

**Oakland A's embracing a 'great lifetime experience' in trip to Japan**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's will travel nearly 11,000 miles in the next week to play two regular-season games in Tokyo.

Their internal clocks will go haywire thanks to the 16-hour time difference, and they are sacrificing eight days of spring training preparation.

So what was the A's collective reaction when Major League Baseball asked them to play the Seattle Mariners in Japan?

Sign us up!

"I don't see anything negative," general manager Billy Beane said. "It's just a great lifetime experience."

The A's fly to Tokyo on Thursday and open the regular season with a two-game series against the Seattle Mariners that starts Wednesday. First pitch is at 7:10 p.m. in Tokyo, and 3:10 a.m. in Oakland.

The A's made the same journey in 2008, splitting two games with the Boston Red Sox at the Tokyo Dome.

But two trips in five seasons begs the question: Why do the A's, whose roster is anonymous to many fans in the Bay Area, get chosen for the international stage not once but twice? MLB has held two other opening series in Japan, and the A's are the only team that has gone twice. In both cases, the games played in Tokyo counted as A's home games.

Paul Archey, MLB's senior vice president of international business operations, pointed to several factors why the A's are targeted.

"Since '08, their popularity has been on the rise (in Japan)," he said. "They had Hideki Matsui last year, which increased their broadcasts dramatically.

And, of course, the movie 'Moneyball' has given more exposure to the A's."

But Archey also acknowledged that the thought of a matchup pitting Matsui vs. the Mariners' Ichiro Suzuki -- Japan's two most famous baseball exports to the United States -- proved very enticing.

The A's did not re-sign Matsui, who remains a free agent.

"We were hopeful perhaps he would be there another year," Archey said. "But we also knew he was in the last year of his contract."

Catcher Kurt Suzuki is the only A's player from that 2008 trip who is going this time, speaking to how much roster turnover the A's have had since then. First baseman Daric Barton and pitcher Dallas Braden also made the '08 trip, but they're staying back for injury reasons.

Suzuki, the A's only player of Japanese descent, was struck by the passion of the fans in Tokyo.

"You've got guys beating drums, blowing horns," Suzuki said. "Autograph people hanging over the wall with strings, balls attached to the strings. It's something I think is pretty cool and should be experienced."

Although the A's are losing two home dates, MLB is paying them an equivalent amount of what they would likely draw for two weekday games against Seattle.

A's officials would not reveal how much money that is, but it isn't likely to be a big figure. The A's averaged just 15,403 fans over their only weekday home series with Seattle last season.

While the A's will technically be the "home" team in Tokyo, one longtime member of the Japanese baseball media predicted the A's will feel like the visitors.

The Mariners feature not only Ichiro but two other Japanese players -- pitcher Hisashi Iwakuma and shortstop Munenori Kawasaki -- both of whom played in Japan as recently as last season.

"Because of Ichiro, Iwakuma and Kawasaki, most Japanese fans will cheer the Mariners," said Gaku Tashiro of Sankei Sports. "If the A's had Matsui, the atmosphere would be completely different."

The A's nearly crossed the Pacific to open the 2003 season, but MLB scrapped the plan because of the war in Iraq. That series also would have been against the Mariners, whose manager at the time happened to be current A's skipper Bob Melvin.

Nine years later, Melvin is getting his trip to Japan. His daughter, Alexi, is joining him on the team charter. His wife, Kelly, is flying in from New York.

"I am looking forward to this trip," Melvin said. "In '03, I was supposed to go, and it would have been my first game as a big league manager."

There's also a humanitarian tie-in to the trip.

A group of A's players will take a bullet train ride from Tokyo to Tohoku, conducting a baseball clinic in a region that was devastated by the earthquake and tsunami of 2011. Another group will travel via helicopter to Yokota Air Force Base to visit troops.

As for the baseball, it's a bizarre itinerary.

The A's play exhibitions against the Yomiuri Giants and Hanshin Tigers over the weekend. After playing two games against the Mariners, they return to the Bay Area and play four exhibitions -- against Triple-A Sacramento on March 31 and the Giants from April 2-4.

In other words, the A's play two games that count, then play four that don't, before "reopening" their season April 6 against ... the Mariners.

"It's kind of weird," Braden said.

The pageantry of the Japan trip also takes some getting used to, as former Red Sox manager Terry Francona found out while managing against the A's in 2008.

Francona said the treatment his team received in Tokyo was first class, but he found the nonbaseball events took his mind off the task at hand.

"Most of us are creatures of habit, probably me more than anybody," Francona said. "Opening day, you want to talk to the team and instead of talking to the team, you're at the American Embassy shaking hands. I got edgy."

That spring, the Red Sox flew from spring camp in Florida to Tokyo, spent a week there and flew to Los Angeles for an exhibition series with the Dodgers.

Then they traveled Oakland to play a two-game set with the A's before flying cross-country to play the Toronto Blue Jays, who swept them.

"We were dead," Francona said. "You don't see too many Fort Myers-to-Tokyo-to L.A.-to San Francisco-to-Toronto road trips."

The Red Sox went 16-11 in April 2008, on their way to a 95-67 finish and trip to the ALCS. So playing in Japan hardly took the steam out of them.

Beane does not view the extensive travel as too much of a burden for the A's.

"Listen," he said. "The way they treat you and the way you travel, if you can't (make the adjustment), there's something wrong with you and you're spoiled."

