

## A's News Clips, Saturday, March 3 2012

### Manny Ramirez sees three pitches in Oakland A's Cactus League loss

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Fans who showed up Friday to watch Manny Ramirez in his A's debut did not get a long look.

Ramirez saw only three pitches in his two at-bats, grounding sharply into a double play and bouncing out softly to second in the A's 8-5 loss to the Seattle Mariners in the Cactus League opener for both teams.

He batted cleanup but was replaced at designated hitter by Jonny Gomes in the bottom of the sixth. It marked Ramirez's first major league game since he retired early last season while with the Tampa Bay Rays.

What did the aging slugger glean from his brief work day?

"I did great. I made contact," he said jokingly in the clubhouse after leaving the game. "I thought it was going to be worse. At least I was seeing the ball pretty good. I was excited, looking forward to my first at-bat."

Ramirez, who joined the A's on a minor league deal Feb. 20, said his first week with the team went well. He gives his new uniform the thumbs-up.

"My friends are calling me, 'Manny you look so good in green!' " he said.

Ramirez received a mix of boos and cheers from the announced crowd of 6,316 at Phoenix Municipal Stadium as he dug in for his first at-bat against Blake Beavan in the bottom of the first. He made solid contact on the second pitch he saw but hit into a tailor-made 6-4-3 double play to end the inning.

He batted again in the fourth and bounced the first pitch he saw to second.

But just his name on the lineup card was a welcome sight to teammates.

"It was exciting," infielder Eric Sogard said. "He's one of the greatest hitters of all time."

Then, in a smiling acknowledgment of Ramirez's reputation for being a non-hustler, Sogard added: "It was great to see him out there hustling down the line, too. We love it."

As the A's prepare for their early season opener March 28 against the Mariners in Tokyo, they face an odd situation with Ramirez.

He will miss the first 50 regular-season games while serving a suspension for violating Major League Baseball's drug policy. The A's will keep him at extended spring training in Phoenix for the first 40 games of the suspension.

Ramirez can work out with the major league club during that time, and the A's plan to bring him to Oakland periodically.

He becomes eligible for the season May 30, the day he turns 40. He can play in a 10-game rehab assignment leading up to that, likely to be split between Single-A Stockton and Triple-A Sacramento. Both have staggered homestands in the days leading to his reinstatement.

Though Gomes will serve as designated hitter Saturday, manager Bob Melvin said Ramirez will start Sunday against the Chicago Cubs and will play on Monday's split-squad day, either against the Los Angeles Angels in Phoenix or against the Cubs in Mesa.

"We'll try to get him some consistent at-bats here early on, just to see how he's swinging and get an early read on him," Melvin said.

But the A's need to evaluate other D.H. candidates, too -- the ones Melvin will have at his disposal when the season starts. That group includes Gomes, Chris Carter, Brandon Allen, Kila Ka'aihue and Seth Smith.

"We know which guys we need to give more at-bats to," Melvin said. "We're out of here on the 22nd (to travel to Tokyo). You'd like to get 'X' amount of plate appearances for guys. We're going to be a little bit short of that, but we understand where we are."

In Friday's game, with a strong wind blowing toward right field, the A's served up five homers to the Mariners, with whom they will get quite familiar in the coming weeks.

The teams play again Saturday in Peoria, and the A's host the Mariners in another exhibition March 16. They open the season against each other with a two-game series in Tokyo on March 28-29, and they resume the season with a two-game set at O.co Coliseum on April 6-7.

"By the time we're done with them in early April, we'll be sick of them and they'll be sick of us," Melvin said.

### **Oakland A's notebook: Seattle Mariners hit five homers in 8-5 win over A's in Cactus League opener**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Conditions were perfect Friday for hitters clearing the fence, and A's pitchers certainly obliged.

The Seattle Mariners connected for five homers in dealing the A's an 8-5 loss in their exhibition opener.

The wind was blowing strongly to right field, and Grant Balfour -- a candidate to be the A's closer -- found the going roughest.

He allowed a two-run shot to center by Jesus Montero and a solo shot by Luis Rodriguez to right, both in the fifth.

"Guys like him are going to throw a lot of fastballs," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "He's probably not going to be as precise with his command right now. He's not a guy that I'm worried about."

A's starter Graham Godfrey struck out four in two innings but found trouble with two outs in the second. After Alex Liddi's double, Godfrey caught too much of the plate with a 1-2 slider that Michael Saunders hit for a towering two-run homer to right.

"There were a lot of things I felt really good about," Godfrey said. "(The key) is being a little more careful with off-speed pitches when I've got two strikes on guys."

Tom Milone, who like Godfrey is battling to make the rotation, gave up a two-run homer to Carlos Peguero, one pitch after second baseman Jemile Weeks' fielding error.

That was Milone's only hit allowed in two innings. The left-hander struck out three and walked none.

"If I can go out there and throw like that, I'll be really happy," he said.

Fautino De Los Santos gave up Johermyn Chavez's solo shot in the eighth for the final margin.

Eric Sogard lined a homer to right for the A's, and Wes Timmons delivered a two-run single. Both are utility players but also in the mix for the third base job. The A's have indicated Josh Donaldson will get a lion's share of the innings at third with a chance to win the job.

Donaldson started at third and went 0 for 3 with two strikeouts.

Former A's third baseman Sal Bando visited camp and was introduced to the team by Melvin.

A Bay Area native, Melvin wears No. 6 in tribute to Bando, who was captain of three straight A's World Series championship teams from 1972-74.

"I think it's important that these guys understand the history," Melvin said.

Indications remain that outfielder Yoenis Cespedes will take his physical Saturday and join the team Sunday.

## **Former third baseman Sal Bando visits A's camp**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

PHOENIX -- Former A's third baseman Sal Bando visited camp Friday and was introduced to the team by manager Bob Melvin.

Melvin, a Bay Area native, wears No. 6 in honor of Bando — captain of Oakland's World Series championship teams of 1972-74 — and Melvin wants his players to be exposed to some of the franchise greats.

"I think it's important that these guys understand the history," Melvin said. "So whenever we have a guy like him around -- one of the all-time great A's -- I think it's important we share that with our guys."

Manny Ramirez is starting at designated hitter for Friday's Cactus League opener against Seattle, but Melvin said he'll pencil in Jonny Gomes as DH for Saturday's game against the Mariners in Peoria.

Ramirez won't be eligible for the A's first 50 games while he serves a suspension, so the A's need to get looks at their other DH candidates who are available for the start of the season. The evaluation period is shorter than usual this spring as the A's open the regular season March 28 against Seattle in Tokyo.

"We know which guys we need to give more at-bats, and we're in a little bit of a rush," Melvin said. "We're outta here on the 22nd, (to travel to Tokyo), and typically you like to get 'X' amount of plate appearances for guys. We're going to be a little bit short of that, but we understand where we are."

## **Manny Ramirez 'feels great' after first A's at-bats**

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

**Manny Ramirez** hit into a double play in his first at-bat with the A's, and grounded out to second in his other at-bat Friday.

The A's new designated hitter - who hadn't played in a game in nearly a year - knows he won't keep grounding out at that kind of rate as he regains his form.

"You better believe it," Ramirez said with a smile.

After his two plate appearances in the Cactus League opener, Ramirez said that his timing was better than he had expected and that he was happy that he was seeing the ball well.

"I feel great," he said. "I made contact."

Ramirez saw only three pitches in his two at-bats, and manager **Bob Melvin** chalked that up to being anxious to do something right away with a new team. Melvin noted that Ramirez's first grounder was hit "on the button."

Melvin anticipates Ramirez playing essentially every other day in Arizona, which probably translates to most home games.

"He needs some consistent at-bats early on so we can get an early read," Melvin said.

Ramirez retired April 8 after testing positive for performance-enhancing substances and must sit out the first 50 games of this season.

