

A's News Clips, Thursday, February 23, 2012

Oakland A's: Brandon McCarthy, wife in spotlight

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

PHOENIX -- A's right-hander Brandon McCarthy and his wife, Amanda, grace the cover of the current issue of ESPN The Magazine, which hit newsstands Wednesday.

The magazine wanted to talk to McCarthy about how he used analytics to help change his pitching motion -- a rather intellectual approach considered uncommon in baseball.

Last week, McCarthy was surprised when the publication contacted him for a cover shoot. They also requested Amanda -- who is quoted in the story -- to be part of the shoot.

"I'm still weirded out by it," McCarthy said of the whole experience. "It was originally just a regular article. Somehow it just got bigger and bigger."

McCarthy is shown in full uniform on the cover, and Amanda, a former model, is saddled up to him in a revealing outfit. The headline reads: "Chicks dig the ground ball."

Most in the A's clubhouse hadn't seen the cover Wednesday, and some weren't even aware of the story. Left-hander Dallas Braden had seen it.

"Oh, he's on the cover?" Braden joked, clearly aware that the gaze of many readers will lean toward Mrs. McCarthy.

McCarthy himself still hadn't read the story as of Wednesday afternoon. He's a low-key personality, and though he's developed quite a following for his Twitter humor -- as has Amanda -- he's not the sort to draw attention to himself.

"I'm scared as (heck) to read it," McCarthy said. "So I don't know how that's gonna go off. It's a cool thing and it's fun, but we don't feel like we're qualified for that."

After being a surprise contributor last season as a rookie, Fautino De Los Santos is looked upon to play a significant role in the A's bullpen this year.

"This is a big year for him," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "Now there's a little bit more of a target on him in that we expect big things out of him."

De Los Santos, 26, earned his first call-up in June and wound up going 3-2 with a 4.32 ERA in 34 appearances. He had 43 strikeouts in 331/3 innings, displaying a fastball in the upper 90s that Melvin says could play well in the ninth inning.

The A's are looking for a closer after trading Andrew Bailey to Boston in the offseason. Melvin has labeled the closer battle a four-way competition among De Los Santos, Grant Balfour, Joey Devine and Brian Fuentes.

He has referred to Balfour and Fuentes as "obvious candidates" to close based on their late-inning experience, and he offered strong praise for both after watching them throw Wednesday.

But it wouldn't be a surprise to see De Los Santos, who missed more than a year after reconstructive elbow surgery in 2008, to get some save opportunities.

Melvin said De Los Santos must continue to sharpen his slider. He also wants De Los Santos to get better at holding runners and improve at getting ahead of hitters.

De Los Santos issued 17 walks last season.

"Typically, closers have one special pitch," Melvin said. "(Mariano) Rivera has his cutter. (Trevor) Hoffman had a change-up. For him, it's an exploding fastball. But for him to get better, he's got to work on other things."

□ The A's rotation is shaping up to be heavily tilted with right-handers, particularly if Braden, a left-hander, starts the season on the D.L. as he comes back from shoulder surgery.

If that were the case, Tommy Milone is the only left-hander currently in camp who appears to be a legitimate starting candidate.

"If it ends up being five righties, it ends up being five righties," Melvin said. "You're going to go with who performs best."

A's expecting Fautino De Los Santos to play big role in their bullpen

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

PHOENIX -- The bullpen holds some mystery for the A's this spring, but manager Bob Melvin expects right-hander Fautino De Los Santos to play a big role one way or another.

De Los Santos went 3-2 with a 4.32 ERA in 34 games as a rookie last season, notching 43 strikeouts in 33 1/3 innings.

"This is a big year for him," Melvin said. "We're not targeting him (for a specific role yet) ... But now there's a little bit more of target on him in that we expect big things out of him."

De Los Santos primarily needs to continue developing his slider to complement a high-90s fastball, Melvin said. But De Los Santos also must cut down walks and hold runners better.

Another reliever in camp, lefty Jordan Norberto, could also land a spot in the bullpen. He was acquired last season from Arizona in the Brad Ziegler trade but struggled with his command. Norberto worked as a starter in the Dominican Winter League this past offseason but has primarily been a reliever since 2008. Melvin mentioned the possibility of experimenting with Norberto as a starter in the minors if he doesn't make the big league club out of camp.

As for the A's rotation, it's shaping up to be right-handed heavy no matter who the five starters are. If Dallas Braden were to begin the season on the disabled list, Tom Milone is the only left-handed starting candidate currently in camp.

Melvin doesn't see it as a big issue. He said the five best pitchers will land in the rotation, and if it's five right-handers, so be it.

McCarthys surprised to be on ESPN magazine cover

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Brandon McCarthy was somewhat mystified to find himself on the cover of the new ESPN the Magazine.

The A's starter knew that there would be a story about him, focusing on how he'd used analytics to help resurrect his career after being sidelined for the better part of three seasons with shoulder injuries.

A nice subject for an article, but maybe not a cover story - an under-the-radar right-hander pitching for an under-the-radar team. But the magazine suddenly scheduled a photo shoot a week ago and asked McCarthy's wife, **Amanda**, to participate, in somewhat skimpy attire.

Now, the McCarthys are highly visible on every newsstand.

"It's weird," McCarthy said. "I thought it was a small little story based on analytics, and a week ago, they were like, 'We'd like a shoot with you and your wife.' I said, 'For what?' "

That became apparent: The magazine wanted Amanda McCarthy to wear something even more revealing, which the McCarthys nixed.

"Clearly, they had to call in Mrs. McCarthy for the photos, they know she's the real talent," left-hander **Dallas Braden** said with a laugh. "Everyone is going to be like, 'Oh, great, the swimsuit issue! Oh, no, wait, it's ESPN the Magazine.'"

Both McCarthys are popular on Twitter, where they banter with wit and affection, but Brandon McCarthy is a legitimately good story on his own after going from an afterthought to the A's likely Opening Day starter.

"I know he didn't understand what was going on with them wanting to do a story," Braden said. "But in all honesty, Mac is an awesome story to dive into because of his cerebral approach. He understands the game on such a different level."

McCarthy is nervous that he might appear as if he thinks he's smarter than he really is; the subtitle is "score one for the nerds!" But his teammates aren't worried about that. "Mac isn't a nerd," Braden said. Former teammate "**Trevor Cahill** is a nerd."

"It's strange if you think you're in no way famous," McCarthy said. "**Chris Paul** was on the cover last week, **Albert Pujols** the week before. Us on the cover? It's very surreal."

