

## A's News Clips, Sunday, March 11, 2012

### Tim Kawakami: Can Yoenis Cespedes save the Oakland A's season?

By Tim Kawakami, Mercury News Columnist

He's not just a baseball tall tale, not anymore.

Yoenis Cespedes stepped from the shadows Saturday and turned into a living, breathing, home-run-hitting major leaguer.

Next question: Can he be a season-saver, too?

"It was pretty electric," manager Bob Melvin said of Cespedes' performance. "We had guys that didn't have to be here watching it. ... Everybody was here.

"We were all pretty excited about watching him play."

There was a lot to see, which is every reason why the A's paid \$36 million to land Cespedes in the first place.

In the A's 6-3 victory over the Reds at Phoenix Municipal Stadium, the Cuban defector walked, singled and -- in the last at-bat of his four-inning stint -- blasted a deep home run far beyond the left field wall.

That wasn't the stuff of simulated games or YouTube sensations. That was real. That was immensely real.

That was everything the A's and Cespedes could've hoped his MLB debut game would be.

"I feel great and happy because I can see the resolve we have," Cespedes said via translator Ariel Prieto.

So will it get easier from here?

"Nothing is easy," Cespedes said. "You have to work."

But the beauty of Cespedes' presence on the A's is that he can accomplish things that nobody else on the roster can do, and he showed that right away.

And you sure didn't hear the A's minimizing the significance of it.

They wanted it to feel large. They needed it to be accompanied by a drum roll and Cactus League intrigue.

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With the spotlight on and a franchise holding its breath just a bit, Cespedes came close enough.

"First game today, I felt a little pressure at home plate," Cespedes said.

In his first plate appearance, Cespedes showed some unexpected plate discipline. He watched six Johnny Cueto pitches go by and didn't swing at any of them, taking a walk.

In his second appearance, Cespedes slashed an RBI single to center field against Cueto to put the A's up 3-0.

Then came the big finale, when Cespedes led off the fourth inning.

After watching ball one and then unleashing an off-balance swing-and-miss on a Jeff Francis off-speed pitch, Cespedes fouled off four consecutive off-speed deliveries.

"I saw the pitcher was mixing pitches, throwing some changes," Cespedes said. "I tried to stay back a little bit instead of go forward."

On the sixth pitch of the at-bat, Francis finally tried to sneak in a fastball, and Cespedes was ready, sending it high through the chilly air over the left field wall.

The Cespedes debut line: walk, RBI single, home run, looked very comfortable in center field.

As an early comparison, I thought he looked a bit like a young Matt Holliday type, a hitter with easy power to all fields and with a fairly discriminating eye.

For someone who defected last year, played some organized ball in the Dominican Republic last fall and winter and has suddenly been plopped onto a major league roster, that is not bad.

"He seems to be acclimating all the way around at a very quick pace," Melvin said.

Cespedes is scheduled to be the designated hitter Sunday, then will be back in the outfield Monday.

From there, the A's will see how it goes. I'd say it's a great bet he's the A's starting center fielder when they open the season in Japan, even if incumbent Coco Crisp won't be thrilled about that.

Either way, the A's are soaking it up.

After the latest fire sale of All-Stars, this team needs attention, needs a middle-order bat, needs life and needs Cespedes-anity.

That's worth \$36 million, all of that.

"We've got a little more going on this spring," Melvin said. "I mean, it's nice to get some attention. Whether it's the Manny (Ramirez) thing or Cespedes or whatever, it's nice to have some national attention.

"It's nice to have TV trucks out there and more than two or three people for these types of things."

It's the stuff of legend and campfire tales, and the A's have the right to enjoy the heck out of it.

They might not be able to keep Cespedes forever, but for the moment, they don't have to think about that.

Right now, they have Cespedes and nobody else does. That's enough.

### **Oakland A's star Yoenis Cespedes makes loud debut**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Four innings of Cactus League play is nothing to draw conclusions from.

But Yoenis Cespedes' eye-catching A's debut Saturday was enough to make one wonder what he might have in store for the regular season.

He lined a home run to go with an RBI single and a walk in the A's 6-3 victory over the Cincinnati Reds at Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

In short, Cespedes did nothing to dispel the hype that preceded his first exhibition game, after he defected from Cuba last summer and signed a four-year, \$36 million contract with the A's four weeks ago.

"It was pretty impressive, really, with the spotlight on him as bright as could be today," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "To respond the way he did probably shows you a little about his makeup."

Cespedes missed the first two weeks of spring training while awaiting his worker's visa. He's now on a crash-course introduction to the major leagues, with the A's regular season opener less than three weeks away.

There's little doubt Cespedes will be in the opening night starting lineup based on what he showed Saturday.

Reds manager Dusty Baker was among those impressed.

"It's hard to evaluate on one game, but if you're going to start out, that's how you want to start," Baker said. "I had never seen him play before. I'm pulling for him. I hope he does well."

Cespedes, 26, said he felt some pressure leading up to the game but was pleased with his performance. He also went 8 for 16 with two homers in three simulated games against minor leaguers.

"These guys are a lot better than in Cuba," he said through interpreter Ariel Prieto. "You can find some good pitchers in Cuba, but all the pitchers I'm going to face, I believe, are going to be better."

Will Cespedes, 26, bump incumbent center fielder Coco Crisp over to left field?

Crisp got the day off Saturday and will likely play center field Sunday against Kansas City, with Cespedes slated to D.H.

But Cespedes played mostly center field in Cuba, and the A's might want to ensure their \$36 million man feels as comfortable as possible by playing him at a familiar position.

Expect Crisp to see time in left field in the next week regardless.

"I just want to see what (Cespedes) has to offer in center field here for a few games before I go down that road," Melvin said of making a final decision.

The right-handed hitting Cespedes didn't take a swing in his first at-bat against right-hander Johnny Cueto in the first inning, drawing a full-count walk. He was more aggressive in the second inning, singling up the middle on a 0-1 pitch to score Josh Donaldson.