He said he loves the A's white shoes - he called the A's home whites "beautiful" - and added, "My friends call me and say, 'You look so good in green!' "

Ramirez has been generous with his time with A's hitters; on Friday, third base hopeful **Josh Donaldson**, who always has studied video of Ramirez hitting, spoke with the DH for a while.

"He's one of my favorite guys to watch, and now I get to pick his brain, watch all the drills he does," Donaldson said. "If I can pick up maybe just one little thing from a guy like that, it might help bring out my full potential."

**Barton's setback:** **Daric Barton** had an MRI exam earlier in the week after developing soreness in his surgically repaired right shoulder.

"Everything looked good, so I'll get back into it slowly," he said. "The biggest thing for me was to find out that it's fine."

Barton cannot throw until mid-March, and now maybe later than that, potentially affecting his ability to win the first-base job, but, he said, "My No. 1 concern is getting healthy. Then I'll worry about everything else. I just need to get back on the field."

**Briefly:** A's greats **Sal Bando** and **Bert Campaneris** were at Phoenix Muni, and Melvin introduced Bando to the team during the morning. ... The A's have an opening at third; asked if he can still play there, Bando, 68, laughed and said, "I can play there, but not very well." ... Bando said he will have to miss the A's ceremony honoring the 1972 championship team on April 21 because of a previous commitment. ... The games today and Sunday will air on 95.7 FM with the pregame show starting at 11:30 a.m.

## **Mariners 8, A's 5**

**Notable:** Oakland pitchers gave up five homers, with two of them coming against reliever Grant Balfour. ... All of Seattle's runs came on homers. ... Eric Sogard hit Oakland's only homer, with two outs in the seventh. ... Wes Timmons, like Sogard a potential option at third, drove in two runs. ... Joey Devine and Pedro Figueroa had the only clean innings for the A's.

**Quotable:** "Today, anything in the air to right field winds up being a home run."

*- A's manager Bob Melvin on the five homers his team allowed*

**Today's game:** A's (Tyson Ross) at Mariners (Hector Noesi), 12:05 p.m. Radio: 95.7.

**Drumbeat: Manny Ramirez about to make Cactus League A's debut – updated**

**From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Phoenix Muni, 3/2/2012, 12:10pm**

The A's are playing in the only Cactus League game of the day today, so it's a decent-sized crowd, there are a ton of scouts here and everyone wants to see one guy:

Manny Ramirez, who is DHing for Oakland.

*UPDATE: Ramirez hit into a double-play to end the first inning in his first A's at-bat, but Jemile Weeks had opened the inning with a double, Cliff Pennington moved him to third and Coco Crisp singled him in.*

Actually, lots of people also would like to see Cuban outfielder Yoenis Cespedes – a lot of scouts have asked where he is – but he won't take his physical until tomorrow and won't officially join the team until Sunday.

Two of the A's all-time greats also are here: Sal Bando was on hand bright and early this morning and manager Bob Melvin introduced him to the team in the clubhouse, while Campy Campaneris just threw out the first pitch of the Cactus League season.

Melvin thought it would be good for his young club to see a three-time World Series team captain, and meeting Bando isn't a bad way to start off the season. It's the 40th anniversary of the '72 A's championship, and Bando told me he has to miss the celebration at the Coliseum later this year because of an earlier commitment.

Daric Barton told me that he had an MRI on his right shoulder, which has been sore lately as he comes back from surgery. He didn't realize it, but with the dye injection for the MRI, there also was cortisone to help calm things down. He is scheduled to appear in a game, at DH only, potentially as early as Monday.

Manny won't DH tomorrow; Jonny Gomes gets the duties at Peoria against Seattle. Gomes will take over at DH today in the later stages, too.

### **Exhibition games follow A's Opening Day in Japan**

Bruce Jenkins, San Francisco Chronicle

This special edition of the 3-Dot Lounge originates about a stone's throw from the Giants' spring-training camp, where we've set up camp for a week.

So much of the Cactus League makes sense: gorgeous weather, the golf courses, the priceless days at the ballparks, the scouts in their straw hats behind home plate, baseball talk over dinner.

Here's a real puzzler: After wrapping up their Arizona stint March 21, the A's head to Japan to open the regular season with two games against Seattle (good to see Japan get some exposure to baseball; they've only been playing it there since 1872).

Do those games even count? It won't seem that way when the A's return for an exhibition against the Triple-A River Cats in Sacramento on March 31 and the Bay Bridge Series April 2-4. Nobody deserves a schedule that awkward ...

Giants fans remember **Jerome Williams** as a kid from Hawaii who overcame some sloppy habits to win 13 games over the 2003-04 seasons before being traded to the Cubs. That's about the time he ballooned to 270 pounds, triggering a desultory run through four minor-league stops, two independent leagues and Taiwan. A ton of hard work earned Williams a job with the Angels last August, and after a successful winter-league stint in the wilds of Venezuela ("That's just crazy, intense - if you can play there, you can play anywhere"), he's the leading candidate for the No. 5 spot in what might be the best rotation in the American League ... Lofty payrolls may help rich teams on the free-

agent market, but it won't make them smarter. While the Giants have home-grown excellence all over the field, the Red Sox haven't produced an impact player since **Jacoby Ellsbury** and **Clay Buchholz** arrived in 2007 - and the Yankees haven't developed a consistently good starting pitcher since **Chien-Ming Wang**, twice a 19-game winner after being signed in 2000. (If you don't count Wang, on grounds of longevity, it would be **Andy Pettitte** in the mid-90s.)

I'd imagine **Troy Tulowitzki** took it personally when Colorado GM **Dan O'Dowd** referred to "clubhouse problems" and "a need to address our culture" after last season's disaster. From the day he broke in, Tulowitzki has been a take-charge guy who isn't afraid to challenge teammates. But now he's saying that the Rockies are *his* team for the first time, with the blessing of veterans **Todd Helton** and **Jason Giambi** ... The Rockies are one ancient group. Over the offseason, they picked up over-34 players **Marco Scutaro**, **Casey Blake**, **Ramon Hernandez** and **Jamie Moyer**, while promoting 36-year-old **Rafael Betancourt** to replace closer **Huston Street**. And **Michael Cuddyer** turns 33 this month. ... From this corner, the Rockies' problems started when they gave absurdly overblown contracts to Tulowitzki (through 2020) and **Carlos Gonzalez** (2017). Great talents, no doubt, but you can't screw up your salary structure like that. It only stirs resentment ...

The A's are going to miss the ray of sunshine that is **Gio Gonzalez**, and, "The fans will love him in Washington," says **Amaury Pi-Gonzalez**, the Bay Area broadcaster now in his second season working the Angels' Spanish-speaking telecasts. "Gio is bilingual, his mother was born in Cuba, and he brings a smile to the park, a tremendous attitude for a young guy that is contagious with the other players. He's a good man, a pleaser, with his best years ahead. In return, the A's got four players who have not yet participated in a major-league game."

**Carlos Beltran** couldn't help but recall a career-low moment when he ran across **Adam Wainwright**, now a teammate, in the St. Louis camp. Beltran represented the Mets' last stand in Game 7 of the 2006 NLCS at Shea Stadium. With the bases loaded, two out and the Cardinals leading 3-1, Wainwright froze him with a curveball - strike three, never got the bat off his shoulder - and the series was over. This is a good career move for Beltran, though. Even without **Albert Pujols**, **Tony La Russa** and **Dave Duncan**, the Cardinals have a special quality that only the best organizations understand ... There are times when **Bobby Valentine** seems completely out of his mind, but his presence will be a blessing to the Red Sox-Yankees rivalry, which has grown oddly stale in recent years (possibly because the pitchers take about 20 minutes between deliveries). Refreshingly, Valentine despises the pitch-count obsession, claiming that none of his pitchers suffered an arm injury during his six years managing in Japan, despite massive workloads in games and bullpen sessions. "No one has ever been protected more than (the Nationals') **Stephen Strasburg**," Valentine said. "They monitored every pitch; they limited everything he did. You know what happened? His arm broke, and he had Tommy John surgery. So is limiting the amount of pitches the end-all for the health of a pitcher's arm? The answer has got to be no." There's plenty more evidence where that came from, Bobby. History shows that your philosophy works in any country.

