

Oakland A's, Manny Ramirez agree on minor league contract

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

PHOENIX -- The A's agreed to terms with free-agent designated hitter Manny Ramirez on a minor league contract Monday, tying themselves to one of baseball's most productive -- and controversial -- sluggers of all time.

The deal is pending a physical, but Ramirez is expected to report to spring training by the end of this week. He must serve a 50-game suspension for violating Major League Baseball's drug policy for a second time, meaning he would become eligible for a May 30 game at Minnesota, on his 40th birthday.

A's general manager Billy Beane, who had been looking for a veteran D.H. for several weeks, is expected to address the signing with the media Tuesday. If Oakland adds Ramirez to the major league roster after his suspension, his salary is expected to be around \$500,000.

"A guy like that can only help out," second baseman Jemile Weeks said. "Being loose, him having his goofy side -- if he still has it, that helps the camaraderie of the team.—

Ramirez ranks 14th on the majors' all-time list with 555 home runs and carries a .312 career batting average. But considering his age, it's fair to ask how much impact he can make, especially since he'll miss almost a third of the season.

Ramirez hasn't played since last April, when he abruptly retired after playing five games for the Tampa Bay Rays. He tested positive for performance-enhancing drugs for a second time, then gained reinstatement in January when his 100-game suspension was reduced to 50 games.

His signing assures the A's will get plenty of national attention in the next few weeks. They're also expected to finalize a four-year, \$36 million deal with highly touted Cuban outfielder Yoenis Cespedes in the next week or two.

Ramirez brings a carnival-like atmosphere on his own, thanks to his "Manny being Manny" persona and frequent oddball behavior. His effort on the field also has been questioned, raising the question of how he'll affect the A's clubhouse chemistry.

But former A's first baseman Scott Hatteberg, who played alongside Ramirez with Boston in 2001, had nothing but praise for him.

"He's about the best hitter I ever played with," said Hatteberg, who counted Ken Griffey Jr. among his teammates during a 14-year major league career. "I have no doubt he's going to have a great work ethic. He's not a great communicator, but he walks the walk."

Starting pitcher Brandon McCarthy is taking a wait-and-see approach.

"If it's the Manny we all know, it'd be nice -- a middle-of-the-order bat that can make an impact," McCarthy said. "I know it's a long time until we'll get to see him (because of the suspension). I'm curious to see how it all works out."

A's reliever Grant Balfour said he welcomes Ramirez's addition.

"He might have messed up a couple times," Balfour said, "but as long as he's willing to come in here and give it all he's got, and just, you know, stick by the books like we're all supposed to do, it would be awesome to have him around.—

According to a recent Fox Sports report, Ramirez can play in spring training games and extended spring training games while on suspension. He can also train with the major league club or a minor league affiliate during the regular season but must leave before the gates open for a game.

As his suspension nears an end, Ramirez can participate in a 10-game minor league assignment.

The A's seemingly face long odds to compete in the American League West this season. Will they still be close enough to first place to benefit from Ramirez's presence once he returns?

When Cespedes joins the outfield, it will leave Seth Smith and Jonny Gomes as a potential left/right platoon at D.H. What if one or both are hitting well when Ramirez is eligible?

Because he's on a low-cost deal, the A's could simply release Ramirez if they like the way their offense is clicking. Time will tell if this high-profile experiment is worth the fuss.

Oakland A's Brett Anderson gives himself high marks on return

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

PHOENIX -- Brett Anderson took a big step on his comeback trail Monday, throwing off a mound for the first time since undergoing reconstructive elbow surgery.

The left-hander threw 25 pitches -- 10 from in front of the mound, 15 from on top of it -- and stuck with fastballs, but he came out of the session well and looked sharp.

"You would have thought he was rehabbing a knee injury or something, not his arm," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "I didn't expect to see the ball come out of his hand like that."

Anderson also was pleased. Asked what grade he would give the outing, he replied: "A-plus."

But Monday was just the first of several hurdles to clear, as Anderson is well aware. He had the ulnar collateral ligament in his left elbow replaced -- the "Tommy John" procedure -- in mid-July. Recovery generally takes from 12 to 18 months.

Anderson and the team have penciled in July or August as a target return date, but that will depend on how he progresses.

"For the most part, I couldn't ask for a better first time off the mound," he said. "We'll see how my body reacts (Tuesday)."

Throwing on the mound next to Anderson was another starter on the mend -- Dallas Braden, who is coming back from surgery to repair a torn shoulder capsule.

"Everything has been positive in terms of the bounce-back," Braden said. "I've continued to get stronger and continued to do a little more each day."

Melvin has estimated Braden's return anywhere from mid-April to early-May, meaning there's a good chance the A's need to find a substitute starter for the first couple of turns through the rotation.

Melvin was very impressed with left-hander Pedro Figueroa, another pitcher on the comeback from Tommy John surgery. Figueroa, ranked the A's fifth-best prospect by Baseball America before having surgery in 2010, has missed the past season-and-a-half.

The goal is to get catcher Kurt Suzuki more time off this season, Melvin said, and the backup catcher job is up for grabs among Landon Powell, Josh Donaldson and Anthony Recker. Donaldson is also seeing time at third base.

The A's don't have a pure backup third baseman who is major league-ready should starter Scott Sizemore get hurt, though utility man Adam Rosales can play there.

Purdy: Don't get too excited about Manny Ramirez signing with the A's

By Mark Purdy, Mercury News Columnist

You know those times on the freeway when, all of a sudden, cars ahead of you stop for no apparent reason? And you wonder why? And then you go far enough to see that the frustrating backup is simply being caused by rubberneckers slowing down to see a crash by the side of the road?

That's how I feel right now about the people who are excited about this Manny Ramirez deal with the A's. They are rubberneckers. And he is the car crash. Or he will be, soon enough.

Ramirez was looking for a place to land after a lost 2011 season in which he "retired" after he tested positive for banned drugs for the second time in three years. The A's decided to provide the landing place. It may sell them a few extra tickets this summer to those rubberneckers. But Ramirez's recent history shows that it's only a matter of time before he becomes a liability rather than an asset, or is suspended, or gets lost on the way to the Coliseum.

