

A's soon-to-expire lease is a bargaining chip for Oakland

By Angela Woodall, Oakland Tribune

Time is running out for the A's.

The team's contract at the O.co Coliseum in Oakland expires at the end of the 2013 season. Even if Major League Baseball decides to grant the wish of A's co-owner Lew Wolff to move the team to San Jose, they won't have a ballpark to play in for several years.

That means the A's will be in Oakland until at least 2015 -- if not much longer -- giving the city and county a bargaining chip when they start talking about extending the Coliseum contract.

The situation has "always been part of the discussion," Mayor Jean Quan said.

The question is whether Quan and other elected officials will leverage their advantage to get a better contract or do whatever they can to keep the team in Oakland.

Wolff said the A's will seek an extension that is "fair to Oakland and works for us -- if possible."

Negotiations could begin as soon as both sides wish, but haven't.

A's President Mike Crowley said he sent what he considered a fair lease extension proposal in June that was met with a "convoluted" response from the Coliseum Joint Powers Authority, which oversees the municipally owned complex.

"So that ended that conversation pretty quickly," he said. "If we can't work something out here, we'll have to find somewhere else to play.

"There are not many options. But we have time. We're here in 2012, and we're here in 2013."

The current contract lease extension was signed in 2006 when Wolff was in talks with Fremont to build a ballpark there by 2011. The A's have control over concessions during all events, as well as parking and pouring rights, a fee beverage companies pay for access to fans at facilities. It's worth as much as \$4.5 million at the O.co Coliseum.

The team also keeps all revenue from their games and nearly three-quarters of money from concessions, which is above industry standards of 50 percent.

But the next deal may not be so generous.

Everything will be on the table, from concessions to maintenance, JPA member and District 1 Alameda County Supervisor Scott Haggerty said. He was also involved in the 2006 talks about the A's possible move to Fremont.

Haggerty declined to discuss any specific negotiating plans regarding 2013. But, he said, "We don't want to be used as a bargaining chip for a team to get a better deal (from a competing city) when they leave. Teams have a responsibility to say, 'We want to be in this community.' "

Instead, said JPA Chairman and Oakland City Councilman Ignacio De La Fuente, "the A's have made it absolutely clear the last place they want to be is in Oakland." The city has bent over backward to persuade them to stay, he said. "Sometimes, enough is enough." The A's either have to pay more rent or share more revenues with the city and county, whose taxpayers subsidize the Coliseum complex each year by about \$20 million.

The A's have deducted more than \$1 million from their rent since 2009 because they refused to pay a city-imposed, Oakland-wide parking tax.

Going forward, they are supposed to pay \$1 million in rent on June 30, 2012, and \$800,000 on June 30, 2013.

"The reality is they're the ones who have a timeline, not us," said De La Fuente, referring to the 2013 deadline and the lack of alternatives to the O.co Coliseum in the Bay Area.

The A's minor league River Cats ballpark in Sacramento doesn't meet MLB standards and likely couldn't accommodate scheduling two teams although Crowley would not rule it out.

The A's are not welcome at AT&T Park or Candlestick Park, said Peter Magowan, the Giants' former managing general partner. The team can keep the A's out because it has territorial rights to San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties.

MLB Commissioner Bud Selig could try to broker a deal between the two teams to make room for the A's in San Jose. But Magowan said there is no reason to doubt that Selig would not honor the Giants territorial rights in Santa Clara County.

The A's might be forced to pay more rent or play outside the Bay Area until they have a ballpark, sports analyst Andrew Zimbalist of Smith College said. But the best Oakland can expect is a short-term lease extension, he added. "Oakland does not have a lot of bargaining power."

The city will have even less if the A's move to San Jose and the Raiders head south, leaving the Coliseum without a permanent tenant, although it could be used for soccer and more concerts.

"This is a unique situation when neither side has any options," Stanford sports economist Roger Noll said.

But the amount of money the city and county could squeeze out of a new A's lease is "pretty trivial," Noll added -- a few million at most. "The stakes are low," he said.

The political stakes are higher, and timing could work against Oakland. De La Fuente and Haggerty said they want to protect taxpayers. Both face re-election: Haggerty in June for his supervisor's seat and De La Fuente in November 2013 if he chooses to defend his City Council seat.

"The pressure is already mounting," De La Fuente said, meaning emails from fans with demands to keep the A's in Oakland at any cost. Three other council members will have to defend their City Council seats in November 2013 as well. And Quan faces a possible recall effort.

She was unwilling to talk about bargaining specifics. It's unclear if she will want the JPA to push the A's harder during negotiations or try to sweeten the deal. She has gone to great lengths so far to induce the A's to stay here.

Oakland Councilwoman Jane Brunner, who is running for city attorney in 2013, said she preferred a nonconfrontational approach. Eventually the team will realize their options are limited and decide to negotiate an extension, she predicted.

While Rangers sign Darvish, A's re-sign McCarthy and Devine

By Sam McPherson, Oakland A's Examiner

Yesterday, the Oakland Athletics announced they signed two pitchers to one-year contracts for 2012.

Not sure too many people noticed.

And especially with today's announcement by the Texas Rangers that they signed Japanese pitching star Yu Darvish, you can be certain few baseball fans really care what the A's do on or off the field any more in the American League West.

Throw in the Los Angeles Angels and their signing of Albert Pujols, and Oakland franchise -- proud winner of four World Series, six AL pennants and 14 division titles since moving to the Bay Area for the 1968 season -- definitely needs something to change if they are going to survive the present and immediate future.

So forgive A's fans or baseball in general if securing the services of Brandon McCarthy (9-9, 3.32 ERA last season) and Joey Devine (1-1, 3.52) for 2012 isn't interesting enough to warrant too much attention.

McCarthy and Devine were the final two arbitration-eligible players on the A's roster.

The former posted his career-best MLB season with Oakland in 2011, and he will be counted on to fill out the team's rotation in 2012 from Opening Day forward -- especially with the departures of Trevor Cahill and Gio Gonzalez.

The latter is a candidate to close for the bullpen with the trade of Andrew Bailey to the Boston Red Sox. Devine missed both the 2009 and 2010 seasons recovering from Tommy John surgery, but he has posted 89 strikeouts in 88.1 career MLB innings to go along with a 2.75 ERA.

So while the Angels and the Rangers have money to spend on high-priced talent, the A's will once again try to survive the 162-game gauntlet with whatever they can patch together -- begging the obvious question:

Do the Athletics know the way to San Jose?

