

**Brandon McCarthy announced as Oakland A's opening-day starter**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

PHOENIX -- Brandon McCarthy was announced Tuesday as the A's opening-day starter, an easy choice for a rotation that was depleted by trades over the winter.

Last spring, McCarthy was battling just to be the No. 5 starter in a deep Oakland rotation. Now he is the leader of a staff that must plug major holes following the offseason trades of Gio Gonzalez and Trevor Cahill.

"It's something I'm excited about and something that's cool to look back on when my career is over," McCarthy, 28, said. "But it's just another reason to get back to work and make sure I'm focused on doing what I have to do."

McCarthy will pitch March 28 against the Seattle Mariners at the Tokyo Dome. He will be followed in the two-game series by right-hander Bartolo Colon, manager Bob Melvin said.

After the trades of Cahill and Gonzalez, along with another deal that sent starters Guillermo Moscoso and Josh Outman elsewhere, it appeared McCarthy would be targeted to pitch the first game.

The right-hander went just 9-9 last season, but he pitched five complete games and set a franchise record for strikeout-to-walk ratio at 4.92-to-1 -- 123 strikeouts and 25 walks in 1702/3 innings.

McCarthy has battled shoulder problems his entire career, but Melvin called him an obvious choice for the opener, comparing his preparation to that of six-time All-Star Curt Schilling, whom Melvin managed in Arizona.

"Curt started the day after he pitched, looking at lineups of other clubs, video of other clubs, and he had a game plan (for his next start)," Melvin said. "Brandon is the same way."

The issue for the A's is figuring out their rotation behind McCarthy and Colon.

Left-hander Dallas Braden is recovering well from shoulder surgery -- he will start throwing bullpen sessions every fifth day. But if he has to begin the season on the disabled list, it leaves three spots to fill.

Assistant general manager David Forst said the team will explore the free-agent and trade markets for third-base options in light of Scott Sizemore's season-ending knee injury.

That doesn't mean Josh Donaldson or someone else on the team can't win the job.

"This is definitely an opportunity for (Donaldson)," Forst said. "At the same time, we have to do our due diligence and see what else is out there to make sure we give Bob the best team we possibly can."

Forst said teams typically aren't looking to deal this early in spring training, but "they know we have a need."

He mentioned the difficulty of acquiring a starting third baseman.

"We felt like with Scott we had really found a guy," he said.

Sizemore tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee Saturday when he caught a spike in the turf while charging a bunt.

"It's devastating to not be out on the field with the guys," he said.

Graham Godfrey will start Friday in the A's exhibition opener against the Mariners at Phoenix Municipal Stadium, and Tom Milone also will pitch. Tyson Ross will start Saturday against the Mariners in Peoria, with Jarrod Parker following him. All four are competing for rotation spots.

Parker, considered the A's top pitching prospect, threw batting practice Tuesday and had his best day of camp, Melvin said.

"I think the hitters know what the hype is all about," he said of Parker.

Brad Peacock, another contender, said his stiff back felt better, but he will need to face hitters again before appearing in a game, Melvin said.

There's a feeling within the organization that outfielder Yoenis Cespedes will report this week, perhaps as early as Thursday. Cespedes, who defected from Cuba and is living in the Dominican Republic, must obtain a worker's visa before his contract becomes official.

### **A's announce Brandon McCarthy will be their Opening Day starter**

By Joe Stiglich, Bay Area News Group

Brandon McCarthy was announced as the A's Opening Day starter Tuesday, a move that had been expected since spring training began.

McCarthy was coming off a solid season — he went just 9-9 for the A's last year but posted a 3.32 ERA with five complete games. The right-hander set a franchise record for strikeout-to-walk ratio at 4.92 — 123 strikeouts and just 25 walks in 170 2/3 innings.

The selection was a no-brainer considering the A's dealt away starters Gio Gonzalez and Trevor Cahill in the offseason and given that Brett Anderson and Dallas Braden are both recovering from long-term injuries.

"I thought it was a natural based on what he accomplished last year, and based on some of the pitchers we traded away," A's manager Bob Melvin said.

McCarthy will take the mound in the March 28 opener against the Seattle Mariners in Tokyo, and Melvin confirmed that Bartolo Colon would start the second game of that two-game series.

In other news, A's assistant general manager David Forst said the team will explore the free agent and trade market for third base options in light of Scott Sizemore's season-ending knee injury.