This is why nobody should become too excited about Monday's agreement. In fact, it is probably an overreaction to have any real reaction to the move.

On a practical basis, the decision is non-monumental, cheap and low-risk for the A's. The deal is for one year. They will pay Ramirez just \$20,000 more than the major league minimum salary of \$480,000. If he is a bust, it won't be a huge financial disaster. If he is fabulously great, he will be vastly underpaid.

But he isn't going to be fabulously great. Ramirez will not be eligible to play a major league game for the A's until he finishes serving a 50-game suspension. If there are no rainouts, he will be permitted to suit up for Oakland on May 30. That happens to be his 40th birthday. Yet two years ago at age 38 with the Dodgers and White Sox, his power was already in noticeable decline, with nine home runs in 320 plate appearances.

Logic says Ramirez won't be more powerful or more on top of his game at age 40 -- especially after taking only 17 at-bats last season with Tampa Bay (and accumulating exactly one hit) before announcing his "retirement."

And even if Ramirez can find a way back to respectability as a major league slugger, he probably will find another way to get in trouble and be gone, anyway -- either via suspension or ejection or through obnoxious behavior that forces a midseason trade or giveaway, as occurred with the Dodgers in 2010.

Keep in mind that on Ramirez's final at-bat in L.A., as a pinch hitter, he argued a first-pitch strike and was thrown out of the game. That's your classic latter-career Manny moment, right there. During the 2009 playoffs with the Dodgers, Ramirez famously was pulled from a game in the top of the ninth inning and immediately took a shower instead of sticking around in the dugout to support his Dodgers teammates when they suffered a demoralizing defeat in the bottom of the inning. He shrugged off being in the locker room and missing that collapse by saying: "I caught the highlights."

The man is a character, no doubt, and his presence might have some value as an amusing sideshow unless you actually care about the A's alleged rebuilding plan. Billy Beane, the general manager, has been selling the idea that his drastic offseason choices to deal away top pitchers for young hotshot prospects with potential are calculated. Allegedly, those young hotshots will put the A's on track to become contenders in 2015 or 2016 when they occupy a theoretical new ballpark in downtown San Jose.

But if that plan is for real, where does Ramirez fit in? In the past, Beane has enlisted such veterans as Frank Thomas, Mike Piazza and Nomar Garciaparra to add punch and/or set a professional example for the less-veteran Athletics. However, Ramirez is hardly in the setting-an-example business. And he will take away some at-bats from the younger talents such as Chris Carter, Daric Barton, Brandon Allen and the promising Cuban free agent, Yoenis Cespedes.

What, then, is Ramirez doing in an A's uniform? Other than slowing down the traffic, that is?

By June, it says here, Manny will have a new nickname: The Human Sigalert. And by August, he will be gone. Try to contain your excitement.

Manny Ramirez, A's agree to minor-league deal

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Manny Ramirez - that's right, the dreadlocked designated hitter known for "Manny being Manny" and "Manny-wood" - is now a member of the A's.

Ramirez, who must sit out the first 50 games of the regular season for testing positive for performance-enhancing substances, agreed Monday to a minor-league deal with the team.

The 39-year-old who made his big-league debut in 1993 will sign for no more than \$500,000, prorated to factor in his suspension without pay, a team source said, adding that the deal does not include incentives.

Ramirez is expected to report this week.

Oakland's players had mixed reactions, although they were mostly positive.

"Gosh, in the American League, Manny is about as well-decorated a player as you can find," said outfielder Jonny Gomes, who worked out with Ramirez before the 2011 season. "He's in the top tier of his time."

"Manny ranks as one of the greatest hitters ever," catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "You put a guy like that in the middle of your order, and it makes everyone around him better."

There is little doubt that the A's need power: Ramirez has 555 career homers, eighth most all-time among right-handed hitters. The top career total on the current roster: Gomes' 118.

Left-hander Dallas Braden said that a bat of Ramirez's caliber would bring a different dimension to Oakland's lineup, and he said Ramirez's occasionally goofy behavior will be welcome.

"He'll be just fine here," Braden said. "Obviously, Oakland, over the years, has been known for a freewheeling clubhouse, and we love it when anyone goes out there and enjoys what he's doing. And Manny has no problem enjoying performing and enjoying his performances. So it will be a seamless transition."

Ramirez's positive drug tests, including one with the Dodgers in 2009 for a female fertility hormone that can be used as a masking agent, have sullied his reputation, as have accusations that he has quit on teams, a charge of domestic violence and an incident in Boston in which he pushed over the team's 64-year-old traveling secretary.

So he has plenty of incentive to give his all for Oakland. If Ramirez proves he has something left, he might earn a guaranteed deal for 2013 somewhere. And even if he doesn't put up big numbers, he has an opportunity to help a young team and perhaps rehabilitate his image.

Ramirez has been known for a great work ethic. He also is good with younger players, and the A's have a bunch of those. Key among them: recently signed Cuban outfielder Yoenis Cespedes, who is expected to join the team about the time Ramirez does.

Cespedes speaks little English (Ramirez is bilingual), and he has no experience playing pro ball in the United States. Ramirez, however long he is with the club, might be extremely helpful for the 26-year-old, who agreed to a \$36 million, four-year deal with Oakland last week.

"Comfort level is one of the most important things," Suzuki said. "If Cespedes has a guy who can show him the ropes a little bit, he might perform better."

For the A's, who entered the offseason focused on rebuilding toward a potential future new stadium, signing Ramirez might seem to be a head-scratcher, and one Oakland player said he is concerned that the signing will keep the A's from taking a good look at longer-term DH possibilities, such as Chris Carter and Kila Ka'aihue.

Gomes, a right-handed hitter who was expected to get at-bats at DH, said he won't be affected during the first 50 games, and after that, Gomes said, "I've been a big fan and a friend of Manny's, and if he rakes, we win. If I need to pick up some slack, I'll do that."