### **Oakland A's notebook: Manager Bob Melvin not ready to name opening-day third baseman**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's third base job is still up for grabs with the season opener less than a week away.

Josh Donaldson has gotten the majority of starts in exhibitions, but manager Bob Melvin said Eric Sogard remains under consideration as well.

"The decision is a work in progress," Melvin said. "... I'm not saying that Donaldson is not starting opening day. I'm just not announcing an opening day starter there (yet)."

Sogard, who has been a utility infielder in his big league time, has played his way into consideration by hitting .366 in 17 spring games. Donaldson, who moved from catcher to third base full time after Scott Sizemore was lost to a season-ending knee injury, is hitting .240 and is still going through some growing pains defensively.

The A's could choose to platoon Donaldson and Sogard, since Donaldson hits right-handed and Sogard left-handed.

The A's will depart Phoenix on a noon flight Thursday for Tokyo, where they open their regular season Wednesday against Seattle.

Their itinerary calls for them to pull into their hotel at 5:45 p.m. local time Friday -- they lose a day because of the 16-hour time change. The thought is that players can eat dinner at a normal time and get to bed at a normal time.

"It's a 12-hour flight," A's trainer Nick Paparesta said. "We'll get on the plane, have lunch, try to get six to seven hours of sleep, and try to stay awake until we land. Then try to get yourself to bed like 11 or 12 o'clock, like you normally would in the United States."

- Sizemore underwent surgery to repair the torn anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee. The A's are optimistic he can return by the start of next spring training.
- Melvin said Tommy Milone will start the A's first exhibition in Tokyo against the Yomiuri Giants on Sunday, which begins at 3:10 a.m. in the Bay Area. Tyson Ross starts the second game against the Hanshin Tigers, with an 8:10 p.m. start time Sunday.
- Graham Godfrey allowed three runs in three innings as the A's lost 8-3 to the Kansas City Royals. They finished Cactus League play at 14-5-2.

### **Inside the Oakland A's: Josh Donaldson hasn't locked down A's third base job yet**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 3/21/2012, 11:14am

With the A's season opener eight days away, their third base job is still up for grabs. Josh Donaldson has gotten the majority of starts in exhibitions, but manager Bob Melvin said Eric Sogard is still being considered as well.

"The decision is a work in progress," Melvin said. "... I'm not saying that Donaldson is not starting opening day. I'm just not announcing an opening day starter there (yet)."

Does "work in progress" mean the A's are considering acquiring a third baseman? Tough to tell, but I'd be surprised if they weren't keeping all options open. The problem is, there aren't any real attractive free agent options and trading for an established third baseman would be costly.

Sogard, who has served as a utility infielder in his big league time, has played his way into consideration by hitting .366 in 17 games. Donaldson, who moved from catcher to third base full time after Scott Sizemore was lost to a season-ending knee injury, is hitting .240 and is still going through some growing pains defensively.

Melvin said he was evaluating things "all the way around" before settling on a starter for the March 28 opener against the Seattle Mariners in Tokyo. The A's could choose to platoon Donaldson and Sogard, since Donaldson hits right-handed and Sogard left-handed.

—Sizemore underwent surgery in Scottsdale on Wednesday morning to repair the torn anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee, and the A's believe it's realistic he could return by the start of next spring training. He also had a torn meniscus repaired. The procedure was done by Dr. Doug Freedberg.

—Coco Crisp will play left field in a minor league game Wednesday instead of starting against the Kansas City Royals as originally planned. A few A's regulars will play in the same minor league game.

—So who have been the camp surprises that have impressed Melvin? He mentioned relievers Travis Schlichting and Evan Scribner, infielder Wes Timmons and first baseman Kila Ka'aihue. Ka'aihue's play, in particular, is noteworthy as he's competing for the starting first base job with Brandon Allen and Daric Barton. Melvin likes what he's seen from Ka'aihue defensively as well. He's made two strong throws across the diamond in games to nail base runners trying to advance to third.

### **A's off for Japan with nice spring in their steps**

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Might the A's channel a bit of the 2008 Tampa Bay magic?

That season, the Rays went from last place the year before to the World Series, and one key component, according to former Tampa Bay reliever Grant Balfour, was that the team built up belief in itself with a successful spring training at the behest of manager Joe Maddon.

"That was a team that hadn't had a lot of success, and that won 66 games the year before, and Joe reiterated that it's important to get that winning feeling," said Balfour, who is now the A's closer. "He wanted us to win during spring training. He said, 'I know it sounds crazy, but we need to get that confidence.'

"We built on that spring training. We took that performance into the season. A lot of things went into what happened that year, but that was one of them."

Much like Maddon, A's manager Bob Melvin has emphasized the importance of winning this spring, and the team responded, going a Cactus League best 14-5-2.

"You want to win, and when you're winning, you want to bottle that up," said outfielder Jonny Gomes, who also played on that Rays team. "It's an attitude, like the one we created in Tampa."

Some of the experienced A's said they don't place too much emphasis on spring results, because there often is no correlation with the regular season, but almost everyone agreed that, with a young club that includes many new players, winning is a good way to create camaraderie and positive vibes.

"It helps build some esprit de corps," general manager Billy Beane said. "Listen, it's better than losing games. But this game is very strange - when the lights come on at the start of the season, you see good hitters who've had great springs start off slow.

