

Oakland A's: Yoenis Cespedes will start in center field; Coco Crisp moves to left

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Yoenis Cespedes will start the season as the A's center fielder and Coco Crisp will move to left field, manager Bob Melvin announced Monday.

Crisp will make his debut in left Tuesday in an exhibition against the Chicago Cubs. With Cespedes in center and Josh Reddick in right, it will provide the first look at the A's projected outfield for their March 28 season opener against the Seattle Mariners in Tokyo.

Melvin's announcement was his first confirmation that Cespedes, who signed a four-year, \$36 million contract March 3, will be on the team's opening-day roster.

But that's no surprise given the potential the A's believe he has and the money they are paying him.

"I think Cespedes is more comfortable in center, Reddick is more comfortable in right," Melvin said. "With Coco, his versatility probably works against him in this respect. To maneuver that all around would be difficult. I still feel like Coco is one of the best center fielders in the game."

Crisp started in center for the A's, when healthy, the past two seasons. But the A's want Cespedes, who defected from Cuba last summer, to be as comfortable as possible as he makes the transition to the major leagues.

When the A's agreed to terms with Cespedes in February, Crisp told the San Francisco Chronicle he should remain in center field unless "(Cespedes) is a demigod come down from the heavens."

He reiterated his desire to stay there upon reporting to camp.

On Monday, Crisp expressed disappointment but didn't come across as bitter.

"I was a little hurt obviously," Crisp said. "I think everybody here would like everything to play out in a fashion they want. You just have to deal with everything as (best) as you possibly can and try to be the best you can with the new situation."

Crisp has played 212 games in left field during his career, according to baseball-reference.com, but none since 2005 with Cleveland. Melvin planned to start Crisp in left Monday in a 6-5 victory over the Arizona Diamondbacks but instead let him devote a day to working there in pregame drills.

"The ball comes off the bat different," Crisp said. "The angle is different. It felt different, weird, I'm not going to lie. It's going to take some adjusting."

Cespedes said through interpreter Ariel Prieto that he was happy to play center but was willing to move if the A's had wanted him to. He also said Crisp was giving him pointers on playing the position in the majors.

Melvin stressed that the outfield alignment isn't set in stone past Japan. The A's will keep evaluating Cespedes in center once the team returns to the Bay Area and plays four exhibitions before resuming the season April 6.

Cespedes is just 3 for 20 in seven exhibitions, and two of those hits came in his first game, when he homered.

He has waved at a few breaking balls for strikeouts and will continue seeing a steady diet of those. Defensively, Melvin said, Cespedes hasn't been challenged enough to get a good read on him.

Over the weekend, Hall of Famer Rickey Henderson tutored him on baserunning.

Cespedes was picked off first by Arizona catcher Miguel Montero on Sunday. But the A's had been working with Cespedes on secondary leads, and Melvin didn't blame him for not getting back in time.

"There are a lot of variables with him you don't have to deal with other players," Melvin said. "There's going to be some mistakes, and there's going to be some aggressive mistakes. (But) you have to see how far you can go."

Oakland A's notebook: Team sends top pitching prospect Jarrod Parker to minors

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

A's right-hander Jarrod Parker was sent to the minor leagues Monday, shortly after allowing seven walks in 32/3 innings during Oakland's 6-5 victory over the Arizona Diamondbacks.

"It's pretty obvious I need to fine-tune some things," Parker said.

He is rated the A's top pitching prospect by Baseball America, and he received rave reviews during camp for his stuff.

A's manager Bob Melvin said just because Parker is being optioned and won't accompany the team to Tokyo for the season opener doesn't mean he can't end up as the fifth starter. Because of off-days, Melvin doesn't need a fifth starter until April 17.

It is conceivable Parker could round into form and be recalled, but he will need to iron out his command issues. He allowed 13 walks in 11 innings over four games, though his ERA is a solid 3.27.

"He is going to be part of this team, if not right now, then certainly in the future," Melvin said. "We feel like he's as talented a guy as we have here."

Parker allowed just two runs Monday but conceded he was trying to be too fine against his former team. The A's acquired Parker from the Diamondbacks as the centerpiece of the Trevor Cahill trade in December.

As things are shaking out, the A's rotation could go Brandon McCarthy, Bartolo Colon, Tom Milone, Tyson Ross and Graham Godfrey. Melvin hasn't announced his starters beyond McCarthy and Colon, who will pitch the two games in Tokyo against Seattle on March 28-29.

The A's leave Thursday for Tokyo and can bring 30 players. Melvin said every infielder currently in camp will make the trip, though they won't necessarily be on the 25-man roster for both regular-season games.

That group includes utility infielder Wes Timmons, who has spent 10 seasons in the minors and never played in a major league game.

Along with Parker, the A's sent down catchers Derek Norris and Ryan Ortiz, and outfielders Jeff Fiorentino and Brandon Moss.

The demotion of Norris and Ortiz ensures that Anthony Recker will break camp as the backup catcher behind Kurt Suzuki.

Colon will throw in a Triple-A game Wednesday in his final tuneup for Tokyo, so Brad Peacock will start against the Kansas City Royals in Surprise.

Manny Ramirez, Josh Reddick and Brandon Allen all hit their second homers of the spring as the A's improved to a Cactus League-best 14-4-1.

Inside the A's II: A's send Jarrod Parker to minors

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, March 19th, 2012, 4:49 pm

Right-hander Jarrod Parker was sent to the minors Monday, shortly after allowing seven walks in the A's 6-5 victory over the Arizona Diamondbacks.

"It's pretty obvious I need to fine-tune some things," Parker said while packing his belongings inside the clubhouse at Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

Parker is rated the A's top pitching prospect by Baseball America, and his raw stuff received rave reviews from within the organization during camp. He entered Monday with a 1-1 record and 2.45 ERA in three spring starts, with nine strikeouts but also six walks in 7 1/3 innings.

He lost his handle on the strike zone Monday – though he allowed just two runs – and he admitted he was trying a little too hard against his former team. The A's acquired Parker from the Diamondbacks as the centerpiece of the Trevor Cahill trade in December.

With Parker out of the mix and Brad Peacock also having struggled, the A's starting rotation could go Brandon McCarthy, Bartolo Colon, Tom Milone, Tyson Ross and Graham Godfrey.

