

A's News Clips, Monday, January 3, 2011

With 2010 in books, baseball looks ahead

By John Schlegel / MLB.com

With one countdown complete, it's time for some others. These each have a ball at the end, too, only with spinning red seams and a unique ability to capture your attention for months, not just seconds like that one in Times Square.

Countdown: 41 days until Spring Training begins with those four magic words -- pitchers and catchers report.

Countdown: 87 days until Opening Day, a Thursday for the first time since 1976.

Countdown: 289 days until the World Series is scheduled to begin ... but maybe that's getting a little ahead of ourselves.

After a 2010 calendar year filled with pitching riches and historic achievements, 2011 is already starting to burn fuel, preparing to blast off for another magical ride into the baseball universe.

What we know already: From that treasured day when the boys of summer leave the winter behind with the first players reporting on Feb. 13 until someone, somewhere takes home the pennant-ringed trophy in October, we're in for something special.

In those 41 days before we get there, baseball's seams keep spinning, after a bit of a holiday respite. There remains offseason work to be done.

A brief rundown of what's happening before baseball's first countdown ends and the players get their uniforms dirty again:

- Results of the **National Baseball Hall of Fame election** for the Class of 2011 will be announced on Wednesday, with Bert Blyleven and Roberto Alomar the headliners. Each was only a handful of votes shy of the 75 percent threshold for election by the Baseball Writers' Association of America a year ago. Blyleven is in his 14th year of consideration and Alomar his second, and every player who received at least 70 percent of the vote eventually gained entrance to the Hall of Fame. Astros first baseman Jeff Bagwell leads the newcomers to the ballot, which also includes holdovers such as Jack Morris, Barry Larkin and Lee Smith.

Last year, outfielder Andre Dawson joined manager Whitey Herzog and umpire Doug Harvey in the hallowed hall. The Class of 2010 already includes longtime Blue Jays, Orioles, Mariners and Phillies executive Pat Gillick, elected by the Expansion Era Committee. This year's hopefuls will find out their fate by 2 p.m. ET on Wednesday.

- As the weeks tick off toward Spring Training, the **free-agent market** will continue to simmer following December's boiling point of \$100 million contracts. No nine-digit deals are expected from here on out, but the Rangers are said to be deep in negotiations on a lucrative contract for Adrian Beltre, and the Angels previously made a reported five-year, \$70 million offer. The A's, meanwhile, reportedly backed off their bid.

The market's finally starting to jell for closer Rafael Soriano, and starter Carl Pavano has the Nationals and a return to the Twins among his options. A few top DH candidates remain as well, with Vladimir Guerrero, Manny Ramirez and Jim Thome still available. The Rangers, Rays, Orioles and Blue Jays are among the teams looking.

And those are just a handful of about 100 free agents still still looking for jobs with that countdown to the report date clicking away.

- They're not free agents, but some of the top players with more than three but less than six years of experience are headed for a big payday before they get back on the field.

Players eligible for **salary arbitration** can file from Wednesday until Jan. 15, with players and clubs exchanging salary figures on Jan. 18. Hearings are slated for Feb. 1-21, but recent years have brought very few, as players and clubs often avoid the sit-down by striking a deal somewhere in the middle.

The Giants' Tim Lincecum (two years, \$23 million) and the Tigers' Justin Verlander (five years, \$80 million) came out the biggest winners last year as they and their teams agreed to avoid the potentially contentious arbitration process by signing long-term pacts.

This year's class has plenty of intrigue as well. Jose Bautista, the Blue Jays' sudden slugger, led the Majors with 54 homers in 2010. He figures to get a substantial bump from the \$2.4 million he made last year. Prince Fielder avoided arbitration two winters ago by signing a two-year, \$18 million deal, and his long-term future with the Brewers hangs in the balance as much as his 2011 salary. Josh Hamilton, the Rangers' outfielder who is coming off an MVP year and a World Series appearance, has two more arbitration-eligible years remaining, and Texas has had internal discussions about wrapping him up in a long-term deal to avoid all that.

