

A's News Clips, Monday, February 27, 2012

Oakland A's look for DH until Manny Ramirez can play

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

With Manny Ramirez suspended for the first 50 games this season, one of the A's biggest chores is identifying a designated hitter until he is available.

There is no shortage of candidates -- outfielders Jonny Gomes and Seth Smith, and first basemen Kila Ka'aihue, Brandon Allen and Chris Carter are being considered.

"I view it as an opportunity," said Ka'aihue, who was acquired from the Kansas City Royals in September. "Do what you have to do, and they're giving you 50 games. It's kind of a blessing for whoever is in that situation. Fifty games to try and stay on the team."

A's general manager Billy Beane said the D.H. job is not being promised to Ramirez, who is on a minor league contract and doesn't come off suspension until May 30. But it seems the only way the A's would not plug Ramirez in at D.H. once he is eligible is if someone is already raking the ball in that spot.

Do the A's have a player capable of that?

Gomes and Smith have the most proven major league track records of all the D.H. candidates, but their career left/right splits are quite drastic. Smith has hit right-handers much better than left-handers over his career (.290 vs. .202), and Gomes is better against left-handers (.281 vs. .224).

A's manager Bob Melvin could platoon the two.

Allen, Carter and Ka'aihue need to prove they can contribute as big league regulars. Allen has the most experience in the majors, but he has played in only 106 games. All three have career batting averages below .220.

Third baseman Scott Sizemore will have an MRI exam on his left knee Monday morning.

The A's are calling his injury a sprain. Sizemore declined to talk with reporters until he gets a clear diagnosis.

"We're holding out hope for good news," Melvin said. "If ever there was a time to have (the injury), it's early in camp to be able to recover from that."

Adam Rosales and Eric Sogard are candidates to play third in Sizemore's absence. The A's also have shifted catcher Josh Donaldson to third base in light of Sizemore's injury. Donaldson played some third last season.

Third-base options on the free-agent market include former A's star Miguel Tejada, Wes Helms and Felipe Lopez.

Melvin has raved about how sharp reliever Brian Fuentes has looked. After a mild hamstring injury slowed him down for a couple days, Fuentes was back on the mound Sunday.

"I'm sure there's some potential carrots he thinks are dangling there," Melvin said in reference to the closer's job that is up for grabs.

Melvin threw batting practice and joked about how much Gomes, Smith and fellow outfielder Collin Cowgill knocked him around.

"It was my first time to face Mr. Cowgill, and he treated me pretty rudely," Melvin said.

Cowgill, 25, came from Arizona in the Trevor Cahill trade. His chances of making the team are slim considering the A's crowded outfield, but Melvin thinks highly of him.

"He's exactly what I heard -- a guy who has fun playing and is always energetic," Melvin said.

Outfield prospect Jermaine Mitchell, who is recovering from knee surgery, is getting closer to full strength but is likely to miss the first week of exhibitions, Melvin said.

Still no word on when Yoenis Cespedes' contract might be completed. The Cuban outfielder, who agreed to a four-year \$36 million contract with the A's two weeks ago, must obtain his worker's visa before he can report to camp.

Severity of knee injury to A's Scott Sizemore still unknown

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

There is no further word yet on A's third baseman Scott Sizemore's knee injury.

The MRI that was originally thought to take place Saturday won't happen until Monday, according to manager Bob Melvin.

"It's just tough to find a place where you know you're going to find a good image (on the weekend)," Melvin said.

The A's want Sizemore to see a specialist rather than get an MRI at a hospital, which sometimes doesn't provide as good of a read on an injury. Melvin talked with Sizemore on Saturday night.

"He's a little down, but we're holding out hope for good news," Melvin said. "If ever there was a time to have that happen, it's early in camp so there's time to recover."

Melvin might name his opening day starter "in a couple days," and it's assumed that Brandon McCarthy will take that honor.

In other news, Melvin said he expects outfield prospect Jermaine Mitchell to miss the first week of exhibitions as he continues recovering from knee surgery. The A's are intrigued by Mitchell's talent even though he's not the youngest prospect at 27. He hit .332 with 15 homers and 78 RBI last season split between Double-A Midland and Triple-A Sacramento.

Purdy: It's home sweet home as Bay Area teams either already have or are planning new stadiums

By Mark Purdy, Mercury News Columnist

As Bay Area residents, we all usually agree on a few things. One, we live in a superior place of beauty and brainpower. Two, we are among the most superior people on earth for deciding to live in such a superior place.

And three, we believe in getting superiorly psychotic whenever our professional sports teams talk about building new stadiums or arenas. Which, of course, happens approximately every five minutes. By tradition, we argue and shout the issues to death and beyond, often into zombiehood. And nothing gets done.

That's why this seven-day span is so amazing. Last Wednesday, San Jose's planning commission gave final approval for the Earthquakes' privately financed 18,000-seat soccer stadium near the airport. Meanwhile, on Tuesday night, Santa Clara's city council is expected to approve the ground lease for the new 49ers stadium, which will require construction to begin within 120 days.

In other words, both deals are essentially done and each team plans to have shovels in the ground by late summer. By 2014, the Earthquakes and 49ers should be playing in new digs. Bam. Just like that.

Yet ponder this: It's just the start of the Bay Area's most radical sports venue restructuring in 40 years. We haven't seen anything like it since the 1966-71 time frame -- when the Raiders, A's, Warriors and 49ers all moved into new facilities.

Before the end of this decade, we face a similar major landscape shift. Five of our seven major pro teams will be playing in new facilities by 2017 if they have their way, which is a pretty stunning prospect. Let's sum it up, sport by sport, in no particular order.

Status: It appears the Santa Clara project is a total go.

Best Case Scenario: Stadium ready for 2014 NFL season.

Worst Case Scenario: Stadium ready for 2015 NFL season.

Forecast: Nothing would seem able to stop it now, barring a change of heart by Goldman Sachs or the NFL on the loan financing. But 49ers CEO Jed York needs to soon announce a major naming rights sponsor, to plant a flag alongside the team and attract further corporate support.