A's manager Bob Melvin hasn't announced his starters beyond McCarthy and Colon.

Inside the A's II: It's official — Yoenis Cespedes to start season as A's center fielder, Coco Crisp will play left

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 3/19/2012, 10:55am

A's manager Bob Melvin made it official Monday that Yoenis Cespedes will start the season as his center fielder and that Coco Crisp will move to left field. Crisp will debut in left in Tuesday's exhibition against the Cubs, in preparation for the A's playing their season opener March 28 against the Seattle Mariners in Tokyo.

It's also the first definitive confirmation Melvin gave that Cespedes, who joined the A's on a four-year \$36 million contract part way through spring training, will travel to Japan and be on the team's opening day roster. But that's hardly a shock given the hype surrounding him and the money he's making.

Melvin stressed that the outfield isn't set in stone past Japan — the A's will keep evaluating Cespedes in center once the team returns to the Bay Area and plays four exhibitions before resuming the regular season April 6. But there's no reason to believe Cespedes won't stay in center if he plays capably and adjusts well to major league pitching. Josh Reddick is slated to start in right field.

"I think Cespedes is more comfortable in center, Reddick is more comfortable in right," Melvin said. "To maneuver that all around would be difficult. With Coco, his versatility probably works against him in this respect. Yet I still feel like Coco is one of the best center fielders in the game."

Immediately after Cespedes agreed to a contract in early February, Crisp was outspoken in his desire to hold on to the center field job. Crisp also made it clear when he reported to camp that he feels like he's the team's best option in center. But Melvin said Crisp handled the news well when he talked to him Monday morning. Crisp was on the field and unavailable when Melvin made the announcement.

"He was a pro about it," Melvin said. "He certainly wants to play center field. Pride does factor in for a guy like that, and I don't blame him for being a little disappointed."

Melvin also said every infielder currently in camp will make the Japan trip, though they won't necessarily be on the 25-man roster for both regular-season games. That group includes utility infielders Adam Rosales, Eric Sogard and Wes Timmons. Were Timmons to be on the active roster against the Mariners, it mark his first major league regular season game after 10 seasons in the minors.

—You can also read my online story, which has some of same info but also includes updates on this morning's other A's roster moves.

A's pick Céspedes over Crisp to start in center

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Phoenix -- - Before spring training, Coco Crisp said it would take "a demigod come down from the heavens" to be better in center field than he is.

Yoenis Céspedes might not be better than Crisp - A's manager Bob Melvin was quick to say Monday that he still believes Crisp is one of the best in baseball in center - but the rookie will man center field for Oakland on Opening Day in Japan and Crisp will play in left.

"Coco was a pro about it," Melvin said. "I don't blame him for being disappointed."

Since the day Céspedes agreed to a deal with the A's in mid-February, all indications were that the team intended this alignment, largely to increase Céspedes' comfort level as he adjusts to a new country.

Crisp said Monday that he was a little hurt to learn that he'd be moving from center field; one reason he'd signed with the A's rather than the Rays in January was because he believed that center-field job to be his.

He is resigned to the switch, though. "What's best for the team, that's what I want," Crisp said. "If I'm going to go play a Gold Glove left field, I'm going to do the best I can."

Céspedes said through coach Ariel Prieto that he's happy to be in center but he also would be OK moving to a corner spot "because I know how important Crisp is." Céspedes said that Crisp has been helping him in the outfield.

Crisp has played left field, 216 career games, but none since 2005.

Crisp manned left during batting practice Monday and, he said, "It felt different, weird, I'm not going to lie. But I made all the reads, I caught all the balls. That's encouraging."

A's option Jarrod Parker to Sacramento

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Phoenix -- - **Jarrod Parker**, the key acquisition in the deal that sent right-hander **Trevor Cahill** to Arizona in December, was optioned to Triple-A Sacramento on Monday after allowing seven walks in a start against his former team.

Parker, downcast by the unexpected development, said that the A's have asked him to fine-tune some things. There is little doubt the team expects Parker to have a rotation spot at some point this year - and it could be sooner rather than later.

All Monday's move means for certain is that Parker will remain in Arizona for regular work while the team is in Japan.

"I know he's disappointed about not going to Japan, but that doesn't mean he's not in the running for the fifth-starter spot," manager **Bob Melvin** said. "He is going to be part of this team, if not right now, certainly in the future. He's as talented a guy as we have."

Oakland can get by with four starters through April 16. The starters left in camp are **Brandon McCarthy**, **Bartolo Colon**, **Tommy Milone**, **Tyson Ross**, **Graham Godfrey** and **Brad Peacock**. Parker entered Monday with a 2.45 ERA. Peacock's is 12.86.

The A's also cut their hottest hitter, nonroster man **Brandon Moss**, who was 10-for-19 (.526) but couldn't crack the crowded outfield.

"I knew the situation coming in," Moss said. "I can't complain about the number of at-bats I got. I had plenty, I got a fair look and I hope I put myself in the back of their minds."

Jeff Fiorentino, also sent out, was 3-for-8 and was playing well defensively. Melvin says he wouldn't hesitate to use either during the regular season if needed.

The A's optioned catchers **Derek Norris** and **Ryan Ortiz** to minor-league camp.

Briefly: Colon will start in a minor-league game Wednesday. He has fully recovered from a blister on his right middle finger. ... Melvin said the A's will keep two catchers, rather than having catcher-turned-third baseman **Josh Donaldson** back up

Kurt Suzuki, meaning that, as expected, **Anthony Recker** will be the backup catcher. ... Nonroster infielder **Wes Timmons**, who hasn't appeared in the major leagues, will be on the Japan trip, and he couldn't be more thrilled - especially because it wasn't what he was expecting when he was called to Melvin's office. "With some other nonroster guys getting cut, my assumption was, 'Well, it was fun while it lasted,' " Timmons said. "So it caught me off guard. It's great."

A's 6, Diamondbacks 5

Notable: **Josh Reddick** hit a three-run homer in the first inning and is 13-for-36 (.361). ... **Manny Ramirez** blasted a solo homer to center in the third, his second home run of the spring. ... **Brandon Allen** also hit a solo shot. ... **Collin Cowgill** had two hits, including a triple, and is 17-for-39 (.436).

