

A's News Clips, Monday, February 20, 2012

Oakland A's have plenty to do in camp before opener

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

For those who think spring training is merely for players to knock the winter rust off, consider the A's situation.

Their to-do list includes identifying a starting first baseman and designated hitter, choosing as many as three pitchers for their five-man rotation, finding a closer and sorting out a crowded outfield.

Then consider they have 11 fewer days to make those decisions than they normally would, thanks to a March 28 season opener against the Seattle Mariners in Tokyo.

The A's play their final Cactus League game March 21 and fly to Japan the next day. Were they not heading abroad, they probably would have played their final Cactus League exhibition April 1.

Perhaps that's why A's manager Bob Melvin was on the move during the first pitchers-and-catchers workout Sunday, observing as many players as he could.

"It's one thing if you have a starting group at every position and you're evaluating young guys," Melvin said. "We're going to have some guys that are integral parts of our team that we're going to have to evaluate."

The A's will have 21 Cactus League games on which to base those evaluations before flying to Tokyo on March 22.

Interesting to note is that the A's could have bought themselves another week to sort out their roster. The Mariners were granted permission by Major League Baseball to open camp Feb. 12 to prepare for the Tokyo series.

Oakland, which also opened early in 2008 against the Boston Red Sox and split two games in Tokyo, declined the opportunity.

"I don't think that just because Seattle (reported early) that we needed to," general manager Billy Beane said. "We've been there, we knew what it took to get ready. We took the same amount of days we did last time and did that this time. Ultimately you need games to get ready. Being in camp a week earlier doesn't allow you to play more games."

Melvin noted that the two-game series in Tokyo is followed by an exhibition against Triple-A Sacramento on March 31 and three more exhibitions against the Giants.

The A's can carry expanded rosters in those games and do more evaluating before settling on a final 25 players to resume the regular season April 6 against Seattle.

But that doesn't lessen the work to be done in the desert.

The A's must identify two starters after Brandon McCarthy and Bartolo Colon, and it will be three if Dallas Braden -- working back from shoulder surgery -- isn't ready to go by mid-April.

Two of the contenders, Tom Milone and Brad Peacock, were among the group to throw their first bullpen sessions Sunday.

"I'll try to do good in spring training, keep the ball down and see what happens," Peacock said.

Brandon Allen, Chris Carter and Kila Ka'aihue will battle at first base, with Daric Barton likely a bit behind that group as he recovers from surgery on his throwing shoulder.

The expected signing of Yoenis Cespedes makes for a crowded outfield and likely pushes Seth Smith into a designated-hitter platoon with Johnny Gomes. But even that gets murky if the A's sign free agent Manny Ramirez.

And then there's the search to replace closer Andrew Bailey, traded over the winter to Boston. Melvin named Grant Balfour and Brian Fuentes as "obvious" candidates because of their experience but also mentioned Fautino De Los Santos and Joey Devine.

The wild card is Koji Uehara, whom the A's are believed to be trying to acquire from the Rangers.

"We'll take our time choosing that guy," Melvin said of his closer.

Oakland A's Sean Doolittle looks to change his luck as a pitcher

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Injuries kept Sean Doolittle from showing the A's what he could do as a first baseman.

Now the once highly touted prospect is trying to change his luck as a pitcher, which is no far-fetched idea.

Doolittle, 25, was a combo pitcher/first baseman for the University of Virginia when the A's made him a supplemental first-round pick in the 2007 draft. They kept him at first base, but after three-plus years away from the mound, things came back to the left-hander quickly.

His fastball reportedly hit 97 mph during the fall instructional league.

"I have no idea what to expect from this whole process," Doolittle said. "I feel like I just got drafted."

A torn patella in his knee cost Doolittle most of the 2009 season and all of 2010. He was playing in extended spring training in 2011, two days away from joining Triple-A Sacramento, when he popped a tendon out of place in his right wrist while swinging the bat.

With that injury slow to heal, Doolittle began pondering his future.

"I asked if I could have an opportunity to switch to the mound," he said. "By the end of August, I was a pitcher."

Doolittle left Virginia as the school's career leader in both RBIs (167) and wins as a pitcher (21).