Only Bud Selig knows for sure.

Oakland A's Trade Analysis: A's Shift Again

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Jan 17, 2012

The narrative of the Oakland A's off-season has been constantly changing. The message shifted once again on Monday, as the team acquired yet another veteran position player. We take a look at the Seth Smith trade inside...

The Details: *The Oakland A's acquired outfielder Seth Smith from the Colorado Rockies for right-handed pitcher Guillermo Moscoso and left-handed pitcher Josh Outman.*

Background

The Oakland A's busy off-season continued on Monday when they acquired a starting outfielder, trading away some of their starting pitching depth in the process. While there were rumors that the A's were interested in Smith for much of the off-season, the trade itself was still somewhat of a surprise given the A's stated intent this off-season to rebuild and field a team of young players with an eye on the future.

While not old, Smith is certainly a player who fits a team more in a "win-now" mentality than a rebuilding one. Smith played in parts of five seasons with the Rockies, appearing in at least 130 games in each of the past three campaigns. Smith has been fairly productive during his time with Colorado. In 2009, Smith had an 888 OPS in 133 games. After falling off to a 783 OPS in 2010, Smith rebounded this past season with an 830 OPS in a career-high 147 games. Overall for his career, Smith has an 833 OPS with 51 homers in 487 games played.

Smith's calling card as a hitter has been his work against right-handed pitching. Over the past three seasons, he has hit .287 with an 878 OPS versus righties. He has had significantly less success versus southpaws. The left-handed hitter has managed only a 616 OPS against lefties over that same span.

Those aren't the only notable splits on Smith's stat sheet, however. Like many hitters who have played a significant portion of their careers with the Rockies, Smith has hit much better in the thin air at Coors Field than he has at sea level. His home OPS over the past three years is 935, while his road OPS is a much more meager 736. Whether Smith can continue to be a productive player playing his home game in a pitcher-friendly ballpark remains a significant question.

Smith was the Rockies' second-round pick in 2004 out of Ole Miss, where he was both a baseball star and the back-up quarterback on Eli Manning's Rebel squads. He had a very productive minor league career, moving quickly through the Rockies' system, reaching the big leagues for the first time in 2007. In five minor leagues seasons in total, Smith had an 885 OPS and he reached double-digits in homers in every minor league season but one.

Smith will be under team control through the 2014 season. Before being traded to Oakland, he and the Rockies had agreed to a one-year deal worth \$2.4 million, avoiding arbitration.

In return for Smith's services, the A's sent two pitchers to Colorado who were expected to play large roles in the A's starting pitching rotation during the 2012 season. Before the trade, Moscoso was slated to be the A's number two or three starter this season. He had a breakthrough rookie campaign with the A's last year, posting a 3.38 ERA in 128 innings. The Venezuelan allowed only 102 hits and walked only 38, helping him overcome the fact that he struck-out only 74 batters. He has been a flyball pitcher throughout his career, a trait that made him well-suited for the cavernous Oakland Coliseum. It remains to be seen whether his style will translate well to Coors Field.

Outman will also have his flyball-tendencies tested at Coors Field. The hard-throwing southpaw threw 136.2 innings last season, a campaign split between Triple-A Sacramento and the big leagues. It was Outman's first season back on the mound after having Tommy John surgery midway through the 2009 campaign. Outman posted an ERA of 3.91 in 17 starts with the River Cats and 3.70 in 13 appearances (nine starts) with Oakland last year. He struck-out 107 and walked 70, although his control improved as the season went on.

Before his surgery, Outman was on his way to establishing himself as a permanent member of the A's rotation. He had a 3.48 ERA in 67.1 innings with a 53:25 K:BB ratio in 2009 before getting hurt. His biggest bugaboo that season was his HR/9 ratio, which was 1.2. Outman has been both a reliever and a starter during his career and could fill multiple roles for the

Rockies moving forward.

Analysis

Last week, we took a look at the potential backlogs in the A's system in 2012 and noted that both the starting pitching and outfield situations were the two largest potential backlogs. This trade, at least for the moment, has lessened the backlog in one of those areas, but has added more stress to the other.

The starting pitching situation has cleared up some with the trades of Moscoso and Outman. Multiple news outlets have reported that the A's have agreed to a one-year free agent contract with veteran right-hander [Bartolo Colon](#). Colon, if the signing becomes official, will slot into the rotation spot that Moscoso would have held. Outman's potential spot either in the A's rotation or the bullpen is now up for grabs amongst the remaining pitchers in the Oakland spring camp. The chances now of one of the A's recently acquired pitching prospects – [Jarrod Parker](#), [Brad Peacock](#) and [Tom Milone](#) – making the team's Opening Day roster have also increased and there should be another spot available in Triple-A for a starter that wouldn't have been available before the trade.

The outfield situation is also clearer, at least at the major league level. Smith will be slotted into the A's starting outfield as the regular left fielder. The A's are talking right now about having Smith play everyday, regardless of whether there is a right-hander or left-hander on the mound. However, if Smith continues to struggle versus southpaws, it wouldn't be surprising for him to turn into a platoon outfielder.

The other two starting outfield slots are also set. [Josh Reddick](#), acquired from the [Boston Red Sox](#) in the [Andrew Bailey](#) trade, will be the A's everyday right fielder, while the veteran [Coco Crisp](#) will be the A's everyday centerfielder for the third consecutive season. Reddick is a left-handed hitter and Crisp is a switch-hitter, but is also injury-prone, meaning that the A's back-up outfielders – especially the right-handed ones – are likely to play significant roles for the A's this season.

The A's have several candidates to be their back-up outfielders this season. Right-handed centerfielder [Collin Cowgill](#) and right-handed corner outfielder Michael Taylor are the leading candidates to play those roles in 2012. However, the left-handed hitting [Brandon Allen](#), [Jermaine Mitchell](#), [Jeff Fiorentino](#), [Cedric Hunter](#), [Brandon Moss](#) and [Jason Pridie](#) will all have opportunities to try to earn a spot as the A's fourth or fifth outfielder. Adding Smith does make it likely – barring another trade or an injury – that there will be at least one more experienced outfielder who is sent down to Triple-A, pushing other outfielders in the A's system down another rung.