That doesn't mean that Josh Donaldson or someone else currently on the team can't win the job.

"This is definitely an opportunity for (Donaldson)," Forst said. "At the same time, we have to do our due diligence and see what else is out there on the market to make sure we give Bob the best team we possibly can."

### **Substitute teacher hopes to fill A's need**

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Scott Sizemore's season ended before it really began, when the spikes on his left shoe stuck in the turf Saturday during the A's first full-squad workout.

In his first public comments since tearing his left anterior cruciate ligament, the third baseman said that while coming in for a bunt during drills, he tried move to his right, but his left foot stayed planted while everything else shifted direction.

Then, Sizemore said, "When I transferred my weight back, my knee gave out on me. ... It was a freak accident. I could do that a million times and it would never happen again."

Sizemore, on crutches and with his leg in a brace, said that he knew that the news would not be great - he figured two months of rehab even as a best-case scenario - but learning that he'd miss all of the 2012 season was difficult.

"I was definitely amped up. I'd worked my tail off to get in the best shape I could to help this team win," he said. "It's just devastating not to be a part of this team."

The common sentiment in the clubhouse Tuesday was sympathy.

"It's not about us, it's about Scott," assistant general manager David Forst said, "You just feel bad for him."

Manager Bob Melvin's reaction: "Terrible, brutal."

After Sizemore arrived in camp in top-notch shape, Melvin said he told the third baseman that he'd drive in 95 runs and score 85. "Scott said, 'You're a little short: 20 (homers) and 100 (RBIs),' " Melvin said. "No one will work harder or be more focused than him next year."

Forst confirmed that Josh Donaldson, who has moved over from catcher, will get the first shot at the third-base job, but he said the team will look at all internal candidates and also possibilities outside the organization. The Angels' Alberto Callaspo is on the team's radar, and other third basemen are likely to become available as rosters shape up.

Wes Timmons is the A's lone non-roster infielder, and at 33, Timmons hasn't played in the majors after 10 seasons of pro ball. A substitute teacher at Chets Creek Elementary School in Jacksonville, Fla., in the offseason, Timmons would be a real feel-good story if he ever makes it.

"You look at his numbers and you're puzzled why he hasn't gotten a shot," Melvin said. "If he looks at where we are right now and how many infielders we have, he's probably encouraged this is the best chance he's had to get to the big leagues."

"It is, I know it," Timmons said. "I'm not a prototype third baseman, but could I play third base every day in the big leagues? I think so. Am I going to hit 30-35 home runs? No. I think if you give Scott 500 at-bats, he's more that kind of player."

Timmons would be happy to win any spot on the 25-man roster at any time, especially after last year, when in midseason, he was sent from Triple-A Sacramento to Double-A Midland.

"Was I excited to be demoted to Double-A at the age of 32? Of course not," he said. "But my job is to honor my contract. I called home and talked to my wife and we decided it was my duty."

Timmons gets a lot of grief in the clubhouse for his age - he's one of the older players, despite his lack of big-league experience - and he stands out for his billowing mane of hair. When infielders were looking at field assignments on Tuesday, a coach suggested, "Follow Timmons' hair."

"It's big," Melvin said.

Outfielder Jonny Gomes added, "He'll be the first player in baseball history with a V05 contract."

Timmons' locks are often held back by a headband, "soccer style," according to Jemile Weeks. "It's interesting," said Weeks, who sports dreadlocks. "I like it, though. It's flowing nicely."

### **McCarthy named to start A's opener**

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Oakland might have many questions, but the identity of the team's Opening Day starter never was in real doubt.

For weeks, all signs pointed to **Brandon McCarthy**, the top returning healthy A's starter, and on Tuesday, manager **Bob Melvin** made it official, saying that McCarthy will go March 28 in Japan against the Mariners.

"I thought it was a natural based on what he accomplished last year," Melvin said.

McCarthy, who was fighting for a rotation spot this time last year, wound up with a career-high 25 starts and nine wins, and a career-low 3.32 ERA.

While he recognizes that the Opening Day start is an honor, McCarthy said he doesn't look at it as a big deal, more like information he needs so he can prepare properly.

"It's more something to look back on later," he said. "Opening Day in Japan is cool enough in itself, now there's this."

**Bartolo Colon** will pitch the second game in Japan, and the same duo is likely to start the first two regular-season games in Oakland on April 6-7. The A's probably will see Mariners ace **Felix Hernandez** in the April 6 opener in Oakland, and then again at Seattle the next week.

