

## A's News Clips, Monday, April 2, 2012

### First base still to be sorted out as Oakland A's wrap up exhibition play

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

After the A's returned from their season-opening trip to Japan, the primary item on their agenda was catching up on much-needed sleep.

Mission accomplished.

Now their three-game exhibition series against the Giants, which begins Monday, allows them to take stock of all they learned during spring training while also addressing important remaining issues, most notably identifying their first baseman.

It's an awkward time for the A's, as they resume exhibitions after playing two regular-season games last week against Seattle at the Tokyo Dome.

But the schedule doesn't bother manager Bob Melvin.

"I'm OK with it," Melvin said. "We go back to the spring training atmosphere again, we get our rest, and once we get back in the regular season, we're in our normal routine."

The A's reported to camp Feb. 18 with three-fifths of their starting rotation needing to be replaced, because of the offseason trades of Trevor Cahill and Gio Gonzalez and a shoulder injury to Dallas Braden.

How well the rotation holds up remains a question mark. But one of the A's more promising developments during the spring was the emergence of lefty Tom Milone, who secured the No. 3 starter spot.

Milone's 1-1 record and 4.97 ERA in four Cactus League starts does not reflect how well he pitched, nor does it include his five shutout innings in an exhibition against the Yomiuri Giants or the six perfect innings he threw against Triple-A Sacramento on Saturday.

"The first day I caught him, I think I could have caught him with my eyes closed," catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "Everywhere I put my glove, he threw it there. That's impressive for a young pitcher."

Tyson Ross, the former Bishop O'Dowd High and Cal star, looks to have sewn up the fourth rotation spot. Graham Godfrey starts Monday against the Giants, and he's the front-runner for the No. 5 spot.

The A's also began camp needing a replacement for two-time All-Star closer Andrew Bailey. Melvin tapped Grant Balfour over Brian Fuentes for the role, somewhat of a gamble given that Balfour never has served as a full-time closer.

Sorting out the starting outfield was a major task after Cuban free agent Yoenis Cespedes signed a four-year contract March 3. The A's opted to slot Cespedes in center and shift Coco Crisp to left field, a move Crisp was not thrilled about. It's worth watching how both perform in those positions.

It appears the A's will go with converted catcher Josh Donaldson as the regular third baseman after Scott Sizemore suffered a season-ending knee injury during the first full-squad workout. Donaldson hit just .231 in Cactus League play but has gradually looked better defensively.

Melvin did start the left-handed-hitting Eric Sogard at third in the season opener against Seattle right-hander Felix Hernandez.

"Those guys know how it's going to play out," Melvin said. "I told Josh he wasn't going to get the first day but that I looked at him as the starter."

First base remains unsettled, with the A's wanting to evaluate the Giants series before choosing between Brandon Allen and Kila Ka'aihue, who each drew a start against the Mariners in Tokyo.

Melvin maintains Daric Barton remains in the mix as well, but Barton still is having problems throwing after coming off shoulder surgery.

The first base call is crucial, as Allen and Ka'aihue are out of minor league options. The A's would have to pass one of them through waivers -- and risk losing the player to another team -- before sending him to the minors. Trading one of them isn't out of the question.

It's also unclear how the middle of the batting order will take shape, and the A's might not hash that out until well past the Bay Bridge series.

Cespedes hit seventh and sixth, respectively, in the Tokyo series, but Melvin anticipates moving him up in the order once he gets more acclimated to major league pitching.

Questions the A's have answered

The rotation: Tom Milone and Tyson Ross enjoyed solid springs to help fill holes on the starting staff.  
Yoenis Cespedes: The A's installed the highly touted outfielder in center and slid Coco Crisp over to left field.  
Grant Balfour: The eight-year veteran gets his first crack at being a full-time closer, replacing Andrew Bailey.

Questions the A's are still waiting to answer

First base: Will Brandon Allen or Kila Ka'aihue grab the reins and claim this job as his own?  
Batting order: Who will the 3-4-5 hitters be, and where will Cespedes eventually fit in?  
Josh Donaldson: Is the converted catcher going to be a legitimate solution at third base?

### **Posey plays in S.F. for 1st time since injury**

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

Buster Posey has reached several post-injury milestones in spring training: First time running the bases. First Cactus League game. First at-bat. First hit (a home run). First time catching. First runner tossed out. First play at the plate. First slide into the plate. First time catching back-to-back games. First time catching Tim Lincecum.

Now comes the biggie, at least for Giants fans.

First time playing in San Francisco.

