

Oakland A's notebook: Manny Ramirez will be the designated hitter in Friday's exhibition opener

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Manny Ramirez will serve as designated hitter and bat cleanup Friday for the A's, providing fans a tease in the team's exhibition opener against the Seattle Mariners.

Regardless of how Ramirez fares in Cactus League play, he will disappear from the spotlight once the regular season begins, when he serves a 50-game suspension for violating Major League Baseball's drug policy.

But his presence adds some intrigue Friday, even if the final score is quickly forgotten as most spring training games are.

The A's lineup will include as many as eight players who could logically start the regular season opener March 28 against the Mariners, though manager Bob Melvin issued a caution.

"I would say don't look too much into (Friday's) lineup," he said.

The batting order: Jemile Weeks (2B), Cliff Pennington (SS), Coco Crisp (CF), Ramirez (DH), Seth Smith (LF), Josh Reddick (RF), Kurt Suzuki (C), Brandon Allen (1B), Josh Donaldson (3B), with right-hander Graham Godfrey making the start on the mound.

Batting Crisp third is an idea Melvin is flirting with for the regular season. But he's also said that if another No. 3 hitter emerges, his most effective lineup probably has the speedy combo of Weeks and Crisp hitting 1-2.

The A's have several roster issues to sort out over their 21 Cactus League games.

The rotation is unsettled, and they must find a closer. Godfrey and Tommy Milone, also slated to pitch Friday, are among those fighting to make the starting five.

"When you're throwing bullpens, sure, you're trying to impress," Melvin said. "But you're not really going to evaluate until you get in games."

The A's need to identify starters at both corner infield spots, though Donaldson will get every chance to be the third baseman. He was the star of Thursday's intrasquad game.

The DH spot is up for grabs with Ramirez missing the first 50 games, and Melvin will try to strike a balance -- giving Ramirez enough at-bats to shake off rust while also evaluating candidates such as Jonny Gomes, Chris Carter, Kila Ka'aihue, Allen and Smith for the start of the regular season.

The outfield is unsettled until the A's gauge the readiness of Yoenis Cespedes, the Cuban free agent expected to arrive this weekend after clearing up visa issues.

Cespedes is known to be taking his physical Saturday in Phoenix, the final step before his four-year, \$36 million contract is finalized. Therefore, it seems logical he might join the A's on Sunday.

That would leave three-plus weeks until the season opener, and the question is whether Cespedes can be major league-ready in that time or whether he needs time in the minors.

On Thursday, El Nuevo Herald newspaper reported that the A's had made a multiyear offer to another Cuban player, third baseman/outfielder Adonis Garcia. An A's source shot down that report, saying Garcia was not a target.

Donaldson, who switched from catcher to third base after Scott Sizemore's season-ending knee injury, belted a three-run homer off Jim Miller to highlight the intrasquad game.

How he fares defensively at third is key to whether he wins the job. He made an error Thursday, letting Wes Timmons' grounder to his left get by him. Later, Donaldson made a nice backhanded stop and threw across the diamond to retire Carter, then leapt high to snare Landon Powell's liner.

He was asked about starting Friday's exhibition opener.

"I can't say that I'm not a little bit nervous, because I am," said Donaldson, who has played in just 14 big league games. "I mean, this is the major league team. Getting the opportunity, it's exciting."

Right-hander Sonny Gray, the A's first-round pick last June, threw a scoreless inning in the intrasquad game, allowing Eric Sogard's single but getting Carter swinging to end the inning.

"He was able to use his off-speed pitches behind in the count," Melvin said. "It was a good showing for him."

Catcher Derek Norris, acquired from Washington as part of the Gio Gonzalez trade, went 2 for 2 with a homer off Miller.

First base candidate Daric Barton received a cortisone shot in his surgically repaired throwing shoulder. The A's expect him to be able to DH in early exhibitions, but he won't play defense until later this month.