Quotable: "We knew it would take a while for him to get locked in, and the more at-bats he's had, the better he's swung the bat."

- Manager Bob Melvin on Ramirez, who had retired early last season after a positive test for performance-enhancing substances.

Today's game: Cubs (**Rodrigo Lopez**) vs. A's (**Brandon McCarthy**), 1:05 p.m. Webcast only.

Drumbeat IV: A's send Jarrod Parker down, but he's still in fifth-starter race

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Phoenix Muni, 3/19/2012, 4:24pm

Jarrod Parker clearly was downcast when I spoke to him after he was sent down to minor-league camp 30 minutes ago, but I'm not convinced that we need to read too much into this beyond the fact that Parker won't be going to Japan and he won't be on the Opening Day roster.

UPDATE: Manager Bob Melvin just confirmed that Parker is, as I'd thought, still in the fifth-starter hunt despite being optioned out to Triple-A Sacramento. "I know he's disappointed about not going to Japan, but that doesn't mean he's not in the running for the fifth-starter spot," Melvin said "He is going to be part of this team, if not right now, certainly in the future. He's as talented a guy as we have here."

The A's don't need even a third starter until April 9, and they can go without a fifth starter until April 17. Parker will be here in Arizona, getting in plenty of work – and it's conceivable that the team could still target him for a rotation spot if the other candidates stumble before then. Parker has the best stuff among the A's young pitchers, and as manager Bob Melvin emphasized today, when Parker is in the strike zone, he's "phenomenal." Parker, 23, is the most high-profile of all of the A's offseason additions; acquired in the Trevor Cahill deal with Arizona, he is a former first-round pick who is considered a potential future star.

Parker walked seven men today, but he was facing his former team and he clearly was a little over-anxious, so Melvin said that's taken into consideration.

Parker told me that he was just told to go to minor-league camp and to fine-tune some things.

Right now, among those still on the roster, the starters are: Brandon McCarthy, Bartolo Colon, Tommy Milone, Tyson Ross, Graham Godfrey and Brad Peacock, but Peacock also has a rough spring, with a 12.86 ERA. He's pitched better than that would indicate, but not as well as Parker – Parker entered today's game with a 2.45 ERA.

The smart money right now is for the A's to use Milone, Ross and Godfrey in those final three rotation spots, but Parker would definitely be the first option if anyone struggles – or if he gets his command sharpened up, as expected, while here in Arizona. I know the A's sometimes like to have young hotshots start the season a little later, to avoid the service clock from ticking too soon, but in this instance, I think Parker and Peacock will be with the big-league club when the A's feel they're most ready to succeed, without too much emphasis on service time and arbitration clocks. But hey, if being on the big-league club in mid-April, late April, mid-May rather than on Opening Day means an extra full season of Parker, I don't think the A's will mind that at all.

We hope to speak to Bob Melvin or David Forst when they get out of a meeting; if there is anything of note, I'll add it here. (Update: See above. Also, I would not at all be surprised to see Peacock also stay here to work on things, too. It sounds as if Travis Schlichting and Evan Scribner will be on the Japan trip to provide length in the bullpen.)

Drumbeat III: A's show power vs. Arizona: Reddick, Ramirez, Allen go deep

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Phoenix Muni, 3/19/2012, 3:32pm

The A's aren't a team expected to outslug opponents much this season, but in today's 6-5 win over Arizona, Josh Reddick hit a two-run homer and Manny Ramirez and Brandon Allen hit solo shots. The A's improved their Cactus League-best record to 14-4-1.

Reddick has quite a bit of pop for a player who is, as manager Bob Melvin put it, "slight." He's thin and wiry, but he generates some power with quick hands and good extension.

It's funny: After the trade in which the A's sent Andrew Bailey and Ryan Sweeney to Boston for Reddick and two minor-leaguers, one scout told me the A's "traded Ryan Sweeney to get Ryan Sweeney." But now that I've seen Reddick more regularly, I'd call him the opposite of Sweeney. Sweeney is built like a strong safety and has almost no power. Reddick is a reed and he just crushes balls out of the park. Were that the straight-up deal, I'd say advantage A's and in a big way.

Ramirez's homer was his second of the spring, and he also got robbed of a hit when his sinking liner to left in the first inning was caught. He entered the day hitting .133; one scout looked at the stats before the game and told me, "I'm not worried about Manny. He's a professional hitter. He'll be just fine. He'll hit."

Allen is in a knockdown fight with Kila Ka'aihue for the first-base job, and both are out of options. Ka'aihue homered yesterday, both have two this spring, and Allen is batting .xxx to Ka'aihue's xxx. The A's are keeping Daric Barton on the roster but leaving him behind in Arizona while the team is in Japan, a pretty clear sign the first-base battle has not been decided and that the A's are not set on either Allen or Ka'aihue. Had one or the other really jumped out and grabbed the spot, it'd be a lot easier decision for the team. Maybe it just winds up Barton's job yet again, if he shows he's healthy and that last year's dropoff in the field and at the plate was a result of that shoulder injury, repaired last summer.

A's starter Jarrod Parker might have pitched his way out of an early-season rotation spot by walking seven men in 3 2/3 innings today, but there is little doubt that Parker will be in Oakland's rotation at some point this season, probably much sooner than later. He has the best stuff of all the A's young pitchers, and he could be a front-line type starter for years.

Parker might have been a little amped up facing his former team, and he said after his outing that he was "a little anxious" and trying to do too much. He called the seven walks "brutal" and called the outing "not acceptable, really."

Drumbeat II: Yoenis Cespedes will be in center, Coco Crisp in left in Japan

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser, 3/19/2012, 11:04am

Just as the A's signaled from the day Yoenis Cespedes agreed to a deal with the team, the Cuban star will be in center field on Opening Day in Tokyo, and Coco Crisp, one of the most talented center fielders in the game, will shift over to left.

Manager Bob Melvin said that Crisp took the news like a pro, even though he's disappointed and would prefer to play center. Melvin agrees that Crisp is one of the best at that position, and Crisp told me after Cespedes agreed to a deal that it would take a "demigod come down from the heavens" to be better than he is at the spot.