### **MLB expands playoff format from 8 teams to 10**

By BEN WALKER, AP Baseball Writer

Major League Baseball expanded its playoff format to 10 teams Friday, adding a second wild-card in each league.

The decision establishes a new one-game, wild-card round in each league between the teams with the best records who are not division winners, meaning a third-place team could win the World Series.

This is the only change in baseball's playoff structure since the 1995 season, when wild-card teams were first added.

"This change increases the rewards of a division championship and allows two additional markets to experience playoff baseball each year," Commissioner Bud Selig said in a statement.

Had there been additional wild-card teams last season, the Braves would have made the playoffs in the NL, while the Boston Red Sox would have qualified in the AL. Instead, each missed the postseason by a game, both going down with historic September swoons.

For the 2012 postseason, the five-game Division Series will begin with two home games for lower seeds, followed by home games for the higher seed. After that, it will return to the 2-2-1 format previously used.

"The players are eager to begin playing under this new format in 2012, and they look forward to moving to full realignment in 2013," MLBPA executive director Michael Weiner said.

As part of baseball's labor deal, the Houston Astros will switch to the American League for 2013, creating two 15-team leagues with three divisions each. Players wanted the change to equalize the chances for making the playoffs for every division.

Each season, eight of 30 major league teams have made the playoffs under the format that began in 1995, a year later than intended because of a strike that wiped out the end of the '94 season. The postseason included just the league winners from 1903-68, then increased to four teams in 1969 after the leagues split into divisions.

In the NFL, 12 of 32 teams make the playoffs. In both the NBA and NHL, 16 of 30 teams advance to the postseason.

Adding two more playoffs teams this year has been complicated because the regular-season schedule was drafted last spring and summer, and the extra game has to be put in place in a manner that doesn't disrupt the World Series schedule. In a further complication, both sides reached a consensus that ties for division titles would be broken on the field with a tiebreaker game under the new format, and not by head-to-head record.

Head-to-head record has been used since 1995 to determine first place if both teams are going to the postseason. But the sides decided that with the start of a one-game, winner-take-all wild-card round, the difference between first place and a wild-card berth is too important to decide with a formula and that a tiebreaker game should be played.

### **Manny satisfied with A's debut**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Manny Ramirez has passed the fashion test.

"I love the white uniforms," he said. "They're beautiful. I got friends calling, saying, 'Manny, you look so good in green.'"

Now, he needs to prove he can still hit in a uniform. Friday marked his first test, as he started as the A's designated hitter and saw just three pitches in two at-bats, grounding out both times in his Oakland debut, an 8-5 loss to the Mariners.

Perhaps it wasn't the most inspiring performance, but by day's end Ramirez was satisfied with his showing.

"It went great," he said. "I feel great. I made contact. ... I thought it was going to be worse. At least I was seeing the ball pretty good."

Ramirez's inning-ending double play in the first inning sounded better than the results read on the scorecard. Manager Bob Melvin remarked after the game that, "He hit it right on the button, but just hit it on the ground."

"I think he's probably pretty anxious to do some things," Melvin said.

The A's skipper plans to play Ramirez every other day, meaning the veteran slugger won't make Saturday's trip to Peoria for a rematch against Seattle. Instead, Jonny Gomes will assume DH duties, as Melvin tries to rotate in several players in need of at-bats, keeping in mind Ramirez's 50-game absence once the season commences.

"That's probably a pretty good recipe at this point," Melvin said. "We'll try to get Manny some consistent at-bats here early on, just to see how he's swinging and get an early read on him."

Ramirez's goal is rather simple this spring -- "Like everybody else, get ready," he says -- but his presence is drawing plenty of attention, particularly from those sharing the same dugout.

"It's exciting," infielder Eric Sogard said of seeing Ramirez in an A's uniform. "That's one of the best hitters of all time and one of the prettiest swings. It's great to see him out there. Hustling down the line, too, we all loved that."

### **Mixed results for Godfrey, Milone in opener**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Right-hander Graham Godfrey entered camp presumably a favorite to land a spot in the rotation, based on his experience with the club last year.

The young hurler feels even more confident about his chances after improving his changeup and slider over the winter, which was mostly spent in the Dominican Republic under the watch of Moises Alou, a former Major League outfielder and the general manager of Leones del Escogido.

Following Godfrey's Cactus League debut in Friday's 8-5 loss to the Mariners, it's safe to say that both pitches are still a work in progress. He struck out four in two innings, mostly with his fastball, but he also surrendered a double and an ensuing two-run homer on a 1-2 slider.

"The biggest thing is being a little bit more careful with my offspeed stuff when I have two strikes on guys," Godfrey said after. "The home run that was hit, I thought was a really good pitch. It was down, but the level of hitters here, it needs to be better placed.

"There are a lot of things I felt really good about, and obviously some things I need to continue working on. It's really early, and as far as the first outing, I was satisfied."

Last year, Godfrey went 1-2 with a 3.96 ERA in five appearances for the A's, and he excelled with Triple-A Sacramento, recording a 14-3 record and 2.68 ERA.

Fellow rotation candidate Tommy Milone also took the mound on Friday, throwing two innings and producing similar results: three strikeouts and a two-run homer. Just one of the runs was earned, though, as the long ball followed an error by second baseman Jemile Weeks.

"For the most part, my game was on," Milone said. "That one pitch for the home run, I felt like it was in a good spot, fastball inside, and I felt like I got it in there. I may have got it up, but he got a pretty good swing on it, so [there's] really not anything you can do."



"If I can go out there and throw like that, I'll be pretty happy, especially [since it was] first game in Spring Training. Usually it doesn't end up like that, the first game. It's always about trying to work on things and the command's not there, but I was pretty happy with my command."

Said manager Bob Melvin: "Other than that homer, he made all his pitches. You can certainly tell he's a guy that knows where the ball's going."

### **A's legend Bando pays a visit to spring camp**

PHOENIX -- Bob Melvin is all about embracing the history of the club he manages, and on Friday he brought a piece of it into his clubhouse, surprising his players with a guest visitor following a meeting to go over signs.

Former A's third baseman Sal Bando was introduced to the team by Melvin, who wears No. 6 in honor of the infielder, hours before Oakland opened Cactus League play against Seattle.

"I think it's important that these guys understand the history," Melvin said. "So whenever we have a guy like him around who is one of the all-time great A's, captain of three World Series teams, it's important we share that with our guys."

During morning workouts, Bando was seen catching up with Melvin and former Oakland second baseman and current special advisor Phil Garner. Bando and Garner were instrumental in helping Melvin start his post-playing career when he was by their side in Milwaukee, where Bando assumed general manager duties from 1991-99.

Another familiar face, former A's shortstop Bert "Campy" Campaneris, was also on hand, and he threw out the ceremonial first pitch to christen the spring season. Campaneris figures to be one of several A's greats that fans see this year, as the organization celebrates the 40th anniversary of the 1972 championship season.

### **Worth noting**

- Though all eyes are on Josh Donaldson as he makes his case for an everyday job at third base, utility player Eric Sogard is garnering some noteworthy attention. Always a solid defender, Sogard showcased his bat during Friday's game, collecting the team's first home run of the spring.

"I definitely wasn't expecting that in my first at-bat," said Sogard, who launched Steve Delabar's split-finger fastball to right field in the seventh inning. "I think most of us are just trying to put the ball in play, and I was able to find the barrel on it and get it out, so [it was a] good start."

Sogard spent the first half of the 2011 season with Triple-A Sacramento but was called up to Oakland at the All-Star break. He spent the remainder of the year with the A's, hitting .200 with two home runs and four RBIs in 27 games.