RAIDERS

Status: The team's lease at O.co Coliseum runs through the 2013 season. Mark Davis, after assuming the ownership reins, has said he wants a new stadium and has not ruled out any possibilities, including a move back to Southern California.

Best Case Scenario: The Raiders stay in their current home beyond 2013 and Oakland develops a financing plan for a proposed multi-use "Sports Village" development that would include a new stadium on the current Coliseum site.

Worst Case Scenario: The Raiders occupy Los Angeles.

Forecast: With no financing on the horizon for Oakland's fantasy "Sports Village," the most sensible idea is for the Raiders to share the Santa Clara stadium, either as tenants of the 49ers or as business partners. Or perhaps the Raiders would sign a relatively short 10-year lease, so the team could become portable again in 2024 if Davis wants his own stadium.

GIANTS

Status: They're at AT&T Park indefinitely.

Best Case Scenario: The Giants, who should have their ballpark mortgage paid off in five years, rake in untold millions after the A's become frustrated in their new ballpark pursuit and leave the Bay Area.

Worst Case Scenario: The A's move to San Jose and the Giants rake in slightly fewer untold millions after the ballpark is paid off.

Forecast: The Giants aren't going anywhere except higher on the Forbes list of most valuable sports franchises.

ATHLETICS

Status: Still waiting for commissioner Bud Selig to rule on whether the team can build a privately constructed new ballpark in San Jose.

Best Case Scenario: Selig gives a thumbs up, San Jose voters approve the ballpark plan and the A's are South Bay residents by 2015.

Worst Case Scenario: Selig fails to reach agreement with the Giants on the territorial rights issue, owner Lew Wolff sells the team to an outside buyer and the team leaves Northern California.

Forecast: Talk to Bud.

WARRIORS

Status: Team's lease at Oracle Arena runs out after the 2016-17 season, and owners Joe Lacob and Peter Guber have cast lustful eyes at San Francisco, where the Giants hope to facilitate a new arena on the parking lot across McCovey Cove.

Best Case Scenario: The Warriors stay in Oakland as part of the "Sports Village."

Worst Case Scenario: The team abandons its East Bay fan base and crosses the bridge. That is, unless you're a Warriors fan in San Francisco, in which case the worst case becomes the best case.

Forecast: The tea leaves are obvious. As long as politics don't intervene, Stephen Curry will be spraining his ankles in San Francisco by 2019.

SHARKS

Status: Team's lease at HP Pavilion runs through 2018.

Best Case Scenario: The lease is extended 10 more years with minimal fuss. With sellouts all but automatic and the building holding up well, why leave?

Worst Case Scenario: The Sharks, annoyed by having the A's as next door neighbors, make noise about a better deal and argue with the city before a new lease is signed.

Forecast: Move along. Nothing to see here.

EARTHQUAKES

Status: Stadium is on track and luxury suites are selling. Only major question involves a naming rights sponsor and whether owner Lew Wolff begins construction without one.

Best Case Scenario: Facebook Field opens in 2014.

Worst Case Scenario: Economy takes another dip and the project is delayed by a few years. But it will eventually get done.

Forecast: The smallish stadium could become a cool, boutique-style, frequent-sellout spot for fervent soccer fans -- as long as the Quakes don't make the mistake of scheduling too many games against big-name opponents at larger Bay Area venues, reducing season-ticket demand. But the Quakes won't be that stupid. Will they? Argue amongst yourselves. With superiority, of course.

A's Kurt Suzuki hopes new bulk helps him thrive

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Phoenix -- Forget Manny Ramirez. The A's new power man this year just might be Kurt Suzuki.

OK, maybe that's a stretch; when Suzuki suggests he'll hit 25 home runs, he makes it clear he's joking ... sort of. He hasn't hit more than 15 in a season, but Suzuki does have more muscle this year, and he also is using a heavier bat.

Suzuki spent the winter bulking up his body, adding 14 pounds at the behest of A's general manager Billy Beane.

Suzuki has one more pound to go to reach his goal of 205, but he said he likes how he feels, and more important, he believes he will have more stamina throughout the season, when he tends to lose weight.

In addition, a little extra cushion might come in handy should Suzuki ever get run over at the plate like the Giants' Buster Posey last year.

"It wasn't the reason why I did it, but it could protect me, yeah," Suzuki said. "But look at Buster: He's a big, strong kid and real athletic. It doesn't matter, if you're caught in that situation and you're in a vulnerable spot. In general, though, a bigger frame might help with impact."

Suzuki is clearly wider in the shoulders, and he said he can feel the difference when he hits.

"It's not necessarily about hitting the ball farther, but more the feeling when the ball comes off the bat - I think I might hit more balls that go into the gap instead of getting caught," he said. "And I think extra strength will help my confidence."

Suzuki's hitting partner during the spring was onetime A's infielder Adam Kennedy, and Suzuki began using one of Kennedy's bats - at 33 1/2 inches and 31 1/2 ounces, a half-ounce heavier than what he usually swings.

He liked the feel so much, he ordered the bat in several different weights, so he can use the Kennedy model (Rawlings 243) all the time.

"He'll love them until he goes 0-for-10, like I always do," Kennedy said by phone with a laugh. "No, really, Kurt is great to hit with, and he's always looking to improve, try new things. But the bat's not 'Wonderboy,' that's for sure."

Last year at this time, Suzuki felt he was in the best shape of his life, but he says now that that doesn't always translate to his sport.

"Triathlon runners are in great shape, but it's not baseball shape," he said. "My body fat percentage was under 10, and now it's 12 - they want it at 12 1/2-15 because I lose so much during the season. You can't be skin and bones when you're a catcher."

So this winter, Suzuki emphasized nutrition, going so far as to hire a nutritionist and subscribe to a specialized meals-delivery service, Sunfare.