He said he's better able to repeat his mechanics on the mound because he's added weight and strength since college.

"I saw him throw one (time) before we started camp and could see right away he's got the tools to be a pitcher," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "He's left-handed on top of it, and he throws hard. You don't find too many of those guys."

Likely opening-day starter Brandon McCarthy was among the group throwing off the mound Sunday. One pitcher who impressed was left-hander Tom Milone, acquired from Washington in the Gio Gonzalez trade.

Kurt Suzuki caught Milone and compared his change-up to that of fellow A's left-hander Dallas Braden.

"For the first day of camp, to start spotting up like he was is pretty impressive," Suzuki said.

All-time stolen-base king Rickey Henderson is expected to arrive soon and serve as a special instructor for the third straight season. One of Henderson's former A's teammates, second baseman Tony Phillips, visited camp Sunday.

A's Josh Donaldson adds 3rd base to his resume

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Josh Donaldson, as usual, reported to spring camp with the pitchers and catchers. He might be more of a third baseman than a catcher these days, though.

The A's don't have a lot of third-base depth in their system, and Donaldson played third at Auburn. He spent the final month of last season playing third at Triple-A Sacramento, and then he went to the Dominican Republic, where he played third throughout winter ball.

The A's received good reports on Donaldson's play at third, according to manager **Bob Melvin**, and Donaldson's versatility - he can catch, play third, first and outfield - will enhance his chances of earning a big-league spot.

Donaldson, 26, is aware that **Scott Sizemore**, converted from second base last season, is ticketed for Oakland's third-base spot and that **Adam Rosales** fills an infield utility role. But, Donaldson said, "I'm coming in here to find a job, and this spring training, I feel like I have my best opportunity yet to make the team. I want to prove I can play third, I can catch, and if they stick me in the lineup, I can produce."

Donaldson still considers himself primarily a catcher, and the A's backup-catcher spot appears unsettled after **Landon Powell**, the incumbent, came off the 40-man roster in December. Melvin said the spot will be filled based strictly on catching skills rather than overall versatility.

Powell remains the front-runner, despite his roster status, because he is a strong defensive catcher and the A's pitchers love to throw to him. Several have requested in the past two seasons that he be their personal catcher.

Anthony Recker also has a good shot. He was called up last season, rather than Donaldson, who was promoted the previous year.

"Anthony deserved it. He had a great year, and I didn't," Donaldson said. "We'll see what happens. We'll all be fighting from Day 1. I feel like this is a great time for any minor-league guy to break through to Oakland if they can bring some value, because there are so many new players and the team is so young."

Gray's first day: Last year's top draft pick, right-hander **Sonny Gray**, threw a bullpen session on the first day of camp, and Donaldson, who caught him, said, "He's young and can work on some things, but the mechanics, everything I saw, looked good. He has a bright future."

Gray said he was looking forward to watching right-hander **Brandon McCarthy** pitch this spring. McCarthy, the A's likely Opening Day starter, set a franchise record for strikeout-to-walk ratio by a starter last year, 4.92-to-1.

"I've heard such good things about him, and I want to see how he does things, watch him out of the corner of my eye," Gray said.

Gray, 22, said he was falling off to the side too much last year, so he's concentrating on striding directly toward the plate.

Briefly: Catcher **Kurt Suzuki** raved about fourth-starter candidate **Tommy Milone**, whom he caught Sunday. Milone's reputation as a control artist is on the money, Suzuki said. "Little curveball, good changeup, good cutter, and he was throwing everything right there. He never missed across the plate. I was pretty impressed." He compared the left-hander to **Dallas Braden**. ... McCarthy threw his first bullpen session and said he's still searching for a changeup

he feels comfortable throwing. "It's been a two-year fight to find a grip I trust," he said. "I've tried 100 grips the last year." Donaldson caught him and said, "Awesome. He looked great." ... Pitcher **Ian Krol**, suspended the final 2 1/2 months of last season for a homophobic remark on Twitter, will attend the team's minor-league mini-camp that starts Wednesday. Krol, 20, was a seventh-round pick in 2009.