Scouts who saw Ramirez during his brief stint with Tampa Bay last year are not certain whether he has the bat speed he once did, and after his long layoff, it's debatable how much he has left in the tank.

"We still don't know what we're getting," pitcher Brandon McCarthy said, "but it will be interesting to see a guy with that kind of pedigree if he's clicking on all cylinders. That would be awesome.

"I certainly get it from the A's perspective: If he comes in and rakes, you're adding an impact bat, and if not, you're not losing anything."

The deal has virtually no risk for the A's. If Ramirez doesn't show much during the spring, at extended spring training and in the 10 minor-league games in which he is allowed to participate, the team simply can release him; ditto if another DH candidate nails down the position by then. If Ramirez shows he's still a threat and he's needed, starting no sooner than May 30 (his 40th birthday), the A's can stick him into the lineup.

Starter Bartolo Colon, who played with Ramirez in Cleveland and Boston, said he is a fan of Ramirez's both personally and professionally and that he is in favor of the move. That echoed the sentiments of another former Ramirez teammate, outfielder Coco Crisp, who said last week that he had enjoyed playing with Ramirez.

The one unusual twist for the A's players is the 50-game suspension.

"That's the thing that is kind of weird," Suzuki said. "You have a guy working out with you all spring, playing games, and then you start the season and he's gone for 50 games, a third of the season.

"Hopefully, when he comes back, we'll be right in it and he'll come in and give us a little added jolt."

Ramirez has not yet had a physical, but the team announced the deal Monday afternoon, anyway, because the contract is not guaranteed.

Manny Ramirez career statistics

Team	G	AB	R	H	HR	RBI	AVG
Indians, 1993-2000	967	3,470	665	1,086	236	804	.313
Red Sox, 2000-08	1,083	3,953	743	1,232	274	868	.312

Dodgers, 2008-10	223	735	130	237	44	156	.322
White Sox, 2010	24	69	6	18	1	2	.261
Rays, 2011	5	17	0	1	0	1	.059
Totals	2,302	8,244	1,544	2,574	555	1,831	.312

Source: Baseball-reference.com

Brett Anderson has an 'A-plus' bullpen session

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Brett Anderson gave himself an "A-plus" on Monday after throwing his first bullpen session since his Tommy John surgery July 14.

Anderson, who could be back in the rotation in the second half of the season, threw 25 fastballs, 10 from the front of the mound and 15 from the rubber.

"For a first time, that's about as good as you could hope for," Anderson said.

Anderson will throw bullpens about once a week initially, according to manager **Bob Melvin**, who was impressed with Anderson's initial session.

"You'd think he was rehabbing a knee injury, not his arm," Melvin said. "I wasn't expecting to see the ball come out of his hand like that."

Anderson and **Dallas Braden** threw next to each other at the Papago Park minor-league complex; Braden also is recovering from surgery, a May 17 procedure to repair his left shoulder capsule. He also threw 25 fastballs.

With Anderson grading himself an A-plus, what was Braden?

"Off the charts," Braden said. "Whatever one step is above (Anderson), I was that."

Braden could join the rotation as early as April 16. Melvin has said anywhere from mid-April to early May.

Braden said the most important thing is that he is bouncing back well between throwing sessions, and he said he feels he is gaining strength each time out. He's now working on throwing strikes.

Briefly: **Jarrod Parker**, acquired in the **Trevor Cahill** deal, threw his first bullpen session of camp and said, "It went great." **Kurt Suzuki**, who caught him, said, "He's another one where when he tells you where he's going to throw it, he does it. These guys are all so young, and they're spotting up." ... Suzuki said reliever **Grant Balfour** looks even more ready to go this camp than he did last spring, calling his stuff outstanding. ... Melvin got his first look of the spring at **Bartolo Colon** and said, "How he makes the ball move like that, I don't know. He has a quick arm, and at this age (38), he remains a power pitcher. That's an amazing accomplishment this far along in his career." ... Reliever

Joey Devine threw 30 pitches, mixed up fastballs and breaking pitches and said he feels great physically. He's an option for closer at some point. ... Melvin said he might try to get Suzuki more time off this season, especially with the A's playing so many day games.

Manny being many: Notes on A's signing Ramirez

John Shea, Chronicle Columnist

A few thoughts on Manny Ramirez joining the A's as we await his 50-game suspension:

-- Ramirez follows in a long line of past-their-prime hitters whom general manager Billy Beane acquired on the cheap, a "Moneyball" tactic in which high value is sought at low risk. In order: Rickey Henderson, Kevin Mitchell, Tony Phillips, Tim Lincecum, John Jaha, Ron Gant, David Justice, Gant, Eric Karros, Frank Thomas, Mike Piazza, Mike Sweeney, Thomas, Jason Giambi, Nomar Garciaparra and Hideki Matsui.

-- The best bang-for-your-penny guys were Jaha in 1999 (.276, 35 homers, 111 RBIs) and Thomas in 2006 (.270, 39 homers, 114 RBIs).

-- If the A's were so willing to sign Ramirez, why didn't they take a flier on Barry Bonds? How awesome would it have been if Bonds suited up in green and gold and played a pigeon's journey from McCovey Cove? In 2008 and 2009, he would have been at least as good as Ramirez is now. Heck, who's to say Bonds, at 47, isn't still a better hitter? Plus, he's not suspended.

-- If Ramirez quits on the A's like he quit on other teams, who's the team sheriff who'll attempt to get him back on track? A good guess: Jonny Gomes. Unless Manny replaces Gomes on the roster. Then it would be Dallas "Get off my mound" Braden.

-- It's probably not a good idea to place Yoenis Cespedes' locker next to Ramirez's.

-- More than one scout has suggested that without performance-enhancing drugs, Manny turns mini.

-- Big difference between Matsui and Manny: Matsui would speak with any reporter of any background at any hour. Manny would blow off the media for months at a time.

-- Where have you gone, Chris Carter?