"He's got some big league time under his belt and feels like a big leaguer," manager Bob Melvin said. "You feel you can move him around the infield, [he] gives you a tough at-bat, even against a left-hander. I don't think he really gets too bogged down on who is where. I think he's more concerned with himself. If he plays well enough, he figures he'll be on a big league team."

- Graham Godfrey and Tom Milone weren't the only pitchers to allow home runs on Friday. Right-hander Grant Balfour gave up two, and righty Fautino De Los Santos surrendered one, accounting for five total from the A's staff on a rather windy day in Phoenix. Aside from the long balls, Oakland's staff combined for eight strikeouts next to just one walk.

"Today," Melvin said, "anything in the air to right field ends up being a home run, and they ended up hitting more balls over there than we did."

- Melvin said on Friday that he needs to decide whether he wants to start the regular season with a strictly backup catcher on the 25-man roster. If Donaldson makes the club as the starting third baseman, he could conceivably play that very role as well. Regular backstop Kurt Suzuki would still see days of rest in that case, with the A's getting five off-days during the first 32 days of the season.

Landon Powell and Anthony Recker are in camp fighting for that backup catcher job.

"Either option is open," Melvin said. "I think you prefer, depending on days off, to have that true second catcher, but I think [Donaldson] adds to a potentially different recipe. I'm not saying I'm leaning toward that, but I've certainly thought about it."

## **Addition of Wild Card berths finalized for 2012**

### **Lower-seeded teams will host first two games of Division Series**

By Barry M. Bloom / MLB.com

And now there are 10.

Major League Baseball expanded its playoffs for the third time, this time with the addition of two more Wild Card teams and a single elimination game in each league. That new format will begin this year.

An agreement between MLB and the Players Association, finalized on Friday, adds a second Wild Card to both the American and National Leagues, increasing the postseason field to 10, the largest in Major League history and the first such expansion since 1994.

The three division winners in each league will await the survivor of a one-game playoff between the Wild Card teams in each league. Both games are slated for Friday, Oct. 5, two days after the end of the regular season. Barring weather disruptions, the Division Series field of four teams in each league will begin the following Saturday and Sunday.

"I greatly appreciate the MLBPA's cooperation in putting the new postseason format in place this year," Commissioner Bud Selig said on Friday. "The enthusiasm for the 10-team structure among our clubs, fans and partners has been overwhelming.

"This change increases the rewards of a division championship and allows two additional markets to experience playoff baseball each year, all while maintaining the most exclusive postseason in professional sports."

The League Championship Series and World Series formats will remain the same, but in 2012 only, the five-game Division Series will begin with two home games for lower seeds, followed by up to three home games for higher seeds. This one-year change will eliminate a travel day prior to a decisive Game 5 of a Division Series and was necessary because the 2012 regular-season schedule -- announced before the agreement on the new postseason was reached -- had no wiggle room. There will still be a travel day between Games 2 and 3.

From 2013 onward, there will be space set into the schedule for the one-game Wild Card playoffs.

Next year, the Division Series will return to the 2-2-1 format used from 1998 through this past postseason. Details on the scheduling of the new playoff games between each league's Wild Cards will be announced in the near future as will be the television partner who will carry the games.

Reverting to the old 2-3 format that was used from 1995-97 will allow the one-game Wild Card playoff winners to remain home and host the first two games of their Division Series, which will begin on Sunday, Oct. 7. The other two Division Series that pits division winners will begin on Saturday, Oct. 6.

Division titles and Wild Card berths will now all be decided by a 163rd game play-in if necessary. In the past, if two teams were tied for a division lead after 162 games and the other had already clinched the Wild Card, the division winner would be determined by head-to-head records.

This year, any play-in games will be staged the day after the regular season ends.

In another interesting wrinkle to the new long-term playoff rule changes, beginning this year a division winner and Wild Card team from the same division will be able to meet in the Division Series, which was not the case in the past.

For example, if the Yankees have the best record in the AL and the Red Sox win their one-game Wild Card playoff, they will meet in the Division Series. In the past, the Red Sox would have played the division winner with the league's second-best record and the Yankees would've played the division winner with the third-best mark.

That happened last year when the Rays won the Wild Card and played the Rangers while the Yankees, who won the AL East, played the Tigers in the first round. Both AL East teams lost their respective Division Series. Under the new format, the Yankees would've played the Rays.

Michael Weiner, union's executive director, lauded both sides for their cooperation on a very complicated issue during a conference call on Friday.

"A bunch of players and a bunch of people on the owners' side put their heads together to try and solve the problem," he said. "There was an agreement to try and move to an expanded playoffs this year. We didn't have a schedule that was designed to accommodate it. It took a lot of hard work by both sides to try and figure out a way to make it happen."

Adding Wild Card teams this year created a logistical issue: The regular season is scheduled to end on Wednesday, Oct. 3, leaving two days for travel, weather problems, possible season-ending tiebreakers to decide division titles and Wild Card berths and the Wild Card elimination games prior to the start of the Division Series. Because of television commitments, the World Series is fixed to begin on Wednesday, Oct. 24.

The additional Wild Cards also place a premium on winning a division title. Division winners will get at least two days of rest before the start of the Division Series, while the Wild Card teams will possibly have to use their best pitchers to win an elimination game.

"If you get in [early] you can plan out your rotation a little better," D-backs manager Kirk Gibson said on Thursday. "You don't have to play the extra game. If you're in the one-game playoff, do you use your top starter, Ian Kennedy, or do use somebody else? It's a different strategy."

The new format was agreed upon last year in the new five-year Basic Agreement between the owners and the players, to start by 2013 at the latest. The two sides then had two months to negotiate the logistics of beginning it a year early. They went a day past their stated deadline.

MLB had been studying how to expand the playoffs for at least two years, and it became a topic of heated discussion among Selig's 14-member committee that has been studying on-field improvements of the sport.

"I'm excited, because it leans more heavily on the integrity of a season than the other system and I think everybody felt the same way," said Angels manager Mike Scioscia, a member of Selig's select committee. "Hopefully, it leans on that integrity a little more heavily and I think that's a good thing."

Last season, the eventual World Series-champion Cardinals made the playoffs by winning the NL Wild Card berth over the Braves on the final day of the regular season, as did the Rays over the Red Sox in the AL. Had there been the additional Wild Card berths, the four teams would've secured all of them much earlier, thus eliminating the last-minute dramatics.

Under the new scenario, the Rays would've have had to play the Red Sox and the Cardinals would have had to play the Braves in a one-game Wild Card playoff to gain entry into the Division Series.

"Everybody remembers day 162 last year and how exciting that was," said St. Louis manager Mike Matheny, a coach in the Cardinals system last season. "We all see the benefit of how the Wild Card played out. There were a lot of people against it at the time and it proved to make some very meaningful games for some teams who otherwise wouldn't have had anything going on. It will be fun to watch how it all plays out."

The previous format, featuring three division winners and a Wild Card from each league, was adopted in 1994 but wasn't actually used until the following year because a players' strike led to the cancellation of the '94 postseason. From 1969-93, there were two divisions in each league and a League Championship Series between the first-place teams as a prelude to the World Series. Prior to 1969, only the pennant winners, the first-place teams in each league, met in the World Series.

Under the new format, MLB, with 10 of 30 teams, will have the lowest amount of playoff qualifiers among the major North American sports leagues. The NFL has 12 of 32, while the NHL and the NBA each have 16 of 30.