The Bay Bridge Series begins Monday night, and Posey will play his first game at Third and King since May 25, the night Scott Cousins barreled into him in a home-plate collision that trashed the catcher's left ankle and sent him to an extensive rehab program that's still in progress.

More than 10 months later, Posey is feeling good about appearing at his home park again, saying of Giants fans, "They're a lot of fun to play in front of. We as players appreciate their passion and knowledge of the game."

The Giants are preparing for Friday's regular-season opener in Arizona. The A's already are 1-1 after splitting their season-opening series with Seattle in Tokyo and resume their regular-season schedule at the Coliseum on Friday, again against the Mariners.

In the Bay Bridge Series, the teams play again Tuesday night in Oakland and Wednesday afternoon in San Francisco. Posey will catch probably two of three.

"I'm optimistic because I thought I made a lot of progress this spring," Posey said. "I think it's only going to get better and better. I think the training staff has done a great job managing it, when to push, when to hold back. I'm happy."

So are his teammates ...

"Now that he's come back and gotten to spend a full spring training with his team, he's back to being himself," Lincecum said. "It's one thing to know Buster's back. It's another thing to see him do what he did before he got injured."

Along with his manager ...

"We were optimistic he'd be fine," Bruce Bochy said. "We haven't had any hiccups with his rehab. (Trainer) Dave Groeschner did a terrific job with the rehab, and Buster came through all the stuff we put him through. I really think he's back to where he was."

With Sunday's 7-4 loss to the Brewers, the Giants finished the Arizona portion of spring training 16-14-3. The A's are 16-6-2, counting Arizona, two exhibitions in Japan and Saturday's 9-0 victory in Sacramento, in which they were still feeling the effects of jet lag.

"Sleeping, eating and back to sleeping again," second baseman Jemile Weeks said of his activities since returning from Tokyo on Thursday. Manager Bob Melvin called his nap on the team bus from the Coliseum to Sacramento's Raley Field "the best sleep I've gotten since I got back."

Graham Godfrey and Tyson Ross are starting the first two games of the Bay Bridge Series, hoping to nail down the final rotation jobs. Lefty Tommy Milone, who tossed six perfect innings on Saturday, was named the No. 3 starter behind Brandon McCarthy and Bartolo Colon.

Cuban defector Yoenis Céspedes, who signed a four-year, \$36 million contract, will make his Bay Area debut Monday and his Oakland debut Tuesday. He's 2-for-6 in the regular season with a home run and double. He batted seventh Saturday, as he did the first game in Japan, but ultimately is expected to be a 3-4-5 hitter.

For now, Weeks, Cliff Pennington and Coco Crisp are at the top of the lineup.

Asked to compare this year's offense with last year's, Weeks said, "It's an offense that wants to prove something, so you get more energy out of this lineup. Everybody's amped up to play, amped up to prove something. You've got a young team. Guys aren't very proven."

Melvin, a Giants catcher from 1986 to 1988, is familiar with the Bay Bridge Series as a player. This will be his first experience as a manager.

"I like the Bay Bridge Series," he said. "I know it's still spring training games, but if there ever was a series leading into a season where there's a little more weight than playing in Arizona, it's the Bay Bridge Series."

**Giants vs. A's**

**Monday:** A's (Godfrey) at Giants (Bumgarner), 7:35 p.m. **CSNCA**

**Tuesday:** Giants (Cain) at A's (Ross), 7:35 p.m. **CSNBA**

**Wednesday:** A's (TBA) at Giants (Petit), 12:45 p.m. No TV

**Note:** All games on 680 and 95.7.

### **A's, Giants preseason series is baseball in its purest form**

By: Mychael Urban, San Francisco Examiner

The A's and Giants are set to go at it for three games before the regular season begins.

The annual preseason Battle of the Bay starts tonight at AT&T Park, and while in reality it's merely the final dress rehearsal for the start of the regular season for both teams, it's more the end of the annual age of innocence and the last chance to enjoy big-league baseball in its most pure form.

And don't give me that "We already started the regular season" nonsense, A's fans. The standings might say that, but nobody else does. The two-game series last week at the Tokyo Dome should have been called the "Sham in Japan."

If it ain't on live TV in 2012, it ain't all that important. Especially when the league's own damned network didn't deem it worthy of a live broadcast. It was a two-game exhibition and money-grab. Period.

The preseason Battle of the Bay is a money-grab to an extent, too, but on the field, it's one last chance for the respective fan bases to dream.