Initially, Suzuki didn't gain a thing, so his nutritionist adjusted his intake, adding more carbohydrates and "good" fats such as almonds and avocados. Like most athletes, Suzuki had been focused on protein, but he wasn't getting enough in the way of carbs to fuel his extensive workouts, and he was burning muscle instead.

"When I added carbs, I started seeing the weight coming," he said.

Even if Suzuki has more endurance this year, he's likely to have less time behind the plate; manager Bob Melvin would like to give him more breaks, especially on day games after night games. That often has been the plan with Suzuki at the start of the year, and somehow he has started 516 games in the past four seasons, most in the majors among catchers.

"Bob knows I love to play every day," Suzuki said. "I prepare myself to come in and play as much as I do, but if it's better for the team if I don't, that's OK."

Last year, scouts thought all those games were catching up to Suzuki, who had career lows in batting average (.237) and on-base percentage (.301). He threw out 19 percent of attempted base-stealers, fourth worst in the league.

Suzuki said that Beane started jokingly asking him to add weight last year, then as the season was ending, proposed that he try for real.

"Given the physical demands of the position, we had concerns that Kurt was wearing down over the course of the season," Beane said.

"I didn't mind that. I liked it," Suzuki said. "I'll try anything if it will help me. I don't want to settle for being an average catcher. I want to be the best and get the best out of my ability.

"I'm not the biggest guy in the world, but with this weight gain, I just feel better. The way I'm hitting, the way I'm throwing, everything is better. I'm not the most talented guy out there, but getting the most out of my body puts me in position to be the best."

A's Scott Sizemore to get MRI on knee Monday

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Phoenix -- Injured third baseman **Scott Sizemore** won't get an MRI exam until today, manager **Bob Melvin** said Sunday, because the team wants a more detailed test than the MRIs used in local hospitals.

So Sizemore will see a specialist today, but it is clear the A's believe that he will miss at least some time after he hurt his left knee during fielding drills Saturday.

Melvin spoke to Sizemore and said, "He's a little down, but we're still holding out hope for good news."

Catcher **Josh Donaldson** moved to third base for the time being, in order to be considered along with **Wes Timmons**, **Adam Rosales** and **Eric Sogard**. If Sizemore were to miss significant time, the A's might think about trading for Angels infielder **Alberto Callaspo**, but such a move would be unlikely until near the end of camp.

The A's will borrow **Stephen Parker** from minor-league camp on occasion when spring games start, but Parker would be a longshot for the big-league spot. He spent most of last season at Double-A Midland before a late promotion to Triple-A Sacramento.

Fun bunch: Most eyes were on **Manny Ramirez** during batting practice, but the players who hit off Melvin - **Jonny Gomes**, **Collin Cowgill** and **Seth Smith** - were drilling homers left and right, much to Melvin's chagrin.

"A lot of balls were lost," Melvin said. "Cowgill treated me pretty rough, as did Mr. Gomes and Mr. Smith."

Melvin was playfully irked by Gomes' last at-bat.

"He walked me off, which really got me the most," Melvin said. "He called it, and someone's car got damaged. It was more the bat flip that hurt me."

Melvin called for a rematch, and Cowgill wondered aloud if Melvin's arm could take that. "It might be a long day," he said.

"Better pack a lunch," added Gomes, who said of Melvin, "It's a good thing he's the manager. He definitely wouldn't have made the team today."

Briefly: Pitchers for Thursday's intrasquad game: **Sonny Gray**, the A's top pick in June; **Fabio Castro**; **Sean Doolittle**, recently converted from first base to pitcher; **Ryan Cook**, obtained in the **Trevor Cahill** deal with Arizona; **Andrew Carignan**; **Jim Miller** and **Evan Scribner**. ... Outfielder **Jermaine Mitchell**, who had microfracture knee surgery in September, said he's not limited this spring, but Melvin said he won't play the first week of games. ... Former big-leaguer **David Segui** was on hand to watch his friend Ramirez take batting practice.

In top form at spring

Scott Ostler, San Francisco Chronicle

Welcome to spring training!

In an effort to provide our players with a winning environment and to meet their individual needs and bizarre demands, we are asking you to fill out this questionnaire. Please use pen or pencil or, if you don't have either, simply spit tobacco juice into the appropriate box.

This spring, you plan to:

Noise Rating: BOMB Announce that I won't be able to play with a clear mind unless the team renegotiates my contract.

Noise Rating: BOMB Drop subtle hints to the newspaper folks that I am tragically underpaid.

Noise Rating: BOMB Tell everyone that I am happy with my contract and quietly give myself a "raise" by undertipping the clubhouse attendants.

Which best describes your current situation?

Noise Rating: BOMB I have given up PEDs.

Noise Rating: BOMB I have taken up PEDs.

Noise Rating: BOMB I am in the awkward in-between phase. So cut me slack on any irrational outbursts.

During the offseason you:

Noise Rating: BOMB Got married.

Noise Rating: BOMB Got divorced.

Noise Rating: BOMB Joined a polygamous cult in southern Utah and will require additional game tickets.

You prefer to chew:

Noise Rating: BOMB Bubble gum.

Noise Rating: BOMB Tobacco.

Noise Rating: BOMB Sunflower seeds.

Noise Rating: BOMB A "ballplayer cocktail" of all the above.

Noise Rating: BOMB Rusty carpet tacks.

Would you would be willing to play another position?

Noise Rating: BOMB Hey, whatever the manager asks.

Noise Rating: BOMB I'll do what's best for the team, and what's best for the team is me staying right where I am.

Noise Rating: BOMB No problemo. You going to ask me to have a sex-change operation, too?

Any dietary changes we should know about?

Noise Rating: BOMB I am on a low-carb, high-protein, gluten-free diet.

Noise Rating: BOMB I am on a seafood diet. Whatever food I see, I eat. That's an old ballplayer joke!

Noise Rating: BOMB Diet? Are you kidding? This is baseball. Have you ever seen Cecil Fielder?

This spring, the plan is to:

Noise Rating: BOMB Go back to the basics.

Noise Rating: BOMB Go back to my original swing/delivery.