"That might be overkill," McCarthy joked.

**Céspedes update:** **Yoenis Céspedes'** visa issues appear to be resolved, The Chronicle has learned, and the Cuban outfielder is likely to arrive at Phoenix Muni this weekend.

The A's signed Céspedes to a four-year, \$36 million deal before camp opened but cannot make it official until he takes a physical. It is unclear when he might debut in a Cactus League game.

**Briefly:** **Dallas Braden** threw a 35-pitch bullpen session and **Brett Anderson** a 30-pitch session, and both went smoothly. Melvin said Braden is likely to begin a more normal throwing schedule. The team is hoping to get him back between April 16 and early May. ... **Brad Peacock**, who had back tightness Monday, said he'll long-toss today and throw to hitters Thursday.

### **Drumbeat: Miguel Tejada says he wants to return to the A's**

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Phoenix 2/29/2012, 5:30am

Late last night, I spoke to Miguel Tejada, who won an MVP while playing shortstop for the A's in 2002, and Tejada told me his fondest desire is to return to the team that gave him his first start.

"I would love it," Tejada told me by phone from Florida. "I have always loved the A's. That's the organization that gave me a chance when I was a little kid in the Dominican. They opened all the doors for me. .... That's my family."

Tejada told me he knows that the A's have lost third baseman Scott Sizemore for the season, and he hopes GM Billy Beane might consider giving him a minor-league deal, as he recently did with Manny Ramirez.

"Tell Billy to give me a call," Tejada said. "I don't want big money. I just want to play."

Tejada has become good friends with Cuban star Yoenis Cespedes, who is expected to join the team this weekend as I report in this morning's Chronicle. Tejada, who played with Cespedes with Aguilas in the Dominican this winter, said he believes that were he around, it would benefit Cespedes.

Tejada also said he thinks he can still play – he didn't perform well with the Giants last year, he said, because he wasn't happy there.

He did not do well in the recent Dominican playoffs, either, hitting .190 in the first round and .226 in the second, and Tejada is 37. Still, he remains a favorite with A's fans, who remember Tejada's glory years and the joy with which he once played the game.

Tejada is probably a longshot for the A's, who will give Josh Donaldson the first crack at third, but his friendship with Cespedes might help, and if nothing else, the team is going to be thin at third base in the upper levels of the minors. If Tejada is serious about taking a minor-league deal and potentially playing at Triple-A Sacramento for a time, well, it's still a longshot, but maybe. It's far more likely, however, that they'd deal for someone such as Alberto Callaspo or another infielder squeezed out of a regular spot this spring.

### **Drumbeat: As expected, A's name Brandon McCarthy Opening Day starter**

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Papago Park 2/28/2012, 9:45am

All the way back at FanFest, the A's were suggesting strongly that Brandon McCarthy would pitch on Opening Day in Japan against the Mariners, and this morning, Bob Melvin made it official.

"It's a credit to him," Melvin said. "He's transformed himself in a number of ways."

Melvin said that based on what McCarthy did last year and some of the trades the A's made in the offseason, McCarthy seemed the logical choice. What McCarthy has done is pretty amazing: His career looked all but over going into 2011 after numerous shoulder stress fractures, and he wound up putting together a strong season that included a franchise record for strikeout-to-walk ratio with a 4.92 ratio. That's dating back to 1901, and the A's have had five Cy Young winners and three pitchers who were MVPs since 1901. Lefty Grove topped the league in strikeouts seven times; Rube Waddell six times. McCarthy still had a better ratio. Here's video of McCarthy from this morning:

Melvin compared McCarthy to another of his former pitchers, Curt Schilling, this morning, saying McCarthy prepares just as meticulously as the former Arizona and Boston ace.

Bartolo Colon will get Game 2 in Japan. The A's, who might go with four starters until April 16 based on Dallas Braden's progression, are looking strongly at Tommy Milone for the fourth spot in the rotation, and the fifth spot is likely to come from a group that includes Tyson Ross, Graham Godfrey, Jarrod Parker and Brad Peacock. As I wrote in this morning's Chronicle, [Milone will start the Cactus League opener](#) on Friday at Phoenix Muni against Seattle.

