

## A's News Clips, Thursday, April 5, 2012

### Season preview: Oakland A's hope their offense generates enough runs

Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Their lineup may change dramatically each year, but the same question persists for the A's: Can they find a way to score enough runs?

Since their last playoff season in 2006, the A's have finished no higher than ninth in the American League in runs scored while featuring some of the league's best pitching.

But this season, with a pitching staff led by two injury-prone veteran starters -- Brandon McCarthy and Bartolo Colon -- and several unproven arms in the back of the rotation and bullpen, it's vital that the A's bats generate more scoreboard activity.

Some observers doubt they can.

"I just don't see where they're going to get any power," said one major league scout who follows the A's regularly.

The A's offensive fortunes rest largely with an exciting but unproven talent.

Center fielder Yoenis Cespedes, who defected from Cuba last summer and signed a four-year, \$36 million contract with the A's in early March, has the tools to be the middle-of-the-order threat Oakland has lacked for several years.

That was evident in a season-opening two-game series in Tokyo last week, when Cespedes mashed a two-run homer against Seattle that nearly left a vapor trail.

"He's got great hands, great wrists," A's hitting coach Chili Davis said. "You see guys that have power, but they don't have that nice fluid, wristy kind of swing. He's not a pull hitter, he's not an inside-out hitter. He drives the ball to all fields."

But it could be the hitters around Cespedes that determine what kind of success he has this season.

Cespedes showed vulnerability to sliders throughout the spring, and there's general skepticism as to how quickly he'll adapt to the majors, which represents a huge jump in competition from Cuba's National Series.

The recent track record of Cuban defectors to play in the majors has been a mixed bag.

White Sox shortstop Alexei Ramirez was 26, the same age as Cespedes, when he signed and went straight to the majors in 2008. Ramirez hit .290 with 21 homers and 77 RBIs that season and won a Silver Slugger award in 2010.

But Cincinnati Reds left-hander Aroldis Chapman, 24, has yet to live up to the hype of his six-year, \$30.25 million contract signed in January 2010. He is 6-3 with a 3.27 ERA and one save in 69 career appearances, all in relief.

Los Angeles Angels first baseman Kendrys Morales debuted in the majors in 2006 at age 23, but he needed considerable seasoning in the minors before his breakthrough season of 2009, when he hit .306 with 34 homers and 108 RBIs for the big club.

A's general manager Billy Beane anticipates Cespedes will struggle at times but feels he has the mental toughness to pull through.

"He takes each at-bat as it is and seems to forget about the last one," Beane said. "He's going to go through the growing pains you get with a young player. (But) he doesn't play afraid."

The A's sorely need a spark from someone -- Cespedes or otherwise -- in the heart of their lineup.

Since 2007, Oakland's No. 3 hitters rank last in the A.L. in batting average (.246), homers (79) and RBIs (388). Their cleanup men rank 13th with a .253 average and 10th in homers (121), and their No. 5 hitters rank last in homers and 12th in both RBIs and batting average.

Perhaps the addition of Manny Ramirez -- who isn't eligible to play until May 30 because of a 50-game suspension -- can provide a power boost. But Ramirez also will turn 40 on May 30, so how effective he might be remains to be seen.

The fact that manager Bob Melvin has speedster Coco Crisp hitting third speaks to the A's current lack of firepower. And Seth Smith, who has never hit more than 17 homers in a season, is hardly an ideal cleanup man.

The A's do have a nice group of table-setters with switch hitters Jemile Weeks, Cliff Pennington and Crisp hitting in the top three spots. But it's worth pondering if their best lineup is Weeks and Crisp hitting 1-2, with a player such as Josh Reddick -- who hit .333 during the spring and homered in Tokyo -- getting a crack in the third spot and Cespedes batting cleanup.

Cespedes hit sixth and seventh, respectively, in the Tokyo series because the A's wanted to keep the pressure off him, but that's likely to change before long.

"We envision him as a middle-of-the-order guy, and at some point I have no doubt he'll be there," Melvin said.

A better offense would provide some breathing room for the A's inexperienced starting rotation, which lost Trevor Cahill and Gio Gonzalez to offseason trades and is without Dallas Braden, sidelined indefinitely with a shoulder injury.

The bullpen is no sure thing, either. Grant Balfour is serving as a full-time closer for the first time, and inexperienced relievers such as Ryan Cook and Fautino De Los Santos are holding down key roles.

The A's also must aid their pitchers by playing tighter defense than in 2011, when they committed an A.L.-high 124 errors.

"Having a great offense gives you room for error. I'm not sure we have that right now," Beane said. "The back end of our rotation is pretty young, so playing defense and (having good) base running is going to be real important."

### **Josh Donaldson hits two homers as A's beat Giants 8-1**

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

Josh Donaldson hit his first two home runs of the spring in his first-two at-bats and drove in five runs to power the A's to an 8-1 victory over the Giants in the final game of the Bay Bridge Series on Wednesday at AT&T Park.

Donaldson, a converted catcher who is expected to get most of the time at third base with projected starter Scott Sizemore out for the season because of a knee injury, slammed a two-run homer to left-center off Giants starter Yusmeiro Petit in the second inning and a three-run shot to left off Petit, who will start the season at Triple-A Fresno, in the third.

The A's also got a solo homer from Johnny Gomes in the third.

The Giants' run came on an RBI single by Buster Posey in the first inning. Posey also doubled in his only other at-bat.

Both teams substituted early and often in the final spring tuneup for both teams. The A's finished their Cactus League campaign at 15-7-2, while the Giants wound up 18-15-3.

### **Oakland A's send right-hander Tyson Ross to minors, choose Graham Godfrey as fourth starter**

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

Tyson Ross is the odd man out in the A's starting rotation for now. He's hoping it's only a two-week detour through Sacramento.

Since Oakland won't need a fifth starter until April 17, Ross was optioned to Triple-A Wednesday as the A's made their final roster trim to get back down to the 25-man regular-season limit.

Graham Godfrey, who pitched five innings of shutout ball against the Giants on Monday, was named the No. 4 starter, while Ross must go to the minors without a guarantee that he'll be the fifth man, although he'll certainly have the inside track.

"His last two outings were probably not his best, and Godfrey's were his best," manager Bob Melvin said. "What I wanted to impress on Tyson was that he's a very talented guy, and he needs to work on getting a secondary pitch over in off counts. It's tough when you get behind and you get predictable. But when he know what he can do when he gets on a roll."

Ross, while disappointed, seemed to understand he needs to fine-tune some things.

"Any time you get sent down you can't be happy, but I'm not going to let it get me down," he said. "I'll be ready when the call comes. I just need to sharpen up my secondary pitches and be a little more consistent."

Ross, a former Bishop O'Dowd High and Cal standout, started the spring very strong but got knocked around pretty good during an exhibition game against Hanshin in Japan and was decent but not as good as Godfrey when he pitched against the Giants on Tuesday night.

The challenge now will be staying ahead of the competition in Triple-A. Melvin asserted that Ross will have to stay a step ahead of Jarrod Parker and Brad Peacock, who were also in the competition for the final two rotation spots until being optioned to Sacramento before the A's went to Japan.

"Tyson will be on schedule to pitch (on April 17)," Melvin said. "But I told him I can't promise him anything, that he's going to have to go out and perform."

- Josh Donaldson saved his best spring training game for his last one. He went 4 for 5 in Oakland's 8-1 win over the Giants Wednesday at AT&T Park with a pair of home runs and five RBIs.

Donaldson, a converted catcher who should get most of the time at third base with the loss of projected starter Scott Sizemore lost for the season following ACL surgery, hit a two-run shot in his first at-bat against Giants starter Yusmeiro Petit in the second inning and hit a three-run shot in the third.

Donaldson has been having consistently better at-bats late in spring now that he has settled in reasonably well at third base.

- No. 3 starter Tommy Milone had his final tuneup for the regular season, pitching just two innings because he was pitching on short rest. The left-hander pitched six perfect innings in Sacramento Saturday, and he gave up one run on two hits with three strikeouts Wednesday.

Milone, acquired in the trade with Washington for Gio Gonzalez, established himself early on in the competition for one of the last three spots in the rotation, and termed his spring successful.

"I had my command right away, so that helped a lot with my confidence," Milone said. "The way I pitch I have to strikes and to be able to do that was obviously a plus, and I was able to throw all of my pitches from Day One. Now I feel I have some good momentum going into the season."

- Shortstop Cliff Pennington, nursing tightness in his left groin, didn't play again Wednesday and will have had three full days off heading into Friday night's home opener.

"I'm feeling almost 100 percent," Pennington said. "I could have played today if this was a regular season game, but I don't need the at-bats. I just want to make sure I'm completely healthy going into the regular season."

- The A's had not yet received the results of an MRI taken on right-handed reliever Joey Devine, who is trying to get to the bottom of why he has had recurring flexor tendinitis ever since undergoing Tommy John elbow surgery in 2009.

### **A's notebook: Dallas Braden's injury not as serious as Oakland A's feared**

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

The A's learned Tuesday that they won't have Dallas Braden for a while, but there is hope the left-handed pitcher might return in the first half of the season.

