

A's News Clips, Thursday, March 8, 2012

Oakland A's notebook: Team denies reports that MLB has decided to uphold San Francisco Giants' territorial rights to San Jose

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

A's ownership went on the offensive Wednesday about media reports that Major League Baseball is preparing to uphold the Giants' territorial rights and deny the A's wish to move to San Jose.

The team released a written statement saying it has been reassured that MLB has not made a decision. A Bill Madden column in the New York Daily News over the weekend suggested that MLB was on the verge of denying the A's bid to move to the South Bay from Oakland.

"Recent articles claiming that Major League Baseball has decided that the A's cannot share the two-team Bay Area market were denied by baseball Commissioner Bud Selig last weekend," said the statement released Wednesday morning.

The statement said the A's and Giants share the Bay Area market in terms of TV, radio, sponsors and fans, but that they play in the only two-team market -- out of four -- that does not "share the exact same geographic boundaries."

No name was attached to the statement, but columnist Mark Purdy of this newspaper said it was issued by co-owner Lew Wolff and the A's. For more, please check out Purdy's column on Page A1.

A Venezuelan newspaper is reporting the A's are one of three teams to have made a minor league contract offer to veteran third baseman Melvin Mora, but he hasn't decided if he wants to play baseball this season.

The Caracas newspaper Correo del Orinoco said Oakland, Texas and Cleveland have extended offers to Mora, 40, who last played in the majors at the beginning of the 2011 season. He played in 42 games with the Arizona Diamondbacks last year, hitting .228 with no homers and 16 RBIs before being released June 29.

He is a .277 hitter with 171 home runs over a 13-year career, 10 of those seasons with the Baltimore Orioles. His best season was in 2004, when he hit .340 with 27 home runs and 104 RBIs.

Mora is currently dedicating himself to a construction project in Venezuela and has told all three teams they'll have to wait on his decision, but added, "I feel like I'm in shape. I've still got two years left in baseball, but for now this project is my priority."

The A's currently have a hole at third base after losing projected starter Scott Sizemore last week with an ACL tear in his left knee.

The A's got another strong performance from a rotation candidate, right-hander Tyson Ross, who threw three innings in a 3-3 tie against the Dodgers. Ross allowed one hit and one walk and struck out two.

"It was nice to go out there, throw some strikes and let the defense work a little bit," said the former Bishop O'Dowd High and Cal standout. "It's a positive, and I just want to move forward and build on it."

Manny Ramirez, who participated in a simulated game and was scheduled to bat cleanup against the Dodgers, was a late scratch because of back stiffness. Manager Bob Melvin said he would hold out Ramirez on Thursday and try to get him back in the lineup Friday against Colorado.

A's newcomer Cespedes goes deep in simulated game

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

Yeonis Cespedes heightened anticipation for his official spring training debut this weekend with a 400-foot preview Wednesday before a small group of highly impressed onlookers.

Cespedes, the highly touted Cuban acquisition, made an auspicious splash against live pitching when he slammed a long home run over the left field fence in his first at-bat of a simulated game at the A's Papago Park minor-league facility.

Then, to underscore that feat, Cespedes proceeded to add three more hits in six total plate appearances against A's minor-league pitchers.

Cespedes has put on some impressive batting practice shows since he arrived in camp late last week, but his first work against actual pitchers was truly something to behold. After looking at a few pitches in his first plate trip against T.J. Walz, a 15th-round draft pick by Oakland last year, Cespedes hammered an offering deep to left and over the wall.

He showed no emotion as he rounded the bases, but coaches and teammates couldn't hold back their excitement about Cespedes' blast, one coach remarking, "Are you kidding me?"

Batting leadoff in every inning of the simulated game, Cespedes stroked a sharp single to left in his second at-bat before Walz finally got the best of him the third time around on a called strikeout.

On his fourth try, the 26-year-old outfielder hit a ball through the hole between first and second for another

hit against A's minor leaguer Jonathan Joseph. In his final plate appearance, he hit a high pop fly to center that dropped between two outfielders, then stayed up at the plate and hit another towering foul popup off first base for an out.

The game wasn't scored, but Cespedes unofficially went 4-for-6. He also hit a ball off the right-field wall in a brief live BP session before the simulated game.

"I just liked his patience and the way he handled his business," said A's hitting coach Chili Davis, who supervised the session. "It would have been easy for him to not take it seriously, but what I liked was that he took it seriously. He was calm, he wasn't jumpy. He didn't try to do too much, he stayed on the ball and he drove the ball. He looked really good."

Davis cautioned that facing live pitching in a simulation still isn't the same as facing a pitcher in an actual game, but that Cespedes was close to being ready for that task.

"He really got into it," Davis said. "He knew there was a purpose to what he was doing and he went out there with a purpose."

After the session, Cespedes smiled broadly and accepted high fives from teammates, including Manny Ramirez, who also participated in the simulated game. He subsequently received another treat when he met former A's shortstop and fellow Cuban Bert "Campy" Campaneris for the first time.

A's manager Bob Melvin said Cespedes will have another simulated session Thursday, but added that the impressive showing probably wouldn't likely accelerate the schedule to get him in a game before the weekend. The manager said on Tuesday that he didn't think Cespedes was in "baseball shape" to run the bases and play the outfield at full speed.

"I know he was pretty happy about today, it was a real productive day for him and it moves us farther along in the process," Melvin said. "But as far as playing in a game, it's more about him being physically ready to go."