Joey Devine looked terrific today, throwing very hard. Some video:

The A's players appeared to be in good spirits this morning despite the loss of third baseman Scott Sizemore to a season-ending knee injury. There was a lot of fist bumping and joshing around; Manny Ramirez appears to be trying out different handshakes and fist bumps with many of his new teammates and he has a smile on his face all the time – he seems to be enjoying being back in a baseball environment a whole lot.

Assistant general manager David Forst spoke about the Sizemore injury this morning and he said the A's main feeling is one of disappointment for Sizemore, who had finally gotten the chance to be an everyday big-league player. Oakland has spent a lot of time an effort finding an everyday third baseman, and after Sizemore's successful conversion from second base last season, "with Scott, we felt like we had the guy," Forst said.

Forst said the A's will consider internal and external options at third, but he confirmed what has been obvious the past few days: Josh Donaldson, another converted player (from catcher, though he played third at Auburn), will get the first look and it might be a long one. "This is his opportunity," Forst said.

Wes Timmons, 33, could also final get a shot at the big leagues at some point, which would be a wonderful story. Timmons has played 11 seasons of pro ball without getting called up, and he's impressed the A's with his attitude and his consistent play. Melvin said this morning that looking at Timmons' numbers, it's surprising he never got the call, but sometimes the opportunity isn't there at the right time. So, Timmons, too, must grab the chance if he gets it.

"He can look at the situation now and say, 'This is a really good opportunity for me,' " Melvin said. "If he looks at where we are right now and how many infielders we have, he's probably encouraged that this is the best chance he's had to get to the big leagues."

I ran through the list of intrasquad pitchers for Thursday's game two days ago in the paper, but I need to add Jerry Blevins to the group, which also includes Sonny Gray, Fabio Castro, Sean Doolittle, Ryan Cook, Andrew Carignan, Jim Miller and Evan Scribner.

Milone goes Friday in the Cactus League opener, Ross and Parker on Saturday, McCarthy on Sunday and Colon on Monday. Those are probabilities only, of course. Things can change quickly, especially this time of year.

### **Baseball's beer debate springs eternal**

Bruce Jenkins, Chronicle Columnist

*Battle lines being drawn*

*Nobody's right if everybody's wrong*

*- Stephen Stills, from Buffalo Springfield's "For What It's Worth"*

Onward goes the saga of beer in major-league clubhouses. It's absolutely fine, until it isn't. Grown men have their rights, until some beer-sodden ballplayer turns the ignition key.

You've probably heard that the Boston Red Sox's most heated rival (for now) isn't the hated New York Yankees, but the hang-loose Rays of Tampa Bay. It wasn't enough that Boston blew a nine-game lead in the wild-card race in September, allowing Tampa Bay to ascend from oblivion into the postseason. It came to light that the Red Sox were a bit cavalier in the clubhouse, where some of the nonparticipants feasted on beer and fried chicken during games.

Just for starters, this news was about as shocking as a summer weather forecast in San Francisco (fog, with late-arriving fog). You name it - alcohol, cigarettes, pep pills, other drugs, let your imagination run wild - players have partaken during games, and that includes players who were *in* the lineup, on some very successful teams. After the Red Sox won the title in 2004, it was revealed that a handful of players took shots of Jack Daniel's before a crucial postseason game or two.

This is all part of baseball's not-so-romantic underside, and while such behavior is never a good idea, nor widespread, it happens. The quirky twist, in Boston, is that beer and fried chicken were portrayed as instruments of the team's demise, leaving the players to be portrayed as reckless juvenile delinquents.

What a joke.

Let's be clear: That season was torched on the field, where the likes of Carl Crawford and John Lackey weren't getting it done. True, it's hardly professional for a starting pitcher to be drinking beer in the clubhouse on an off-day. That "all for one" mentality goes right out the window. But the most damaging element, with a new season at hand, is that the information became public. Josh Beckett is speaking angrily of a "snitch" in the Red Sox camp, and new manager Bobby Valentine has decided to make Boston one of 19 major-league teams that do not allow alcohol in their home clubhouses.

"This team needs to play a game. Now," wrote Steve Buckley in the Boston Herald. "I remember the days when Carl Yastrzemski would sit in his director's chair, his back to the rest of the room, and he wouldn't talk to the media until he had finished his postgame bottle of Miller."