UPDATE: Crisp says he was "hurt" to learn he'll be moved to left, but he also said that if that's where he is, he's going to try to be a Gold Glove left fielder. He played out there today during batting practice and it felt "different, weird," he said. Different angles, different routes he'll have to get accustomed to.

The A's all along have felt that if Cespedes is most comfortable in center, which is where he has played his entire life, that he'd stay there. He has enough other things to get used to: a new country, a new language, a new league, new teammates, pretty much everything. This is one thing that the A's can do to increase his comfort level.

UPDATE: Cespedes, through interpreter Ariel Prieto, says he's happy to be in center, but he'd be willing to play a corner outfield spot too because he knows how valuable Crisp is in center. He also said that Crisp has been helping him in the outfield already during batting practice and drills.

Crisp has played plenty in left, and as Melvin said this morning, Crisp's versatility almost hurts him. He's the guy who has to move because he's the one who can play every spot exceedingly well.

In other news this morning, Melvin said Wes Timmons – and all the infielders remaining in camp – will go to Japan. The A's can take two non-roster players, so they don't have to make a decision on Timmons right away. He's another guy who has done nothing but help himself all spring.

And no surprise here: Melvin says that they'll carry two catchers and not lean on catcher-turned-third baseman Josh Donaldson to back up Kurt Suzuki. That pretty much nails down the spot for Anthony Recker, which was pretty much a given once Landon Powell was released.

In today's earlier Drumbeat, I wrote about the outfield crunch finally catching up to non-roster players Brandon Moss and Jeff Fiorentino, who both had terrific camps.

I asked Melvin about cutting Moss, who was batting .526 and he said, "I was trying to come up with a reason for Moss about why he was being sent down and I couldn't come up with one. But it is what it is. He understands. He can count."

Melvin said he wouldn't hesitate to use either Moss or Fiorentino if the A's need outfield help later in the year.

He also said he liked what he saw from catcher Derek Norris, who was part of the Gio Gonzalez trade. Melvin said the scouting report was that Norris was a better offensive player than defensive, but he was impressed with his work behind the plate.

As for Chris Carter and Michael Taylor, sent down last night, Melvin said both need to go down and dominate at the Triple-A level. Considering that Carter already has turned in some strong seasons at Triple-A, I asked Melvin what more Carter could do there, and he said that Carter must show those things at the big-league level, and he hasn't yet. It's taken Carter time to adjust to each level, and, Melvin said, in the big leagues, you just aren't afforded that extended kind of time to perform.

"It has to happen at the big-league level, and it hasn't at this point," Melvin said. "But we still feel Chris has a lot left to offer at the big-league level."

Drumbeat I: A's cut four more today, including hot-hitting Brandon Moss

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Phoenix Muni, 3/19/2012, 9:59am

Wow, it's tough to crack Oakland's outfield, even with an expanded roster for Japan: The team sent out non-roster outfielders Brandon Moss and Jeff Fiorentino today, and both were having very strong camps. Moss was batting .526 after three hits yesterday, Fiorentino .375 with several excellent plays in the field.

"I did everything I could when I got the opportunity," Fiorentino told me this morning as he was packing up his locker. "I know everyone here played their hearts out. I worked my tail off to give myself a chance, it's just a tough camp. It's not just the number of guys, it's the number of good guys. Moss is hitting over .500, Josh Reddick is hitting .400, Seth Smith has a great at-bat every time, it seems like everyone does. What are you going to do? I'll keep my head up and work hard. I've been around long enough to know how this game is, and I'll be ready when they need me."

Moss went to the Dominican this winter specifically to be ready from the get-go, and he was. Yesterday, manager Bob Melvin said, "Moss is a hitter, no doubt. He's showed that all spring."

Moss told me this morning that he'd figured it would be a longshot for him as the A's acquired outfielder after outfielder this winter.

"I knew the situation coming in," he said. "I can't complain about the number of at-bats I got, I had plenty, I got a fair look, and I hope I put myself in the back of their minds."

"It's just unfortunate how things go sometimes. Sometimes, it's not in the cards."

Both men had starred in the 2008 series in Tokyo between Oakland and Boston; Moss hit a ninth-inning homer to tie the season opener, which his Red Sox then went on to win; Fiorentino provided a key hit in the A's win in game two there. Both had hoped to return to Japan with the team this week, and really, they did nothing to hurt their chances.

The team just has too many outfielder on the 40-man roster, and need to get down to 30 players, total, by Friday. After cutting Chris Carter, Michael Taylor and Neil Wagner last night and Fiorentino, Moss and catchers Derek Norris and Ryan Ortiz this morning, the A's are down to 37 active players, and one of those is Manny Ramirez, who won't go to Japan; he is not eligible to play in the first 50 regular-season games.

Moss and Fiorentino could surface again, much as Matt Carson did for several years. They're both capable, and should the A's swing a deal for a third baseman at some point in the next month or so, it's reasonable to assume they might trade an outfielder or two, because that's an area of abundance. That might move Moss and Fiorentino up the depth charts.

Moss tells me he also plays first base. You'd think that might be a spot where he could get some time at Triple-A Sacramento, and it's not as if that's the most settled position at the big-league level. I have no idea about Moss' skill levels there, but it might be worth a shot to give him at least a try there at Sacramento now and then. The guy can definitely hit, as Melvin said.

Reddick, Manny, Allen power up vs. D-backs

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Three home runs powered the A's to a 6-5 victory over the visiting D-backs on Monday at Phoenix Municipal Stadium, marking their 10th victory in the past 11 games.

Overall, Oakland is 14-4-1 -- best in the Cactus League -- while Arizona has played to a 7-11-1 record.

Outfielder Josh Reddick got the A's on the board early in the first against right-hander Josh Collmenter with a three-run homer to right field -- his second this spring -- that scored Collin Cowgill and Eric Sogard, who reached on back-to-back singles.

The red-hot Cowgill hit a triple two innings later, scoring on Sogard's sacrifice fly just minutes before Manny Ramirez launched his second homer of the spring to dead center. Former D-backs prospect Brandon Allen, a favorite for the A's first-base job, joined the long-ball club in the fourth with a solo shot to center field.