Purdy: A's owner Lew Wolff turns up heat on Giants, territorial rights battle

By Mark Purdy, Mercury News Columnist

So it appears Lew Wolff wants to turn up that front burner a little bit. Maybe more than a little bit.

Over the past three years, as the A's quest to pursue a San Jose ballpark has dragged on through an endless "blue ribbon panel" study, team owner Wolff has largely bitten his tongue on the subject in regard to the Giants' territorial rights claim to the South Bay. For those of us who love public arguments, Wolff was being way too nice a guy.

He was a bit more pointed Wednesday, at least for a few paragraphs. Wolff and the A's, irked by a spate of recent stories on the issue, issued a statement to clarify their stance about the team "sharing territory" with the Giants.

Basically, here's what the statement said: The A's are mounting their own defense of the territorial rights issue and aren't afraid of putting their evidence on the table.

The statement's most intriguing reference was to "MLB-recorded minutes" from a 1990 meeting at which the Giants made their original request to be granted rights to pursue their own ballpark in Santa Clara County. The statement says the minutes "clearly indicate that the Giants were granted" those rights "subject to relocating to the city of Santa Clara," which was where the ballpark project was planned before voters rejected it.

Those minutes, which were examined by the "blue ribbon panel," also allegedly contain a passage that says the Giants' rights to Santa Clara County took effect provided the new stadium was satisfactorily completed. If that's the case, the Giants' claim to San Jose and the South Bay rests on more shaky ground than once believed.

Reached at his Los Angeles office Wednesday, Wolff declined to elaborate on his formal statement. But he confirmed that his intention was to bring a more well-rounded view of the A's request to regain shared-territory status for Santa Clara County.

"I'm trying to say in a gentle way that I don't consider it to be an upset of territorial rights," Wolff said. "Of course, I'm prejudiced."

Although Wolff did not say so, A's officials clearly believe the Giants were in some way behind a story that appeared in the New York Daily News last weekend. The story speculated that other owners would not vote to allow the A's permission for a Santa Clara County move because it would establish a precedent.

Bud Selig, the Major League Baseball commissioner, said in January that the resolution of the A's situation was "on the front burner" for the sport. He is believed to have met with A's and Giants' officials about the matter in the past several weeks, although the three parties have not met together. If there's a burner at that meeting when it happens, the flame is not likely to be set on "low."

Check back later for further updates on this developing story. Contact Mark Purdy at mpurdy@mercurynews.com or 408-920-5092.

Manny too stiff to DH, not too stiff for BP

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Manny Ramirez was scratched from designated-hitter duties because of back stiffness before Wednesday's game but he took batting practice at Phoenix Muni and then again at Papago Park when outfielder **Yoenis Céspedes** hit off live pitching.

Manager **Bob Melvin** said that Ramirez is OK and he expects to have him DH on Friday.

Catching up at third: Melvin said that he has liked what he has seen of **Josh Donaldson's** defensive work as the converted catcher gets the first shot to win the third-base spot, and he believes that Donaldson might be trying too hard at the plate; Donaldson is 2-for-15.

"We're trying to impress on him 'Don't worry too much about your at-bats,' " Melvin said.

Melvin said again that **Eric Sogard**, **Adam Rosales** and **Wes Timmons** are being considered for the job; Sogard started at third Wednesday and went 0-for-3 with two walks.

Timmons, a nonroster player, is faring the best of the bunch at the plate; he is 6-for-17 after going 1-for-3 on Wednesday.

"Timmons has impressed each and every day," Melvin said.

A'S 3, DODGERS 3

Notable: **Josh Reddick** had a two-run double and the outfielder, obtained in the Andrew Bailey deal with Boston, is 6-for-12. ... **Tyson Ross** threw three scoreless innings, allowing a hit and a walk and striking out two; he's still a solid contender for a rotation spot. ... Closer hopeful **Brian Fuentes** pitched a scoreless fifth, walking two and striking out one. ... A's pitchers walked eight batters.

Quotable: "I threw some strikes, let the defense do the work. ... You outnumber the batters 9-1; that's the idea."

- *Ross, who was helped by two double plays .*

Today's game: A's (**Jarrod Parker**) at Dodgers (**Chris Capuano**), 12:05 p.m. Webcast only.

A's Yoenis Céspedes makes a splash, quietly

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

While nearly 150 media members were at Peoria, Ariz., watching a Japanese legend make his Cactus League debut, three reporters sneaked over to cozy Papago Park to witness another debut of sorts by another player from another country.

Apparently, Yoenis Céspedes doesn't rank on the popularity scale with Yu Darvish.

Not that the A's care a lick.

For the first time since reporting to A's camp, Céspedes faced pitchers throwing heaters instead of coaches tossing marshmallows, and the results wowed a collection of coaches and executives, one of whom screamed "really?" when Céspedes homered on his first swing in a simulated game.

Granted, he was facing minor-league pitchers, but he followed the homer with sharp singles to left and right and got another single when the defense botched a high popup. He finished 4-for-6 and said through interpreter Ariel Prieto, "This is really important for me to be ready to play in these games. I want to prove it to the team and show everything I can do."

We'll have to wait until he plays in Cactus League games - manager Bob Melvin said it could happen this weekend - to witness his speed, but one insider said Céspedes can keep up with anyone in camp, including Coco Crisp, Jemile Weeks and Michael Choice. Former A's shortstop Campy Campaneris, a fellow Cuban, met Céspedes for the first time Wednesday and plans to give him baserunning tips in the next few days.

"I thought it was a pretty good hitting display. Yeah," batting coach Chili Davis said of the \$36 million man. "The way he goes about his job and the abilities he has, I see no reason he won't be a big-league ballplayer very quickly."