The Rangers also have upstart starter C.J. Wilson eligible for arbitration, the Rays have starter Matt Garza and outfielder B.J. Upton to deal with, the Cubs have negotiations pending with Carlos Marmol and the Red Sox have business to attend to with Jonathan Papelbon -- which should prove interesting now that Bobby Jenks changed his Sox.

- Excitement for 2011 will start building from city to city as **fan festivals** take place, bringing the warmth of the boys of summer to a frozen winter setting in many areas.

And then there'll be one team basking in the orange glow of 2010, once more. Or many times over, actually.

Starting Tuesday, the Giants will embark on a **World Series trophy tour**, taking that hardware they brought home to San Francisco for the first time since moving there in 1958 and trotting it around from town to town and city to city for the next month. From Eureka and Santa Rosa to Sacramento and Lake Tahoe to Fresno and Monterey, the trophy will tour the entire radius of the Giants' NorCal fan base.

But what makes this trip special is that it includes a Jan. 20-23 voyage to New York City, where the Giants played when they last won the World Series in 1954, and from whence Willie Mays and the rest of the Giants traveled to the West Coast in '58.

Just another example of how baseball transcends the decades while getting you to count the days.

Again, that's 41 until pitchers and catchers, 87 until Opening Day.

Let the countdowns begin.

New additions could help push A's to top

Matsui, DeJesus, Willingham lead Oakland's revamped roster

By Jane Lee / MLB.com 1/1/2011

OAKLAND -- Just months ago, the A's were forced to watch the Rangers celebrate a division title on their own turf.

Suddenly, it's a new year, and they're ready to return to that turf. But this time, they want to drink their own champagne, create their own celebration.

For that to happen, though, several pieces have to fall into place. Health will be key, as will consistency, and the A's believe they have just enough manpower to conquer both courtesy of a revamped roster.

Whether these reveries become realities is unknown, but it's not too early to take a look at some of the questions facing the uncertainties surrounding the 2011 campaign.

1. How have the A's fared since season's end, and are they done making moves?

Appreciable, and not quite. They've subtracted the likes of Rajai Davis, Jack Cust and Vin Mazzaro, while adding pop in the form of Hideki Matsui, David DeJesus and Josh Willingham, along with depth by way of hurlers Brandon McCarthy and familiar face Rich Harden. The offensive additions, though by no means overwhelming, are respectable and figure to lend the A's more runs -- several in the form of long balls -- next season. McCarthy and Harden, meanwhile, give the club leverage in both the rotation and bullpen.

Every facet of this team seemingly appears set when looking at the full 40-man roster, though extra bullpen depth is still a possibility. Oakland's brass would likely contend that it's also still open to continue upgrading the offense -- it has the cash to do it -- but the free-agent market, from which it would have to target rather than trade options, is thinning.

2. So, then, how have they compared with their American League West counterparts this offseason?

In the world of wheeling and dealing, Billy Beane and Co. are leading the pack right now. While the A's proved creatively aggressive from the start, division rival Texas was earnestly spending all of its time and efforts on Cliff Lee. In the end, Lee waived off two AL suitors and opted for Philadelphia, and the Rangers are now plotting their next move to fill their rotation. The Angels, meanwhile, balanced their bullpen but have yet to beef up their offense. And Seattle, while adding bits and pieces (including Cust), hasn't exactly made any major splashes.

3. Is Adrian Beltre still a possibility? If not, does Kevin Kouzmanoff again start at third?

Possibility is a safe word, but don't go holding your breath on this one. There's been no indication that Beltre's agent, Scott Boras, and A's officials have renewed discussions since Oakland pulled its initial offer for the third baseman. While the A's are able and willing to spend big, their version of "big" doesn't exactly correspond to that of Boras'. He would reportedly like to see his client earn \$18 million annually over at least five years, and the Angels -- trying to counter with those numbers -- appear to be his strongest suitor at the moment.

Thus, it's safe to assume that Kouzmanoff will be donning green and gold again at the hot corner. The 29-year-old third baseman still offers the A's a good dose of offensive production, and he'll look to bounce back from a rather inconsistent 2010 campaign. He should benefit from the presence of Matsui, DeJesus and Willingham, as it will allow him to hit from a more comfortable No. 6 or 7 slot.