A's starter Jarrod Parker, dealt by the D-backs in November, allowed just one hit against his former team in 3 2/3 innings. But he struggled with his command, walking seven and allowing two runs.

Collmenter went three innings for Arizona, allowing five runs on six hits. Gerardo Parra tallied an RBI single in the third inning, and Ryan Roberts collected an RBI in the fourth on a groundout.

The D-backs trimmed the lead to 6-4 in the eighth, when Cody Ransom hit a two-run homer off A's left-hander Jerry Blevins. Paul Goldschmidt made it a one-run game an inning later with a solo shot off righty Justin Souza, who finished it off for his first save of the spring.

Up next for D-backs: The D-backs return to Salt River Fields on Tuesday to take on the Giants. Trevor Bauer, the No. 3 overall pick in last year's Draft will start for the D-backs. He is expected to go four innings while another one of the organization's top prospects, Patrick Corbin, is slated to throw four innings in relief.

Up next for A's: Right-hander Brandon McCarthy is scheduled to make his final Cactus League appearance Tuesday against the visiting Cubs, marking his final tuneup before he takes the mound in Japan for a regular-season matchup with the Mariners on March 28. Behind him, appearing together for the first time in a game this spring, will be center fielder Yoenis Cespedes and left fielder Coco Crisp. First pitch is scheduled for 1:05 p.m. PT at Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

Major Lee-aque: Parker optioned

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 3/19/2012, 5:06pm

Following a seven-walk outing against his former D-backs club Monday, A's top pitching prospect Jarrod Parker talked about the need to "move on." He'll have to do that in the Minors for now.

Parker was optioned to Triple-A just an hour later, but Melvin said the move does not preclude him from the fifth-starter mix, since the A's can get by with a four-man rotation until April 17.

Still, Parker was vividly disappointed and said he was told by manager Bob Melvin he must "figure a few things out and be ready when my time comes."

Earlier in the day, the 23-year-old right-hander more than doubled his spring walk total, having entered the game with six free passes to his name, and mentioned he was maybe trying to do too much, be too fine, against familiar faces.

"Seven walks is pretty brutal," he said.

Parker, acquired by the A's in the Trevor Cahill deal in November, is finding out what most Tommy John survivors learn following their procedure, in that command is normally the last thing to come back. Melvin agreed but said Parker's fastball command, more so than his breaking stuff, should have already returned by now.

"His stuff's good when he gets it over the plate," Melvin said. "He has the stuff to get behind guys and get guys out, but you just don't want to put guys on base like he did today."

"Today didn't help," Parker said, after learning of his demotion. "I strive to be better than that, and that's what I'm going to do."

Arizona's first-round Draft pick in 2007 pitched in just one big-league game for the D-backs, tossing 5 2/3 shutout innings last year as a September callup from Double-A, where he went 11-8 with a 3.79 ERA. He compiled a 3.27 ERA with 13 walks and nine strikeouts in 11 innings this spring.

Cespedes to start in center field in Japan

A's announce Crisp will shift to left field to begin the season

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- It appears Yoenis Cespedes will remain the center of attention -- literally.

Just as the A's anticipated when signing the Cuban outfielder to a four-year, \$36 million deal, manager Bob Melvin announced Monday morning that Cespedes will start the season in center field. One of the game's best center fielders, Coco Crisp, shifts to left.

It marked the first definitive statement from Melvin that Cespedes will travel with the team to Japan and appear on the Opening Day roster, sandwiched between Crisp and right fielder Josh Reddick.

"I think that's what we go with for the time being," Melvin said. "Cespedes is more comfortable in center, Reddick is comfortable in right. To maneuver that all around would be difficult."

However, the A's skipper noted that the makeup of the outfield is not set in stone past Japan, allowing the club time to continue evaluating Cespedes in center field during the exhibition games that follow in order to assess his readiness for its home opener in the United States on April 6.

But Cespedes is likely to stay put through that time, so long as he continues to make adjustments and fare well defensively and at the plate. Entering Monday, he had just three hits in 17 at-bats (.176 average), with six strikeouts.

Adjustments will have to be made by Crisp, too. Though he was forced to make the same move seven years ago while with Cleveland when Grady Sizemore was handed the Indians' center-field job, he said this transition will be "tough." He's played 1,011 games in the big leagues, 216 in left.

"Coco's versatility probably works against him in this respect, yet I still feel like Coco is one of the best center fielders in the game," Melvin said. "He was a pro about it. He certainly wants to play center field. It's not going to be an issue for us, but pride does certainly factor in for a guy like that, and I don't blame him for being a little disappointed."

At the start of camp, before Cespedes even arrived, Crisp publicly stated he wouldn't be in favor a switch. But when approached about it Monday, following his discussion with Melvin, he was understanding of the team's decision.

"I was a little hurt, obviously," Crisp said. "It's a humbling conversation. I don't think that you take it well. You try to take it as best you can. Whenever you hear something you don't want to hear, it's hard, so I'm just trying to deal with the news as best as I can and try not to let it be a distraction."

"Different outcomes end up happening and I think they feel like this is best for the team, and I'm all for what's best for the team. So if I can go out and play a Gold Glove left field, I'm going to try to do the best I can."

In center field, the ball reads more true, Crisp said. In the corner, he'll have to again familiarize himself with different angles from which the ball comes off the bat. The 32-year-old veteran took fly balls at the position Monday and admitted it felt "different, weird."

"I just have to recalibrate myself and makes sure I take the right routes," he said. "I think once I learn how to do that, that's half the battle, and catching is the other half."

Though Crisp mentioned he'll have to remind himself he's no longer the leader of the outfield having shed himself of center-field duties, the A's likely would say otherwise. Cespedes, 26, and Reddick, 25, will rely heavily on the experienced Crisp to head the communication department.

Cespedes, through translator Ariel Prieto, said he's eager to learn from Crisp, and though "happy and excited" about maintaining his home in center field, relayed much respect to Crisp for obliging with the move and said he would do the same if the team ever asked.

A's skipper Melvin focused on present

PHOENIX -- Many managers in this situation, with a young club in a truly difficult division, would publicly give you nice, safe song and dance about what a great team this will be at some indefinite point in the future.

Not Bob Melvin, manager of the Oakland Athletics. Melvin's optimism regarding his club is as immediate as it is sincere.

