

**Monte Poole: Oakland A's co-owner Lew Wolff says he cares about team, but it's a tough sell**

By Monte Poole, Bay Area News Group

The face of the A's is a septuagenarian with olive skin, a genial smile and a mop of white hair. It looks nothing like Billy Beane, because it's not Billy Beane.

It's Lew Wolff, which means baseball in Oakland isn't as significant as it used to be.

The profile of Beane, the general manager who once stood tall astride this sports enterprise, has been eclipsed by that of the managing partner. Wolff, perhaps deliberately, has evolved into the symbol of this foundering operation.

And if that doesn't explain Beane's absence, it certainly sheds light on Wolff's carefully orchestrated contribution to A's FanFest, attended by roughly 7,000 on Sunday at Oracle Arena. Whereas Billy's custom was to field questions from the audience during this promotion, a shepherd addressing his adoring flock, Lew did no such thing.

While Beane apparently was out of town, Wolff's interaction with fans was limited to those invited to his office, which was fewer than 10, each one at a time.

It was a wise move on the part of Wolff and his staff, surely recognizing that a displeased individual is less daunting -- and more easily mollified -- than an angry mob.

That's what has formed around Wolff. Many A's fans have had enough. They're not renewing their ticket plans. They've endured Wolff's endless prattle about leaving [O.co](#) Coliseum and moving out of Oakland. They've watched their beloved club plummet from contender to irrelevance.

They are raw from the effects of an offseason dismantling in which three All-Stars, still quite affordable, were swapped for prospects who could reach their primes by 2020.

And, based on recent history, those primes will take place in different uniforms.

A's fans know Beane made the deals, but they blame Wolff and his silent partner, John Fisher, for creating a climate cool to the concept of chasing every game, every season.

"What I try to do is pick up the phone and talk with them," Wolff explained during a news conference. "Some agree. And some say, 'Gee, we've heard this so much and we don't agree with you.'

"From our point of view, we are not giving up. We're not trying to reduce payroll just to put money in our pockets. We really want to win. And we thought we'd be there sooner."

When Wolff says "there," he means a place other than Oakland, ideally San Jose, which he identifies as the pot of gold at the end of his rainbow. He may be right. The South Bay generally is wealthier and more densely populated with businesses prone to treating their employees and friends to the delights of a luxury box, bar included.

To many current A's fans, however, "there" is defined as an attractive team capable of contending, as the A's were in the seven seasons before the Wolff-Fisher ownership. Those clubs averaged 94 wins per season and made four postseason appearances.

Though the book and movie "Moneyball" got much of the praise that rightfully belonged to the likes of Jason Giambi, Miguel Tejada, Tim Hudson, Mark Mulder and Barry Zito, talk was of baseball and not a ballpark.

The team's priority clearly was the game, not the yard. Billy emerged as the face of the club. Owners Steve Schott and Ken Hoffman were tolerated because they sold a quality product. The A's mattered more than their location.

That they don't matter as much as they once did lands in the laps of Wolff and Fisher, whose every desire is framed by the purpose of getting a ballpark in San Jose.

"People think I don't care about them," Wolff said. "But I think the people who come here are the most loyal of all fans you can get, because here I am telling us we're going to move and we're not going to have these players. I don't know if I was convincing about it, but I was giving them my logic and the logic of our people."

Meanwhile, the players come, they thrive and they go.

"We're all trying to do the best that we can, and we're very committed and very appreciative of the fans that can stick with us," Wolff said. "I know how hard that is. But I think we'll be there soon."

Until then, the A's are less a baseball club than a franchise adrift, paddling in circles indefinitely. Their narrative no longer is about whom or what, but when and where.

There are no answers to either, not yet. It's forever Oakland, and probably irrelevant for the time being, until it's someplace else.

So Wolff, in his mid-70s, is the face of the franchise. He won't meet the masses, but he also won't hide with the regularity of, say, former Warriors owner Chris Cohan.

Billy and the fans will have to accept this. They won't be happy about it, but happiness isn't an option when your favorite team is staring at tiny crowds and a 100-loss season.

### **Oakland A's open to signing Manny Ramirez**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Fans were introduced to some of the A's new players during FanFest on Sunday, but the most high-profile newcomer might still be on the way.

Assistant general manager David Forst acknowledged the possibility of signing designated hitter Manny Ramirez during a fan question-and-answer session.

"We're open to it," Forst told an announced crowd of more than 7,000 inside Oracle Arena. "We do have other things going on, and we expect other additions between now and opening day. We have never been in a situation where we had too many good players."

It was the first public acknowledgment by anyone in the A's baseball operations that Ramirez is an option. A's co-owner Lew Wolff said last week that he was receptive to signing Ramirez, who would have to serve a 50-game suspension for violating Major League Baseball's drug policy for a second time.

Were the A's to sign him, Ramirez would become eligible for a May 30 game at Minnesota. He turns 40 that day.

"I think at this point it's probably still speculation," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "... There's probably some momentum to it, but certainly not anything that I'm in position right now to comment on."

Melvin all but declared right-hander Brandon McCarthy his opening day starter March 28 against the Seattle Mariners in Tokyo.

McCarthy, 9-9 with a 3.32 ERA and five complete games in 2011, is the top returning starter from a rotation that lost Trevor Cahill and Gio Gonzalez to trades.

"If I earned that honor, I'd be thrilled to have it," McCarthy said.

Recently signed Bartolo Colon probably will draw the second start in the two-game series in Tokyo.