"But with a young team, playing well not only was important but it also made this spring a lot of fun."

The A's spring record was their best since 2008, when they went 18-8 and set a record for best team winning percentage during spring. That team, which also traveled to Japan to open the season, won 75 games during the regular season and finished 24 1/2 games back in the division - so the A's will look to those 2008 Rays as a model, instead.

"Any time you get on a diamond, you want to win," shortstop Cliff Pennington said. "It's a competition. If you're winning, there's kind of a vibe you can get from spring training. It can't hurt, and hopefully carries over. We're doing well, now we've got to keep it going throughout the whole season."

No decision on corners: Melvin said he has not yet settled on a third baseman or a first baseman for Opening Night in Japan. Josh Donaldson and Eric Sogard are the possibilities at third and Brandon Allen and Kila Ka'aihue at first.

Melvin did announce starting pitchers for the two exhibition games in Tokyo; Tommy Milone will go against Yomiuri on Sunday and Tyson Ross against Hanshin the next day.

Briefly: Coco Crisp was switched from the game at Surprise to a minor-league game; many of the other experienced players also got in work in the minors Wednesday with the team leaving for Japan this morning. ... Bartolo Colon, who fill face Seattle on March 29 in Tokyo, pitched in a minor-league game and went 5 2/3 innings, throwing 82 pitches.

### **Royals 8, A's 3**

Notable: Brandon Allen, locked in a heated battle for the first-base job, went 2-for-3 with a two-out RBI, and he hit .303 during Cactus League play. ... Another first-base candidate, Kila Ka'aihue, playing against his former club, went 0-for-2, leaving his average at .242. ... Daric Barton, who won't go to Japan but who remains on the roster, is also a first-base hopeful. He was the designated hitter, went 1-for-3 and left four runners stranded, two in scoring position.

Quotable: "It's good to have that kind of outing now, make sure it doesn't happen again."

- Starter Graham Godfrey, who allowed six hits and three runs in three innings. The candidate for the fifth spot in the rotation walked two and struck out one.

### **Drumbeat: A's have made no decisions at first base or third – updated**

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Phoenix Muni, 3/21/2012, 10:10am

Manager Bob Melvin says that he hasn't settled on a third baseman for Opening Night in Japan next week, but it either will be Josh Donaldson or Eric Sogard. Same thing at first base, where it will be either Brandon Allen or Kila Ka'aihue.

I think Ka'aihue might be sneaking in front for time in Japan, at least; Melvin mentioned him as one of the surprises of camp, along with nonroster pitchers Travis Schlichting and Evan Scribner and nonroster infielder Wes Timmons. Ka'aihue has homered in two of the past three games and he tied yesterday's game in the ninth with a double.

Coco Crisp was a late scratch in left today. I'm not sure what's going on there; maybe they'd like him to get more time working in left field not in game situations. Or maybe it's just that there are few veterans going to Surprise today, and so he's getting the afternoon off with the team leaving tomorrow morning for Japan.

*UPDATE: Melvin gave Crisp the option this morning of playing in the game at Surprise or going to play a few innings in a minor-league game, which still gets Crisp some playing time but a shorter afternoon of work, and Crisp opted for the latter, which considering the team is departing in the morning seems sensible.*

Scott Sizemore had knee surgery in Scottsdale today. Dr. Doug Freedberg performed the procedure, in which part of Sizemore's hamstring tendon was used to replace his left anterior cruciate ligament. Sizemore also had a miniscal tear repaired.

A's trainer Nick Papresta said this morning that the surgery went well and said Sizemore should be fully ready for spring training 2013. "He'll walk in the door as ready as anyone else," Papresta said.

Melvin said that he'll announce the starting pitchers for the exhibition games in Japan later today. It's likely that Tommy Milone would be one, and that Tyson Ross might be the other. That's my guesswork, anyway.

### **Melvin pleased with A's days in Cactus sun**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- The joke's been made plenty this spring. Perhaps the A's should have saved some of their goods -- 218 hits, 133 runs and 14 wins, to be exact -- for the regular season.

Manager Bob Melvin, who guided the club to a 14-5-2 record in 21 Cactus League games, maintained a different outlook.

"We told them it certainly isn't the most important thing in the world to win games," he said, "but we told them it was important to us. Guys have gone out and played well."

Their record says just as much. But it doesn't tell the whole story. Melvin has been around plenty camps in his tenures as a player, scout and coach, but he believes the first he endured with his A's club has to rank near the top.

"Effort. Buying into what we're doing," he explained. "We did a lot of work. I've been in camps where you do that much work every day, you'll get some resistance. The guys have been just the opposite. Everything we've thrown at them, they've done very well and been ready for it. I think everyone was in great shape coming in, and that lent to the work we put in in a short period of time."

Just two injuries surfaced during camp, the first of which could greatly impact the team this year. Third baseman Scott Sizemore, expected to break out at the plate and continually progress with the glove, instead suffered a torn ACL on the first day of workouts, forcing the A's to turn to a catching prospect for help.

Josh Donaldson has fared well enough at the hot corner to stay there on Opening Day, and he should only get better with more innings. But his defense isn't yet sound, and he's struggled in the past to showcase offensive consistency at the Major League level. The A's, then, will keep Eric Sogard in mind for third base, as the competition heads to Japan.