In the fourth, Cespedes waved at strike one from lefty Jeff Francis before fouling off four straight off-speed pitches. Then Cespedes hammered a high fastball over the left-field wall for a solo homer.

"I was happy because right after I made some bad swings, I tried to make adjustments and hit the ball well," he said.

Second baseman Jemile Weeks was curious to see Cespedes' debut.

"He did a great job," Weeks said. "That's how he's supposed to come on the scene."

Cespedes had just two routine fly balls go his way, the second off the bat of Daryl Jones. Cespedes made the catch one-handed while posed in a semi-crouch, no shocker from a player who has made behind-the-back catches while shagging flies in batting practice.

Bartolo Colon worked four innings and allowed one run with four strikeouts and no walks. He's slated to start the A's second regular-season game March 29 against Seattle in Tokyo.

Manny Ramirez went 0 for 3 and is now 0 for 8 in three games.

Donaldson went 2 for 3 with an RBI but also made an error when the third baseman couldn't come up with Todd Frazier's chopper on the short hop. Shortstop Cliff Pennington committed his fourth error in six games.

Melvin had no comment on the 50-game suspension of outfielder Jason Pridie, who reportedly violated the minor league drug policy. Pridie is still in camp, and his suspension doesn't kick in until the regular season.

**Talking Points: The Tale of Cespedes: He plays, he homers, he's more than myth**

Posted by Tim Kawakami on March 10th, 2012 at 5:22 pm

\* *Straight from tomorrow morning's paper, with a topper...*

-Wow, must say that was a very eventful four days in Arizona for me.

The A's-Giants press-release cold war, Buster Posey's debut and today, Yoenis Cespedes doing the Robert Redford "Natural" special.

I've got a few leftover thoughts from my days down here (on the San Jose territorial rights, on the Cain contract talks, etc.), but I'll carry them over into the next few days rather than crowd out the Cespedes column.

I'll just say it's always good to be around these teams during spring training—more so because I haven't covered the Cactus League since 2007 and got lost enough times driving around out here this year to prove it.

I almost pulled off getting to Sharks-Coyotes tonight but the airline change-fee was not palatable. So... Many kudos to the BANG baseball crew down here—Alex Pavlovic, Joe Stiglich & Carl Steward—for their help and dinner conversations.

Time for me to get back to the NBA trade deadline, NFL free agency and NCAA tournament. Yeah, that boring stuff.

—***the column*** (UNEDITED VERSION)/

PHOENIX—He's not just a baseball tall tale, not any more.

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**Talking Points: Cespedes' loud debut: Walk, RBI single... and BAM**

Posted by Tim Kawakami on March 10th, 2012 at 2:43 pm

Yep, Yoenis Cespedes did everything the A's could have hoped he'd do in his Cactus League debut, and looks like he can do a whole lot more.

Afterwards, I asked him if it will get easier from here. Through translator Ariel Prieto, Cespedes was succinct: "Nothing is easy."

Here's what he did today...

-Showed patience and took a six-pitch walk (without swinging) in the first inning vs. Johnny Cueto.

-Lined a single up the middle off Cueto in the second for an RBI.

-Then crashed a deep home run to left off of Jeff Francis to lead off the fourth inning.

Cespedes also looked quite comfortable playing center field, though he didn't have anything tough come his way.

But the memorable moment, of course, was the HR, and there was an impressive progression throughout that at-bat.

Francis, the soft-throwing lefty, started Cespedes off with a ball.

Then Cespedes looked bad on a swing-and-miss at something off-speed for a 1-1 count.

So of course Francis kept throwing the off-speed stuff (from what I could tell from the pressbox)... which led to four straight foul balls.

When Francis finally decided to sneak a fastball in there, Cespedes launched it.

**Talking Points: Bob Melvin on Cespedes' upcoming debut: "This is a day we had marked on our calendar"**

Posted by Tim Kawakami on March 10th, 2012 at 9:44 am

Definitely a ratchet-up of the interest-level at A's camp today, which manager Bob Melvin was all too happy to confirm—and all too happy to see.

"Nothing to see here today!" Melvin joked as he strode into the clubhouse this morning.

Today, of course, is the Cactus League and MLB-uniform debut of Yoenis Cespedes, a player many believe can slide right into the middle of almost anybody's line-up immediately.

Cespedes is batting 2nd today because Melvin wants to maximize the number of at-bats, and he'll play center field and probably four innings.

The CF is interesting because the A's incumbent CF Coco Crisp very much would like to stay there.

But every indication is that if Cespedes looks like what the A's think he'll look like in CF, he'll be the CF and Crisp will be in another spot.

—BOB MELVIN partial gaggle transcript (sorry for the weird type-face, that's just the way it came out)/

-Q: What are your realistic expectations from Cespedes today?

-MELVIN: I'd like to see three home runs, three stolen bases, rob somebody of a home run in centerfield. Other than that, not a whole lot.

No, we just want to see him be part of the team. And that's what he's excited about, is being able to go out there with his teammates.

What we've seen as far as batting practice and over at the simulated games over there... you really start to get a feel

for what a player can do once he's out here in this scenario in these types of games.

This is a day we've had marked on our calendar.

We kind of targeted this day, because of the two home games as well. Worked out well.

-Q: He'll play tomorrow?

-MELVIN: DH tomorrow.

-Q: Billy was saying Cespedes might've been ready baseball-wise a little while ago, and it was the cultural things that you wanted to make sure about. What kinds of things were you looking at?

-MELVIN: I just wanted him comfortable and to be here for a couple days and then go over there where you're only with your teammates for a couple days, go out there, go over to minor-league camp and have some at-bats.

It's part of being around your group and getting to know everybody. I think he picks up a few English words each and every day...