Following an examination Monday in New York by Dr. David Altcheck, the surgeon who repaired the torn anterior capsule in his left shoulder last May, Braden was given a platelet-rich plasma (PRP) injection and told he has to completely shut things down for three weeks.

Braden and the A's had feared a potentially worse prognosis.

"He will do strengthening, but he won't throw a ball for three weeks," said manager Bob Melvin. "But from what we hear and from what the doctor told him, he just needed a shot, that it's just a strain in his shoulder, and they just want him to lay off and do more strengthening."

Melvin has no clear idea of how much ground Braden will have to make up once he is able to start throwing again in late April.

"The schedule he was on obviously we're not on anymore, and we'll start again after this three-week period is up, and we'll see where he's at," the manager said. "He certainly won't be back at square one, like he was after the surgery, but we're not even looking at a schedule right now. We're just waiting to see how he feels after three weeks and then going forward accordingly."

Braden was at O.co Coliseum on Tuesday night but unavailable for comment

- If judged by the past two nights, Graham Godfrey probably beat out Tyson Ross for the fourth spot in the rotation, with Ross temporarily headed to Triple-A since the A's don't need a fifth starter until mid-April. Godfrey threw five shutout innings Monday night, and Ross gave up three runs (two earned) in five innings Tuesday.

But after Tuesday night's game, Melvin still wasn't ready to make a call.

"It's pretty close," he said. "There are a lot of things that factor into it. We'd feel comfortable with either of them."

Melvin said the A's would name the fourth starter Wednesday, but it wouldn't necessarily mean whoever goes to Sacramento is guaranteed to come back or that the No. 4 man stays in Oakland.

"We'll name the fourth, then we have some time, a couple of starts and you never know what happens," he said. "You can't guarantee anybody anything. Certainly (the fifth starter sent down) would have the leg up, there are so many things that can change. I think everything's still a work in progress for us."

Ross was fairly satisfied with his final spring outing.

"I came out of there after five feeling good and strong," he said. "That's probably the most important positive. I can definitely be more consistent with my tempo, but I'm happy where I'm at."

- In a move that was hardly a surprise, first baseman Daric Barton was placed on the 15-day disabled list as he continues to prepare his surgically repaired right shoulder for everyday duty. Barton played in just seven spring training games, batting .176 with a double and no RBIs and indicated Monday that he still needs some strengthening to play every day.

"We just felt like he needed -- and he felt it as well -- several games in a row to really feel good about where his arm strength is," Melvin said.

Barton's D.L. assignment can be backdated six days from the A's opener in Japan March 28, meaning he will be eligible to be activated April 8. Melvin wouldn't speculate if it would happen then.

- Shortstop Cliff Pennington had the night off after removing himself from Monday's game in San Francisco in the second inning with tightness in his groin. Pennington said he was feeling significantly better Tuesday, but Melvin doesn't want to take any chances.
- Right-handed reliever Joey Devine had an MRI exam on his elbow Monday to determine why he continues to be plagued by flexor tendinitis even though the elbow ligament he had repaired from Tommy John surgery is fine. A report is expected from Dr. James Andrews on Wednesday.

"The next 12 hours is going to answer a lot of questions," Devine said.

- Brett Anderson, on the 60-day disabled list following Tommy John elbow surgery last season, continues to make progress in throwing sessions. Anderson threw 40 pitches in his latest bullpen session and was able to throw sliders and curveballs.

### **Inside the Oakland A's: Ross sent to Triple-A for now, 25-man roster set for Friday**

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune, 4/4/2012, 12:37pm

In for Joe Stiglich one more day ...

Not much of a surprise after the last two days, but the A's elected to keep Graham Godfrey on the roster as their No. 4 starter and send Tyson Ross to Triple-A Sacramento to get down to the 25-man roster limit. Ross could be back on April 17 when the A's need a fifth starter, but it's not a sure thing. The former Bishop O'Dowd High and Cal standout started the spring very strongly but got knocked around pretty good in an exhibition in Japan, and was shaky Tuesday night against the Giants. Godfrey, meanwhile, had his best two performances of the spring in the final two, which manager Bob Melvin said was the deciding factor.

Ross was disappointed, but understands he needs to sharpen his secondary pitches. The challenge for him will be staying at No. 5 and holding off Brad Peacock and Jarrod Parker, who were also in the mix for the No. 4 and No. 5 spots throughout spring. Ross knows he's not guaranteed anything, but he does have the inside track on coming back as long as he doesn't flame out with Sacto. Don't be surprised if the A's do a lot of juggling with the No. 4 and 5 spots this year. Godfrey will have to pitch well to keep his job, too, but right now he's the clear No. 4 behind Brandon McCarthy, Bartolo Colon and Tommy Milone.

It was a quiet day for the A's compared to the Giants, who had to make 9 roster moves to Oakland's 1.

Shortstop Cliff Pennington will probably take the full day off to rest his tight groin. He told me he could play if it was a regular season game and that he's pretty close to 100 percent, but doesn't need the at-bats and wants to be fully healthy for the home opener Friday night.

No word yet on RHP Joey Devine's MRI to determine what's causing his chronic flexor tendinitis.

The Giants consented to allow the A's to use the DH today even though they're playing in a National League park. Kurt Suzuki gets the nod with Anthony Recker behind the plate.

Yoenis Cespedes has settled into a pattern of mashing at least one ball per game. I'm going on record: This guy's going to hit 30-plus HRs (hey, only 29 to go) as long as he stays healthy. He's already established that you can't miss one of his at-bats.

### **Josh Donaldson homers twice as A's rout Giants**

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

The A's say so long to spring training for the second time, and this time, they end exhibition games with a 25-man roster.

First base is the one spot still unsettled, but the A's are starting to feel comfortable with some of their other major question marks. One in particular delivered Wednesday: Josh Donaldson, a converted catcher named the team's starting third baseman last week, went 4-for-4 with two homers and five RBIs in the A's 8-1 victory over the Giants.

The A's worst news of the spring was the season-ending knee injury to third baseman Scott Sizemore on the first day of workouts, but there is optimism about Donaldson as a replacement. He played third base at Auburn, and he has performed reasonably well there this spring, but he hadn't homered until Wednesday.

Donaldson cracked a two-run homer off Yusmeiro Petit in the second inning, then added a three-run shot in the third, a single in the fifth and an opposite-field base hit in the sixth, the at-bat that pleased him the most.

"I took what he gave me," Donaldson said of Steve Edlefsen. "Normally, if I hit a home run early, I want to try to hit home runs. Today, I felt the same every at-bat."

Early in the spring, Donaldson said, he might have been so focused on defense that his offense fell off a bit, but since being named the starter, "It feels easier on me, mentally and physically. I'm just playing, and hitting."

Manager Bob Melvin has expressed few concerns about Donaldson all spring, and Donaldson said Melvin's confidence has enabled him to feel more comfortable with his transition to third.

"Today was fitting ... with how much he worked this spring," Melvin said, adding later, "We all feel good about him being a production guy in the lineup."

There also were questions about center fielder Yoenis Céspedes because he hadn't played pro ball in the United States. His defense and his hitting have been more than adequate, and the \$36 million free agent has shown flashes of potential stardom.

He went 0-for-4 Wednesday, dropping his average for the spring to .229, but in two regular-season games against Seattle in Japan, he doubled off Felix Hernandez and homered off Shawn Kelley.

As expected, the team is keeping two first basemen, Brandon Allen and Kila Ka'aihue, who are both out of options. Neither has laid a strong claim to the everyday job, and it's clear that Daric Barton will get the next shot when he comes off the disabled list, unless Allen or Ka'aihue goes on some sort of tear.

Ka'aihue started Wednesday and had a single, double and two walks, and he scored three runs.

Melvin said that shortstop Cliff Pennington was held out as a precaution after groin tightness Monday. He's fully expected to play in Friday's home opener.

### **A's roster**

# Pitchers  
50 Grant Balfour  
13 Jerry Blevins  
38 Andrew Carignan  
21 Bartolo Colon  
48 Ryan Cook  
60 Fautino De Los Santos  
40 Brian Fuentes  
45 Graham Godfrey  
32 Brandon McCarthy  
57 Tommy Milone  
77 Jordan Norberto  
# Catchers  
26 Anthony Recker  
8 Kurt Suzuki  
# Infielders  
14 Brandon Allen  
20 Josh Donaldson  
25 Kila Ka'aihue  
2 Cliff Pennington  
28 Eric Sogard  
19 Jemile Weeks  
# Outfielders  
52 Yoenis Céspedes  
12 Collin Cowgill  
4 Coco Crisp  
31 Jonny Gomes  
16 Josh Reddick  
15 Seth Smith

### **A's say Tyson Ross still likely 5th starter**

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

**Tyson Ross** said he was disappointed to be sent down to Triple-A Sacramento on Wednesday. He remains the top bet to be Oakland's fifth starter, but isn't taking it for granted.

"I don't think anything is guaranteed, unless you sign a contract like **Matt Cain** did," Ross said. "You have to fight for every opportunity. I have to try to put myself in the best position I can."