This trade also sends another mixed message as to how the A's front office views the 2012 campaign. The trades of [Trevor Cahill](#), [Gio Gonzalez](#) and Andrew Bailey were sold as part of a rebuilding plan. However, the A's recent additions of veterans Crisp, Smith and reportedly Colon appear more like the kind of moves a team that is hoping to be somewhat competitive would make. The A's have talked about building towards a competitive window that begins in 2014 or 2015. Crisp and Colon will certainly not be part of that window and Smith, a free agent after 2014, isn't likely to be either.

Moscoso and Outman weren't likely to play significant roles on a championship team in 2015 (although Outman has the stuff to exceed expectations). However, by acquiring Smith and signing Crisp, the A's are once again not giving themselves an opportunity to try out their young talent to see if those young players are the long-term answers in the outfield. In addition, in Smith the A's are once-again bringing in a hitter whose success has come in a very different hitting environment than the one he will encounter in Oakland. The A's recent history with these type of acquisitions has been disappointing, at best.

In all likelihood, the acquisition of Smith (as well as Crisp and Colon) will make the team marginally better in 2012. However, in a division with Albert Pujols and the two-time defending AL Champions, the A's have little hope of actually being competitive. If wins and losses in 2012 mattered, it seems like the A's would have been better served holding onto Cahill, Gonzalez and Bailey and not venturing down this rebuilding path at all. However, having embarked down the rebuilding path, it is curious that the A's are now seemingly making an attempt to try to improve for 2012 with less of an eye on the long-term future of the team. This half-rebuild/half-compete mode has been the team's modus operandi the past five seasons and it hasn't netted the franchise anything more than mediocrity. Will that streak continue into a sixth season?

Backlog: A's Depth Chart Crowded, Part 2

was given up. In part two of this two-part series, we look at the potential backlog of pitching talent within the A's system.

Since the off-season began, the Oakland A's have made four trades, sending seven players to other teams. In return, they have received 11 players. In addition, the A's have picked up several other non-roster players through a variety of avenues and are expecting a group of prospects back from injuries that limited them in 2011. While the team has released some players and has seen a few walk via free agency, they will still be entering the 2012 spring training with more talent than they had at the same time in 2011.

Having more talent is a good problem to have, but it will create some difficult roster decisions for the A's front office in the coming months. Below is a look at the starting pitchers and relievers within the A's system and how the backlog will impact minor leaguers throughout the system (note: we examined the positions most impacted by a potential backlog earlier this week: <http://athletics.scout.com/2/1147709.html>).

Starting Pitchers

The A's may have said good-bye to three of their five top starters from 2011 ([Trevor Cahill](#), [Gio Gonzalez](#) and [Rich Harden](#)), but they still have plenty of starting pitchers with major league experience who will be vying for spots in the A's rotation this spring. Staff ace [Brett Anderson](#) will miss most of the season after undergoing Tommy John surgery last summer, but the A's do expect lefty [Dallas Braden](#) (who missed most of the 2011 season with shoulder problems) to be ready early on in 2012. Other starters returning to the team who made starts for the A's in 2011 include [Brandon McCarthy](#), [Guillermo Moscoso](#), Tyson Ross, [Graham Godfrey](#) and [Josh Outman](#).

McCarthy and Moscoso are shoo-ins to make the A's Opening Day rotation, while Ross, Godfrey and Outman will be in the thick of what will be a heated competition for the other two or three spots. Through the team's trades this off-season, the A's acquired three young pitchers who made their major league debuts last season – [Brad Peacock](#), [Jarrod Parker](#) and [Tom Milone](#).

In addition, the A's signed longtime major league veteran [Edgar Gonzalez](#) to a minor league contract, as well as minor league veteran [Fabio Castro](#) (who has been mostly a starter during his lengthy minor league career and has major league experience as a reliever). All five pitchers will have legitimate chances to win rotation spots this spring. A's 2011 first-round pick [Sonny Gray](#), a non-roster invitee to spring training, will also have an outside chance of winning a roster spot.

Of course, the A's will only be able to carry five starters on the Opening Day roster, and if Braden is healthy enough to pitch on Opening Day, the A's will only have two spots available for nine pitchers. In other words, either six or seven starters will be sent down to the minor leagues when the A's break camp, unless one or two are traded, released or moved to the bullpen.

With that many experienced starters heading to the minor leagues, the A's figure to have a crowded rotation in Triple-A Sacramento. Ross, Outman and Castro have significant experience coming out of the bullpen, but the A's are likely to give Ross and Outman – at the very least – significant starting rotation time if they are in the minors. Godfrey, Gonzalez, Gray, Peacock, Milone and Parker have been starters almost exclusively throughout their careers.

The most likely candidate from this group to go down to Double-A is Gray. The right-hander made his professional debut with Midland last season and was spectacular in five starts with the Rockhounds. However, he only has 22 professional innings under his belt, so some additional Double-A experience might not hurt. The rest of the group has way too much experience to send them back to the Double-A level.

So what does this mean for the A's minor league starters who are not invited to big league spring training? It could be bad news, especially for right-hander [Travis Banwart](#) and left-hander [Carlos Hernandez](#). Over the past two seasons, Banwart has made 36 starts for the River Cats and has been one of Sacramento's most reliable starters during that stretch. Hernandez started last season in Double-A, but he made 19 starts for Sacramento in 2011. The left-hander has experience as a reliever as well as a starter and could be moved into the bullpen as a way to stick in Triple-A, but he has shown promise as a starter. The Bay Area native pitched well during the Mexican Winter League season as a starter, as well. Figuring out where Hernandez and, in particular, Banwart fit into the Sacramento picture could be tricky.

With no open spots in Triple-A, it would appear that 2011 Midland starters [Anthony Capra](#), [Gary Daley](#) and [Shawn Haviland](#) are ticketed to return to the Texas League. Right-hander [Yadel Marti](#), a veteran of the Cuban national team who pitched at three levels for the A's last season, is also a candidate for the Midland roster, although he is currently on the restricted list and may not return to the organization this spring.

There are starters who finished the 2011 season with High-A Stockton who the A's will need to make room for at the Double-A level. Right-hander [A.J. Griffin](#) was arguably the A's best minor league starter last year. He pitched at all four of

the A's full-season levels, spending the most time at Low-A and High-A. Griffin should be the second starter in the Midland rotation next season behind Gray. Right-handers [Daniel Straily](#) and [Murphy Smith](#) also had solid seasons with Stockton in 2011 and deserve promotions to Midland.