**Major Lee-ague: If you can't keep track of A's tweeters...**

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 3/2/2012, 4:54PM

Plenty new A's faces have joined the Twitter world. Here's an updated list of tweeting players:

Jarrold Parker: [@JarrodBParker](#)  
Sean Doolittle: [@whatwouldDOOdo](#)  
Josh Reddick: [@joshreddick16](#)  
Michael Taylor: [@MTAYinh](#)  
Collin Cowgill: [@Ccowgill12](#)  
Ryan Cook: [@ryancook\\_48](#)  
Jemile Weeks: [@RealJemileWeeks](#)  
Max Stassi: [@MaxStassi10](#)  
Michael Choice: [@VinnyChoice](#)  
Sonny Gray: [@SonnyGray2](#)  
Kurt Suzuki: [@kurtsuzuki](#)  
Brett Anderson: [@BrettAnderson49](#)  
Dallas Braden: [@DALLASBRADEN209](#)  
Brandon McCarthy: [@BMcCarthy32](#)  
Coco Crisp: [@Coco\\_Crisp](#)  
Brian Fuentes: [@teetofuentes](#)  
Andrew Carignan: [@A\\_Carignan38](#)

### **Major League: Game 1 Lineups: Mariners @ A's**

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 3/2/2012, 9:55am

For the A's:

Weeks 2B  
Pennington SS  
Crisp CF  
Ramirez DH  
Smith LF  
Reddick RF  
Suzuki C  
Allen 1B  
Donaldson 3B

SP: Godfrey

And the Mariners:

Kawasaki SS  
Seager 3B  
Wells LF  
Montero C  
Peguero RF  
Catala DH  
Liddi 1B  
Saunders CF  
Rodriguez 2B

SP: Beaven

### **A's spring training: Manny has fun with debut at plate**

#### **Oakland loses spring opener 8-5 against Mariners**

By BOB BAUM, ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHOENIX — Manny Ramirez saw just three pitches and took two swings in his Oakland debut. He never got the ball out of the infield. Still, just being there seemed enough for now.

"I feel good," he said afterward. "I make contact."

Then he laughed and laughed.

The suspended slugger grounded into a double play and bounced out in the Athletics' 8-5 loss to the Seattle Mariners in their spring opener on Friday.

Ramirez will have plenty of opportunities to refine his form. He will have turned 40 by the time he's sat out the first 50 games of the season for violating MLB's substance abuse policy.

Jesus Montero, the touted 22-year-old acquired in a trade with the New York Yankees for Michael Pineda, hit one of Seattle's five home runs. But Montero left in the fifth inning after being hit by a foul.

Actually, Montero got hit twice in nearly the same place.

"He's OK," Seattle manager Eric Wedge said. "He got hit in the jaw a couple of times. I don't know that I've ever seen that happen two times in a row like that. The first one got him pretty good but obviously the second one right on top of that, so we got him out of there."

The A's and Mariners play the major league opener on March 28 in Tokyo.

Montero, who also had an error when he dropped a foul ball on a windy afternoon, was one of the few regulars the Mariners brought to the Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

Seattle got some big hits, a nice sign for an offense that was awful last year. Montero, Michael Saunders and Carlos Peguero each hit two-run homers and Luis Rodriguez and Johermyn Chavez added solo shots.

Ramirez, his trademark locks falling below his helmet, drew a loud mix of boos and cheers when he stepped to the plate in the first inning to face Blake Beaven with a runner on first and one out. On the second pitch, he hit a sharp grounder right to the shortstop, who easily converted the double play.

Three innings later, Ramirez led off the fourth and grounded out sharply to second on the first pitch.

Someone said he probably didn't plan on hard grounders when he returns to the majors this season.

"You got that right," he said. "It's been a long time since I haven't faced nobody, but tomorrow's another day. Tomorrow I'll do better."

Actually, it will be two days before he has a chance to do better. Manager Bob Melvin said his plan is to play Ramirez every other day through the spring. Then Ramirez will have to stay in extended spring training, with some intermittent trips to Oakland to work out with the team, before he regains his eligibility to play.

Ramirez had just 17 at-bats at the start of the season last year with Tampa Bay before leaving with a suspension looming.

Before Friday's game, Melvin praised Ramirez's efforts this spring.

"He's been terrific here," Melvin said. "Every day he tells me how lucky he is to be here and how appreciative he is to be here. He's one of the first ones in the cage every day and one of the last ones to leave. As many younger players and the turnover that we have here, to be able to have an example like that with the history and the numbers that he has makes it pretty easy to get guys to work here."

That probably wouldn't have been the description for Ramirez in his final days with the Los Angeles Dodgers, and certainly not in his rocky time in Boston. But Ramirez seems to be cherishing this opportunity.

"He's certainly not getting paid like he used to," Melvin said, "and he knows that each and every day he's got to prove himself to get to the next step of potentially having him around after 50 games. So, so far, so good."

Ramirez said that he felt better than he expected.

"At least I was seeing the ball pretty good," he said.

And he said he loves the uniform.

"I like the white uniform. It's beautiful," he said. "My friends, they'll be calling, 'Man, you look so good in green.'"

### **Cohn: Extra wild card will be good for baseball**

By LOWELL COHN, THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

The baseball purists are bellyaching. You can hear their wail clear across the country.

Major League Baseball is likely to add one more wild-card team in each league for this season's playoffs, and baseball purists are absolutely beside themselves. No sport has purists like baseball. They're acting as if vandals poured yellow paint over the Ark of the Covenant.

Please.

It says here that one more wild-card team is peachy keen and just what the doctor ordered. We'll get back to the wild-card fracas in a minute. But first, let's talk purity and baseball.

Baseball ain't so pure, and pardon my grammar — I revert to Brooklyn when I'm worked up. I also say "deeze" and "doze" in moments of high anxiety.

Baseball gave up its purity a long time ago. Like when it created the designated hitter. Talk about a desecration.

Baseball is a game with a certain morality — it used to be. For the privilege of getting up to bat, you have to field your position, unless of course you're a pinch hitter. If you don't field, you don't hit.

That was a bedrock rule like Thou Shalt Not Kill, until it wasn't a bedrock rule anymore. A designated hitter does not even need a baseball glove, which means baseball broke its code, adulterated its morality, violated the purity rule.

You want more baseball impurity? How about night games? How about replay? How about performance-enhancing drugs galore? Good grief. So, please, don't introduce the word "purity" into the wild-card discussion. It simply won't play.

Adding one more wild-card team is a great idea. Each league would now have two wild-card teams and they would meet in a one-game, do-or-die playoff to determine which team advances to the next round, which includes the three division champs.

The thinking behind this change is admirable. A wild-card team has not earned a playoff spot the way a division champion has. A division champion should have an advantage over a wild card, and the surviving wild-card teams must struggle extra hard to survive in the postseason.

Sounds good to me.

You may argue I'm all wet because, sometimes, wild-card teams have better records than division winners. So, why should a wild-card team with a superior record be penalized by having to play a sudden-death game?

I'll tell you why. Because the wild-card teams did not win their divisions. That's why.

Baseball is made up of divisions and, for divisions to mean something, the champion must get an extra benefit. Of course, purists could argue that divisions themselves are a desecration, as is the bloated number 30 — that's the number of big-league teams.

Adding a wild-card team in each league means there will be 10 contenders for the postseason instead of eight. That hurts no one, as far as I can see. It invites more teams to the party and extends interest in the postseason to cities that would have been turning their fancies exclusively to football.

When it comes to playoff teams, baseball is still more stingy than the NFL, in which 12 of 32 teams make the playoffs; or the NBA, where 16 of 30 make the playoffs — quite prodigal; call it playoff inflation.

A wild-card playoff game will start the postseason with a serious, you might even say grim contest to determine who survives. The postseason is all about surviving and being eliminated. This game will set the tone and remind everyone the stakes are high.

And it will help the Giants. The Giants are going to have a tough time finishing ahead of the Diamondbacks over 162 games. Believe me. They may end up being the second wild-card team and, if that's the case, San Francisco fans will praise this new format until the end of time.

The Giants are built for the postseason because the postseason is all about pitching and low-scoring games. Even if the Giants limp into the playoffs, they will be dangerous once they get there.

And one other thing. Baseball is not installing the wild-card game for money. No one will earn that much from one game. Baseball is doing it for the right reasons — to increase interest and drama and, get this, to be fair.