Melvin emphasizes pitcher-catcher relationship

Skipper wastes no time making his mark on club's culture

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- A's skipper Bob Melvin is wasting no time in establishing rules and routines that reflect his managing style.

Tacked to the all-important bulletin board residing in the clubhouse at Phoenix Municipal Stadium is a sign relaying a rather simple message: When traveling the five-minute journey to the club's Minor League facilities, where workouts are being held, no cars allowed. Take a team van or be left behind.

"I'm a timing guy," Melvin said on Sunday, when pitchers and catchers gathered for their first official workout of the spring. "I want to make sure guys are on time. The vans are going to go [at] the times we want them to."

Just the fact Melvin is holding workouts at Papago Park Sports Complex, rather than at Phoenix Muni like in recent years while former manager Bob Geren was at the helm, signals change. The former arena houses six fields, the latter just two.

"You can do more work in a shorter amount of time on multiple fields, and you have a six-pack [of mounds] here, where you're able to see six pitchers at a time -- whereas the other side, you just have two mounds and you pick two guys who you want to see on a particular day. ... I think it's important to get numerous guys throwing at the same time, so our staff can see more."

Sure enough, coaches were seen transitioning from one field to the next on Sunday for a variety of drills, as were the players. More than a dozen pitchers threw bullpens, including Brandon McCarthy, Brad Peacock and 2011 first-round Draft pick Sonny Gray.

The action was preceded by an hour-long meeting that was meant mostly for introductions. Melvin did, though, use the first day to relay the significance of relationships between pitchers and catchers.

"We're trying to cultivate that, let the pitchers know that if they throw the ball and nobody's there to catch it, they're probably going to have to go and pick it up," said Melvin, a former big league backstop himself. "The catchers are an extension of the pitcher, and we want our guys to feel like when a pitcher gives up a run, that's their run, too, on their ERA. I don't want the pitchers thinking they're out there alone."

Melvin and Co. had the opportunity to begin camp nearly a week earlier than they did because of the club's early-season series against the Mariners in Japan. Seattle took advantage of the time, having its pitchers and catchers report Feb. 12. But Melvin decided not to do the same, opting to keep his players on their normal offseason schedule.

"You can do all the work like this to get their arms ready and so forth, but it's when you get into games that you really start to find out about people," Melvin said. "We didn't feel like we needed to go too early. We're talking about two regular-season games, and then we come back and resume exhibition games."

The Melvin-run schedule continues on Monday, when rehabbing hurlers Dallas Braden and Brett Anderson are both slated to throw a bullpen session.

Closer battle one to watch in camp

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Though it will be downplayed in comparison to other competitions brewing in camp, the battle for the A's closer role will, nonetheless, remain an intriguing spectacle.

A's manager Bob Melvin has several options following the winter trade of Andrew Bailey, notably Brian Fuentes -- now wearing Bailey's No. 40 -- and Grant Balfour. Then, there's Joey Devine and Fautino De Los Santos, both of whom could easily grab hold of the job, as well. One thing, at least, is certain: There will only be one winner.

"I like to define the role," Melvin said on Sunday. "I think it's easier on them, knowing when the phone rings. Everybody has a good idea of who's getting up, and guys are able to visualize and get ready for their inning. I think that's something I want them to know."

Fuentes appreciates the system. It was well documented that a lack of one under former skipper Bob Geren last year, combined with further miscommunication problems, led to public criticism by Fuentes. On Sunday, he spoke of its importance.

"I've never met a closer who hasn't liked it that way, or really anyone in the bullpen," Fuentes said. "The eighth- and ninth-inning guys usually like to have that defined role so they can prepare, and stretch out and get ready."

The 36-year-old lefty has the most experience of the bunch, having racked up 199 career saves, including an American League-best 48 in 2009 while with the Angels. He converted 12 of 15 saves last season, and posted a 3.70 ERA in 67 appearances.

Though used mostly in the seventh and eighth innings last season, Fuentes isn't shy about his desire to return to his previous role.

"I want to close," he said. "That's what I feel like I do best, and I know I'm capable of it. It's just about putting myself in that position. Whether that comes about or not, it's not my decision. What I can control is how I throw the ball, so hopefully I pitch well."