Although Dallas Braden hopes to be ready by opening day, Melvin said mid- to late-April is a more realistic timetable as the left-hander returns from shoulder surgery. Braden is scheduled to throw off a mound Monday for the first time since getting a torn shoulder capsule repaired in May.

That makes three rotation spots open, with the contenders including Tyson Ross and Graham Godfrey and newcomers Tom Milone, Jarrod Parker and Brad Peacock.

Were the A's to get approval from MLB to build a stadium in San Jose right now, Wolff said it probably wouldn't open until the 2016 season, citing the need to secure a building permit and the construction time.

Daric Barton, coming off surgery to his throwing shoulder, will be limited at the start of camp, which could put him behind in the crowded first-base battle. Barton said he should be ready to be a designated hitter by the start of exhibitions, but he won't complete a throwing program until mid-March.

Brandon Allen, Chris Carter and Kila Ka'aihue also are in the mix at first base.

After a stellar rookie season, second baseman Jemile Weeks kept an eye on the A's offseason, as Oakland traded Cahill, Gonzalez and two-time All-Star closer Andrew Bailey, among others.

"I was like, 'They've got a plan,' " Weeks said. "I didn't know what the plan was, but they've got a plan, and I'm on board for whatever they got going on."

Melvin has sketched out numerous possible batting orders. He likes Weeks at leadoff and is considering Coco Crisp as his No. 3 hitter. In that case, he probably would have Cliff Pennington hit second.

Recently signed outfielder Jonny Gomes sported a spiked Mohawk that rivals Crisp's occasional large Afro as an eye-catcher.

Gomes was asked if it is tough fitting a hat over his head.

"I just squish it down," he said. "I think Coco's is taller than mine."

### **Athletics' owner willing to meet fans**

Contra Costa Times

Oakland Athletics co-owner Lew Wolff is volunteering one-on-one chat time with fans Sunday during the team's FanFest at Oracle Arena.

At least one VIP member planning to attend knows what question he would fire at Wolff.

"Is he committed to the city of Oakland and to Alameda County as far as improving the A's and trying to make it a proud franchise?" former A's pitcher Vida Blue said. "I'm sure all fans want to know that, and that's the same stuff that I'm curious about."

Blue and two of his former teammates, Joe Rudi and Gene Tenace, are scheduled to attend FanFest as part of a 40th anniversary celebration of the A's 1972 World Series championship.

But the biggest surprise is Wolff's willingness to meet individually with fans "to discuss a variety of topics in an intimate setting," according to an A's release.

Fans can sign up to talk to Wolff at the information booth on the plaza between O.co Coliseum and Oracle Arena from 9-10:30 a.m. Those chosen to meet with him will be announced later in the day. FanFest runs from 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Wolff, also the team's managing partner, has incurred the wrath of many fans. Chief among the reasons: His desire to move the team to San Jose and the decision to trade several of the team's most recognizable players.

Why place himself in the eye of the storm Sunday?

"I just felt that some people would want to have a rational conversation with me and that it would be kind of fun," Wolff said in a phone interview. "It might turn out to be very negative, I don't know. I hope not. (But) I'm really sort of tired of getting beat up without anyone asking me what I think. I'm sure I won't change any minds, but I might as well give it a shot."

Inasmuch as the A's have traded a slew of players - including All-Star pitchers Gio Gonzalez, Trevor Cahill and Andrew Bailey - keeping the fan base engaged and caring can be a challenge.

"When you're trading away players all the time, that revolving door never stops," Blue said. "These fans are savvy enough to see what's going on. If you're not committed to putting a competitive team on the field, a lot of those fans are going to go away."

The A's, who ranked last in the majors in home attendance last season (averaging 18,232), are holding FanFest for the first time after a three-year hiatus. Lots of players are scheduled to attend, but the majority will be newcomers or young players who have yet to establish themselves.

Given that, it's understandable why rumors of the A's possibly signing Manny Ramirez as their designated hitter create a stir. Wolff reiterated his openness to signing the controversial free agent.

"I think it would be fun, but (marketing) isn't a reason for us signing him," he said.

There's been no indication from the A's front office that Ramirez is on the radar, and pursuing him would be puzzling for a team that just signed Jonny Gomes as a D.H. option and also has younger players who might contend for the role.

## **Opportunity, optimism in the air at A's FanFest**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

The A's have one item nearly crossed off the list before they head to spring training: It appears that right-hander Brandon McCarthy will be the Opening Day starter in Tokyo.

Manager Bob Melvin said during a media session at the A's FanFest on Sunday that it will be McCarthy and Bartolo Colon pitching in that series March 28-29, and he hinted that that might be the order. McCarthy set a franchise record for strikeout-to-walk ratio last season, and he is the team's top healthy returning starter.

"That would be a lot of fun," he said of Opening Day honors. "That's one of those notches anyone would like to have."

Elsewhere, the A's have a mass of unknowns: the fourth and fifth starters are TBD, the middle of the order is unsettled, first base is up for grabs, the closer is undetermined. But even with a young team and many question marks, Melvin said he does not like the term "rebuilding" and he does not plan to use it. His team will be prepared, no matter what the experience level.

"This is the big leagues, and you're expected to win," he said. "And that's what we expect to do."

Though most experts pick the A's to finish last in the beefed-up AL West, Melvin isn't discounting Oakland, saying, "Every year you see someone come out of the pack with expectations that were low."

One of the most unusual features of Sunday's FanFest was owner Lew Wolff's one-on-one meetings with fans, which Wolff described as "very courteous," even though some fans "agreed to disagree" with some of his explanations about team issues. Most of the questions revolved around efforts to move from Oakland to San Jose and about the number of popular players traded this offseason.

