

**Oakland A's sign Cuban outfielder Yoenis Cespedes**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's added another twist to their curious offseason Monday, agreeing to a four-year, \$36 million contract with Cuban outfielder Yoenis Cespedes.

Cespedes -- hyped as having excellent power, good speed and a strong arm -- was considered the top hitter on the international market this winter. But he couldn't be signed until he established residency in the Dominican Republic after defecting from Cuba.

Cespedes, 26, still needs to obtain a worker's visa and pass a physical before his deal is completed. His agent, Adam Katz, would not speculate on whether Cespedes will be in training camp when A's position players report Feb. 24. Pitchers and catchers report Saturday.

The A's hope they finally have filled a need for a young power-hitting outfielder. The right-handed Cespedes hit 33 homers in 90 games last season in the Cuban National Series, Cuba's premier league. He hit .458 in six games during the 2009 World Baseball Classic.

"This kid is a physical presence," A's player personnel director Billy Owens told MLB Network Radio. "We've actually scouted him the last four or five years in international competition, and he blows you away with sheer physicality, running speed, the power potential."

A's general manager Billy Beane declined to comment on Cespedes.

It is unknown whether the A's will thrust him into the opening day lineup or give him time in the minors.

Their projected outfield, left to right, is Seth Smith, Coco Crisp and Josh Reddick. Owens said the A's view Cespedes as a center fielder, suggesting that Crisp might be shifted to a corner spot.

As recently as Sunday, the Miami Marlins were considered the favorite to sign Cespedes. The Cubs, Indians, Orioles, Tigers and White Sox also reportedly were in the hunt.

But the A's swept in with a contract that will pay him \$6.5 million this season, \$8.5 million in 2013 and \$10.5 million in both 2014 and 2015, making him their highest-paid player in annual salary and total contract value.

"Miami was a great visit ... but the A's were for me," Cespedes told [mlb.com](http://mlb.com).

His addition adds to a perplexing winter for the A's. They traded All-Star pitchers Trevor Cahill, Gio Gonzalez and Andrew Bailey, trimming salary and stockpiling prospects as part of a rebuilding effort.

Yet in recent weeks, they have shown interest in signing 39-year-old Manny Ramirez, who wouldn't even be able to play until serving a 50-game suspension for violating Major League Baseball's drug policy a second time.

Now the A's are throwing big money at Cespedes, whom Baseball America's Jim Callis said would rank from seventh to 15th on his list of top major league prospects.

It is tough to gauge how Cespedes might fare based on the history of Cuban players who have defected and played in the majors.

Chicago White Sox shortstop Alexei Ramirez won a Silver Slugger award in 2010 and has turned in four solid seasons. On the other hand, the A's drafted right-hander Ariel Prieto in the first round in 1995, but he never lived up to expectations, going 15-24 with a 4.85 ERA over six seasons with Oakland and Tampa Bay.

One major league scout, who requested anonymity, said the news of the A's getting Cespedes "came out of nowhere."

"Obviously he's a gifted athlete," the scout said. "It remains to be seen what he does on the field."

There is no indication that signing Cespedes would keep the A's from pursuing Ramirez as a designated hitter. The A's also are looking at relievers and have been linked in trade speculation to the Texas Rangers' Koji Uehara and reportedly have had discussions with free agent Mike Gonzalez.

### **A's sign Cuban outfielder Yoenis Cespedes**

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Just when it appeared as if the A's might be among the league's least compelling teams, at least in the near future, they made a big, big splash - with more ripples likely to come.

Oakland, which spent the winter trading its top three pitchers, unexpectedly snatched prized Cuban outfielder Yoenis Cespedes away from the Marlins and other big spenders Monday, signing the 26-year-old to a four-year, \$36 million deal.

The contract will not be official until Cespedes, who defected, obtains a visa, which will take several days, and takes a physical, but team sources and agent Adam Katz confirmed the agreement. Cespedes will earn \$6.5 million in 2012, \$8.5 million next season and \$10.5 million in each of the final two years of the deal.

Cespedes, a right-handed hitter, will give the A's power the team lacks in the middle of the order, and the team could make more big news later this week by signing designated hitter Manny Ramirez. Even with Cespedes' addition, Ramirez is "still on the board," according to an Oakland source.

So, in the course of a few days, the A's could go from a snooze of a spring camp to a circus atmosphere: Cespedes was considered a top target this winter. Ramirez, who has 555 career home runs, sat out most of last season after violating baseball's performance-enhancing drug policy and must serve a 50-game suspension before he can play this year.

"You can argue Ramirez is one of the greatest who's ever played," Oakland catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "You add him to the heap when he comes back, it's like, 'Hey, we have something cooking here.' If it happens, I'll be pretty pumped."

Cespedes' gaudy numbers in Cuba (he hit .333 with a league-record 33 homers and 99 RBIs in 90 games in 2010-11) and at the World Baseball Classic (.458, two homers, five RBIs in six games) cause some baseball experts to gush.

"You can dream on him all day," Baseball Prospectus' Kevin Goldstein said. "He's the best athlete the team has by a mile the second he shows up in Arizona. He's built like an elite NFL running back."

Said Suzuki: "From everything I've heard, he's supposed to be a freak athlete, with all the tools and potential. I'm looking forward to seeing him wearing our uniform. This gives us a shot at being a good team going forward."

Shortstop Cliff Pennington noted that Cespedes averaged more than one homer every three games in his most recent season in Cuba and said, "If he does that in Oakland, I'll be pretty happy."

Oakland believed Cespedes would be out of the team's price range; initial estimates soared past \$60 million. The A's set their sights on another Cuban outfielder, 19-year-old Jorge Soler, but Soler's value kept rising just as Cespedes began telling teams that he'd prefer a shorter deal. Most teams, including Miami, wanted him for a minimum of six years, but the A's agreed to make Cespedes a free agent after four years.

That means he'll be a free agent at 30, able to pursue a monster deal if he has enjoyed success. If Cespedes does thrive, the A's hope is that a stadium will be opening just as his deal is expiring and that the team will be coming together as a contender, enticing him to sign an extension.

Oakland traded All-Stars Gio Gonzalez, Trevor Cahill and Andrew Bailey this winter in an effort to stockpile top young talent for a move to a new stadium in 2015 or so.

The A's are trying to add relief help, with the Rangers' Koji Uehara a leading possibility. Oakland has plenty of outfielders to deal, including Stanford alum Michael Taylor, who - several trades later - is the last remnant of the Matt Holliday deal with Colorado.

Cespedes' arrival is likely to push Coco Crisp from center field to left, with Josh Reddick in right and Seth Smith potentially getting more at-bats at DH than in the outfield.

### **Power play**

Outfielder Yoenis Cespedes set a Cuban baseball home run record in 2010-11. The Cuban National Series season is 90 games and goes from November to February:

Year	Avg.	HR	RBI
2005-06	.351	23	78
2006-07	.303	17	66
2007-08	.284	26	78
2008-09	.323	24	76
2009-10	.345	22	67
2010-11	.333	33*	99

\*Cuban National Series record

### **Drumbeat: Oakland A's land Cuban star Yoenis Cespedes**

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser

The A's have come to terms with Cuban outfielder Yoenis Cespedes on a four-year, \$36 million deal, yanking the star defector away from teams with much larger payrolls in one of the bigger surprises of the offseason.