Balfour, meanwhile, is also a logical option, though his ability to get a key out or two in the seventh and then pitch the eighth makes him a valuable setup man. Devine enjoyed a remarkable 2008 campaign, with a 0.59 ERA. But he still has yet to showcase consistent health, following his 2009 Tommy John surgery. De Los Santos, though considered the closer of the future, perhaps needs more grooming in a Major League bullpen before being inserted into such a coveted role.

Plenty of time remains, though, before a decision must be made.

"We have many candidates, and we'll discuss amongst the staff where we think we'll need to go," Melvin said. "Typically, when you get into games, your closer's not pitching the ninth inning of Spring Training, anyway. You like getting your veteran guys in there earlier in the game and getting them out of there. It's not until later in spring, for the most part, where those guys are pitching in their actual roles in the games."

Worth noting

- Right-hander Brandon McCarthy, expected to start the regular-season opener in Japan on March 28, was among several A's pitchers throwing bullpen sessions on Sunday.

McCarthy noted that he felt good, but, like most pitchers early in spring, wasn't overly impressed with his stuff. However, he believes he'll have it all together by the time he takes to the mound against the Mariners in Tokyo. It's around that time last year when he was already up to 100 pitches.

His status as the club's Opening Day starter has not been made official, but Melvin has strongly hinted at it more than once.

- Former Oakland player Tony Phillips made a visit to A's camp, bouncing around fields while observing the day's activity.

Oakland A's Spring Training Battles: SPs

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Feb 20, 2012

Last spring, the Oakland A's starting rotation was being featured on ESPN as one of the best in baseball. This year, a revamped starting five will try to surprise the baseball world. We take a look at the candidates to take the ball every

fifth day for Oakland in 2012...

A Look Back At 2011

At the start of the 2011 season, the A's rotation of [Brett Anderson](#), [Trevor Cahill](#), [Gio Gonzalez](#), [Dallas Braden](#) and [Brandon McCarthy](#) was being hyped as one of the top rotations in all of baseball. Injuries and inconsistency knocked the A's from the group of elite rotations, although the rotation did still finish seventh in all of baseball in quality starts and posted a 3.70 ERA. The rotation as it looked on Opening Day didn't last long, however. Gonzalez and Cahill each made all of their starts, but the A's were forced to use 10 starters during the regular season because of injuries. Braden was limited to only three starts before he was lost for the year with shoulder problems and Anderson had a couple of stints on the DL before he succumbed to elbow surgery, having made only 13 starts himself.

McCarthy would finish third on the team behind Gonzalez and Cahill in starts with 25 and Guillermo Moscoso – who was acquired in a minor trade just before spring training – would be fourth on the team with 21 starts. [Rich Harden](#) also chipped in with 15 starts during the second half of the season after missing the first half with injury. Josh Outman (nine starts), Tyson Ross (six starts) and [Graham Godfrey](#) (four starts) would round out the A's rotation for the season.

The A's top starter in 2011 was unquestionably Gonzalez. The left-hander emerged as a rising star with an All-Star campaign that saw him post a 3.12 ERA and strike-out 197 in a career-high 202 innings. He led the A's with 16 wins.

McCarthy was the A's second-best starter. In by-far his best major league season, McCarthy posted a 1.13 WHIP and a 3.32 ERA in a career-high 170.2 innings. He was able to reach his career-high in innings pitched despite missing the entire month of June with a shoulder injury.

Cahill entered the season as the A's Opening Day starter after winning 18 games the year before. He had an up-and-down year, however, and wound-up with a 4.16 ERA in 207.2 innings. Cahill was among the league leaders in ERA through the month of May, but he didn't manage an ERA under 4.00 in June, July or August before finishing the year with a 3.56 ERA in September.

Moscoso had arguably the most surprising season of any member of the A's pitching staff. The right-hander relied on his defense to post a team-best 1.08 WHIP in 125 innings. He struck-out only 71 but walked only 37 and allowed only 98 hits. A flyball pitcher, Moscoso benefited from pitching his home games at the Coliseum.