A's deny interest in Cuban free agent Adonis Garcia

By Joe Stiglich, Bay Area News Group

There is no truth to a report that the A's are targeting Cuban player Adonis Garcia, an A's source said Thursday.

El Nuevo Herald reported earlier in the day that the A's and New York Yankees both submitted multi-year offers to Garcia, a 26-year-old third baseman/outfielder. Oakland is trying to be aggressive in the international free agent market, but those efforts don't include interest in Garcia, the source said.

However, another Cuban player will be arriving this weekend. It's believed that outfielder Yoenis Cespedes will take his physical in Phoenix on Saturday. That's the final step before Cespedes' four-year, \$36 million contract is finalized, so it's possible he could join the A's on Sunday.

The team has issued no statement but general manager Billy Beane said he expected Cespedes in camp possibly by the weekend.

Josh Donaldson a hit in A's intrasquad game

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Josh Donaldson was going to be the main attraction in Thursday's intrasquad game anyway, because the converted catcher is getting the first shot to win the everyday third base job.

Then Donaldson followed an error in the third with a slick backhand play near the line and a strong throw to end the inning, and he hit a three-run homer to right to give the home team a 4-1 victory at Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

"That ball to right field was about as far as I've seen one hit here," manager **Bob Melvin** said.

Melvin was especially happy with Donaldson's ability to bounce back after flubbing a hopper to his left by **Wes Timmons** in the third.

"The first one gets by you and then he makes a nice play. That's good to see," Melvin said. "That shows a little about his makeup. It's his first look over there. He wants to make a good first impression. And I've heard from our minor-league guys that he is a guy who comes up big."

Donaldson said, "If I mess up, which is going to happen sometimes this year, they're going to have to count on me the next play. So I've got to man up and make the play."

Reliever **Sean Doolittle**, who was on the mound for the third inning, also has switched positions - he's moving from first base. "What, that's Josh's second or third day at third base this spring?" Doolittle said. "He had one in-between hop that was a tough play, and then he makes a great play there to end the inning. He did an awesome job."

Donaldson said that going to the Dominican Republic to play third base this winter didn't just help him defensively, but also might have put him a little ahead at the plate. He said he's concentrating on going back to being a solid contact hitter rather than trying to drive the ball so much, an approach he believes brought his average down the past two seasons.

Donaldson will start today's Cactus League opener at third, and, he said, "I can't say I'm not a little bit nervous, because I am. Major-league team, getting an opportunity, it's exciting. If I wasn't nervous I wouldn't be human, and I wouldn't be telling the truth."

Briefly: Cuban star **Yoenis Céspedes** is expected to be in town Saturday for his physical, which means that he will not join the team in any official capacity until Sunday. ... The A's were linked to another Cuban, third baseman **Adonis Garcia**, in a report by El Nuevo Herald in Miami, but team officials quickly denied the report in the strongest possible terms. ... Melvin said not to read too much into today's lineup for the Cactus League opener. **Manny Ramirez** won't be eligible to play on Opening Day, Céspedes isn't here yet, and there are ongoing battles at third base and first base. But here it is: **Jemile Weeks**, 2B, **Cliff Pennington** SS, **Coco Crisp** CF, Ramirez DH, **Seth Smith** LF, **Josh Reddick** RF, **Kurt Suzuki** C, **Brandon Allen** 1B, Donaldson 3B. ... **Sonny Gray**, the A's top pick last June, allowed one single in his intrasquad inning, and he struck out one.

Drumbeat: Oakland A's: Intrasquad game, broadcast info, new scoreboard

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Phoenix Muni 3/1/2012, 10:54am

Today is intrasquad game day, and as anticipated, few regulars are participating. They'll be in the Cactus League opener tomorrow.

Here are the lineups:

"visitor" – Sogard 2b, Timmons 3b, Pridie rf, Carter 1b, Powell c, Green cf, Hunter lf, Fiorentino dh, Ortiz dh, Ladendorf ss.