Ditto the one involving the first-base job, as well as the battle for several rotation spots. Uncertainty, though not comforting, is also the result of multiple good performances. Better to have too many options, Melvin has said, than too few.

"I think there are always certain players that come out of the pack that surprise you," Melvin said. "There were guys that certainly did that."

He counted Kila Ka'aihue, who is making the first-base decision a difficult one, among them. Melvin also made mention of non-roster invitees Evan Scribner and Travis Schlichting, whose Cactus League performances were rewarded with a trip to Japan, where they'll lend the A's length out of the bullpen. And then there's Wes Timmons, the real-life version of Crash Davis who has played in 998 Minor League games but none in the Majors. He is hitting .278 this spring and is also heading to Tokyo.

Beyond the surprises, though, the A's found success in minute -- yet significant, even more so given the time restraints surrounding their Japan trip -- areas: getting hitters the needed at-bats, the pitchers the necessary innings.

And though the days in the desert can become mundane, A's camp proved to be anything but boring this year, thanks to the arrivals of 19-year veteran Manny Ramirez and Cuban sensation Yoenis Cespedes.

"Based on what we try to accomplish, I think everything has gone pretty well," Melvin said. "All in all, it's been a successful camp."

### **Godfrey can't gain command in loss to KC**

By Dick Kaegel / MLB.com

SURPRISE, Ariz. -- Lorenzo Cain, who's been leading all Major League hitters in Spring Training, belted a home run and kept his average at .500, as the Kansas City Royals beat the Oakland Athletics, 8-3, on Wednesday at Surprise Stadium.

Cain hit his third home run over the left-field wall leading off the second inning against right-hander Graham Godfrey. Cain went 1-for-2 and is 17-for-34 with 10 extra-base hits.

Godfrey battled with command and gave up three runs on six hits and two walks in his three innings. He ran up a pitch count of 75, including just 37 strikes.

"Location was not very good," Godfrey said. "I feel like all spring I've worked to keep the ball down and have done a good job of it, and today it was almost the opposite."

Royals starter Luis Mendoza was struck by a shot off the bat of Brandon Allen to start the second inning and was taken out of the game with a bruised left hamstring. His availability was listed as day to day. His one-plus scoreless innings lowered his ERA to 0.77.

"It's just sore right now," Mendoza said. "It hit the back of the leg in the muscle. It's nothing serious."

Greg Holland fanned four A's, boosting his strikeout total to 12 in seven innings, but was taken out with two on and two out in the fifth. Both runners scored against Jose Mijares on a wild pitch, two walks and an infield single.

The Royals' four-run sixth inning against Travis Schlichting included a two-run, bases-loaded single by Max Ramirez and RBI singles by Alex Gordon and Eric Hosmer.

A's Minor Leaguer Cedric Hunter cracked a home run off Jeremy Jeffress leading off the seventh.

**Up next for the A's:** Having completed Cactus League play, the A's will board a 12-hour flight to Tokyo on Thursday morning as they embark on a week-long stay in Japan, where they're set to open the regular season against the Seattle Mariners on March 28-29.

### **Sizemore undergoes surgery on torn ACL**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

SURPRISE, Ariz. -- A's third baseman Scott Sizemore underwent successful surgery to repair a torn ACL in his left knee on Wednesday morning, and he is expected to make a full recovery by the start of Spring Training next year.

Dr. Douglas Freedberg, who does extensive work with several of Arizona's professional sports teams, administered the reconstructive procedure, which brought about "nothing that was alarming," according to A's head trainer Nick Paparesta.

"He'll walk in the door next year as ready as anyone else," Paparesta said.

Part of Sizemore's hamstring tendon was used to replace the damaged ligament, a common practice familiar to several surgically repaired athletes, including lefty Brett Anderson, whose hamstring tendon was transplanted to his elbow and used as a graft on top of his ulnar collateral ligament during Tommy John surgery.

The 27-year-old Sizemore, who appeared primed for a breakout season before suffering the injury within two hours of the club's first full-squad workouts in February, will remain in Arizona for a couple of weeks before visiting Freedberg on March 30 for a checkup.

When comfortable to do so, Sizemore will then make his way back to Oakland, where he will rehab under the watch of the A's. During the first six weeks of that process, the infielder will work to retain his range of motion. The next step will be strengthening the knee, in an effort to begin baseball activity again.

### **Melvin still mulling options at corner spots**

#### **A's manager yet to name starters at both first and third**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

SURPRISE, Ariz. -- Less than 10 days remain before the A's open regular-season play in Japan against the Mariners, yet manager Bob Melvin still finds himself undecided on who will play the corner infield positions.

Just before announcing that Scott Sizemore underwent successful knee surgery Wednesday morning, Melvin said he is still evaluating the third baseman's replacement candidates. Josh Donaldson received the majority of starts in Cactus League play -- in fact, he leads all Major League players with 118 innings -- but Eric Sogard is still considered an everyday possibility.

Donaldson finished his Cactus League campaign with a .231 average in 52 at-bats. He hit zero home runs and tallied five RBIs, while Sogard compiled seven RBIs with two home runs and a .341 average in 44 at-bats.

"It's a work in progress," Melvin said of his decision. "I'm not saying that Donaldson is not starting Opening Day, I'm just not announcing an Opening Day starter there yet."