In six starts, Ross had the best ERA of any A's starter with a 2.61 mark. He only struck-out 18 in 31 innings but used his infield defense to his advantage to limit opposing batters to a .612 OPS. An oblique injury landed him on the DL in late May and he never regained that early season form and spent the rest of the season in the minor leagues.

Outman struggled with his command in his nine starts with the A's – walking 21 in 51.1 innings – but still managed a 3.86 ERA. It was his first season back on the mound after undergoing Tommy John surgery midway through the 2009 campaign. Harden struck-out a team-best 9.91 batters per nine innings, but he also walked 31 in 82.2 innings and was surprisingly hittable, allowing 87 hits and 17 homers. He finished with a team-worst 5.12 ERA. Godfrey made four starts for the A's, including a memorable outing during which he bested [San Francisco Giants' ace Tim Lincecum](#) in front of a sold-out crowd at the Coliseum. Godfrey had a 4.71 ERA in four starts. He also had a four-inning shutout relief appearance versus the [Texas Rangers](#) at the end of the season.

Good-Bye And Hello

The A's 2012 Opening Day starting rotation will bear little resemblance to the 2011 iteration. McCarthy is the only member of the 2011 Opening Day rotation who will be in the 2012 rotation (barring any spring training injuries). Part of the reason for the different look will be because of injuries, as Anderson and Braden will begin the year on the DL. However, trades have also played a large part in the changes.

This off-season the A's bid adieu to 2011 starters Cahill, Gonzalez, Moscoso, Harden and Outman. Cahill, Gonzalez, Moscoso and Outman were all traded and Harden was let-go via free agency (he remains unsigned but he announced last week that he would be undergoing shoulder surgery that will keep him out for the entire 2012 season).

Cahill and Gonzalez were traded in blockbuster deals that saw the A's net seven prospects in return. Five of those prospects were pitchers and three of those pitchers were starters now on the A's 40-man roster – [Jarrod Parker](#), [Brad](#)

Peacock and Tom Milone. All three are in big league camp competing for spots in the A's rotation and all three are among the A's top-20 prospects. Moscoso and Outman were traded in the same deal, as both were shipped to the Colorado Rockies in exchange for outfielder Seth Smith.

The A's signed major league veteran Bartolo Colon to a one-year free agent deal. They also signed minor league free agents Edgar Gonzalez and Fabio Castro this off-season. Both have previous big league experience.

Starting Pitchers Invited To Camp

Brett Anderson*
Dallas Braden*
Fabio Castro
Bartolo Colon*
Sean Doolittle*
Pedro Figueroa*
Graham Godfrey*
Edgar Gonzalez
Sonny Gray
Brandon McCarthy*
Tom Milone*
Jarrod Parker*
Brad Peacock*
Tyson Ross*

**Denotes player on 40-man roster*

Number Of Starting Pitchers Likely On Roster – 5 (not including those who will be on the DL on Opening Day)

Locks To Make The Team

Brett Anderson: It will be several months before the A's see their number one starter pitching in a game that counts. The left-hander underwent Tommy John surgery last season and isn't expected to return to the A's rotation until August, at the earliest. Anderson's rehab is reportedly going well, but recoveries from Tommy John surgery often hit bumps in the road once a pitcher starts throwing off of a mound. If the A's do get eight-to-10 starts from Anderson this season, that will be considered a major victory, as it will give Anderson a good base of innings on which to build in 2013.

Dallas Braden: Like Anderson, Braden will be participating in spring training with the knowledge that he will begin the year on the disabled list. Unlike Anderson, his stay on the DL should be a matter of weeks rather than months. Braden made only three starts last season before a sore shoulder landed him on the disabled list. He eventually had surgery to repair a torn shoulder capsule. His recovery has also gone relatively smoothly and the A's are optimistic that Braden will return by mid-April at the earliest or early-May at the latest. Given the recent surgery and Braden's injury history in general, his workload should be monitored closely throughout the season. The A's may choose to skip Braden or give him an extra day off whenever possible to keep the lefty fresh throughout the season.