Cespedes was one of the hottest names on the market this winter, a power-hitting center fielder who can answer the A's need for a midde-of-the-order hitter. Many experts thought he might command as much as \$60 million but the A's were more flexible than some other suitors, according to a source – most teams wanted to lock the 26-year-old up for five or six years or more.

The Chronicle has learned that Cespedes' contract breaks down like so: He'll receive \$6.5 million in his first year, \$8.5 million in his second year and \$10.5 million in each of the final two years of his contract.

Cespedes' signing could change the look of Oakland's outfield. He plays center, as does Coco Crisp, so the A's must move one to a corner spot, with Crisp the more likely option.

The A's also had interest in another Cuban outfielder, Jorge Soler, but this signing ends that pursuit. The team is still likely to sign Manny Ramirez, however. "Manny is still on the board," one source told me. With Ramirez sitting out the first 50 games because of a suspension, the thinking is that signing him is win-win: If the team still needs a bat at that point, give him a whirl.

After a long winter in which A's fans saw three All-Star pitchers traded elsewhere, this is one big splash by the team and something for the fan base to get excited about. Most analysts had Cespedes pegged for the Marlins or one of baseball's big spending teams.

Instead, Oakland gets what it most needs, a big bat, and the payroll still won't go above \$60 million this year.

*UPDATE: There seems to be some feeling out there that Cespedes potentially will start the season in the minors. That's not what I'm hearing from A's people, who are already trying to figure out what the big-league outfield is going to look like. When they're considering shifting Crisp from center, they're not thinking Sacramento for Cespedes – or at least not any long stay there. I'd be surprised if he's not in the Opening Day lineup, though a poor spring training might change that.*

*In addition: The A's have Cespedes for four years because he didn't want to lock into anything too long-term anywhere – but the hope is that if the club is just unveiling a new stadium and enjoying the success they anticipate, keeping him around won't be a problem. Conversely, if he's somehow a flop (international players are tough to project), then Oakland isn't on the hook for several extra seasons.*

### **A's land Cespedes with four-year contract**

#### **Power-hitting Cuban outfielder agrees to \$36 million deal**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Following a series of unpopular moves, the A's changed the course of their busy offseason on Monday, agreeing to terms with Cuban sensation Yoenis Cespedes for four years.

The 26-year-old outfielder is set to make \$36 million during that time, MLB.com confirmed.

The deal, which won't be officially announced by the A's until Cespedes has taken a physical, precludes Oakland from offering him arbitration, meaning the outfielder will automatically become a free agent at the conclusion of the 2015 season.

"I am super happy because it's been a dream of mine for a long time," Cespedes told MLB.com from the Dominican Republic. "To leave my country and play in the big leagues is what the goal was. My family is really happy, too. They are living their dreams through me."

Oakland is believed to have outbid the Miami Marlins, who had been considered the favorites to land Cespedes amid a competition that also included the Cubs, Tigers, Orioles and White Sox. Just last week, Cespedes was in Miami via a travel visa, touring the Marlins' new facility with agent Adam Katz.

"Miami was a great visit," Cespedes said. "I had a good time. I ate with the team president and other people in the front office. They were nice and it was a great experience, but the A's were for me.

"It was a great process, training and working out for teams. It was a difficult decision to leave Cuba, but I'm really excited with how things worked out. I saw a bunch of teams and they saw me, too, but Oakland was the best for me."

The Marlins reportedly offered Cespedes a six-year deal ranging in value from \$36 million to \$40 million but were not willing to give him \$9 million per year, as the A's did.

Moreover, Cespedes' representatives felt "the A's wanted him more than anyone else," MLB.com's Peter Gammons reported via Twitter. Oakland was among the finalists for Cuban players Aroldis Chapman and Alexei Ramirez when they were free agents after defecting in recent years.

By snagging Cespedes, thought to be a five-tool player, Oakland has landed a power-hitting center fielder who will perfectly slot into the middle of what was previously a lackluster lineup. He can play all outfield positions but is best suited for center, meaning Coco Crisp could potentially settle at one of the corners.

The A's, who essentially entered the offseason with a blank outfield, also have Josh Reddick, Seth Smith, Collin Cowgill and Jonny Gomes in the mix -- a scene that should make for an eventful Spring Training.

"My first goal is to make the team and stay healthy all season, and little by little, I'll make more goals," Cespedes said. "I've been preparing every day for this, and I 100 percent believe that I am ready for the Major Leagues. I have a lot of international experience and experience at a high level. I'm very confident in my abilities.

"Believe me, I'm going to give the best I have, and I'm going to leave it all on the field. I'll do my best and show I deserve this opportunity. I know I can do it. I'm ready."

Monday's move also perhaps restores faith in doubtful fans who, earlier in the winter, watched Oakland trade All-Star pitchers Trevor Cahill, Gio Gonzalez and Andrew Bailey as it looks ahead to the potential of moving into a new stadium in San Jose. Cespedes' signing would seem to complement the A's plans of contending in that new home, although there's no guarantee he'll still be with the A's when that time comes.

The 6-foot, 215-pound Cespedes played eight seasons for Granma in the Cuban League, tallying a record 33 home runs to go along with a .333 average and 99 RBIs in 90 games during the 2010-11 campaign. He was also Cuba's starting center fielder during the 2009 World Baseball Classic, batting .458 in six games.

The Cuban defector, who recently gained temporary residence in the Dominican Republic, was declared a free agent by Major League Baseball on Jan. 25 but was not allowed to sign with a team until legally cleared by the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control.

Recently unblocked, Cespedes was free to sign with the A's, and he'll need to obtain a worker's visa before joining the team in Arizona for Spring Training.

### **Cespedes says Athletics were the right fit**

By Jesse Sanchez / MLB.com

The boyhood dreams of Yoenis Cespedes have become a reality in adulthood.

On Monday, the 26-year-old outfielder agreed to a four-year, \$36 million contract with Oakland, citing the reputation of A's general manager Billy Beane and the direction of the franchise among the reasons he chose the A's.

It didn't hurt that one of Cespedes' favorite players growing up in Cuba was former Oakland shortstop Miguel Tejada.

"I am super happy because it's been a dream of mine for a long time," Cespedes told MLB.com from the Dominican Republic. "To leave my country and play in the big leagues is what the goal was. My family is really happy, too. They are living their dreams through me."

Cespedes, who can play all three outfield positions, is best suited for center field and could slot into the middle of the A's lineup. He joins group of outfielders that includes Coco Crisp, Josh Reddick, Seth Smith, Collin Cowgill and Jonny Gomes.

The club's future also proved appealing to Cespedes. During the offseason, the A's traded All-Stars Gio Gonzalez, Andrew Bailey and Trevor Cahill and received a total of 10 prospects in return. The A's are also hoping to move into a new stadium in the future.

"My first goal is to make the team and stay healthy all season, and little by little, I'll make more goals," Cespedes said. "I've been preparing every day for this and I 100 percent believe that I am ready for the Major Leagues. I have a lot of international experience and experience at a high level. I'm very confident in my abilities."

Cespedes has a track record of success. He was Cuba's starting center fielder during the 2009 World Baseball Classic, batting .458 in six games. He hit .333 with 33 home runs, 99 RBIs and 11 stolen bases over 90 games in Cuba during the 2010-11 season and later hit .143 with one home run and 10 strikeouts in 35 at-bats for Aguilas Cibaenas in the Dominican Winter League.