4. What kind of lineup will the A's run out come April?

Decent and improved. Yes, it's still flawed without a 30-home run hitter, but the A's figure to sport speed at the top and bottom of the lineup thanks to Coco Crisp and Cliff Pennington, and the middle of the bunch has the potential to leave behind many woes associated with RISP production. Walkaholic Daric Barton, along with DeJesus, whose bat should make good use of the sprawl of the Coliseum, are key pieces. The same can be said of Kurt Suzuki, who, like Kouzmanoff, is hoping to put aside forgettable 2010 numbers and take advantage of the new acquisitions around him.

One scenario: Crisp CF, Barton 1B, DeJesus RF, Matsui DH, Willingham LF, Suzuki C, Kouzmanoff 3B, Ellis 2B, Pennington SS. There are multiple more, though, with plenty of time to adjust.

5. Will Matsui really represent a noticeable upgrade over Cust?

The Matsui vs. Cust debate is a popular one, no doubt. Both are on-base machines, and both are capable of hitting 20-plus homers. But Cust didn't do the latter last season -- for all intents and purposes, it can be noted that he was awarded 133 fewer at-bats than Matsui (who hit 21) in 2010. But, more than anything, the A's were in need of new blood. Matsui strikes out far less than Cust, and he'll add some momentum as a gap-to-gap guy. He hits plenty balls the other way, which could result in a large handful of run-scoring doubles to offset the club's lack of home run-hitting ways.

So, yes, the move marks an upgrade. How much of one remains to be seen.

6. Where does Chris Carter fit into the 2011 picture?

That's a mystery at this point. At the end of the 2010 season, Carter figured to be a prime candidate to earn the starting job in left field. But then the A's went on an outfield shopping spree and acquired Willingham and DeJesus and also tendered contracts to Ryan Sweeney and Conor Jackson. The latter two are expected to act as the club's fourth and fifth outfielders. With a solid group of five outfielders when including Crisp, Carter is the odd man out -- not only in the outfield but on the 25-man roster should the A's stick with 12 pitchers, five infielders, two catchers and Matsui as the primary DH.

Keep in mind, though, that this club is prone to injuries. Crisp, Willingham, DeJesus, Sweeney and Jackson were all derailed by lengthy DL stints in 2010, so we can't assume each and every one will break camp healthy. Carter, still a defensive work in progress but boasting of power potential at the plate, could easily find himself a roster spot in the event of an injury or two. Otherwise, he may start the year at Triple-A Sacramento.

7. That precocious pitching staff should only get better, right?

If healthy, by all means yes. Trevor Cahill, Gio Gonzalez and Dallas Braden bear close watch after a season in which each logged 190-plus innings. But the A's staff was careful not to push them, and will continue to monitor them. Plenty eyes will also be on Brett Anderson, who made just 19 starts because of an elbow injury. But these four, backed by what's arguably the most underrated defense in the game, figure to head the best young rotation in the AL. Each made huge leaps and bounds in the maturity department last year, and that process should only continue under the leadership of new pitching coach and former bullpen coach Ron Romanick.

8. Who will be the fifth starter?

There's no definitive answer but also no lack of options, which is how the oft-injured A's like it. Josh Outman, Tyson Ross and Bobby Cramer gathered some competition for the spot mid-offseason thanks to the signings of McCarthy and Harden. The most recent additions, along with Outman, could be the front-runners, as the club is in no hurry to rush Ross and could start him at Sacramento. Cramer proved to be a welcoming September surprise, but he'd likely have to endure something close to a perfect spring to beat out the others. McCarthy, if healthy, is a strong option, as is Harden. But Harden could just as easily transform into a bullpen threat. Outman, meanwhile, could come out the winner if able to prove health and a repertoire reminiscent of his 2008 days.