Drumbeat: A's starter Brandon McCarthy, wife Amanda, grace cover of ESPN the Magazine

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Papago Park, 2/22/2012, 8:29am

If you missed my tweet last night, Amanda McCarthy posted this photo on Twitter last night:

It's great to see McCarthy get some national attention – what he went through to return to the big leagues and to pitching effectively is extraordinary. Last year at this time, the A's didn't know what they were getting. This season, he's the likely Opening Day starter.

And if you don't follow the two of them on Twitter, I highly recommend it. They're hilarious, the Nichols and May of the pro-athlete Twitter set. To follow: [@BMcCarthy32](#) and [@Mrs_McCarthy32](#).

Hayward native Erick Threets returns - to the A's

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

When Erick Threets was about to be drafted in 2000, both the A's and the Giants called to check on his signability.

Threets, who grew up in Hayward and Livermore, was such a big A's fan, he said, that "after the A's called, I didn't even want to talk to the Giants."

But it was the Giants who drafted the left-handed pitcher in the seventh round out of Granada High School, and he broke into the bigs with them in 2007. After the 2008 season, he was signed by the White Sox, and he had a 0.00 ERA in 11 appearances with them in 2010. But in his final outing, he felt something grab in his elbow.

"I could feel in my stomach that something wasn't right," he said. "I didn't know what to do - I had two strikes on Mark Teixeira, and there were two outs. But my body was telling me it was bad, and I came out."

Shortly thereafter, Threets had Tommy John surgery, but he is now recovered. The A's scouted the 30-year-old in winter ball in Mexico this offseason, and called his agent - former Oakland great Dave Stewart - to offer a minor-league deal and an invitation to camp.

"I've come full circle, back to the A's," Threets said. "I'm training with Dave Stewart. It's cool."

Threets spent a week working with Stewart in San Diego before A's camp, and he said he learned a lot. He's even trying to pick up Stewart's death stare.

"I'm working on it," Threets said with a laugh. "I wore my hat like him when I was younger and tried to be intimidating like him. We've had talks about being more aggressive, and we've talked a lot about fastball location."

The A's emphasis this spring is on all their new young pitchers, meaning pitchers such as Threets and another former Giants reliever, Merkin Valdez, might not get too long a look. Older non-roster pitchers can "get lost in the shuffle," manager Bob Melvin admitted, but Melvin added that he knows such players are highly motivated.

"They get a chance in major-league camp," Melvin said. "This is their playoffs, when they show what they have to offer."

Threets, knowing the A's well, believes he's what they're looking for.

"I feel like I can be like the second generation of 'Moneyball,' " he said. "Cheap labor, and I can be extremely effective."

Threets said that his friends are major A's fans, so they're constantly chiming in now that he's with the organization.

"It's crazy," he said with a laugh. "They're always talking to me about, 'Why did they do this? Why are they doing that? Are they throwing in the towel trading all those pitchers?'"

"I tell them, 'These guys are smart. They signed me. They must know what they're doing.' "

Milone has chance to impress with A's

Left-hander wanted to be a hitter, but could join rotation

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- A's newbie Tom Milone never really envisioned himself as a pitcher, at least not in the early stages of his playing days.

It wasn't until he was 11, participating in a typical Little League game in Southern California, when he was called to the mound essentially as a last-minute option. Perhaps this type of scene, in some storybook, leads to the discovery of an overnight sensation.

But this isn't one of those tales. The small-statured Milone -- he's generously listed at 6 feet on Oakland's roster -- proved far from flashy. But he did learn something about himself that day.

"I could throw strikes," he said.

Still, he believed himself to be a hitter, even in the high school days that followed. In the meantime, he kept throwing strikes and, in 2006, the soft-tossing southpaw could be found at USC's Dedeaux Field -- as a pitcher.

Collegiate ball wasn't so kind to Milone during his first two seasons, as he averaged a 5.55 ERA and 1.52 WHIP as a freshman and sophomore on the same team as **A's prospects** Grant Green and Ryan Cook.

However, just in time for scouts to take notice, he upped his stock as a junior, posting a 3.51 ERA and 1.17 WHIP in 97 innings -- good enough for the Washington Nationals to reel him in as a 10th-round pick in the 2008 First-Year Player Draft.

The A's scouted him at USC but, like many teams, weren't sold on his long-term potential. Fast forward four years and one trade later -- Milone belongs to a quartet of players acquired in the winter deal that sent Gio Gonzalez to the nation's capital -- and they're now raving about it.

"He's definitely got the tools to be that steady presence in a rotation," A's catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "He's pretty impressive. You can tell he has a really good feel for what he's doing. You obviously aren't going to get a complete look at him until he enters games, but what you see now is he's able to put the ball where he wants."

In fact, when teaming up as his backstop for the first time this spring during a bullpen session, Suzuki insists "every ball he threw to me was for a strike."

That doesn't surprise Derek Norris, the catching prospect brought over in the same trade as Milone who is plenty familiar with the lefty.

"I think it's just his intelligence on the mound," Norris said. "He knows the pitches that get him hurt in certain situations, he knows how to stay out of trouble and he knows how to get out of jams, and I think that's really what separates him from the rest, just his ability to put the ball where he wants at pretty much all times and his ability to change speeds."

While Milone's fastball normally sits in the 85-87-mph range, and can reach 88 and 89 when necessary, the 25-year-old hurler owns a deep arsenal of secondary pitches, including a plus changeup that goes along with a cutter and a curveball. His command is impeccable, and his performance has been matched by his durability, as he's tallied over 150 innings in each of his three full professional seasons.

Oh, and he can still hit.

Milone compiled a .346 average in 26 at-bats for Triple-A Syracuse last year and proceeded to hit a home run on the first pitch in his first at-bat while making his Major League debut with the Nationals in September.

On the mound, he posted a 3.81 ERA in five starts with Washington. Now, he's looking to break into an A's rotation that currently features at least two available spots -- possibly three, depending on Dallas Braden's (shoulder) progress. And although he hasn't been the most talked about pitcher among those acquired by the A's via trade in the offseason, he appears to be the one most likely to make an immediate impact for the club in 2012.

But it will depend on how he fares in the coming weeks at camp next to fellow rotation candidates Jarrod Parker, Brad Peacock, Tyson Ross and Graham Godfrey -- all of whom happen to be right-handed. Manager Bob Melvin, who said performance takes precedent over the ratio of lefties and righties he carries in his rotation, has already been impressed with Milone.

"He definitely knows where the ball's going," Melvin said. "He has a great mix of pitches, uses both sides of the plate. You get the sense he's a smart pitcher, a pretty polished guy."