We knew that there were some issues not only on-field stuff but off-field stuff that we wanted him to be comfortable with. We feel we're at that point now.

-Q: Do you see him as a No. 2 hitter?

-MELVIN: No, this is early at-bats. I wanted maybe to try to get him a third at-bat if the game goes quickly.

-Q: A 3-4-5 hitter?

-MELVIN: I don't know that yet, but that's what we hear, that he is a middle-of-the-order power guy.

-Q: Do you want to see him in the corner spots?

-MELVIN: Let's just go day at a time. But he has played the corner at times, from what I understand. But let's just get through today and see where we are the next day.

-Q: Have you made any connection with him?

-MELVIN: I bring him in my office—today is the first day, we had stuff going on, I have not had him in there and asked him what he had for dinner last night, where did he go...

-Q: Is he eating well?

-MELVIN: He had steak last night. He likes steak. We're going to scout out some Cuban places for him here down the road.

-Q: Did Cespedes know this was the date you were projecting for him?

-MELVIN: Not really. I don't think so.

-Q: Have you noticed he's any difference in him since he knew it was today?

-MELVIN: Well, yesterday he knew that today could be the day and there was a little bit more of a smile on his face yesterday, because he wanted to play in games. He knew yesterday if everything went smoothly he was going to play today.

-Q: How does affect where Coco Crisp will play?

-MELVIN: I'm not really sure yet.

-Q: Is Cespedes back in CF on Monday?

-MELVIN: I don't know yet.

-Q: Will there a point where he and Crisp play together—would Cespedes be playing CF for now just to see what he can do there?

-MELVIN: I'm not sure yet. I just want to see he has to offer in center field here for a few games before I go down that road.

-Q: So those games will be in center?

-MELVIN: I don't know.

-Q: How important is this for the franchise, to have a guy like this come in?

-MELVIN: With limited resources, this is similar to what Cincinnati did last year with Chapman. We have a chance to get potentially a very high-end player. And we don't have that many opportunities to do that.

There's some more unknowns, but that's why we had an opportunity. Based on what our people saw, they really feel like he has a chance to be a heckuva player and certainly to this point has done nothing to disprove that.

We're excited about him.

Yes, to answer your question, absolutely.

And we've got a little more going on this spring—I mean, it's nice to get some attention. Whether it's the Manny thing or Cespedes or whatever, it's nice to have some national attention.

It's nice to have TV trucks out there and more than two or three people for these types of things.

-Q: How excited are you to see what he can do—he is still a bit of a mystery.

-MELVIN: We know less about him than we do anybody else in camp.

### **A's Céspedes cracks a homer and a smile in debut**

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

And on the seventh day, Yoenis Céspedes let loose.

And finally exhaled.

Appearing as the most serious player in A's camp over three days of workouts and three days of simulated games, Céspedes on Saturday did what he came here to do, play baseball at the highest level for the A's and flash a few smiles along the way.

"For a very serious guy," manager Bob Melvin said, "he showed a little bit of a lighter side."

How could he not have? Céspedes made his Cactus League debut against the Reds with three plate appearances he'll never forget, drawing a full-count walk, hitting a sharp RBI single to center and lining a home run to left.

While in his home-run trot, he didn't think of his defection from Cuba, his new life in America, his \$36 million contract or reuniting with his family, now in the Dominican. He thought about getting all of Jeff Francis' fastball to cap an eight-pitch at-bat that included four straight foul balls.

Asked about his thoughts circling the bases, Céspedes said through interpreter Ariel Prieto, "I was happy because right after I made some bad swings, I tried to make an adjustment and hit the ball well. ... I'm happy because I can see the results."



Céspedes received warm dugout welcomes each time he returned from running the bases, and some teammates considered his walk more impressive than his homer because he didn't swing at all, preferring to recognize pitches - not an easy chore, considering how eager he must have been.

Céspedes stepped to the plate far more aggressive the next time, swinging at the first two pitches and singling past pitcher Johnny Cueto to score Josh Donaldson. He had five cuts in his final at-bat.

"That's how you have to come to the scene. Just like that," second baseman Jemile Weeks said.

"It was about as good as it could be," added shortstop Cliff Pennington. "It was a great start for him, but at the same time, we can't expect that every day. If he does that once a week, he'll be a pretty good player."

Céspedes expects tougher at-bats against big-leaguers, saying, "You can find some good pitchers in Cuba, but all the pitchers I'm going to face, I believe, are going to be better."

Early Saturday, Melvin joked about having modest goals: "I'd like to see three home runs, three stolen bases and rob someone of a home run in center field. Other than that, not a whole lot." On a serious note, Melvin added, "We know less about him than anybody else in camp."

Not anymore.

"Great day for the organization, great day for him," pitcher Dallas Braden said. "Today, he got to do exactly what he was born to do, and it was awesome we got to watch that day in his life reach fruition. To understand what the guy is going through on a daily basis, to have all this pressure and these question marks, to come out and just relax and play ball, you couldn't wish anything more for the guy."

Céspedes batted second and will hit third today (facing Royals lefty Bruce Chen), a more likely home for the 26-year-old power hitter, especially in a lineup that lacks punch.

Céspedes made two routine catches in center and showed extra flair one-handing Daryl Jones' fly to end the fourth. Melvin said he's not sure who'll be his No. 1 center fielder, Céspedes or Coco Crisp, who'll play there today.

Counting simulated games, Céspedes is 10-for-18 with three homers. Eleven more days of Cactus League games remain before the A's fly to Tokyo to begin the regular season. How odd is it for Céspedes to dream about playing in the majors, only to have to go to Japan to play an opener?

"Weird," said Céspedes, who wasn't complaining. Not after one memorable week in an A's uniform.