Noise Rating: BOMB Go back to my favorite spring training strip club.

When relaxing in the clubhouse, your favorite game is:

Noise Rating: BOMB Dominoes.

Noise Rating: BOMB Cards.

Noise Rating: BOMB Hide-'n'-seek.

Any new tattoos?

Noise Rating: BOMB A heart with "Mom."

Noise Rating: BOMB Barbed wire around my upper arm.

Noise Rating: BOMB Mount Rushmore covering my entire back, with my children's faces instead of the mugs of those president dudes.

Which of the following would you like to see banned from the clubhouse?

Noise Rating: BOMB Beer.

Noise Rating: BOMB Beer, until "happy hour" (the fifth inning).

Noise Rating: BOMB The media.

Noise Rating: BOMB The manager.

Noise Rating: BOMB PED-sniffing dogs.

To get loose before the game, the preference is:

Noise Rating: BOMB To stretch with the team.

Noise Rating: BOMB My private yoga routine.

Noise Rating: BOMB A shot of Jack Daniel's.

During the offseason, you:

Noise Rating: BOMB Wrote a book about myself.

Noise Rating: BOMB Read a book about myself.

Noise Rating: BOMB Got booked myself.

The clubhouse music you prefer is:

Noise Rating: BOMB Country-western.

Noise Rating: BOMB Rap.

Noise Rating: BOMB Country-western rap.

Noise Rating: BOMB Wagner. Just to annoy everyone.

During the offseason, you developed:

Noise Rating: BOMB A new pitch.

Noise Rating: BOMB A new swing.

Noise Rating: BOMB An allergy to advice from our hitting or pitching coaches.

Adjacent to the clubhouse, you would like to have access to:

Noise Rating: BOMB A weight room.

Noise Rating: BOMB A video room.

Noise Rating: BOMB A wine cellar.

You would like clubhouse-access privileges for:

Noise Rating: BOMB My personal trainer.

Noise Rating: BOMB My pedicurist.

Noise Rating: BOMB My imaginary friend, Earl.

You believe playing time should be:

Noise Rating: BOMB Fixed and regular, so everyone knows what to expect.

Noise Rating: BOMB Based on merit (who's playing well) and team need.

Noise Rating: BOMB I don't care, as long as I'm in there.

If the team signs a star player who wears your uniform number, you would yield the number to him in exchange for:

Noise Rating: BOMB A Rolex.

Noise Rating: BOMB A set of golf clubs.

Noise Rating: BOMB That's a good start. What else you got, Vanna?

At your clubhouse cubicle, you prefer:

Noise Rating: BOMB A regular chair.

Noise Rating: BOMB A therapeutic/ergonomic chair.

Noise Rating: BOMB A chair Barry Bonds would envy.

You feel rejuvenated this spring because of:

Noise Rating: BOMB A new conditioning program.

Noise Rating: BOMB A revised outlook on the game and life in general.

Noise Rating: BOMB What does "rejuvenated" mean?

You will be happy to sign autographs for fans:

Noise Rating: BOMB After batting practice.

Noise Rating: BOMB At the gates of the players' parking lot.

Noise Rating: BOMB At the gates of hell during ski season.

Noise Rating: BOMB As soon as my new name, -, becomes legal so I can sign with a bingo dauber.

Noise Rating: BOMB Being a team guy, I can't risk hand fatigue. Please hire a stunt double for autographs.

Drumbeat: No news on A's Scott Sizemore today; MRI tomorrow

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Papago Park 2/26/2012, 8:59am

The A's want third baseman Scott Sizemore to get a more detailed MRI for his left knee than what was available at area hospitals over the weekend, so he will not get an MRI until tomorrow, when he can see a specialist who is only open on weekdays. I'd been surprised yesterday that the team couldn't get a player in for an immediate MRI, but this sounds like sound reasoning – if a normal hospital MRI might not tell them everything they need to know, a delay of two days won't make much difference.

As I reported in today's Chronicle, Josh Donaldson told me yesterday that he's been told to put away his catcher's gear, he's going to be playing third base now – along with all the other candidates for the spot, should Sizemore miss much time.

In addition, I reported that Alberto Callaspo of the Angels is a very likely trade possibility should the A's look outside the organization for third-base help, though it's hard to imagine Oakland would surrender any top-notch prospect for Callaspo after spending the offseason acquiring top prospects. Maybe one of the A's many extra outfielders could be a match; someone will have to come off the 40-man roster when Yoenis Cespedes gets a visa and comes to camp, anyway.

I spoke to outfielder Jermaine Mitchell today; he'd been mentioned as a possibility for Oakland's outfield this season were it not for microfracture knee surgery in September. Mitchell had a terrific season that included a .453 on-base percentage at Midland, and he was co-player of the year in the A's organization along with outfielder Michael Choice.

Mitchell told me he is not limited in any way this camp and he has been participating in full workouts, but manager Bob Melvin said that Mitchell will be held out of the first week of games. He will get into game later in the spring, and, of course, the A's have added numerous outfielder since back in October, when they were discussing Mitchell for a potential spot in Oakland in the second half of 2012. Still, he's one to watch for sure; the A's have high hopes for him. Could an A's outfield of the future include Cespedes, Mitchell and Choice, with Grant Green also in the running?

A few tidbits about today's Oscars were cut out of my A's beat in today's paper, so I'll tack 'em on here.

Dallas Braden told me he was making no Oscar predictions because he'd already whiffed on "Moneyball"'s future once.

"I jokingly told Billy when they were filming it, 'Let's be honest, it's going to go straight to DVD.' And here they are at the Oscars."

Catcher Kurt Suzuki said he hopes Brad Pitt wins Best Actor. "What if he does and then says, 'Hey, Billy, come up here with me!' " Suzuki said. "That would be great."

If you didn't seem them back when the movie came out, I did two stories on the "Moneyball" phenomenon: one breaking down **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**; and another on whether the book actually wound up hurting the A's ability to compete.