-- No certainty that Ramirez will ever play for the A's. His contract isn't guaranteed, and if the A's have a suitable right-handed designated hitter May 30, when Ramirez will be eligible, he could be released. Then again, Manny being Manny, he could disappear long before then for no reason.

Drumbeat: Manny Ramirez agrees to a minor-league deal with A's

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Phoenix, 2/20/2012, 12:22pm

As I reported was likely last Wednesday, the A's have come to terms with Manny Ramirez on a minor-league deal – and the contract will be worth no more than \$500,000, I'm told, and it could be a little less. There will be no

incentives package. The A's were the only real option for Ramirez, as the deal demonstrates, but it's an opportunity to resurrect his career or, at least, polish his image a bit before retiring for good.

Ramirez, who will be 40 in May, is considered one of the great right-handed power hitters of all time, with 555 career homers, but his reputation has taken a hit in recent years with positive tests for performance-enhancing substances and accusations that he has quit on teams. So he's something of a controversial addition, but whatever critics might say about Ramirez's past or about his current condition (I hear mixed things about his potential to come back after sitting essentially a year), the A's aren't risking anything.

Ramirez must sit out 50 games for violating the drug policy, and if the A's find a better DH option from among their current cast in the meantime, they can just release him. If he shows he can still be a threat in the middle of the lineup during that time, well, the A's certainly could use that. Plus, the A's are always searching for right-handed power.

The news was greeted with mixed results in Oakland's clubhouse. Bartolo Colon, who played with Ramirez in Cleveland and Boston, was happy with the news – he says the two are friends and he thinks highly of Ramirez both personally and professionally. Dallas Braden and Kurt Suzuki like the idea of being able to add a bat of that caliber to Oakland's lineup in May, although Suzuki said it will be weird to spend all of spring training with a player and then see him go away for nearly a third of the season. Coco Crisp, like Colon a former teammate of Ramirez's in Cleveland and Boston, was very much in favor of playing with Ramirez again when I spoke to Crisp last week.

Another player expressed concern that some of the younger A's hitters won't get nearly as much of a look with Ramirez needing to also get at-bats; with the team in rebuild mode, the idea of adding a 39-year-old who might not have much left was a head-scratcher.

Ramirez's arrival – he'll need to pass a physical before the deal is official and I hear that is expected to happen before the end of the week – will present a challenge for Bob Melvin, who will have to juggle many players around the DH and outfield spots to find time for all of them. Daric Barton is limited to DHing until his surgically repaired shoulder can handle throwing, and the A's need to see what he has offensively after a poor 2011. The team also planned to get a long look at Kila Ka'aihue at DH, and Chris Carter remains the team's elusive power prospect – he hasn't produced consistently in the big leagues, but the organizational people all believe he will be a beast if given time to adjust.

Adding Ramirez does put the A's into the spotlight a bit, something no one expected this season. And a team that looked as if it might be deadly dull a month ago is suddenly now pretty fascinating with Ramirez and the signing of Cuban star Yoenis Cespedes. The next few days could be something of a sideshow, in fact. Ramirez's signing means no Hideki Matsui for the A's, and a few players had hoped to see Matsui back with the club this year.

Ramirez is allowed to play in all spring games, including the two exhibition games in Japan. He also may attend extended spring training, but he will be able to get in 10 minor-league games before he is eligible to play in a regular-season big-league game.

Manny signs Minor League deal with A's

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- This isn't another story of Manny being Manny -- at least not yet.

For now, it's just about Billy Beane being Billy Beane.

The A's general manager has a well-documented history of making bold moves -- some brilliant, others bewildering and occasionally brash. Perhaps a new word will have to be created for his most recent transaction, which was finalized on Monday, when the A's announced the signing of embattled slugger Manny Ramirez to a Minor League deal.

MLB.com confirmed that the 19-year veteran will earn no more than \$500,000 -- just over the league minimum, as expected -- and will report to camp by week's end.

Ramirez will be utilized by the A's as a designated hitter, but not before serving a 50-game suspension stemming from his second violation of MLB's Joint Drug Prevention and Treatment Program, meaning he won't be paid or allowed to participate in a game until as early as May 30 -- his 40th birthday.

In the meantime, Ramirez's new teammates are anticipating help in ways not just seen at the plate.

"From an organization standpoint, you always want to put your team in the best position to win," A's pitcher Dallas Braden said. "If right now that means bringing in somebody who could potentially help the molding of the organization and its young stars, you want to do that as well, and I think that's what he offers. It's almost two birds with one stone. We can bring in a guy who can still perform and a guy who can show these guys how to go about their business at a perennial All-Star level.

"It's something we need here. While we've had tremendous leaders in the past, they've been more of the lead-by-example types, like Mark Ellis."

Ramirez's reputation -- along with the pair of drug violations, he was also formally charged with domestic violence last year -- understandably led to little interest from other clubs. But the A's never shied away, and his signing equates to the ultimate no-risk investment.

If at any time Ramirez acts up or fails to give the A's the type of performance they're expecting from a right-handed power bat, the club can simply release him. If, instead, he resurrects his reputation and career -- even perhaps restoring enough value to lend the A's trade bait near the non-waiver Trade Deadline -- all the better.

Oakland enters camp without a proven bat in the middle of the order and is coming off a season in which it ranked 12th in the American League in runs. Much is expected of Yoenis Cespedes, whose four-year, \$36 million deal with the A's should become official soon, but it's worth remembering that the Cuban defector has never faced Major League pitching.

Then there are Seth Smith, Coco Crisp and Jonny Gomes, who, though capable of bringing in runs, don't combine for the power residing in the lineups of AL West rivals Texas and Los Angeles.

Ramirez doesn't represent a quick fix, but he carries an impressive resume. Through 19 seasons, the 12-time All-Star is a career .312 hitter with 555 home runs -- good for 14th on the all-time list -- and 1,831 RBIs.

"He's one of the greatest right-handed hitters I've seen in my lifetime, and I hope he's got a lot left in the tank," Jemile Weeks said. "He's had some time off, and whether that helps or hurts, we hope it's a positive thing. I just think the addition of him can help out, no matter the upside on the field."