### **Recker sees clearer path to becoming backup catcher**

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

**Landon Powell's** release on Friday opened a backup catching job, and **Anthony Recker's** goal is to win it.

"It's probably my first camp where I've come in with a really good opportunity," Recker said. "I really appreciated Landon as a catcher, competitor and teammate. It's kind of bittersweet for me to have the opportunity at his expense. At the same time, obviously it's a business, and I'm happy I'm getting this opportunity."

Recker, 28, came out of the 2005 draft and was at Triple-A Sacramento the past three years, hitting .287 with 16 homers and 48 RBIs in 2011.

"He feels like he belongs. The next step is to get him more at-bats," said manager **Bob Melvin**, who plans to start Recker today. "It seems like he's more comfortable this year."

The only other catcher on the 40-man roster (other than starter **Kurt Suzuki**) is **Derek Norris**, 23, who was acquired from the Nationals in the **Gio Gonzalez** trade and was in Double-A last year. **Josh Donaldson** opened camp as a catcher but is playing third base with **Scott Sizemore** shelved for the season.

**Dallas Braden** said he'll miss Powell, who caught Braden's perfect game.

"We shared a special memory, a special bond," Braden said. "He's one of the better catchers and has a real feel for the art of pitching and catching and that type of relationship, and that'll help his chances of catching on with someone."

**Braden's shoulder:** Braden's shoulder surgery was similar to **Johan Santana's**, but Braden's rehab has been more accelerated. Santana's surgery was 18 months ago, and the Mets hope he'll finally be ready to pitch when the season starts. Braden had surgery 10 months ago, and he could return by early May, the A's say.

"If the progress is not impeded and things continue to go well and I continue to take steps, there's no telling how accelerated the program can be," Braden said. "There's also no telling if a setback will occur, how long that'll take to get around. I'm truly taking the day-by-day approach to its fullest."

**Briefly: Rickey Henderson** returns to spring training this week, rotating between the minor- and major-league camps. ... The A's and Reds play just once in spring training. The A's play the Giants once in Arizona - Saturday in Scottsdale with a split-squad.

### **A'S 6, ROCKIES 3**

**Notable:** In the shadow of Yoenis Céspedes, who was 2-for-2 with a homer and walk, Bartolo Colon tossed four impressive innings (one run, three hits, four strikeouts, no walks) in his second start. Colon has two more outings before starting the second regular-season game in Japan on March 29. ... Manny Ramirez returned to the lineup after missing time with a stiff back and went 0-for-3. He's hitless in eight at-bats. ... Josh Donaldson raised his average 60 points to .250 with a 2-for-3 day. ... Six errors were committed, three by each team. Shortstop Cliff Pennington has a team-high four E's.

**Quotable:** "I thought the A's didn't have any money."

- Reds manager *Dusty Baker* on signing *Céspedes* for \$36 million.

**Today's game:** Royals (Bruce Chen) at A's (Tommy Milone), 95.7 FM.

### **Ex-Oakland player Mark Ellis says A's need a stadium**

John Shea, Chronicle Columnist

In large part, ballplayers don't monitor the Giants-A's territorial rights brouhaha. Turnover among players is too rampant for anyone to get caught up in a prolonged stadium debate. They have enough on their minds without having to worry about why Major League Baseball keeps the A's in purgatory.

**Mark Ellis** is different.

"They need a ballpark," Ellis said. "MLB needs to do something. I'm not afraid to say it. It really is a storied franchise. So many good players have come through there, and that team has done so many great things. They need a little help from MLB, to at least make a decision. Yes or no. None of this waiting around stuff anymore."

A member of the A's for a decade before his June 30 trade to Colorado, Ellis now is outfitted in Dodger blue. He's L.A.'s new second baseman and No. 2 hitter, courtesy of a two-year, \$8.75 million contract, and has made a leap on the rivalry scale from A's-Giants to Dodgers-Giants.

But three years after Commissioner **Bud Selig** formed his committee to examine the ballpark dilemma, the A's remain in limbo.

"They should be able to figure it out in three years," Ellis said. "I know they're intelligent people. I know they're dealing with stuff from the Giants' side as well. But they need to do something for the better of MLB and baseball in the Bay Area."

Oakland is where young players get their first break and old guys get one last shot at glory - while others in between depart for the big money - but Ellis always said he wanted to play his entire career for the A's. Well, he got a little older, and along came **Jemile Weeks**. So much for that.

Looking back, he knew he played for the Bay Area's underdogs.

"It was big fish vs. little fish," Ellis said. "It wasn't on our minds when I played in Oakland, but once you step back and look at it, (the Giants) definitely had the ballpark and the bigger market."

Same market, just more privileged.

Like the Dodgers used to be in L.A.

"They had a couple of tough years, but they're still the Dodgers, and we're going to be the Dodgers again," Ellis said.

"The Dodgers have had great ballplayers, expectations of first place every year, the means to do things."

As in spending gobs of money. Whichever group buys the Dodgers from **Frank McCourt** for upward of \$1.5 billion, big payouts are expected to continue.

"It's something I've never been part of before," Ellis said. "Not to say it was bad in Oakland. We were very competitive and creative and always had a chance to win. Whether we did or not, that's another thing. But we always had four or five guys who could throw the ball and give you a chance to win every night. But this is a different animal. It's a large market, and the capabilities are much greater."

As a Dodger, Ellis might hear things at China Basin he didn't hear while wearing green and gold.

"We'll see what happens. It'll be fun to go back there," Ellis said. "I'm really looking forward to the rivalry."

**Battle by the bay:** In their snipe-off with the A's last week, the Giants gave a good indication why they're so unwilling to share Santa Clara County. They claimed that of all the people in their territory - six counties compared with two for the A's - 43 percent reside in Santa Clara County.

No wonder the A's want to move there.

Two more points:

In a 2009 Chronicle report citing the Bay Area's top 200 public companies, 37 were positioned in the A's territory - just three in Oakland.

The Giants' territory includes 4.2 million people, the A's territory 2.6 million, according to the 2010 census.