"home" – Cowgill cf, Moss lf, Taylor rf, Ka'aihue 1b, Donaldson 3b, Recker c, Choice dh, Norris dh, Horton 2b, Cabrera ss.

The A's are using 10-man lineups, four DH's altogether, to get more of a look at the many non-roster players and prospects in big-league camp.

The A's borrowed three infielders from minor-league camp: Josh Horton, Yordy Cabrera (the team's second-round pick in 2010) and Tyler Ladendorf.

Based on today's game, the players you can expect in tomorrow's game against Seattle: Suzuki, Allen, Weeks, Pennington, Rosales, Crisp, Reddick, Ramirez, Smith and Gomes.

Though manager Bob Melvin told us yesterday that the Cactus League opener would have a near Opening Day look, today he said not to read too much into it. For instance, Manny Ramirez will DH tomorrow; he's not eligible for Opening Day. It's assumed that Yoenis Céspedes will play Opening Day and he won't arrive here until Saturday or Sunday. And of course the first-base and third-base situations are unsettled, and so are the defensive positions in the outfield once Céspedes arrives.

Daric Barton had a cortisone shot for his right shoulder recently, Melvin said, so he won't participate in games this weekend but might DH in a split-squad game Monday. Barton cannot play first until mid-March at the earliest after his September shoulder surgery.

Here's broadcast info for this spring: Tomorrow's game will be webcast on the A's official site, and the weekend games, like all weekend games, will air on 95.7 FM in the Bay Area with Vince Cotroneo and Ray Fosse. Cotroneo will be on at 11:30 a.m. Pacific with the pregame show. The March 16 night game also will air on 95.7 FM.

For those wondering about the games in Japan, the two exhibitions will not be aired, but the regular-season games against Seattle will be on 95.7. MLB Network will air those games vs. the Mariners on a tape-delayed basis (the games begin at 3 a.m. and 2 a.m. Pacific, so tape delay seems sensible.) I'll provide more info on those TV broadcasts as it becomes available.

The A's have a brand-new scoreboard in right field at Phoenix Muni, and that's an unexpected development. The old incandescent scoreboard broke and couldn't be fixed in time for spring games, so a new, brighter, LED model that had been repo'd for non-payment was found. (It's the city of Phoenix that eventually will get the bill for such things, but it's still classic small-budget A's to find a repo'd scoreboard that never had been put in use.) I'm told it has video capability (though it probably won't be used for that this spring) and it's more "green" than the old scoreboard. Also fitting for the A's.

Cactus League games are meaningful for A's

Club hopes to settle many position battles during spring slate

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Most clubs read little into spring performances. This year, the A's are not most clubs.

Oakland has several position battles brewing in camp, making Friday's Cactus League opener against the visiting Mariners at Phoenix Municipal Stadium all the more significant. The A's, perhaps more so than any other team, will be evaluating their players extra closely this year -- while trying to put together an Opening Day lineup that, at this point, features many unknowns.

Some (think players like Jemile Weeks, Kurt Suzuki and Brandon McCarthy) won't warrant the attention. But plenty of others -- particularly those battling for spots at first base, third base, designated hitter and the outfield -- are expected to use these games as a tryout. Ditto for the rotation and bullpen candidates.

The club's time in the desert has been condensed from the usual four weeks to three, as the A's and Mariners are slated to travel overseas on March 22 for a week-long stay in Japan, where they will open the season on March 28-29. It marks the second time in five years Oakland has made the trip.

There's very much a sense of urgency, then, in the way manager Bob Melvin and his staff go about creating a roster. The club had the option of starting camp early, as the Mariners did, but chose to begin on a normal schedule -- mostly not to rush its pitching staff.

"We talked to the organization about what they did in the past, and we were comfortable doing this," Melvin said. "I can't tell you what their variables were, whether they had more guys in camp or needed to do some things, but I can speak for us in saying we're comfortable at the pace we're on."