Over at first base, Brandon Allen and Kila Ka'aihue appear to be neck-in-neck in battle for the starting role. They've endured similar springs, with Allen batting .303 with two home runs and 12 RBIs in 13 games and Ka'aihue hitting .242 with three homers and six RBIs in 14 games.

Both players are out of options, and there's only room for one, considering they both hit left-handed. However, at third base, Melvin could choose to platoon the right-handed hitting Donaldson and left-handed Sogard.

The A's skipper will have plenty of time during the team's 12-hour flight to Tokyo on Thursday to consider his options.

"It's funny," Melvin said. "In my mind, it will change from day to day. That's the good part of the competition part, and that means guys are responding."

Worth noting

- A's manager Bob Melvin announced that left-hander Tommy Milone and righty Tyson Ross will start the two exhibition games in Japan, to be played Sunday and Monday.

### **A's lose 8-3 to Royals in last game in Arizona**

Associated Press

SURPRISE, Ariz. (AP) Luis Mendoza became the second Kansas City Royals pitcher to be led off the mound by a trainer in four games.

Mendoza was removed in the second inning after being struck in the left leg by a Brandon Allen single as the Royals defeated the Oakland Athletics 8-3 Wednesday.

Oakland was playing its last game in Arizona before leaving for Tokyo, where the A's meet Seattle in an opening two-game series next Wednesday and Thursday.

"It's just sore right now," Mendoza said. "I was scared because it really hurt. It was a hard ground ball, but it hit my hamstring, it hit muscle in the back of my leg. Right now, I'm glad it's nothing serious. It was a big bruise."

Royals closer Joakim Soria exited Sunday with ligament damage in his elbow. He is taking a few days to consider his options after receiving a second opinion. Soria has damage to the ulnar collateral ligament in his right elbow. He had reconstructive elbow surgery in 2003 to replace the same ligament.

"No more," Mendoza said of pitchers leaving prematurely for the trainer's room.

Mendoza is 4-0 with a 0.77 ERA, giving up one run in 11 2-3 innings this spring.

"The ball got him on the back of the knee, a real meaty part," Royals manager Ned Yost said. "It's just a bruise. It hit him pretty good. It's not something to continue with at this point of the year. You don't want to take a chance of it swelling or him altering his mechanics at all because he's throwing the ball so well."

Yost said Mendoza remains "definitely right in the mix" as a rotation candidate.

Lorenzo Cain, who tops the Cactus League with a .500 batting average, homered to lead off the second inning. Alex Gordon and Eric Hosmer each had two hits and drove in a run for the Royals, who won for the fifth time in six games. Max Ramirez contributed a two-run pinch single in the sixth to up his RBI total to 11 in 13 games.

A's right-hander Graham Godfrey gave up three runs on six hits and two walks in three innings, throwing only 37 strikes in 75 pitches.

"Not very good," Godfrey said of his location. "That's one thing I talked with Curt (Young, pitching coach) about. Typically I fill the zone up, throw a lot of strikes. Today was almost the opposite. It's good to have that kind of outing now, learn from it and make sure that doesn't happen again."

Godfrey was familiar with Cain, who he faced last year when both were in the Pacific Coast League. Cain homered on a 3-1 pitch.

"He's a good hitter," Godfrey said. "This spring he's been doing pretty well. He was one of the guys I had to be careful of last year. It was a case where I was working behind a lot of hitters. I don't want to walk anybody. I gave him a cookie and he did what he's supposed to do with it."

Godfrey worked out of a bases loaded jam in the third, retiring Cain on a fielder's choice to end the inning.

"I thought I made some good pitches when I needed to," Godfrey said. "Sometime it worked out for me. Other times there was a broken bat flare where nobody was playing. I try not to be so result-oriented, but obviously it wasn't the result I



wanted, but most of the pitches were kind of where I wanted them. There were some good things and some bad things mixed with a little bad luck I thought."

Minor leaguer Cedric Hunter homered for the A's in the seventh.

NOTES: A's 3B Scott Sizemore had surgery Wednesday to repair a left knee ligament tear and will miss the season. Sizemore hit 11 home runs with 52 RBIs in 93 games last season with Oakland after being acquired in a trade with Detroit. He injured the knee last month in the A's first full-squad workout. . Yost said C Humberto Quintero and OF Jason Bourgeois, who were scheduled to arrive Wednesday night after being acquired in a trade with Houston, would be in the Royals lineup Thursday.

### **MANNY COULD SPEND TIME WITH PORTS**

By Bob Highfill, Stockton Record

STOCKTON - Oakland A's slugger Manny Ramirez might play in some games for the Stockton Ports and Sacramento River Cats this spring.

Ramirez, who has 555 career home runs, is in spring training with the A's and still must serve a 50-game suspension for his second violation of Major League Baseball's performance-enhancing drugs policy. Ramirez's suspension allows him to play or rehab in the minor leagues for 10 days leading to his reinstatement, which could come as early as May 30 when the A's are at Minnesota.

Ramirez's potential minor-league stint could include Ports home games on May 21-23 with San Jose and their home game on May 24 with Visalia. The River Cats are at Raley Field on May 25-28 against Reno and May 29 against Fresno.

"Officially, I don't know anything yet, but the odds are he would play here at some point," Ports general manager and president Pat Filippone said. "It would make sense for him to play in Stockton or Sacramento, but there's been no official word from the A's."