"Believe me, I'm going to give the best I have and I'm going to leave it all on the field," he said. "I'll do my best and show I deserve this opportunity. I know I can do it. I'm ready."

It's already been a long road for the international prospect.

Cespedes was declared a free agent by Major League Baseball on Jan. 25 but was not allowed to sign with a team until legally cleared by the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control on Monday. He defected from Cuba last winter and gained temporary residence in the Dominican Republic last month. He eventually acquired a travel visa and visited the Marlins, who many believed to be the front-runners for his services, last week in Miami.

"Miami was a great visit," Cespedes said. "I had a good time. I ate with the team president and other people in front office. They were nice and it was a great experience, but the A's were for me."

The Cubs, Tigers, Orioles and White Sox also expressed strong interest in signing the outfielder. Cespedes, who did not visit any other teams, has never been to Oakland.

"It was a great process, training and working out for teams," Cespedes said. "It was difficult decision to leave Cuba, but I'm really excited with how things worked out. I saw a bunch of teams and they saw me, too, but Oakland was the best for me."

## **Beane making things interesting in Oakland**

### **A's on track if deals for prospects, signing of Cespedes work out**

By Richard Justice / MLB.com

I was tempted to write something really silly. You know, like saying the Oakland A's might contend for a playoff berth in 2012. I took a deep breath and didn't do it.

It's not that I'm afraid of looking silly. Been there, done that. It's just that there are too many moving parts with these A's.

Almost everything that can be measured says that the A's will be terrible in 2012, but the problem with that assessment is that there's only so much that can be measured.

Unless you know what Collin Cowgill, Josh Reddick, Jemile Weeks, Michael Taylor, Jarrod Parker, Tom Milone, Brad Peacock and, now, Yoenis Cespedes, will do, it's impossible to know what the A's are capable of.

Still, it's silly to predict anything until we actually see some of these young players on the field. Besides, it's a serious stretch to think they could finish in front of the Angels and Rangers in the American League West.

That said, this is going to be a fun Spring Training for general manager Billy Beane and assistant GM David Forst. Can you imagine how they're going to feel as they get their first real look at the players they believe will lead the franchise back into contention in the years ahead?

Beane didn't trade Gio Gonzalez, Trevor Cahill and Andrew Bailey with the idea of making the playoffs in 2012 anyway. In fact, his entire offseason blueprint was based on his belief that the A's probably couldn't catch the Angels and Rangers this season.

Beane's goal is to contend in, say, 2014, when the A's could be on the verge of moving into a new stadium. His model is the Cleveland Indians, a franchise that began to win the moment it opened the doors to Jacobs Field in 1994.

Beane points out that the stadium itself didn't change the Indians. That change came in the years before the move as then-GM John Hart and former assistant GM Dan O'Dowd constructed a model baseball operation.

The Indians hadn't made a postseason appearance in 40 years when Jacobs Field opened, but beginning in 1995, they went five years in a row.

Likewise, Beane and Forst want to have the A's positioned for long-term success whenever the doors to a new ballpark open, and if that means taking a step back, so be it. Their goal was never to be just respectable anyway.

Oakland acquired 10 players between the ages of 19 and 25 in the Gonzalez, Cahill and Bailey trades. They received some young players who could make an impact this year, but that's a bonus.

And then, on Monday, the A's agreed to terms with Cespedes, the 26-year-old Cuban center fielder, on a four-year, \$36 million deal. Cespedes was a five-tool star in Cuba, and though it's impossible to know how his skills will translate to the Major Leagues, Beane and Forst are betting he'll be special.

Is Cespedes a gamble? Absolutely. So is every young player, whether he's coming from Cuba or the Dominican Republic or Stanford.

It's impossible to know how a player will change both physically and emotionally. But if Cespedes were a sure thing, the A's wouldn't have the money to sign him.

Cespedes will have a chance to make the club in his very first Spring Training. A four-year contract isn't ideal, since it carries him right into free agency, and if the evaluations comparing him with Raul Mondesi and Justin Upton are correct, his re-signing could be problematic.

But the A's believe they'll have a new stadium by then and that they will be able to afford to keep him. Regardless, Beane views him as an asset to the organization, and regardless of how that asset is used, the A's believe they got better on Monday.

Suddenly, an already interesting roster situation got more interesting. There was already competition up and down the depth chart. Now there's a bit more, and if that competition brings out the best in the young guys, everyone benefits.

For instance, there's outfielder Cowgill, who is 25 years old and who has been on Beane's radar for years. He finally got him in the Cahill deal with Arizona.

With Coco Crisp guaranteed one starting spot, Cowgill is going to have to earn his playing time in Spring Training and beyond. If Cespedes wins a job, it's unlikely that the A's would keep both Cowgill and another youngster, Reddick, on the Opening Day roster.

There's similar competition on the pitching staff. Brandon McCarthy, Dallas Braden and Bartolo Colon are penciled in for the first three spots in the rotation, but Beane hopes Parker, Peacock and Milone will make those decisions difficult.

Regardless of when it happens, it does appear the A's are on their way back. It may not happen this season, but they were already interesting, and Cespedes simply makes them more so.

If Beane's goals this offseason were to accumulate power arms, speed and youth, he ought to go to Arizona feeling pretty good about things. As for winning in 2012, that's definitely out. I think.

### **A's make big, irrelevant splash**

By LOWELL COHN, Press Democrat

Before Monday, had you ever heard of Yoenis Cespedes?

I'm serious. Were you sitting around the house contemplating the great Cespedes, thinking what a big deal he is?

Oh, in case you haven't noticed, Cespedes is a baseball player. He is the outfielder the A's just agreed to sign for four years at \$36 million, the Cuban defector who is supposed to knock baseball on its ear, starting in April. Many newspaper stories claim the Cespedes signing is a monumental event for the A's and gives them a rooting-tooting power hitter.

Let's get one thing straight right away. Nothing the Oakland A's do is monumental or even slightly rooting-tooting or even a little important. The A's are the most irrelevant sports franchise in the known world and any one of their signings is by definition irrelevant.

But there's more. Cespedes never has played in the major leagues. Baseball people are allegedly over the moon about him, but he has no discernible track record where it counts — against big-league pitching. That doesn't exactly make him a lock to succeed.

How many times has a so-called "highly touted prospect" arrived in the majors and been a dud? Let me answer that one for you — more than you can count.

Plus, you wonder if there's something wrong with this guy — in his noodle or his body — to sign with the crummy A's when other teams reportedly were interested in him.

Does he have a broken arm? Is he incapable of hitting the inside curveball? Does he secretly yearn to leave baseball and become a beekeeper?

The world wants to know.

He's no spring chicken, by the way. He's 26, and that's ancient to be entering the Show.

But that's the beauty of the A's, they specialize in signing hurt players or old players or players with a problem. To make the A's take notice, a player must have something distinctly wrong with him. Don't ask me why this is this case, but it is.

During the offseason, they traded away Trevor Cahill, Gio Gonzalez and Andrew Bailey, but kept Brett Anderson. To the best of our knowledge, Cahill, Gonzalez and Bailey are perfectly healthy, in the pink. As a result, they were of no use to the A's.

Anderson, on the other hand, fits right in. His 2011 season was interrupted by Tommy John surgery — kind of a big deal, you'll admit. Who knows how good he is anymore? The A's will be paying him \$3 million this season to find out. It's not Cespedes money, but it isn't exactly chump change, either.