For Melvin, Friday's contest will represent his first Cactus League game as A's manager, and he's planning to run out a handful of regulars. Weeks will lead things off, with shortstop Cliff Pennington following in front of center fielder Coco Crisp. Manny Ramirez gets his first start at DH in the cleanup spot, while left fielder Seth Smith and right fielder Josh Reddick follow afterward. Suzuki will bat seventh, and first baseman Brandon Allen and third baseman Josh Donaldson will round out the lineup, with right-handed starter Graham Godfrey on the mound.

Familiar faces surely abound, but Melvin advised reporters on Thursday not to read too much into his first lineup.

"I would say, 'Don't look too much into tomorrow's lineup,'" Melvin said. "Certainly, if you're forecasting guys that are regulars at this point, you'll see quite a few of those. Yet, the lineup and the order of it, don't think too much into it. You'll see a lot of different lineups."

Ramirez, for instance, will certainly not be getting all of the at-bats at DH, especially considering he won't be allowed to play in Oakland's first 50 regular-season games. Allen, Smith, Daric Barton, Kila Ka'aihue and Jonny Gomes will also see time there.

At first base, Melvin plans to shuffle Allen, Ka'aihue and Chris Carter, while Barton is expected to join the mix sometime in mid-March once his surgically-repaired right shoulder is cleared to throw. The A's skipper also has decisions to make in the outfield, where an already large number of players is expected to grow by one, when Yoenis Cespedes makes his anticipated weekend arrival.

Cespedes' presence could immediately shake up the look of the outfield, as Crisp could then be forced to move to left, while Reddick continues seeing the most time in right. Melvin also has to work in Gomes, Collin Cowgill, Jermaine Mitchell and Michael Taylor.

Back in the infield at third base, Donaldson will get an extended look, while utility players Adam Rosales, Eric Sogard and non-roster invitee Wes Timmons mainly see work at shortstop and second base, due to the team's lack of infield depth. With incumbent third baseman Scott Sizemore out of the mix with a torn left ACL, the A's are hoping Donaldson quickly grabs hold of the job.

The A's youngster, who initially entered camp as a candidate for the backup catcher spot, plans to take advantage of his opportunity.

"I'm excited," Donaldson said. "I can't say I'm not a little nervous, because I am -- just being over there, and this is the Major League team and getting the opportunity. If I wasn't nervous a little bit, I don't think I'd be human. It's going to be fun. It's going to be a learning experience, playing over there every day again."

Donaldson and the A's play host to 10 Cactus League contests, while they're slated to take part in 11 on the road. Of those 21 games, four are of the split-squad variety. The A's play the Mariners three times before facing them in Japan -- and then again in Oakland to restart the regular season -- with Seattle making another visit to Phoenix on March 16 for the only A's night game of the spring.

By that time, perhaps Melvin will have a better idea of how his pitching staff will look. Outside of McCarthy and No. 2 starter Bartolo Colon, the rotation has plenty of spots to fill. Lefty Dallas Braden, working his way back from shoulder surgery, should slot in there by the beginning of May, while Godfrey, Tyson Ross, Tommy Milone, Jarrod Parker and Brad Peacock duke it out for the other spots.

In the bullpen, Brian Fuentes, Grant Balfour, Joey Devine and Fautino De Los Santos are expected to compete for the closer's job. Meanwhile, Jerry Blevins, Andrew Carignan, Ryan Cook, Pedro Figueroa, Jordan Norberto and Neil Wagner will simply be competing for any relief role with the big league club.

Four of the A's contests will be featured on MLB.TV: March 6 vs. Milwaukee at 12:05 p.m. PT; March 8 vs. Los Angeles Dodgers at 12:05 p.m. PT; March 10 vs. Cincinnati at 12:05 p.m. PT; and March 17 vs. San Francisco at 1:05 p.m. PT.