Zak Basch, the River Cats' coordinator of public relations and baseball operations, spoke with an A's official at spring training last week who speculated Ramirez would play in Stockton and Sacramento. The team official also told Basch that Ramirez might play with the A's Double-A affiliate in Round Rock, Texas.

"The A's typically don't like to have their guys travel too far," Basch said. "But who knows what might happen."

Ramirez will join the A's for their exhibition Bay Bridge Series with the San Francisco Giants on April 2-4, but that he will not accompany the team for its season-opening series against Seattle next week in Tokyo.

The Ports will scrimmage the River Cats on April 2 at Raley Field and on April 3 at Stockton Ballpark. Stockton's season opener is April 5 at Lake Elsinore, and the home opener is April 12 against Modesto. Information: (209) 644-1900.

### **A new beginning for Manny Ramirez**

### **After retiring due to a second positive test for PEDs in 2011, slugger back in game**

By Jim Caple, ESPN.com

PHOENIX -- Taped to Manny Ramirez's spring training locker is a Baseball America cartoon that shows a father and son entering their home to find Manny parked on the living room couch watching TV, with the son shouting, "He's back!" Manny is indeed back. Whether that is good news or bad news depends on your perspective on performance enhancers ... as well as his OPS.

Ramirez has tested positive for performance-enhancing drugs twice in the last three years.

"I like him because he has a good eye, a great bat and he is a good player but at the same time he can be a cancer to a clubhouse," Oakland fan Ian Horvath said at a game this week. "I'm excited about what he can do for the team but I also want him to keep the spirit up. ... I hope he changes coming here, especially after the drama of last season, and kind of gets his act together for us and bring something good to our clubhouse."

Horvath said he hopes Ramirez is clean, adding, "I'm just going to wait and see on him."

When we last saw Ramirez, he had tested positive a second time for a performance-enhancing drug just five games into Tampa Bay's 2011 season. That second positive test carried a 100-game suspension, but Ramirez chose to retire instead and sat out the rest of the season. He had a change of heart over the winter and returned to baseball, signing a minor league contract with the Athletics. Because MLB is requiring that he sit out 50 games, he is not eligible to play for Oakland until the earliest May 30, which will be his 40th birthday.

"Of course I missed [baseball]. What kind of a question is that?" Ramirez said of last summer. "You play the game your whole life. If you quit working for ESPN, would you miss it?"

Fair enough, but another question is whether baseball missed Manny. Crowds at Oakland's home Cactus League games have greeted him with a mixture of loud applause and jeers.

Asked about his two positive tests, Ramirez replied, "That's in the past. I'm moving on. I'm not perfect. He's not perfect, you're not perfect, nobody is perfect. You've made mistakes. Doesn't matter who you are. I don't care about that." He also says he has nothing to prove to fans. "I don't want to say nothing to them," he said. "I'm here because God put me in this place."

Ramirez says he felt "in his heart" that Oakland is a good place for him, which is convenient because he didn't have a lot of options. He said the Blue Jays and Orioles expressed interest in signing him before deciding against it.

A's general manager Billy Beane said he didn't have any issue signing Ramirez despite the two positive tests. As long as the rules say a player can come back after a second suspension, Beane said, "I couldn't think of a reason why not [sign him]."

The contract certainly is low-risk, or at least as low-risk as any contract can be with Ramirez -- his salary is about \$500,000 and he won't be paid during the suspension. What the Athletics might get in return is the bigger question.

Ramirez has 555 career home runs and has been one of the great hitters of this era, but his production (as well as his games played) has been in significant decline -- his home run totals dropped from 37 in 2008 to 19 in 2009 to nine in 2010 to zero last year, when he had one hit in 17 at-bats. He hit just one home run after June in 2010. At last glance, he was hitting .167 with a .250 on-base percentage and two home runs in 18 at-bats this spring.

"Rome wasn't built in one day. Baby steps," Ramirez said. "When you play all year round and then you sit out for a year and come back, it's a work in progress."

"Listen, he'll be 40 years old," Beane said. "The layoff combined with his age, we'll see what kind of impact it has. I would be surprised if it doesn't have an impact."

On the other hand, Ramirez is in midseason form in at least one respect: Last week he took a pitch for a ball and appeared to head toward first base to take the walk. The only problem was it wasn't ball four. It wasn't even ball three. It was only ball two. Getting confused over a 1-2 count is impressive even by lofty Manny Being Manny standards.

"

Rome wasn't built in one day. Baby steps. When you play all year round and then you sit out for a year and come back, it's a work in progress.

" -- *Manny Ramirez*

Another factor in Ramirez's return is that even if he gets back to form, he'll need to keep his batting stroke in synch while working out in Arizona for more than a month until he is allowed to begin a 10-game minor league rehab assignment before the suspension ends.

Ramirez has been in good spirits this spring and might possibly test positive for a trace amount of humility. He reportedly offered to mentor rookie outfielder Yoenis Cespedes (as if the Cuban player didn't have enough on his plate). Cespedes said Manny has been very helpful to him since the day he arrived.

"He tries to outwork everybody," Oakland pitcher Brandon McCarthy said. "He goes over and hits in the minor league games and then he comes over and hits here. He just really enjoys swinging a baseball bat and the strategy of the game and working the pitchers.

"When he's not working, he mixes it up in the clubhouse. He has a good time and gets along with everybody. He's a normal teammate."