Except for getting visibly frustrated for striking out, Céspedes showed no emotion, as if making an immediate splash was expected.

"I think I'm ready," he said.

A's, Giants issue territorial-rights statements

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

The Giants and A's have fought over territorial rights a long time, and now they are fighting between themselves.

So long as Commissioner Bud Selig remains publicly noncommittal about the future of Bay Area baseball, the feud is sure to escalate. In statements they released Wednesday, the teams took calculated shots at each other.

At 9:58 a.m., the A's - irked by a suggestion in the New York Daily News that the team will not be allowed to move to San Jose - e-mailed their statement to the media saying, for the first time, they don't believe delineated territorial rights exist in the Bay Area.

The A's contend rights to Santa Clara County should have reverted to neutral after a failed Giants stadium ballot measure two decades ago:

"Of the four two-team markets in MLB, only the Giants and A's do not share the exact same geographic boundaries. MLB-recorded minutes clearly indicate that the Giants were granted Santa Clara, subject to relocating to the city of Santa Clara. The granting of Santa Clara to the Giants was by agreement with the A's late owner Walter Haas, who approved the request without compensation. The Giants were unable to obtain a vote to move and the return of Santa Clara to its original status was not formally accomplished."

The A's statement further said the team's only desire is to build a modern ballpark "35 miles further away" - the phrase was bold-faced and italicized - from AT&T Park and establish good competition between the clubs.

To which the Giants, in their rebuttal e-mailed at 4:42 p.m., said hogwash.

The Giants' argument is that A's owners John Fisher - who once was part of the Giants' current ownership - and Lew Wolff agreed to the rights when purchasing the team "for just \$172 million in 2005."

The Giants' statement added: "Indeed, the A's fail to mention that MLB's 1990 territorial rights designation has been explicitly re-affirmed by Major League Baseball on four separate occasions."

The Giants said Santa Clara County represents 43 percent of their territory, which they said they heavily targeted after purchasing the team in 1992.

The A's statement emphasized that the commissioner's office denied the Daily News story and also stressed a new stadium would eliminate the team's dependence on revenue sharing. It also pointed out the Giants opened one of their team stores in Walnut Creek and that Wolff said at the time he was "fine with the Giants store and wished there was an A's store in San Francisco."

Earlier this week, Wolff told The Chronicle's Matier and Ross, "My level of hope is high - one way or another. I didn't say necessarily that I would like the result."

On Wednesday, Wolff said in an e-mail, "I remain hopeful" about moving. Reached again after the Giants' statement, he said, "We will continue to follow the process."

Drumbeat: Wow! What a day for A's newcomer Yoenis Cespedes

John Shea reporting from Camp Cespedes . . . 3/7/2012, 12:47pm

Nothing like a walk-off home run in your first at-bat in your first simulated game.

It was a walk-off homer because Yoenis Cespedes hit a ball way over the left-field fence and simply walked off to the dugout. No need to run the bases in simulated games, after all.

Cespedes' first swing was a thing of beauty. He turned on a pitch from minor-leaguer T.J. Walz, a 15th-round pick in last year's draft, and sent it high in to the desert air and past some cactus beyond the fence at the A's minor-league facility at Papago Park.

A "really?" and a "you gotta be kiddin' me" were heard among A's minor-league coaches after the mighty swing, and a few team officials couldn't help but feeling proud with their \$36 million investment.

As for Cespedes, he showed no emotion, as if making an immediate splash was expected.

"This is really important for me to be ready to play in these games," Cespedes said through an interpreter, Ariel Prieto, the pitching coach at Class A Vermont. "I want to prove it to the team and show everything I can do."

Cespedes hit a sharp single to left in his next at-bat, off Jonathan Joseph, a Dominican who pitched at A-ball Burlington last year. The third at-bat was a strikeout (looking) by Walz, after which Cespedes was seen in front of the dugout frustrated at himself.

He grounded a single through the 3-4 hole off Joseph in his fourth at-bat and fouled up with a major-league popup off Justin Souza that dropped for a single, thanks to a botched defensive play.

Cespedes began walking to the dugout with a 4-for-5 to his name but was summoned back to the batter's box for another try. With his final swing of the day, he popped out foul.

Nice start for the Cuban defector who could play his first Cactus League game as early as the weekend, manager Bob Melvin said.

"I feel good," Cespedes said. "I'm reading the pitches. I'll be happy to play a big-league game. I think I'm ready."

Drumbeat: Oakland A's statement on territorial rights

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Phoenix Muni, 3/7/2012, 10:13AM

The A's remain pretty hacked off at suggestions in a baseball column in the New York Daily News that Major League Baseball will not overturn the Giants' territorial rights to allow the A's to move to San Jose. So this morning, they put out a statement about it. For more background on the Giants' take on the territorial issues, here's a story I wrote about all their arguments two months ago:

Here it is:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 7, 2012

STATEMENT BY OAKLAND A'S OWNERSHIP

REGARDING A'S AND GIANTS SHARING BAY AREA TERRITORY:

"Recent articles claiming that Major League Baseball has decided that the A's cannot share the two-team Bay Area market were denied by baseball Commissioner Bud Selig last weekend.

Currently the Giants and A's share the two-team Bay Area market in terms of television, radio, sponsors and fans. Last year, the Giants opened a specialty store in the middle of the A's market (Walnut Creek). At the time, Lew Wolff commented that he was 'fine with the Giants store and wished there was an A's store in San Francisco.'