Ramirez most recently went 1-for-17 in five games last season for Tampa Bay before retiring rather than serving a 100-game suspension that was ultimately cut in half.

A first-round Draft pick of the Indians in 1991, Ramirez spent the first eight years of his Major League career with Cleveland before signing a free-agent deal with Boston, where he played for seven-plus seasons. He also spent time with the Dodgers and White Sox before his short stint with the Rays.

It was during Ramirez's time with the Dodgers that A's first baseman Brandon Allen, then with Arizona, encountered the slugger a handful of times on the basepaths.

"From talking to him a few times at first base, you can tell he's obviously a funny guy," Allen said. "He's a genuine guy also. He's down to earth, just as normal as anybody else. He's a great player and hopefully a great teammate. I believe age is nothing but a number. If you can hit, you can hit, and he was born to hit."

"Right now is a fun and exciting time to be in our organization, because moves like this are being made," Braden said. "We're retooling and reshaping the foundation of the organization. Any time you can bring somebody like that in, with the resume he has in tow, it's going to impact the younger guys."

Perhaps, even, in more ways than expected. With Ramirez on board, concerns could be raised about the possibility of younger hitters not getting as much of a look during Spring Training -- particularly those fighting for the DH spot that Ramirez won't immediately be allowed to occupy.

Thus arises a challenge for manager Bob Melvin, who will be faced with a juggling act of sorts with several contenders for the DH, first-base and outfield spots. Kila Ka'aihue was expected to get a long look at DH, and Chris Carter remains in the mix as well. Moreover, Daric Barton has no choice but to DH until mid-March, when his surgically repaired right shoulder is supposed to be ready for throwing again.

Nevertheless, Ramirez's looming presence puts to rest any speculation surrounding the A's interest in bringing back Hideki Matsui or signing Magglio Ordonez or Johnny Damon. However, the club remains open to bolstering its bullpen in the next week and has been linked to Texas' Koji Uehara, along with free-agent lefty Mike Gonzalez.

"Nothing surprises me anymore," Weeks said. "I like what we're doing. Manny is a clubhouse guy, and I think, for this type of team, a lot of people aren't expecting much out of us and guys might put too much pressure on themselves to try to perform. He's going to be the one keeping us relaxed and a guy who's going to put fans in the seat, along with it."

A's hoping they get to see talented Manny

By Richard Justice / MLB.com

One of these days, Manny Ramirez may look back on his career and be filled with regret. He might wish he'd worked harder, been a better teammate and built a reputation worthy of all that talent.

Let's begin there. He could have been one of the all-time greats. He was blessed with quick hands and lightning-fast reactions. He made a very hard game look easy.

He AVERAGED 36 home runs between 1995 and 2008. His OPS was 1.013 in that time. Barry Bonds and Albert Pujols were a bit better, but during Manny's best years, he was in every debate about baseball's best player.

Unfortunately, he may never get the credit he deserves for being a great player. Some will debate whether he was malicious or just a bit different. Regardless, there are former managers and teammates who believed he just didn't care about anything other than money.

Now, he's 39 years old and seemingly desperate to play. Maybe, just maybe, the A's are getting him at the right time. He's a no-risk gamble. He's no longer significant enough to be a distraction, so Billy Beane can only win. If Manny can still play, he'll be a great bargain. If he can't, he'll be sent packing.

The A's won't have to gauge Manny's moods, or wonder whether Manny will be a bad influence on their young players. Manny will either do the right thing, or Manny will be gone.

There's no way of knowing if he has anything left in the tank. He's three years removed from his last really productive season and four years removed from the last time he played more than 104 games.

It could be a good sign that he wants to play badly enough to take a contract that'll pay him only \$500,000. To get that, he has to make the club first, and then serve a 50-game suspension before being eligible to play in the Majors.

Manny has made more than \$200 million in his 19 seasons, and his reputation is that he's a cautious spender. If he's finally at the point where he's playing for love of the game, he might be able to squeeze in another productive season or two.

There I go with the optimistic Spring Training stuff again. Manny has a long history of doing the wrong thing, and that's not even counting the two positive tests for banned substances.

He drove the Red Sox crazy at times with his lack of hustle and mysterious injuries. Once he landed with the Dodgers, he seemed to be a completely different person, and their coaches rave about how he behaved himself and set a great example in the clubhouse and on the field.

Only Manny would know whether he was campaigning for a new contract. Regardless, he ended up wearing out his welcome there, too.

The Dodgers came away convinced Manny was an asset as long as his team was in contention, but that doesn't explain his behavior with the Red Sox. So, maybe there's no way of knowing when Manny will decide to be Manny.

Now, his career is hanging by a thread. He'll be 40 years old by the time he serves a 50-game suspension, and who knows how long it'll take him to play himself into shape? The A's may not even need him, especially if some of those youngsters -- Collin Cowgill, Seth Smith, Josh Reddick, etc.-- are productive.

Again, though, Beane is risking nothing, and Manny is just two years removed from a .409 OBP in 265 at-bats. He homered just nine times that season, but there's no way of knowing if his heart was in it.

He has been one of those guys who made the game more interesting for those of us who cover the game. He was ALWAYS a story because he'd either seemingly turned over a new leaf or was doing something to call attention to himself.

After sitting out virtually all of last season after learning he'd tested positive again, this season would appear to be his chance to write a different kind of ending to a career that should have been so much more.

The A's have no way of knowing which Manny they'll get, and this time it doesn't matter. This time, it's all about Manny not being Manny.

Lefties Anderson, Braden throw off mound

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- From afar, it appeared to be just another ordinary spring scene in the desert -- a pair of pitchers throwing off the mound with a handful of coaches and a couple of fans and media members watching on.

And it would have been, had the pitchers not been lefties Brett Anderson and Dallas Braden.

For the former, it marked his first bullpen session since undergoing Tommy John surgery in July. And, for the latter, it was his fifth following a May shoulder procedure. Each threw 25 pitches -- 10 from the front of the mound and 15 off the rubber.