The A's, it is said, have been interested in signing Manny Ramirez. It is not clear to me if the acquisition of Cespedes rules out Manny. I sure hope not.

Manny would be another ideal Oakland Athletic. He is banned from playing the first 50 games of the season — something the A's may not be able to resist — because he was discovered to be a cheat and a phony. He took performance-enhancing drugs.

That's certainly not a good thing. And then he got caught — not for the first time. What self-respecting baseball player gets caught? This would lead us to believe Manny may be brain dead. As he approaches age 40, he almost surely is baseball dead, as in all washed up. That means he would be ideal for the A's.

It is beyond me why the A's make all these strange signings. I know they are waiting around for a new San Jose ballpark, which may never happen and, while they wait, they don't actually try to win games. They merely, as per league requirements, put a team on the field — a not-very-good team. They try to generate interest in the club by making these carnival-like deals, but the world, which usually can spot a fraud, loses interest in them by mid-June.

It's possible Cespedes — that's his name, right? — may be the next Willie Mays. I certainly hope so. And if he is, the A's will trade him long before his contract expires.

That's what the A's do, they trade their good players for a group of unknowns who have the identical last name — "Prospect." At many positions, they have a guy named

Prospect. Are they all cousins?

It is said Cespedes will have no trouble getting a visa.

He may live to regret that.

### **A's to sign Cuban OF Yoenis Cespedes**

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ESPN.com news services

Cuban outfielder Yoenis Cespedes has agreed to a four-year, \$36 million deal with the Oakland Athletics. The Miami Marlins also bid \$36 million for Cespedes. But their offer was over six years, not four, one source familiar with the Cespedes negotiations told ESPN.com's Jayson Stark. The Marlins weren't interested in a deal shorter than six years, an executive who spoke with the team told ESPN.com. Cespedes can sign Monday after receiving his unblocking license from the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, his agent, Adam Katz, told ESPN.com's Stark. The outfielder needed the clearance because he is a Cuban national who has established residency in another country after defecting.

"At the end of the day with all these big free agents, it comes down to the total package," Katz said. "Sure, money and the economic package had something to do with it. But it's also about all the surrounding circumstances. And basically, this was a player who felt like this club wanted him more than anybody else."

Once Cespedes receives his worker's visa he is free to show up for spring training and play for the A's. The contract allows him to become a free agent after the fourth year instead of having to wait six, Katz said. Cespedes will receive \$6.5 million in his first year, \$8.5 million in his second year and \$10.5 million in each of the last two years of the deal.

The deal would make the 26-year-old Cespedes the highest-paid player on Oakland's roster this season before he plays a major league game. The next-highest salary belongs to outfielder Coco Crisp at \$6 million.

Cespedes, who is tied with Fernando Despaigne for the Cuban League's single-season home run record with 32, established legal residency in the Dominican Republic last month after saying six other major league teams were interested in signing him.

Cespedes met with the Marlins and toured their new ballpark last week.

"You don't land everybody you want to land. But I think we've been aggressive," Marlins president of baseball operations Larry Beinfest said. "We're really happy with the way the club looks. You always have a sense of disappointment when you're trying to either trade for or sign a player. It's not the first time and won't be the last. We would certainly wish him well."

Cespedes played for Cuba in the 2009 World Baseball Classic and is projected to be ready for the majors.

The other teams Cespedes said he drew interest from were the Baltimore Orioles, Detroit Tigers, Cleveland Indians and the Chicago Cubs and White Sox. The Athletics were never mentioned.

The agreement comes a week after the Athletics said they were extending the contracts of general manager Billy Beane and president Michael Crowley through the 2019 season.

The franchise has been seeking approval from Major League Baseball to move to the South Bay, where the San Francisco Giants hold territorial rights to the technology-rich region filled with fans and corporate dollars.



The A's, who open the season early against the [Seattle Mariners](#) in Japan on March 28, are hoping for a resolution to the long-standing dispute soon.

### **Oakland's motive for the Cespedes deal**

Buster Olney, [espn.com](#)

It's not only casual baseball fans who view the [Oakland Athletics'](#) offseason as an unsolvable logic maze. Some rival talent evaluators puzzled and puzzled until their puzzlers were sore on Monday night, after word broke that the Athletics had signed 26-year-old outfielder Yoenis Cespedes to a four-year, \$36 million deal.

After all, Oakland traded two good young starting pitchers for prospects -- first [Trevor Cahill](#) and then [Gio Gonzalez](#) -- reducing its ability to contend with the [Texas Rangers](#) and [Los Angeles Angels](#) in the next couple of seasons. And now the Athletics have paid a premium to Cespedes, giving an unproven outfielder who is older than either Cahill or Gonzalez more money than they've committed to any other player in their organization.

But there is common thread to all of it, and you can sum it up with four numbers: 2. 0. 1. 5.

As in the year 2015. Everything the Athletics are doing is being funneled into 2015, or thereabouts.

The earliest they could probably open a new San Jose ballpark, if the commissioner's office forces or negotiates with the [San Francisco Giants](#) to give up the territorial rights to that city, would be in 2015.

The final year of Cespedes' deal -- when the Athletics probably have the best chance of getting return on their investment -- will be 2015. They can't get elite veteran power hitters to sign with their organization, so they have signed an amateur with big-time power. "To me, what you're paying for is two years of development for him, as he makes his adjustments," said one general manager, "and two years of good production, if he is what they think he is."

The Athletics, who debut in our [Future Power Rankings](#) in the bottom third of the 30 teams partly because of their uncertain ballpark situation, have created a wave of prospects that could hit in a big way in 2015.

[Jarrod Parker](#), who Oakland got in the Cahill deal, will probably be in his third or fourth full season by then. Sonny Gray, a right-hander taken in the first round last summer, may follow a similar path. [Brad Peacock](#), who might be the most important piece from the Gonzalez trade, is highly regarded by rival executives. "I think he's got a chance to be a special pitcher," said an NL evaluator on the day the deal was finished.

The Athletics have built similar blueprints in recent seasons only to blow up those plans. A year ago, they appeared to be riding into the future built on [Brett Anderson](#), Cahill, Gonzalez and others. But a year ago, they had hope that their ballpark situation would be resolved quickly enough for them to get a new home in 2013 or 2014, and because of the recurring delays, that timetable has been backed up -- and Oakland would've been faced with a situation in which Cahill, Gonzalez and Anderson would be on the verge of free agency in 2015, just as they hope to open their new park.

The reality is that it's very possible that if no hard plans are made for a ballpark and Oakland's stagnant situation continues to rot, the Athletics will again blow up the blueprint and back up the rebuilding timetable. The team really can't follow through until baseball officials follow through with assurances of settling the San Jose situation, one way or another.

Some notes on the Cespedes signing, from Justin Havens and J.B. Kritz of ESPN Stats and Info:

- He hit .333 BA/.424 OBP/.667 SLG with 33 HRs and 99 RBIs in 90 games during his 2010-11 season
- He was Cuba's starting center fielder in the 2009 World Baseball Classic (.458 BA in six games)
- He went 5-for-35, 1 HR, 0 BB, 10 K in Dominican Winter League
- He'll earn approximately \$9 million per season in his four-year, \$36M deal, with \$6.5 million coming in 2012. That would make him the highest-paid player on the A's next season (about \$500,000 more than [Coco Crisp](#)).
- Cespedes' \$36 million contract represents more than 10 percent of the Athletics' franchise value and more than 50 percent of their Opening Day payroll last season. Forbes magazine valued the club at \$307 million in March 2011.
- For Cespedes to earn his average annual value of about \$9 million, he will need to produce somewhere between 1.9 and 2.2 WAR (according to FanGraphs). Some outfielders who fell into that range last season: Crisp, [Nick Markakis](#), [David DeJesus](#), [Josh Willingham](#) and [Seth Smith](#).