Players returning from injury will also be wildcards for the Midland and Sacramento rotations. One is right-hander [James Simmons](#). The A's 2007 first-round pick missed the 2010 season and part of the 2011 campaign with shoulder problems, but pitched the second half of last season pitching for Stockton. Simmons struggled with reduced velocity with the Ports, but the A's are hopeful that his arm strength will return in 2012. If it does, his skills and experience would make him a strong candidate for either Double-A or Triple-A.

Left-hander [Ian Krol](#) had a nightmare 2011 season that saw him miss half of the year with an elbow injury and a team suspension kept Krol off of the field for the rest of the year. Krol was spectacular during his first full professional season in 2010 with Low-A Kane County and Stockton. He was slated to pitch for Stockton before the elbow injury felled him last spring and is likely to be sent there again at the start of 2012, although a spectacular spring training could push Krol up to Double-A.

Right-hander [Arnold Leon](#) spent the 2009 season with the Midland Rockhounds and pitched briefly for the Rockhounds in 2010 before he injured his elbow during the first month of the season and had to undergo Tommy John surgery. He missed most of the 2011 season recovering from the surgery but is on-track to be ready for the 2012 campaign. Leon has spent most of his professional career as a reliever, but he showed promise as a starter at the tail-end of 2009 and could be a rotation candidate.

Like Leon, left-hander Pedro Figueroa had Tommy John surgery in 2010 and missed the majority of the 2011 season. The hard-thrower is a member of the A's 40-man roster and has an impressive fastball-slider combination. There has been talk about moving Figueroa to the bullpen, but he has been a starter throughout his career. Regardless of whether he is in the rotation or the bullpen, Figueroa is likely to start his 2012 season with Midland.

The biggest wildcard for the Midland pitching staff may be left-hander Sean Doolittle. The A's second pick in 2007 was a position player for the first five years of his professional career, but injuries have forced a move to the mound. Doolittle was a standout starter in college for [Virginia](#) and he was impressive during the A's fall Instructional League, flashing a mid-90s fastball and promising secondary pitches. Given that he is already five years into his professional career, his best path to the big leagues may be in the bullpen, but the A's could put him in the starting rotation to give him more innings to develop as a pitcher. Either way, he will likely start his season either with Stockton or Midland.

There are plenty of candidates for the Stockton rotation, as well. Right-hander [A.J. Cole](#) was acquired in the Gio Gonzalez deal with Washington and is now considered one of the top pitching prospects in the A's organization. The 20-year-old spent all of last season pitching for the Nationals' Low-A affiliate and he is more than ready for a spot in High-A. The A's front office will want to take a close look at their new prospect this season and will have that luxury with Cole pitching in Stockton.

There are a number of other talented arms who are candidates to pitch for Stockton in 2012. Left-hander [Jake Brown](#) spent most of the 2011 season with the Ports and is likely to return there to start the 2012 season. Right-handers [Blake Hassebrock](#) and [Josh Bowman](#) had strong seasons for Low-A Burlington in 2011 and should move up a level this season.

Right-hander [Matt Thomson](#) was one of the A's most promising 2010 draft picks, but labrum surgery cost him virtually the entire 2011 season. He was outstanding as a starter with short-season Vancouver and Stockton in 2010 and, if he is healthy, he could factor in the 2012 Stockton rotation. Another promising arm, left-hander [Julio Ramos](#), is also expected to be back in 2012. He was scheduled to be in the Stockton rotation in 2010 before an elbow injury knocked him out for the 2010 and 2011 seasons.

There are several candidates for the Low-A Burlington rotation, as well. In addition to those who are pushed back from the Stockton rotation due to a lack of roster space, right-handers [Blake Treinen](#), [T.J. Walz](#), [Jose Macias](#) and [Tyler Vail](#) are all likely to be in the Bees' rotation. Newly acquired right-hander [Raul Alcantara](#), a hard-thrower with a high ceiling, pitched at the short-season levels for the [Boston Red Sox](#) last season and is also ready for the jump to full-season ball. In addition, 2011 Vermont Lake Monsters [Seth Frankoff](#), [Brent Powers](#), [J.C. Menna](#), [Kurt Wunderlich](#) and [Tanner Peters](#) will all draw strong consideration for spots in the Bees' Opening Day rotation.

The Bullpen

This off-season, the A's cut ties with three of their most valuable relievers over the past three seasons, trading closer [Andrew Bailey](#) and left-hander [Craig Breslow](#) and releasing right-hander [Michael Wuertz](#). Despite those loses, the A's still

have a number of candidates to fill their bullpen.

The 2012 A's bullpen will be led by veterans Grant Balfour and Brian Fuentes. Behind them is a group of young relievers who will vie for the final four or five slots. Right-hander Fautino De Los Santos had a strong rookie season with the A's last year, striking out 43 batters in 33.1 innings. He is virtually a lock to be on the Opening Day roster and could win the A's closer role.

The rest of the slots are open for competition. Right-handers Andrew Carignan, Ryan Cook, Joey Devine and Neil Wagner will be the main candidates. Starter candidate Tyson Ross could also factor into the bullpen equation if he doesn't win a rotation spot. From the left side, Jerry Blevins and Jordan Norberto will be the main competitors for the number two lefty role in the A's bullpen. Like Ross, Josh Outman could also be a factor in this competition if he fails to win a rotation spot.

Oakland has also signed a number of veteran relievers to minor league contracts who will be in camp as non-roster invitees. Right-handers Jim Miller, Travis Schlichting and Evan Scribner and left-handers Erick Threets and Fabio Castro all have major league experience and long minor league track records.

All told, the A's will likely be sending seven relievers back to Triple-A at the end of camp. This could be bad news for incumbent River Cats' relievers Bruce Billings and Justin Souza, as well as Trey Barham, who finished the year on the River Cats' post-season roster. Billings spent a full year at Triple-A last year and made his major league debut, while Souza and Barham pitched well at Double-A.

Right-hander Paul Smyth may also have to repeat at Double-A despite having put a full season in at the level last year. Right-hander Brett Hunter is also likely to repeat at Double-A and left-hander Ben Hornbeck could be in the Midland bullpen again, as well, if he is healthy. Right-handers Josh Lansford and Jose Guzman and left-hander A.J. Huttenlocker all had standout seasons in the Stockton Ports' bullpen and would likely have little to gain by having to repeat at High-A in 2012. Right-hander **Ryan Doolittle pitched extremely well for Stockton last season before an injury ended his season early. He is expected back at the start of 2012 and is a candidate for the bullpens in Midland or Stockton.**

The Sacramento and Midland bullpen situations could be further complicated if the A's choose to have Arnold Leon, Pedro Figueroa, Anthony Capra and/or Sean Doolittle pitch out of the bullpen rather than the rotation.