Mitchell eager to showcase skills at A's camp

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- It's easy to look past Jermaine Mitchell's name on the list of A's outfielders in camp.

After all, 12 other players are on there -- a number expected to grow by one upon Yoenis Cespedes' pending arrival -- and more than a third of them play best in center, as does Mitchell. He also happens to be the only one coming off microfracture knee surgery.

"I'll probably be flying under the radar a bit," Mitchell said Sunday.

But he hopes not for long, especially since he's deemed himself 100 percent healthy and says he's facing no restrictions, despite undergoing the surgery just five months ago.

"I'm glad he thinks he's 100 percent, but I don't think he's 100 percent yet," manager Bob Melvin said. "We're not going to put him in a position where he's rounding bases and such. I'm glad he feels good, but he's going to be behind in games. So that obviously affects things. Until he's absolutely 100 percent and gets in games can we can watch his abilities and evaluate him."

Still, his name is an intriguing one, and so is his talent, even though he's not the youngest prospect, at 27.

Following a handful of disappointing seasons in the Minors, Mitchell last year showed the ability the A's had hoped to see when they selected in the fifth round of the 2006 Draft. Splitting the season between Double-A Midland and Triple-A Sacramento, he clobbered pitchers and hit a combined .332 with a .430 on-base percentage and .530 slugging percentage.

It marked, by far, the most successful campaign of a career he almost seemed destined to take elsewhere had he not performed in such a manner. The secret behind it all, he said, was rather simple.

"Going into last year, I told myself, 'Make sure every time you go out there to play, go out like you did when you were in Little League and have fun,'" he said.

Fun was surely added, and a leg kick he sported for years was subtracted from his swing.

"I cut it out completely, and my timing was a lot better," Mitchell explained. "I found myself being much more consistent with the barrel, since it allowed me to go back to a simple stride."

Unfortunately, he was unable to show it off at the Major League level in September, when news broke he had been playing with a knee injury for much of the season. The damage, thought to be relatively minor at the time, proved rather extensive, leading the A's to believe he'd likely be out of the mix until at least April.

Mitchell always had a different plan in mind, though.

"I always shoot high," he said. "I was hoping to be ready the day after the surgery. I knew it would be a long process, but I feel great now."

Despite the influx of outfielders crowding Oakland's roster, Mitchell will likely make his Major League debut before year's end, considering the club figures to audition several of its young players even after Spring Training action concludes. It will mark his seventh professional season.

"I'm sure he wished he didn't get hurt," Melvin said, "because I'm sure he'd be right in the middle of it right now."

"The only thing I can do is go out there whenever I get my opportunity and do what I know how to do," Mitchell said. "It was very frustrating when I found out I had to have surgery, but I knew it was the best thing for me at the time. If anything, the rehab's made my body stronger."

A's await injured Sizemore's prognosis

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- The wait continues for news on third baseman Scott Sizemore's left knee injury.

The MRI exam that was expected to take place Sunday won't happen until Monday morning, when Sizemore is scheduled to see a specialist.

"It's just tough to find a place where you know you're going to find a good image [on the weekend]," manager Bob Melvin said.

Sizemore was on crutches in the A's clubhouse on Sunday afternoon but, understandably, said he'd prefer not to comment on the situation until he knows more.

Having spoken to Sizemore Saturday night, Melvin said in the morning, "He's a little down, but we're holding out hope for good news. If ever there was a time to have that happen, it's early in camp so there's time to recover."

Melvin is calling the injury a sprain, but those nearby when Sizemore went down Saturday afternoon said they heard a popping sound. Depending on the severity of the injury, the A's could be forced to try several hands at third base during the next few weeks.

Among the candidates to fill in for Sizemore are Josh Donaldson, Eric Sogard and Adam Rosales.

Ka'aihue relishes new opportunity with A's

PHOENIX -- It's not exactly the most ideal situation, entering a first-base competition that includes three other players, but the A's Kila Ka'aihue wouldn't have it any other way right now.

Following a frustrating season in Kansas City, where he spent the first 10 years of his professional career, Ka'aihue enters camp with the A's feeling refreshed and "like I have control over my career." That wasn't necessarily the case when he was wearing a Royals uniform.

"Being here, it's a similar situation, where I have the opportunity to make the team," he said. "But, at the same time, if I don't, it won't be because they always had someone else in mind. I'm not having to look over my shoulder anymore. In Kansas City, they always had someone else they wanted. They never really wanted me there. I always did well enough to hang around but was always passed up."

Ka'aihue likened his role with the Royals to a bandage. He began the 2011 season as the club's regular first baseman but was quickly replaced by Eric Hosmer, whose arrival had long been anticipated, after just 23 games. At the time, Ka'aihue was hitting just .195 with two home runs and six RBIs. At designated hitter, where he could see time with the A's this spring, he was blocked by Billy Butler in Kansas City.

Ka'aihue ultimately spent the majority of the season in Triple-A and, in September, was designated for assignment before being traded to Oakland.

"I wouldn't say it was my toughest year, but I would say it was the least enjoyable," he said. "In 2006, I had a knee injury and struggled badly at Double-A. That was frustrating because I was hurt. Last year was flat-out not enjoyable. I did better, but it wasn't fun. It was just a hard year."

Ka'aihue couldn't be happier with the A's, a team that's much closer to his hometown of Honolulu. His brother, Kala, spent some time in the organization in 2010 and promised he'd "love it."

"Everything he's said has been right so far," he said. "The people here are awesome. It just has a different feeling here to it. It doesn't feel like you're on the outside, looking in on a bunch of older guys. This team, there's a bunch of younger guys, and it's refreshing. I feel refreshed. I feel like I want to be here."

The A's have long been enamored with Ka'aihue's power potential, after he shot to prominence in 2008 when he combined for 37 home runs and 100 RBIs with a .314 average for Double-A Northwest Arkansas and Triple-A Omaha. But he also wants to make them aware of his defensive skills, which, if proven to be above average, could further shake up the first-base competition with Daric Barton, Brandon Allen and Chris Carter.