9. Can the bullpen stay healthy?

This question doesn't come with an immediate answer, but it's surely one worth proposing given the large number of intriguing -- and injury-prone -- names lingering in the bullpen. Craig Breslow proved to be the team's workhorse, especially down the stretch, last year, and the A's are hoping a healthy Michael Wuertz and Jerry Blevins can ease the southpaw's load in 2011. That trio represents a high-caliber setup team for closer Andrew Bailey, whose 2010 injuries proved costly for the club. Joey Devine, if healthy, could handle the closer role if need be as well. There's also Brad Ziegler, as well as options in Harden, McCarthy and fellow newcomers Philip Humber and Trystan Magnuson. All in all, the A's are hoping their depth -- which could continue to grow throughout the winter -- leads to a way of combating fewer injuries.

10. Will this team be a legitimate playoff contender?

If they can stay on the field and out of the trainer's room, the A's have a realistic shot at wearing the AL West crown in 2011. With the pitching and defense in hand and an upgraded offensive supporting cast on board, Oakland has potential to stay in contention every step of the way. That's not to say Texas and Los Angeles, or even Seattle, will make it easy on them. But this is a young team oozing with confidence, and it's got the talent to match.

2010 Oakland A's Position Analysis: Center Field

Sam McPherson, examiner.com, 1/2/2011

Centerfielder Coco Crisp was probably the Oakland Athletics' best offensive player in 2010, but the problem was he just wasn't on the field enough to make a significant difference.

The veteran outfielder hasn't played a full season since 2007, so perhaps this was to be expected. Yet the teasing nature of his abilities is something the A's got a taste of for half the season this year.

Crisp hit .281 as the centerfielder with a .786 OPS mark, and while neither number is outstanding on its own, they represent the best marks of any A's outfielder in 2010.

He also scored 50 runs in just 73 games, which projects to 111 runs over a full season. The last time an A's player scored that many runs in a season was Jason Giambi (115 runs) in 1999. So it's clear what Crisp is capable of, if he can stay healthy. Even on a poor offensive team in 2010, he was scoring a lot of runs.

Crisp hit eight home runs and stole 32 bases -- while only getting thrown out three times. He electrified an offense from the top of the order, but he just wasn't in the lineup enough.

With Crisp missing 79 games to injury, Rajai Davis -- the regular leftfielder -- had to fill in. As discussed previously, Davis was a much better hitter in left field for whatever reason. As a centerfielder, he struggled a lot at the plate.

When moving from left to center, Davis' batting average dropped 26 points to .280, and his OPS dropped from .758 to a mere .686 mark. Consider the fact Davis played almost twice as much in centerfield as he did at his natural position, and the struggles of the offense in 2010 become more apparent.

Combining Crisp and Davis in centerfield produced decent numbers overall, including 62 stolen bases. But the inconsistency from the position, whether in the form of Davis' struggles or Crisp's injuries, was a big blow to the offense last year.

Hamilton to receive Wynne Award

American League MVP Josh Hamilton, a former Raleigh high school baseball star, will receive the Will Wynne Award at the 61st annual Raleigh Hot Stove League banquet, scheduled for Jan. 25 at the McKimmon Center on the N.C. State campus.

Hamilton hit .359 for the Texas Rangers with 32 home runs. He will not be able to attend the banquet. The Wynne award is presented annually by the Hot Stove League to the North Carolinian who contributed the most to baseball the previous year.

Oakland Athletics catcher Landon Powell and University of South Carolina baseball coach Ray Tanner will be the headline speakers at the banquet, which begins at 6 p.m. Powell, a Raleigh native, caught Dallas Braden's perfect game last season. Tanner led the Gamecocks to the College World Series championship. Both will receive the Board of Directors Special Achievement Award.

Tickets are \$35 and are on sale at Durham Bulls Athletic Park, Five County Stadium in Zebulon and Johnson-Lambe Sporting Goods in Raleigh's Cameron Village.

Baseball needs more good guys like Steve Boros

By Gary Peterson, Bay Area News Group 1/1/2011

The knock on Steve Boros, who died last week at 74, was that he was too nice a guy to be an effective major league manager. Maybe so if you go by the numbers. In three seasons (two with the A's, one with the Padres) his teams produced winning percentages of .457, .455 and .457.