A clear distinction is made between the home and road clubhouses. Most players drive to their home games, putting themselves at risk afterward if they take the wheel under the influence. On the road, players generally walk, take taxis or ride the team bus back to the hotel, and there's an old-school philosophy that holds true today: From a bonding standpoint, it's actually good news when a bunch of players stick around the clubhouse for an hour or so after road games, hashing out the game (or other issues) over a couple of beers. Better that than 25 guys heading into the night with separate agendas.

Where it all goes wrong, regrettably, is behind the wheel. The A's, concerned over a drunken-driving charge levied upon pitcher Esteban Loaiza, became the first major-league team to issue such a ban in 2006. Nick Swisher had been very public in his desire to be a crazed party hound - he certainly wasn't alone on the team - so Billy Beane brought down the hammer. As he said at the time, "You don't tell the employees at Walmart to hit the kegger on the way out."

While some crusty baseball types scoffed at Beane's decision, the sport got a disheartening jolt in May of 2007, when St. Louis Cardinals pitcher Josh Hancock reportedly had a few beers in the clubhouse, drank some more at a local restaurant, and was legally drunk when he was killed in a traffic accident that night. The Cardinals immediately issued an alcohol ban, and others followed suit.

There are those who still cling to the old-school mentality, along the lines of "let men be men." Terry Francona, who managed those ill-fated Red Sox last year, called Valentine's decision "a PR move. I think if a guy wants a beer, he can probably get one. I've always thought if you furnish a little bit, it almost keeps it to a minimum."

That has been the Giants' theory: to treat the players like men, assuming they stay within the boundaries of common sense. "We do have a limited amount of beer available, but I hardly ever see guys drinking after games," said a seasoned Giants spokesman. "It was prevalent in the past, but not over the last 5 to 10 years. It just doesn't happen."

Tampa Bay manager Joe Maddon, who brings considerable wit and intellect to the scene, scoffed at the notion that alcohol cost Boston the pennant. "All of this knee-jerk stuff that occurs in our game absolutely drives me crazy," he told reporters after the Red Sox faced a tidal wave of criticism in the Boston media. "Give me a break. Let's bring the Volstead Act back, OK? Let's go right back to prohibition and start legislating everything all over again.

"Do we sell beer in the ballpark?" Maddon went on. "People who attend the games have a much greater chance of becoming drunk by the time they leave than a baseball player does. Most of the time if you have a beer after the game, it's one, maybe two, and that's it. I have a glass of wine. ... There's not a thing wrong with that."

And now that Valentine has fired the first anti-alcohol shot of spring? Maddon hasn't changed a thing in Tampa Bay. This new rivalry lends a whole new meaning to baseball talk.

### **A's, Sizemore deal with injury's aftermath**

By Jesse Sanchez / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- It was an afternoon filled with new and uncertain beginnings Tuesday at Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

Oakland third baseman Scott Sizemore limped into the home clubhouse on crutches and in pain, but eager to embark on the road to recovery from an injury that will keep him off the field this season. The A's hunt for his replacement, a search that will take them inside and outside of the organization, has just begun.

On Monday, Sizemore tore the ACL in his left knee after his spike got caught in the grass while charging in on a bunt during drills. He expects to have season-ending surgery in three weeks when the swelling subsides.

"They don't know the extent of everything that is going to happen with post-surgery recovery, and they can't tell until they get in there," Sizemore said. "But the doctor said it was pretty straight forward and they know what they are expecting. It's nothing crazy, just the standard ACL recovery."

Sizemore's standard recovery will have an extraordinary impact on how the club will be constructed leading up to Opening Day. Josh Donaldson will get the opportunity to prove that he can be the club's full-time third baseman, but he's not the only one. Adam Rosales, Eric Sogard and Wes Timmons are also expected to get a chance to win the job.

The A's are considering all of their options.

"This is definitely an opportunity for [Donaldson] but at the same time, we definitely need to do our due diligence and see what else is out there on the market to make sure we can give Bob [Melvin] the best team that we can," Oakland assistant general manager David Forst said. "Typically, you don't see deals getting made the first week of March because teams spent all offseason putting a team together and they want to see what they have, at least for a little bit. It's not a time that most teams are really willing to engage, but they obviously know we have a need."

Sizemore, who hit .249 with 11 home runs and 52 RBIs in 93 games for the A's last season, appeared primed for a breakout year in 2012. He had positioned himself as the long-term solution at third base, but now that plan is on hold for at least a year.