Manager **Bob Melvin** said Ross will be on schedule to start April 17, which is when the A's will need a fifth starter. Melvin said Ross is in the driver's seat for the job, but, Melvin said, "I told him I can't promise anything. 'You will have to go out and perform.' "

**Graham Godfrey**, who threw five scoreless innings against the Giants on Monday, was named Oakland's fourth starter. "He's always been a fierce competitor," Melvin said. "You look at his stuff and nothing overwhelms you, but he goes out there and competes."

In his final spring start Tuesday, Ross allowed three runs, two earned, in five innings, but he also threw 93 pitches. Godfrey threw 57 in five innings.

**Cuban power: Yoenis Céspedes'** Cuban single-season home run record fell Tuesday when **Alfredo Despaigne** hit two out to reach 35 in 85 games; Céspedes hit 33 in 90 games in the 2010-11 season with Granma to break Despaigne's mark of 32 the previous year for the same team.

"I'm very happy because the guy who broke the record was my roommate for six years," Céspedes said, with USA Today's **Jorge Ortiz** interpreting. "I'm proud of him, and two years ago, I broke his record. As long as it stays within the province and the team, I'm happy. So congratulations!"

At 25, Despaigne is younger than Céspedes, but were he to defect, he is not expected to command as high a price because he is not as athletically gifted as Céspedes, who got \$36 million for four years with Oakland.

**Briefly:** The A's borrowed minor-league catcher **Max Stassi** and left-hander **Fabio Castro**. Stassi, who is from Yuba City (Sutter County), said his mom, **Racquelle**, was driving down for Wednesday's game. "It would be cool to play here in a big-league park," Stassi said before the game. ... The team will hold a workout Thursday afternoon at the Coliseum. ... Minor-league outfielder **Cedric Hunter** was sold to St. Louis.

## On Deck

### Friday

vs. Mariners

7:05 p.m. **CSNCA**

Vargas (10-13) vs.

McCarthy (9-9)

### Saturday

vs. Mariners

6:05 p.m. **CSN+**

Hernandez (14-14) vs. Colon (8-10)

### Sunday

Off

## Leading off

**A's top spring hitter:** Minor-league outfielder Brandon Moss singled in the seventh and was 11-for-22 this spring with Oakland. "I think they have an idea what my approach is as a hitter," Moss said. "I'm just looking for another chance in the big leagues, to show I've made adjustments that work."

## **The Drumbeat: Big day for A's third baseman Josh Donaldson**

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at AT&T Park, 4/4/2012, 4:14pm

Josh Donaldson, named the starting third baseman last week in Japan, spent the early part of the spring proving he could handle the move from catcher to third. On Wednesday, he had his biggest day of the spring at the plate, going 4-for-4 with two homers and five RBIs in the A's 8-1 victory over the Giants.

"Today was fitting for him with how much he worked this spring," Manager Bob Melvin said, adding later, "We all feel good about him being a production guy in the lineup. ... His body of work this spring was just terrific."

Donaldson said that he might have been so focused on defense earlier in the spring that it detracted some from his hitting, but since being named the starting third baseman, "It's easier on me mentally and physically. I'm just playing, and hitting."

Donaldson had a 45-minute video session with hitting coach Chili Davis on Tuesday night, along with several other players, and he said that helped his mental approach Wednesday. "I felt I really wasn't trying to do a lot," he said. "It slowed things down for me, I got in some good counts, and when I got one, I drove it."

The corner infield spots have been areas of concern for the A's, particularly since starting third baseman Scott Sizemore incurred a season-ending knee injury the first day of full workouts. But Wednesday, Donaldson and first baseman Kila Ka'aihue combined to reach base eight times and to score six runs. Ka'aihue had a single, a double and two walks, and with first base still unsettled, he might have helped extend the look he'll get at the spot.

No. 3 starter Tommy Milone worked only two innings because he was working on short rest after starting Saturday at Sacramento; he allowed two hits and a run. He said he feels ready for the season, and he summed up his spring in one word: "Successful."

Milone might have been the one guy unhappy the A's got the DH today at an NL park – he homered on the very first pitch of his very first at-bat last year.

Kurt Suzuki, who caught nine innings last night, DH'd, and he went 0-for-2 with a walk.

Guys who had darn good springs: Jemile Weeks, who hit .339; Collin Cowgill, .396, and Brandon Moss, who hit .500. Moss is not on the roster – he was assigned to Triple-A Sacramento before the team left for Japan, but he was borrowed for this series.

### **The Drumbeat: A's name Graham Godfrey fourth starter, Tyson Ross sent down**

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at AT&T Park, 4/4/2012, 12:06pm

Graham Godfrey's final two spring starts were better than Tyson Ross', and that probably made the difference in the close battle for the A's fourth-starter spot. Ross was optioned to Triple-A Sacramento this morning, but he is on track to start on April 17, which is the first time the A's need a fifth starter.

Manager Bob Melvin again said that it is not written in stone that Ross will be the fifth starter, but he does have a strong edge and as long as he performs well at Sacramento, he'll remain the top choice for that fifth spot. Jarrod Parker and Brad Peacock are the other possibilities, but for many reasons, the A's would like Ross to be the guy on April 17, including the fact that Parker and Peacock could both benefit from at least a short amount of time spiffing things up in the minors.

Ross said he's disappointed to be sent out, but he will work to be more consistent with his secondary stuff and on command of his sinker, and he said he will do his best to be ready whenever needed.

As for heading out with no specific guarantees about the fifth spot, Ross said, "I don't think anything is guaranteed, unless you sign a contract like Matt Cain did. You have to fight for every opportunity."

Godfrey is a "bulldog" in the eyes of catcher Kurt Suzuki, and Melvin described Godfrey as "a fierce competitor."

"You look at his stuff and there's nothing overwhelms you, but he goes out there and competes," Melvin said.

No word yet on Joey Devine's MRI results, and Cliff Pennington won't play today purely for precautionary reasons, there is no concern about his availability for Friday. He said he feels fine after some minor groin tightness Monday night.

Here's the lineup; the Giants agreed to the DH but they didn't Monday because they, quite reasonably, wanted Madison Bumgarner to hit that night: Weeks 2B, Crisp LF, Reddick RF, Suzuki DH, Cespedes CF, Ka'aihue 1B, Donaldson 3B, Sogard SS, Recker C.

### **Donaldson, A's pound Giants in spring finale**



### **Third baseman goes deep twice; Gomes adds solo shot**

By John Schlegel / MLB.com

SAN FRANCISCO -- The A's went long for a trio of home runs -- two by Josh Donaldson -- in the first three innings Wednesday as they pulled away in the final game of the Bay Bridge Series against the Giants, posting an 8-1 victory at AT&T Park.

Donaldson, a career catcher who will start at third base for the A's to begin the season, went 4-for-5 and smacked a two-run shot in the second and a three-run blast in the third. Jonny Gomes added a solo shot in the third, with all the homers coming off Giants Minor Leaguer Yusmeiro Petit, who took the loss.

Starter Tommy Millone was the victor after allowing a run on two hits while striking out three in his two innings of work, but Donaldson was the star of the day for the A's.

"I think today was a fitting end for him and how much work he's done this spring, how much he's had to focus on his defense," A's manager Bob Melvin said of Donaldson. "I think it's all starting to come together right now to where I don't think he's thinking about his defense as much. We really feel good about him being a production guy in our lineup."

The Giants opened the scoring in the first when Buster Posey singled home Pablo Sandoval, who had hit a ground-rule double into the stands in left-center field.

After the A's opened up their lead against Petit, they added a pair of runs in the fifth when Anthony Recker hit a sacrifice fly and Jemile Weeks followed with an RBI single to drive home Donaldson with his third run of the game.

With the outcome of Wednesday's game, Oakland finished their exhibition schedule with a 15-7-2 mark, while San Francisco posted an 18-15-3 record this spring.

**Up next:** After a Thursday workout, the A's will host the Mariners in their home opener on Friday at 7:05 p.m. PT, essentially continuing the series that began with two games in Tokyo last week. Brandon McCarthy, who took the loss in the opener in Japan despite holding the Mariners to one run in seven innings, will be on the mound for Oakland against Seattle's Jason Vargas.

### **Godfrey named No. 4 starter; Ross demoted**

By Alex Espinoza / Special to MLB.com

SAN FRANCISCO -- Manager Bob Melvin wasn't lying when he said the race for the A's fourth spot in the rotation would go down to the wire. Less than three hours before Wednesday's 2 p.m. PT deadline for final roster cuts, Melvin announced Graham Godfrey has earned the No. 4 starter position, meaning Tyson Ross will start the season at Triple-A Sacramento. Melvin said he felt Godfrey finished his spring with his two best starts, including Monday night's strong effort in San Francisco, when he tossed five scoreless innings and gave up four hits while striking out three. Godfrey, 27, made five appearances (four starts) with Oakland last year, posting a 1-2 record with a 3.96 ERA.

"He's always been a fierce competitor," Melvin said of Godfrey. "Not being a knock on him, but you look at his stuff and you say there's nothing that really overwhelms you. But he goes out there and competes. ... He earned the job."