Of the four two-team markets in MLB, only the Giants and A's do not share the exact same geographic boundaries. MLB-recorded minutes clearly indicate that the Giants were granted Santa Clara, subject to relocating to the city of Santa Clara. The granting of Santa Clara to the Giants was by agreement with the A's late owner Walter Haas, who approved the request without compensation. The Giants were unable to obtain a vote to move and the return of Santa Clara to its original status was not formally accomplished.

We are not seeking a move that seeks to alter or in any manner disturb MLB territorial rights. We simply seek an approval to create a new venue that our organization and MLB fully recognizes is needed to eliminate our dependence on revenue sharing, to offer our fans and players a modern ballpark, to move over *35 miles further away* from the Giants' great venue and to establish an exciting competition between the Giants and A's.

We are hopeful that the Commissioner, the committee appointed by the Commissioner, and a vote of the MLB ownership, will enable us to join the fine array of modern and fun baseball parks that are now commonplace in Major League Baseball."

I know the A's were furious that what read to me like an opinion piece in the NY Daily News was cited as a "report" in many places, and the Commissioner's office immediately shot the NYDN piece down.

It's interesting that several days after the fact, and a day after the Oakland City Council announced it will spend some funds on plans for that "Coliseum City" development, the A's put out this statement. Maybe the A's are just still angry. Maybe they feel they need to swing momentum back their way – for the past several months, it's seemed as if more people around baseball were starting to think of San Jose as a legitimate spot for a big-league team, and perhaps there was worry that a long-time baseball columnist such as Bill Madden weighing in against such a move might hurt their chances.

But this is the first time we've seen such an open statement from the A's, spelling out their side in detail. And yet – there is no individual owner name attached. It's "Oakland A's ownership." Is this Lew Wolff? Is it John Fisher? Is it Billy Beane, Mike Crowley, any of the other partners? Or did they all decide this was the time for such a statement and approve it together?

I have no idea what it means, but it's sort of fascinating.

A's hopeful for resolution of territorial rights

By Barry M. Bloom / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Oakland A's owner Lew Wolff said on Wednesday that Commissioner Bud Selig had not yet decided to deny a move to San Jose for the team, despite a published report to the contrary. The possibility of the club exploring moving from the Oakland Coliseum to a new ballpark in downtown San Jose has been studied by a Major League Baseball appointed committee for more than two years.

"Recent articles claiming that Major League Baseball has decided that the A's cannot share the two-team Bay Area market were denied by baseball Commissioner Bud Selig last weekend," Wolff said in a statement from the A's, which he confirmed came from him.

"We are hopeful that the Commissioner, the committee appointed by the Commissioner, and a vote of the MLB ownership, will enable us to join the fine array of modern and fun baseball parks that are now commonplace in Major League Baseball."

Wolff said the "gentle statement" was issued in response to a bevy of reports in the past few days stating the contrary, beginning with an article in the New York Daily News. The subject has been a hotly contested issue between the two San Francisco Bay Area clubs. The Giants claim they own the south Bay territory, including San Jose and all of Santa Clara County. The A's, who once possessed that part of the territory, do not.

Wolff reiterated in the telephone interview that he hadn't heard anything new about the situation from Selig, once his fraternity brother when the two attended the University of Wisconsin.

"There's nothing either way," Wolff said. "We're just continuing to follow the process. Hopefully we'll hear something soon."

The San Jose market once belonged to the A's, who ceded it to the Giants in the 1980s. The Giants were trying to build a new ballpark in Santa Clara County, but the club lost two separate popular votes. The Giants have since self-funded their own successful ballpark on the waterfront in San Francisco that opened in 2000, but are still claiming San Jose as their territory. Accordingly they have succeeded in blocking the A's move.

MLB has four two-team markets, but only the A's and Giants claim separate geographic territories within their own markets.

"MLB-recorded minutes clearly indicate that the Giants were granted Santa Clara, subject to relocating to the city of Santa Clara," Wolff said in the statement. "The granting of Santa Clara to the Giants was by agreement with the A's late owner Walter Haas, who approved the request without compensation. The Giants were unable to obtain a vote to move and the return of Santa Clara to its original status was not formally accomplished.

"We are not seeking a move that seeks to alter or in any manner disturb MLB territorial rights. We simply seek an approval to create a new venue that our organization and MLB fully recognizes is needed to eliminate our dependence on revenue sharing, to offer our fans and players a modern ballpark, to move over 35 miles further away from the Giants' great venue and to establish an exciting competition between the Giants and A's."

Wolff, a real estate developer and hotel magnate, led a group that purchased the A's in 2005 and almost immediately began to search for a site to build a ballpark. Oakland was quickly eliminated as a viable option.

With Cisco Systems, Inc. as an investor and corporate sponsor, the A's researched privately funding and building a ballpark on a parcel of land in Belmont, Calif., which is just on the Oakland side of the border from Santa Clara County and is in the A's territory. When that deal fell through in 2008, Wolff turned his attention to building Cisco Field in San Jose. That's when the Commissioner established his committee.

There has been greater attention paid to issue recently on account of changes in the revenue sharing portion of the new Basic Agreement negotiated between the owners and players last year. The agreement now defines 15 major markets in MLB that no longer will be able to be receivers from the revenue sharing pool by the time the agreement expires at the end of the 2016 season.

The San Francisco Bay Area is one of those markets and the A's are one of those teams, meaning that a decision on their pending move is essential to the franchise's future financial success. If they are turned down, the A's may then begin exploring a move to another market outside the San Francisco Bay Area.