Wolff was asked again about the possibility of signing Manny Ramirez, and he reiterated his recent remarks to The Chronicle that he'd be open to such an idea. Assistant general manager David Forst confirmed that the team would consider signing Ramirez, who'd be a non-roster signing because he must serve a 50-game suspension for violating baseball's drug policy before he could play any big-league games.

"He's just a pure hitter, and he knows what he's doing," starter Dallas Braden said of Ramirez, who has 555 career home runs. "If something like that does happen, we can only benefit. But we're also creating something here with dedication, hard work and appreciation for the game, and anybody who comes on board is going to have to accept that."

Braden, who is returning from arthroscopic shoulder surgery, is likely to be ready to go the first date he's needed, because the A's can get by with four starters until April 16. Braden has his first session off the mound today, 25 fastballs, and he compared it to Christmas, saying, "Get to bed early, leave cookies and milk on the table, see what happens."

Daric Barton also is returning from shoulder surgery, and the first-base candidate said he will be limited to designated-hitter duties until mid-March. The A's are well acquainted with Barton's defensive ability; it's his bat about which they have

concerns after a poor 2011 in which he hit .212 with zero homers and 21 RBIs in 67 games. Barton will compete with Brandon Allen, Chris Carter and Kila Ka'aihue, although one team source said Allen also is likely to get time in the outfield this spring.

Outfielder Josh Reddick had left wrist surgery to repair torn cartilage and remove a cyst after the season, but he is swinging a bat and he said he will be ready for camp.

FanFest was held for the first time in four years, and it was held at Oracle Arena for the first time. The event drew more than 7,000, which was near capacity, with a walk-up crowd of 3,000.

### **A's reaching out as winter FanFest is restored**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

When the A's did away with their traditional FanFest the past three years, some people grumbled that this was yet another indication that the team didn't really care about its fans.

Tarps, trades, no FanFest - all means to diminish interest in the A's in an effort to prove to Major League Baseball that Oakland doesn't support the club, or so the thinking went.

Now FanFest is back today at Oracle Arena, and the A's say they've taken fans' desires into consideration all along as they've experimented with other events.

"It seems crazy to have to say it, but we value the fans, and we want to do things that make sense for the fans," vice president of sales and marketing Jim Leahey said of the previous three years. "Lots of teams do these events at different times and in different ways. There's no one formula. Some teams don't do them at all."

In fact, according to Leahey, some fans have said they preferred the recent in-season tailgate event, because it included a game afterward. The traditional FanFest, while popular, has specific challenges, including getting players to attend during the offseason, when they're all over the country, and weather. Many years, the event at the Coliseum has been limited by rain, and it's often cold. The field usually is inaccessible because of other events.

The elements won't come into play today, with the arena setting, and the club is expecting a large turnout of current and former players, more than 30 in all. Ticket sales have been brisk (FanFest is free for season-ticket holders, though they have been asked to RSVP because capacity is limited to 8,000), and while there should be walk-up tickets available, Leahey recommends arriving early for the event, which runs from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

This is an excellent year to introduce A's players to the fan base, because the team has had so much recent changeover.

"I think it will be a great opportunity to see a lot of new faces in person," assistant general manager David Forst said. "I know there have been jokes about handing out name tags, but there really are a lot of new guys here, and this will give people a chance to get to know them."

"It's good to put the faces with the names," said catcher Kurt Suzuki, one of the few A's players to have been at a January FanFest before. "And it's good for the new guys, too, to see the surroundings, interact with fans. Both sides benefit."

Comcast SportsNet is sponsoring the event, but Leahey said that is not the reason for its return; much of CSN's support comes via publicity and, he said, FanFest is in no way a moneymaking venture.

"We do it because we feel it's a great way for the fans to connect with the players," he said. "We're doing this to attract more people to the product. If it's a smash success, we'll do it again. We love our fans."

## **FanFest**

**When:** 10 a.m.-2 p.m. today

**Where:** Oracle Arena

**What:** Autograph sessions; photos; clubhouse tours; Q&A sessions that will include manager Bob Melvin, assistant general manager David Forst, Vida Blue, Gene Tenace, Joe Rudi, Scott Hatteberg, David Justice, Jemile Weeks; one-on-one interview sessions with owner Lew Wolff; individual game tickets go on sale.

**Admission:** \$8 adults, \$5 children (free for season-ticket holders), free parking.

## **Finding acts for the A's baseball circus**

Bruce Jenkins, San Francisco Chronicle

It seemed baffling at first, but now I know why **Jose Canseco** tweeted **Billy Beane** last week, hoping to get a shot at the A's 2012 roster. This team is right on the verge of becoming a full-blown circus, and Canseco would fit right in.

You figured that **Manny Ramirez** rumor was a joke, right? Hardly. Co-owner **Lew Wolff** told our **John Shea** that he wouldn't have a problem signing Ramirez, and that he's "a good clubhouse guy." Amazing. Wolff isn't merely negligent when it comes to this franchise and its rotting stadium. He's fully delusional.

Perhaps none of this should be taken seriously until Beane makes the A's interest official, but the mere *thought* of Ramirez is preposterous - in any uniform, at this stage of his life. He's through as a player, he's a slouch by nature, he'll quit on his team at the first sign of discord, and he carries a history of using performance-enhancing drugs. He's the four-tool travesty, quite rare these days.

Coming next: The Bearded Lady. Clowns who aren't funny. Three-legged tigers. And, you bet, Jose Canseco. As the Coliseum crowds rise dramatically from 8,118 to 11,463.