Melvin said Ross is scheduled to rejoin the A's on April 17 as the fifth starter, but that he has to harness his control before returning. While Melvin deemed Ross' sinker to be a "plus-plus pitch," the A's skipper said he needs to get command of it, especially when he falls behind in the count.

"He definitely is a talented guy," Melvin said. "When he gets on a roll, you've seen here what we can accomplish. We just need him to be a little bit more consistent at this point."

### **A's trim roster to 25, will carry 11 pitchers**

SAN FRANCISCO -- The A's finalized their 25-man roster, as the club announced right-hander Tyson Ross has been sent down to Triple-A Sacramento on Wednesday. But the A's will have another roster move to make before April 17, as Ross is scheduled to return as the fifth starter.

For now, the A's will carry 11 pitchers, two catchers, six infielders and six outfielders. There has been plenty of turnover in a year's time, as only seven active players remain from Oakland's 2011 Opening Day roster: Grant Balfour, Jerry Blevins, Brian Fuentes, Brandon McCarthy, Kurt Suzuki, Cliff Pennington and Coco Crisp.

"I feel like the group has come together for a lot of new guys, a lot of young guys," manager Bob Melvin said. "To that point, we've accomplished what we've wanted to in spring, but it's still going to be a work in progress how this thing's going to shake out for us."

There is a chance for injured first baseman Daric Barton (shoulder) to make a quick return to the club, as he is eligible to return from the 15-day disabled list on Monday. But Melvin said there will be something of a platoon situation at first base, as Kila Ka'aihue and Brandon Allen will split the at-bats.

"It's probably going to be matchups at this point -- a hot hand," Melvin said.

## **Melvin moving Cespedes around batting order**

SAN FRANCISCO -- After a full Spring Training, it's clear Yoenis Cespedes has plenty of pop in his bat. Oakland manager Bob Melvin has shuffled the Cuban slugger all over the A's lineup, hitting him anywhere from third to seventh. For Wednesday's exhibition finale against the Giants, Cespedes batted fifth and played center field.

"Down the road, I think he's a middle-of-the-order guy -- whether it be three, four or five," Melvin said. "I've often said all spring with him that he's got enough to handle right now. I don't want to put the added pressure of putting him in the fourth spot every day. We'll move him around the lineup wherever we see fit on a particular day."

Since the scouting report came out on Cespedes this spring, Melvin said pitchers have been feeding him a steady dose of breaking balls, but that Cespedes has done a good job of adjusting. Cespedes drilled a couple of hanging sliders for doubles on Tuesday, showing the type of power the A's envisioned when they signed him to a four-year, \$36 million deal this offseason.

"When he squares it up, it jumps off his bat," Melvin said. "When you watch his batting practice, his ball probably travels a little further than most, and to an extent, makes a different sound."

## **Worth noting**

- Oakland manager Bob Melvin spoke with Giants skipper Bruce Bochy before Wednesday's exhibition and the two agreed to use the designated hitter position at AT&T Park. A's catcher Kurt Suzuki was happy to find out he would be the DH, as Anthony Recker received the start at catcher.

- Because of Oakland's season-opening trip to Japan, A's starters Brandon McCarthy and Bartolo Colon will get two starts apiece in their team's first four games. Melvin said it's a bit of an advantage to have his top two arms go twice to start the season, but pointed out Seattle is in the same situation. The Mariners have also altered their rotation, moving ace Felix Hernandez back a day, meaning the A's will face him three times in their first eight games.

## **Reality figures to slap A's upside the head in 2012**

By LOWELL COHN. THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

It is customary to write a preview for a major-league baseball team just before the season starts. Toward that end, let's assume the Oakland A's are a major-league baseball team, although a reasonable person could argue against that premise.

One question and one question only pertains to the A's: What would constitute a respectable season for them?

Notice we are not asking if they can win the American League West or even contend late into the season. We don't ask those questions because we don't want to get laughed out of the press box.

We're merely trying to define respectable. For context, consider in 2011 they finished third of in a four-team division with a record of 74-88. You could say that record gives promise for this season, or merely that it flat-out stunk. You also could say both things.

OK, so what would be respectable?

How about a .500 record? How about winning 81 games?

It is a modest goal but it would show improvement and it would be a surprise from the team most experts are picking last by a mile.

What do the A's have going for them?

Jemile Weeks, who plays second and will lead off, is a talented and exciting player. Any team would want this guy — that makes it surprising the A's didn't trade him for prospects. The A's have a tropism to trade good players for prospects.

Yoenis Cespedes, the Cuban defector, will play center field. He has zero major-league experience, but we are trying to be positive here. So, let's just say he looks like a fantastic player, and looks are very important in the modern day. He can field and run and he hits with power — well, he did hit with power in Cuba. He is such a good center fielder, Coco Crisp had to become the left fielder. Which means the A's had an over-abundance of talent in center field. Over-abundance is a rare problem for the A's, whose cupboard is traditionally bare.

We'll quickly refer to the other position players, mostly to say they are "guys," who mostly could be replaced by other "guys" as needed. Oh, Crisp is a very good player and, although he grumped about being moved to left field, he is better-suited to left because he doesn't throw well and, in the past, batters would hit a single to center and, giddy at the prospect of Crisp throwing the ball, would stretch it to a double as Crisp tossed pop-ups back to the infield.

The A's expect — hope — right fielder Josh Reddick can hit. Ditto for shortstop Cliff Pennington.

The pitching could turn out better than expected. Brandon McCarthy and Bartolo Colon may surprise a lot of people. Then again, they may not. And closer Grant Balfour, who hasn't really been a closer before, probably can close. Or not.

The A's are in this iffy situation because of "the ballpark," henceforth referred to in this column as "the illusion." The A's nurse the hope that the illusion will come true, that fantasy will turn to reality and the Easter Bunny will smile upon them.

In this candy-colored scenario, they get the illusion built in a few years down there in San Jose and, just about that time, the prospects they got for big-league players like Gio Gonzalez and Trevor Cahill blossom into full-blown stars.

And the A's become like Superman at that moment, Clark Kent rushing into a phone booth (well, they don't have phone booths anymore, but you get the idea), Clark rushing into a phone booth and tearing off his suit and, wow, he's Superman with a red cape and blue tights. And in the same manner, Billy Beane gets revealed as a genius and he swears off Moneyball forever and says it's beneath him, and he pays big bucks for free agents and the A's surge to the top of the AL West and stay there.

And everyone in Northern California bows down to Lew Wolff and admits he was a hero all the time, and even crusty reporters call him Uncle Lew and he forgives them for saying he was cheap and didn't know squat about baseball, and the Giants say the A's were right all along to demand territorial rights in Santa Clara County, and Larry Baer, tears streaming down his face, says he's sorry and invites Wolff over to his house for Friday dinner and a little chopped liver on New York rye bread, and year after year the A's and Giants meet in the World Series with red-white-and-blue bunting pasted all around the stands, and it's all because of the illusion becoming real, and everyone in Northern California lives happily ever after.

But until further notice, the illusion is just an illusion. The reality is this preview, which says the A's, God love them, finish last.

### **Donaldson powers A's to win over Giants in exhibition finale**

Nate Stuhlbarg, csnbayarea.com

SAN FRANCISCO -- It only took Josh Donaldson three innings to knock in five runs on two no-doubt blasts as the A's defeated the Giants 8-1 to avoid being swept in the spring Bay Bridge Series.

It was the final spring tune-up for each team. Both teams will have Thursday off, before the A's open a two-game series with the Mariners and the Giants face Arizona in their opening day Friday.

**Bottom of the order power:** Bob Melvin said Tuesday that it won't quite be a platoon at third, that Josh Donaldson has earned the majority of the time over there. He showed why Wednesday, sending deep fly balls into the left-field bleachers in each of his first two at bats.

Donaldson will be counted on, Melvin said, to provide the team with a "bottom of the order power guy."

If he continues to hit like he did Wednesday, Melvin will have a tough time keeping him down in the order, let alone platooning him at third.

Donaldson finished the game 4-for-5 with five RBI.

**Congratulations, you're platooned:** Brett Pill received hearty congrats from teammates and media members alike in the Giants clubhouse after the game. Pill couldn't hold back the smile as he recalled how he found out he made the 25-man roster.

Bench coach Ron "Wotus called me in," Pill recounted. "He downplayed it and I thought it was bad news. But he shook my hand and said congratulations."

Pill did not reward his coaching staff with a strong showing after making the roster. He finished the day 0-for-4, but it didn't deter the 27-year old rookie.

"It's a great feeling to know they have confidence in me," he said afterward.

Pill got the start at first base with lefty Tommy Milone on the hill for the A's. But his best plate appearance came against right-handed pitcher Evan Scribner. Pill worked the count to 2-1 in the seventh inning before taking a big cut at an 85 mph fastball. It looked and sounded solid off the bat, and AT&T Park reacted, but it had too much air under it and landed in left-fielder Jonny Gomes' glove.

I asked Pill about the difference facing righties vs. lefties.

"I don't have a strong preference," he replied. "I have a little more power against righties because they come into me more."