Cespedes will give the Athletics power in the [middle of their order](#). It was a twist on their [curious offseason](#), writes Joe Stiglich.

The [Miami Marlins](#) were outbid by about 50 percent in annual salary, as it turns out -- they offered \$6 million a year for six years, rather than \$9 million a year for four years -- and weren't very surprised that [they missed out](#), writes Clark Spencer.

## Notables

- Clayton Kershaw is a 23-year-old with the maturity and wisdom of a 50-year-old.
- The time has come for Hanley Ramirez to impress his teammates, writes Mike Berardino.
- The Cleveland Indians signed Jon Garland to a minor league deal.
- The Chicago Cubs are the leading bidders for Jorge Soler, writes Dave van Dyck.
- Part of the reason some executives are leery of Johnny Damon, as Joel Sherman explains, is that they fret about how he seems to be expanding his strike zone as he draws closer to 3,000 hits.
- Phil Hughes is much more fit, writes Kevin Kernan.
- The Philadelphia Phillies are swinging for a huge television deal, writes Matt Gelb.

## Moves, deals and decisions

1. Little progress has been made on a Ryan Zimmerman extension, writes Adam Kilgore.
2. Ike Davis says he's good to go.
3. The Pittsburgh Pirates and New York Yankees continue to haggle over the A.J. Burnett deal, writes Marc Carig.
4. A Minnesota Twins reliever was sent to Triple-A.
5. Jerry Dipoto is not eager to trade Bobby Abreu, writes Mike DiGiovanna.
6. If the Kansas City Royals added a veteran starter, says Dayton Moore, it would block an in-house candidate.
7. Some Detroit Tigers left-handers are getting an early start, writes Lynn Henning.
8. Roy Oswalt is not on the Reds' radar at the moment.
9. The Baltimore Orioles and Adam Jones have had preliminary extension talks.
10. David Ortiz settled his arbitration case with the Boston Red Sox. He's reached the stage of his career when the Red Sox will probably go year to year with him, and as soon as he shows marked decline in his performance, they'll probably turn the page.
11. Daniel Bard is ready to get cranked up in his effort to move into the rotation.
12. The Toronto Blue Jays signed Casey Janssen.
13. Wade Davis is taking trade rumors in stride, writes Roger Mooney.
14. A reliever is getting another chance with the Seattle Mariners, writes Geoff Baker.

## Other stuff

- A decision on Ryan Braun is expected before Feb. 24, writes Tom Haudricourt.
- Matt Holliday has added squash to his offseason workouts, writes Derrick Goold. I saw Matt the other day at Vanderbilt, where his brother is a coach, and he was enthusiastic in talking about the Cardinals for the upcoming season.
- The man they call Mud Grant was signed to a multiyear deal, as Bill Center writes.
- Ozzie Guillen won't be dull, writes Dave George. Not surprisingly, the Marlins are getting their own show.

- The Red Sox need a rebound from Josh Beckett, writes Gerry Callahan.
- Derek Jeter has learned to take less time off in the offseason, writes Anthony McCarron.
- Carroll Rogers went to Cuba and got a feel for baseball there.
- Drew Pomeranz will enter spring training with a lot of confidence.
- Vanderbilt coach James Franklin won't talk about a quarterback possibly transferring into his program.
- Derek Holland worked as a weatherman.

And today will be better than yesterday.

### **Cuban defector Yoenis Cespedes, Oakland agree on contract | Baseball**

Cuban defector Yoenis Cespedes, a 26-year-old outfielder, and the Oakland Athletics have agreed to a \$36 million, four-year contract.

By The Associated Press and The New York Times

OAKLAND, Calif. — After a winter of rebuilding, the Oakland Athletics were the surprise winner for Cuban defector Yoenis Cespedes.

Cespedes and the A's have agreed to a \$36 million, four-year contract — quite a splash for the low-budget franchise that traded several players this offseason.

Agent Adam Katz confirmed Monday the slugging outfielder had reached agreement on a deal, with details to be finalized. Cespedes, 26, needs to pass a physical.

The agreement is a significant move for Oakland, which wanted to add a steady hitter. Last month, Cespedes said six teams were interested in signing him: Miami, Baltimore, Detroit, Cleveland, the Chicago Cubs and the Chicago White Sox.

"At the end, I think he felt like Oakland wanted him more," Katz said on SiriusXM Radio. "Of course, the package has something to do with it."

Cespedes will earn \$6.5 million this year, \$8.5 million in 2013 and \$10.5 million in each of the final two seasons of the deal. He can become a free agent at the end of the contract, which is the highest for a Cuban defector.

Cespedes' deal surpasses pitcher Jose Contreras' \$32 million, four-year contract with the New York Yankees before the 2003 season.

Before Cespedes, the richest total contract on the Oakland roster belonged to catcher Kurt Suzuki, who is halfway through a four-year, \$16.25 million deal. By average annual salary, the team's highest-paid player had been center fielder Coco Crisp, at \$7 million a year for two years.

All winter, Oakland general manager Billy Beane's strategy had been to deal his best young pitchers while they still had peak value, acquiring a prospect haul that could rise together when (and if) the team gets a new ballpark in San Jose. Beane shipped out three former All-Stars — starter Trevor Cahill to Arizona, closer Andrew Bailey to Boston and starter Gio Gonzalez to Washington — to net 10 players in return.

Cespedes toured the Miami Marlins' new downtown ballpark Wednesday.

"You don't land everybody you want to land. But I think we've been aggressive," said Larry Beinfest, Marlins president of baseball operations. "We're really happy with the way the club looks. You always have a sense of disappointment when you're trying to either trade for or sign a player. It's not the first time and won't be the last. We would certainly wish him well."

Cespedes played for Cuba in the 2009 World Baseball Classic and is projected to be ready for the majors.

### **Ortiz, Red Sox avoid arbitration hearing**

BOSTON — David Ortiz and the Boston Red Sox avoided an arbitration hearing by agreeing to a one-year deal worth \$14.575 million.

The deal for the designated hitter was between the \$16.5 million he asked for last month and the \$12.65 million submitted by the Red Sox, which matched his 2011 earnings.

Ortiz, 36, became a free agent after the season and passed up a chance to go elsewhere when he accepted Boston's arbitration offer Dec. 7. He hit .309 with 29 homers and drove in 96 runs last year.

"I figure I was gonna reach this deal and that's what we're celebrating right now," said Ortiz, who was a Mariners minor-leaguer in the mid-1990s.

## Notes

- Right-hander **Casey Janssen** and Toronto avoided an arbitration hearing, agreeing on a \$5.9 million, two-year contract.

Janssen, 30, gets \$2 million this year and \$2.9 million in 2013. The agreement includes a \$4 million team option for 2014.

Janssen was 6-0 with a 2.26 earned-run average and two saves in 55 relief appearances last year, when he made \$1.095 million.

- Right-hander **Jon Garland**, who has won 132 games in the majors for five teams, agreed to a minor-league contract with the Cleveland Indians, who seemingly have four starting spots filled but want to add depth and experience.