The A's skipper compared his crafty ways to Braden's.

"Totally, 100 percent agree," Suzuki said. "They're virtually identical. Very rarely are they going to leave the ball in the middle of the plate."

Milone doesn't know any other way.

"I've been the same pitcher my entire life," he said. "It's just worked for me."

De Los Santos has the heat, but needs control

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Right-hander Fautino De Los Santos' plus-plus fastball could very well turn him into one of the game's elite closers some day.

"Typically," A's manager Bob Melvin said, "closers have one special pitch. [Mariano] Rivera has the cutter, [Trevor] Hoffman had the changeup, and for him it's the exploding fastball."

De Los Santos, whose fastball velocity can reach up to 99 miles per hour, has been mentioned often as a possible successor to departed closer Andrew Bailey. But continued development with his slider may have to come first. Melvin is also looking for the reliever to be quicker to the plate and to limit the walks.

"He has to concentrate on getting ahead of hitters, making sure two of the first three pitches are strikes," Melvin said. "Where that 1-1 count goes ... it's something we're going to stress once we lead into games."

The first pitch may prove of even more significance for De Los Santos, who saw opponents go 5-for-10 (.500) against him when pitching with a 1-0 count, compared to a 1-for-7 (.143) showing when 0-1.

The 26-year-old power pitcher has just 34 games of big league experience under his belt, and he's posted a 4.32 ERA. And while he offered up too many free passes in that span, walking 17 in 33 1/3 innings, he also fanned 43 for a strikeout ratio of 11.6 per nine innings -- a number closely resembling the 11.7 mark he posted in his Minor League career.

"He's a guy for us now, so this is a big year for him," Melvin said. "He goes from a guy that was kind of a surprise last year and worked his way up really without the spotlight on him ... and now there's a little bit more of a target on him and we expect big things out of him. I think consistency with his breaking ball will be key."

Norberto will get his chance in bullpen

PHOENIX -- The A's aren't shy about their vision of left-hander Jordan Norberto as a starter. But they're going to give him every chance to break camp with the club this year as a reliever.

"With his stuff and the amount of starters we have, if he's going to make an impact, it's going to be in the bullpen," manager Bob Melvin said. "It's up to him to be able to go out there and calm down a little bit, think a little bit slower."

Norberto, 25, was acquired along with Brandon Allen in the trade that sent Brad Ziegler to Arizona. He has struggled with his command since arriving, but showed signs of improvement while pitching for Leones del Escogido in the Dominican Winter League as a starter, the role he assumed during the first three years of his Minor League career.

"We've talked about him a little bit in a starting role," Melvin said. "That way he's able to ease into some things, because he's a jumpy, high-strung kid. The trick for him coming out of the bullpen is going to be throwing the ball over the plate early. If you're coming in and facing one left-handed hitter in a specialist role, you have no room to settle in."

His versatility could ultimately lead to a job as the club's long-relief man, though that role could also be handed to one of the rotation candidates who isn't a member of the starting five come Opening Day.

Worth noting

- A's right-hander and likely Opening Day starter Brandon McCarthy has garnered himself some national attention, joining wife Amanda on the cover of ESPN The Magazine's first Analytics Issue that's set to hit newsstands Friday.

McCarthy made use of advanced analytics to turn his career around, and manager Bob Melvin is happy to see his pitcher be recognized for the results that have transpired.

"I think he certainly deserves it," he said. "He's a humble guy. He's not looking for that kind of exposure, but to get it is always a feather in the cap. There are a lot of different scribes out there, a lot of different people, looking to ask him how it was done, and he's got quite a story on top of it."

- Nearly every position player is in camp, even though official reporting day isn't until Friday. Seth Smith was the most recent to show up Wednesday, joining the likes of Jemile Weeks, Cliff Pennington, Scott Sizemore and Jonny Gomes, among others.

For small-market A's, uphill climb only gets steeper

By Jorge L. Ortiz, USA TODAY

PHOENIX – At Sunday's Oscars ceremony, Oakland Athletics general manager Billy Beane will be rooting in person for Best Picture nominee *Moneyball*, which depicts him as the creative genius behind a hardscrabble team that overcomes payroll disparity to succeed.

If actor-producer Brad Pitt were to propose a film project on the A's now, it seems unlikely any studio would buy it. Even Hollywood has limits on turning hopeless causes into storybook endings.

Ten years after the magical season featured in the movie, the A's are languishing in a dreary, antiquated stadium, desperate to leave but held hostage by Major League Baseball's protracted study of its ballpark options, now in its 36th month.

And Beane, facing an increasing monetary gap with the competition, is tilting at ever-bigger windmills. His latest desperate attempt at keeping the A's viable in the American League West was to sign fading slugger Manny Ramirez, who has twice violated baseball's drug policy and will have to serve a 50-game suspension, in hopes he can fill the team's glaring need for a cleanup hitter.

The move comes in a hectic offseason highlighted by the stunning signing of Cuban outfielder Yoenis Cespedes to a four-year, \$36 million contract but characterized more by the trades of All-Star pitchers Gio Gonzalez, Trevor Cahill and Andrew Bailey for prospects.

Those swaps follow a 15-year trend of Oakland dealing away its top players before they become unaffordable, except now that time comes a lot sooner in their careers.

Gonzalez and Cahill were four years from free agency, Bailey three.

"It makes team-building and the competitive aspect that much harder here," says right-hander Brandon McCarthy, the A's likely opening-day starter. "It's not even being a small-market team. It's being a dead-market team."

Beane says the A's, who received a \$32 million revenue-sharing payout last year, will rank last in the majors in revenue this season. With more resources allocated to signing amateur players, the payroll has shrunk from \$67 million in 2011 to \$57 million in 2012, prompting the wave of trades.

"We're not doing it to be mean," says Beane, aware of the trades' impact on the team and its shrinking fan base. "It's not like I come into this office like I just jumped off the stage of *Wicked* with a green-painted face and go, 'How can I trade my guys?' We do it because we have no other choice."

Division rivals in spend mode

The A's retrenchment comes at a time when their division rivals are spending freely. Flush with cash from new local TV contracts valued at \$3 billion each, the Los Angeles Angels invested more than \$317 million this offseason in adding three-time National League MVP Albert Pujols and pitcher C.J. Wilson, and the Texas Rangers doled out nearly \$112 million to acquire Japanese pitching ace Yu Darvish.

No TV windfall is about to rescue the A's, who share the Bay Area market with the more popular San Francisco Giants and are entering the fourth season of their 25-year deal with Comcast. Team co-owner Lew Wolff says the contract allows either side to opt out in the 15th year.