Bartolo Colon: The A's acquisition of Colon was one of the more surprising moves of the team's offseason, especially at the time the move was made. When the A's agreed to terms with Colon, they seemingly had an overflow of starting pitching. However, before the Colon deal became official, the A's completed a trade to send two of their 2011 starting pitchers – Guillermo Moscoso and Josh Outman – to the Colorado Rockies, thereby making the need for an experienced starting pitcher such as Colon more acute. Colon had a career renaissance, of sorts, last season with the New York Yankees. The former AL Cy Young award-winner hadn't pitched in the big leagues since midway through the 2009 season, mostly due to arm problems. He had a controversial and cutting-edge stem cell therapy procedure before the 2011 season and it seemingly helped Colon to regain much of the arm strength that he had before the arm troubles began. The veteran got off to a fast start with the Yankees. He had a 3.20 ERA over his first 15 appearances (12 starts) with the Yankees. However, he faded down-the-stretch, posting a 4.96 ERA over his final 14 starts. Much of that fall-off in performance came after Colon spent time on the disabled list with a hamstring injury. The right-hander was a durable pitcher early in his career, but he will turn 39 during the 2012 season and conditioning has

never been a strong suit for him. However, if the A's can get the 164.1 innings of 4.00 ERA and a 135:40 K:BB ratio from Colon that the Yankees received last season, they will take it.

Brandon McCarthy: At this time last season, McCarthy was battling for an opportunity to be the A's fifth starter. Now McCarthy enters the 2012 season as the presumptive favorite to be the A's Opening Day starter. McCarthy earned that privilege thanks to a strong 2011 campaign. In 25 starts (170.2 innings), McCarthy posted a 3.32 ERA and he had a 123:25 K:BB ratio. He had five complete games and allowed only 11 homeruns. McCarthy benefited from pitching his home games at the Coliseum, where he had a 2.65 ERA, but was still solid on the road (3.99 ERA). He was consistent throughout the season, posting ERAs between 3.82 and 2.19 in each month of the season. The A's love the fact that McCarthy fills up the strike-zone and keeps the ball in the ballpark. The biggest question surrounding McCarthy this season is his health. Despite missing five weeks with a shoulder issue in 2011, McCarthy threw more innings than he had since 2005. As with Braden and Colon, the A's will keep a close eye on McCarthy's workload this season.

Favorite For The Final Spots

Graham Godfrey: The 2011 season was the stuff of dreams for the A's right-hander. Godfrey began the year as the odd-man out for a spot in the Triple-A Sacramento rotation and he finished the year with 25 major league innings. In between, Godfrey went 14-3 with a 2.59 ERA in 111.1 minor league innings. For the A's, he posted a 3.96 ERA. Godfrey continued that dream season with four solid outings in the Dominican Winter League. Godfrey made a mechanical adjustment with his release point before the start of last season that gave him more movement on all of his pitches. He doesn't have the same level of raw stuff that some of the A's younger pitching prospects possess, but Godfrey has always been a groundball pitcher with excellent durability and he had improved command last season. If that increased movement and improved command carry over into this season, he could stick as a back-of-the-rotation starter.

Edgar Gonzalez: The last time the A's traded off some of their top starters, they brought in Gonzalez on a minor league deal to give them an experienced arm. He split the 2009 season between Triple-A Sacramento and the big leagues, making seven starts for the River Cats and six starts and 20 relief appearances for the A's that year. Gonzalez was let-go by Oakland at the end of the 2009 season and he spent most of the last two years pitching in the minor leagues (he had one major league appearance for Colorado last season). Gonzalez has been pitching professionally for 10 seasons but he won't turn 30 until May 2013. He is coming off a strong winter league season in Mexico. Gonzalez doesn't project to be more than an innings-eater in the big leagues, but if he can be anything close to a league-average pitcher for the A's in 2012, he will help them not only in 2012 but also down-the-road as the A's will be able to give some of their young prospects more time in the minor leagues to improve. If Gonzalez struggles during spring training or early in the season, however, it could motivate Oakland to insert one of their young prospects into the rotation earlier than they would otherwise prefer to. Gonzalez isn't on the A's 40-man roster, but that shouldn't be a major hurdle for Gonzalez to overcome in making the team if he pitches well during spring training.