"I like our club," Melvin said Monday at Phoenix Municipal Stadium. "I like what I've seen this spring. I like how the group has come together at this point. We still have some decisions to be made. The pitching still needs to be ironed out. We have a lot of good, young, talented starters here that we're still evaluating. But I like our group. I really do."

This is not, of course, the preseason prognosticators' preferred view of the A's. This club is in against some of baseball's best in the American League West. Both the Angels and the defending American League champion Rangers are not only loaded with talent, they are coming into mega-millions with new television rights deals.

The Athletics, meanwhile, traded three pitchers of established value -- Gio Gonzalez, who had won 31 games over the last two seasons, Trevor Cahill, who had been an 18-game winner, and Andrew Bailey, who had been a successful closer.

In these sorts of circumstances, it is much safer for the manager to gaze well down the road at a future that is open to subjective interpretation because it cannot be seen from here.

"Not me," Melvin says. "I'm looking forward to the next day. That's my rhetoric to the team. You know, there are some teams in our division that can probably say, 'All right, we expect to be here.' I don't expect us to be anywhere but the next day, the next game and expect to win that game. That's what I talk to these guys about."

This approach is not markedly different than the one Melvin, a former big league catcher, has taken throughout his career.

"I have experience with that," Melvin said with a smile.

This is his third Major League managing job. In the last one, with Arizona, Melvin was named the National League Manager of the Year in 2007, after winning a division title. That team achieved a statistically improbable feat, winning 90 games despite being outscored.

The degree of difficulty may be even greater in this job. But Melvin believes that his club is better than widely believed.

"People don't think our offense is very good, but I do," Melvin said. "I think our offense will be better than people think, because of the personnel that's here. We have some unknowns. Certainly our center fielder [Yoenis Cespedes] is an unknown. If we get down that road and add Manny [Ramirez] after those 50 games [of suspension], that's another potential upgrade to the offense. So I think we're an intriguing team, more so than we were three weeks before Spring Training started."

Cespedes, the widely sought Cuban outfielder, received a four-year, \$36-million deal from the A's. He meets the standard for the term "intriguing." By all reasonable reports he is a major talent, but that talent has yet to be fully tested at this level. The Athletics have made one major accommodation for Cespedes: On their trip to Japan to open the regular season with two games against the Seattle Mariners, Cespedes will play center while the previous and highly capable center fielder, Coco Crisp, will move to left.

There are other young position players around whom the A's, or any team could build. Second baseman Jemile Weeks is an exciting offensive player. Outfielder Josh Reddick proved that he could produce against Major League pitching when he played with Boston. Kurt Suzuki is coming off what was a substandard year for him offensively, but he has established himself as a big league catcher. The cupboard is not bare, although it does not appear to be as full as the cupboards in Arlington and Anaheim.

This may not count for much over the long haul, but for the moment it appears that the young Athletics have taken to heart Melvin's next-game, next-day, right-away approach. With a 6-5 victory over the Diamondbacks Monday, the Athletics improved their record to 14-4-1, best in the Cactus League.

"It's something I talked about the first day, is that winning is important no matter where you're playing, where its Spring Training, regular-season game, intersquad game, you lace your shoes up, you go out and you expect to win," Melvin said. "I told them that winning was important. I wanted the second group of guys -- typically the second wave of players dictate the outcome of games in Spring Training -- and I wanted them to take pride in that. And they have. When the first group comes out, the second wave goes in very energetic, hungry and has done very well. And where we are with our record, I'm proud of the fact that these guys take it seriously and they're out there to win."

This may not help immediately, but the A's have indisputably upgraded their farm system with the talent they received from the pitching trades, particularly the Gonzalez deal with the Nationals.

"I'm excited about where this team is going," Melvin says. "This could be the start of something that we feel is going to get better each and every year."

And that improvement, for this manager, starts not at some hazy future date, but this year, this season, here and now.

Mariners, A's set to play Japan's Tigers, Giants

Stateside, several veterans try to get back in action

By Cash Kruth / MLB.com

Casper Wells has played baseball in the United States and the Dominican Republic.

By the time Saturday comes, the Seattle outfielder will be able to cross another country -- and continent -- off the list.

Wells, his Mariners and the Oakland A's are scheduled to leave Thursday for the Far East, where they will play a slate of exhibition games against the Hanshin Tigers and Yomiuri Giants in Tokyo.

The exhibition games precede the two-game Japan Opening Series from March 28-29 at Tokyo Dome, which will count as home games for the A's.

"It's really exciting," Wells said of playing in Japan. "I've traveled with baseball to the Dominican, and I enjoyed seeing how they play the game and what their thoughts are and how important baseball is there. It'll be nice to see that in a different part of the world."

Wells should get plenty of chances to take in Japanese-style ball before Major League Baseball's 2012 season officially opens at 6:10 a.m. ET on March 28.

The Mariners and A's each will play two games against the Tigers and Giants. The Mariners are the first to play, at 11:10 p.m. ET on Saturday against the Tigers, while the A's play the Giants at 6:10 a.m. Sunday and the Tigers at 11:10 p.m. the same day. The Mariners close the exhibition slate at 6:10 a.m. Monday against Yomiuri.

This season marks the fourth time MLB will open in Japan, and the first since the Red Sox and A's played at the Tokyo Dome in 2008.

Since 1999, 10 teams have participated in international openers; the games have proven to be a hit, with more than 875,000 fans having attended 21 MLB Opening Series games in Monterrey, Mexico (1999), Tokyo (2000, 2004, 2008) and San Juan, Puerto Rico (2001).

Just like the fans who get to watch them play, the players are also eager for the experience.

"Everybody is pretty pumped to go over there," Mariners right-hander Blake Beavan said. "I don't think anybody is really looking forward to the flight, but everybody is looking forward to seeing a different part of the world and a different culture, and see how they go about their business."

"It'll be interesting to see first-hand the amount of respect shown by the Japanese culture and be part of that. I think it'll not just be good for the organization, but for the young guys like myself to experience all that."

While the Mariners and A's are in Japan, there still will be plenty of baseball back in the U.S., and as the second-to-last week of Spring Training begins, some key players are continuing to work their way back from injuries.