By that time, the club hopes it has long been ensconced in San Jose, where Wolff thinks a new ballpark and the ensuing corporate support from Silicon Valley companies could make the A's competitive again. They haven't had a winning season since 2006.

"Our revenues would be significantly higher even with our current TV agreement," Wolff said in a phone interview, estimating the increase at \$80 million-\$100 million a year. "Our budgeting is based on having a new ballpark with a market for more sponsors."

The Giants claim that area of the South Bay as part of their territorial rights, though, and have shown no interest in cutting a deal. At the owners meetings in January, Commissioner Bud Selig said the A's stadium situation was "really on the front burner," nearly three years after appointing a committee to look into the issue.

With a resolution perhaps approaching, the offseason trades, which yielded promising pitching prospects such as Jarrod Parker, Brad Peacock and A.J. Cole, have been widely seen as the A's aiming to contend if they move into a new facility by 2015 or so.

"You look at what the Miami Marlins have done this year (adding free agents as they open a new facility), and I think that's where Oakland wants to head," says Bailey, now with the Boston Red Sox.

But then the A's threw the rest of baseball a curve by outbidding the Marlins, among other clubs, for Cespedes, an enticing but untested talent, and signing him to a deal that would allow him to walk possibly before they move into a new ballpark.

Beane says trading his top pitchers freed about \$11 million in salary. Six weeks later, Beane made Cespedes Oakland's highest-paid player this year. His \$36 million deal won't become official until he secures a visa, expected in the next few days.

In recent years the A's have pursued players such as Adrian Beltre and Rafael Furcal, who have taken less money to go elsewhere. Ramirez comes with heavy baggage, though only a \$500,000 minor league deal.

"The bigger the gap between the haves and the have-nots, the more the have-nots have to take bigger risks," Beane says.

High rate of turnover

That has led to increasingly high turnover and a feeling of instability that even long-term contracts won't allay. Cahill signed a five-year, \$30.5 million extension in April 2011. Eight months later, he was sent to the Arizona Diamondbacks.

"Everybody always said, 'You could be gone, you could be traded,' " Cahill says. "And I was like, 'Yeah, I've seen it, but it won't happen to me.' And it did."

Cahill had three years of service time when he was dealt, Gonzalez slightly less than that. A decade ago, the A's let young stars such as Jason Giambi and Miguel Tejada play their six years in Oakland and then leave as free agents.

In subsequent years, star pitchers Tim Hudson— one year shy of free agency —Mark Mulder and Dan Haren (each with two years of club control remaining) were dealt for prospects.

But even Haren, traded in December 2007 from Oakland to the Diamondbacks, is stunned at the state of affairs.

"It's amazing that two or three years later after I left, I couldn't name two or three guys that I played with that were still on the team. The turnover is so quick."

Current members of the team typically profess little public concern. They express confidence in Beane's hypercompetitive nature and his track record of maximizing resources. Even through their current five-year downswing, the A's haven't lost as many as 90 games in a season.

But McCarthy calls the A's current limbo while awaiting a ballpark decision "untenable," and he acknowledges it has an impact on the players.

"It's a major issue," says McCarthy, who also has pitched for the Rangers and Chicago White Sox. "I think it's one of those things that's crippling this franchise. I've never seen anything like this where something like that could just become the rolling avalanche of things not being the way they should. A decision has to come."

Beane says the uncertainty has been damaging because it has embittered even hard-core fans while preventing the club from cultivating a new following in the South Bay.

The A's ranked last in the majors in attendance last season with an average of 18,232 — actual head count was considerably lower — and have seen their total turnout hover below 1.5 million each of the last three years.

The Philadelphia Phillies led the major leagues last season with nearly 3.7 million.

Haren says the A's "get like 3,000 (fans) a game, but they're die-hards all the way through. When I go there now, the same fans are out there."

Left-hander Dallas Braden, who pitched a perfect game on Mother's Day 2010, says he feels bad for the team's followers being caught in what he calls "fan purgatory."

"It's tough because they're not sure if they're rooting for a team that's going to be gone in two years," Braden says.

Or for players who could be gone in two months.

Reliever Brad Ziegler, an Athletic from 2008 until being traded to the Diamondbacks last July 31, says the A's constant overhauling has created a vicious cycle where the club sheds its top assets on a regular basis when it realizes it can't contend — a cycle that has only accelerated in recent years.

"The fans there are like, 'We want to get to know you and we're going to cheer for you while you're out there, but we don't want to get too close because we don't want to get hurt whenever you leave,' " Ziegler says.

The same applies to the franchise.

Spring preview: Young A's pitchers could be ready

By Jorge L. Ortiz, USA TODAY

PHOENIX — Everywhere he looks this spring, Oakland Athletics manager Bob Melvin sees young pitchers with impressive arms and glowing minor league credentials.

Last year, his top pitchers also had youth and impressive arms, but they came with All-Star Game credentials.

In a busy offseason, Oakland parlayed those All-Stars — Gio Gonzalez, Trevor Cahill and Andrew Bailey— into a talent haul that included six pitching prospects, most notably Jarrod Parker, Brad Peacock and lefty Tommy Milone.

Conventional wisdom says the A's are positioning themselves to contend in a hoped-for new ballpark around 2015, but Melvin says some youngsters could have an impact this season.

"Milone's ready to go," Melvin said. "Peacock certainly believes he is. Parker believes he is. (Graham) Godfrey. Tyson Ross is looking to have a great camp. There are quality guys and a number of them competing for those spots, so I'm excited about that."

The addition of free agent Bartolo Colon and the return of Dallas Braden from shoulder surgery — expected in mid-April or early May — give the A's two veterans to team with No. 1 starter Brandon McCarthy.

The rest of the starting core remains uncertain, though, and much of the focus in camp will be on the competition for the final two spots, and possibly three depending on when Braden is activated.

Athletics at a glance

Last season: 74-88, third in the AL West

Manager: Bob Melvin, second season (first full one)

General manager: Billy Beane, 15th season

Projected lineup: C Kurt Suzuki, 1B Brandon Allen, 2B Jemile Weeks, SS Cliff Pennington, 3B Scott Sizemore, LF Coco Crisp, CF Yoenis Cespedes, RF Josh Reddick, DH Seth Smith

Projected rotation: RHP Brandon McCarthy, RHP Bartolo Colon, LHP Dallas Braden, LHP Tommy Milone, RHP Jarrod Parker

Closer: LHP Brian Fuentes

Roster question: Who will play first? Candidates abound, with Allen, Daric Barton, Chris Carter and newcomer Kila Ka'aihue. Allen showed flashes of power last season but batted .200 in 175 at-bats. Barton, the starter for most of the last four seasons, was demoted to Class AAA when he batted .212. He is coming off shoulder surgery. Carter and Ka'aihue have failed to translate their big power numbers in the minors to the majors.