In every other respect, his demeanor was his biggest asset. He was never happier than when he was in uniform. Our favorite Boros memory was watching him pitch batting practice in the rain during an informal workout at the Oakland Coliseum in January 1984. It was just one way he'd been marking the interminable time between seasons.

He admitted waking up at 5 o'clock one morning thinking about his lineup. And he said he was enjoying Thomas Boswell's new book, "How Life Imitates the World Series." He especially liked the part where Ray Miller wished for a recording of batting practice he could listen to during the offseason.

"You really miss that sound of the bat hitting the ball, the ball hitting leather," Boros said.

Baseball would be better off if more of its rank and file were that unabashed about their love for the game. This is a recording.

Another exciting year of baseball awaits in 2011

By Mark Newman / MLB.com

Pitchers and catchers report next month to Spring Training.

You know you are a real baseball fan when Jan. 1 arrives and that is your first thought. Of course, we at MLB.com also want to wish all baseball fans a Happy New Year.

"There are a lot of impatient fans," Terry Collins said, and while he was referring to Mets faithful, the club's new manager could be talking about all of us in general.

We are so ready already. The first order of business here in 2011 is to find a full two-liter of Ginger Ale and douse everyone around you, in the spirit of Major League Baseball's reigning Player of the Year, Rangers outfielder Josh Hamilton. The second is to find some of our favorite No. 11s past and present, from Carl Hubbell to Ryan Zimmerman.

It is 1-1-11, and we are here to help with that second order. First is an appreciation of the four retired No. 11 jerseys: Luis Aparicio (White Sox), Jim Fregosi (Angels), Hubbell (Giants) and Paul Waner (Pirates). Here is the "411," so take a closer look before you get going:

Aparicio carried the flag proudly for Venezuela long before such countrymen as Felix Hernandez, Miguel Cabrera, Elvis Andrus and Pablo Sandoval -- and was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1984. The 10-time All-Star spent his entire 18-year career as an American League shortstop -- leading the AL in steals each of his first nine seasons and winning that many Gold Gloves. The White Sox un-retired No. 11 so that Venezuelan shortstop Omar Vizquel could wear it in tribute, which he will do again at Spring Training.

Fregosi also played 18 seasons, and in his case he came to represent Angels baseball. The club entered the Majors in 1961, and he was an All-Star each year from 1964-70 except for '65. Actually, Fregosi and Aparicio were both AL All-Star shortstops in 1964 and '70.

In 1933, Hubbell, aka the "Meal Ticket" of the New York Giants, led the National League with 23 wins, a 1.66 ERA, 10 shutouts, 308 2/3 innings pitched and a 0.98 WHIP. He won Games 1 and 4 of the World Series, the Giants beat the Senators in five, and he was the Most Valuable Player in the NL that year and in '36.

Waner wore eight numbers in a Hall of Fame career from 1926-45 -- and his first number did not come until 1932, as the Pirates joined those adding numbers to jerseys. He amassed 3,152 hits, and his brother Lloyd's 2,459 meant they would finish with the still-record 5,611 hits for a brother act. In 2007, the Pirates retired No. 11, and you can see it at PNC Park on a plaque this season.

Dodgers coach Manny Mota wore No. 11 for Los Angeles from 1969-82, and Ron Cey was the team's fixture at third base wearing No. 10 through four World Series in the 1970s and '80s, but The Penguin finished up as No. 11 for the Cubs and A's. That's because No. 10 in Chicago belonged to the great Ron Santo, who we will miss so much as this calendar now flips ahead.

We will greet this new year promptly with a Hall of Fame announcement, and it remains to be seen whether Barry Larkin and/or Edgar Martinez get the nod for the 2011 Class. Either way we acknowledge them here, because both wore No. 11 during careers spent with one team, Larkin in Cincinnati and Martinez in Seattle.

Active No. 11 players in addition to Vizquel and Zimmerman include: Red Sox pitcher Clay Buchholz, Phillies shortstop Jimmy Rollins, Yankees outfielder Brett Gardner, Astros outfielder Jason Bourgeois and Rays outfielder Justin Ruggiano. Indians manager Manny Acta wears No. 11, and so do coaches Ivan De Jesus of the Cubs and Jose Oquendo of the Cardinals.