Normal has not always been the adjective of choice when talking about Manny's world. But, hey, it's a new beginning. Even if it might be the last one.

"It's a blessing," Ramirez said. "I'm doing something that I like. What more could I want?"

### **Billy Beane leaves Moneyball behind to refocus on statistical truths**

Brad Pitt portrayed him in a movie, but Beane is glad the hype is over now the 2012 Major League Baseball season is starting

Simon Burnton, Guardian UK

Next Wednesday at the Tokyo Dome in Japan the Oakland Athletics will officially launch the 2012 Major League Baseball season, and at the same time mark the 10th anniversary of the moment a journalist called Michael Lewis turned up at the club to research what was supposed to be a newspaper article about their general manager. Lewis found the subject unexpectedly interesting, and the article became a book, which became a phenomenon: Moneyball sold a million copies and spawned a film, in which Brad Pitt's portrayal of the central character earned him an Oscar nomination.

With the film now released on DVD and his publicity duties completed, Billy Beane can finally step out of the Moneyball machine. "What with the book and then the movie, it's been in the public eye for a decade," Beane says. "It's been a great experience, I wouldn't trade it for the world, but it's kind of relaxing now everything is starting to calm down. I love my job, and maybe some anonymity will help me really focus on it."

The team could probably do with some attention. The A's have qualified for the post-season play-offs, the commonly-accepted definition of basic baseball success, only once since the book's release in 2003. That year had marked a fourth successive appearance, a minor miracle given their budget, but over the past decade his once-revolutionary techniques have become commonplace.

Beane's success was achieved by taking the drastic step of disregarding traditional scouting methods in favour of detailed analysis of statistics. This enabled him to identify the most productive players irrespective of the all-round athleticism and merchandise-shifting good looks that clubs had previously coveted. "We had nothing to lose," he says. "We were in a position where we could try anything and no matter what happened we were probably not going to end up any worse."

His disillusionment with old-fashioned scouting was fuelled in part because he himself was the perfect example of its failure. As a 6ft 4in 18-year-old he was one of America's most sought-after prospects when the New York Mets won the battle for his signature in 1980. But the predicted success never came; in 1988 he was on to his fourth club, moving to Oakland as a free-agent outfielder. "There were a lot of guys who maybe weren't the natural athlete I was, but they were much better baseball players," he has said. "They were measuring the wrong things." Two years later, having hit three home runs in six Major League seasons and boasting the horribly ho-hum batting average of .219 – which in the 2011 season would have made him the 145th most productive batter in MLB – he gave up and became an opposition scout. Success off the field proved considerably more achievable: within three years he was assistant GM, and he took over the top job in 1997.

Fourteen years after his appointment Beane continues to make good use of the players others leave behind. This close season, for example, the A's brought in Manny Ramirez, a 12-time All-Star and one of the game's biggest names, who was without a club after twice testing positive for banned substances. "He's arguably a hall of fame player, and we basically signed him because there was no risk and a lot of reward," Beane says. "He cost us the minimum salary and he's still a productive player. We could do quite well out of it, and if we don't it cost us nothing."

The Cuban defector Yoenis Cespedes was a less typical signing. "He's the best player from the Cuban amateur team, and we signed him to a four-year \$36m contract with frankly a very limited amount of information. He was a higher risk," Beane says. "Our ability to track that kind of player is limited, but a lot of teams had spent their budget by the time he became available, and a centre-of-the-diamond athletic player at the prime of his career is worth the risk."

Beane's revolution at the A's was assisted by Paul DePodesta, a tall, thin Harvard-educated number-cruncher (who refused to lend his name to the film, and thus appears as Peter Brand, a short, overweight Yale-educated number-cruncher) who is now vice-president of player development and amateur scouting at the New York Mets. "The process of discovering sabermetrics was longer than in the movie, but there were certainly eureka moments along the way and one of those was

when I brought in my former assistant," Beane says. "I'd started my own investigations, but when Paul came in that was the spark, and it created a very unique partnership. It was like Brian Clough and Peter Taylor, a very similar relationship."

Beane sprinkles conversations – at least those with Englishmen – with references to football, a sport with which he has become mildly obsessed. He says the challenge of attracting players to the Coliseum, the A's dilapidated stadium – they are due to finalise a move to a new venue in San Jose imminently – is "like convincing someone to play for Blackpool instead of Arsenal; they've got two very different stadiums, and players love to play at a great stadium". I later hear him tell TalkSport that his club are "sort of like Wigan".

Happily, Beane's love of English football is reciprocated. He has strong links with Liverpool, whose co-owner John W Henry once attempted to hire him for the Boston Red Sox. Their director of football, Damien Comolli, has wholeheartedly embraced Beane's methods and described reading Moneyball as the moment "when everything fell into place". Chelsea's director of football operations, Mike Ford, is another key ally.

"I'm always somewhat sheepish talking to football people, people who have followed the game since they were children," he says, "because I never played one minute of soccer in my life, not one minute. I appreciate the athleticism and skill but as a fan I can't relate, having never scored a goal in my life."

Beane watches several matches a week, subscribes to European football magazines and listens to podcasts – including the Guardian's own Football Weekly – in the car. "I watch as much as I can," he says. "We probably get more matches over here than you have over there. It depends on my schedule, but if there's a big game and I can't watch it live I'll just record it. It's a great release if nothing else."