Tom Milone: Milone was one of the young pitchers acquired by the A's during their off-season trading spree. The left-hander comes to Oakland from the [Washington Nationals'](#) organization. He had a standout 2011 campaign that was split between Triple-A Syracuse and the major leagues. In Triple-A, Milone posted a 3.22 ERA in 148.1 innings. He struck-out 155 and walked only 16 while allowing just nine homeruns. After a late-season call-up to Washington, Milone made five starts. He had a 3.81 ERA in 26 innings with 15 strike-outs and only four walks. Despite striking out more than a batter an inning in the minor leagues last season, Milone doesn't have over-powering stuff. His best pitch is a change-up and his best asset as a pitcher is his impeccable command. Although Milone has only four years of professional experience under his belt, he is the most polished of the A's young pitching prospects and has likely the least to gain from another season at the Triple-A level. Milone has a similar profile to Braden and, ironically, it could be Braden's early-season DL stint that gives Milone an opportunity in the big leagues at the outset of the season.

Battling For A Spot

Jarrod Parker: Parker was the centerpiece in the package the A's received from the [Arizona Diamondbacks](#) for Cahill during the off-season. He enters the 2012 season as the A's top pitching prospect and he is one of the top pitching prospects in baseball. The right-hander missed all of the 2010 season after undergoing Tommy John surgery midway through the 2009 campaign. After shaking off some early season rust, Parker put together a solid 2011 season with Double-A Mobile. Parker posted a 3.79 ERA with a 112:55 K:BB ratio in 130.2 minor league innings. Parker also made his major league debut at the end of the season, tossing 5.2 scoreless innings in one start. Parker has electric stuff.

Despite being only 6'1", 185 pounds, Parker has a fastball that routinely sits in the mid-90s. He also has a plus slider, a solid curveball and a decent change-up. Parker's command was off at the start of the 2011 campaign, but it improved as the season wore-on. Parker has never pitched at the Triple-A level, but he doesn't have a lot left to prove in the minor leagues. All things being equal, Parker could probably benefit from a few more months of minor league baseball to continue his work on his command and his change-up. Although keeping Parker in the minor leagues for the first month of the season would delay his free agency clock, if he is one of the best starting pitchers in A's camp, Oakland will likely give him a chance in the rotation out of the gate.

Brad Peacock: Peacock was one of the players acquired by the A's from the Washington Nationals for Gio Gonzalez this off-season. The right-hander is one of the A's top pitching prospects and he is coming off of the best season of his professional career. After four mostly mediocre minor league seasons, Peacock shot up the Nationals' depth chart with a spectacular 2011 campaign. He went 15-3 with a 2.39 ERA in 146.2 innings split between Double-A and Triple-A. Peacock had a 177:47 K:BB ratio and he allowed only seven homeruns. He finished the year in the big leagues, where he allowed only a run in 12 innings of work. Peacock has a firm fastball that sits in the 92-94 MPH range and he has a plus knuckle-curveball and a developing change-up. Command has been an issue for Peacock at times during his career and he did walk six in his 12 big leagues innings. Whether Peacock starts the year in the big leagues or in Triple-A will depend a lot on his command during spring training.

Tyson Ross: Each of the past two seasons, Ross has entered spring training as a longshot to make the major league roster and each of the past two seasons he was in the big leagues by mid-April. In 2010, Ross served mostly as a reliever for the A's, but he made six starts for Oakland in 2011. Ross pitched well for the A's last year, posting a 2.75 ERA in 36 innings. However, that momentum was stalled when Ross landed on the disabled list with an oblique injury. The A's anticipated that Ross would return to the major league rotation when he was healthy, but he pitched so poorly during his rehab outings in the minor leagues that he was kept in the minors even after his rehab was over. Ross never got back on-track with Triple-A Sacramento. Although his stuff was mostly fine, Ross' command was erratic during his minor league stint. He pitched better during the Arizona Fall League but it is hard to know which Ross will show up this spring – the one who pitched for the A's early last season or the one who struggled later in the year. Ross has always had unorthodox mechanics and those mechanics have continued to be a work-in-progress throughout his professional career. There are many in the A's organization who believe that Ross' ultimate future is in the back-end of the bullpen but there are others who view the 6'6" right-hander with the hard sinking fastball and sharp breaking ball as a starter.