**Lost in Translation?** It didn't take long for the first **Yu Darvish** controversy. After his first appearance, the Rangers' pitcher seemingly said through an interpreter he wasn't impressed with **Will Venable's** double off the center-field wall: "The air is dry in Arizona, and the wind was blowing out, so, no, I don't think he hit it squarely."

To which Venable, a Padres' outfielder who grew up in San Rafael, said on the Padres' flagship radio station, "That's as well as I could hit a ball, to be honest. I don't know if something was lost in translation there. I would have liked to hear a little more humility from the guy. To each his own."

Darvish's agent, **Don Nomura**, said his client meant to say, "I didn't think he hit it that far, but he sure has lots of power."

Lost in translation? A truth or an excuse? Let's say both for now, at least until Darvish's next postgame interview.

**Around the majors:** **Carl Crawford's** setback following wrist surgery could put him on the disabled list when the Red Sox open the season, leaving a corner outfield spot for **Ryan Sweeney**. **Cody Ross** seems to have the other corner locked up. ... **Travis Ishikawa** could land a job as a Brewers outfielder to start the season now that **Corey Hart** has had arthroscopic knee surgery. Ishikawa, known as a solid defensive first baseman, played 34 games in left and right for Triple-A Fresno last year. He has never played the outfield in the majors. ... Another recognizable player

competing for one of the final spots on the Brewers' roster: Braves castoff **Brooks Conrad** (2010 Division Series, anyone?). ... New Cubs manager **Dale Sveum** is experimenting with hitting **Alfonso Soriano** first and 21-year-old **Starlin Castro** third after Castro led the league with 207 hits and drove in 66 runs as a top-of-the-order hitter. Previous manager **Mike Quade** tried Castro in the No. 3 spot, but he hit .225 in 42 games.

### **Drumbeat: Yoenis Cespedes makes A's Cactus League debut: center field today, DH tomorrow**

John Shea reporting from Camp Cespedes . . . 3/10/2012, 9:36am

Manager Bob Melvin has modest goals for Yoenis Cespedes, who'll play his first Cactus League game today.

"I'd like to see three home runs, three stolen bases and have him rob someone of a home run in center field," Melvin said. "Other than that, not a whole lot."

Cespedes will play center field today. Tomorrow, he'll DH. He's hitting second today, but that's just so the staff can see him early in the lineup, perhaps have Cespedes get a third at-bat.

"He's a middle-of-the-order power guy," Melvin said. "That's what we hear."

Melvin isn't saying what he'll do with both Cespedes in Coco Crisp, also a center fielder, in the same lineup.

Through interpreter Ariel Prieto, Cespedes has daily chats with his manager. "Today was the first day I have not had him in there and ask him what he had for dinner last night."

So far, Cespedes has simply taken batting practice and played in three simulated games. Otherwise, the A's haven't seen much of the Cuban star beyond limited international play

"We know less about him than we do anybody else in camp," Melvin said.

They'll know soon enough.

"With limited resources, this is similar to what the Cincinnati did last year with (Aroldis) Chapman," Melvin said. "We have a chance to potentially have a very high-end player. We don't have that many opportunities to do that. There are some more unknowns, that's why we had an opportunity. Based on what our people saw, we feel he has a chance to be a heck of a player. Certainly to this point, he has done nothing to disprove that, so we're excited about it."

Today's game is on TV (Comcast) and the radio (95.7 FM).

### **Cespedes homers in much-awaited A's debut**

By Barry M. Bloom / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- A's center fielder Yoenis Cespedes made the most of his first official Major League game on Saturday, lining a homer to left to lead off the fourth inning and drilling a ground-ball RBI single to center with runners on first and third and one out in the second.

The homer came off the sixth pitch from Reds left-hander Jeff Francis, who had just entered the game. Cespedes fouled off four consecutive pitches before lining the ball toward Van Buren Street.

"I love the way he came up," A's second baseman Jemile Weeks said. "'Bam, this is what I do.'"

The A's won the game, 6-3.

Cespedes came out swinging in his second at-bat against starter Johnny Cueto, tapping a grounder foul down the third-base line on the first pitch and then smacking a single on the next one. That followed a six-pitch full-count walk in the first inning in which Cespedes didn't offer at a pitch.

"They were all impressive," A's manager Bob Melvin said about the Cespedes at-bats. "But his first at-bat was as impressive as the others, because you know he wanted to go up and show what he has, and he took a walk."

Cespedes' final line was 2-for-2 with a homer and two RBIs in four innings, making two catches in center field where Melvin said he also looked very comfortable. Melvin added that Cespedes will be the designated hitter vs. the Royals on Sunday when the A's play again at Phoenix Municipal Stadium at 1:05 p.m. PT, batting in the third or fourth spot in the lineup.

For his part, Cespedes said he felt the pressure, but he rose to the occasion.

"Things will get better," Cespedes said through Ariel Prieto, the Cuban-born pitcher who also played for the A's and is acting as his liaison and interpreter. "I just had three at-bats today. The pitching is much different here than it is in Cuba. I have to play more and adjust. This was the first game. I felt a little pressure on me today when I went to the plate."

The much-awaited Cactus League debut of the Cuban-born right-handed swinger was played before a raucous crowd of 6,644 on a beautiful sun-splashed day in the desert. The A's dugout was packed with players who weren't even slated to play on Saturday, Melvin said -- all there to watch Cespedes do his thing. To his point, Weeks was not in the lineup, but was still around late in the game when reporters interviewed Cespedes.

Melvin joked to reporters with a big smile on his face in the clubhouse earlier that this was a special day.

"There's nothing to see here today. Nothing to see here today," he said.

Later, Melvin said that the buzz around Cespedes' debut was definitely good for the franchise.

"This is a day we've had marked on the calendar," Melvin said. "With limited resources, this is similar to what Cincinnati did [a couple of years ago] with [Cuban pitcher Aroldis] Chapman. We have potentially a chance to get a very high-end player. We don't have many opportunities to do that."