### **Who is A's most vital player?**

Grant Cohn, CSNBayArea.com

Defining the A's goal for 2012 is tricky. It's somewhere between "Make the playoffs," and "Be exciting." It's a long shot for the Beane Bunch. But, the A's will try with all their might, diligently pursuing relevance, and perhaps, competitiveness.

Who might be a difference-maker for Oakland? Who will be the five players the A's can least afford to lose?

### **Manny Ramirez**

He's not an important baseball player any more, but that didn't stop the A's from taking a chance on him. Although he slugged 555 home runs over his career, he's nothing more than a minor-league sideshow until he serves his 50-game suspension for using performance enhancers. He got one hit in 17 at bats last season for the Rays before walking away from the game. If he reaches double digits in home runs it will be a small miracle.

### **Yoenis Cespedes**

If he's as good as he's supposed to be, he'll be the A's best player, by far, and he'll be the only reason to watch the team in 2012. But then again, if Cespedes is really, really good, the A's will trade him midseason for more "prospects," probably.

### **Jemile Weeks**

He batted .303 as a rookie, and he was the most exciting baseball player in the Bay Area. He's a switch-hitting leadoff hitter who can steal bases, but he has no power. Still, he's the A's best player until Cespedes proves otherwise.

### **Josh Reddick**

This right fielder batted .280 in 254 at bats for the Red Sox last season, which means he wasn't good enough to stay in Boston, but he's a prized acquisition for A's. Go figure. The A's are crossing their fingers for more .280-hitting from Reddick, but they'll settle for .265.

### **Kurt Suzuki**

We used to think Suzuki was an up-and-comer, soon-to-be one of the best catchers in baseball. He batted .270-plus in back-to-back seasons ('08 and '09), a performance he followed up with a .242 season in '10 and .237 in '11 — two horrendous years. The A's would love to get the old Suzuki back. He could be an addition who makes the A's semi-competitive.

### **The winner — Cespedes**

If I absolutely have to pick one guy for this team, I'll go with Cespedes. In the 2009 World Baseball Classic, in which some major league pitchers pitched, Cespedes hit .458 with three triples, two home runs and six RBI in six games. He may be a legitimate major leaguer. He has a chance to be a star, and the A's haven't had one of those in quite some time.

### **Oakland A's Spring Training Battles: RPs**

Last season, the Oakland A's entered spring training with a veteran-laden bullpen that was built to help lead the team to the playoffs. The 2011 A's fell well short of that playoff goal. This year, the A's will be fielding a much younger, different-looking bullpen. Who will be the A's new closer and who will fill out the middle-inning roles?

### A Look Back At 2011

Before the 2011 season began, the Oakland A's had designs on a post-season run. One of the areas they focused much of their off-season maneuvering on was their bullpen, adding veterans [Grant Balfour](#) and [Brian Fuentes](#) to an already talented group. Both Balfour and Fuentes were signed to lucrative, multi-year deals and the A's seemed primed to have one of the deepest bullpens in the American League. Injuries had a major impact on the A's bullpen almost from the outset of spring training. The end result was that the A's relief crew finished seventh among 14 AL teams in bullpen ERA with a 3.74 mark. A's relievers were hung with 25 losses, good for fifth-most in the league, and 18 blown saves, eighth-most in the league.

The injuries began with closer [Andrew Bailey](#), who went down with a right forearm/elbow injury during spring training. He wouldn't make his 2011 debut until May 29th. In his absence, the A's struggled to find the right fit at the end of ballgames. Fuentes and Balfour each had opportunities as the A's closer and both had trouble locking down the role. As for Bailey, he was effective upon his return, converting 24 of 26 save opportunities, but his stuff never seemed quite as sharp as it had been in previous seasons. Bailey finished the year with career-highs in ERA (3.24), hits allowed per nine innings, WHIP (1.10) and losses. Still, overall Bailey was one of the stars of the A's bullpen in 2011.

Fuentes and Balfour also righted themselves once they were able to slot into the roles the A's had intended for them at the start of the year. Fuentes finished the season with a mediocre 3.70 ERA, but he was far better the second half of the season. He had a 1.71 ERA after the All-Star break after struggling to the tune of a 4.82 ERA before the break. Fuentes finished second on the team with 12 saves.

Balfour had a 2.47 ERA and a 1.03 WHIP. He actually saw his ERA go up slightly after the All-Star break, but his command improved significantly. Before the break, Balfour walked 15 in 34.2 innings. After the break, he walked only five in 27.1 innings. His strike-out numbers went down along with his walks, but were still a solid 22 strike-outs in those 27.1 innings. He battled a few minor injuries during the season, including a strained oblique that cost him some time mid-season.

[Michael Wuertz](#) was another veteran set-up man who was supposed to pave the way to the ninth inning for Oakland. However, he was cut down with an injury during the first week of the regular season and was never right the rest of the year. He made 39 appearances and posted an ugly 6.68 ERA in 33.2 innings. Wuertz's K:BB ratio was nearly as ugly, as he struck-out 32 but walked 26. He also allowed five homeruns.

Right-handed submariner [Brad Ziegler](#) was a workhorse for the A's in a middle relief role before he was traded at the July deadline to the [Arizona Diamondbacks](#). Ziegler made 43 appearances for the A's and posted a 2.39 ERA, the second-best ERA of his A's career. His K:BB ratio wasn't great (29:13), but he didn't allow a homer and was his normal effective self versus right-handed batters.

[Craig Breslow](#) was a workhorse for the entire year for the A's. The left-hander finished tied with Fuentes for the most appearances by any A's reliever with 67. It was an up-and-down year for Breslow, who finished with a 3.79 ERA and a 1.52 WHIP. The Yale alum had a 44:21 K:BB ratio and a career-high three blown saves. Breslow's 67 appearances were actually the fewest he had made since 2008.

During the second half of the year, the A's got an extended look at hard-throwing right-hander **Fautino De Los Santos**, who could be a closer in the near future for the team. De Los Santos struck-out 43 in only 33.1 big league innings, giving him the highest K/9 ratio of any A's reliever with more than 10 appearances. Walks were a bit of an issue for De Los Santos, however, as he issued 17 free passes and finished with a 4.32 ERA.

Left-hander [Jerry Blevins](#) and right-hander [Joey Devine](#) were the only two other relievers to make more than 20 appearances for the A's last season. Both split their years between the big leagues and Triple-A. Blevins was designated for assignment four times during the season, although he was kept on the 40-man roster in every occasion, thus remaining protected from the waiver wire. He had a 2.86 ERA in 28.1 innings with the A's, although his WHIP was 1.34 and he walked 14.

Devine began the year in Triple-A but got the call to the big leagues by late May. He pitched well for the A's initially but was demoted in late July after a bout of wildness. Devine would spend the rest of the year in Triple-A. It was his



first season back on the field after undergoing Tommy John surgery at the start of the 2009 campaign.

Eleven other relievers would combine to throw the remaining 79 relief innings for the A's, although none of them logged more than 15 innings. The A's bullpen finished with 455 innings pitched. A's relievers went 15-25 with 40 homeruns allowed and 426 hits allowed. They struck-out 402 batters and walked 189.

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### **Good-Bye And Hello**

The A's bullpen will have a decidedly different look in 2012. In addition to saying good-bye to Ziegler during the 2011 regular season, the A's also cut ties with Bailey, Breslow and Wuertz during the off-season. Bailey was traded to Boston, while Breslow was dealt to Arizona and Wuertz was released. Oakland also traded reliever [Trystan Magnuson](#) to Toronto for cash considerations. Magnuson made nine appearances for the A's in 2011.

There were rumors that the A's were interested in bringing in a veteran reliever this off-season, but as of March 1st, the team hadn't signed any veteran relievers to a major league deal or made any trades for one. The A's did sign several veteran relievers to minor league contracts, including [Fabio Castro](#), [Jim Miller](#), [Travis Schlichting](#), [Erick Threets](#) and [Merkin Valdez](#). Relief prospects [Ryan Cook](#) and [Evan Scribner](#) were also acquired – Cook via the same trade that sent Breslow to Arizona and Scribner via the waiver wire from San Diego.