Braves right-hander Tim Hudson is expected to throw his first batting-practice sessions at some point this week, the next step in his recovery from offseason back surgery. Although Hudson won't be ready to pitch when the regular season begins, Atlanta hopes he can pitch at least an inning or two in a Spring Training game.

St. Louis' Chris Carpenter, who's been dealing with a bulging disc in his neck, threw to live hitters Sunday, two days after throwing his first bullpen session since March 3. Although Carpenter is unsure of when he'll be able to return, he said Sunday was a good first step.

"I was all right," Carpenter said. "It's a good step to get back out there and throw a little bit. Now we move on to the next step. If I wake up good enough tomorrow, then I'm going to go out and do that again maybe sometime soon."

Phillies second baseman Chase Utley said on Saturday that he's hoping to get back on the field this week. Utley's chronic right knee condition likely isn't ever going to go away, but with Opening Day inching closer it's imperative for the five-time All-Star to get some time in. Despite Utley not doing much of anything this spring, Phillies general manager Ruben Amaro Jr. doesn't appear to be concerned.

"I don't think there's any chance he won't be ready Opening Day," Amaro Jr. said on Thursday. "We fully expect him to be ready Opening Day."

For the Angels, designated hitter Kendrys Morales is expected to take at-bats against Major League pitchers shortly, as he continues his comeback from his broken left leg during a home-plate celebration in May 2010.

"He had a very good day yesterday as far as how he feels, and if that continues, then we're going to be seeing him get some Major League at-bats very shortly," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said Friday. "When that is, we'll see."

The sooner teams know when players like Carpenter, Morales and company can contribute, the easier it will be as clubs continue to finalize their rosters. Some teams are preparing for the second round of cuts and want to begin focusing on the players with whom they'll open the season.

Rays manager Joe Maddon said on Saturday that he'd like to start playing his regular lineup more often as the end of Spring Training nears, because he believes it takes "about 10 days" for players to jell in various facets of the game.

"To play the defenses together, to play the offenses together

A'S 6 DIAMONDBACKS 5

A's top Arizona, Parker off to minors

Ramirez adds to luster with homer in 6-5 Oakland win; Parker walks seven

ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHOENIX -- Jarrod Parker is on his way to the minors after a wild outing against his former team.

Manny Ramirez could be headed for a big role with the Oakland Athletics.

The 39-year-old slugger hit a mammoth homer and the A's beat Arizona 6-5 on Monday even though Parker walked seven Diamondbacks batters.

Parker was reassigned to minor league camp after the game. A top prospect, the right-hander was acquired by Oakland from Arizona this offseason in a trade for All-Star starter Trevor Cahill.

Drafted ninth overall by the Diamondbacks in 2007, Parker had Tommy John surgery late in 2009 and missed all of the 2010 season. He admitted he was a bit nervous facing his old team for the first time.

"I feel like I was guiding the ball, trying to be too fine," he said.

Parker gave up one hit and two earned runs in 3» innings. He did not have a strikeout but was helped by two double plays.

"Give him credit. He made some good pitches when it counted," Diamondbacks manager Kirk Gibson said.

Still, Parker acknowledged the performance was "kind of a step back," and he found out just how far back when he received the news of his demotion from manager Bob Melvin.

The A's, who open the regular season in Japan against the Seattle Mariners next week, do not need a fifth starter until mid-April and it is conceivable that the 23-year-old Parker could return at that point.

"The guys welcomed me. I am in a great situation. I feel pretty good and I am healthy," Parker said.

Josh Reddick and Brandon Allen also homered for the A's.

Reddick hit a three-run shot in the first and Ramirez highlighted a two-run third by hitting a drive off the center-field batter's eye, about 430 feet away.

Allen, another former Arizona player, connected in the fourth.

Ramirez is 3 for 18 with two homers in Cactus League play. Melvin hopes to see what Ramirez can do in games that count.

"He has been showing much better, particularly with the limited number of at-bats he's gotten," the manager said. "We can envision him in the middle of the order."

A'S NOTES

Former Diamondbacks outfielder Colin Cowgill had two hits for the A's, raising his spring average to .436.

Melvin expects veteran Coco Crisp to move over from center and be his everyday left fielder, with Cuban import Yoenis Cespedes in center and Reddick in right.

Leading Off: Should A's Cespedes start if he can't hit?

Tom Couzens, Sacramento Bee

The A's announced Monday that Cuban star Yoenis Cespedes will start in center field on Opening Day in Japan next week, despite his struggles this spring, pushing defensive ace Coco Crisp to left field.

Cespedes, who signed a four-year, \$36 million contract earlier this month, had an impressive debut with the A's on March 10 with a home run and RBI single. But he has had just one single in six games since and is batting .150. And he has struck out six times in 20 at-bats.

With the size of Cespedes' contract and his gate potential, the A's find themselves in a difficult situation.

Do they play him every day, even if he's struggling to reach the Mendoza Line, and risk crushing his confidence?

Or do they send him down to the River Cats to start the season to work on his game, as they would most young players with such dismal offensive statistics?

After the two season-opening games in Japan, the A's play the River Cats at Raley Field on March 31, then play their annual three-game Bay Bridge series against the Giants.

Perhaps by then, Cespedes will be hitting well enough to justify starting in center over Crisp, a better defensive player.

If not, maybe River Cats fans will see him in center field every night at Raley Field.

Baseball is moving toward alcohol-free clubhouses

The Dodgers are one of 19 teams that have banned alcoholic beverages from their clubhouse, which Manager Don Mattingly says, is a reflection that society and baseball are changing.

By Kevin Baxter, Los Angeles Times

Chris Carpenter pitches for a team once owned by America's largest brewery in a stadium that shares its name with a brand of beer. But should Carpenter wish to toast any of his victories this season he'll have to wait until he leaves the ballpark.

That's because the St. Louis Cardinals don't allow beer or other alcoholic beverages in their clubhouse. Same for the Colorado Rockies, who play at Coors Field, and the Milwaukee Brewers, who are not only named after beer makers but play in a stadium (Miller Park) sponsored by a beer company before a mascot who once celebrated home runs by plunging down a plastic slide into a huge faux beer mug.