Cespedes had to work his way through a week of obstacles to get here. The decision was made for him to play on Saturday after Cespedes played in his third consecutive simulated game at Papago Park, the A's nearby training complex, on Friday. In one of the most highly attended simulated games, Cespedes went 1-for-4 with an infield single and a strikeout, and played center.

The entire A's hierarchy was there from owner Lew Wolff and general manager Billy Beane on down to Melvin, who was present for a few innings before catching the bus to nearby Scottsdale, Ariz., for a Cactus League game his team won, 6-4, over the Rockies. Beane had said afterward that a green light from the training staff was the only impediment to Cespedes playing. That green light obviously was given.

Cespedes was evidently game ready. In the previous two simulated games, he hit two homers -- one in each game -- and went 3-for-6 on Thursday.

Even the Reds arrived at the ballpark with great anticipation.

"I talked to a couple of Cuban friends I have in Miami, and they told me he was a pretty good ballplayer," Reds manager Dusty Baker said. "I'm surprised the A's signed him."

The A's indeed signed Cespedes this month to a four-year, \$36 million contract, their highest impact acquisition of the offseason.

Cespedes is only 26 and has a chiseled body. His upside potential is obviously tremendous. He began playing for the Cuban national team in 2003 and many may remember him tearing the hide off the ball in the '09 World Baseball Classic when he hit .458 with one double, three triples, two home runs, five runs and five RBIs in six games, even though the Cubans were eliminated by eventual title-winning Japan in the second round.

That is all behind him, though, now and the yard stick for Cespedes is succeeding in the Majors.

"I am going to try to be a better player here than I was in Cuba," he said. "This is the best baseball in the world. There's not even any comparison."

## **Mysterious Cespedes interests everyone**

By Richard Justice / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Yoenis Cespedes seemed completely at ease from the moment he slipped into his new uniform Saturday afternoon.

There are so many things the A's just don't know about him and things they won't know for a long time as he adjusts to a new culture, new teammates and a new level of baseball.

In these first days of Spring Training, they've been blown away by his work ethic and intensity. At one point, Cespedes had to be ordered out of the batting cage as he pushed himself through round after round of batting practice.

Still, the A's just don't know how good he's going to be or how quickly he's going to help them. They believe he was worth a four-year, \$36 million commitment because of his package of skills and his work ethic.

Beyond that, the whole thing is a leap of faith.

"We know less about this guy than anybody in camp," A's manager Bob Melvin said Saturday. "It's a huge question."

Melvin knows a bit more about him after watching him walk, single and homer in three plate appearances against the Reds on Saturday afternoon.

Melvin batted him second in the batting order and put him in center field. With Coco Crisp also on the roster, Cespedes may end up playing somewhere other than center, but those things will be figured out in the months ahead.

For one day, it was smiles all around.

When Melvin began to break down Cespedes' first game, he began with a first-inning walk off Reds starter Johnny Cueto.

"This is the day we were waiting for, to watch him in games," Melvin said. "There was a pretty bright spotlight on him today, so for him to be able to go up there and take a walk the first at-bat impressed me as much as the other at-bats. Certainly, they got better and better as it went along."

Yes, they got better. He grounded a single up the middle to drive in a run in his second at-bat, and then with two strikes on him in his third plate appearance, he fouled off three straight Jeff Francis offspeed pitches.

That's when Francis tried to get a fastball in on his hands. When the ball drifted back over the plate, Cespedes hit a booming home run to left field.

"Like good hitters do, they wait for a pitcher to make a mistake and fight off pitcher's pitches," Francis said. "He did a good job fouling them off. I don't think he put great swings on them, but I think he was off balance and did a good job fighting them off."

And?

"I messed up," Francis said. "He took advantage of it, and that's what good hitters do. He's a darn good athlete."

Later, Cespedes sat at a small table surrounded by reporters at one end of the A's clubhouse. With so many new things being thrown at him, this simply was one more, and he seemed curious about the whole thing as translator Ariel Prieto relayed the questions.

"He feels great," Prieto said. "He's happy, because he can see the results he had today. Makes him feel good."

The Reds said they used no scouting reports on Cespedes, but Cueto and Francis threw him a steady diet of changeups and breaking pitches. Cespedes responded by showing both plate discipline and power.

"It looked like he has some idea at home plate," Cueto said.

But it'll be a long time until anyone knows how good Cespedes can be. His outfield defense hasn't been great, but that could improve with work.

He's just 5-foot-10, but has big hands and a large lower body. Of the dozens of scouts who've seen him through the years, virtually all of them thought he was good enough to play in the Major Leagues.

Whether Cespedes will be an impact player or not is another matter.

"He doesn't want the fans to worry about him," Prieto said. "He'll do the best he can to show everybody what he has. He's going to try and be a better player here than he was in Cuba."

### **Colon just as impressive as Cespedes**

By Barry M. Bloom / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- It may have been a big day for Yoenis Cespedes, but Saturday was just as big for Bartolo Colon as the A's downed the Reds, 6-3, at Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

The Cuban-born Cespedes homered and had an RBI single in his first three Cactus League at-bats, and veteran right-hander Colon set down the Reds on one run and three hits with four strikeouts over four innings. Colon threw 52 pitches, 39 for strikes.

Colon, who pitched last year with the Yankees after missing the entire 2010 season because of right shoulder and elbow injuries, is slated to start the A's second game of the season against the Mariners at the Tokyo Dome on March 29, so he's on an accelerated schedule this spring.

"You know he's throwing strikes when he's around the plate," A's manager Bob Melvin said after the game. "A lot of times in Spring Training, guys like that get hit around a little bit. He's got a quick arm. He'll be ready for his start on the 29th."

Reds third baseman Juan Francisco had the only extra-base hit off him -- a fourth-inning double. Colon took Todd Frazier's grounder off a leg during the fourth, but he stayed in to retire the next hitter and finish the inning.