"I'd say that's the best part of my game," he said.

Such confidence wasn't always there. It wasn't until the Royals put him on waivers and the A's reeled him in that he found motivation. Ka'aihue also gained plenty perspective when he learned his wife, Blair, was pregnant with twin boys, due on the Fourth of July.

"I feel like if I win a job, I might have a chance to stay here for a while," he said. "It's a good feeling, after having been passed up over and over. I love the guys in Kansas City, but I'm looking forward to this year so much more. And I can't wait to play them."

Worth noting

- Melvin again raved about lefty Brian Fuentes, who had a mild hamstring issue for a couple days but was back on the mound facing hitters Sunday.

Start of exhibition games signals spring rush

Oakland and Seattle open exhibition slate later this week

By Doug Miller / MLB.com

Let the exhibition games begin.

After weeks of pitchers' fielding practice, bullpen sessions on back fields, batting practice and intrasquad games, fans in Arizona and Florida will finally get to see the first real evidence of the coming season later this week.

We're talking about March, which means real Major League Baseball teams pitted against each other in packed stadiums as the smell of hot dogs, popcorn and sunscreen wafts through the stands.

Yep, soon enough, baseball will really be back.

The fun starts in earnest on Friday, when the Seattle Mariners visit the Oakland A's at Phoenix Municipal Stadium at 1:05 p.m. MT. It's fitting that these two clubs should suit up first in the Cactus and Grapefruit Leagues considering that they're the same teams that will begin the regular season when they meet in Tokyo on March 28-29 as part of the Japan Opening Series.

The Mariners-A's game will be the only legitimate exhibition game on Friday, but Saturday will feature a semi-full slate in Arizona and Florida, starting with five games -- Tigers at Braves, Yankees at Phillies, Pirates at Blue Jays, Rays at Twins and Nationals at Astros -- beginning at 1:05 ET in the Sunshine State. The Cactus League slate, set for two hours later, includes split D-backs squads taking on the Giants and Rockies, the Indians playing their Goodyear, Ariz., complex-mates, the Reds, and the A's and Mariners matching up once again, this time at Seattle's home park in Peoria.

The week will end with a packed Sunday featuring 12 games on both coasts.

What to expect from these early March games? Well, not a lot of tosses from starters, who usually crank it up for only an inning, and maybe two at-bats from the regulars in the lineup as the hitters attempt to catch up with the pitchers.

But don't worry; there's plenty of drama yet to come. This is where the positional battles we've all been reading about in February start to simmer and the countdown to 25 (roster spots) begins to heat up, just like the weather.

The most prominent ones include the Angels logjam in which Mark Trumbo, Kendrys Morales and Bobby Abreu could find themselves wondering where they might play around the diamond and how many at-bats they'll each receive. There's also the D-backs' upcoming decision regarding who will get more reps in left field between reigning National League Gold Glove Award winner Gerardo Parra and recent signee Jason Kubel.

The Tampa Bay Rays will be forced to make the always-tough choice between two worthy candidates for the starting rotation, with Jeff Niemann and Wade Davis competing for the No. 5 slot. However, if **top prospect** Matt Moore gets lit up all spring, it might be a three-way competition.

The Red Sox will determine if Mike Aviles or Nick Punto deserves to start at shortstop and replace the slick glove and clutch bat of Marco Scutaro.

And at Nationals camp, what will happen with super-prospect Bryce Harper? Will Harper make the roster right away or will he start the regular season in Triple-A? We'll find out soon enough now that there are games being played.

So it goes all around the camps, although there's still time for some rosters to change shape. Believe it or not, March will arrive and several big-name players are still out there and looking for jobs.

The biggest of those names, starter Roy Oswalt, indicated that he might wait until the middle of the season to sign somewhere. Johnny Damon and Vladimir Guerrero are still unemployed and looking to work right away, as are Mike Gonzalez, Derrek Lee, Hideki Matsui, Magglio Ordonez, Miguel Tejada, Jason Varitek, Javier Vazquez, Michael Wuertz, Chris Young (the pitcher) and others.

And don't rule out the possibility of trades, either. With many players out of Minor League options, Spring Training can be a convenient time to unload one roster spot for another.

Bottom line: There's still a lot that remains to be seen, but starting this week, at least we'll be watching big league games while we're wondering what'll happen next.

Chavez disputes 'Moneyball' portrayal

By Barry M. Bloom / MLB.com

TAMPA, Fla. -- The movie "Moneyball," based on the landmark book by Michael Lewis, is an entertaining fantasy. So says Eric Chavez, one of the players who was a main cog on that 2002 Oakland Athletics team, but is not mentioned in the cinematic depiction when multiple reasons are given for the success of that 103-win season.

The filmmakers would have you believe that the A's won the American League West and put together an AL record 20-game winning streak because Oakland general manager Billy Beane used statistical analysis to mine the likes of heretofore unheralded first baseman Scott Hatteberg, side-armed relief specialist Chad Bradford and an aging David Justice, whose contract was mostly paid by the Yankees.

But the common criticism from most baseball people is that the scriptwriters ignore the fact that Beane also took advantage of a young and athletic core in Chavez, shortstop Miguel Tejada and starting pitchers Barry Zito, Mark Mulder and Tim Hudson.

"Those are some pretty good players," Chavez told MLB.com earlier this week. "I saw the movie and it wasn't a realistic view of what happened there. It's easy to say you had a formula and it worked. They drafted really well. We were fortunate to have young guys come together at the same time and play really well together. Billy has tried to do it again over the last few years, but it's hard to duplicate. It's hard to do. It's a slippery slope when you start saying you have an equation for success."

The discussion is germane again because it is Oscar Sunday tonight in Hollywood and "Moneyball" has been nominated for six Academy Awards, including Best Picture and Brad Pitt as Best Actor in the role of Beane.