Interestingly enough, De Jesus wore No. 11 for the Cardinals during their pennant-winning season of 1985, and then Oquendo took it the following season there through 1995.

It is interesting that Gardner even can wear No. 11 today. Why isn't Lefty Gomez's No. 11 retired? His plaque is in Monument Park at Yankee Stadium. He is in the Hall of Fame. He pitched for the Yankees from 1930-42 and was No. 11 from 1932-42. During that time, he pitched in five World Series, going 6-0 in seven starts, helping the Bronx Bombers to five titles, making seven consecutive All-Star appearances. This might be the appropriate year to consider making it the 18th retired Yankees number.

Others who have worn No. 11 include: Ken Caminiti (Astros, Braves, Rangers), Delino DeShields (Orioles), Alex Gonzalez (Red Sox, Marlins, Blue Jays), Jose Guillen (Pirates, D-backs, Royals), Chuck Knoblauch (Royals, Yankees), Hal McRae (Royals), Hideo Nomo (Red Sox, Brewers, Rays), Tim Lincecum (Orioles), Richie Sexson (D-backs, Brewers) and Gary Sheffield (Braves, Yankees).

Speaking of Sheffield, we just saw the first season without him in uniform since 1987. Assuming his career is over, that means one year of waiting for Hall of Fame eligibility is in the books. He finished with 509 home runs and 2,689 hits, representing eight clubs.

New Year's Day is all about looking ahead, and while Sheffield may be a Hall possible down the road, we know that a clinch moment is about to happen in 2011. Derek Jeter, already a likely Cooperstown pick, enters the season with 2,926 hits. Project No. 3,000 for sometime in June, and then, barring some unforeseen hindrance, project likely the most-attended Hall induction within the state of New York ever later this decade.

It is truly a happy time if you are a baseball fan, because you can almost smell the leather of the baseball mitts and the sizzling juice of the hot dogs. Spring Training plans are under way. The NFL moves into its postseason, and then the first Sunday after the Super Bowl, much of the fantasy baseball activity gets rolling. Baseball resumes its rightful place at the top of public consciousness, and soon everything is right with the world again.

The 2010 season is history, as history as Babe Ruth's Called Shot in 1932, Ted Williams' .406 season of 1941, Kirk Gibson's Miracle Homer of 1988, Tom Glavine's shutout to clinch it for Atlanta in 1995 and Brian Wilson's save last fall.

The year 2011 dawns with a San Francisco Giants Trophy Tour across the West, and the assurance that anything can happen after watching that team beat the Rangers in a World Series. Will Carl Crawford and Adrian Gonzalez bring another title to Boston? Will Jose Bautista bring his same stroke to Toronto? Will it be another Year of the Pitcher, or was 2010 a fluke?

Right now, we stop and just appreciate how 2011 feels. We say a happy birthday on this day to a pair of Hall of Famers, Tim Lincecum (342 wins from 1880-93) and Hank Greenberg (331 homers in 13 seasons, almost entirely with Detroit). We say a happy second birthday to MLB Network, remembering that fascinating New Year's launch with the telecast of Don Larsen's 1956 perfect game.

Your favorite players are in "beast mode" most everywhere, preparing for the inevitable again. Jobs are ready to be won, and players are getting ready to follow up on the promise of so many free-agent signings. The trucks will be backing up into the ballparks before you know it, and the **official info** says Feb. 13 is the voluntary reporting date for pitchers, catchers and injured players. Feb. 18 is the voluntary reporting date for all others.

The Cactus and Grapefruit League exhibitions schedules begin on Feb. 25, with the D-backs at the Giants, and then we are off and running into the great unknown. Opening Day comes early, and this time on a Thursday -- March 31. Five games are played that day, including the traditional opener at Cincinnati, and it all heads for a World Series guaranteed to end in October.

"I can't wait to put the uniform on," Carlos Pena said last month after being introduced as the new Cubs first baseman. "They have faith in me and I am going to honor that."