Looking To Make An Impression

Fabio Castro: Castro has long been a favorite of many fans of minor league baseball because of underdog status. At only 5'7", he doesn't look the part of a major league pitcher but, despite his size, he has 44 big league innings under his belt. The southpaw has been pitching professionally since 2003 and has called several organizations home. In 2011, Castro spent the entire season in the Seattle Mariners' chain, pitching for Triple-A Tacoma. Castro had a 3.63 ERA in 79.1 innings. Out of 24 appearances, Castro made 12 starts. Throughout his career, he has moved back-and-forth between the rotation and the bullpen. It isn't clear where Castro will spend the majority of his time in 2012. Even if the A's do see him as a reliever, they may choose to stretch him out during spring training to give them extra starting pitching depth going into the start of the year. Castro is a three-pitch pitcher. He rarely breaks 90 MPH with his fastball, but he gets good cutting action on the pitch. Castro also features a change-up and a curveball. Despite not being a hard-thrower, Castro has always managed to rack up a decent number of strike-outs. He is tough on left-handed hitters and he could be considered for a left-handed specialist role in the bullpen if the A's decide not to stretch him out as a starter. Command has been an issue for Castro at times and he will need to demonstrate that he can throw strikes consistently to be considered for any role on the A's staff during the 2012 season. Despite pitching professionally for nine years, Castro is only 27.

Sonny Gray: Gray was the A's top pick in 2011 and was the organization's consensus top pitching prospect before the A's acquired Parker this off-season. There isn't much that separates Gray and Parker from a talent perspective, however. Like Parker, Gray has a hard fastball with excellent movement and a wipeout breaking ball. Gray's change-up isn't as advanced as Parker's, however, and that is the pitch that the A's will want Gray to improve on most before he makes his major league debut. The A's will also be looking for Gray to refine his command. Gray has only six weeks of professional baseball under his belt, but he was impressive during that stretch. In five starts with Double-A Midland, Gray allowed only one run on 15 hits in 20 innings. He struck-out 18 and walked six. It is only a matter of time before Gray makes his major league debut, but that timeframe will be based in large part on his progress with his change-up and his overall command. If he shows improvement in both areas during spring training, he could set himself up for a major league debut sometime in 2012.

Here For The Future

Sean Doolittle: This won't be Doolittle's first big league spring training camp, but it will be his first as a pitcher. Formerly one of the A's top position player prospects, Doolittle converted to the mound towards the end of the 2011 season after nearly three years of injuries kept him from competing as a first-baseman/outfielder. Doolittle was a two-way star in college and many scouts believed he was a better pitching prospect than he was a hitting prospect at the time he was drafted in the 2007 supplemental first round. The left-hander made one appearance during the Arizona Rookie League season at the tail-end of the 2011 campaign, but he got his first extended work on the mound during the A's fall Instructional League. He showed impressive velocity and good command during that camp. Doolittle is still working on his secondary pitches, but he is much more advanced than most position players who convert to pitching mid-career. At [Virginia](#), Doolittle was a starter, but the A's may move him to the bullpen to allow him to move up the organizational ladder more quickly. Either way, Doolittle will be in big league camp to get some innings under his belt and to soak up as much information about pitching as he can from the A's big league coaching staff and the team's more experienced pitchers.

Pedro Figueroa: Figueroa missed the last year-and-a-half after undergoing Tommy John surgery during the 2010 season. The hard-throwing left-hander was pitching out of the Double-A Midland rotation at the time of the elbow injury. The A's had hoped he would get back into game action towards the end of the 2011 season but that didn't quite materialize. Figueroa did recover in time to participate fully in the A's fall Instructional League and should enter camp with no restrictions. He has a mid-90s fastball and a sharp breaking slider. Figueroa has been a starter for the vast majority of his career. He is 26 and has only 71.1 innings above the A-ball level under his belt, however, so the A's may decide to move him to the bullpen to speed up his development. In any case, like Doolittle, Figueroa's time in big league camp will be more about learning than competing for a job.