There are many ways -- aside from power -- to impress a coaching staff in your first MLB season. Pill knows it.

**Welcome to the Bigs:** Hector Sanchez came into spring training not expecting to make the team. With the bow tied on the 2012 spring season, Sanchez is the Giants' backup catcher.

"It's amazing for me," Sanchez said after the game.

Bochy spent more time in his postgame press meeting talking about Sanchez than anyone else.

"He's earning it every day," Bochy said, citing his improved blocking and throwing.

"I try to keep working on my defense. Keep working," Sanchez reiterated. It's paying off. He's been focusing solely on his work behind the dish, as Bochy and the Giants recognized his gift for hitting in his brief stint with the big-league club last season.

"We're taking a leap of faith," Bochy admitted. "We did it with Buster."

If Hector Sanchez has a fraction of the impact Buster Posey did in 2010, the leap of faith will have been well-advised.

If not, the Giants expect to have Eli Whiteside waiting in Triple-A.

**Carrying it over:** "It's not an issue," Brandon Crawford said wiggling the thumb in question. "I'm ready."

Crawford, who sat out Wednesday's game, was busy telling media members about how nice it was to know your role with a club, instead of fighting for one, when Aubrey Huff sauntered by.

"Why's everyone talking to you?"

"I don't know," relied Crawford. "I guess I had a good spring."

Crawford -- whose bat has always been the knock against him -- hit .333 in 21 games this spring. He also hit three home runs, one less than Pablo Sandoval, Melky Cabrera and Hector Sanchez for the team lead.

With the protective sleeve gone from his thumb, the Giants are counting on his spring success to carry over.

**The beard:** Bruce Bochy said he would get Brain Wilson in Wednesday's game for a batter, two at the most. True to his word, it was Wilson who exited the dugout in the top of the eighth inning.

Wilson got Kila Ka'aihue to ground out to first base. And Bochy left Wilson in the game to face the scalding-hot Donaldson, already 4-for-4 in the game. Wilson induced the 4-3 putout -- the only time Donaldson was retired -- and Dave Righetti promptly headed to the mound to relieve Wilson, who got a loud ovation from the 39,780 fans in AT&T Park.

Two-thirds of an innings for Wilson, no hits, runs, walks or strikeouts.

**Manager's orders:** Aside from scoring more runs early, manager Bruce Bochy thinks the Giants are ready for the season. Since the manager made the request for early offense Tuesday, the Giants have led off two games with first-inning runs. On Tuesday in Oakland, it was all Gregor Blanco, whose contract was purchased Wednesday. A day later, Pablo Sandoval and Buster Posey provided the run as Sandoval got to Tommy Milone early with a ground-rule double -- showing early power from the right side -- and Posey flared a single to right for one of those early runs.

Sandoval's rope came from the right side, and after the game Tommy Milone admitted he left the pitch up.

**The real deal:** Just about every player and coach who met the media Wednesday used the word "excited" when referring to the regular season getting under way.

The Giants will fly out to Arizona at noon Thursday and get in a 3:30 p.m. workout before Tim Lincecum and the Giants take on Ian Kennedy and the Diamondbacks Friday.

Brandon McCarthy and the A's are set to face Felix Hernandez and the Mariners -- again. This time, as the home team, they'll actually be playing at home.

### **A's set roster, option Ross to Sacramento**

Nate Stuhlbarg, [csnbayarea.com](http://csnbayarea.com)

SAN FRANCISCO -- A's manager Bob Melvin made it clear no matter who got the fourth and fifth rotation spots -- Graham Godfrey, Tyson Ross, Jarrod Parker or Brad Peacock -- the A's are confident they have the talent to get production from the back of their rotation.

Since the A's won't need a fifth starter until April 17, and they needed to clear one more roster space to get to the 25-man cap, Tyson Ross -- the projected fifth starter -- was optioned to Triple-A.

The first pitcher with a chance to prove Melvin right is Godfrey, who earned the gig as the A's fourth starter after five shutout innings against the Giants Monday, the A's manager announced Wednesday morning.

Melvin maintained his staunch support of Ross, citing his plus-sinkerball as most impressive. He did indicate that Ross needs to develop some consistency with his pitches. Ross knows it, and after Tuesday's game he talked about harnessing the movement on his pitches and "making it [his] own."

Ross was 2-1 with a 1.80 ERA in five starts with the A's this spring, not including a start and loss in an exhibition game against Hanshin in Japan March 26, when he allowed eight runs on 10 hits in 4.0 innings.

The A's now have 25 active players on the 40-man roster. The breakdown includes 11 pitchers, two catchers, six infielders

and six outfielders, plus Brett Anderson (elbow) and Scott Sizemore (knee), who are on the 60-day disabled list.

## **Donaldson's 2 HRs power A's past Giants 8-1**

By ANTONIO GONZALEZ AP Sports Writer

Josh Donaldson is starting to show signs that he might be a reliable replacement for Scott Sizemore. Donaldson hit two homers and drove in five runs against Yusmeiro Petit, and the Oakland Athletics avoided a Bay Bridge Series sweep with an 8-1 victory over the San Francisco Giants in Wednesday's spring finale.

"I've felt good about where he is in his progress, and I think today was a fitting end for him and how much work he's done this spring," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "It's all starting to come together right now."

Donaldson never figured to have such an eventful year.

That all changed in an instant.

Sizemore tore a ligament in his left knee during Oakland's first full-squad workout

of spring training, ending his season and making Donaldson—a converted catcher—the starting third baseman before a game had been played. Donaldson finished 4 for 5 in the finale, pushing his batting average up to .270 after a dismal start. "Every day in spring training I'm in there doing early work, whether it's hitting, defense, then playing the game, then doing more after the game," Donaldson said. "Right now, I feel it's easier on me mentally and physically just going out there playing and hitting."

An otherwise quiet spring ending for San Francisco still had a bright spot.

Buster Poster, receiving rousing ovations from fans every time his name was announced, cleared another milestone with an RBI single in the first. Both were firsts at AT&T Park for the 2010 NL Rookie of the Year since a brutal season-ending collision at home plate with Florida's Scott Cousins last year.

Posey was 0 for 2 with two walks in Monday night's exhibition in San Francisco. He also added a double in the fourth in the last spring training game, setting the stage for San Francisco's chase to reclaim the World Series title the franchise won two years ago.

"We're set now. Now it's time to get the season started," Giants manager Bruce Bochy said. "I like the way the spring went. We worked hard and played hard. I think they're ready."

A sun-soaked day at San Francisco's cozy waterfront ballpark still belonged to an unproven slugger from across the bay.

After a so-so start to spring training, Donaldson smacked a two-run shot to left in the second to put Oakland ahead 2-1. He followed with a three-run homer to deep left-center in the third for his only long balls this spring.

Donaldson's latest go-around in the Bay Area figures to last a little longer than his first.

Originally a first-round draft pick of the Chicago Cubs, Donaldson was traded to Oakland in a deal for pitcher Rich Harden in 2008. He briefly played for the A's in 2010 and hadn't done much since.

Sizemore was acquired by Oakland last May in a trade with Detroit. He hit .249 with 11 home runs and 52 RBIs in 93 games with Oakland.

The 26-year-old Donaldson wasn't the only A's hitter to suddenly find some pop in a lineup that rarely shows any of it.

Jonny Gomes—from nearby Petaluma—also hit a solo home run earlier in the third, helping Oakland build an 8-1 lead.

Brian Wilson retired both batters he faced in the eighth, all the work Bochy wanted from his bearded closer in the exhibition finale.

The Giants open the regular season at defending NL West champion Arizona on Friday. The A's host Seattle in the last two of a four-game set that began in Japan and was squeezed between the final week of the exhibition schedule.

Not that Oakland ever discounts a win at the home of the rival Giants.

"We needed to create something going into the season," Melvin said. "Momentum for a new group, confidence for a new group, I think, that type of winning in spring training can carryover."

NOTES: A's reliever Joey Devine was still waiting to hear the results from an MRI on his surgically repaired right elbow. Dr. James Andrews was scheduled to read the scan for Devine, who had Tommy John surgery in April 2009 and is experiencing more problems. Devine is already on the DL with right biceps tendinitis and has been shut down for now. He hopes this won't threaten his season. "This is the story of my life," Devine said. "It's just a constant. It's pretty sore—same symptoms, putting shampoo in my hair, turning a doorknob." ... The A's optioned RHP Tyson Ross to Triple-A Sacramento. Melvin plans to have Ross return April 17, the first time the A's will need a fifth starter. ... The Giants will open AT&T Park for a free viewing party Friday night so fans can watch the team's opener at Arizona.

## Inside Baseball

### Opening Day is not what it used to be but that's just fine

Michael Rosenberg, SI.com

*Opening Day. There is only one, and it's in baseball. The theater has opening nights scattered here and there about the calendar, and there are various opening days of ... the fishing season, the race meeting, the NFL season. But there is only one Opening Day ..."*

*-- Frank Deford, "Spring Has Sprung," in the April 10, 1978 issue of Sports Illustrated*

Well, that is not quite true anymore, is it?