The inevitable question is whom Beane, so famous for identifying hidden gems, would identify as the most undervalued player in football. "You're asking me to quantify performance and I'm not necessarily privy to some of the metrics," he deadpans. "You know, I'd actually say Lionel Messi. He's so remarkable, watching him play he's probably still undervalued. When you're scoring five goals in one Champions League match, there's no value that's too high."

Baseball, composed essentially of a succession of set pieces, seems more likely to submit to statistical analysis than more free-flowing sports such as football, but that isn't stopping anybody from trying. "There's key metrics for every sport," Beane says. "The challenge is finding which numbers actually matter. To say that in football there's not key numbers that mean something, I think that would just be foolish."

Though managers have been guided by statistics at least since Charles Reep's theories provoked a more direct brand of football in the 1950s, there remain those who make decisions based on little more than habits and hunches. "I always thought that because of the emotion of football a lot of visceral decisions were made," Beane says. To avoid succumbing to similar failings, he famously refuses to watch any of the A's competitive matches live. "We try not to make emotional decisions here," he says. "I prefer to know the result and then make decisions with a more rational mind."

His approach is perhaps not one for romantics but Beane has little time for those who would prefer top-level sport to remain a game of guesswork. "The ends justify the means," he says. "However you get there, the only thing that matters in sport is that you get there."

### **Talking Baseball With Bob Melvin**

By STU WOO, Wall Street Journal

Not a lot of people in Major League Baseball get to play for or manage teams on their home turf. Bob Melvin has done both.

The Palo Alto native and former San Francisco Giants catcher is starting his first full season as manager of the Oakland Athletics. He joined the team as its interim skipper last June, after manager Bob Geren was fired, and three months later signed a three-year contract.

That brought Mr. Melvin, 50 years old, back to the region where he attended Menlo-Atherton High School, the University of California, Berkeley, and Cañada College. He played mostly as a backup catcher for seven teams in an 11-year career before managing the Seattle Mariners and Arizona Diamondbacks.

Mr. Melvin is now hoping to guide Oakland to its first winning season since 2006. He finished his partial season with the A's with a 47-52 record last year, when the movie "Moneyball" revived national interest in the team.

At the team's spring-training facility in Phoenix, Mr. Melvin discussed the challenges of performing in front of family and friends, as well as the coming baseball season.

WSJ: Who did you cheer for growing up?

Mr. Melvin: I cheered for, you name it. I was a Warrior fan, but then I was a Raider fan when I needed to be, a 49er fan when I needed to be, a Giant fan when I needed to be and an A's fan when I needed to be.

WSJ: The A's won three straight World Series, from 1972 to 1974, when you were growing up. Do you remember that?

Mr. Melvin: I do. I actually went to two of those World Series.

WSJ: You played for the Detroit Tigers before coming back to the Bay Area to play for the Giants. Was it easier for you to play here because you had the support system, or was it more stressful because of your friends and family?

Mr. Melvin: I think a little of both. One, it's great that you're a hometown guy playing for your hometown team. When you struggle, it's harder to struggle in your hometown. And therefore, for me as a player, at that time in my life when I was a younger player, it was more difficult. I was better off playing somewhere else.

WSJ: You played for teams all over the country. What's the difference between fans on the West Coast and East Coast?

Mr. Melvin: I think in general West Coast people are more laid-back than East Coast people. And I think to an extent maybe that rolls over into a fan base where there might be a little bit more laid-back fans in the West than there are on the East. I don't want to say "passionate." I want to say...what's the word I'm looking for?

WSJ: Maybe I'll put it this way: I don't see fans booing their own team on the West Coast as much as they do on the East Coast.

Mr. Melvin: Yeah, definitely. But I'll tell you what: I think the A's fans are a little different. I think there's a part of our fan base that's, say, rowdier than on the East Coast. If we got 10,000 people in the stands, it sounds like 15,000 or 20,000. Because the fans that we do have in Oakland are very passionate about the A's.

WSJ: Your big off-season signing, outfielder Yoenis Céspedes, has been in the U.S. for less than a month after defecting from Cuba. How do you make him feel comfortable here?

Mr. Melvin: I make sure I get him in [my office] almost every day with his translator, and I talk to him on a personal level, not necessarily on a baseball level. How's he doing off the field? What's he eating? Where's he going? Those type of things. I think him being on a baseball field is probably his most comfortable place right now. That's his solace. That's where he goes out there and his instincts take over. I want him to know that I worry about him off the field, where it can be more difficult for a guy like that being dropped into an environment that he's never had to deal with before.

WSJ: Your other big off-season signing, superstar Manny Ramirez, has been chatting with Céspedes during batting practice and in the locker room. Did you ask Ramirez to mentor Céspedes?

Mr. Melvin: I wanted to see how it went first, and [Ramirez] took to it right away. I did discuss with Manny that I really appreciate what you're doing with him, because that's probably the one player that [Céspedes] really knows in this locker room, and respects.

WSJ: A's fans have a sort of underdog mentality that perhaps comes from "Moneyball." Is that fair to say?

Mr. Melvin: Where we are in our history right now, we're a little bit more underdogs right now. Since we've been in Oakland, it's been 14 western division titles, six pennants, four World Series. So it's a terrific history that the A's have. This is a terrific organization. Now, we are not at our high point right now. But any business, any organization, any company goes through highs and lows. And we will be back again.