A decade later, Chavez is a bit player now on the verge of being re-signed by the Yankees as a backup corner infielder and designated hitter. Drafted by the A's No. 10 overall out of Mount Carmel High School in north San Diego County

during the 1996 First-Year Player Draft, Chavez starred for the 2000-2003 A's teams that lost four consecutive AL Division Series in five games.

When the A's finally did ascend to the ALCS in 2006, the Tigers swept them. Oakland hasn't been back to the playoffs since.

There were some fatal flaws in the A's system that led to the team's demise. The movie depicts Beane and a young assistant played by Jonah Hill trying to think outside the box when first baseman Jason Giambi leaves for big bucks in New York after the 2001 season. With limited resources, Beane had to pick and choose when it came to re-signing his own players.

Beane ultimately let Tejada and Zito go to free agency and traded Mulder and Hudson, receiving six players in those deals who never had much of an impact on the Major League club save for pitcher Dan Haren, also later traded.

Strike one.

A product himself of Mount Carmel High, Beane scouted Chavez personally and was in love with the player. Using those limited resources through two ownerships, Beane locked up Chavez in 2004, signing him to a six-year, \$66 million extension. Chavez then broke down, suffered through multiple back and shoulder surgeries and played in only 154 games in his last four seasons in Oakland.

Strike two and three.

Chavez still wonders what it would have been like for the A's had he remained healthy. He still blames it on himself that the franchise suffered because he couldn't play at his expected level. But then, a GM has to make his choices, whether they are based on advanced metrics or on the feeling in his own gut, and then has to live with them. Regardless of the measure, no one has a crystal ball that will allow him to predict future production based on past performance.

"I'm not sure how my injuries played from an organizational standpoint, but it couldn't have been good," said Chavez, who is only 34. "I regret not being [able] to help them win more games. I regret that completely. That's one of the reasons I told Billy that it would be hard for me to continue playing there because back in the day I was such a productive player. I told him, 'I don't know if I can ever get back to being that type of player. In the fans' eyes it would always be underachieving.' For me, it was very frustrating. Billy agreed completely."

Chavez says he still talks to Beane regularly and, back to the movie, he added that Pitt couldn't have been more dead on in his characterization of the GM, whose own self doubts led to failure as a projected five-tool player once drafted high by the New York Mets.

Like many observers, Chavez said that Phillip Seymour Hoffman's depiction of then manager Art Howe couldn't have been more fictional.

"It was completely opposite," he said. "Physically, not even close. Demeanor, not even close. Art was very quiet. Not very outspoken at all. I never heard one thing about a contract dispute during that time. The way some of the guys were portrayed in the clubhouse I wasn't very fond of, either. During the 20-game streak, go back and look at the numbers put up by Tejada and myself. Our number four or five starter went 5-0."

We checked. It was the late Cory Lidle, who was actually 3-0 during that streak. Tejada batted .379 with three homers and 17 RBIs. Chavez hit .329 with six homers and 28 RBIs. They both played in all 20 games. To the chagrin of Chavez, none of that was mentioned in the film.

"Part of Hollywood has to go into a movie to make it interesting for the normal fan," Chavez said. "I'm happy it was a success. But for somebody who was there, you just want it to be portrayed for what it was."

A's lefty starter Dallas Braden pain-free, confident about strong return from shoulder surgery

By: Janie McCauley, The Associated Press

PHOENIX - Dallas Braden decided against being a world traveller this winter, realizing his rehabilitation from shoulder surgery took top priority.

Braden is working with the hope of returning to the Oakland Athletics' depleted rotation come mid-April or perhaps early May. He understands the urgency for a pitching staff that traded away All-Star starters Trevor Cahill and Gio Gonzalez this off-season, along with All-Star closer Andrew Bailey.

Everybody wants to know when his first start will be.

"So do I, so do I," Braden said. "For two years I'd been throwing in pain, not with pain but in pain. That's tough to do, and now just to be able to throw a baseball pain-free has been tremendous."

The 28-year-old Braden hopes to return to his 2010 form, when he pitched an improbable perfect game against Tampa Bay on May 9, the highlight of a year in which he went 11-14 with a 3.50 ERA in a career-best 192 2-3 innings.

Braden received a \$3.35 million, one-year contract in mid-December. He made three starts last season before being sidelined by a shoulder injury. He was 1-1 with a 3.00 ERA before going on the disabled list April 18. He had surgery to a repair a torn capsule in his left shoulder May 17.

"He's a guy that we're definitely looking to rely on," reliever Grant Balfour said Sunday. "He's been around a while now and he went through the surgery. They kept him for a reason: He's had success, and that's what they're looking for, to come back and put up those numbers he's put up in the past."

Fellow left-hander Brett Anderson also is working his way back from reconstructive elbow surgery last July. He has thrown two bullpen sessions this spring since having Tommy John surgery.

Both pitchers are on a schedule that includes throwing two bullpen sessions each week.

Manager Bob Melvin has noted neither looks as if he is working back from surgery.

"It's a credit to them and how hard they rehabbed," Melvin said Sunday. "Based on the fact Dallas has rehabbed as hard as he had, I think has really bridged the gap on how good he feels each and every time out. If you slack on that a little bit in the shoulder, it's a little bit different. He's a hard-working kid, we all know that, and he's dedicated to what he does. Seeing that the fruits of that right now is a credit to him and the training staff and those who are working with him."

Catcher Kurt Suzuki knows Braden will be prepared when his day back on the mound finally comes.

"He wants to go out there," Suzuki said. "He wanted to pitch even with a sore shoulder last year. He's a competitor, he wants to get on the field. That's definitely the kind of guys you want. Dallas is looking good, Anderson is looking good. That's a good sign."

Doctors told Braden no amount of rehab would heal his shoulder, so surgery became the best option. And he has kept himself ahead of schedule in his throwing program.

He did a lot of work before surgery to strengthen the area "so that when I came out of it I wasn't like a baby deer on training wheels."

"By the middle of October I had already completed a throwing program that had me out to 150 feet," he said.

Getting Braden and Anderson back will mean a lot.