Ross, Reddick lead A's charge against L.A.

By Joey Nowak / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Tyson Ross pitched three scoreless innings and Josh Reddick drove in a pair of runs with a first-inning double, as the A's and Dodgers played to a 3-3 tie on Wednesday at Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

After Dodgers starter Aaron Harang retired the first two hitters in the first, the A's strung together four straight hits -- including a double by Kurt Suzuki and a two-run double by Josh Reddick -- to take an early 2-0 lead.

Harang left after two innings of work, surrendering the two earned runs and four hits without walking or striking out a batter.

Oakland starter Tyson Ross had a bit more luck working out of jams, using a 6-4-3 double play in the second inning and a 5-4-3 double play to get out of trouble in the third.

"That's why they're there," said Ross, who tossed three scoreless innings and allowed just one hit. "You outnumber the [offense] nine to one. Just use the defense and let them work. We've got a lot of talented infielders out there, and they make my job easier when I can just roll a ground ball and let them work."

Ross was relieved by right-hander Jim Miller, who walked the first three Dodgers batters he faced in the fourth and surrendered two runs on grounders to second and short. Miller walked four hitters in the inning.

The A's broke the 2-2 tie with a two-out rally in the fourth, as Coco Crisp delivered a single to left off Chris Withrow, plating Michael Taylor. But Los Angeles answered with a Cory Sullivan double in the seventh to tie the game at 3.

Oakland pitchers registered eight walks on the day, but managed to induce three double plays. Dodgers pitchers walked four batters.

Oakland designated hitter Manny Ramirez, who was originally slated to hit cleanup, was scratched just before first pitch with back stiffness. Chris Carter took his place.

Up next: The A's head to Camelback Ranch in Glendale, Ariz., on Thursday for another date with the Dodgers at 12:05 p.m. PT, this time with top starter Brandon McCarthy taking the hill against Los Angeles' Chris Capuano. Oakland could also have the services of infielder Adam Rosales, who has been recovering from left shoulder soreness. Rosales took batting practice on Wednesday, and manager Bob Melvin expected him to be available Thursday if all went well.

Offseason work has Suzuki ready for 2012 **Catcher spent time honing his defensive prowess**

By Joey Nowak / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- As much as A's catcher Kurt Suzuki dedicates himself to working with the young and talented Oakland pitching staff, he still tries to carve out a little "me time" here and there.

The backstop made a concerted effort this offseason to improve his defensive play, and it's already shown this spring. Suzuki says he's come into camp at a more comfortable weight, and he feels like he has more life in his arm. He's already made his mark cutting down baserunners during Oakland's Cactus League schedule.

"I felt strong last year, I felt like I was in good shape," Suzuki said on Wednesday. "But I didn't feel like I was in baseball shape. I thought I was a little lighter than I would like. This year, I put on a few pounds and weighed in to what I usually weigh. ... I feel stronger, more balanced."

The key to his arm, Suzuki says, is in his legs.

"The main thing is the footwork, using your legs," he said. "The more you use your legs, the less pressure it puts on the rest of your arm. The less you use your arm, the more you can work on your throwing -- because there isn't that stress. You can use your legs and do a lot of reps."

Those reps have come a bit easier this spring in Phoenix, Suzuki said, after he felt like he did a little too much early in last year's camp. His arm became tender and he didn't have the strength to work on his game. That, he said, led to inconsistency.

"My throwing was -- it wasn't a weak point, it was just inconsistent," Suzuki said. "It felt like I never really got into a groove throwing, and I worked on it and worked on it. But some days I'd have good ones, and some days I'd have bad ones. It wasn't consistently how I would like it."

This year, Suzuki took to an offseason workout that included daily long toss -- an exercise he never performed until he would reach Spring Training. But doing so this winter helped to keep his arm in shape. Now, he says he just has to control those things he can.

"A lot of it's mental and not rushing, and knowing that if you do your job and put the ball on the bag on a consistent basis, that's the only thing you can control," Suzuki said.

Manager Bob Melvin said the mental aspect is paramount in the A's getting the most out of their catcher, who at times last season would try to do too much to bail out the pitching staff.

"I think last year got out of whack, a little bit, because we weren't great about holding runners. And I think, as a catcher, you try to figure out a way to try to be quicker," Melvin said. "You can get a little out of whack with your mechanics, so we're working on consistent mechanics this spring. He certainly has the ability to be a very good thrower."

Suzuki says he's all for improving the defensive aspect of his game, but is determined to not let it affect what he considers to be his most important responsibility with the club.

"My main goal is to make sure the pitcher [is] comfortable," Suzuki said. "I focus on my hitting, I focus on my defense, but the main objective is to learn my pitchers -- to build that relationship with my pitchers."

"I don't expect them to trust me the first or second time catching them in a game. You earn their trust by getting their respect. You earn that respect and that trust factor, and that's my job to show them that I care and that I'm gonna work hard for them. I'm there for them. I'm not there for me."

Cespedes has stellar simulated game

By Joey Nowak / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Oakland outfielder Yoenis Cespedes participated in a simulated game on Wednesday afternoon, and had four hits -- including a home run -- in five at-bats, manager Bob Melvin said.

"I know he was pretty happy about it," Melvin said. "It was a real productive day for him, which moves us a little bit farther in the process. We'll look to do that again [on Thursday] if that's going on over there. And we'll see where we are this weekend."

Melvin said it was "reasonable" to expect Cespedes to make his Cactus League debut this weekend, if all goes well up until that point.