The way the Angels and Texas are building high-powered teams, the A's will be lucky to finish 30 games out in the AL West. They'll have a lot of players worth watching - **Jemile Weeks**, **Coco Crisp**, **Kurt Suzuki**, **Jonny Gomes**, **Chris Carter** (if he ever rediscovers his swing), perhaps outfield sensation **Michael Choice** by midseason. But the pitching staff has been rudely decimated (**Cliff Pennington** told 95.7 The Game that "it stinks" to have lost so many rotation guys), and the notion of watching an overweight, over-the-hill **Bartolo Colon** is simply disgusting.

One can only hope that Wolff is speaking way out of turn on Ramirez. Otherwise, a very sad chapter becomes bonfire kindling.

## Soon means never

Meanwhile, Commissioner **Bud Selig** assures us that MLB is acting at "a quick pace" in resolving the A's stadium issue. Absolutely. Bud stuck the documents on the shell of a turtle, in Nebraska, and they should be arriving in about 75 years - but only if the turtle hands it off on schedule to a coyote ... Why soccer won't ever become a mainstream sport in this country: The women's World Cup was one of the most memorable events of recent years, full of drama, engaging personalities and the unforgettable U.S. victory over Brazil. Within months, the Women's Professional Soccer league had dwindled to five teams and needed a special waiver from the U.S. Soccer Federation to retain its Division I status. One of the teams that folded, the Florida-based magicJack, featured **Abby Wambach**, **Hope Solo**, **Megan Rapinoe** and other stars of the national team. On Friday night, with a berth in the Olympics on the line, the U.S. women played Costa Rica in Vancouver, and it was televised only by Universal Sports. ESPN, apparently, couldn't be bothered ... Interesting that **Steve Decker**, a terrible hitter in his day (.221 over seven seasons) has become the Giants' coordinator of minor-league hitting instruction. Not that performance and teaching ability are connected, necessarily. Decker says he wants to build a "predator type hitter, aggressive in nature," without being a "hacker." And that's great. The obsession with on-base percentage has created too many hitters who go up there to "take a few," thereby ignoring the pitch they really wanted ... Class acts in the news: Not sure how **Mark DeRosa** (Washington) or **Omar Vizquel** (Toronto) will fare with their new teams, but **Cody Ross** has a chance to excel in Boston. **J.D. Drew** had become a tired act in right field, and Ross might be able to work his way out of a platoon with **Ryan Sweeney** ... The wait goes on for the Mavericks big-wave surfing contest. You probably heard that the beach and cliff areas will be closed, giving way to an on-site festival featuring big-screen viewing, food and access to the surfers once they've finished competing. Organizers are looking for volunteers to work the festival, and can be e-mailed at [mavericksvolunteers@gmail.com](mailto:mavericksvolunteers@gmail.com) ... Thanks to KNBR's **Tom Tolbert** for interviewing Warriors coach **Mark Jackson** on Thursday night and posing actual questions. This has become a rare art, as ex-Chron ace **Tim Keown** writes in "Death of the Interview," a must-read piece on ESPN.com: "Once positioned, the demands begin. That's right - demands. What now passes for a question is prefaced with the two most dreaded words in sports journalism: talk about. As in: Talk about your defense. Talk about the interception. Talk about the game plan." There's no hope for veteran journalists entrenched in the madness, but if you're just starting out in journalism, don't ever get this lazy. You're disgracing the profession.

### **Drumbeat: Top FanFest tidbit: McCarthy likely Opening Day starter**

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at FanFest, 1/29/2012, 2:23pm

Lots of newsy items from Oracle Arena today, including strong hints from manager Bob Melvin that Brandon McCarthy will be the Opening Day starter March 28 in Japan. Melvin said McCarthy and Bartolo Colon are likely to start the two games against the Mariners, which was expected, and the order sounds as if it will be just like that.

McCarthy said that would be fun, an Opening Day start is one of those things any pitcher would like to notch off, and being in Tokyo will only add to the fun.

Melvin didn't provide a lot of clarity on the A's many other questions going into the spring: the final two rotation spots after McCarthy, Colon and Dallas Braden (who probably will be very close to ready to go when his turn first comes up in April); the middle of the order; first base; the closer. Essentially, there will be a lot of competition at a lot of spots, and spring training will determine some or all of those things.

Speaking of the middle of the order, I continue to believe that the A's are serious about signing Manny Ramirez. I have heard nothing negative about him from any A's front-office types, nor have I heard anything to dissuade the impression that they're pursuing him. Owner Lew Wolff reiterated his remarks to The Chronicle the other day that he'd have no opposition to signing Ramirez, despite his 50-game suspension for violating baseball's performance-enhancing drug policy.

Ramirez would, at least, give the A's a recognizable name as they go into a season with a young club and few expectations ("Dark-horse team at best," McCarthy said of outside expectations for the team, before adding that the A's could be a 60-

win team or a 90-win team depending on how they come together.) Melvin said that he doesn't like the term "rebuilding," though, and he is not going to use it. He figures that every big-league team's business is to win games, and that's exactly what he and his coaching staff plan to prepare the A's to do. He's been in this situation before, with Arizona, so it's not unfamiliar – it winds up meaning more hands-on coaching work than facilitating (as with a veteran club), and he doesn't mind that at all.