Opening Day is today, a week after the Major League Baseball season began, and a day before I thought it began, when the St. Louis Cardinals play the Miami Marlins. The Cards are the defending champs, of course, and the revamped Marlins are hoping a new ballpark, high payroll, and manager Ozzie Guillen can get fans excited, or at least get them to show up.

Then, the next day, there are seven more games. And Friday there are nine more. And last week, the A's and Mariners played a pair of games in Japan, which roused my interest exactly as much as a pair of A's-Mariners games in Oakland. This is to say: Not at all.

So I *guess* today is Opening Day. I'm still not quite sure.

Opening Day is not quite what it used to be. But I won't whine about that, or long for the days of yesteryear, when everybody knew when Opening Day was and writers could type "days of yesteryear" without sounding like complete dorks.

Times change. Baseball is, in many ways, as popular as it's ever been -- and better, too. The regular season is more exciting. So many more games are available on television, and technology has made it a lot more fun to watch. We know so much more about the best pitchers, hitters and fielders, and what it really takes to win (thanks to better stats, unless you are anti-intellectual and reject them all). The typical pitcher throws harder than he did 30 years ago, and I suspect that most curveballs break more sharply. Hitters adjust quicker. More fans live within driving distance of a major league team, and even the lousiest ballparks are pretty nice.

So I'm not complaining. Baseball is better. But Opening Day is like college football's bowl season -- it's spread out for marketing reasons, and not as great as it used to be. It's a casualty of progress.

I spent some time this week trying to think of how baseball can make Opening Day one of the biggest days on the sports calendar again. SPOILER ALERT: I couldn't do it. Part of the problem is that Opening Day is about hope and dreams and innocence, and so much of the modern sports landscape is about firing that idiot and trading that jackass.

There are logistical issues, too. Opening Day is wedged between two events that are undoubtedly bigger: The men's Final Four and the Masters. Ideally, baseball's Opening Day would be the Monday after the Masters -- perhaps with a single, marquee Sunday night game after somebody picks up the only green sport jacket in the world that is acceptable to wear. I think we would all get fired up, watching the leaders at Amen Corner, knowing that the next day was Opening Day. This seemed like a great idea to me until I thought about watching the World Series on Thanksgiving. As long as baseball is determined to stick with a 162-game schedule AND expanded playoffs, the season has to start before the Masters.

I kept thinking about this, and then I realized: Does it even matter anymore?

The NFL season used to start on Sundays, because every game was on Sunday, except one, which was on Monday. Now the NFL opens with a marquee game on Thursday night, which draws 147 million people to their television sets, because it's early September and we're all shaking because it's been seven months since our last NFL-game morphine drip. This would make you think that baseball can do the same thing, But it can't. One regular-season baseball game to start the season just isn't Cowboys-Giants.

Baseball could have everybody start the season the day after the Final Four. In time, that would become a tradition, if not a Tradition Unlike Any Other. But let's face it: Major League Baseball has decided it is more important (read: more profitable) to send teams overseas a week early than to have a real Opening Day.

The fact is, Opening Day was great when seasons actually ended. They don't end anymore. One of the biggest days of the NFL year happens in April. I don't know how to quantify the money the NFL makes from the draft, but when you consider

how many people watch NFL Network draft specials, read stories on NFL.com about the draft, and watch the draft, and buy jerseys of players who just got drafted, a rough guess would be: A lot.

Baseball does not really need to announce its presence on the sports calendar, because baseball is always present. When the World Series ends, we talk about free agency. And trades. And then spring training, which is not about training anymore, and is only marginally about the current season -- it's a time to talk about prospects and impending free agency and arbitration clocks, and to wonder WHAT ON EARTH the Reds were thinking when they gave Joey Votto a 10-year extension, on top of two years he has left on his deal. Votto is a great player and all, but *12 years?* What did his agent ask for? Fifteen years and naming rights to the ballpark?

The fact is, baseball season does not start on Opening Day anymore. That is just when the games start. And I'm glad they're here.

### **Inside Forbes: What the Club of Journalism Can Learn From Moneyball and Billy Beane**

Lewis Dvorkin, Forbes, 4/4/2012

I watched the movie version of *Moneyball* a few months ago. Then, on vacation last week, I read the book (you're right to wonder what took me so long). The book beats the film in every way — and I'm a guy who loves baseball movies. Both capture the life and times of a disruptor — Billy Beane, the general manager of the Oakland Athletics, who wanted to upend the cozy world of Major League Baseball. There are two sentences early on in the book that turned what captivated me about movie into the beginning of a thought-provoking lesson plan for much of FORBES is trying to do.

At the bottom of the Oakland experiment was a willingness to rethink baseball: how it was managed, how it is played, who is best suited to play it, and why. Understanding that he would never have a Yankee checkbook, the Oakland A's general manager, Billy Beane, had set about looking for inefficiencies in the game.

Then came this gem, near the end of an extraordinary tale, that made me reflect on my own experiences as a journalist — and what's likely to transpire as FORBES works to build a new, scalable model for journalism.

The club [of baseball] includes not only the people who manage the team but also, in a kind of Women's Auxiliary, many of the writers and commentators who follow it, and purport to explain it. The club is selective, but the criteria for admission and retention are nebulous.

I've been lucky enough over four decades to sit at the great tables in print and digital journalism. In the 70s, at *The New York Times*, I participated in a rather imposing 3:30 pm daily news meeting presided over by the legendary editor, Abe Rosenthal (I can still remember being taken to his private woodshed for a glib remark I made). In the 80s, I battled with other *Newsweek* editors at 10 every morning for the magazine's cover story. In the 90s, I did much the same here at FORBES. And in the 00s, I programmed the AOL Welcome Screen, back then one of the most valuable pieces of digital real estate.

Yes, I was a member (and probably still am) of both the traditional and new media clubs (at this point, AOL could be considered traditional new media). And I sure did learn a lot. Enough to realize this: the digital era would crush the economics of the media industry, and the way news had been produced for the last 100 years — if not the Club of Journalism itself — needed to change to survive.

All FORBES staffers and contributors have a real-time data dashboard that tells them how they're doing. We'll be releasing an update in the months ahead that will include the module above. The stats you see are mine for March. I definitely need to increase my repeat visitors.

One must be careful not to overplay the similarities between the worlds of baseball and journalism. But I'll risk it. What the A's did was different for baseball, just like what we're doing at FORBES is different for journalism. The A's focused on a new set of statistics to evaluate ball players. On-base percentage was more important than a batting average, the ability to draw walks and control the strike zone more important than sacrifice bunts. They judged a player's physical being in a new way — “we're not selling jeans here,” Beane lectured. They replaced high-priced players signed by more monied teams in a new way — don't “recreate the individual,” Beane would say, “recreate the aggregate.” At FORBES, we're focused on stats, too — unique visitors, repeat visitors, followers, active pages and active referrers (my stats for March are just above to the right). For us, the “look” of today's journalist is as much about reporting as it is self-publishing, self-marketing and self-promotion. And when people do leave FORBES, it's not about replacing what was lost, but understanding what we need to be successful within our new structure.

So much of what FORBES is doing, just as it was with Oakland, was made possible by those who came before — the people who broke new ground and in doing so inspired others to think differently. For Oakland, it was Bill James, a one-of-a-kind baseball writer, and the cult of statisticians who believed in and advanced his ideas. They were obsessed with the need to judge expensive on-field talent by the numbers (the right ones, not the standard measures) rather than the “mind's eye.” For us, it was the passion of early blogging sites like Engadget, some of what Gawker's Nick Denton taught everyone about putting a “Big Board” in the newsroom, and the technology startups that made things like that possible.

Michael Lewis, who wrote *Moneyball*, described his story as a “biography of an idea.” Billy Beane has yet to win his World Series in Oakland (the idea did produce an America League record 20 straight victories in 2002). But the Boston Red Sox grabbed hold of the idea and did win the Series after it brought on Bill James as a consultant and Theo Epstein as a first-time general manager (Beane first accepted, then declined the job). The biography of an idea is exactly the way to look at what we’re up to at FORBES. Our strategy is about finding new ways — “reason, with science,” Beane called it — to measure success and implement new processes to efficiently produce quality journalism in the era of social media.

That can be difficult for the “Women’s Auxiliary.” As one of Billy Beane’s disciples said when he moved on to bring Oakland’s ideas to the Toronto Blue Jays, “Look, if you can stand the heat in the media, I can make you cheaper and better.” FORBES has done a lot in the last 21 months to disrupt traditional media. Along the way, we’ve doubled our audience (it’s now 30 million monthly unique users), in part by building a publishing platform for 1,000 knowledgeable content creators. We’ve also made our fair share of mistakes, many of which I’ve pointed out and some of which seem more interesting to journalists and industry observers than the biography of the idea behind our efforts. What’s so exciting for all of us right now is this: rather than putting into place stop-gap solutions for a fading, century-old model, we’re building new systems for a collective vision of where journalism needs to go.

And now for one last quote from *Moneyball*:

If you challenge the conventional wisdom, you will find ways to do things much better than they are currently done.