"First and foremost, for him, I feel awful," Melvin said. "The first day he was here I told him I was thinking 90 RBIs and 85 runs. He said, 'I think you are a little short, Skip. Twenty and 100.' It was one of those years where we felt like we thought it would be a breakout year for him."

"I never had any knee issues, so that makes it that much worse that is was a freak accident," Sizemore said. "If I tried to do the same thing a million times, it would never happen again. For whatever reason it happened and you just have to deal with it."

Donaldson, the catcher-turned-third baseman, hit .261 with 17 home runs and 70 RBIs in 115 games for Triple-A Sacramento last season. He played third base in college and in the Dominican Republic this winter and will play the position exclusively for the remainder of Spring Training.

"He works hard and he's real athletic," A's catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "He's been taking grounders and he looks good over there at third. But what do I know? I'm not an infield coach, but from what I see with him being as athletic as he is, he seems to pick it up really fast."

Donaldson should expect a challenge from Timmons, a non-roster invitee. Timmons, 33, combined to hit .341 at Double-A and Triple-A last season.

"Timmons, if you look at his numbers, you are kind of puzzled why he has not gotten a shot at the big league level," Melvin said. "Those guys will get a lot of reps in games."

In the meantime, Sizemore's future "reps" will come during his rehabilitation sometime in the future.

"I worked my tail off to get in the best shape I possibly could to help this team win," Sizemore said. "It's devastating to not be on the field with the guys, going to war with them every day and helping them win. That's what I am going to miss the most, being a part of the team and group of guys working toward that common goal."

### **A's tab McCarthy to start Opening Day**

By Jesse Sanchez / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- It's official.

On Tuesday, Oakland manager Bob Melvin announced Brandon McCarthy as the A's Opening Day starter against the Mariners on March 28 in Japan. Veteran Bartolo Colon, 38, will start the second game of the season.

"I thought it was a natural based on what [McCarthy] accomplished last year," Melvin said. "With some of the pitchers that we ended up traded away, we had a good feeling that would be the case. Then we have the experience of Colon and we have some competition for the other spots."

Last season, McCarthy had a career-year, going 9-9 with a 3.32 ERA in 25 starts for the A's. He struck out 123 hitters and walked only 25 in 170 2/3 innings.

"Part of the fact that he is a bit ahead is that he knows he has to get ready a little earlier," Melvin said. "I don't want to say he is set up, but he is very aware of the timing of when he will pitch, and, therefore, it seems that he is a little ahead of guys."

It's been a long road for McCarthy. He went 13-15 with a 4.68 ERA in 44 starts for Texas from 2007-09, which included four stints on the disabled list. He spent all of '10 in the Minors, another season interrupted by shoulder problems.



"It's credit to him. He's transformed himself in a number of ways," Melvin said. "Sometimes, you learn quite about it yourself physically when you go through those injuries. You are very aware of your body and when it is pushing a little bit. He's a smart guy and he understands all ends of it."

Melvin credited McCarthy's work ethic as a big reason for the pitcher's recent success. He compared McCarthy's preparation to that of Curt Schilling.

"Curt started the day after he pitched by looking at lineups of the other clubs and video of the other clubs and how to game plan starting the next day. Brandon is the same way," Melvin said. "They are both guys that on the day that they pitch, you leave them alone and let them do their thing because they are very routine-oriented."

Like McCarthy, the manager said that Colon is role model for the young pitchers in the organization. Colon, who won nine games and had 4.00 ERA for the Yankees last season, signed a one-year deal with Oakland in January.

"He knows what works for him and doesn't try to do too much, as far as adding pitches," Melvin said. "When you are experience liked he is, he reads hitters very well. He can read swings. He's probably not the most talkative guy in the world, but he's another guy you learn some things from by watching how he goes about his business."

### **Suzuki, Manny teaming up in batting cages**

By Jesse Sanchez / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- It appears that Kurt Suzuki has a new hitting partner.

The A's catcher, who hits in the batting cages each morning at 7:30 MT with hitting coach Chili Davis, has been joined by Manny Ramirez during the last two days. Ramirez told Suzuki he will be there Wednesday morning as well.

"I'm a kid hitting with Chili Davis, who was one of the best switch-hitting players to play to the game, and Manny Ramirez, who has 500 and something home runs ..." Suzuki said. "Can you ask for anything better? I don't think so."

Suzuki said he was pleasantly surprised to be approached by Ramirez.