Cespedes has been participating in drills since he first took the field in Phoenix on Sunday, and the team is monitoring him offensively and defensively. Part of what Melvin and his staff want to see is how well Cespedes fields his outfield position.

"It's tough to tell, but certainly his foot speed is great and he moves around well," Melvin said. "But I haven't seen him go after enough balls to really get a read on how his defense will be."

Walks plague A's in tie with Dodgers

PHOENIX -- The A's pitchers did a nice job of turning trouble into double plays on Wednesday against the Dodgers. But manager Bob Melvin was more concerned with how they got into that trouble in the first place.

"We walked too many guys," Melvin said. "It was a little disappointing after [Tuesday], when [we] threw 80 percent strikes -- or something along those lines. Today, we just walked too many guys. And that's why [we] were in jams, that's why they scored runs -- because we walked guys."

Oakland's pitchers -- six hurlers logged at least an inning -- registered eight walks, but got the Dodgers to ground into three double plays.

"You outnumber the [offense] nine to one. Just use the defense and let them work," said starter Tyson Ross, who tossed three scoreless innings and induced two double plays. "We've got a lot of talented infielders out there, and they make my job easier when I can just roll a ground ball and let them work."

Reliever Jim Miller walked four batters in one inning, while Brian Fuentes walked two and Fautino De Los Santos walked one. Neil Wagner and Edgar Gonzalez did not walk a batter in three combined innings.

Melvin discusses health of trio

PHOENIX -- Oakland manager Bob Melvin updated reporters about the statuses of infielders Adam Rosales and Daric Barton, as well as left-hander Brett Anderson, before the A's Cactus League game on Wednesday against the visiting Dodgers at Phoenix Municipal Stadium. According to the skipper:

- Rosales, recovering from left-shoulder soreness after falling while running the bases last week, took batting practice on Wednesday. If everything goes well, Rosales will play on Thursday against the Dodgers.

- Barton, who had a second cortisone shot in his surgically-repaired right shoulder on Monday, still needs a day or so to recover. The shot typically requires a player to be shut down for three days, and Melvin said the next step will be hitting. "Hopefully, because of the shots, we get a little farther along with the throwing, but I'm not sure yet," Melvin said.

- Anderson had another throwing session on Tuesday, which Melvin observed. The manager said the pitcher looked good, "almost to the point where you have to try to hold him back." Anderson's recovery from Tommy John surgery has been encouraging, and Melvin said the ball is coming out of the southpaw's hand like it would in a normal bullpen session. "I'm surprised to see him feel good every time like he does," Melvin said. "Usually, you hit a little bit of a wall at some point in time. But his elbow feels great."

Worth noting

- Oakland designated hitter Manny Ramirez, who was slotted into the cleanup spot in the lineup, was a late scratch due to back stiffness on Wednesday. He was replaced by Chris Carter, who went 1-for-4 with a run, a walk and two strikeouts. Melvin said after the game that Ramirez was taking swings before the game and experienced some tightness. The skipper added that Ramirez would have the day off on Thursday, and will likely return Friday against the Rockies in Scottsdale, Ariz.

A's eager for resolution to territorial rights

By JANIE McCAULEY, ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — The Oakland Athletics said Wednesday that their attempt to relocate some 40 miles away to San Jose is not "a move that seeks to alter or in any manner disturb MLB territorial rights."

The San Francisco Giants clearly see it the other way. They cherish their hold on technology-rich Silicon Valley, with Santa Clara County making up 43 percent of the club's territory and generating a significant number of fans, corporate sponsors and other supporters.

The A's released a statement Wednesday saying they hope Commissioner Bud Selig, his special committee appointed to evaluate the Bay Area issue and a vote of baseball's owners will allow the club to leave its current venue in the aging Oakland Coliseum and build a new ballpark in San Jose.

Oakland team officials insist that could help the low-budget club become a big spender that wouldn't have to be so heavily reliant on the rest of the major league organizations.

"We simply seek an approval to create a new venue that our organization and MLB fully recognizes is needed to eliminate our dependence on revenue sharing, to offer our fans and players a modern ballpark, to move over 35 miles further away from the Giants' great venue and to establish an exciting competition between the Giants and A's," Oakland's release said, adding it would, "enable us to join the fine array of modern and fun baseball parks that are now commonplace in Major League Baseball."

At the January owners meetings, Selig said the situation was on the "front burner." He appointed a committee in March 2009 to study the issues facing the teams, but there is no indication a ruling is imminent.

Selig, who was a fraternity brother with Oakland managing partner Lew Wolff at Wisconsin, has repeatedly said the A's can't survive in their current ballpark.

The City of Oakland still believes it has several suitable locations to build a new ballpark for the A's. Yet Wolff has his sights on San Jose and has repeatedly said his franchise has exhausted its options in Oakland after years of trying.

Giants CEO and president Larry Baer indicated at spring training Feb. 25 there might not be a swift resolution to the situation.

While Selig has asked the two franchises not to publicly debate the issue, the Giants on Wednesday refuted the statement by the A's earlier in the day with the intent of "setting the record straight on the history of territorial rights."

Late Oakland owner Walter Haas gave the Giants the OK to assume rights to San Jose in a favor of sorts to former San Francisco owner Bob Lurie when his team was considering moving to Florida. The deal basically happened with a handshake — and "without compensation," the A's wrote — and then was approved by baseball's owners.

The A's said that "MLB-recorded minutes clearly indicate that the Giants were granted Santa Clara, subject to relocating to the city of Santa Clara."