Anderson gave his efforts an "A-plus," while Braden said, "Whatever one step above that is, I was that."

That's encouraging news for the A's, who are poised to have Braden back in the rotation by early May and Anderson in tow in August.

"Today was good," Anderson said. "I didn't know what to expect from throwing off the mound for the first time. Adrenaline was raised and I probably threw a couple too hard, but for the most part, I probably couldn't ask for a better first time off the mound. The true test will be to see how the body reacts tomorrow, but for the first time it was about as good as you can feel."

And look, apparently.

"I don't want him to read this," manager Bob Melvin said, "but it looked like he was rehabbing a knee and not his arm. I didn't expect the ball to come out of his hand like that on the first day. It certainly seems like everything's tightened up in there pretty good, and the credit goes to him for how well he's rehabbed."

The plan for Anderson, as well as Braden, is to throw one bullpen a week until further notice.

"I feel like every day we're making progress in terms of being able to stretch it out a little farther, put a little more on it, and the biggest area of focus is the bounceback," Braden said. "Everything has been positive thus far in terms of that. I've continued to get stronger."

The A's southpaw has yet to throw a changeup, since his goal is to resume fastball arm speed. That's currently a work in progress -- at a pace the ultra-competitive Braden would hasten if given the chance.

Said the lefty: "We've had a couple of sit-down meetings on how Dallas needs to approach his effort level, and I tell [Melvin], 'Look, I got lucky. I never threw 95, so it's not like I'm going to get back to throwing 95. Why don't you just let me muscle up my 88 at any point in time?,' and they're going, 'No, no, you're 88 could hurt you right now.'"

So, Braden will keep to doctor's orders, all the while acting as a rehab buddy to Anderson.

"Him and I have kind of unconsciously come closer together just because of going through this process together," Braden said. "We have those days where we give each other that internal high five, and then look at each other when it doesn't go so good and give that internal, 'I hate life right now,' and we each understand, so it's nice."

Major Lee-ague: The Manny show comes to Oakland

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 2/20/2012, 11:32am

MLB.com has confirmed that Manny Ramirez has signed a Minor League deal with the A's, worth approximately \$500,000 — just over the league minimum of \$480,000, as expected. More to come on MLB.com soon, but this news now rules out any speculation about a potential Hideki Matsui return or Magglio/Damon signing.

Manny Ramirez, A's reach deal

By JANIE McCAULEY, ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHOENIX — Manny Ramirez and the Oakland Athletics have reached agreement on a minor league contract.

The A's announced the deal Monday. Ramirez is expected to report to spring training by the end of the week.

The 12-time All-Star is due to serve a 50-game suspension for his second positive drug test before he can play for the A's. Barring rainouts, his first game could be May 30 — on his 40th birthday.

Ramirez ranks 14th on the career list with 555 home runs. This would be the 20th major league season for Ramirez, a career .312 hitter with 1,831 RBIs.

Leading Off: A's should expect Ramirez's best effort

Victor Contreras, Sacramento Bee

A's general manager Billy Beane found enough change between the couch cushions in Lew Wolff's office Monday to make a small purchase at baseball's surplus store.

Manny Ramirez, a 12-time All-Star with a career .312 batting average and 555 home runs, had a little dust on him after being shelved for nearly one year. But, with a clearance price tag of \$500,000, Beane and the cost-conscious A's couldn't resist.

How could they? Signing Ramirez to a minor-league contract is the ultimate low-risk, high-reward gamble. If he fails to produce or causes problems, the A's can waive him without getting hurt financially.

He can put up big numbers and double, if not triple, his value.

Of course, there's the matter of Ramirez's 50-game suspension, which will keep him stuck in a batting cage until May 30 — Ramirez's 40th birthday — barring rainouts.

But by then, the A's could be 10 games back and need a gate attraction. Who better than Ramirez? He can be as accommodating as he can be moody.

Beane and the A's, however, should expect nothing but Ramirez's best effort. Earning just enough money to keep his million-dollar shoes polished this season, Ramirez should use every at-bat in 2012 as a public audition for any American League teams looking for a designated hitter next season.

The only question is where will Ramirez start once activated. The A's may want to see him in action before buying his contract.

How fun would it be for River Cats fans to see Ramirez take his first cuts at Raley Field?

Note to River Cats staff: Order the "RC" dreadlocks hats now.

It's worth the risk.

What to watch

NBA, Kings at Miami, 4:30 p.m., CSNCA, NBATV: Ending a five-game losing streak will be tough against the Heat.

Today's poll

What do you think of A's signing Manny Ramirez?

- It's worth the risk
- Waste of \$500,000

Vote above or leave your comments in the comments field; or go to www.sacbee.com/sports

Monday's results

Should the Giants place a statue of Barry Bonds outside AT&T Park?

- Yes: 43%
- No: 57%

Total votes: 453

Column: Braun's tale is spring training's juiciest

By JIM LITKE, AP Sports Columnist

Of all the story lines threading their way across spring training, Ryan Braun's is the most delicate, not to mention the juiciest.

Braun is scheduled to report to Milwaukee Brewers camp Friday, coming off the best season of his career and still awaiting word on whether he'll be suspended for the first 50 games of this one. To say he's had an awkward offseason doesn't tell the half of it.

Braun learned about his positive test in October and, without breathing a word of it, was voted the National League MVP in November.

In December, he confirmed the positive test in response to an ESPN report, maintained his innocence and has done an admirable job of laying low ever since.

Last month alone, Braun filed his appeal, showed up at the baseball writers' dinner in New York to collect his MVP hardware and bowed out of the "Brewers On Deck" fan festival with little more than a peep. All that changes the day he reports to Maryvale Park in Phoenix.

Not surprising, Brewers manager Ron Roenicke was hoping for the best while at the same time bracing for an entirely different outcome.

"He's been doing good all winter through this," Roenicke said Monday. "He's excited to get going in spring training, and hopefully the outcome will be how we all want it.