Because they're opening the season with two games in Japan on March 28 and 29, followed by a week off and then two more days off in their first week of play stateside, the A's won't need a fifth starter until April 17.

By that point, they might have gotten an early look at some of the key pieces they picked up in the trades.

Parker, the top acquisition in the swap that sent Cahill to the Arizona Diamondbacks, holds the most intrigue.

He was the ninth overall pick in the 2007 draft and moved quickly toward the majors before missing the 2010 season recovering from Tommy John elbow surgery.

Parker struggled to a 5-6 record with a 4.87 ERA in the first half of last season at Class AA Mobile (Ala.) before developing a changeup that helped him go 6-2 with a 2.84 ERA after the break.

"It's what spurred that second-half charge, throwing a lot of changeups and staying positive," said Parker, 23.

"It's been a great weapon for me to even things out. If I'm struggling with my heater and get behind, I can get back in the count with the changeup."

Like Parker, Milone and Peacock got a brief taste of the majors last season. They fared well with the Washington Nationals, who sent them to Oakland for Gonzalez, a 31-game winner over the last two years.

Milone, 25, is regarded as the more polished of the newcomers and has a strong chance to claim the fourth spot in the rotation. He's in the Braden mold, making up for the lack of an overpowering fastball with exceptional command and movement. In his last two seasons in the minors, Milone went 24-11 and posted a stunning 8-1 strikeout-to-walk ratio.

Peacock, 24, rose up the ranks of prospects with a breakout season last year, going a combined 15-3 with a 2.39 ERA in Class AA and AAA.

Though he hasn't been able to master a two-seam fastball, Peacock has caught Melvin's eye with a low- to mid-90s four-seamer that defies convention by staying down in the zone.

"Very impressed," Melvin said. "You look at the command, the downhill plane. The ball explodes out of his hand."

Which adds to Melvin's optimism about his young pitchers' chances of bursting on the scene

Chili Davis takes A's opportunity

Ray Ratto, csnbayarea.com 2/22/2012

Bob Melvin has a thing about early. He likes early. A lot. In fact, he's spent each of the last two days raving about the pre-dawn to post-dusk workday of bench coach Chip Hale.

But this won't be about Hale and his pre-5 a.m. hauntings, or the fact that Melvin himself arrives before 6. It's the first thing that sprang from Melvin's lips when he was asked about his self-selected hitting coach, Chili Davis.

"He's here early, and that's with just pitchers and catchers here," he said, once again leading with his alarm clock. "It's important that the guys see that the hitting coach is going to be there for them whenever they get to the park."

Even Manny Ramirez?

Melvin smiled. "You know what I mean," he said.

When told the story, Davis laughed. "With Manny," he said, "I'm going to watch how he does what he does. And I want the hitters to watch, too."

Davis is 52, one-fourth of his life removed from the end of his playing career, and he has his moments of pride and his share of regrets. One of those regrets is that this is his first major league coaching job.

"I've had opportunities before this, and if I had it to again, I probably should have taken one of them," he said Wednesday. "Colorado, San Diego, they asked, and I don't know why I said no, but I did. I had a chance in Arizona and Seattle with Bo (Melvin), but I was going through a lot of crap then and I didn't think I could devote my full attention to it. I missed some chances, I know that."

The closest he came to scratching the baseball-after-baseball itch was when he took a job with the Australian Baseball Federation as its chief hitting coach, but he admitted, "That was fun, but it was almost like a paid vacation in some ways. It was good, I went back the second and third time because they have some talent there, but it wasn't like being at the park every day. It wasn't like being in the big leagues."

But right about the time he was being told he had turned down too many jobs to be ever asked again, he had an epiphany and one more opportunity – with the Dodgers as a hitting coach in instructional league in 2010. That became a job with the Red Sox as the AAA hitting coach at Pawtucket, and he had just signed a deal to go back this year (after turning down yet another job, as Seattle's roving hitting instructor) when Boston's player personnel director Ben Crockett told him he had a message from Billy Beane.

"We talked, and then an hour later I talked with Bo, and he asked, and I didn't hesitate," Davis said. "But I asked him, 'Why me?' It hadn't happened twice before, but he came back, and I asked him, and he said, 'Because I liked your approach and the way you'd grind out an at-bat. The way you'd come to the plate when I was with the Orioles and I'd say how's it goin' Chuck, and I'd say, not now Bo, I gotta hit.'"

"I'd heard nothing but raves from the people who saw him at Pawtucket," Melvin said. "He'd get there early, he'd talk to the hitters and teach them and listen to them too. So I figured I'd give it another go."

This time, Davis said yes. Thus, when Melvin called this time, Davis was eagerness itself, and his alarm was synced to the atomic clock. A career of being declared "done," and not just once but several times, had shown Davis that "done" is mostly a state of mind, and not a terminal condition but the once.

"That's something I want to show these guys – the (Chris) Carters and the (Michael) Taylors and the (Jemile) Weekses and the (Daric) Bartons and guys like that," he said. "Nobody expects anything from them, but they've all got talent, and they've all shown it. Now it's just getting them to trust it.

"It's not about me. I don't want to hit any more. It's about them, and understanding what they're doing and what they're looking for, and how to wait until it happens. It's about them knowing who they are, and trusting themselves."

Davis needed all of his Giant career and half his Angel and Twins careers to learn what that trust really means. His face is a road map of glories and disappointments, of knowledge gained and then used properly, to the point where he was a de facto assistant hitting coach with the Yankees when actual hitting coach Chris Chambliss could only be in three places at once.

"I remember Joe Torre telling me I should stay in the game, be a hitting coach, and I said, 'No, I'm done,'" Davis said, using the D-word again. "But my mom liked to tell me, 'When they say you're through, you're just starting.'"

And 12 years later, she nailed it. After a lot of golf, struggles with civilian life, two continents and two minor league jobs, it's unknown whether Chili Davis can be the new Lou Piniella or Rudy Jaramillo on a team that has gone years without being any kind of offensive force. But we do know this:

On a team whose manager is big on early and just as big on late, Davis was on the field working and talking with hitters a good two hours after practice had ended. He walked to the dugout while listening to Weeks talk about his approach, and said, "That's what I'm after. Mentality, not philosophy."