Barton limited to DH duties for now

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- The A's first-base competition will surely heat up with the commencement of Friday's Cactus League opener, but contender Daric Barton will be limited to designated-hitter duties for now, as expected.

Barton, on the mend from right-shoulder surgery, recently had a cortisone shot and was instructed to take three days off. He should be swinging a bat again by Saturday, and could make his spring debut at DH in one of Monday's split-squad contests, manager Bob Melvin said.

Barton, 26, isn't expected to begin throwing again until mid-March, at which point he would only have a limited number of days to see game action at first base before the club departs for Japan. Such a timeline seemingly puts him behind competitors Brandon Allen, Kila Ka'aihue and Chris Carter. But that's not necessarily the case, given the club's familiarity with his defensive skills.

"We know what we expect of him, and we need to get him healthy before we can see some of those results," Melvin said.

Barton was the A's Opening Day starter at first base last year, but never got on track offensively -- hitting .212 with no home runs and a .267 slugging percentage in 67 games, before being optioned to Triple-A Sacramento in June. What he can do with the bat over the next few weeks will likely dictate his chances of starting the year in Oakland.

"I'd like to see everything," Melvin said, "but that's the thing that's going to come first. We feel good about his defense."

Cook's heat breaks a couple of bats

PHOENIX -- The A's are still educating themselves on right-handed reliever Ryan Cook, but they learned yet another thing about the pitcher in Thursday's intrasquad game.

His fastball can break a bat -- or two -- as he did in his 1-2-3 inning of work.

"We always thought he was a guy that had an exploding fastball with good movement and a little deception, blows up the bat right away and has a real quick inning," manager Bob Melvin said. "One knock on him is, maybe, his walks. But it looked like he was out there going right after guys."

It's hard not to glare at the eight walks he issued in 7 2/3 innings with Arizona last year, but Cook insists that stretch wasn't reflective of his typical performances. The 24-year-old righty, acquired in the Trevor Cahill trade, says he was simply "in a little bit of a funk at that point."

"Honestly, I've not struggled with a walk problem at all until then," said Cook, who also fanned seven in that time. "I was just a hair off here and there with my mechanics."

So Cook teamed up with D-backs pitching coach Charles Nagy and worked on being smooth to the plate, rather than speedy, and in doing so found a better sense of command during his second and final stint as a September callup.

"I realized I didn't need to change anything, just be smooth," Cook said. "So I'm trying to stick with what I do and hopefully raise the right eyebrows here."

Cook has a good chance of pitching his way into a bullpen that also includes the likes of Brian Fuentes, Grant Balfour, Joey Devine and Fautino De Los Santos. It was just this time last year when he was stripped of starter duties and made the transition to a relief role at the Double-A level.

Not four months had passed since the start of the regular season when Cook got the call to the big leagues.

"It was surprising and amazing," he said. "The walks, I think the move to the bullpen influenced that a bit. As a starter, I moved nice and easy, and wasn't worried about velocity or being nasty, if you will. There was much more adrenaline. But I'm going best when my fastball is lively and I can command it. The bad days are when I can't."

The A's have yet to see one of those.

"He's been real impressive," Melvin said. "He's definitely in the mix for a bullpen spot."

Donaldson shakes off error, has big day

PHOENIX -- It took three innings for a ball to make its way over to Josh Donaldson in Thursday's intrasquad game, and when it did, the result wasn't so favorable.

Donaldson, looking to grab hold of the third-base job vacated by the injured Scott Sizemore, misplayed a ground ball on a play that would have been deemed an error had it occurred in an actual game.

"By the time it got to me, I wasn't in a very good position to make the play," Donaldson said.

Such a miscue could shake up a young player, but it had the opposite effect on Donaldson. He quickly transformed from goat to hero -- not only by making a pair of impressive plays at third, but also hitting a go-ahead, three-run homer to right-center field that led to a 4-1 victory for the "home" team.