Anderson was 3-6 with a 4.00 ERA in 13 starts last season before going on the 15-day disabled list on June 7 with elbow soreness. The 24-year-old pitcher originally had a platelet-rich plasma injection in his elbow and was going to see whether rehabilitation could help him.

In April 2010, Anderson received a \$12.5 million, four-year contract that includes team options for 2014 and 2015. The total value of the deal could reach \$31 million. He went 7-6 with a 2.80 ERA in 19 starts that year.

Now, each time Braden pitches he is able to think less about how he feels "and more and more about getting something out of it."

"How I feel is the only timetable we can go on. I've understood because I've been through this before. Putting a date on it right now for me isn't important, because I feel so good in terms of throwing that the day will just come, and it will come before I know it," Braden said. "To be getting back to a position where I can learn from my work, that's Christmas for me. The biggest thing for us right now is to make sure because we are heading in the right direction that we don't take a wrong turn."

Notes: 3B Scott Sizemore is scheduled for an MRI exam with a specialist Monday. He sprained his left knee during Saturday's first full-squad workout. ... RHP Brian Fuentes threw batting practice two days after having his regular session halted due to a tweaked hamstring. "He threw the ball really well," Melvin said. "He was on it, with good stuff. There's a potential open role at the end I know he'd like to have. For his first on-field endeavour it was good to see." ... OF Jonny Gomes called his shot on the final pitch of the day, thrown by Melvin. "Somebody's car might have been damaged for all I know," Melvin said with a chuckle. "He got to me the most. It was the bat flip that irked me."

A's move to San Jose still up in the air

By JANIE McCAULEY, ASSOCIATED PRESS

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — San Francisco Giants president and CEO Larry Baer hinted Saturday there might not be a swift resolution regarding his club's territorial rights in the South Bay and whether the Oakland Athletics will be allowed to relocate to San Jose.

It appears as if negotiations on a possible contract extension with Giants ace Matt Cain also could take a while. While the Giants have said they are committed to keeping their top two pitchers for the long haul — including two-time NL Cy Young Award winner Tim Lincecum — Cain said for the first time Saturday he's seeking a "fair value."

"We're listening to anything that's of fair value. That's the way we're taking it," Cain said.

At the owners' meetings last month, Commissioner Bud Selig said the situation facing the A's and Giants was on the "front burner." He appointed a committee in March 2009 to evaluate the issue facing the Bay Area's two baseball teams, but has not indicated when an announcement on the findings might come.

"We continue to be respectful of the process, and there is a process," Baer said his team's Scottsdale Stadium spring training site. "The game is bigger than any internal machinations. I think it's not good for the game to have whatever internal back and forth between teams. That's not good for the game. We want to be respectful and see the game flourish in our market, in all the markets."

In regards to negotiating with Cain, Baer said "it's to be determined" whether the sides will reach any common ground on what would be considered fair market value. Giants general manager Brian Sabean has long identified keeping his top pitchers around for the long haul as one of his top priorities. Lincecum received a \$40.5 million, two-year contract late last month to avoid an arbitration hearing.

"I don't want to comment on status but any time you're talking, it's a good thing, and we'll talk," Baer said of dealings with Cain. "It's been a lot of back and forth conversations. All I will say is that if there are conversations, that's a good thing. We care about all of our players and the homegrown players, obviously, carry some special qualities. Matt or any of our guys are people that we're going to put big energy into."

The 27-year-old Cain, a two-time All-Star, went 12-11 last season with a 2.88 ERA and reached 200 innings for the fifth straight season — a span in which he also has made at least 32 starts each year. He also didn't allow an earned run during the entire 2010 postseason, when the Giants pulled off an improbable World Series championship.

San Francisco might have to pull out its pocketbook for this one.

Cain hasn't said what price tag or the number of years he would like, though it's believed the right-hander's desired range would be for five years and the upwards of \$100 million considering several other top pitchers around the majors have five-year contracts — Phillies ace Cliff Lee (\$120 million), the Angels' C.J. Wilson (\$77.5 million) and Jered Weaver of the Angels (\$85 million). And Weaver's deal was considered a hometown discount.

Cain, who now has a few new faces in his CAA Sports representative team that includes agent Jeff Berry, said he hopes there will be a decision one way or the other before the start of the season and doesn't plan to think about his contract status once games begin.

"I believe both sides would like to have something resolved, whether it's signing back or whether it's not," Cain said.

While the A's have said since the season ended last fall they expected to hear before the start of the 2012 season whether they would be allowed to move to technology-rich Silicon Valley, nothing appears imminent.

"Think whatever. This was discussed when Steve Schott owned the (A's) 12 years ago," Baer said. "We know it's been studied and being studied. We're cooperating."

A's managing partner Lew Wolff said in an email Saturday he is "simply following the process" and has nothing new to report regarding a decision. Wolff has said his low-budget franchise needs to build a new ballpark in order to survive.

In December 2009, the City of Oakland unveiled three potential spots to build a new ballpark for the A's. Wolff has his sights on San Jose and has repeatedly said his franchise has exhausted its options in Oakland after years of trying.

When asked if the process includes negotiations over a possible settlement to allow the A's to move, Baer paused before saying, "Not necessarily."

"Again, there's a lot of things being studied and I'm going to go back to being respectful of the process. There's a presumption that there needs to be an answer to a question and I'm not sure that that's the question," Baer said of it being a simple yes or no regarding letting the A's move. "I know that some folks would like to see an answer to that question but that's not necessarily the question — maybe it is, maybe it isn't the question that's on the table. I'll just leave it at that."

Notes: All-Star RHP Ryan Vogelsong, nursing a back strain sustained Feb. 7 while lifting weights, said he is set to play catch Monday. Manager Bruce Bochy said he should be back on the mound for a bullpen in about a week. "He's eager, anxious to get going," Bochy said. "It looks like he's at the tail end of this situation." ... Lincecum pitched a bullpen session with no problems after he was held back earlier in the week because of a stiff back. "He threw great," Bochy said. "He feels good. We're going to still be a little cautious with him."