Then he stayed for an hour more, to explain it. And wonder if he'd talked too much to the players, and whether he should back off the next day. And he left after everyone else.

Well, everyone but Chip Hale. Apparently, Hale and Davis are Melvin's kind of guys – come real early, stay real late. That is to say, part vampire.

Catching up with A's starter Brandon McCarthy

Kate Longworth, csnbayarea.com, February 22, 2012, 11:44 am

TWITTER TIME

Want to know what Brandon McCarthy -- and his wife -- are up to? What's on their minds, and what makes them tick? Check out their Twitter feeds.

bmccarthy32

I pitch baseballs. I love Liverpool and LSU football. Those are different footballs but I'm not explaining the difference. My wife says to say that I'm married.

Mrs_McCarthy32

I have a Westie and a husband (in order). I love wine, food, & I watch way more baseball than anyone should be allowed ... on an airplane

PROGRAMMING NOTE: *For the full interview with Brandon McCarthy and all the news from A's camp -- including Bob Melvin's message to pitchers and catchers -- tune in to SportsNet Central tonight at 9, 11 and midnight.*

PHOENIX -- A's starter Brandon McCarthy is one of the smartest guys in the game, but once he stopped thinking about what he "had to do" on the mound, and just did what he knows how to do, the results were off the charts.

McCarthy finished 2011 with career highs in wins (9), starts (25), complete games (5), innings pitched (170 2/3) and strikeouts (123). His strikeouts-to-walks ratio of 4.92 set an A's record.

We caught up with the right-hander in the dugout at Phoenix Municipal Stadium on Wednesday.

Q: Is there a difference in your preparation, knowing your role this year vs. last year trying to make the rotation?

MCCARTHY: To be honest, there is no difference whatsoever. Last year, my focus was doing everything had to do each day, and then that'd show up when I'd go out and pitch. And it's the same thing now. Where you throw in the rotation or what your situation is... I mean there's little things you're always working on, but they don't take over the bigger picture. It's just focus on what I have to do to become a better pitcher, and when I get into the game let that take care of itself.

Q: What was the difference maker for you last year that fueled your success?

MCCARTHY: Most of the changes I had made the year before. I had finally become comfortable, everything was where I wanted it to be. I was just able to get into a routine where I knew what I was doing each day. There wasn't a lot of guess work. I wasn't trying to do new things. It was just literally, take what I have and throw with it. So, I was able to gain confidence as the year went a long, and settle into the pitcher that I wanted to be. As in the past I kept trying to search.

Oakland A's GM Billy Beane an expert at shaking things up

By Art Spander , Special to The SF Examiner

The A's picked up controversial slugger Manny Ramirez for pennies on the dollar, and whatever the outcome, everyone will be watching.

The A's? "Team Irrelevant"? Grabbing supposedly the best Cuban baseball playing defector available, Yoenis Cespedes, for \$36 million? Then signing Manny Ramirez? The A's?

Welcome to the New World of Moneyball. No longer when a journalist asks GM Billy Beane whether we'll recognize any members of the A's will he be able to respond, if tongue in cheek, "Do you ever?"

What now with all those covered seats in the third deck at the Coliseum, "Tarp-Land"? Borrow the name "Mannywood"? Not original — thanks, Dodgers fans — but quite acceptable.

The buzz is back. Talking baseball. Talking dropped fly balls and off his bat balls dropping over the fence. Dreadlocks? How about dreadful, which is what A's attendance has been.

Maybe five years ago, disturbed by the way A's management kept trading away the best players, someone (blush!) complained to Beane, "There's no buzz here." Billy, who invariably gets in the last word, answered, "You call it buzz. I call it noise."

Whatever it's called, it's necessary for sports in the 21st century. Sports in every century. People are no less famous for how they're perceived than how they perform.

It's Jeremy Lin's wonderful tale. It's the din surrounding Jim Harbaugh. And Tim Lincecum. And Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson. It's, "Did you see that?"

It's what ESPN puts on the screen and Sports Illustrated puts on the cover and newspapers put on the front pages.

"Hey, we got something cooking here," A's catcher Kurt Suzuki said when Oakland announced it was acquiring Manny, drug suspension and all.

Hey, what they got, besides talent, is one player everybody knows and in Cespedes, if the reports are accurate, another player everybody will know.

What they've got is a reason for people to go to the ballpark, and no less importantly, to go to the papers and Internet. Who knows whether Manny still can be Manny, but the A's organization must be commended for the willingness to find out. Our curiosity's running wild, as Chuck Berry sings.

The game isn't just on the field, it's in the hearts and minds of all involved. You didn't dare miss a Barry Bonds at-bat, no matter how much you despised him. Or idolized him.

Throughout Southern California, even as far west as Santa Monica, the Anaheim-We-Wish-We-Were-in-Los-Angeles Angels have posted dozens of billboards showing the back of Albert Pujols' jersey as he swings, "PUJOLS" and "5" very visible alongside "BIG A."

Subtle. Smashing. You have a star, you take advantage of the situation, right, Brad Pitt?

A's owner Lew Wolff, who seemingly cares only about moving the club to San Jose, proved differently.

"It wouldn't bother me to have him on the team," Wolff said last week when asked about the possibility of getting Ramirez. "In fact, just the opposite. It would be fun."

That's what sport is supposed to be: fun. That's what going to AT&T for a Giants game is. The A's play in a stadium that is too large and also shared with the Raiders, yet that doesn't mean their games can't be enjoyable.

Manny is a personality. Cespedes is a possibility. Two weeks ago, the A's were merely the A's. Now they are an attraction. Delightful.

Recovery On Tap For A's Prospects & System?

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Feb 23, 2012

Injuries have plagued the Oakland A's farm system for the past few seasons. A number of top A's prospects had their 2011 seasons washed away by injuries. Inside we take a look at eight A's prospects who are on the comeback trail...

One of the main reasons the Oakland A's traded [Trevor Cahill](#), [Gio Gonzalez](#) and [Andrew Bailey](#) this off-season was to strengthen their farm system. Before the trades, the A's system was considered middle-of-the-pack, at best. The infusion of new talent has moved the A's system up in the ranks; however, the system could receive an even bigger boost with the return of several high-profile prospects who missed most or all of the 2011 season with injuries. We take a look at eight such prospects who are heading to spring training with clean bills of health and a hopeful outlook for 2012.