Injuries will likely thin out some of this backlog, especially as the season goes on, but if everyone is healthy through spring training, the A's player development staff will have a big challenge on their hands to determine the best place for players at all levels of the organization.

Could the A's Return to Philadelphia?

This is a town ready for two baseball teams

Ed Condron, The Philly Post, phillymag.com

Scoring Phillies tickets is about as difficult as landing a prime Saturday night dinner reservation at Vetri on short notice. Citizens Bank Park is the place to be in town from April through October. The Phillies' well-designed yard has been sold out for 204 consecutive regular season games, and that number will swell 15 short of 300 by the end of the 2012 season. For the first time ever, the Phillies led the MLB in attendance with 3,680,718 last season. If you want Phillies season tickets, wait in line.

The mania begs the question: **Can Philadelphia support two major league baseball teams?**

Well, there happens to be a troubled organization looking to make a move that once called North Philadelphia home.

Celebrated Oakland A's General Manager Billy Beane's "moneyball" approach helped the financially strapped A's make the playoffs 2000 through 2003 and in 2006. Beane's love of OBP (on-base percentage) and sabermetrics and surprising success also inspired Michael Lewis's terrific best-seller *Moneyball*, which yielded last year's entertaining film of the same name starring Brad Pitt as Beane.

The A's currently play in one of the worst parks in baseball, Oakland's miserable Coliseum. The population in Oakland is dwindling, and the A's swarthy fan base is shrinking as well.

San Jose has been a sought-after destination, but the A's haughty National League brother team, the San Francisco Giants, has successfully claimed territorial rights.

There was some conversation about the A's trekking to Las Vegas, but pro sports and Sin City is a poor match.

What about luring the A's back to where the once proud franchise started in 1901?

The laws of supply and demand suggest that it is possible. There aren't enough Phillies tickets for rabid Philadelphia baseball fans.

This is also about righting a wrong. How did the A's leave in the first place? Every two-city baseball town lost the lesser squad. The feckless Boston Braves and the pathetic St. Louis Browns packed their bags while the storied Boston Red Sox and the phenomenally successful St. Louis Cardinals remained.

The A's were *the team* in town, while the Phillies were their foundering cousin during the first third of the last century. When iconic owner-manager Connie Mack wasn't selling off legendary players, his team was winning championships.

The '29 A's featured such Hall-of-Famers as Jimmie Foxx, Lefty Grove and Mickey Cochrane and is arguably the greatest team of all time.

However, Mack sold off those stars and the A's fell from grace. The A's moved to Kansas City after the 1954 season, but Mack's white elephants remain the most successful team in Philadelphia sports history, winning five championships during his reign.

It would be amazing if Philly could bring back a franchise that has won nine World Series titles—the third-best record in baseball history, behind the New York Yankees and St. Louis Cardinals—but the reality is that the A's would have to deal with Phillies' territorial rights. Is that possible?

Fishtown baseball uber-fan J.T. Ramsay, who has a campaign that already has more than 1,000 followers, to bring the A's back to Philly (["Bring Your A's Game"](#)); he believes that there is a chance that the nomadic franchise could return after nearly six decades west of its birthplace.

"Anything is possible," Ramsay said. "If they put NHL hockey in the desert, anything is possible. If you have the baseball commissioner on your side and you can work out something with the territorial rights, I think the A's could come back and draw many more fans in Philly than they have in Oakland. I think the A's could do very well in Philadelphia. The A's are in a bad state right now. They're selling off their best players again, just like they did under Connie Mack. They need stability and a home."

Baseball is re-aligning. The Houston Astros are moving to the American League West. If the A's were to move East, the New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox would be natural rivals.

"You would have that and it would be something new for Philadelphia," Ramsay said. "You would have a new ownership group and a new stadium. It would be so exciting. I think Philadelphia sports fans would go for it."

However, former Phillies closer and MLB analyst Mitch Williams, who knows a little bit about how Phillies aficionados feel, does not agree.

"I can't see Oakland moving back to Philadelphia," Williams said. "There isn't another team that could come in and survive. The Phillies have die-hard fans, who wouldn't pack up their bags and root for another team. One baseball team in Philadelphia is enough, especially when they're a World Series contender."

Ramsay still has hope. "Crazier things have happened in the world of sports. The A's need a home, and I think Philadelphia, which is a bigger market than San Francisco/Oakland could be the city for them."

Oakland A's Prospect Profile: A.J. Cole

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Jan 19, 2012

In December 2007, the Oakland A's traded their staff ace for a package of prospects including a 19-year-old pitching prospect. That prospect went on to become one of the top young lefties in the American League - Brett Anderson. The A's are hoping that history repeats itself with their newest young pitching sensation - A.J. Cole. We take a closer look at Cole inside...

Name: [A.J. Cole](#)

Birthdate: 01/05/92

Height/Weight: 6'4"/180 pounds

How Acquired: Traded along with [Derek Norris](#), [Brad Peacock](#) and [Tom Milone](#) for [Gio Gonzalez](#) and [Robert Gilliam](#) on December 22, 2011. Originally drafted by the [Washington Nationals](#) in the fourth round in 2010.

Background

Over the past few years, the Washington Nationals have used "over slot" bonuses to stock up with talent through the Major League Baseball amateur draft. No year was more indicative of this strategy than 2010, when the Nationals inked several high-profile picks to above-slot bonuses. The most high profile of these signings was number one overall pick [Bryce Harper](#), but Cole didn't trail far behind Harper in the headlines. Taken in the fourth round, Cole was inked to a \$2 million bonus, the highest ever given out to a player taken in the fourth round (ironically the bonus eclipsed the record set the previous year by the Oakland A's when they signed [Max Stassi](#) to a \$1.5 million deal after taking him in the fourth round).

Before the draft, Cole was considered one of the top high school pitchers in America and most draft pundits projected that the Florida native would go in the first 20 picks. Even though Cole put together a strong high school All-Star tournament season, teams backed away from him in the first round on draft day because of his reported bonus demands, his commitment to the University of Miami and some questions about his health. It was a bit of an upset when the Nationals took him in the fourth round and were actually able to get him into their system.