"I just want to come here and have fun," said Orlando Hudson, who now teams with Jason Bartlett as the new middle infielder for the Padres.

This is what baseball fans are thinking right now. We can't wait for them to put the uniforms on and we are going to have so much fun in 2011. It is here. Spray some Ginger Ale, **order your tickets** and have a Happy New Year.

AREA SPORTS PERSON OF THE YEAR

PITCHER OF PERFECTION

By Jason Anderson, Stockton Record, 12/31/2010

STOCKTON - Oakland Athletics pitcher Dallas Braden recently spent 15 days trekking through Southeast Asia aboard riverboats and large land mammals with San Francisco Giants closer Brian Wilson.

They rode elephants through the jungle and annoyed their guide by baiting sharks on an underwater spearfishing expedition. They visited Hong Kong, Thailand and the islands of Macau and Ko Samui. Along the way, Braden fed a baby tiger shortly after watching it bite a woman, putting puncture wounds in her arm.

Braden, a Stockton resident who pitched a perfect game for the A's in May, and Wilson, who won a World Series with the Giants in November, enjoyed the adventure, isolation and relative anonymity their surroundings offered.

"It was pretty cool," Braden said. "We were recognized, but for the most part those people couldn't care less what's happening in America. It's nice to fly under the radar and be a maniac and nobody cares - nobody's going to tweet about it."

Braden, The Record's 2010 sports person of the year, had the nation and his hometown all atwitter over his Mother's Day gem after pitching the 19th perfect game in major league history in a 4-0 victory over the Tampa Bay Rays. He dedicated the game to his mother, Jodie Atwood, who died of skin cancer when he was a senior at Stagg High, and grandmother, Peggy Lindsey, who helped raise him.

Braden reflected on his year in a wide-ranging interview, touching on his travels, his pending free agency, the negligence suit he filed against the A's former medical provider and the notoriety he has received since pitching the perfect game.

Fame and misfortune

Braden famously feuded with New York Yankees star Alex Rodriguez in the weeks leading up to the perfect game and has long been a local favorite, but his performance at the Oakland Coliseum that day launched him to a new level of stardom. The 27-year-old left-hander graced the cover of Sports Illustrated, appeared on national television shows such as the "CBS Early Show" and "Late Show With David Letterman," was profiled on HBO's "Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel," and was inducted into the Stockton Athletic Hall of Fame.

Braden is recognized wherever he goes in Stockton and often attracts large crowds. He has stopped for hours at a time to sign autographs and pose for pictures, just as he did recently at the Bed, Bath and Beyond on Trinity Parkway.

"He was very good to everybody," said 19-year-old Celso Arevalos, an employee at Bed, Bath and Beyond. "I got an autograph. My brother came in and got an autograph. He signed everything. It was pretty exciting because he's my favorite player."

Lindsey said she can hardly believe all the attention Braden has received.

"It's still kind of surreal to me," Lindsey said. "I see him on TV and think, 'Oh, my God, that's my grandson.' I'm just so proud of him. He's worked hard, and it just amazes me that all this has happened."

It was a wonderful year in so many ways, but 2010 was not a perfect season for Braden. He went 0-5 in nine starts after throwing the perfect game before being placed on the disabled list with elbow tightness. He returned to pitch well over the final two-plus months of the season but continued to experience discomfort in his left foot, which he fears could cause more elbow and shoulder problems.

In October, Braden filed a lawsuit against Dr. Thomas Peatman and Webster Orthopedic Group. Braden claims Peatman severed a nerve while removing a cyst from his foot in August 2009. Braden missed the rest of the 2009 season and said he has pitched with numbness in two toes ever since.

Braden is seeking unspecified damages in the lawsuit. The suit alleges that he feels "extreme pain" and "fatigue in the later innings" while pitching as a result of Peatman's negligence. The suit also asserts that "the damage, instability and sensitivity of his left foot will cause biomechanical problems in his pitching delivery system, which will likely result in further injury and shortening of his career."