Said the Giants: "The Giants' territorial rights were not granted 'subject to' moving to Santa Clara County."

The territorial rights have been "explicitly reaffirmed by Major League Baseball on four separate occasions," according to the Giants, beginning when former Giants managing partner Peter Magowan bought the team before the 1993 season.

"Upon purchasing the team 20 years ago, our plan to revive the franchise relied heavily on targeting and solidifying our fan base in the largest and fastest growing county within our territory," the Giants said. "Based on these Constitutionally-recognized territorial rights, the Giants invested hundreds of millions of dollars to save and stabilize the team for the Bay Area, built AT&T Park privately and has operated the franchise so that it can compete at the highest levels."

The Giants have faced their own tough financial times. They lost \$115 million from 1993-99 at Candlestick Park after Magowan's group bought the team for \$100 million and took over before moving into AT&T Park — and drawing Oakland-like crowds of about 9,000 fans a night when things were especially dire.

Baer said San Francisco, the 2010 World Series champion, has a chance to sell out every game again in 2012 like it did last year.

Ross opens with 3 strong innings, Athletics and Dodgers tie at 3

By Associated Press

PHOENIX — Even in the spring, Los Angeles Dodgers right-hander Aaron Harang appreciates a quick out.

"I'd like to thank that guy for swinging at the first pitch," said Harang, who allowed two runs in the Dodgers' 3-3, nine-inning tie against the Oakland Athletics on Wednesday. "One pitch, fly ball to left, always makes things a lot easier."

After getting two outs, Harang gave up a two-run double to Josh Reddick that scored Kurt Suzuki and Chris Carter. He then retired the final four batters he faced.

"If you look at my track record it's pretty much the same thing," said Harang, who signed a two-year, \$12 million contract with Los Angeles after going 14-7 and posting a career-low 3.64 ERA last year for San Diego. "I'm not concerned about it."

Harang has been limited slightly this spring, at least in non-pitching activities, with soreness in his right foot unrelated to the injury he had in the same foot a year ago.

"Physically I felt fine," Harang said. "Sometimes you get those days where you feel really sharp in the pen and then you get out there and everything's staying over the middle of the plate. But everything felt nice and easy."

Right-hander Tyson Ross, yet another of Oakland's young, largely unproven arms, had few such issues during his three-inning stint.

Ross, who was 3-3 with a 2.75 ERA in nine games and six starts for the A's last season, allowed just one hit and walked one while striking out two in his second start of the spring.

"It was good to see him respond, give us three innings and do some good things," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "His velocity looked to be better."

NOTES: Oakland OF Yoenis Cespedes went 4 for 5 with a home run in a simulated game earlier Wednesday. Melvin said Cespedes could be in the A's lineup as early as this weekend. . A's 1B Brandon Allen, who entered the game leading the majors with eight RBIs, went 0 for 3 with a strikeout. . Dodgers non-roster OF Cory Sullivan had three of Los Angeles' four hits. . Los Angeles scored two runs without a hit in the fourth on four walks and two RBI groundouts. . The Dodgers were playing their first game away from their Camelback Ranch home. . Oakland DH Manny Ramirez was scratched 20 minutes before the first pitch with stiffness in his back experienced while getting some extra at-bats in a simulated game. Ramirez, who is hitless in his first five at-bats and has hit only one ball out of the infield, also will take Thursday off before returning to the lineup on Friday. ... Carter took Ramirez's place and went 1 for 4. . Dodgers 2B Dee Gordon was given the day off after starting the past two days.

Marcos Breton: Here's hoping we see more of Manny Ramirez

Marcos Breton, Sacramento Bee

PHOENIX – I would love to see Manny Ramirez playing at Raley Field this spring.

It could happen. Man-Ram launching tape-measure bombs onto the grassy berms where parents and Little Leaguers dwell.

The dreadlocks; the bandana on said dreadlocks; that goofy smirk of indifference; and that swing that launched 555 career home runs in the big leagues, some chemically enhanced.

Think of the conversations Ramirez could inspire between kids and parents if the guy with the R-rated reputation were rounding the bases at the family-friendly ballpark by the Sacramento River.

Baseball has been idealized for too long. We've been too slow – myself included – to face up to the reality and hypocrisy of baseball's steroids era.

Why not some straight talk?

I'm trying to teach my kids to love baseball as my dad taught me, so here is what I would say to them about Ramirez if he came to the idyllic ballpark created by the late, great River Cats owner Art Savage.

I'd say that Manny is an older guy now, pushing 40, who is trying to come back to baseball with a new attitude after getting into trouble.

Last year, he quit after getting caught using performance-enhancing drugs. He also had a terrible reputation of being a guy who only cared about himself.

I always wished Manny had been different. If he weren't always acting like a hard guy, he would have been one of the biggest stars in sports.

Despite the way he looks – the baggy pants, the suspect body language – he is one of the greatest power hitters ever born.

Manny saw the ball. He hit the ball. It didn't matter how hard you threw it or how much you bent it or if you threw it at him. Sooner or later, he would hit it so far it would make your spine tingle.

And he would smile in a way that showed an open heart and a fun-loving spirit. It's just that when the games were over, that spirit would disappear. He wouldn't talk – or he would and you wish he hadn't.

Manny comes from a tough life, a tough neighborhood in New York City. He learned two things growing up there – how to hit a baseball and not to trust anybody.

You know what was the saddest part about Manny? He didn't appreciate the gifts he had.

Manny would drop balls in the outfield and act as if he didn't care because he knew he could hit the home run and everyone would cheer and forget how terrible he was in the field.