Cole signed mere days before the August deadline, so he threw only one official inning in his professional debut season. Pitching for the short-season Vermont Lake Monsters (now an A's affiliate), Cole tossed a scoreless frame with one strike-out and one walk. He got his feet wet professionally later that fall at the Nationals' Instructional League camp.

At the start of the 2011 season, the Nationals were conservative with Cole, initially holding him back in Florida for extended spring training. There was talk that he would pitch in Florida until June and then report to Vermont for the New York-Penn League season, but Cole pitched well enough that the Nationals sent him out to the full-season South Atlantic League on May 7. He would spend the rest of the year in the [Hagerstown Suns](#)' starting rotation.

Cole was the youngest pitcher on the Suns' roster at 19 years old, but he held his own against a league filled with collegiate draft picks and second-year pros. In 89 innings, Cole posted a 4.04 ERA with a 108:24 K:BB ratio. Batters hit .251 against him and he allowed six homeruns.

Ironically, Cole's ERA increased towards the end of the season despite the fact that his velocity also increased and his homer rate dropped. The right-hander allowed five homeruns over his first seven outings and then gave up only one more the rest of the season, despite being a flyball pitcher throughout the year. Cole was kept on a tight pitch count by the Nationals throughout the season and he never threw more than 27 innings in any one month. His highest workload month was August, during which he had the highest ERA and BB/9 of any month during the season, but he also had his best K/9 month.

Scouting Report

Coming out of high school, Cole's best pitch was his fastball, which was regularly clocked in the 92-94 MPH range. That pitch continued to be his best offering in 2011. Cole began the season with his fastball sitting in the 91-93 range, but he saw his velocity tick up later in the season, when he was sitting 93-95 and occasionally touching 97. He also spotted the two-seam and four-seam fastballs well.

Cole's other two pitches – a change-up and a curveball – weren't as effective for him in 2011, although both were improved over his high school days. Cole's change-up is a relatively new pitch to him and he is just now starting to use it in important in-game situations. It is a pitch that figures to get a lot of attention from the A's coaching staff. Cole's curveball is a little more advanced and he used it most frequently to off-set the fastball. A "power" curve, the pitch has a tight break and is generally clocked in the 77-81 MPH range. He still needs refinement with the pitch, but it was an effective weapon for him against Low-A competition last season.

At 6'4", 180, Cole is tall and lanky with broad shoulders and what scouts call a "projectable" frame. As he gains weight, he may add more velocity to his fastball, an enticing thought considering how hard he already throws. Despite being one of the youngest players in the Sally League last season, Cole demonstrated a calm demeanor on the mound and rarely seemed intimidated by the competition. Cole worked through a few nagging injuries while in high school, but was healthy in 2011.

Although Cole's command of his secondary pitches is still a work in progress, his overall control is excellent, especially for a

young pitcher. He struck-out four-and-a-half batters for every batter he walked and managed 10.9 strike-outs per nine innings pitched. Those numbers are a big reason why most observers felt he pitched significantly better than his 4.04 ERA would indicate.

Outlook

Of all of the players acquired by the A's this off-season, Cole has arguably the most potential upside given his frame and his arm strength. However, he also is a considerable risk being only 20 years old (he turned 20 in early January). It will likely be at least two years before the A's truly know what they have in Cole.

Given his success in the Low-A Sally League in 2011, Cole should start the 2012 campaign with High-A Stockton. The California League will present a challenge for Cole, whose flyball tendencies could get him in trouble in some of the smaller parks in the southern part of the league. He will draw comparisons to former A's prospects [Brett Anderson](#) and [Trevor Cahill](#), both of whom pitched in the Cal League for Stockton as 20-year-olds. Cole isn't as polished as either of those two were at the start of their year-20 seasons, but Cole arguably has better raw stuff than Anderson or Cahill.

Oakland A's Top-50 Prospects: 10-6

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Jan 17, 2012

It's that time of the year when we take stock of the Oakland A's organization and analyze the top prospects. For the next few weeks, we will profile our top-50 prospect list in groups of five. Today, we continue the series with a review of prospects, 10-6.

Note: These rankings are from [our original top-50 prospect ranking](#) posted on November 17, 2011. We will re-rank the A's top-50 prospects to incorporate any newly acquired players in late January.

10. [Eric Sogard](#)

Players such as Sogard are often lost in the shuffle when it comes to prospect rankings. Not particularly big (5'10", 190 pounds) or flashy, Sogard has a tendency to fly under the radar. However, Sogard is the kind of player who does many of the little things well that help a team win, making him a valuable asset.

Originally acquired by the A's from San Diego before the 2010 season, Sogard has spent two years in the A's system, splitting both of them between Triple-A Sacramento and the big leagues. In 2010, Sogard spent the entire regular season with the River Cats but received a September call-up to Oakland after the River Cats' post-season run ended. In 2011, he was the A's final cut out of spring training and would spend the final two-and-a-half months with Oakland as the team's back-up middle infielder.

Sogard's two years in Sacramento are indicative of the kind of player he can be when given the chance to play everyday. He was firmly ensconced in the top two spots in the River Cats' line-up the past two seasons and earned a reputation during that time for being one of the toughest outs in the Pacific Coast League. In 2010, he hit .300 with a .391 OBP and in 2011, he nearly matched those numbers with a .298 average and a .381 OBP. He walked more than he struck-out both seasons and posted slugging percentages above .400, all while playing above-average defense at second and showing a solid glove at shortstop.

In 2011, Sogard spent most of his time with Sacramento at shortstop thanks to the presence of second basemen [Jemile Weeks](#) and [Adrian Cardenas](#) on the Sacramento roster. A natural second baseman, Sogard began learning the shortstop position in 2010 and showed significant improvement with his turns around the bag and his range at short in 2011. Sogard also improved his base-running in 2011, swiping 13 bases in 16 chances for the River Cats after going 14-for-23 in 2010. The only blemish for Sogard with the River Cats was his April performance. Although he hit .270, he posted only a 689 OPS, his only month with an OPS below 819. He started slowly in 2010, as well, so getting off to a better start will be an area of focus for Sogard in future years.

