his productivity for the River Cats and keep him fresh in the event of injuries in Oakland and a need for his services.

It will take an impressive spring showing to crack the Major League roster though.

### **Brandon Allen**

Following his acquisition from the Arizona Diamondbacks at the trade deadline, Brandon Allen was an instant success in Oakland.

He showed the athleticism and defensive ability we had been lacking at the position for much of the season and he just kept hitting while putting on impressive power displays in both Yankee Stadium and Fenway Park.

Unfortunately, he cooled off significantly down the stretch and finished the season with a very underwhelming .200 batting average (.205 in his time with the Athletics).

He has the type of power that we have missed in Oakland since Frank Thomas' departure from the team though, and he is the favorite heading into the winter as the regular starter in 2012.



At the time of his acquisition, manager Bob Melvin mentioned his athleticism and the ability for him to slide into an outfield position if necessary, something I'm sure the team would love to avoid, but could be helpful if they dip into the trade or free agency market in search of another veteran first baseman.

### **Offseason Need: Bring in a Veteran to Push the Youngsters**

Although the A's already have several options at the position, they lack a known entity that will demand respect from opposing clubs at an important production position in the lineup.

Brandon Allen and Chris Carter could wind up evolving into that role in the future, but right now that is still very much up in the air with their inconsistency.

Daric Barton may rebound and contend for come-back player of the year, but he is more likely headed for a change of scenery if he doesn't win the position back during the spring.

I would prefer to see the A's head outside the organization and pick up a veteran first baseman that can push the rest of the group in spring training and force a legitimate competition.

Joey Votto would be ideal, but falls into the zero-chance category. He would instantly take over the starting role without any competition necessary.

I'm thinking a player such as Michael Morse of the Washington Nationals, who has the versatility to play another position if necessary, or even Carlos Pena or Derrek Lee who could both find significant time in a DH platoon as well to give Allen or Carter playing time at first base as well.

## **Oakland A's 2012 Outlook By Position: Catcher**

By [Brandon McClintock](#), Fowler News, 10/9/2011

Let's begin our offseason with a look at where the A's stand at each of their positions heading into next season.

With nine weeks remaining before the beginning of baseball's winter meetings, we'll split the roster up into exactly nine installments of this segment: catcher, first base, second base, third base, shortstop, outfield, designated hitter, starting pitching and bullpen.

There may need to be some updates here and there if the front office gets busy early on, but ideally we'll be able to use this as a starting point and reflect on whether or not the A's are making positive steps in the right direction headed forward.

So without further ado, let's get started and take a look first at the catching position in our system and how it performed at each level of the A's organization.

### **MLB-Starter: Kurt Suzuki**

By his own admission at various different times this season, Suzuki had a down season. Although actually it was his second down season in a row.

His batting average dipped to a career low .237 and his on-base percentage was also a career low .301. He showed decent power though, posting his second best season in terms of homers at 14.

Defensively he posted a .993 fielding percentage behind just seven errors in 976 chances. He threw out just 28% of would-be base stealers, up from his previous two seasons but still well below his career best of 37% in 2008.

For as good as fans have believed Suzuki is defensively though, [FanGraphs.com](#) has his defensive-runs-saved (DSR) at -3 for 2011.

Barring a trade, Suzuki will be back behind the dish as the starting catcher again in 2012. He is signed through 2013 with a team option for 2014.

The A's and the fans will be hoping he can bounce back and raise his average to around the .275 mark he averaged between 2008-2009.

### **MLB-Backup: Landon Powell**

Not only has Powell's offensive production slipped in each of his three pro-seasons, his playing time has also seen drops in all three years.

He played in 46 games in 2009, 41 in 2010 and just 36 this season thanks, in part, to a demotion to Triple-A in favor of Anthony Recker as the season wound down.

Powell batted just .171 with a single homer in his 2011 campaign.

He posted a .992 fielding percentage in his 254 chances behind the plate and threw out 36% of would-be base stealers. He posted the exact opposite DSR statistic than Suzuki at a positive 3 (runs saved).

It's not exactly a secret that Powell's value is his defense, and the pitching staff absolutely loves throwing to him, but he will need to make some major strides offensively in spring training if he is to retain his job in 2012.

### **Triple-A: Anthony Recker**

Following a breakout season in Sacramento in which he batted .287 with 16 homers and 48 RBI, Recker finally earned his call-up and made his Big League debut for the A's this season.

Although that experiment did not exactly land the added offensive punch the A's had hoped for, he batted just .176 in 21 plate appearances, Recker should be given as a shot as the primary backup next season if he can outproduce Powell in the spring.

His minor league defensive stats this season were right in line with both Suzuki and Powell. He posted a .994 fielding percentage and threw out 25% of base stealers.

### **Triple-A: Josh Donaldson**

Josh Donaldson probably represents the biggest offensive threat behind the plate for the A's, unfortunately he also represents the biggest defensive liability of the four options mentioned so far.

Donaldson bounced around the diamond this season for the River Cats but still managed to find himself strapped into the catcher's gear 71 times.

He put together a .261 batting average with 17 homers and 70 RBI for Sacramento. His fielding stats as a catcher included a .977 fielding percentage and he threw out 39% of would-be base stealers, the best number of any of the four catchers mentioned.

Donaldson will be another strong contender for the backup role in 2012 if he can work on his defense to bring his fielding percentage in line with the other contenders and maintain his offensive superiority.

### **Offseason Need: None**

Short of a trade for a Major League ready catching prospect such as Jesus Montero (which has been rumored), there is no need to make any drastic moves at this position.

The strength of our team is the pitching staff and the current crop of backstops are familiar with their abilities and know how to bring out the best in them.