"I know everybody thinks it's really hard but it's not something that I dwell on," the manager added a moment later. "I know it happens during the course of a season where you lose key players and you have to move on. It's part of baseball. Every year somebody goes down who you're not expecting, you miss them for months or you miss them for an entire season and you deal with it."

If it's any consolation to either man, there will be plenty of distractions available elsewhere. Around the same time as Braun shows up, 40-year-old, two-time offender Manny Ramirez is supposed to report to the A's camp some 10 miles away.

And the soap operas already unfolding on the other side of the country—one featuring new Boston manager Bobby Valentine and his truculent Red Sox team; the other pitting new Marlins manager Ozzie Guillen against his truculent superstar, Hanley Ramirez—are sure to siphon off their fair share of reporters.

Expect plenty of dispatches, too, heralding the American League West as the new center of power, now that Albert Pujols is an Angel and the Rangers handed over nearly \$108 million for the right to talk to and then sign Yu Darvish, the latest Japanese import.

Bet Braun goes through the ringer first.

Nearly three dozen major leaguers have been suspended after testing positive since 2005 and not one has overturned the verdict on appeal.

All told, 11 MVPs from the past four decades have been linked to performance enhancers at one time or another during their careers, but only seven-time winner Barry Bonds has shown up at spring training the season after receiving one with a PED cloud hanging over his head.

And you probably remember how that went. One year, he scolded reporters for scaring his kids; another year he dismissed all the investigators from MLB looking into steroid use as Keystone cops.

"Let them investigate. Let them, they've been doing it this long," Bonds said. "It doesn't weigh on me at all—at all. It's just you guys talking."

Braun is a different guy altogether. He says he's avoided giving his side of the story for fear of being a distraction, and his supporters hint that when the case becomes public, it will be different in both fact and substance than any one that's gone before it. Until then, they're asking everybody to withhold judgment.

In the meantime, it's left the field wide open to speculation. He's promised to address the matter thoroughly once the decision by baseball arbitrator Shyam Das is issued and then plans to be done with it.

Yet even if Braun is suspended, he can still train with the Brewers and play in Cactus League games, which opens him up to questions from fans who can be less deferential and a whole lot more insulting. Either way, it's likely to make for an interesting few weeks.

MLB likes to say the steroid era is effectively over because of its tightened-up drug testing program, but that's probably far from true, given the range of new drugs and masking substances that are constantly being developed to replace the old performance enhancers.

But the reaction to Braun, who came off as one of the good guys in baseball before the positive test, will tell us a lot about whether fans think the era is over, too. It means there's one less guy left to bust that would make most fans give a damn.

Manny Ramirez says he's signing with Oakland Athletics, will have to serve 50 game suspension

Slugging outfielder/DH has 555 career home runs

BY BERNIE AUGUSTINE / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

The Oakland Athletics are taking a chance on Manny Ramirez.

The 39-year-old Ramirez, who is obligated to serve a 50-game ban (without pay) for violating the league's drug policy for a second time, told ESPN that he and the AL West team have come to terms on a deal.

The Associated Press reported Sunday that Ramirez would agree to a deal with Oakland for slightly more than the league minimum of \$480,000. The AP also reported that Yoenis Cespedes — a Cuban defector outfielder who signed a four-year, \$36 million deal with the club last week — had expressed an interest in playing with Ramirez.

Ramirez retired from baseball last season rather than serve a 100-game suspension for violating the league's drug policy. Major League Baseball announced in December that Ramirez had applied for reinstatement. Since he sat out most of last year his suspension was trimmed to 50 games.

Barring any rainouts, Ramirez could return to the field for Oakland June 2 in Kansas City.

FoxSports.com reported that Ramirez would be able to play in spring training games with any club that signed him and could continue to work out with the team once the season begins as long as he left the ballpark before the gates opened and participated in extended spring training games.

A career .312 hitter with 1,831 RBI and 555 homers (14th all-time), Ramirez has played for the Indians, Red Sox, Dodgers, White Sox and Rays over his 19 major league seasons.

Ramirez, who will turn 40 in May, had drawn interest from the Toronto Blue Jays and the Baltimore Orioles, but both clubs opted to pass on him.

The 10 best things about being an A's fan

By 'Duk | [Big League Stew](#), yahoosports.com

The request we're sending to bloggers of all 30 teams this spring is a simple one: What are the 10 best things about being a fan of your favorite team? What features of the franchise have you excited for opening day and what keeps you coming back year after year?

*Over the next few weeks, we'll give each of the 30 teams a day in the spotlight, showcasing the icons and traditions that make each big-league hamlet special. Up next is our pal **Ben Koo** of [Awful Announcing](#), [Bloguin](#) and [Koo's Corner](#).*

1. Unexpected years of contention: Baltimore, Kansas City and Pittsburgh? I just don't know how you do it. Sure, the A's are constantly in a state of roster flux, and I don't know if any team has a shorter average player tenure than the A's. But what I've learned and enjoyed over the years is that no franchise holds the ability to randomly compete in a year in which they're deemed to be irrelevant as a playoff contender.

The 1999, 2005 and perhaps even the 2002 team from "Moneyball" were all squads that didn't really have any business north of .500. Even when the A's are deemed to be in rebuilding mode, we're able to dream that the onset of highly touted prospects, and some veteran throwaways could somehow combine to form a 90-win team. On paper, the team we're fielding this year should be terrible, but perhaps the stars will align again. There's always hope.

2. We have a legitimate reason to hate Bud Selig: A's fans in the East Bay don't want them to move to San Jose. But fans to the south and the city of San Jose are all for it. Regardless of your take on the relocation, MLB's nearly three-year decision process is not only a huge abomination in leadership gone wrong, but a massive hindrance to allowing the A's to increasing their payroll and bolstering their roster.

Selig is a guy who is often begrudged by baseball fans. When pressed as to why the stodgy, awkward-looking commissioner can be public enemy No. 1 to baseball fans, all too often the case to condone his stewardship of MLB is very flimsy. However, after yet another winter of dismantling what looked to be a contending team and spending another year in relocation purgatory, there just isn't any excuse or explanation of why such a pivotal decision should take this long.