Michael Ynoa: Until the A's signed [Yoenis Cespedes](#) last week, the organization's most high-profile international signing was Ynoa. It has been more than three-and-a-half years since the A's shocked the baseball community and inked the 6'7" right-hander to a \$4.25 million bonus. Before the Ynoa signing, the A's had been second-market players overseas, at best. Since signing Ynoa, the A's have made significant in-roads in the international amateur free agent market. They have signed several players to six-figure bonuses and have extended the boundaries of their scouting reach into Asia, Europe and different parts of Central America.

Unfortunately, the one thing that hasn't happened since July 2, 2008 is the development of Ynoa himself. Thanks to a bum right elbow, the Puerto Plata native has pitched in only three official minor league games for a total of nine innings. All of those outings and innings came with the A's Rookie League team in 2010. The A's are hopeful that this is finally the year Ynoa will be able to make significant progress on the mound rather than in the doctor's office.

Ynoa is now 18 months removed from his 2010 Tommy John surgery and is set to report to spring training on time and without restrictions. While he will be on a strict innings limit this year, the hope is that that will be the only limit imposed on Ynoa's development. Because the A's are likely to keep Ynoa well under 100 innings this season, they probably won't send him out to a full-season team this year, even if he pitches well during spring training. Pitching for the short-season Vermont Lake Monsters is a real possibility for Ynoa, however.

At the end of the day, it won't really matter whether Ynoa gets his innings pitching for Vermont or the A's Arizona Rookie League team, as long as he gets those innings somewhere. Despite the three lost seasons, Ynoa is still only 20-years-old. The A's will have to decide whether or not to protect him from the Rule 5 draft this off-season. If he can put together 50 promising innings of short-season baseball, it will make the A's decision to add him to the 40-man roster that much easier and will set him up for being able to pitch at a full-season level as a 21-year-old in 2013.

When Ynoa has been on the mound in exhibition games and for bullpens, his immense talent has been very evident. Having a healthy year from a pitcher of Ynoa's talents would be a big boost to the overall depth of the A's farm

system.

Ian Krol: Krol's season began with a left forearm injury sustained during spring training and ended with a team-imposed suspension. The end result was that the top pitching prospect in the A's system heading into the 2011 season threw only five innings, and all five of those innings came with the A's Rookie League team. In 2010, Krol put together a standout first full professional season, posting a 2.80 ERA in 138.1 innings for the A's two full-season A-ball affiliates. He allowed only eight homeruns and posted a 111:28 K:BB ratio.

The left-hander's suspension was lifted after the end of the regular season, and he was able to participate in the A's fall Instructional League camp. Krol was on a mostly regular routine at Instructs and is expected to report on-time and without restrictions to the A's minor league spring training mini-camp tomorrow (February 23). Krol isn't a flame-thrower even when healthy (his fastball fluctuates from 86 to 91 MPH), but he pounds the lower half of the strike-zone and induces a lot of groundballs. He has a highly competitive nature on the mound and rarely beats himself with a bad pitch selection or location. Off the mound, Krol is intelligent but has been dogged by a reputation for immaturity thanks to an incident in high school that resulted in a year-long suspension from his baseball team and last year's suspension-inducing Tweet.

Krol was slated to pitch for High-A Stockton in 2011 before the injury and suspension scuttled those plans. Barring another injury this spring, Krol should head to Stockton for the 2012 season, where he will likely be joined by fellow top A's pitching prospect **A.J. Cole**. Krol was seemingly on the fast track through the A's organization before last year's missteps. If he can put together a healthy and productive season on the mound and keep his behavior in check off the field, Krol, who turns 21 in May, will be right back on that fast track. Although the A's are much deeper at starting pitcher in the minor leagues now than they were at the start of last year, Krol can still separate himself as one of the top pitching prospects in the organization with another year like his 2010 effort.

Arnold Leon: The 2010 season was the year of Tommy John amongst the ranks in the A's minor league system. Leon was the first of several high-profile pitching prospects to undergo the surgery that year. Because Leon had his surgery early on in the 2010 season, the A's were hopeful that he would be able to pitch more than a handful of innings during the second half of the 2011 campaign. Leon made it back on the mound in late June, but he ran into some additional soreness and was shut-down for a month after only 2.1 innings. He did return in time to make three appearances for the A's Rookie League team in late August but totaled only 6.1 official innings for the season.

Leon was healthy enough to pitch during the A's fall Instructional League camp, although his velocity had not yet returned to its normal 88-91 MPH range by the end of camp. The A's believed that that aspect of Leon's recovery would come in time and were pleased in general with how he pitched during Instructs. He is set to report to minor league camp with pitchers and catchers on March 5 and should be pitching without restrictions.

The A's originally signed Leon out of the Mexican league before the 2008 season. They had to share the right-hander with his Mexican league club for the 2008 campaign and Leon also continued to pitch in the Mexican Winter League during the off-season before the 2009 and 2010 campaigns. Although the innings totals weren't outrageous, Leon was essentially pitching full-time for three consecutive years. In some ways, his elbow injury may have come at a good time, and may have saved him some wear-and-tear down-the-road.

Leon, 23, has had success both as a reliever and as a starter during his short minor league career. The native of Saltillo, Mexico, is a groundball pitcher with excellent command and a plus breaking ball. He was pitching for Double-A Midland at the time of the injury and will be competing in camp to return to the Rockhounds. Whether he is in a bullpen or a starter's role remains to be seen. Leon's career-high for minor league innings pitched is 74.1, so look for him to be kept to 100 innings or so at a maximum this season.

Pedro Figueroa: The hard-throwing Figueroa was another pitcher who succumbed to Tommy John surgery in 2010. The injury came at an unfortunate time for the Dominican native. After several years in the A's system, Figueroa broke through as a top prospect in 2009 when he posted a 3.38 ERA and struck-out 145 in 152 A-ball innings. He was added to the A's 40-man roster before the 2010 season.

Figueroa's elbow injury flared up midway through his first season at the Double-A level. He wasn't himself with the Rockhounds, allowing a .295 BAA and six homeruns in 71.1 innings. Figueroa rehabbed throughout the 2011 season, returning to the mound at the end of the 2011 campaign. He threw two innings for the A's Rookie League team, striking out the side in both frames. He continued to progress during the A's fall Instructional League. His velocity returned to the mid-90s and his plus slider showed its usual break.

Figueroa is participating in the A's big league camp as a member of the team's 40-man roster. The 26-year-old is on his third option season, but he has yet to pitch at the Triple-A level. He is likely to start the 2012 campaign at Double-

A, but he could be a candidate to move up to Triple-A mid-season if he is pitching well. When healthy, Figueroa has arguably the most lively left arm in the A's system.