Reds right-handed starter Johnny Cueto walked Cespedes on six pitches in the first inning and allowed Cespedes' RBI single in the second.

"I don't think about any names. I just want to get this guy out," Cueto said. "He looks like he had some idea at home plate."

Cespedes blasted his homer off left-hander Jeff Francis to open the bottom half of the fourth. Francis had just come into the game and faced the leadoff-hitting Cespedes, throwing a plethora of breaking balls that the right-handed hitter kept fouling off to the left side. Cespedes had fouled off four consecutive pitches before launching a fastball over the left-field fence.

Manny Ramirez returned as the A's designated hitter on Saturday after missing three games because of a sore back. He went 0-for-3, and reached on an error in his final at-bat.

**Reds up next:** Third baseman Scott Rolen is batting .556 (5-for-9) with two RBIs and appears to be feeling good after an injury-filled 2011. Rolen and the Reds will host an Angels split-squad on Sunday in Goodyear, Ariz., at 4:05 p.m. ET. Jay Bruce will also play and serve as the designated hitter and get at least four at-bats. Mat Latos is scheduled to make his second spring start, and will be followed by Brett Tomko, Ron Mahay, Jose Arredondo and Logan Ondrusek.

**Athletics up next:** Melvin said that Cespedes will be the DH in Sunday's home game against the Royals at 1:05 p.m. PT. He added that he had made no further plans for Cespedes for games next week, saying that he was just taking it day to day for the moment. The A's are still searching for three starters at the back of their rotation, and one of the top candidates, left-hander Tommy Milone, will make his second start. He'll face Royals left-hander Bruce Chen.

### **A's spring training: Cespedes hits homer in first game**

ASSOCIATED PRESS



PHOENIX — Athletics manager Bob Melvin joked before the game that he'd love to see Yoenis Cespedes hit three homers, steal three bases and rob a hitter of a home run in center field in his first major-league spring-training game Saturday.

He gladly settled for what the Cuban defector delivered — a solo homer and an RBI single — in Oakland's 6-3 win over the Cincinnati Reds.

What impressed Melvin more than those two big hits, however, was Cespedes' patience in his first at-bat, when the swift center fielder didn't take a single swing while drawing a walk off right-hander Johnny Cueto.

"This is the day we were waiting for," Melvin said. "There was a pretty bright spotlight on him today, so for him to be able to go up there and take a walk his first at-bat, I think impressed me as much as the other at-bats.

"Certainly, they got better and better as they went along: a bullet up the middle and then with two strikes fouled off some pitches and then finally got one he could handle and hit it out," Melvin said. "So, I would think he's going to go home tonight with a smile on his face, feeling pretty good about his first day."

Indeed.

"I feel great, Cespedes said with former A's pitcher and fellow Cuban native Ariel Prieto interpreting for him. "The results I had today make me feel good."

Cespedes, 26, had spent his first week in the A's camp acclimating himself both on and off the diamond before getting his first taste of big-league pitching.

Cespedes walked on six pitches in his first at-bat. He came out swinging his second time up, singling up the middle to drive in Josh Donaldson from third. In the fourth, he crushed a fastball over the left field wall off lefty Jeff Francis after fouling off several off-speed pitches, putting Oakland ahead 6-1.

Cueto (1-1), the Reds opening-day starter, allowed three runs and five hits — two earned — in two innings.

"Today was one of those days I was feeling too strong. I was trying to throw the same speed but my arm felt so good I was overthrowing," Cueto said. "I didn't think about any names. I just wanted to get this guy out."

Bartolo Colon (1-0) pitched four innings, allowing one run on four hits in his second spring start. He struck out four.

Cespedes said he didn't swing his first time up because "I wanted to try to recognize pitches."

He wanted to be aggressive in his second at-bat with runners in scoring position. In his third time up, he got to strut his stuff.

"You could see him telling himself stay back, stay back, and then he didn't miss the heater," Melvin said. "I really think that the first (at-bat) was as impressive in that a guy that really wanted to go up there and hit and show what he has took a walk. So, all the way around all his at-bats were good today. And he looked comfortable in center field.

This isn't an easy center field with the sun right behind us."

Cespedes even crouched a bit and one-handed a high flyball to end the fourth.

"He looks to have some flair," Melvin said. "For what seems to be a very serious guy, he showed a little bit more of a lighter side out in the field as he got more comfortable and the game went on."

The A's wanted to ease Cespedes into the lineup after his arrival last Sunday, and they've had Prieto hanging out with him to help him adjust to his new surroundings.

"He seems to be acclimating very well all the way around at a pretty quick pace," Melvin said.

There was a buzz at Phoenix Municipal Stadium with the 6,644 fans and even players on both teams eager to see Cespedes' debut. Pitchers who weren't throwing and position players who weren't in the lineup and weren't required to

stay for the game packed the dugout anyway.

"We had a full boat in here and we don't play the Reds" in the regular season, Melvin said.

Cincinnati manager Dusty Baker was curious about Cespedes, too.

"I talked to a couple Cuban friends in Miami. they said he was a pretty good ballplayer," Baker said. "I'm surprised the A's signed him. I thought they didn't have any money."

Yes, the signing of Cespedes to a \$36 million, four-year contract, the highest ever for a Cuban defector, is a real splash for a low-budget franchise that surprisingly outbid some big-spending clubs for a player who starred for Cuba in the 2009 World Baseball Classic, where he hit .458 with two home runs and five RBIs in six games.

That was about all the A's had to go on before Saturday's game.

All his YouTube videos were impressive, as were his BP sessions.

But this was his first big test.

"He was great," teammate Jemile Weeks said. "That's how you're supposed to come onto the scene."

The Athletics expect he'll only get more comfortable now.