The 32-year-old Garland's deal is contingent on him passing a physical in the next week at the team's training complex in Goodyear, Ariz.

Garland's 2011 season was cut short by injury. He went 1-5 with a 4.33 ERA in nine starts for the Los Angeles Dodgers before having shoulder surgery in July.

## **\$36 Million Deal Puts Spin on Athletics' 'Moneyball'**

By TYLER KEPNER, New York Times

If the Oakland Athletics ever fashion a winning sequel to "Moneyball," they will have to do what they do best: think differently. Criticize Billy Beane for his latest and most expensive unconventional move if you wish. But if Yoenis Cespedes makes it big, you could be a background sound bite in the next movie.

The A's reached a four-year, \$36 million contract agreement with Cespedes on Monday, according to a person with direct knowledge of the talks. The deal will not be official until Cespedes passes a physical.

"At the end, I think he felt like Oakland wanted him more," said Cespedes's agent, Adam Katz, confirming the deal on SiriusXM Radio. "Of course, the package has something to do with it."

The package is less than Cespedes, a Cuban defector who is expected to play center field, might have expected to command early this off-season, when there was talk of a \$50 million deal. . But for Oakland, it is a staggering commitment.

Before Cespedes, the richest total contract on the Athletics' roster belonged to catcher Kurt Suzuki, who is halfway through a four-year, \$16.25 million deal. By average annual salary, the team's highest-paid player had been center fielder Coco Crisp, at \$7 million a year for two years. All winter, Beane's strategy had been to deal his best young pitchers while they still had peak value, acquiring a prospect haul that could rise together when (and if) the team gets a new ballpark. He shipped out three former All-Stars — starter Trevor Cahill to Arizona, closer Andrew Bailey to Boston and starter Gio Gonzalez to Washington — to net 10 players in return.

Contending in the American League West seems implausible. The Texas Rangers have won the last two pennants and last month spent \$111.7 million for the Japanese star Yu Darvish. The Los Angeles Angels, tired of finishing second and soon to be flush with television money, added the game's premier hitter, Albert Pujols, and the All-Star starter C. J. Wilson.

For the A's to have a chance this season, they need young starters like Brad Peacock and Jarrod Parker, who have three career starts combined, to develop quickly.

They also need much more from an offense that averaged only 3.98 runs a game last season, 12th in the league.

That is where Cespedes comes in. He is a right-handed hitter with power to all fields and the speed to play center, despite a thick frame. (Crisp may be forced to shift to a corner outfield spot.) Scouts rave about Cespedes, but with little experience against major league pitching besides the World Baseball Classic, he is a gamble.

But a gamble could be the Athletics' best strategy to acquire a high-impact player. Beane has tried this several times in recent years, giving \$10 million to starter Ben Sheets in 2010 and \$4.25 million to Michael Ynoa, a pitching prospect from the Dominican Republic, in 2008. Neither move has worked out, but Beane explained his thinking in an interview last summer.

"Sometimes, you're relegated to buying that lottery ticket," he said. "Anybody will tell you that the lottery is not a great way to invest your money."

But you can't win if you don't play, and at least the A's are playing.

They also bid on the Cuban left-hander Aroldis Chapman, who signed with Cincinnati before the 2010 season for six years and more than \$30 million. The Reds had the same idea as Oakland: investing in a dream costs a lot less than paying premium prices for a sure thing. Though Chapman has been effective for the Reds, he has still not made a start in the majors.

Creative investing, though, may be the only way for low-budget teams to win in the post-"Moneyball" era. By recognizing statistical truths earlier than most competitors, Beane was able to extend the playoff run of his Tim Hudson/Barry Zito/Mark Mulder teams in the early 2000s with cheap, undervalued talent. By now, the data revolution has spread to every team. Market inefficiencies are harder to spot, causing teams like Oakland to gamble on high-end talent.

The team that has done the most with the least, in recent years, has been the Tampa Bay Rays, who have reached the postseason in three of the last four seasons.

This winter, the Rays' bold move was to lock up starter Matt Moore's salary for at least the next five years.

Moore has made only two career starts, including a gem in the playoffs, and he will make \$14 million for the next five years, with club options for three more years beyond that. If Moore becomes an ace, he will be a major bargain. For the Rays, that lottery ticket was worth the money.

The Rays have been so thrifty, in fact, that their greatest commitment to any player is only half of what the A's have guaranteed Cespedes: Ben Zobrist has a four-year, \$18 million deal, a bit more than Evan Longoria's six-year, \$17.5 million contract.

Tampa Bay remains the East Coast version of the Athletics: stuck in an outdated ballpark, with no viable plan for relocation. It is a credit to both organizations that they continue to have the vision to make things interesting.

### **A's shock us with not-so-crazy Cespedes signing**

Danny Knobler, cbssports.com

Yes, it's a shock.

"Oakland?" one baseball executive repeated to me after I told him the A's were the team signing Cuban outfielder Yoenis Cespedes.

Yes, Oakland.

Yes, it's a shock. But that doesn't necessarily make it a crazy idea for the A's, and here's why:

When Cespedes' agents approached the A's recently after finding a softer-than-expected market elsewhere, the A's saw opportunity. They know that signing Cespedes for \$36 million over four years is a risk -- an expensive risk for a team that doesn't have any other player signed for more than \$6 million this year.

But they also know that the upside is great. The scouts who like Cespedes compare his combination of power and speed to Bo Jackson.

You just don't find players like that. The A's don't find them, anyway, not in their price range.

The A's know they're not going to win this year, and probably not next year, either. That's why they spent this winter trading Trevor Cahill, Gio Gonzalez and Andrew Bailey for young prospects.

But the plan has been to build a team that can win in 2014-15. If the A's are right about Cespedes, that's when he will be emerging as a true star.

As one A's person said Monday, "We're not trying to finish in last place."

They're trying to build a team in a challenging environment, one that won't get much less challenging until a new stadium is on the way. For now, the A's are operating with a low budget, but also with a difficult image.

When they've tried to spend, they haven't been able to. A year ago, they tried to sign both Adrian Beltre and Lance Berkman. They chose the right players; the players didn't want to come.

They have to take chances, which is why they're one of the few teams willing to consider signing Manny Ramirez.

The A's were also one of the higher bidders on Aroldis Chapman, who until Monday held the record for most money given to a Cuban free agent.

"The problem is no one wants our money," the A's person said.

So when Cespedes' people approached them and said that the outfielder was interested in coming to the A's, the A's were willing to consider it. They were even willing to make a deal that will allow Cespedes to become a free agent again after four years (a condition that Cespedes demanded of every bidder, Tigers general manager Dave Dombrowski told the Detroit Free Press).

They weren't one of the many teams involved in the Cespedes bidding from the start, but the A's have liked the player since watching him several years back in the World Baseball Classic.

In the end, Cespedes got a better deal from the A's than the one the Marlins offered (\$36 million over six years, according to sources). But Cespedes had also told officials from other teams that he preferred not to go to Miami, because of the potential circus playing in a city with a huge Cuban exile population.

That won't be an issue in Oakland, unless Cespedes turns into an instant star and leads the A's into contention this year.

Now that would really be a shock.

### **Cespedes agrees to \$36M, 4-year deal with A's**

Janie McCauley, AP Baseball Writer

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Cuban defector Yoenis Cespedes and the Oakland Athletics have agreed to a \$36 million, four-year contract.