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### **Relief Pitchers Invited To Camp**

Grant Balfour\*  
Jerry Blevins\*  
[Andrew Carignan](#)\*  
Fabio Castro  
Ryan Cook\*  
Fautino De Los Santos\*  
Joey Devine\*  
Brian Fuentes\*  
Jim Miller  
[Jordan Norberto](#)\*  
Tyson Ross\*  
Travis Schlichting  
Evan Scribner  
Erick Threets  
Merkin Valdez  
[Neil Wagner](#)\*

*\*Denotes player on 40-man roster*

### **Number Of Relief Pitchers Likely On Roster –7**

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### **Locks To Make The Team**

**Grant Balfour:** Balfour (along with Fuentes) was one of two major free agent signings meant to bolster the bullpen made by the A's before last season. The former [Tampa Bay Rays'](#) reliever put together a solid season as a set-up man in the A's bullpen last year, but he struggled in a couple of high-profile situations filling in for the injured Bailey as the A's closer. Balfour blew five saves and recorded only two. He also allowed eight homeruns in 62 innings pitched. The rest of his numbers were solid (1.03 WHIP, 2.47 ERA, nearly a strike-out an inning) – if not spectacular – and he has the stuff to be a closer. He will need to convince the A's coaching staff that he has the make-up for the position, but even if Fuentes or someone else is named the A's regular closer, look for Balfour to get some save opportunities during the season. He may also be a candidate to be traded at the deadline if the A's are out of contention. Balfour is signed only through 2012, although the A's have a team option for 2013.

**Fautino De Los Santos:** When the A's traded [Nick Swisher](#) in January 2008, it was De Los Santos – not [Gio Gonzalez](#)

– that many prospects experts pegged as the jewel of the package Oakland received. De Los Santos' march to the big leagues was halted early on in his A's career, however, when he injured his elbow early in the 2008 season and had Tommy John surgery. Several set-backs kept De Los Santos off of the field for most of the 2009 season and pushed him from the starting rotation into the bullpen in 2010. De Los Santos put up some intriguing strike-out numbers in 2010 for High-A Stockton and Double-A Midland, but a 5.13 ERA made him somewhat of a question mark going into the 2011 campaign. De Los Santos erased those questions fairly early on, putting together his healthiest and strongest campaign since 2007. He blew through the top two levels of the minor leagues, posting a 2.17 ERA with 36 strike-outs in 29 innings, before being called up to the big leagues mid-season. In 33.1 innings with the A's, De Los Santos had a 4.32 ERA with a 43:17 K:BB ratio. His fastball averaged nearly 96 MPH on the gun and his slider was a dominant swing-and-miss out pitch. De Los Santos is out of options, so his spot with the A's is all but guaranteed as long as he is healthy. He has been mentioned in the closer mix, but he will need to show dramatically improved command to be trusted in that role. De Los Santos walked 33 in 62.1 combined big league and minor league innings last year and allowed five homeruns. This winter, De Los Santos pitched for Licey of the Dominican Winter League and he walked four while striking out 12 in nine innings pitched.

**Brian Fuentes:** Fuentes had an uneven first season with the A's. His overall numbers were decent, but he had a few high-profile blown saves early in the year that didn't endear him to A's fans. The southpaw also had a public disagreement regarding his usage with then-A's manager [Bob Geren](#). Geren was fired not long after the incident. Fuentes lost eight games and blew three saves, but he also had a 3.70 ERA and a 1.23 WHIP. Fuentes' performance improved significantly as the season wore on. Traditionally, Fuentes has pitched better versus left-handed batters, but he actually fared slightly better versus right-handers last season, although he held both sides to OPSs below 700. Fuentes has years of experience in the closer's role, with 199 career saves, but his stuff isn't particularly well suited for the role. He may get the most opportunities in the role early, but he figures to share it with some of the A's harder throwers as the season wears on.

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### Favorites For A Spot

**Jerry Blevins:** Blevins had a strange 2011 season. He yo-yoed back-and-forth between the majors and Triple-A, tossing 29.2 innings for Sacramento and 28.1 innings for the A's. Blevins struggled with his command at the major league level, walking 14, but he had a 2.86 ERA. In the minors, he posted an impressive 35:7 K:BB ratio but had a 4.85 ERA. Blevins has been part of the A's bullpen for parts of each of the past four seasons, but only in 2010 did he spend the entire year in the big leagues. He has pitched well for the A's and has a career 3.75 ERA with a 133:53 K:BB ratio in 141.2 innings. His command has slipped each of the past two seasons, however, and the A's seemed to lose some confidence in him last year. Still, solid left-handed relievers don't grow on trees and Blevins is out-of-options. Some of his struggles last year, especially early in the year, may have been attributed to off-season surgery on his left hip. If Blevins comes into camp throwing strikes, he has a strong chance of being the A's second bullpen lefty.

**Joey Devine:** Like Blevins, Devine had a strange 2011 season. After missing the 2009 and 2010 campaigns recovering from Tommy John surgery, Devine was a strong candidate for the A's bullpen coming into spring training. Control problems dropped him out of the race and he was sent to Triple-A Sacramento to start the year. He got off to a great start with the River Cats, not allowing a run over his first 11 appearances. Devine got the call to the big leagues in May and continued to pitch well through the end of the month. He began to struggle with his command in June and had a dramatic control breakdown in late July in the heat in New York. Devine would spend the rest of the season in Triple-A, where the control issues continued. He struck-out a remarkable 17 in only nine innings, but he walked seven and allowed 10 hits, including two homeruns. Control issues aren't uncommon for pitchers coming off of Tommy John surgery and Devine has had control issues in the past even when he was healthy. Like Blevins, he is out of options and Devine has plus stuff. It will likely take an injury or a complete control meltdown for the A's not to carry him on Opening Day.

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### Battling For A Spot

**Andrew Carignan:** After two seasons marred by arm problems, Carignan overcame an early season foot injury in 2011 to rise to the major leagues. He pitched at three minor league levels and then spent September with the A's. In the minors, Carignan struck-out 46 in 39 innings and he allowed only 25 hits and one homerun. He made six appearances with the A's and was effective in all but one of them. To make up for the time he missed with the foot injury, Carignan was sent to the Arizona Fall League. He had a similar run in the AFL as he did in the big leagues, putting together 10 solid outings and two poor appearances. Carignan is a hard thrower with a sharp breaking ball. Before the arm injuries, he was considered a possible future MLB closer, with only his command holding him back. If

he can throw strikes and avoid the occasional bad outing this spring, Carignan is a strong candidate to break camp with the A's.

**Ryan Cook:** Cook was one of three players acquired from the Arizona Diamondbacks in the [Trevor Cahill](#) deal. The hard-throwing right-hander made his major league debut last season with Arizona. He will be introducing himself to the A's organization for the first time this spring, although A's manager Bob Melvin is likely familiar with his talents thanks to Melvin's time in the D-Backs' front office. Cook can hit triple-digits with his fastball and he regularly clocks in the 95-98 MPH range. Last season was Cook's first as a reliever and the role seemed to suit him. He struck-out more than a batter an inning, held opposing batters to a .192 average and allowed only two homeruns in 61 minor league innings. Control problems sabotaged his brief major league stint, as he walked eight in 7.2 innings. Cook has two solid secondary pitches – a hard slider and a split-fingered fastball – and he induces a lot of groundballs. If he is throwing strikes this spring, he will be in the thick of the running for a middle relief role with the A's when camp breaks.