Although Sogard spent 10 weeks with the A's in 2011, he managed only 70 at-bats over 27 games. He struggled with that inconsistent playing time, batting only .200 with an uncharacteristic .243 OBP. Despite those struggles, Sogard figures to be

the favorite to win the back-up infield job with the A's this spring and is currently the A's top option at both second and short should starters Jemile Weeks or Cliff Pennington go down with injuries.

Sogard doesn't have Weeks' dynamic speed or Pennington's cannon for a right arm, so he is likely to continue to slot behind both players on the A's depth chart for the foreseeable future. However, given the history of leg injuries for both Weeks and Pennington, the A's may look to use Sogard more frequently in 2012 to keep some of the wear-and-tear off of their starting double-play combination. Sogard can also spell third baseman Scott Sizemore in a pinch.

In some ways, Sogard is a similar player to former A's second baseman Mark Ellis. He has Ellis' ability to see a lot of pitches per at-bat and can flash occasional homerun power. Sogard can not only work a walk, but he is also an excellent contact hitter and is difficult to strike-out. As a base-runner, he doesn't have blazing speed, but he is fast enough to swipe bases when the situation dictates. Defensively, Sogard has an above-average glove at second and is capable of filling in at short and third when needed. He will turn 26 in May.

9. B.A. Vollmuth

Top pick Sonny Gray got most of the post-draft hype, but the A's were equally excited that Vollmuth was available for them to draft with their second pick, which didn't come until the third round in 2011. Vollmuth, a third baseman/shortstop out of Southern Miss, was projected by many pundits to be a top-two round pick, so the A's felt they had a steal when he was still on the board at slot 105.

Vollmuth came to the A's after a standout career for the Golden Eagles. During his final two seasons in college, Vollmuth hit 32 homeruns and posted an OBP above 1000. His junior season with Southern Miss was somewhat of a disappointment, in that he saw his average drop from .386 to .301 and his homer total go from 20 to 12. Some of that drop can be attributed to the change in bats in college baseball this season, which helped suppress offensive numbers across the country. Vollmuth also battled a variety of injuries during the season, including a hip flexor injury. In addition, he was a marked man in Conference USA in 2011 as one of the conference's top prospects and rarely got good pitches to hit.

Because he dropped further in the draft than expected, Vollmuth wasn't quick to sign with Oakland. The A's were able to get him into the system a few days before the signing deadline, however, and that allowed for just enough time for Vollmuth to play in a handful of games with the A's two short-season squads. After working off the rust with the A's Arizona Rookie League team, Vollmuth flew out to short-season Vermont to help the Lake Monsters' final weekend of the season push towards the playoffs. He was a star over those final four games of the season and a big reason the Lake Monsters earned a playoff spot on the last day of the year. In four games with Vermont, Vollmuth collected seven hits in 14 at-bats. He scored eight runs, doubled four times, tripled once and drove-in six. Vollmuth also walked twice for good measure.

Since Eric Chavez's injury problems began to sideline him for significant stretches in 2008, the A's have been looking for their next cornerstone at third base. Current A's third baseman Scott Sizemore showed some promise during his 2011 rookie campaign, but it could be Vollmuth who eventually steps into Chavez's role as a middle-of-the-order threat and above-average defensive third baseman. At 6'3", 215, Vollmuth has a power hitter's body and the game to match. His power has been his calling card throughout his career, even when he has struggled with other aspects of his offensive game. During his 2009 stint in the Cape Cod League, for instance, Vollmuth hit only .230 with a .274 OBP but he still managed to slug at a .470 clip and hit five homers in 100 at-bats.

"I saw Vollmuth struggle mightily in the Cape two summers ago. But I still came away grading out his hit tool very highly," Scout.com's National Baseball Expert Frankie Piliere said.

"I think struggling up there probably helped prepare him for the pros too. He's a guy I think could advance quickly on the strength of his bat."

A's Director of Player Personnel Billy Owens said that Vollmuth's power was a big factor in why the A's coveted him during the draft.

"His main attribute is the fact that he has serious power. The A's have always been starving for serious right-handed power and B.A. Vollmuth has the potential to carry that attribute," Owens said shortly after the draft.

The A's also believe that defense will be an asset for Vollmuth. In college, he split his time between shortstop and third base, but the A's are planning to keep him at third. They like his arm strength and his hands and believe he will be an above-average defender at the position.

"I think he's certainly a profile third base prospect. He's definitely got power. He's got defensive ability. He has played

shortstop a great majority of his career," A's Director of Scouting Eric Kubota said after the draft.

"We've seen him at third and we anticipate that the transition to third will be seamless and that he is going to be a very good defender with power potential."

Vollmuth turned 22 in late December. Given his age and his collegiate experience, he is a candidate to skip over the Low-A level and go straight to High-A Stockton in 2012, provided the A's have the roster room at that level. With his power, Vollmuth could put up huge numbers in the hitter-friendly California League.

8. Vicmal De La Cruz

De La Cruz is easily the most intriguing position player to come out of the A's Dominican Academy in several years. The now 18-year-old outfielder was signed by the A's as an international free agent before the 2011 season. As a 17-year-old, De La Cruz hit .318/.438/.453 with 10 stolen bases and 37 walks in 58 games for the A's Dominican Summer League team in 2011. After a strong showing during the A's US fall Instructional League, he is expected to make his US affiliate debut in 2012.

Although De La Cruz was highly regarded when he was signed to a six-figure bonus, he surprised nearly everyone with his polish during his professional debut season. Known for his fierce swing as an amateur, De La Cruz showed a blend of aggressiveness and patience that escapes many hitters until they are much older. The native of Santo Domingo struck-out only 27 times in 192 at-bats while walking 37 times and batting .318. His .438 OBP was seventh-best in the league and his 891 OPS was ninth-best. De La Cruz also finished 10th in the league in batting average, tied for 14th in triples and tied for 22nd in doubles. He was the MVP of the league's mid-season All-Star game.

Despite the strong debut, De La Cruz will still have plenty to prove when he debuts either in the Arizona Rookie League or the New York-Penn League in 2012. He will be adjusting not only to a higher level of competition, but also to a new culture. The A's sent De La Cruz to the US for their fall Instructional League to help start his acclimation to US culture, but he will still have some growing pains on that front in the near-term.