## **MINOR LEAGUE NEWS**

### **Trades bolster an already solid farm system**

### **A’s increase Draft budget, funds for international signings**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- A’s general manager Billy Beane maintains that he’s always spent what he’s been given, no matter the amount bestowed upon him from ownership each year. Consider this year no different, except in the way those funds will be utilized. Amid the hustle and bustle of three major trades last winter that sent away All-Star pitchers Gio Gonzalez, Trevor Cahill and Andrew Bailey, Beane noted each deal was done with an eye toward the future. To that end, he collected 10 prospects in return and also noted that the club’s Draft budget will be well more than three times higher than it was last year.

Factor in an increased international signing budget, along with the additional hiring of more staff to help in those areas, and it’s clear that Beane and Co. are set to once again do what they were once best at: drafting and developing a formidable farm system.

### **Athletics' top prospects**

No.	Prospect	Pos.	ETA
1	Jarrod Parker	RHP	2012
2	Michael Choice	OF	2013
3	Brad Peacock	RHP	2012
4	Sonny Gray	RHP	2013
5	A.J. Cole	RHP	2014

**Click here** for the complete Top 20 list on Prospect Watch.

Pitching depth, barren entering the offseason, has been bolstered by way of the aforementioned trades. Lefty Tom Milone is in the big league rotation, and right-handers Jarrod Parker and Brad Peacock will surely see Major League action this season. Also watch for projectable righty A.J. Cole to climb his way up the ladder quickly, with 2011 first-round pick Sonny Gray expected to do the same.

Away from the mound, homegrown outfielders Michael Choice and Grant Green are likely just a year away from being deemed ready for the Majors. Michael Taylor and Chris Carter also wait their turn in Triple-A, where recently acquired catcher Derek Norris is stationed as well.

This year, look for the A’s to add depth to their corner infield positions -- a need seen even in Oakland at the moment, with Josh Donaldson getting his feet wet at third base, while an unsettled first-base competition exists between Brandon Allen and Kila Ka’aihue, with Daric Barton watching from the disabled list.

Minor League Baseball’s Opening Day is Thursday, and you can keep track of the Oakland’s top prospects throughout the season on **Prospect Watch**. And get scores, stats, news, schedules, tickets and more for all of Oakland’s Minor League teams on the A’s **affiliates page**.



### **Stacked squads**

Parker and Peacock are sure to draw plenty of attention at Triple-A Sacramento, where the River Cats are once again poised to take their talents to the playoffs, thanks to an intriguing staff. Right-hander Tyson Ross, the favorite to be promoted to Oakland in mid-April when the A's need a fifth starter, will start his season there, as will relievers Pedro Figueroa and Neil Wagner, alongside batterymate and top catching prospect Norris.

Carter, who has long enjoyed success in the Minors, will man first base. Perhaps more intriguing, though, will be the development seen at third base by Stephen Parker. Then there's Adam Rosales and Wes Timmons, who at 33 has played in 998 Minor League games but is working toward his first one in the Majors.

In the outfield, Taylor will continue to try to prove himself, as will Green and Jermaine Mitchell, who appeared to have a shot at a big league roster spot before the A's brought in a bevy of outfielders in the offseason. Veterans Jeff Fiorentino and Brandon Moss will also be rotated in the mix.

### **New Kid on the Block**

Cole will start the year at the Class A level and isn't expected to don an A's uniform for some time, but several scouts have projected him to have the highest ceiling of any pitcher that came to Oakland over the winter. The lanky right-hander, anticipated to be a frontline starter in the future, has a fastball, curve and a progressing changeup, and his already impressive velocity -- he's occasionally touched 97 mph -- is only expected to improve.

Acquired from the Nationals in the Gonzalez deal, Cole went 4-7 with a 4.04 ERA in 20 games (18 starts) at the Class A level last year, tallying 108 strikeouts against just 24 walks.

### **Teams on TV**

The Sacramento River Cats are among a growing number of teams whose games are available on **MiLB.TV**. The 2012 MiLB.TV package will include more than 2,500 Minor League games streamed live, as well as games archived for on-demand streaming soon after completion.

### **New pitchers settle into roles with ease**

Matt Kawahara, Sacramento Bee

They made their big-league debuts within weeks of each other last September, two young, hard-throwing right-handers who worked their way up the organizations that drafted them.

And then, in December, Jarrod Parker and Brad Peacock were introduced to the business side of baseball, traded to an A's organization that was moving members of its budding pitching staff in exchange for young talent.

Parker was shipped by the Diamondbacks as part of the deal that sent A's right-hander Trevor Cahill to Arizona. Peacock was one of four players packaged by the Washington Nationals in a swap for left-hander Gio Gonzalez and a prospect.

"I saw (the trade) on the computer two weeks before it happened," said Peacock, 24. "And then I started getting phone calls from the Nationals media ... so I kind of knew it was coming. But it's exciting to come to a new organization, something new."

Indeed, both players took a pragmatic view toward the moves. Parker, 23, said that processing his trade took "about 24 hours."

"Then it was an 'it is what it is' kind of thing," Parker said this week at Raley Field. "It's baseball, the business side of it.

"Guys don't really play for one team their whole career, so you know there's always a chance. And if a team traded for you, they want you and there's an opportunity."

There's no guarantee of when it will come -- and neither pitcher is dwelling on it as they start the 2012 season with the Triple-A River Cats -- but the opportunity they seek is to crack the A's new-look rotation that is back-ended by young arms largely unproven at the major league level.

Parker, ranked the A's top minor league prospect by Baseball America, drew glowing reviews in spring training. He was 11-8 with a 3.79 ERA at Double-A Mobile last season, as opponents hit .236 against him.

Ranked second, according to the publication, is Peacock, who was a combined 15-3 with a 2.39 ERA for Washington's Double-A and Triple-A teams before his September call-up. The Nationals' Minor League Pitcher of the Year in 2011, Peacock struck out 177 hitters in 146 2/3 innings.

"(Parker) and Peacock, for me, have close to the same stuff as far as a good changeup, plus fastball, very good breaking ball," said River Cats catcher Derek Norris, another piece in the Gonzalez trade who has caught Peacock for parts of the past four years and is now getting to know Parker.

Parker throws a slider and says he'll "throw the curveball every now and then." Peacock, when things are working, says he often goes to his curveball as an out pitch.

Both are listed as 6-foot-1 and, according to River Cats manager Darren Bush, "perfectionists" on the mound.

They came to their debuts last season, however, by decidedly different routes.

Parker was a 2007 first-round pick by Arizona, selected ninth overall out of high school in Indiana. He had pitched for the U.S. Junior National Team in 2006 and went 12-5 in his first pro season in the Class-A Mid-Atlantic League.

Shelved by a right-elbow injury midway through 2009, Parker missed the entire 2010 season recovering from Tommy John surgery, but he returned last year and helped lead Mobile to a Southern League title.

Peacock, meanwhile, was taken in the 41st round by the Nationals in 2006 and signed in 2007 after playing a season at then-Palm Beach Community College in Florida.

Originally a third baseman, Peacock said he pitched a total of eight innings in high school, where he came in to close games and "just tried to throw as hard as I could." He moved to the mound full time in his community college season – first relieving, then starting.

Both competed this spring for one of several spots in the A's rotation. Parker went 2-1 with nine strikeouts and a 3.27 ERA, but he also walked 13 batters in 11 innings. Peacock had a 12.86 ERA in three games, two of them starts, allowing 12 hits in seven innings.

"Not good, pitching-wise," Peacock said of his spring with a wry grin. "I've just got to get the ball down and get ahead (in counts). That's the only thing to it."

Both reportedly are still in the running for the A's fifth starting spot, which won't be needed until mid-April, but it appears that job will go to an ex-River Cat, either Tyson Ross or Graham Godfrey.

So the prospects will start in Sacramento, amid new surroundings and new faces.

"I really don't know anybody, yet," Peacock said. "I don't even know Parker too well."

"Same game," said Parker, "just a different place."

Behind Travis Banwart, Parker is projected to be the River Cats' second-day starter, followed by Peacock, in the team's opening series this weekend in Las Vegas.

Rotation mates now, as they continue their development, both pitchers vie for the same call.

"That's competition," Parker said. "That's what's in this game. Everybody's good friends, but we're pitching to one-up each other. And I think that's what makes a good staff a good staff."

### **A's draft pick considered future superstar, makes stop with RockHounds**

Jordan Mason, Midland Reporter Telegram

After stops in Phoenix, Ariz., Vancouver and Stockton, Calif., last season, Midland RockHounds outfielder Michael Choice is happy to be playing in the Texas League this season, particularly for the road trips to Frisco.

"I'll get to stay home then," the Arlington native said.

The problem with that is no one wants to see Choice in a Midland uniform for long -- not RockHounds manager Steve Scarsone, not hitting coach Tim Garland and certainly not Oakland Athletics' fans.

That's what happens when you're drafted 10th overall, as Choice was in 2010, and go hit-for-hit in a showdown with phenom Bryce Harper, the first player selected in that draft, as Choice did in an Arizona Fall League matchup. That game, in which Choice matched Harper's line of a home run, a double and three RBI, is a prime example of why most can't wait to see him in Oakland green and gold, not Midland orange and blue.