"I learned early in my career to take one play at a time," Donaldson said. "If I mess up, I'm not going to help the team by continuing to dwell on that. If I mess up, which is going to happen a few times this year, they're going to have to count on me to make the next play."

"I like the fact that he recovers," manager Bob Melvin said. "All of a sudden, he's thinking of what probably isn't a good play, and then he recovers and makes a great play the next time and then hits the ball about as far to right-center field as I've seen hit here. It ended up being a really nice day for him and, hopefully, confidence-wise, he feels that much better going into games [on Friday]."

"I've heard from the developmental staff he's a guy that comes up big, and makes big plays and so forth."

Donaldson will receive plenty of looks on defense, but the A's are just as intrigued by what his bat can do -- especially after an offseason in which he learned valuable lessons by playing winter ball in the Dominican Republic.

"I've really worked hard this offseason to try to get back to my approach when I was younger, of just trying to make solid contact," Donaldson said. "I've hit for higher averages in my career, not so much the last two years. I've really focused on trying to drive balls. I'm trying to get back to just being more of a hitter than a power guy. And I feel if I make solid contact very consistently, my power numbers are going to be there."

Worth noting

- Baseball sources confirmed that Cuban outfielder Yoenis Cespedes is expected to be at Phoenix Municipal Stadium on Saturday to undergo a physical. His four-year, \$36 million deal will be made official soon after, and it's likely Cespedes will finally join the team on Sunday. He will wear No. 52.
- Lefty Sean Doolittle, who has made the full-time transition from position player to pitcher, was one of eight hurlers to pitch in Thursday's intrasquad game. Doolittle faced four batters, giving up a triple and an unearned run.

"I thought he threw well," Melvin said. "He doesn't really look like a convert. He looks like a pitcher out there."

Don't plan on Tejada in Green & Gold

Ray Ratto, csnbayarea.com 2/29/2012

So what to make of Miguel Tejada and his request to join Manny Ramirez as the oldest three-four hitting combo since slo-pitch softball?

Uhh, nothing. Nothing will come of it. Billy Beane has made his splash for the elderly, and there won't be a second.

But ridiculing Tejada? Not here. He wanted to play. He wants a better send-off than the one he provided himself in San Francisco. If that is selfish, well, most of baseball is. It's not like he'd demanding a place, or that he deserves one. He said he's available, nothing more.

And that's your classic no-harm no-foul case.

Tejada isn't owed an opportunity, this we know. He offered many great years to the A's, and he was paid well for them -- a fair exchange by any accounting. He is owed respect for those years, which included the 2002 AL MVP, and it is fair to say he has received it.

But he is certainly allowed to offer his services in these, the twilight days of his career. Or, more likely, the closing time of his career.

The point, essentially, is that this is an interesting bit of story from Susan Slusser of La Cronica, and it can be a bit of a talker, but neither offering or declining that offer creates much of a tavern argument.

And why? Because 40-year-olds three years removed from their last productive season don't get asked to kick in some more. Ramirez is a gamble for that very reason, and many people think Beane is daft to have signed him, even if he is playing essentially for free.

But Ramirez is different than Tejada; a much better power hitter, and has only that one job. Tejada would play third base as well as hit, and probably no better than he did in San Francisco.

In short, the A's have already shown too much of a liking for past-it players, and to double up now is not just daft, it's full-on mad.

Put another way, it was Moneyball, not Geronto-ball.

Tejada just got in too late, and offered a skill set that the A's aren't interested in having. No harm in that, just as there's no harm in asking. So there will be no ridicule here, not when Tiger Woods is dealing with suggestions that he wanted to play Charlie Sheen's role in the remake of "Navy SEALS."