Sean Doolittle: Doolittle has been on the "recovering from injury" list since 2009, but there is optimism that this will be his first healthy year since 2008. Plagued by a torn patella and then a torn wrist tendon the past three years, Doolittle is hopeful that a position change will be the key to keeping him on the field. The former first base/outfield prospect made the transition to pitcher last August and things have been going according to plan thus far. He was able to pitch through some minor bicep tendinitis during the A's fall Instructional League and was generally impressive during that camp, showing good command and reaching 95 MPH with his fastball.

The left-hander was an accomplished pitcher in college at UVa, so his learning curve on the mound isn't nearly as steep as it would be for most position players making this same transition. However, Doolittle did show some rust during Instructs, especially with his move to first and with maintaining the same arm speed on his secondary pitches as he does on his fastball. Assuming he can iron out those details and stay healthy, Doolittle could rise quickly through the A's system.

Doolittle was a starter in college and has enough pitches to be a starter professionally, but he may be kept in the bullpen in order to make his path to the big leagues shorter. Given that he hasn't pitched a full season since 2007 (and that that season was in college), Doolittle won't be allowed to go past 100 innings, so a relief role may make the most sense. Assuming camp goes smoothly, Doolittle is likely to start the season with High-A Stockton, where he starred as a hitter in 2008. He was added to the 40-man roster before the start of last season, and this is his second option year, giving him a relatively short timeframe to position himself as major league ready. With his arm strength and command, however, Doolittle could become a top relief prospect in a hurry.

Ryan Doolittle: Sean's younger brother Ryan has had similar struggles with injuries since he turned pro in 2008. Ryan missed all of the 2009 season and the majority of the 2011 season with a right forearm strain. Like his older brother, Ryan was able to participate fully during the A's fall Instructional League. Ryan is expected to report to minor league camp on time and without restrictions.

Not as well known as his brother, Ryan is an intriguing relief prospect in his own right. When he has been healthy, the younger Doolittle has shown a remarkable ability to throw strikes. At the time he was injured while with Stockton last season, Doolittle was on a roll. In 20.1 innings, he had allowed only five runs on 17 hits. He had walked only three and had struck-out 24. Doolittle isn't just a soft-tossing control artist, either. The right-hander has a fastball that sits regularly in the 90-93 MPH range with good sinking action. He also has a solid slider and change-up.

Although he hasn't pitched much, Doolittle has posted some impressive numbers when he has been on the mound. For his career, he has averaged only 1.21 walks per nine innings while striking out more than eight per nine innings pitched. He has also allowed only seven homeruns in 112 innings and has induced more than two groundball outs for every flyball out.

Doolittle has seen time both as a starter and as a reliever during his short career. However, he will turn 24 in March, so his best chance at a big league career may be as a reliever. Doolittle could team-up in the same bullpen as his brother in Stockton to start the 2012 season if he makes it through spring training unscathed.

Max Stassi: During the 2009 draft, Stassi slipped from a projected first or supplemental first round pick to a fourth round selection in part because he had a right shoulder issue during his senior year of high school. The catcher was able to play through the shoulder problem during his first full professional season in 2010, but he wasn't able to repeat that feat in 2011.

The soreness in Stassi's shoulder got worse towards the end of spring training. The A's first attempted to have him rehab the shoulder while DHing for the Stockton Ports. After five weeks it became clear that rehab wasn't going to be enough for Stassi to fix the shoulder issue. He underwent season-ending shoulder surgery in May and missed the rest of the season.

One of the hardest working players in the A's system, Stassi tackled his rehab with gusto and was able to participate partially in the A's fall Instructional League camp. He was on a throwing program during the camp and was able to take regular at-bats. Stassi is now participating in big league camp and is back to throwing without restriction. Assuming he can stay healthy through spring training, Stassi will be starting the season in his best health since turning pro.

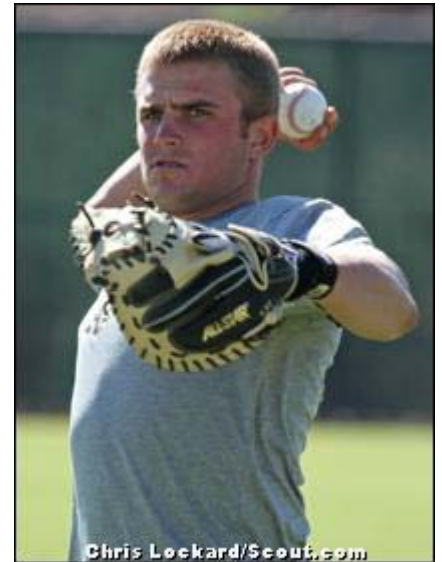
In a little more than one year of professional baseball, Stassi has shown glimpses of the player he is projected to be. He had a rough start to his 2010 campaign defensively but made dramatic improvements by the end of the year and had some in the organization calling him the best defensive catcher in the A's system. At the plate, Stassi has shown flashes of power but has also struggled to make consistent contact. Without the distraction of a sore shoulder, Stassi could be in-line to make similar improvements to his offensive game that he made defensively in 2010.

This will be a big year for the Northern California native. The A's acquired highly regarded catching prospect [Derek Norris](#) during the off-season and drafted two promising catchers ([Beau Taylor](#) and [Nick Rickles](#)) last June. To keep himself near the top of the A's depth chart at the catcher position, the soon-to-be 21-year-old will need a strong and healthy season.

Matt Thomson: With the exception of number one pick Michael Choice, no one shined brighter after being selected by the A's in the 2010 draft than Thomson. The lanky right-hander posted a 1.94 ERA in 51 innings that season with short-season Vancouver and High-A Stockton. He struck-out 71 and walked only 10 – all while not allowing a homerun. Unfortunately, Thomson was diagnosed with a slight tear in his right labrum at the end of that season. He had minor surgery after the 2010 campaign and wasn't ready at the start of last season. Thomson spent the first two months of the year at extended spring training and was sent out to the Low-A Burlington Bees in early June. Thomson made it through only two relief appearances before the pain returned.

This time, Thomson had the full surgery on his labrum. Labrum surgery is tricky for pitchers but it is a good sign that Thomson is expected to report to minor league spring training on time and ready to pitch. When healthy, Thomson is a four-pitch pitcher with a low-90s fastball, an above-average slider, a solid change-up and a curveball. He has pinpoint command, as well.

Thomson's college teammate A.J. Griffin had a break-through season in 2011. If he is fully recovered, Thomson could have a similar break-through. Thomson has collegiate experience as both a reliever and as a starter. Whether Thomson is a starter or a reliever, he will be monitored closely.



Stassi will have a healthy shoulder for the first time in three years.