Agent Adam Katz confirmed Monday the sides had reached agreement, with details still to be finalized. This is a significant move for Oakland, which now has the steady hitter it sought to boost the roster heading into 2012. The A's also have expressed interest in slugger Manny Ramirez.

The A's, hoping to be given clearance from Major League Baseball to relocate to San Jose and construct a new ballpark, have been in rebuilding mode this winter. Oakland traded starting pitchers Gio Gonzalez and Trevor Cahill and also All-Star closer Andrew Bailey.

### **Cuban outfielder Yoenis Cespedes agrees to \$36 million, 4-year deal with Oakland Athletics**

By Associated Press, Published: February 13

OAKLAND, Calif. — After a winter of rebuilding, the Oakland Athletics were the surprise winner for Cuban defector Yoenis Cespedes.

Cespedes and the A's have agreed to a \$36 million, four-year contract — quite a splash for the low-budget franchise that traded away several key faces this offseason.

Agent Adam Katz confirmed Monday the slugging outfielder had reached agreement on a deal, with details still to be finalized. This is a significant move for Oakland, which wanted to add a steady hitter.

Cespedes will earn \$6.5 million this year, \$8.5 million in 2013 and \$10.5 million in each of the final two seasons. He can become a free agent at the end of the contract, which is the highest for a Cuban defector. Cespedes' deal tops Jose Contreras' \$32 million, four-year contract with the Yankees before the 2003 season.

The A's expect Cespedes to secure his P1 visa in the next couple of weeks, travel to the team's Arizona spring training site to take his physical and be ready to start training shortly thereafter.

The team also still has interest in slugger Manny Ramirez. The A's, hoping to be given clearance from Major League Baseball to relocate to San Jose and construct a new ballpark, have been in rebuilding mode this offseason. Oakland traded starting pitchers Gio Gonzalez and Trevor Cahill and also All-Star closer Andrew Bailey.

Cespedes toured the Miami Marlins' new downtown ballpark last Wednesday, and appeared to have other suitors, as well. In a surprising move, it was the A's who made a splash and outbid some big-spending clubs.

"You don't land everybody you want to land. But I think we've been aggressive," Marlins president of baseball operations Larry Beinfest said. "We're really happy with the way the club looks. You always have a sense of disappointment when you're trying to either trade for or sign a player. It's not the first time and won't be the last. We would certainly wish him well."

Cespedes played for Cuba in the 2009 World Baseball Classic and is projected to be ready for the majors. Cespedes said six teams were interested in signing him: the Marlins, Baltimore, Detroit, Cleveland and the Chicago Cubs and White Sox.

Major League Baseball said Monday it has been told by Cespedes' agent that he has obtained an unblocking license from the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control — another key step to him signing.

In January, Cespedes' representatives announced he had established legal residency in the Dominican Republic, the final hurdle to him becoming a free agent. MLB then had to receive proof of residency before clubs were notified of his status as a free agent.

### **Spring excitement gets early start this weekend**

#### **Mariners pitchers, catchers first to begin workouts on Sunday**

By Mark Newman / MLB.com

Pitchers and catchers report to Spring Training this weekend.

That is one of our favorite phrases in the baseball lexicon, right up there with "Play Ball!" and "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" and "Opening Day" and "World Series champions."

True, it will be just one of 30 Major League Baseball teams reporting at the outset, a full week earlier than most. The Mariners will take advantage of a special allowance to start workouts Sunday and begin preparations for the Japan Opening Series 2012, in which they will face Oakland on March 28-29 in Tokyo.

No matter how many players show up and suit up, this makes it official. Pitchers and catchers report this weekend. That means you are about to see Felix Hernandez, one of the game's best pitchers. You are about to see two of the top 16 prospects in the Majors: newly acquired catcher Jesus Montero (No. 13) and left-hander Danny Hultzen (No. 16).

"I think everybody's ready for Spring Training to get going," Mariners manager Eric Wedge said at the team's FanFest. "It's going to be a little bit different this spring with the trip to Japan. ... I'm just really thrilled and ready to take this thing for a ride. ... We're going to try to push the envelope a little bit in regard to our mindsets and what our expectations are."

If you are a baseball fan in the Valley of the Sun, you are about to see some activity. If you are following at MLB.com and MLB Network and outlets everywhere, you are about to see images of players on emerald lawns wearing workout gear and throwing baseballs.

Then it will truly hit you: The game is coming back again, a tradition dating back to the 1800s. Fans are ready to take this thing for a ride, too.

The A's will wait until Feb. 19 for their first pitchers-and-catchers workout, opting for the maximum offseason break, opting not to rush their arms before arriving at their spring home in Phoenix. It is a study in contrasts, the first of the season: One club raring to go a week early and one doing what the other 28 teams are doing.

Technically speaking, Sunday is listed on the [Important Dates](#) page as the "Voluntary report date for pitchers, catchers and injured players (Oakland and Seattle)." On Feb. 17, A's and Mariners full squads may begin reporting. For all other clubs, Feb. 19 is the voluntary reporting date for pitchers, catchers and injured players, and Feb. 24 is the earliest for full-squad workouts.

One of the highlights over these coming days will be the mere familiarity of a life's passion. Seeing players going through drills, wearing spikes, a baseball glove on one hand. Watching the mechanics of a delivery again. Hearing the thump of fastballs into catchers' mitts.

One of the highlights over these coming days also will be the jarring vision of players in new places. Seeing Mark Buehrle and Ozzie Guillen together as pitcher and manager was a common sight over many White Sox springs in Arizona, but what a view it will be when they each wear new Marlins uniforms as Miami's pitchers and catchers start workouts in Florida on Feb. 22.

The defending World Series champs start workouts on Feb. 19, and the difference will be palpable right from the beginning. There likely will be no sign of future Hall of Fame manager Tony La Russa, now retired and replaced by Mike Matheny. But for Cardinals fans, it will mean the long-awaited sight of Adam Wainwright, no longer just a rooting presence like last fall but a Cardinals pitcher once more after missing all of last season and having Tommy John surgery.

Mat Latos' first workout with the Reds will be Feb. 19 in Arizona. C.J. Wilson returns to the Cactus League, but with the Angels on Feb. 20 instead of the two-time defending American League-champion Rangers, who will introduce Japanese sensation Yu Darvish to their field starting Feb. 23.

A special thrill is in store for Red Sox Nation, because pitchers and catchers begin workouts Feb. 21 inside brand-new JetBlue Park at Fenway South, in Lee County, Fla. It will bring a touch of 100-year-old Fenway Park down to the subtropics, complete with Green Monster. More important, it also will mean turning the page on the 2011 finish, with Bobby Valentine managing instead of Terry Francona.

The first live exhibition game of any kind will be Florida State against the Phillies on Feb. 29 in Clearwater, Fla. Roy Halladay, Cliff Lee and Cole Hamels are about to return, a dreaded trio for Phillies opponents. Even though the combination was not enough to put Philadelphia into the National League Championship Series, it is a presence that will stand out again when that club's pitchers and catchers begin workouts on Feb. 19.

The first game between two Major League clubs is the same Mariners-A's matchup, March 2 in Phoenix. The Japan Opening Series will christen the regular season, then the Cardinals will be in Miami for Opening Night on April 4, followed the next day with seven Opening Day games.



And so it begins, with a gradual trickle of players, a metamorphosis again into ballplayers. It starts with one team well ahead of the others, but one team is enough and the certainty of arrivals is right behind them. It is OK to get a little excited again.