3. The best bang for your buck in all of MLB: Compared to their rivals across the bay, the A's are lacking on a lot of fronts on the game-day experience. There is no neighborhood or watering holes around the stadium, the stadium itself is one of the worst in the league, and the local businesses and residents just don't fill up the stadium like across the bay.

With that in mind, I'm unaware of any team that goes to the lengths of the A's in terms of special promotions to get fans to the park. Free parking Tuesdays! Dollar hot dogs! Two-dollar ticket Wednesdays! Beerfest! Tickets with all-you-can-eat food included in the ticket!

Plus, promos that include a handful of awesome bobbleheads, fireworks nights you can watch while sitting on the field, root beer floats served by the players, and (OMG!!) Coco Crisp Chia-Pet day. Outside of actually paying me to go to a game, the A's do more to solicit my business than perhaps even McDonald's when the McRib is back.

4. The Battle of the Bay: For six days a year, the Bay Area is a great place as a sports fan. Not particularly known as a haven of sports zealotry, those six games bring out a passion, competitiveness and excitement level that is rarely seen in the Golden State. The crowds are lively, the bars are packed, fans on both sides are chirping, and for just a quick minute, it feels like that magical October in 1989.

Unlike other rivalries pitting teams from the same geographic area against each other, the cultural and social divide between the fans of these two teams is great. That said, these games, while competitive and significant, typically don't erode into an unfriendly environment, as both fan bases seem to mesh well in both ballparks and are usually treated to some very competitive baseball.

5. You can get away with anything: Are you a mischievous rabble rouser? Well, Oakland just might be your place. A certain team across the bay will charge you \$80 to tailgate as they require an additional parking space and even still, you're not really given the liberty to stretch out and descend into debauchery.

The Coliseum parking lot features plenty of spaces to play. (Ben Koo)Not in Oakland, where the parking spaces to cars ratio is about 12:1 meaning you can setup whatever drinking game or slosh-ball field your heart desires. Need to relieve yourself? Having drastically reduced the number of porta-potties and locations they're located at in 2006, parking lot etiquette has evolved (or devolved, if you will) to allow a more organic way of relieving yourself, if so inclined.

With Oakland's close proximity to Hamsterdam and Berkeley, it seems as if the parking lot and the stadium itself have been annexed as a ganja-friendly destination. It's common place that on a trip to the Coliseum you're likely to see a higher amount of people hitting the green than players in green getting hits off the other team.

Even if you're not a big trouble-maker, the ability to sit wherever you want is a nice perk. The stadium is usually half empty and fans are late to arrive and early to leave, in addition to a good chunk of fans spending their time at the various watering holes the stadium has to offer. Out of the last two dozen or so games I've attended, I have only sat where my ticket was only a handful of times. There is something uniquely rewarding in spending \$10 for a ticket and sitting in a \$50 seat or even finagling your way into a luxury box.

6. "Moneyball": You're probably a tad bitter. We didn't really win anything, yet we had a best-selling book penned about one of the most memorable years in our history. Hollywood then double-downed on the book with an awesome movie. Who knows if we'll ever win another World Series in my lifetime, but for two hours, I can mentally escape the drain of being a fan and celebrate what was truly one of the more remarkable sports stories to take place in my lifetime. Have fun watching "Angels in the Outfield," Anaheim.

7. Close games: We may not win a lot, but rarely do the A's really get pummeled. With a philosophical preference for starting pitching, a strong bullpen and patient hitters, the A's are almost perennially a team that finds themselves in close, low-scoring games. In fact, last year through 47 games, more than 1/4 of the A's games ended up going extra innings, which is by no means good for your health. It's a blessing and a curse, as the A's are usually leading by just enough to blow it late or within striking distance for some late-game heroics that often never come.

Before she made a mint selling cookies, Mrs. Fields was an Oakland ballgirl.**8. We've Got Characters:** Who is this foxy former A's ball girl below? Why that's none other than Mrs. Fields, who perfected her craft of baking delicious cookies during her time in Oakland, where she baked for those hard to bribe umpires.

MC Hammer worked in our press box growing up, the guy who invented propeller hats drunkenly walks the stadium known as Banjo Man (often mistakenly believed to be a hobo), and Tom Hanks sold soda in the bleachers back in the day.

There is nothing wrong with being a bit eccentric in Oakland as evidenced by the likes of Rickey Henderson, Catfish Hunter, Bill King and Barry Zito. I wouldn't have it any other way.

9. The upside of Yoenis Cespedes: Starting in 2003, the A's have only had one player reach 30 home runs and 100 RBIs, and that was back in 2006 with Frank Thomas. Since then, the middle of the A's lineup has been an abyss, featuring the likes of unfulfilled potential like Jack Cust, or washed-up veterans like Mike Piazza, Nomar Garciaparra and Hideki Matsui. Outside of some speed at the top of the lineup, there really hasn't been much offensively to get excited about or sell any tickets.

Enter the unexpected addition of Cespedes, who depending on who you trust, will either be as bad of an investment as Dell in the mid-2000s or could end up being the masher needed to contend with higher payroll clubs in the division.

I'm not going to pretend that I have the answer here, but it's been so long since I've been able to drink the Kool-Aid of an A's power hitting star. I'll certainly drink up (with irrational exuberance) that Cespedes is the next Vladimir Guerrero.

10. 20 straight wins will likely never happen again: Yes, I am well aware that our 20 wins did not occur in October. That said, I'll always have those memories. Especially being in attendance at games 18 and 20, which were won with remarkable walk off home runs. After the first 10 wins, it seemed that the bubble was just due to be popped. Game by game, the narrative of the winning streak grew with more momentum and significance, and culminated in what was one of the most remarkable sporting moments I've ever seen.

Only one team wins it all each year, but perhaps in 2002, A's fans were allowed to experience the height of that emotion as it certainly felt like we achieved something of similar significance. We'll always have those memories and that unique perspective. The odds are nobody else will have that experience, and if they do, I highly doubt they'll reach 20 with as much style and fireworks as the 2002 A's did.