The scoreboard is as irrelevant as those at T-ball fields across the country. All that matters is that the fans get one last look at their boys before the harsh reality of winning-is-everything either slaps them silly or gives them that warm, third-shot-of-tequila sensation that comes with feeling like everything just might be right in your little corner of the world.

As it stands, the Giants have a far better chance of bringing that latter feeling to their fans. They have more talent, they have more hope, they have more established pitching.

The A's? Well, the weekend injury news relating to Dallas Braden, their most established starter still of career-prime age (sorry, Bartolo Colon), and Manny Ramirez, their most established position player (until Yoenis Cespedes gets a year or two under that superhero utility belt of his), says it all.

Until further notice, Oakland is cursed for one reason or another.

But not, officially, until they play the Seattle Mariners again on U.S. soil.

For now, they've got just as good a shot at winning one of the 10 playoff spots in Major League Baseball's vomit-inducing playoff expansion plan as anyone, and while they're taking on the Giants, who have a much better shot as grabbing one of those diluted postseason berths, unbridled optimism should be the prevailing sentiment for both sets of fans.

Until the bell actually rings, and really until the fat lady sings, you absolutely have to believe that your team can accomplish great things.

The bonus backdrop, of course, is the rivalry.

Honesty check: The rivalry is virtually nonexistent on the field and in the clubhouses. The players could care less if Giants fans detest the A's or vice versa. Even if they say otherwise for public consumption.

But the rivalry is very real in the stands, where it's more of a sibling rivalry than anything — with Giants fans in the role of arrogant, older bullies and A's fans playing the I'll-show-you-but-I'm-still-eager-to-please little brothers and sisters.

Don't shoot the messenger, folks. You know it's true. And that's what makes it compelling. The same dynamic is at work with the New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox, if you really want to break it down. The Yanks are the Giants. The Sox are the A's. Think about it.

Or don't. Better yet, just enjoy the last remnants of baseball that doesn't really matter. Baseball played at a ridiculously high level, for sure, but it still doesn't matter.

What matters is coming later in the week, in the form of the Mariners and Diamondbacks.

The Battle of the Bay is meant to be pure fun. Keep that in mind, and it will be.

## **Preseason Battle of the Bay**

### **Giants vs. A's**

- Today, 7:35 p.m., at AT&T Park. TV: Comcast SportsNet California (live), MLB Network (tape-delayed at 11 p.m.)
- Tuesday, 7:35 p.m., at O.co Coliseum.
- Wednesday, 12:45 p.m., at AT&T Park.

*All games broadcast on KNBR (680 AM) and KGMZ (95.7 FM)*

## **In Tug of War Over San Jose, A's and the Giants Remain at a Standoff**

By KEN BELSON, New York Times

OAKLAND, Calif. — To some outsiders, the Bay Area can look like one big patchouli party united by high technology, good food and liberal politics. But when it comes to baseball, relations between the Oakland Athletics and the San Francisco Giants have become positively nasty.

The teams, which have shared a market for 42 years, are battling over who controls the rights to San Jose, which is in the heart of Silicon Valley about one hour south of both cities. The A's want to build a new stadium there because, they say, Oakland lacks the fans and the appealing locations. Being in San Jose, the A's argue, will help the team generate more money, increase its payroll and reduce its reliance on the revenue-sharing money it has been receiving to stay afloat.

It is a nice idea, except the Giants insist that San Jose is in their territory, a fact included in Major League Baseball's constitution in 1990. The owners say they bought the team in 1993 partly because it included the rights to San Jose, where they have spent tens of millions of dollars trying to woo fans and sponsors. Letting the A's move there, they say, would erode their investment.

The dispute has become so fractious that in 2009, Commissioner Bud Selig appointed a committee to study the issue. Since then, the Mets, the Yankees, the Minnesota Twins and, this week, the Miami Marlins will have moved into new parks. Meanwhile, the A's wait, playing in what is now the fourth-oldest ballpark in the majors and the only one that hosts another team in another sport (the Raiders).

Selig, who declined to answer questions for this article, has been criticized for letting the standoff linger. But he faces a thorny quandary. He wants to help the A's find a new stadium to boost their revenue, but he does not want to hurt the Giants, who spent their own money to build AT&T Park and have revitalized the team, making it one of the most admired in baseball.

The Giants argue that there is nothing for Selig to decide because San Jose is theirs. Lew Wolff, the principal owner of the A's, disagrees and says he has already tried and failed to find a decent site for a new stadium in Oakland and nearby Fremont. San Jose, which has largely cleared the way for the team to build a stadium there and where Wolff has been a major real estate developer over the years, is the only reasonable option, he said. All he needs is the green light that Selig has yet to give him.