Currently, De La Cruz is slender, but well-built, with a smooth swing from the left-side. The A's believe he will fill out his 6'0", 180 pound frame as he ages and will eventually add homerun power to his list of offensive attributes. For the moment, he is a gap hitter with above-average speed. Nagging injuries limited De La Cruz to only 10 stolen bases with the DSL A's in 2011, but he should rack up some impressive stolen base totals in time. He uses the whole field well and has a good understanding of the strike-zone. A's coaches have also noted that De La Cruz picks up instruction well and he showed significant improvement during his time at Instructs.

"Vicmal can swing it. From a body-build standpoint, he reminds me of Raul Mondesi," A's Director of Player Personnel Billy Owens said.

"He has a tenacious demeanor about him. His motor is always as high as can be."

De La Cruz turned 18 in late November, and he will be brought along gradually by the A's. He will report to the A's complex in Phoenix this spring and may stay in Phoenix for the entire year, first for extended spring training and then for the Arizona Rookie League. If the A's feel that he is acclimated enough to the US, they may try to push him up to short-season Vermont, but the team will be careful not to rush him.

7. Max Stassi

Stassi's 2011 season was over almost before it began thanks to a right shoulder labrum injury that required surgery and cost him the final three-and-a-half months of the year. The Yuba City native has been busily rehabbing the shoulder since late May and is expected to be able to start the 2012 campaign either on Opening Day or close to it.

Before the injury, there were big expectations for Stassi for the 2011 season. The A's 2009 fourth-round pick had an uneven first full professional season in 2010 with Low-A Kane County. Stassi hit for power early in the season, but struggled defensively. His glove improved significantly as the year wore on, but his approach at the plate deteriorated and his production dropped off precipitously. There was optimism that a move from the pitcher-friendly Midwest League to the hitter-friendly California League would help Stassi get his bat back to where it was early in the 2010 campaign.

Unfortunately, right shoulder soreness prevented that scenario from playing out. It wasn't Stassi's first encounter with right

shoulder pain. He suffered from shoulder soreness during his last year in high school. That injury, coupled with a perceived strong commitment to UCLA, dropped Stassi from being a projected supplemental first-round pick to where he was selected in the fourth round.

Although Stassi was able to play through the soreness for much of 2010, the pain intensified at the tail-end of spring training. At first, there was hope that he would be able to rehab the shoulder while gaining experience as the Stockton Ports' DH. However, after six weeks with Stockton, Stassi's shoulder wasn't improving and it was starting to impact his at-bats, as well. At that point, the A's and Stassi elected for the surgery and he missed the rest of the year.

When healthy, Stassi is one of the best defensive catchers in the A's system, which is quite a statement considering how much he struggled with the glove early on in 2010. His rapid improvement with the glove is a product of his work ethic, which A's coaches and front office personnel rave about. Offensively, Stassi did show some improvement with his pitch recognition before the surgery, although his power was non-existent. Given the injury, it's hard to read too much into any of the numbers that he compiled with the Ports in 2011.

Stassi's rehab has been going well and he was throwing at the A's fall Instructional League and swinging a bat, although he wasn't catching live games. Fellow A's catching prospect Ryan Ortiz had a similar surgery in 2010 and he missed the first month of the 2011 season. Stassi's surgery came about a month earlier in the year than Ortiz's, so there is optimism that Stassi will be ready to go at the start of the regular season. His arm strength may not be 100 percent in 2012, but as long as he is pain-free, he should be able to continue his development.

"As far as him working hard and him being a baseball rat and him being around the field every day, he'll get through [the rehab] because no one is going to work as hard as Max," A's Director of Player Personnel Billy Owens said.

"Once he's able to catch without restrictions, you'll see the talent elevate itself."

Given that Stassi only spent six weeks with the Ports, it is highly likely that he will return to Stockton for the 2012 campaign. Despite the lost season, Stassi is still on the young side for his level. He won't turn 21 until March, making him younger than most college players drafted last season. With the A's depth at the catcher position, the team can afford to move deliberately with Stassi.

6. Ian Krol

Arguably the most disappointing aspect of the A's 2011 season from a player development perspective was the lost year for Krol. The A's 2010 minor league pitcher of the year injured his forearm during spring training, costing him the first half of the season. Then when he was days away from being sent out of Arizona to High-A Stockton, Krol typed an inflammatory Tweet and was suspended by the organization for the rest of the year.

Krol pitched only five official innings in 2011, all for the A's Arizona Rookie League team. He was outstanding in those five innings, not allowing a base-runner and striking out six. However, the suspension prevented Krol from building on those appearances.

Going into the 2011 season, Krol was the A's top pitching prospect. Despite the lost season, he remains a top prospect in the Oakland system, although he can't afford any more missteps like he had in 2011. From a pitching perspective, Krol finished the year at the A's fall Instructional League. While his stuff and location at Instructs weren't quite up to his 2010 levels, but he was healthy and in a good frame of mind, leaving the A's coaching staff optimistic about what lies in store for Krol in 2012.

"I think getting Ian Krol back [in 2012] will be good. He had a good camp here [at Instructs] and should be up and going at a normal pace at the start of spring training," A's Director of Player Development Keith Lieppman said.

A's minor league pitching coordinator Gil Patterson believes that with a normal off-season of rest, Krol should be back to the pitcher he was in 2010, when he had a 2.80 ERA and an 111:28 K:BB ratio in 138.1 innings for Low-A Kane County and High-A Stockton as a 19-year-old.

"I think when he gets home and has a regular spring training and then pitches in a regular game, I don't think there will be many bumps in the road for him," Patterson said at the end of Instructs.

Despite being only 20 years old, Krol has an advanced feel for pitching. His fastball velocity ranges anywhere from 87-92 MPH, but it is his ability to locate his fastball that makes him successful. He also has a good feel for his breaking ball and change-up and he can use all of his pitches in any count. Krol has excellent command and is a groundball pitcher. As he

advances, he will be challenged by more experienced hitters who aren't as easily fooled by mixing up his pitch selection.

On the mound, Krol receives high marks for his competitive nature and his mental toughness. Off the mound, he can be immature at times, a trait that has already cost him a season of high school baseball and half a season of minor league ball. Krol will be on thin ice with the A's from a behavior standpoint and will need to prove to the organization that he can be as trustworthy off the mound as he is on it.

Before injuring his forearm during spring training, Krol was slated to go to High-A Stockton and that is likely where he will be sent to start the 2012 season. He should be part of a talented rotation that will include fellow top prospects A.J. Cole and Blake Hassebrock, among others. Krol won't turn 21 until May, so he will still be on the young side for his level despite missing most of 2011.