Manny to DH in Friday's opener

A's manager Bob Melvin advised reporters Thursday morning not to read too much into Friday's lineup for the Cactus League opener against the Mariners. That notion is supported by his decision to start Manny Ramirez at DH. Ramirez, of course, is banned from the club's first 50 games. Plenty regulars will be sprinkled around Manny, but the order in which they appear won't necessarily have an Opening Day-look. Melvin plans on experimenting with several lineups over the next couple of weeks, in part because there are several spots up for grabs, including first base, third base and DH. The outfield is also far from settled, as it remains to be seen where Yoenis Cespedes fits into the picture once he reports to camp, which I'm hearing could be as soon as tomorrow.

Among those heavily in the mix at first base is Daric Barton, who is getting three days off after receiving a cortisone shot recently. Melvin said he should be hitting again Sunday and it's a possibility he could slot into the DH slot in one of Monday's

split-squad contests. Barton, recovering from shoulder surgery, isn't expected to be ready to play defense until mid-March at the earliest. That would seemingly put him behind fellow first-base contenders Brandon Allen, Kila Ka'aihue and Chris Carter, but not as much as you would think. The A's are very familiar with Barton's abilities as a defender, so it's not like he'll be having to prove himself all that much with his glove. His bat, more so, will do the talking, it seems. But it will be interesting to see just how soon he's allowed to take the field at first base.

A's notebook: McCarthy's the man; quandary at third base

Kate Longworth, csnbayarea.com, February 28, 2012, 11:34 am

News of Day: When the Athletics open the 2012 season in Tokyo, it'll be Brandon McCarthy on the mound.

"I thought it was natural based on what he accomplished last year," A's manager Bob Melvin said, in officially announcing what we've all been speculating this spring.

Melvin cited McCarthy's focus, dependability and natural ability to pound the strike zone as attributes that led to his decision. And when discussing McCarthy's road to recovery, fighting through injuries throughout his career to finally 'arrive' last year, Melvin said, "credit to him."

"He's transformed himself in a number of ways ... when you go through injuries, you are aware of your body. He's a smart guy."

McCarthy is also one of the most routine guys you'll come across in the game, which is saying a lot if you know baseball players.

The day after he pitches, he's already started his gameplan for his next start. And as Melvin explained, you don't approach the righty on the day of his outing: "He's focused."

Melvin compared him to one of his other former pitchers, Curt Schilling (minus the bloody sock...sorry, I had to go there). It's a comparison to be proud of for the 28-year-old McCarthy.

And Now There Are Two: Bartolo Colon will be in the 2-spot of the A's rotation.

Melvin cited his experience and mechanics, the way they "stand out...he reads hitters really well."

If his shoulder rehab continues on course, Dallas Braden will fit into that No. 3 slot come mid-April, early May.

The four and five spots, and still that potential third slot, remain up for grabs.

'I Don't Know' at third: The A's weren't able to escape their injury plagued ways this spring. Scott Sizemore went down with a left knee injury the first day of full squad workouts. It's now been confirmed he'll miss the entire 2012 season due to an ACL injury. He will be re-evaluated in two weeks, when the swelling goes down, and surgery will be scheduled then.

"I feel for him," Melvin said, "Scott put in the work for a breakout season."

That means the Athletics' utility men Adam Rosales and Eric Sogard will be getting looks at third, while rotating throughout other infield positions.

And it's time to hang up the catcher's gear for Josh Donaldson; he will be getting exclusive looks at the hot corner. Melvin has frequently mentioned Donaldson's athleticism over the past week, and he complimented his bat this spring.

And movie studios, get ready... we could have another heartwarming story of the oldest rookie trying to make his dream come true as 33-year old Wes Timmons might finally get his big break.

"You look at his numbers and you're puzzled why he hasn't had a shot at the big league level," Melvin explained.

More on the journeyman tonight on SportsNet Central.

Injury Updates: Brad Peacock was shut down yesterday with back stiffness. But, as Melvin predicted, it's not a serious situation. The righty will face hitters once more, then be worked into game action.

Play Ball: Speaking of game action, the A's will play an intrasquad game March 1, noon at Phoenix Municipal. It'll be an 8-pitcher, 4-inning game.