"I'm the most patient man in baseball, except for the commissioner," said Wolff, who was a college fraternity brother of Selig's. "I'd like this to get done in as collaborative way as possible. But Bud will make his decision in the best interests of baseball, not because we know the fraternity handshake."

Oakland, a largely blue-collar city, is getting little respect in all this but is trying to fight back. Last month, its city council agreed to spend \$3.5 million to look at ways to develop the area around the A's stadium, Oakland Coliseum, and include room for a new park for the team.

The A's, no doubt aware that a credible plan to keep them in Oakland would give Selig one fewer reason to let the team to move to San Jose, dashed off a news release again urging him to approve their plan for San Jose. The Giants swiftly issued a rebuttal, reiterating their opposition.

"The A's fail to mention that M.L.B.'s 1990 territorial-rights designation has been explicitly reaffirmed by Major League Baseball on four separate occasions," the Giants said in a statement.

The clock is also ticking on the A's lease in Oakland, which expires at the end of next season. The team has not signed a new lease because it does not know where it might play in a few years. The A's have also traded many of their top players and are stockpiling prospects in the hopes that they will blossom by the time the team presumably moves into a new park, wherever that may be.

The strategy has led fans to accuse Wolff of trashing the current A's to prove that operating in Oakland is untenable. Fans resent that Wolff has put tarps over the upper deck — even during the 2006 playoffs — and shuttered concession stands. Handmade signs that say "Slumdog Billionaire" and "Don't Take Our A's Away" now show up in the stands.

"They make it so difficult to come to games," said Garth Kimball, a member of Baseball Oakland, a group of fans dedicated to keeping the A's where they are. "The more this goes on, the more obvious his motives are."

Jean Quan, Oakland's mayor, also seems to feel snubbed by Wolff. She said he had dismissed two of the city's proposals and had shown little interest in continuing discussions about extending the A's lease.

"I think he's turned his back on Oakland," she said, sitting in a conference room at City Hall that was adorned with a giant A's banner. "We're going to do everything we can to keep the team."

Wolff, though, says he doubts Oakland can come up with a credible plan. "Just drawing some lines around a few blocks doesn't get you a stadium," he said, adding that there are not enough A's fans in Oakland to justify keeping the team there.

Oakland's population has indeed peaked. But the team draws heavily from the surrounding suburbs. For much of the 1980s and early 1990s, the A's routinely outdrew the Giants; as recently as 2005, the A's drew more than 2.1 million fans. The next year, Wolff and the Fisher family took over the team, and attendance has fallen ever since, to just 1.48 million fans last year, the smallest in baseball.

Other teams have pleaded poverty to get a new stadium so they could compete with wealthier teams. But stadiums do not guarantee winning teams. Just ask the Pittsburgh Pirates, who have not had a winning season since they moved into PNC Park in 2001. And the A's, with Billy Beane as the general manager, have qualified for the playoffs several times despite often operating on a shoestring.

The question, though, is whether the A's have the right to move to San Jose. Selig has said in recent years that territorial rights are sacrosanct because owners need certainty that their investments are not undercut by another's team moving into the same market.

In New York, Los Angeles and Chicago, where there are also two teams, both clubs occasionally butt heads. The Dodgers took offense when the Angels renamed themselves the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim. The Mets blocked the Yankees from moving their Class AAA franchise to Newark for a year.

In the Bay Area, the market had always been more clearly demarcated: the Giants had the rights to San Francisco and San Mateo Counties, and the A's controlled Alameda and Contra Costa Counties. Neither team had Santa Clara County, where San Jose is.

Then in 1990, Bob Lurie, the owner of the Giants at the time, wanted to move to San Jose; Walter Haas, the A's owner, gave his consent. When Lurie's deal collapsed, the Giants kept the rights to Santa Clara County.

Wolff argues that Haas agreed to give the Giants the rights to Santa Clara County only if the team moved there. Yet when Lurie sold the team in 1993, the buyers — which included the Fisher family — did so in part because Santa Clara County would remain Giants territory. When Fisher sold his stake in the Giants so he could buy the A's, he did so knowing the Giants had control of Santa Clara County.

While both teams have dug in their heels, Selig has several options. He could, according to people in baseball with knowledge of his thinking, reaffirm that the Giants control Santa Clara County. Some baseball insiders, though, believe that the A's could eventually be allowed to move to San Jose if they offer to indemnify the Giants, although both teams reject that possibility. Indemnity payments, in any event, could wipe out any profits the A's might generate from a new stadium.