**Jordan Norberto:** Norberto is also a former Arizona Diamondbacks' farmhand, although he came to the A's in the Brad Ziegler trade. The flame-throwing left-hander had an opportunity to make a first impression with the A's last season. He made six appearances for Triple-A Sacramento and another six for the A's. Norberto's command was an issue at times, especially in his final big league outing, when he walked five in two-thirds of an inning. In the minors, he walked 30 in 57 innings for Reno and Sacramento. Norberto has a mid-90s fastball, a curveball and a change-up. He was a starter early in his professional career, but the D-Backs moved him to the bullpen in 2008. In 2010, he reached the big leagues. Norberto has consistently struck-out more than a batter an inning, but he has also walked way too many batters. He split his Dominican Winter League season between the bullpen and the starting rotation and actually pitched better as a starter. The A's have talked about considering Norberto for a starter's role in the minor leagues if he doesn't make the big league bullpen out of camp. Norberto's chances of making the big league team are tied to his ability to throw strikes consistently in camp.

**Tyson Ross:** As we detailed in our starting pitching preview, Ross will be in camp vying for a spot in the starting rotation. However, if he doesn't win a rotation role, he will still be in the running for a spot in the bullpen. Some within the organization believe Ross ultimately is best suited as a reliever, although there are plenty of supporters for him as a starter, as well. Ross had an uneven year in 2011. He pitched well in the major leagues as a starter early in the season, but after injuring his oblique in late May, he never got back on track in the minor leagues. Ross never returned to the big leagues after the injury and he walked 23 in 37.2 innings. Ross did improve his command during a stint at the Arizona Fall League. His mechanics are still a work-in-progress and injuries have been an issue throughout his career, but there is no denying Ross' talent and if he is pitching well this spring, the A's will find a spot for him either in the rotation or in the bullpen.

**Neil Wagner:** Wagner came out of nowhere to earn a September call-up with the A's last season. In the span of two years, the flame-throwing right-hander went from being shipped to the A's from the Indians for cash considerations to a legitimate candidate for the big leagues. Wagner struck-out 87 batters in 66.1 minor league innings last season and opposing batters hit only .232 against him. He was roughed up in six big league appearances, allowing six hits and three walks. Wagner hit 100 MPH a few times last season and he has a decent slider and change-up. As with many hard-throwers, Wagner can lose command of the strike-zone at times. In terms of the organizational depth chart, Wagner probably slots behind Carignan, Ross, Cook and Norberto, but Wagner has the stuff to make up ground on those other pitchers this spring.

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## Looking To Make An Impression

**Fabio Castro:** We discussed the diminutive left-hander in the starting pitching preview. The nine-year minor league veteran has split his time between the rotation and the bullpen during his career. Castro, who signed with the A's as a minor league free agent this off-season, may end up in the Sacramento starting rotation, but his best shot of making the big league club at any point this season will likely be as a reliever. He is very tough versus left-handed batters and could be well-suited as a left-handed relief specialist should the A's find a need for someone for that role during the season.

**Jim Miller:** Miller was signed to a minor league free agent contract this off-season after a solid year in the Triple-A Colorado Springs bullpen. Although Miller's ERA was an inflated 5.25, his peripheral numbers were much better. He struck-out 73 in 72 innings and walked only 24. Miller was hurt by pitching in the high altitude of Colorado Springs. He served as the Sky Sox closer last year, saving 24 games. Miller appeared in six games for the Rockies and he allowed three hits and four walks in seven innings while posting a 2.57 ERA. The New Jersey native was an eighth-round pick in 2004 by the Rockies. He was traded to the Orioles in 2007 and appeared in eight games for the Orioles in 2008. The O's left him in Triple-A for the next two seasons, however, and he returned to the Rockies as a minor league free

agent last season. He is another hard-thrower, but he will need to show that he can do more than light up a radar gun to move up the A's depth chart.

**Travis Schlichting:** Schlichting is another free agent signing by the A's. The right-hander has been playing baseball professionally since 2003. He began his career as a third baseman with Tampa Bay and then spent time in the Angels' chain before joining the Dodgers in 2008 after making a conversion the mound in the independent leagues. He reached the majors in 2009 and 2010 with the Dodgers, but he spent all of the 2011 season with Triple-A Albuquerque. It was a down year for Schlichting, who walked 30 in 64.2 innings and posted a 7.10 ERA. He made up for that poor season with a standout stint in the Puerto Rican Winter League. In 39.1 innings this winter, Schlichting allowed only four earned runs and eight walks. He struck-out 30. Schlichting's best pitch is his slider. He gets sinking movement on his fastball thanks to a three-quarters throwing motion. As with many of the relievers in camp with the A's this spring, Schlichting has had trouble with his command at times. Given his major league experience and his groundball tendencies, Schlichting will serve as solid depth for the A's at the Triple-A level this season.

**Evan Scribner:** Scribner was claimed off of waivers by the A's from the San Diego Padres' organization this off-season. The A's eventually designated him for assignment, but he cleared waivers and remained in the Oakland organization. Scribner's 2011 season included his major league debut but was cut short by a right shoulder injury. Between the big leagues and Triple-A, Scribner threw only 42.2 innings after tossing at least 66 innings in each of the past three seasons. His best pitch is his slow curveball, which sits roughly 20 MPH less than his 90-92 MPH fastball. The A's may take it slow with Scribner this spring given his shoulder issues last season, but, if healthy, he should get plenty of work with Sacramento this season and could pitch his way into the A's plans. He is 26 years old.

**Erick Threets:** Threets is on the comeback trail after Tommy John surgery forced the left-handed reliever to miss part of the 2010 season and all of the 2011 campaign. The East Bay native has major league experience with the San Francisco Giants and the Chicago White Sox. It was while pitching in the big leagues for the White Sox that Threets injured his elbow. An 11-year veteran of professional baseball, Threets has always had a live arm. Pre-surgery, Threets' fastball was regularly clocked in the mid-90s and had reached triple digits on occasion. He also had a sharp slider that was an effective swing-and-miss pitch. Injuries and wildness (307 walks in 461 career minor league innings) have prevented Threets from establishing himself as a major league reliever, however. Left-handers who throw as hard as Threets does are relatively rare. He may not get a long look in camp with incumbent A's lefties Fuentes, Blevins and Norberto ahead of him on the depth chart. However, the A's have never been shy about adding non-roster relievers to their 25-man roster during the season, so a strong showing even in limited appearances in camp could position Threets well for a mid-season call-up. He shouldn't be limited by the elbow problem, as he made 32 appearances this winter in the Mexican Winter League without incident, posting a 1.17 ERA and striking out 40 (while walking 22) in 30.2 innings. He allowed only 13 hits.

**Merkin Valdez:** Threets isn't the only former Giants' reliever in A's camp. Valdez spent five years in the Giants' organization, including parts of three of them in the big leagues with San Francisco. He originally joined the Giants' organization in late 2002 from the Atlanta Braves along with Damian Moss in exchange for Russ Ortiz. Valdez has also spent time in the big leagues with the Toronto Blue Jays in 2010 and the Texas Rangers last year. The wiry right-hander has a career 5.57 ERA with 59 strike-outs and 42 walks in 73 big league innings. Valdez is coming off of a solid year at Triple-A, which he split between the Rangers' Triple-A affiliate in Round Rock and the Dodgers' Triple-A affiliate in Albuquerque. In 50 appearances, he posted a 3.29 ERA with 57 strike-outs and 29 walks in 65.2 innings. He struck-out six in 4.1 major league innings for Texas but allowed two homeruns. The 30-year-old Dominican native spent the winter pitching in the Dominican Winter League, where he had a 1.86 ERA in 19.1 regular season innings. Control was an issue for Valdez, however, as he walked 15 while striking out 19. He was part of the Dominican Republic's Caribbean World Series squad and allowed a run in 3.1 innings during the tournament. Valdez began his career as a starter and was once a top prospect in that role, but since undergoing Tommy John surgery in 2006, he has been primarily a reliever. Like Threets, Valdez will provide Sacramento with a solid veteran presence and could position himself as a first or second option for the A's during the season if injuries strike their right-handed relievers.