"He watched me hit one day and noticed some things, so he asked if we could hit together," the catcher said. "We hit. We and Chili Davis talk a lot about hitting and philosophies and the ideas behind it."

The A's signed Ramirez to a non-guaranteed contract worth \$500,000. If he makes the club, he will have to serve a 50-game suspension for violating MLB's Joint Drug Prevention and Treatment Program.

"I'm excited and really energized to go and learn from one of the best hitters in baseball," Suzuki said. "It's awesome, such a great feeling."

### **Worth noting**

- Eight pitchers will take the hill for the A's in Thursday's four-inning intrasquad game.

Jerry Blevins, Sonny Gray, Fabio Castro, Sean Doolittle, Ryan Cook, Andrew Carignan, Jim Miller and Evan Scribner are all slated to pitch.

- News of the season-ending injury to third baseman Scott Sizemore made for a quiet clubhouse Tuesday morning but did not affect the energy level during the workout later that afternoon.

Manager Bob Melvin credits his staff, particularly bench coach Chip Hale, for creating a high-energy environment each day.

"You try to think of different things to do," Melvin said. "You do some timing stuff on the infield a couple of days in a row and that gives them something else to focus on besides catching a ground ball and throwing it somewhere."

- Pitching prospect Jarrod Parker had his best day of Spring Training during Tuesday's workouts.

"He stood out. The position players know what the hype is all about," Melvin said, adding that Tyson Ross and Pedro Figueroa also had impressive afternoons on the mound.

## **A humbler Manny working his way back to being 'baseball ready'**

By: Art Spander, San Francisco Examiner

**PHOENIX--** Green-collar baseball? When Manny Ramirez is in camp for the A's, it's green do-rag baseball. It's "Guess who's in the cage?" baseball. It's "Can he still do it?" baseball.

It hasn't been like this for a while at Papago Park, the A's training complex, a ball player who has to be watched, if even to find out whether he still deserves to be watched.

He won't be eligible to play until May 30, the day on which Manuel Aristides Ramirez turns 40.

"I have to show I can still play," said Ramirez on Tuesday. "I haven't been in a game since April. It will take time. But I'll be there."

Five days into his stay with the A's, Ramirez isn't taking time.

At 7:30 a.m. Tuesday, the wind blowing below the huge buttes which act as twin sentinels for Oakland spring baseball, Manny, being Manny, was swinging away, joining catcher Kurt Suzuki.

Ramirez is serving that 50-day suspension which was reduced from a repeat offender 100-day suspension for violation of MLB's Joint Drug Prevention and Treatment Program.

He wore out welcomes virtually everywhere he played, particularly with the Boston Red Sox, where his idiosyncrasies and apparent lack of focus had Boston journalists ready to crack lobster shells with their teeth, if not crack Ramirez over the bean with a wicked adjective.

But so far, so good for the A's, who chasing the moneyed Los Angeles Angels and Texas Rangers with little more than dreams and a once-great slugger, need every bit of help and attention they can receive. Ramirez is providing both.

There were maybe 30 to 40 fans at the multi-diamond complex where the streets are named for Walter Haas, Charles O. Finley and others from A's history. Wherever Ramirez went, the spectators followed. They know a draw when they see one.

And A's manager Bob Melvin, the onetime Cal and Giants catcher, knows an opportunity when he has one. "In what I'm seeing now," said Melvin, alluding to Ramirez's approach and results, "he's doing all the same things he's always done. Two out of every five balls are going over the fence in batting practice."

The question is answered with another question, when Ramirez, cordial and laughing, is asked why, as a free agent, he signed with the A's. "Why everybody ask 'Why you sign with A's?' I wanted to play in Oakland," he said. "I could have gone with Toronto."

The A's new batting coach, Chili Davis, who once roamed the outfield at Candlestick Park for the Giants, said he has to remind the 39-year-old Ramirez a different approach is required than a few years earlier, especially when a man hasn't faced major league pitching in literally a year.

"He keeps telling me every day, 'Attack, attack,'" Ramirez said. "When you're away from the game, you do things, get your hands in the wrong place."

Ramirez, once he decided to return to the game, went through a boot camp to get physically prepared.

"But I'm not baseball ready," said Ramirez, who has a career total of 555 home runs, "I have to get down timing with pitchers, and sliding on bases."

He'll get that timing. The A's only wish they didn't have to wait until the end of May to get Ramirez.