Maybe it's not a big deal for fans to look ahead -- a January article on BaseballAmerica.com already had Choice penciled into the A's 2015 starting lineup -- but when former professionals such as Scarsone and Garland give him similar praise it lets you know what kind of player Choice is.

"Hopefully, he won't be here very long with us," Garland said. "The man's got everything it takes to be a superstar at (the major league) level.

"I'm just excited to have him here and be able to witness it for free."

Of course, you don't have to listen to Garland.

Choice is the No. 3 prospect in the A's organization, one spot ahead of former RockHound Grant Green, the A's top prospect last year. And standing a stout 6-0, 220 pounds, Choice, considered the best power hitter in the A's farm system, is built like a Dodge Ram.

But he wasn't always heavy duty.

At Mansfield Timberview High School, Choice was an 185-pound pitcher and catcher with only one real Division-I offer despite earning District 4-5A MVP honors while hitting .506 as a senior.

"The only schools I really got looks from coming out of Timberview, I believe, was like OU, Kansas State and (University of Texas at Arlington), and that's where I ended up going was UTA," Choice said. "Basically, (UTA) was my only offer until I signed."

That was the last time Choice went overlooked on a diamond, as he transformed himself into a 220-pound outfielder by his sophomore season while continuing to show the power that he said first came to him his junior year of high school.

"I just went out there, and I had a chance to play as a freshman, and I started every game as a freshman, and I had a good year and from there it just kind of kept going," Choice said.

Choice led the Mavericks in batting (.376), home runs (7) and RBI (51) while earning a litany of superlatives, including Southland Conference Freshman of the Year. Two years later, he earned an even bigger superlative, as Oakland made him the highest-drafted player ever out of UTA.

Yet his transition to professional baseball wasn't nearly as smooth as his transition at UTA, as Choice vividly remembers the growing pains of trying to adjust to the everyday grind of professional baseball.

After going a forgettable 0-for-7 in Rookie League and getting off to a slow start in Vancouver for Class A Short Season, Choice tweaked his swing and his mental approach to hit .285 with 30 home runs and 82 RBI in a full season for Class A Stockton.

"(It was) just basically having to come to the park with a gameplan," Choice said, "not just going out there and playing kind of how I did in college, (where) you just go show up and play."

Choice also received help from Angels outfielder Torii Hunter, who reached out to Choice via the scout that signed him to Oakland, inviting the fellow Metroplex resident to his home in Prosper to work on his swing and talk playing in the majors.

"It was cool to bring him over," Hunter said told the Oakland Tribune at the time. "He's an athlete, and he worked pretty hard this offseason."

The experience, particularly the sight of a hitting cage at Hunter's home in Prosper, left an impression on Choice.

"It lets you realize what you can get if you really strive to be great," Choice said.

Choice's desire to be great is what Garland admires the most, noting how the 22-year-old seeks him for advice after every at-bat.

Garland said Choice can stand to improve his pitch selection, after he struck out as many times as he got a hit in Stockton, but his hard-working mentality is why Garland and Scarsons have no doubt that Choice will live up to all the hype.

"We just hope that he continues on his progression," Scarsons said. "We'll do everything we can to help him along the way, but he's got an opportunity to make a name for himself and really put him in a good position to play in the big leagues more sooner than later."

Choice, meanwhile, said he's focused on picking up where he left off in Stockton here in Midland. But he doesn't mind the fact that many are hoping he won't be here long.

"It's always a good feeling," Choice said, "because you want to prove those people right and live up to those expectations."

### **RockHounds' Gray keeps father's dream alive**

Oscar LeRoy, Midland Reporter - Telegram

Sonny Gray is well aware of the expectations and pressure placed on a former first round-draft pick and highly-regarded prospects, but he always tries to keep things in perspective.

There are worse things that Gray could be doing right now instead of pitching for the Double-A Midland RockHounds.

"There's so many people in the world that would rather be doing this," said Gray, a right-handed pitcher and No. 2 rated prospect in the Oakland A's organization by Baseball America. "I'm one of the lucky ones that gets to live that out. You can't take that for granted because you never know what could happen. You could be playing one day and not the next."

Gray should know to not take things for granted. When he was a freshman in high school in Smyrna, Tenn., his father Jesse died from injuries suffered in a car accident. Gray said his father was a huge influence and always had a dream about his son playing professional baseball.

"He grew up a baseball guy and I grew up with him being my coach," Gray said. "It's something we talked about a lot. We had lot of dreams together about hopefully one day being able to do this. The thing that I'm doing now is something we always talked about."

Gray could have been a pro ballplayer after high school when he was drafted in the 27th round by the Chicago Cubs. But instead, he chose the college route and enjoyed a successful three years at Vanderbilt University -- a program which had also produced major league pitchers David Price and Mike Minor in recent years. During his junior year in 2011, he helped lead the Commodores to the College World Series and was 12-4 with a 2.34 ERA and 123 strikeouts.

Later that summer, the 5-foot-11, 200-pounder, was selected by the A's as the 18th overall pick in the Major League Baseball First-Year Player Draft. Gray's ability to throw a fastball consistently at 92-93 mph to go with a devastating curveball made him an appealing prospect.

RockHounds pitching coach Don Schulze added that Gray has also got a sinker that's comparable to current A's starter Trevor Cahill and is adding a effective changeup to his repertoire

"He's got a Trevor Cahill-type sinker that is probably with one or two miles an hour better than Trevor's," Schulze said. "That's their early contact pitch as far as breaking balls go. I see his curveball to be a little more devastating than Trevor Cahill's early in his career. The one thing that Trevor had was a good changeup. That's one pitch that has power and raw ability. He's going to have to get the hitters off-balance more with his changeup, and he's been working hard on it. He didn't have a changeup until he came here last year."

Schulze said that the 22-year-old, who was a non-roster invitee to big league camp, threw 70 pitches with 14 being changeups in a major league game during spring training.

"A lot of them were strikes. That's a pretty good percentage," Schulze said. "He's pretty raw with his ability, but when he straightens some things out, he's going to be right there."

Gray, who added that he will also have to get used to the grind of a 140-game season and long bus rides in the Texas League, acknowledged he's got work to do to become a pitcher that's capable of playing in the majors on a full-time basis.

"As every pitcher, I want to work on more consistency and everyone could always be able to throw more fastballs where they want to, more changeups and breaking balls and be more consistent in the strike zone," Gray said. "Once I'm able to do that I think I would be headed in the right direction."

RockHound fans got a small taste of Gray last season when he was called up to Midland in the last month of the season. In five starts, he had a 0.45 ERA, struck out 18 batters and walked six in 20-plus innings. Because he threw 130 innings at Vanderbilt and took a month off from pitching, Gray was on a limited pitch count last year, which meant he only worked two-three innings per start.

"If we think about what he showed us last summer, we had four or five starts and each one of them was very good," RockHounds manager Steve Scarsone said. "This spring he got a chance to throw some games in the big leagues. It was a way to get a little exposure and get a feel for how to pitch to more experienced hitters, and that's only going to help him."

As the pitch count grows, so will the expectations for Gray, who has the potential to be in Oakland in only a matter of time. Gray said he can't get caught up with that and realizes it's just part of the process of being a first-round draft pick.

"Just because you're a first rounder doesn't mean that you're any better than any other guy on the field," Gray said. "The only thing I can do is put the team in good position to win."

Winning and having fun playing the game he loves are a big part of the focus for Gray right now. After all, there are worse things in life he could be doing.

### **Catching up with Jermaine Mitchell**

In this edition of Docking with the Ports, we catch up with former Stockton Ports and current River Cats player Jermaine Mitchell, who played in the Ports vs. River Cats exhibition game on April 3, 2012.

**Stockton Ports:** So you played in Stockton for the 2008, 2009, and even part of the 2010 season. What was your time like here and what'd you get out of it?

**Jermaine Mitchell:** I had a lot of fun while I was on the Ports, but of course you never want to repeat a year. So I was looking to get out of here and move up.

**SP:** What was your fondest memory while on the Ports?

**JM:** Winning the Cal League Championship in 2008.

**SP:** You've talked a lot about your turning point in working with Rickey Henderson. What do you think it was that helped things click for you?

**JM:** Rickey taught me how important it was to go out and enjoy the game and play to have fun. I'm such a perfectionist and he helped me see that you can fail seven out of ten times and still be one of the best hitters in the game, when I was aiming to hit seven out of ten. So I've really loosened up and started having fun with it.

**SP:** How was the off season for you, and what have you been focusing on improving?

**JM:** I wasn't able to do much in the off season because of my knee surgery, so I've just been trying to stay healthy. And I want to pick up where I left off last season.

**SP:** Aside from making it to the majors, what are your goals for the season?

**JM:** My number one goal really is to stay healthy. And I'd like to get around 40 to 45 stolen bases this season.

**SP:** What are your expectations for 2012?

**JM:** I just want to have another great season. I really want to prove last season wasn't just a one year thing. So I expect to have a really good year.