Melvin does like the fact that the A's have added a few more hard-nosed, go-go-go types, to go along with the hustle-happy Adam Rosales, including Petaluma's Jonny Gomes (sporting a slick Mohawk today) and another outfielder, Collin Cowgill. Melvin knows Cowgill from the Arizona organization and he compares him to Eric Byrnes for his all-out style, and it's no secret that Gomes is fiery and has had some fisticuffs on the field here and there. (Gomes told us today that he doesn't condone fighting in baseball, but he then said that the 2008 AL champion Rays thrived after a spring training brawl with the Yankees and a regular-season melee with Boston).

Gomes was wearing No. 1 today, but he plans to wheedle No. 31 away from Brandon Allen, though he says he'd prefer not to "have to play the veteran card."

Injury updates: Daric Barton says his fall shoulder surgery will limit him to DHing until mid-March, but I don't believe that will impact his ability to win back the first base job. The A's already know what he can do defensively – despite some poor play there last season, the team still considers Barton their best defensive first baseman. He must show some offensive production to win back time there.

In addition, outfielder Josh Reddick says his left wrist surgery after the 2011 season will not hamper him in any way during the spring. He is swinging the bat already after having a cartilage tear fixed and a cyst removed.

Wolff says his one-on-one sessions with fans today were courteous, even if they agreed to disagree. He explained all the various things we've heard all offseason about why the A's are not looking for a stadium in Oakland, why they want to go to San Jose, why they're trading so many good players, and so forth. I've heard he was booed in the concourse, but, hey, sweet-talking one fan at a time might not win over the entire base all at once.

Wolff spoke to the local media for more than half an hour and there wasn't really anything new. They need a new venue, they are approaching it like they're going to get one, it could be ready for 2015, maybe, if they get the OK for San Jose soon, but 2016 might be more realistic. He said more than once that today's event should have been taking place in a new venue already, instead of just standing around talking about it.

### **Braden progresses to throwing from mound**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Leave it to A's lefty Dallas Braden to shake up the holiday calendar.

"Tomorrow's Christmas for me," Braden said Sunday. "Get to bed early, leave cookies and milk out on the table, see what happens."

The quirky A's pitcher will wake up to a different kind of a gift on Monday -- the chance to take the mound for the first time since undergoing shoulder surgery in May. He's slated to throw 25 pitches -- all fastballs -- at the University of the Pacific in his Stockton, Calif., hometown.

"Buy a ticket," he joked.

Braden was in good spirits while addressing the media at A's FanFest, much thanks to improved physical health and the prospect of maintaining it through spring. He noted he's well ahead of his own rehab schedule, but perhaps slightly behind that of his pitching mates.

The 28-year-old southpaw won't pitch in the club's two-game Opening Series in Japan -- "I don't want him to have to worry about that," manager Bob Melvin said -- but Braden still has hopes of being ready by April 6's stateside opener in Oakland.

Though a realistic time frame may read more like mid-April, Braden simply wants to make sure that "when I hit the ground, I want to hit the ground running. I don't want to hit the ground face first."

Upon his return, Braden is expected to slide behind right-handers Brandon McCarthy and Bartolo Colon in a rotation that has two spots up for grabs. He'll be looking to rebound from a shortened 2011 campaign that included just three starts.



"There's nothing like being back on the field, feeling the grass beneath your feet, smelling the field, smelling baseball and being around other guys on your team," he said. "It doesn't get replaced.

"I feel great. I feel really strong. It's nice to know all the hard work we put into the offseason and the days you didn't want to get up and the days you didn't want to push through, you now understand why it's important to do so."

And Braden assured there were plenty of those days.

"I had to hide every belt and shoelace in my closet so I could stay alive through this timetable," he joked. "It was just an absolute mental struggle, and I knew that coming into it, having been down that road before. I had to sit here and watch my teammates play baseball, and that's absolutely brutal. I had to wear it for a year."

### **A's owner Wolff addresses Manny, stadium**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Fresh off a handful of one-on-one meetings with select fans, A's managing partner Lew Wolff took his turn with the media at FanFest on Sunday, addressing a number of issues in a small room housed in Oracle Arena, where more than 7,000 fans attended the event.

"I thought by now we'd be in our new media room in some new venue," Wolff said.

But approval of such a venue -- expected in San Jose -- has yet to be awarded to the A's, and general manager Billy Beane once again began restructuring the team this winter as it awaits resolution of the issue.

"We're at a point now where we have to have a new venue, and we sort of said that within three or four years we're going to have one, so we have to build toward that opening," Wolff said. "I thought we were building toward that two or three years ago."

And this is what he told the fans who were selected for the unique opportunity to step inside his office on Sunday. Wolff said the fans were "courteous," even if they were upset about this winter's trades.

"It was fun talking to them," Wolff said. "The fans are very important to us. People think I don't care about them, but I think the people who come here are the most loyal of all fans you can get. I don't know if I was convincing by it, but I was giving them the logic of our people. That's the most you can do. They were extra courteous, which I appreciate. I thought the dialogue was fair."

Wolff, in fact, sympathizes with fans upset about yet another youth movement.

"One of my grandsons doesn't want to really talk to me with Gio [Gonzalez] gone," he said.

Wolff said he explained to fans why Oakland is no longer an option for a new stadium site and why San Jose is essentially the only fit in the Bay Area. He remains optimistic about getting a stadium decision from Major League Baseball soon, but even he is tired of waiting.

"We should be opening now," he said, "not just waiting for an answer."

If approval comes "soon" -- think a few months -- Wolff believes that 2016 is a realistic year to envision a new ballpark being opened, given the time attached to gaining a building permit followed by actual construction.

For now, Wolff has no choice but to believe that the A's can compete this year, despite so much roster turnover. And he would be just fine if more of it came in the form of Manny Ramirez.