More likely, these insiders say, Selig will wait to see if Oakland's latest plan for a revamped stadium district gains momentum, even though California has eliminated the urban-redevelopment fund that might have been used by Oakland to develop a site.

Of course, if Wolff and the Fisher family become fed up with the process, they could sell the team. After all, they paid about \$180 million in 2005 and the team is now worth nearly twice as much, [according to Forbes](#). They would not even need to build a new ballpark.

### **The A's come to Yolo County: Recap or reality?**

Dino Gay, The Woodland Record

Last night the MLB A's travelled from their up-the-road home in Oakland to play a game on-the-farm in Yolo County against their AAA affiliate River Cats.

The preseason game conjured up more than just a daily box score. Just the simple fact that the major league A's were playing baseball in West Sacramento was more intriguing. Could they play at Raley Field on a regular, or perhaps permanent basis? The possibility of a Sacramento Athletics team is often discussed, but so far the concept has not gained any traction.

In 2006 Gabe Ross, then Director of Media Relations for the River Cats stated that Raley Field "...was not built expressly to be easily expanded in the future. The stadium was designed specifically for its current tenant, Triple-A Baseball, and all of the comfort and intimacy that makes Triple-A Baseball so successful. That said, in the unlikely case that we would want to expand the ballpark to accommodate a larger capacity, the stadium would need significant adjustments but likely not need to be demolished and rebuilt from scratch. (NewBallPark.blogspot.com)

Last year the Sacramento River Cats drew an average of 8,455 fans per game with a season total of 600,306. That

puts them on par with the Oakland A's 1970s attendance figures. In 1976, the game average for the A's was 9,696. In '77 it was 6,157, in '78 it was 6,506 and in '79 attendance fell to a dismal 3,787. After surging in the late '80s and early 90s – the Tony La Russa era (World Series champs in '89) – attendance dropped again before Art Howe adapted to the "Money Ball" philosophy. But again in 2008 the A's game attendance dropped below the 20K mark and the average over the past four years became 18,280. (Baseball Almanac)

Historically the Oakland Athletics have been amongst the lowest-ranking MLB teams in attendance, whereas the Sacramento River Cats have been at the top or near the top. In 2001 the River Cats attracted a high of 12,516 fans on average at each game. Over the past four years, the team has averaged 9,110 fans per game. (BizOfBaseball.com)

Now consider this, in its current configuration the River Cats' Raley Field can hold more than 15,000 visitors per game. The Oakland Coliseum has a baseball capacity of about 34,000. So the River Cats have filled their stadium at 61% over the past four years, the A's about 54%. Do the figures make a compelling case for the A's to play games in West Sacramento? Do the figures make sense for the Oakland A's to move to Yolo County instead of Bay Area locations like San Jose?

For a sampler, maybe the A's can play some of their home series at Raley Field when the River Cats are not in town. Here are some possible dates, opening and closing series excluded:

April 23-25, Chicago White Sox  
May 21-23, LA Angels  
June 4-7, Texas Rangers  
July 6-8, Seattle Mariners  
August 31 - September 2, Boston Red Sox  
September 14-16, Baltimore Orioles  
September 28-30, Seattle Mariners

Possible stadium sites for the Oakland A's, if they were to make their home in the Sacramento area, include: Raley Field in West Sacramento, Woodland's mostly-vacant industrial area or at the Power Balance Arena site in Natomas. Of course our beloved River Cats would need to relocate if the A's moved in. Oakland maybe?

The market area of Yolo and surrounding counties (Sacramento, Solano, Napa, Lake, Colusa, Sutter) includes a population of about 2.4 million. Add Yuba, Placer, San Joaquin and El Dorado and the expanded market area comes to about 3.7 million. Throw in Contra Costa County (which is two counties from Yolo but adjacent to Sacramento) and the potential market area grows to about 4.8 million people. By contrast, the San Francisco Bay metropolitan area (Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, and Sonoma) has about 7.1 million residents – but the Giants and A's split that market. Can 2.4 to 4.8 million support the Sacramento A's?

By the way, the A's Tom Milone (six innings) and Andrew Carignan (one inning) no-hit the River Cats last night at Raley Field in a rain shortened 9-0 blow-out.

10,112 attended the game last night. Pretty good for a soaking, wet exhibition game.

# # #

The 2012 season opener for the Sacramento Rivercats is April 5 at the Las Vegas 51s' Cashman Field. Opening Day at Raley Field is April 13 versus the Reno Aces.

On the farm: Sacramento Rivercats