But he lost the game. He had all this money, but he no longer had a purpose. Everyone needs a purpose in life.

Manny has little kids and a beautiful wife, and yet he was just another steroids cheat.

For me, being someone who has loved and followed players from Latin America, Manny's situation was hard to take. Jose Canseco. Sammy Sosa. Miguel Tejada. Rafael Palmeiro. Manny.

All these guys had Hall of Fame written all over them. In Spanish, they call that *Salon de la Fama*.

And now all of them are outside of baseball. Canseco is always on Twitter, saying how much he misses the game. I know that Tejada is crying this spring with no job in baseball.

Now Manny is back with the A's, the only team that will have him. He's making \$500,000, which is a lot to you and me, but it's nothing to a guy with his talent.

The A's have made no promises. It's on Manny to be able to hit. He's trying. I've seen him posing for pictures with kids. He's trying to help young teammates. He's trying to hit again, though on Wednesday some A's minor league pitchers had their way with him during batting practice.

He's 0 for 5 in Cactus League games and didn't play Wednesday because his back hurt. That happens when you get older. What also happens is you realize, sometimes too late, that you can lose what you loved the most if you don't appreciate it.

Maybe Manny doesn't really mean it when he says he wants another chance. He wasn't around for me to ask after the A's and Dodgers played to a 3-3 tie. But I hope he does mean it.

I hope he catches on with the A's, a dull team in desperate need of some excitement. If he makes it, I hope the A's send him to Triple-A Sacramento before calling him to Oakland.

It would be a great sight at Raley Field – and a great conversation to have while those dreadlocks rounded the same bases little kids run after weekend games.

A's statement on relocation says more about Giants than anything else

By Sam McPherson, Oakland A's Examiner

The Oakland Athletics released a public statement today about relocation-denial rumors circulating currently in media reports, and it truly says more about the San Francisco Giants' greed and hubris than it does about anything Green and Gold:

Recent articles claiming that Major League Baseball has decided that the A's cannot share the two-team Bay Area market were denied by baseball Commissioner Bud Selig last weekend.

Currently the Giants and A's share the two-team Bay Area market in terms of television, radio, sponsors and fans. Last year, the Giants opened a specialty store in the middle of the A's market (Walnut Creek). At the time, Lew Wolff commented that he was 'fine with the Giants store and wished there was an A's store in San Francisco.'

Of the four two-team markets in MLB, only the Giants and A's do not share the exact same geographic boundaries. MLB-recorded minutes clearly indicate that the Giants were granted Santa Clara, subject to relocating to the city of Santa Clara. The granting of Santa Clara to the Giants was by agreement with the A's late owner Walter Haas, who approved the request without compensation. The Giants were unable to obtain a vote to move and the return of Santa Clara to its original status was not formally accomplished.

We are not seeking a move that seeks to alter or in any manner disturb MLB territorial rights. We simply seek an approval to create a new venue that our organization and MLB fully recognizes is needed to eliminate our dependence on revenue sharing, to offer our fans and players a modern ballpark, to move over 35 miles further away from the Giants' great venue and to establish an exciting competition between the Giants and A's.

We are hopeful that the Commissioner, the committee appointed by the Commissioner, and a vote of the MLB ownership, will enable us to join the fine array of modern and fun baseball parks that are now commonplace in Major League Baseball.

A few interesting tidbits stand out in this statement.

First, the fact the Giants are so fiercely protective of their own territory yet have the hubris to open a merchandise store in the middle of the A's "territory" demonstrates that the San Francisco organization has no interest in doing unto others what they would have other do unto them.

That kind of arrogance and greed was clearly illustrated by the Giants' repeated exploitation of felon Barry Bonds for profit, of course, but now it's extending into a territory that just smacks of laughable hypocrisy.

Second, the fact the A's organization tried to help the San Francisco stay in the Bay Area franchise 20 years ago without demanding compensation says a lot about the principle of accepting help when in need -- and then refusing to help that same "other" in need after succeeding yourself.

Who does that? What kind of entity takes a handout given generously and doesn't return the favor to the same party when it's needed in return? Again, just more arrogance and greed out of San Francisco -- and a distinct lack of ethical and moral integrity from the Giants' organization as a whole.

Finally, the San Francisco organization explored its options in the South Bay years ago, was unable to make the situation work for them and built a new ballpark elsewhere to succeed on and off the field. Why do they even care about the A's moving even further away from where they are now?

The Giants are in San Francisco where they belong -- if the Oakland organization wants to move to San Jose, which is the third-largest city in the state, why should the Giants care? They could have moved there themselves years ago and chose not to.

Like a small child who doesn't want someone else to have anything, the San Francisco organization continues to simply be a ridiculous example of corporate arrogance, greed and hubris in 21st century America.

Sure, this press release is subjectively about the Athletics, but it really tells a lot more sad stories about the Giants and their ridiculousness.

A's Focused on San Jose

By KEN BELSON, New York Times

The Oakland Athletics reiterated that they hoped Major League Baseball would approve their plan to build a stadium in San Jose, Calif., and that moving there would not violate their territorial rights agreement with the San Francisco Giants.

The team's statement came days after a Daily News report said Commissioner Bud Selig would not permit the move. After the column was published, a league official said Selig had not made a decision.

The Giants currently control the rights to Santa Clara County and do not want to cede them to the A's, arguing that they have invested millions of dollars marketing to fans there. The A's say that if they can move to San Jose, they would be able to build a stadium that would reduce their dependence on revenue sharing.