Ramirez, who will turn 40 in May and would have to serve a 50-game suspension at the start of the season after having his suspension reduced from 100 games, has been pegged as a potential designated hitter for Oakland. Despite the history he brings, Wolff believes "he should be viewed on a basis of talent."

"If he serves his penalty, the idea of serving a penalty is that you're free to go back and do something," he said. "I think it would be fun. I hear he's in great shape. I don't know if we're in the running for him, but it wouldn't bother me to have him on the team. In fact, just the opposite.

"My theory in life, which may not apply to baseball, is that we all make mistakes, and if we serve a penalty, there's no reason we shouldn't have the opportunity to do the right thing after that."

Along with Wolff, assistant general manager David Forst also was on hand Sunday and greeted fans in a question-and-answer session. The presence of Wolff and Forst was appreciated by the players as well as the fans in attendance.

"I know there are a lot of people who have had questions about the moves that have been made, but I do like the front office stepping up, answering questions and showing that there is a path that we're taking and there's reasons for all of this," pitcher Brandon McCarthy said. "It's not just drunk monkeys throwing at a dartboard. People have a plan, and they're trying to do something. This whole day has been a nice surprise."

### **Melvin: McCarthy favorite for nod in Opener**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Plenty of questions face the A's pitching staff, which is set to report to camp in less than three weeks.

Who will fill the back end of the rotation? Who will assume the closer's role?

Time will only tell, but Bob Melvin didn't necessarily need much of it to make another decision. Though nothing is set in stone, the A's manager hinted at FanFest on Sunday that Brandon McCarthy will start the club's Opening Series contest against the Mariners on March 28 in Japan, with fellow righty Bartolo Colon to follow in the second game.

Left-hander Dallas Braden, expected to return by mid-April, will ultimately join that crew. And, beyond that, "all of the other guys have the opportunity." Jarrod Parker, Brad Peacock, Tom Milone, Tyson Ross and Graham Godfrey are among those vying for a chance.

McCarthy, coincidentally, was among the fifth-starter mix just last year. Now, following an offseason that brought about the trades of All-Stars Gio Gonzalez and Trevor Cahill, he's standing at the front of the line.

"It would be a lot of fun," McCarthy said of potentially starting Opening Day. "I think it's one of those notches any guy wants to have at some point. It's certainly something you'd love to be able to do on a yearly basis -- where you're a lockdown guy and everyone refers to you as that, so that's an ultimate career goal. But to be able to do it would be great. And if I earn that honor, I'd be thrilled to have it."

McCarthy went 9-9 with a 3.32 ERA in 25 starts last year, compiling 123 strikeouts in 170 2/3 innings.

"If there's one mainstay in that rotation, right now, it's going to be [McCarthy]," Braden said. "The way he pitched in the second half of last year, he was near unhittable, in my opinion."

### **Barton won't be at full strength by start of camp**

OAKLAND -- Daric Barton will have to outplay three other candidates this spring in order to regain first-base duties in Oakland. And for a few weeks, he'll have to do it while still rehabbing his surgically-repaired right shoulder.

Barton won't be at full strength by the start of camp, so he'll likely be limited to the designated-hitter role when exhibition games begin, he said on Sunday at FanFest. He won't be throwing at 100 percent until at least mid-March.

Still, Barton remains optimistic he'll be ready by Opening Day. He's been hitting off a tee, and will begin soft toss and live hitting this week, as he prepares for a season he hopes will include improved offensive numbers.

The 26-year-old hit just .212, with no home runs and a .268 slugging percentage, in 67 games for the A's before he was optioned to Triple-A Sacramento on June 22.

"There wasn't any production last year," Barton admitted. "That's something that needs to improve. There were some things hindering my swing last year, which I believe we fixed, and I look forward to competing for a job.

"I want to help the team. I'm healthier now than before."

Brandon Allen, Kila Ka'aihue and Chris Carter are also in the mix at first base.

## Mohawk Jonny

### Much more to Petaluma's Gomes than stark hairstyle

By BOB PADECKY, THE PRESS DEMOCRAT 1/30/2012

OAKLAND — It is almost certain to be the first thing anyone who meets Jonny Gomes notices. The mohawk haircut is bushy and black and most definitely bold in an industry in which everyone wears a uniform, a glove, spikes and a hat. And if clothes supposedly make the man, then this man must be at least edgy, if not confrontational and most assuredly without joy. Oh yeah, the dude flosses with tree bark.

"People think all I do is ride my motorcycle and eat rocks," Gomes said Sunday at the A's FanFest, "and then they meet me."

And then, if they take the time and open their mind, they start peeling back the layers of Jonny Gomes, the layers upon layers, to the point it's nearly exhausting to try to take it all in. Yet Gomes still takes it all in, every detail, every heartbreak, every nuance and when you're through, you want to give him a standing ovation. Right there. Right now. You made it to the big leagues, kid. Through all that. You made it to the big leagues, nine years and counting.

"When you lose your best friend at 16, when you have a heart attack and almost die at 22," Gomes said, "you don't worry too much about what people think about the mohawk."

When you sleep in a car as a kid, in stretches of a week to 10 days at a time, homeless, as Gomes did, he could have gone sideways. When the car went off the road that night in 1997 and Adam Westcott died, his best friend sitting right next to him, and Gomes lived, he could have gone sideways there, too.

And as if he needed another slap in the face, there was that heart attack and the pinched valve and the angioplasty, all that and everything else which preceded it. Goodbye, Jonny Gomes could have said. I'm only 22 but I'm tired. Enough. I'm finding a tree in the Sierra. Located somewhere between Nowhere and Seclusion. See ya.