"You want to get all those firsts out of the way, your first game, your first hit," Melvin said. "And it gets you that much closer to your teammates, too, when you're productive and you have something to shake hands in the dugout about.

"It's easier to feel good about what you're doing and fit it when you have a game like that."

## NOTES

Cespedes will DH today against the Royals and bat third.

Manny Ramirez went 0 for 3 in his return to the lineup after missing a few days because of lower back stiffness. He reached base twice on two errors.

### **Melvin shows he's a "players' manager"**

Csnbayarea.com

In the second inning of the A's spring training game against the Reds, Bartolo Colon was in a bit of a jam with runners on second and third and two outs.

Colon induced a fly ball to left field, and Seth Smith made the one-handed catch to end the inning, only Smith didn't realize it. He fired a shot to home, thinking the inning was continuing.

A's manager Bob Melvin was in the midst of an in-game interview with Comcast SportsNet broadcasters Glen Kuiper and Ray Fosse, who jumped on the lapse in focus.

"That was the third out!" Ray Fosse exclaimed.

Melvin immediately came to the defense of his outfielder, responding without missing a beat, "Trust me, he's working on that. Sometimes you got to take a little extra time to do that, he found the opportunity right there."

Melvin made it clear in his time with the A's last year he is a manager who defends his players at all costs. It's early in 2012, but it doesn't look like anything has changed.

### **Manny Ramirez making most of second chance**

Associated Press

A bat in his hands and a smile on his face, Manny Ramirez bounded through the Oakland Athletics' clubhouse Saturday hollering, "I'm back in the lineup! I'm back in the lineup!"

Yes, Manny is back.

The sullied slugger with the long dreadlocks and red do-rag is getting a do-over.

He's trying to make it back to the major leagues a year after retiring from the Tampa Bay Rays rather than serve a 100-game suspension for a second positive drug test.

He's soaking it all in this time around, too.

"I'm just blessed to be here and playing the game that I love," he said.

It shows in his work ethic and the way he interacts with his new teammates, especially Cuban defector Yoenis Cespedes.

The 39-year-old clubhouse cutup was excited to return to the Athletics' lineup this weekend after spending a few days hitting in the team's minor league camp with Cespedes, who made his spring training debut Saturday against the Cincinnati Reds.

Ramirez is eager to go back about proving he still has some pop at the plate.

"I'm back, I feel great," Ramirez said before his first game since getting scratched from the A's lineup Wednesday with lower back stiffness.

Ramirez is still chipping off the rust after nearly a year away from the game.

The 12-time All-Star signed a minor league deal with the A's last month that's worth \$500,000 if he's added to the big league roster - that's about 100 times less than he made in his two seasons with the Los Angeles Dodgers. He's allowed to participate in spring training games and exhibition games scheduled in Japan, but must serve a 50-game suspension before he can play in the regular season for Oakland should he make the club.

The A's will have a bargain on their hands if Ramirez can return to the level that made him one of the most feared hitters in baseball.

Ramirez just wants to show he can still play so he can do right by the game that gave him fame and fortune and to honor his wife and kids who stuck by him through difficult times, he said.

"I'm just so happy to be here. I never thought I was going to get another chance," he said.

There's a skip in his step as he tries to right his wrongs.

"Absolutely. He tells me every day how lucky he feels to be able to be here and to have another opportunity, how blessed he is," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "And it's good to see. He's very energetic. He's one of the first in the cages every day and one of the last ones to leave. His work ethic for a younger group of guys goes a long way.

"Not only is he a big help for Cespedes but for our young group to see how he works and how he works at his craft and, really, he'll say a few things to some of the hitters, too," Melvin added. "I think maybe in the past he's been a bit more reserved to what he does, but I think he's probably a little bit more open now to talking about what he does. And he's done it pretty well."

When Ramirez arrived in camp, he was accompanied by his wife, Juliana, and two sons. Juliana occasionally put her hand on Ramirez as he spoke about the difficulties - he did not address specifics - he's endured since telling Major League Baseball he was retiring a week into the 2011 season. He was arrested last September for allegedly hitting his wife during a domestic altercation.

"Sometimes you don't appreciate what you have until you lose it, and that's what happened to me," Ramirez said.

"Now I appreciate my family more, my kids, the game. I've got a beautiful wife, I've got my kids, my family and I'm getting my career back. It's been a blessing."

On Saturday, Ramirez said he wanted to leave the game the right way, whenever that is, so that he can leave a legacy his children can be proud of.

"That's what I'm doing because nobody's perfect in this world," Ramirez said. "I've got problems. You've got problems. Everybody's got problems. I'm going to keep playing because God has given me the power to keep going." Ramirez will remain in extended spring training while he serves his suspension, though Melvin said he foresees having him work out with the team in Oakland for a series here and there before he's eligible to play 10 games in the minors. "Once fans come in the stands he has to go away, but it would break up the monotonous grind of being at extended (spring training) every day," Melvin said.

Don't worry, Ramirez said, he's not going to get bored.

"Oh, I love it," he said of the prospect of facing prospects. "I'm blessed to be back in baseball. I'm working on everything. I feel great. They gave me a chance. I'm just going to do my best. I'm doing something that I love."

Ramirez, the career leader in postseason home runs (29) and RBIs (78), said he has no expectations other than to show he can play. Asked what his goals were, he said, "To be there for my kids when they need me."

A career .312 career hitter who's 14th on baseball's all-time home run list with 555, will wear the number 1 - as in a new start - because his first choice, 7, belonged to infielder Adam Rosales.

So far, Ramirez has been the engaging, gregarious, hardworking teammate the A's were hoping for and not the sulking slugger some fans feared would show up.

"He's having fun, he's joking around, I mean, he keeps the clubhouse loose," catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "The one thing we see all the time is when he's here, he's here to work. And he works hard. That's something us young guys can take out because he's in the cage just taking hundreds of swings. He takes young hitters under his wing. That's awesome."