So although the Red Sox caused a stir when new Manager Bobby Valentine announced last month that his team would also be going dry, Boston was actually late to the non-alcoholic party since 18 teams — including the Dodgers, New York Yankees, New York Mets and Chicago Cubs — had already had their last call.

Last fall, officials in the commissioner's office considered a league-wide ban on alcohol in the locker room, an idea that is still under discussion, a baseball official confirmed this week.

All this is good news for Jan Withers, national president of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, a group that for three decades has called for responsible drinking.

"Celebrities — and sports figures are major celebrities in this country — are role models. So it is an effective statement when they ban alcohol in the locker room," she says.

"It really makes a difference. That they're coming out and just making a clear statement to be safe. I am grateful to them for doing this."

Baseball is not alone. In the NFL, where two Denver Broncos players were arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence in the last seven months, a long-standing league policy bans alcohol in the locker room. The NBA and NHL allow individual teams to set their own rules, with the Lakers, Clippers, Kings and Ducks all prohibiting alcohol in their dressing rooms. The Kings have gone even further, banning drinking on team flights as well as in their road hotels.

Those decisions were possibly influenced by the 1999 death of former Carolina Hurricanes star Steve Chiasson, who was found to have a blood-alcohol level more than three times the legal limit when his pickup flipped on the way home from a team party, throwing Chiasson from the cab and killing him instantly.

A similar tragedy four years ago led the Cardinals, Yankees and Baltimore Orioles to ban alcohol from their clubhouses. Hours after a game at Busch Stadium, St. Louis pitcher Josh Hancock was killed when he drove a rented Ford Explorer into the back of a flatbed tow truck. His blood-alcohol level was found to be nearly double the allowable limit.

The Oakland Athletics didn't bother waiting for a player to be killed. When pitcher Esteban Loaiza was ticketed for suspicion of driving under the influence on his way home from a game, General Manager Billy Beane immediately removed alcohol from the locker room.

And the Arizona Diamondbacks were even more proactive, banning liquor in their clubhouse three years ago "for liability reasons and to keep our players safe," says team President Derrick Hall.

But aside from protecting players, the zero-tolerance policies are also sending a positive and socially responsible message, some league officials believe. Dodgers Manager Don Mattingly, who inherited a dry clubhouse at home when he took over the team two years ago, said public perception — shaped by such groups as MADD — has played a big role in forcing teams to act.

"In general, society has changed, which has changed baseball," said Mattingly, who played for the Yankees at a time when postgame beers were as much a part of the baseball culture as chewing tobacco and sunflower seeds. "Now you go out and have a few drinks, you go, 'I better drink some water for a while.' I think society has changed in the way they look at DUIs and how dangerous they are.

"It makes sense at home, it really does."

The Dodgers, like a handful of other teams, relax their rules on the road, where players generally take a bus back to the hotel.

The Angels, on the other hand, allow players to drink beer at work, home and away, even after losing a player to an alcohol-related accident three seasons ago. Pitcher Nick Adenhart was killed along with two companions when a minivan ran a red light and plowed into the car in which they were riding. Andrew Gallo, the driver of the van, was later convicted of murder and felony DUI.

"It's about responsibility," Manager Mike Scioscia said. "There are things that make you reexamine the policy in-house, but we haven't experienced those things here."

They experienced them in Boston last season, when pitchers Clay Buchholz, Josh Beckett and John Lackey — a former Angel — reportedly ate fried chicken and drank beer in the clubhouse during games.

A few seasons ago, at least one Red Sox player confessed to drinking whiskey in the clubhouse before games.

But that team won the World Series while last year's team lost 20 of its last 27 games, narrowly missing the postseason and sending the entire organization into a period of self-examination.

If the Red Sox had made the playoffs no one would have noticed, said Angels outfielder Vernon Wells, who agrees with his manager that the issue is mainly one of personal responsibility, not alcohol.

"If you're responsible adults, you know what's right and wrong, so it's just a matter of being smart with your choices," said Wells, who said he doesn't drink anything stronger than Sprite in the clubhouse after games. "There are always guys who are going to make bad choices, and that's on them. If you put the onus on the players, it's their responsibility.

"But I don't see anything wrong if you're going to have a beer after the game."

Boeing Teams up with Major League Baseball and Seattle Mariners for Season Opener in Japan

Sacramento Bee

SEATTLE, March 19, 2012 -- /PRNewswire/ -- Boeing (NYSE: BA) will be a major sponsor of Major League Baseball and the Seattle Mariners for this year's season opening series in Tokyo, Japan. *Gloops Japan Opening Series 2012* features the Mariners and the Oakland Athletics in a two-game series March 28 and 29.

"The opportunity to spotlight our relationship with the Seattle Mariners in Japan, a place where Boeing has had a strong presence for more than five decades, gives us a great deal of pride," said Mary Foerster, vice president of Communications and Marketing for Boeing Commercial Airplanes. "The Mariners have been valued community partners since the club was founded, and the Japan series expands our shared tradition of investing to make our communities stronger and more vibrant."

In the days leading up to the opening series, Boeing will partner with Major League Baseball and the Mariners to host a children's baseball clinic in Ishinomaki, one of the cities most impacted by last year's earthquake and tsunami. About 100 children are expected to participate in the event. The players will later share a meal with the community featuring *tonjiru*, a traditional Japanese stew.

"This is one small way we can work with the Mariners to give something back to the people of Japan," said Mike Denton, president of Boeing Japan. "We hope it puts smiles on the faces of children and parents who've faced so much tragedy."

In the aftermath of last year's earthquake, Boeing employees donated \$1.3 million and the company pledged \$1 million more toward the recovery efforts.

During *Gloops Japan Opening Series 2012*, the Mariners will wear a Boeing jersey patch on their sleeves. Boeing's logo is well-known by Japanese baseball fans since it is prominently featured on the right-field wall of Safeco Field, directly behind Ichiro Suzuki. The Mariners will also play exhibition games with the Yomiuri Giants and the Hanshin Tigers leading up to the series with Oakland.

"Boeing is one of the great companies of the Northwest and they are one of the best supporters the Mariners have ever had. This is a first for us to wear a sponsor logo on our uniforms and there is no one we would rather have on our jerseys than Boeing," said Bob Aylward, Mariners Executive Vice President Business Operations.