But he didn't. He couldn't. Damn guy just doesn't know when to quit. Even when the universe seems to be telling him.

"I wasn't overlooked coming out of high school (Casa Grande)," Gomes said. "I wasn't that good."

Maybe. But there were flashes.

"Go up to Jonny and raise both of your arms above your head, like you're a football official signaling a touchdown," said Casa baseball coach Paul Maytorena before I talked to Gomes Sunday. "Don't say anything."

I did. Gomes smiled.

"The home run at Petaluma High School," Gomes said. "Went through the football uprights."

A shot that traveled, Maytorena guessed, between 425 and 450 feet.

"It was an explosion," the coach said.

But Gomes didn't explode enough. He was all-NBL as a senior but the world wasn't beating a path to his door.

"I had to beg to play JC (SRJC) ball," Gomes said.

There, under the firm, knowledgeable hand of SRJC's coach, Damon Neidlinger, Gomes began to respond. Baseball for him wasn't a slog through mud anymore. Least not as much. Still, Gomes was an 18th round draft choice in 2001. Players drafted in the 18th round usually fill the rosters so the prospects can have a game in rookie ball.

"Only four percent of the kids drafted ever make it to the big leagues," Maytorena said.

In rookie ball Gomes thought he was one of those 96 percenters.

"I started strong but then I went into a slump," Gomes said. "I was thinking, 'This is rookie ball. There are six levels above this to the major leagues. Maybe I'm not cut out for this life.'"

He thought about quitting. It was as close as Gomes ever came to defying his nature. "Then one night I looked into the mirror," Gomes said.

What he saw staring back at him was the kid sleeping in a car, that car accident, that heart attack, all those people who said he would never make it, all those people who said, 'Jonny, see, you're picked in the 18th round. That should be your hint.' He saw all that pain and heartache and Adam's initials (AW) tattooed on his right bicep. In that moment, which would decide his life, Gomes straightened his shoulders and shrugged.

"I didn't want to look back with regret," Gomes said.

Whatever ability he had, he wanted to squeeze the most out of it. Now, more than 10 years later, Gomes looks back and sees this: Appalachian League Player of the Year (2001), Bakersfield's Player of the Year and California League All-Star (2002) and played in his first Major League game in just his third season as a professional.

He would become the first Tampa Bay Devil Ray to homer three times in a game. He finished third in the American League Rookie of the Year balloting in 2005. He's hit 118 homers in the big leagues, hitting 20 or more in a season three times. The home run is Gomes' signature skill, like that 474-footer at Tropicana Field in Tampa Bay. Or the one against A's pitcher Dallas Braden.

It was a spring training game in Phoenix. Gomes was batting for Cincinnati.

"I punched him out (struck out) twice," Braden said. "And he got me once. He hit a home run that the Howler monkeys caught in the zoo. Or maybe it's still going. I dunno."

While he'll never make it to Coopers-town, Gomes was good enough that four teams wanted him and valued enough that anyone who called him a teammate will never forget.

"I've had a lot of good teammates over the years," said A's utility infielder Adam Rosales, "but Jonny stood out when we were with Cincinnati. He brings a lot of energy to the park. Teammates feed off it."

Play each game like it's your last,

Gomes always has said. Play it to have fun, he also said that. And play it the right way. Gomes wouldn't have made it without all three. This is how an 18th-round draft choice has to look at things. An 18th-rounder can't cut corners. An 18th-rounder needs to contradict his late-round status: He needs to become invaluable. No better way to do that than lay your body out for the guys.

"Fighting has no place in baseball," Gomes said, "but in the heat of the moment between two teams, you don't have a lot of time to negotiate."

That's Gomes Code for this: A brawl with the Yankees, another one with Boston's Coco Crisp, now his teammate. The Yankees' fight occurred when Tampa Bay was a rising power after years of mediocrity. The Rays thought they deserved respect and weren't getting any.

"We were tired of them (Yankees) taking our lunch money," Gomes said.

Fighting for respect, well, Gomes has made a career out of it every day, and the Yankee fight is a metaphor for that. Gomes needed to establish territory and he wasn't going to budge. Each stop along the way Gomes has become a fan favorite. Players who don't run out grounders, who tippy-toe into slides, who showboat, fans will scorch those players — and love those who play hard.

When a guy like Jonny Gomes comes along, taking nothing for granted, fans take him in as their own. In Oakland Gomes will experience fan nirvana. Of the A's players on the podium who were asked questions Sunday at FanFest,

Gomes was solicited the most. With Petaluma and his homies an hour away

Gomes and the A's are in the initial stages of having a Gomes Rooting Section somewhere in the Coliseum bleachers.

A name-on-a-sign has yet to be decided but "This Is Mohawk Country" is good place to start. "Bob," asked one fan, "what will it take for you to wear a mohawk like Jonny's?"

Bob Melvin is the clean-cut A's manager, and to imagine Melvin in a mohawk is to imagine Newt Gingrich with lipstick. "Twenty-one (victories) in a row!" Melvin said. "Twenty-one in a row! It's done!"

The crowd went nuts. The other players on the dais went nuts. This is the affect Jonny Gomes has on people. They get past the mohawk and hear the stories and find the inspiration and the grit and wonder why all professional athletes can't have the perspective Jonny Gomes has: It's a privilege to be here, and I'll never be a punk about it.

"No one will ever take the uniform off my back," Gomes said. "Whenever I retire, they are going to have to rip it off."