Pitchers and catchers report to Spring Training this weekend.

### **Cespedes deal with A's a head scratcher**

Ken Rosenthal, foxsports.net

Oakland Athletics owner Lewis Wolff acknowledged recently that even if the A's receive permission to move to San Jose soon, they likely would not open their new ballpark until 2016.

Spring training is here. See the action from Florida and Arizona.

On Monday, the Athletics stunned the baseball world by agreeing with Cuban outfielder Yoenis Cespedes on a four-year, \$36 million contract that allows him to become a free agent after 2015, according to major-league sources.

Why would the Athletics agree to such a short deal when sources say that teams such as the Miami Marlins and Chicago Cubs wanted control of Cespedes, 26, for at least six years?

What is the point of the Athletics even signing Cespedes if he might be gone before they ever find their way to San Jose?

Both reasonable questions — and considering the uncertainty surrounding Cespedes, who has never played an inning in the North American system, there are many more.

If the Athletics are right about Cespedes, they likely will lose him after four years, when a team in a more robust market will be willing to pay him monster dollars at age 30.

If the Athletics are wrong about Cespedes, well, there goes \$36 million — a huge sum for a low-revenue team that routinely fields one of the lowest payrolls in the sport.

So again, what is the logic?

It's actually fairly simple: The Athletics view Cespedes as a premium middle-of-the-diamond performer, the kind they never attract in the major-league free-agent market. Seeing as how Cespedes never has seen Oakland or the much-maligned Coliseum, he can't run from the city or ballpark the way established major leaguers do.

Opening Day is just 52 days away. Until then, Ken Rosenthal and Jon Paul Morosi keep you up to date.

Timing, then, was everything. The Athletics might not have landed Cespedes if he had become available earlier this offseason; a greater number of high-revenue teams likely would have been involved. But general manager Billy Beane saw an opening, knowing that most in the industry assumed Miami was the best fit for Cespedes — and that the Marlins, as the supposed front-runner, probably figured they would not need to overpay.

The willingness of the A's to negotiate a shorter contract separated them from other clubs, but also confounded rival executives, some of whom say that Cespedes needs to start in the minors as he makes the massive adjustment from Cuba to the U.S.

The Athletics have no such plans for Cespedes — they intend to start him in center, move Coco Crisp to left and play Josh Reddick in right, with Seth Smith getting most of his at-bats as a DH, sources say.

The team's strategy will be fine if Cespedes produces immediately — and the Athletics believe that he will, hitting .260-.270 with 25 home runs and playing above-average defense in center field.

Yet, how can they possibly know?

Cespedes is precisely the type of player you never would have found in Paul DePodesta's computer — or Peter Brand's spreadsheets, for those who have seen "Moneyball." Then again, it's not as if he is a complete mystery. Sabermetricians at both the club level and in the media have attempted to translate his numbers from Cuba to the major-league game.

Dan Szymborski, editor-in-chief of Baseball Think Factory, contributor to ESPN.com and creator of the ZiPS projection system, forecast Cespedes' numbers through 2019 and came up with this line for his first season — .270/.331/.435 with 23 homers and 86 RBI.

Matt Kemp, Jacoby Ellsbury, Melky Cabrera and Shane Victorino are the only regular center fielders who had better rate stats in all three categories in 2011. Kemp, Ellsbury, Curtis Granderson and Andrew McCutchen are the only ones who had better home run and RBI totals.

The unknown, of course, is how quickly Cespedes will adjust to the North American game — and whether he adjusts as successfully as the Athletics envision.

The A's can't wait on Cespedes, given the size of their investment and the ticking clock on his contract. But as one rival executive said, "What do you do if he's hitting .110 after 20 games?"

It's quite possible that will happen — even scouts who like Cespedes believe that major-league breaking balls will give him fits and that he will compile big strikeout totals, at least initially.

If he struggles early, he could warrant a minor-league demotion. If he gets demoted, he could lose confidence. And if he loses confidence ... well, let's just say it's a slippery slope.

The Athletics have other outfielders coming — Michael Choice, their No. 3 prospect according to Baseball America, and Grant Green, their No. 4. They've transformed a bottom 10 farm system into a top 10 with the signing of Cespedes and three offseason trades. They also hold three of the top 47 picks in the next amateur draft.

See which guys will be working in a new MLB city on Opening Day.

Even this season, the A's could be better than they were a year ago, not to mention younger and cheaper. Cespedes obviously isn't cheap, but his age and promise make him a logical fit for the team's latest rebuilding plan.

Still, not everyone in the industry is convinced — particularly when the Athletics helped put themselves in this position with some of their previous drafts, trades and international signings.

"Hope this one works out better than their last record-breaking international sign," one rival executive cracked, referring to Dominican right-hander Michael Ynoa, who has pitched nine innings in three seasons due to injuries. Ynoa, then 16, signed for \$4.25 million in 2008, the largest bonus ever at that time for a Latin amateur.

The way the Athletics see it, they had no choice — there was simply no other way for them to acquire a player like Cespedes.

It's a gamble, a big one. The Athletics are building toward San Jose, and Cespedes might not make it to San Jose.

Four years from now, even if everything goes according to plan, it might be fair to ask, What was the point?

### **Athletics Rustle Up Five-Tool Find In 2011 Draft**

By Casey Tefertiller, Baseball America

OAKLAND—Sue Crocker did everything she could to make her son into a cowboy. Almost from the time he could walk, Bobby Crocker learned to rope and ride horses. He even spent his youth working the chutes at the rodeos around his rural hometown of Aromas, Calif.

But Crocker soon found a different muse: He loved to hit. He wanted to smash baseballs at every chance, and he loved that competitive flavor of the diamond.

So baseball became his passion, and it took him to Cal Poly and now to professional baseball, after the Athletics tabbed him in the fourth round of last year's draft. They are excited about the outfielder's potential.

"He's one of the few guys who is a self-motivated, hard-working player," farm director Keith Lieppman said. "I watched the way he plays, and the first thing that caught my eye was his work ethic. He runs out every ball and works hard in practice. He has a good feel for the game."

Lieppman said the 6-foot-3, 225-pound Crocker shows five projectable tools, which is unusual for a fourth-round pick. He has the arm to play right field, above-average speed for a corner outfielder and a good sense for routes in the outfield. The 21-year-old also shows the potential to hit for power and average.

"A lot of guys try to take the easy road. This guy doesn't," Lieppman said. "Sometimes he plays so hard we may even have to try to get him to tone it down a bit. You can tell he came from a good coaching background."

Crocker's background includes playing for the Monterey-based Aldrete Baseball Academy travel team, then advancing to Aptos High and Cal Poly, where he hit .339/.431/.497 with five homers in 189 at-bats as a junior, earning first-team all-Big West Conference honors.

He credits Cal Poly coach Larry Lee with furthering his development, saying, "He taught me I'm the man who controls my swing. He taught me what it takes to become a better hitter."

Crocker's baseball education continued in A's instructional league. "I worked mostly on staying behind the ball and just reacting to the inside pitch," he said.

#### A's ACORNS

- Righthander Michael Ynoa finished his offseason program by throwing well in simulated games, Lieppman said. The A's expect the Tommy John surgery alumnus to engage in full competition this season after sitting out 2011.
- The A's plan to give trade acquisition Miles Head a chance to return to third base. He played first base in the Red Sox system prior to joining Oakland in the Andrew Bailey deal.