### **A's still open to signing Manny Ramirez**

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. -- The Oakland Athletics are open to signing slugger Manny Ramirez but the team is not actively pursuing the free agent.

That was the message Sunday from assistant general manager David Forst, who talked during A's Fanfest held at the Oakland Arena, next door to the Coliseum. A's owner Lew Wolff had suggested the move last week.

"We're open to it," Forst said. "We do have other things going on and we do expect other additions between now and Opening Day. We have never been in a situation where we had too many good players."

Ramirez applied for reinstatement to Major League Baseball last month. He was suspended for 100 games last year but the ban was trimmed to 50 because he sat out nearly all of last season. The suspension would start with the first game he is eligible to play after signing with a club.

"I think it would be fun," Wolff said. "This should be viewed on the basis of talent. Once he's served the penalty he should be free to do what he wants. I don't know what kind of shape he's in, though I hear he's in great shape."

Ramirez, who will be 40 on May 30, ranks 14th on the career list with 555 home runs. He was 1 for 17 (.059) in five games last season for Tampa Bay, which had signed him to a one-year deal worth \$2.02 million. He retired from baseball rather than serve his longer suspension.

"I never actually met him," A's outfielder Josh Reddick said. "But to have a veteran hitter like Manny? That experience can only help us. We're a young team and I would look forward to a guy like that, a guy we can learn from."

Reddick was in the Red Sox organization when Ramirez was traded from Boston to the Los Angeles Dodgers in July 2008. He made his major league debut with the Red Sox exactly one year later.

Reddick said Ramirez left "an interesting" legacy behind.

Wolff also expressed some impatience with Major League Baseball's study committee about the A's planned move to a new stadium site in San Jose.

"We should be in it now instead of waiting for it," he said. "It's hard to be patient when it has hurt us everywhere. The only site available to us based on our analysis is the downtown site in San Jose."

Forst also denied reports that signing Jonny Gomes doomed OF prospects Michael Taylor and Chris Carter to the minors.

"That is not true," he said. "There is a fifth outfield spot and the DH spot. They have an opportunity to be on the 25-man roster."

A's manager Bob Melvin said he sees Gomes, Reddick, Seth Smith and Coco Crisp as part of a rotation for the outfield and included Collin Cowgill as a possible candidate for the fifth spot.

### **Oakland A's 2012 FanFest set for Sunday**

By Ramon Aranda, Oakland Sports Examiner

On Sunday, Jan. 29, the Oakland A's will host its 2012 FanFest at Oracle Arena, which will feature nearly 30 players and coaches, including Manager Bob Melvin, Coco Crisp, Dallas Braden, Kurt Suzuki and others.

Admission tickets are priced at \$8 for adults and \$5 for children ages 14 and under, while 2012 A's season ticket holders (and those who place a deposit for a season ticket package) will be admitted for free. Tickets will be available beginning at 9 a.m. at the Gate D Kiosk.

The event will be held from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and will also give fans a chance to purchase individual game tickets for the upcoming season.

Fans in attendance will be able to participate in free autograph and photo sessions, Q&As, a memorabilia sale and even a tour into the A's clubhouse. 95.7 The GAME's Chris Townsend will be on hand for a live broadcast of the FanFest from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Former players will also be on hand, including Gene Tenace, Vida Blue, Scott Hatteberg and David Justice, while a number of select fans will be allowed to meet one-on-one with A's owner Lew Wolff.

The team also announced this week that they will utilize "dynamic pricing" on all single-game tickets this year. Using software analytics, the team will be able to adjust ticket prices in real-time based on demand for each particular game and taking into account the weather, day of the week, team performance and more.

"By using dynamic pricing on all individual tickets this season, we are able to offer fans the best value possible, in addition to more ticket options at a variety of price points," explained Steve Fanelli, Executive Director of Ticket Sales and Operations. "Fans are encouraged to purchase individual game tickets early, or guarantee savings with season packages, but will ultimately have the ability to track market value and make purchase decisions based on real-time demand."

### **Leading Off: More than a bay separates Giants, A's**

**Tom Couzens, Sacramento Bee, 1/29/2012**

The Giants and A's are vastly different organizations, and a great example of that was Tuesday's announcements of deals with starting pitchers.

On the day the Giants reached agreement with Tim Lincecum on a two-year, 40.5 million deal, the A's finalized a contract that will pay Bartolo Colon \$2 million for the 2012 season.

Yes, that Bartolo Colon ... who turns 39 on May 24.

Yes, that Bartolo Colon ... who was 8-10 for the Yankees in 2011 and whose best season was seven years ago.

During the offseason, the A's have traded right-hander Trevor Cahill to Arizona, All-Star left-hander Gio Gonzalez to Washington and All-Star closer Andrew Bailey to Boston for a bunch of prospects who won't sell many tickets.

While the Giants' rotation will feature Lincecum, Matt Cain, Madison Bumgarner and Ryan Vogelsong, the A's top three starters – Colon, Dallas Braden and Brandon McCarthy – combined for 18 victories in 2011.

The Giants plan to spend about \$130 million on payroll this season, while the A's likely will spend even less than the \$66.5 million they did last season.

For these teams, you get what you pay for.

The Giants won the World Series in 2010 and were in the race nearly to the end last season, finishing 86-76. The A's were 74-88.

The Giants sold out all 81 home games in 2011, and their 41,818 average attendance was third in the majors. The A's were dead last, averaging just 18,232.

So what's the A's long-term strategy? Minimize payroll and remain mediocre until a miracle happens and a ballpark is built in San Jose – or Sacramento?

Don't hold your breath.