"You know how sometimes you wake up and it feels like your foot has been asleep for three hours?" Braden said. "Well, that's what I feel every day, all day long."

"Being an athlete who works on his feet, that could definitely cause problems. That could definitely shorten a career, and there's been a lot of worry about whether that's going to alter my mechanics, which could alter my arm slot, which could lead to injury."

The A's fired Webster Orthopedic, their longtime medical provider, shortly after Braden filed his lawsuit.

A lawyer and spokesperson for Webster Orthopedic said they could not comment on the suit, which is pending.

Also pending is Braden's contract status. The A's and Braden's representatives are negotiating an agreement that would keep him in Oakland in 2011. Braden said he expects to return for a fifth season with the A's and had hoped a deal would be in place by Christmas.

Holiday cheer

In the meantime, Braden is home for the holidays. He spent Christmas with his grandmother and friends in Stockton and took in the Pacific-UConn women's basketball game Tuesday at Spanos Center.

Braden said his annual Thanksgiving food drive was the best yet. Lindsey accompanied Braden when he visited local restaurants to solicit food donations for the St. Mary's Interfaith dining hall in Stockton. She said it was a "heartwarming" experience.

"Dallas is trying to do something, and people in this town are trying to help him," she said.

Edward Figueroa, chief executive officer of St. Mary's Interfaith Community Services, said the dining hall served 720 meals the day of Braden's food drive, approximately 200 more than the previous year.

"The highlight of the day is watching the children's faces," Figueroa said. "They see a Major League Baseball superstar serving them, and it really reminds them how important they are. They think, 'Hey, I'm somebody if someone like Dallas cares.' "

Braden said he enjoyed collecting, preparing and serving food to the homeless, offering up his usual but unique blend of humor, charisma and kindness.

"I'm never going to be the guy who just writes the check and mails it in," Braden said. "You don't see the face of the guy who writes the check. Not only are you going to see my face, but you might taste one of the hairs that fall off my face and into your food."

Braden went to the top of the world and circled the globe on his way back, but his best efforts always bring him home.

"There's a reason I haven't started a big charity foundation or anything like that," Braden said. "It's the little things I want to do. I want to help the people around me, the people I can directly affect, and those are the people in the city I live in."

2011 Oakland predictions: Big police issues ahead

Chip Johnson, San Francisco Chronicle, 12/31/2010

So what does the coming year hold in store for Oakland, the East Bay and the rest of California?

There are things we already know, like a new mayor for Oakland and new governor for the state. But for other developments, it's anybody's guess what's going to happen. So let's take a shot in the dark, step out onto the skinny branches and make some New Year's predictions for 2011.

Copland: Oakland city officials will again open negotiations on the touchy subject of increased pension contributions from the Oakland Police Officer's Association, the union that represents the city's sworn officer force. And union officials will grudgingly contribute more than the 2 percent they now pay, but nowhere near the 7 percent the city is seeking. And just FYI, council members make no contributions to their own pensions.

Staffing crisis: The triple-whammy of attrition, the layoff of 80 Oakland police officers in July and no new police academies since May 2008 will create a severe shortfall of police officers.

Big loss: Unless Mayor-elect Jean Quan can dedicate new resources to bolster police staffing, the city risks the loss of popular Police Chief Anthony Batts, who is in the second-year of a three-year contract. Batts is media-savvy, strategic in his work and well respected by colleagues. His departure would be a big loss, and I sure hope I'm wrong on this one.

Hands-on mayor: Unlike her predecessor, who was harder to find than Waldo, Quan will take a proactive role at city governance. Early indications are that she will attend council meetings on a regular basis.

Growing pains: Now there will be a transition period between Oakland's new mayor and her former colleagues on the council, not so surprising when you consider that only District 3 Councilwoman Nancy Nadel endorsed Quan's mayoral run. There is a fine line between engaging the council as policymakers and micromanaging the council, and Oakland's mayor-elect will have to walk it.

The A's won't stay: They might not have a destination just yet, but the A's aren't staying in Oakland. Team owner Lew Wolff's plan to move the team remains unchanged from the day he purchased the Major League Baseball franchise in March 2005. Fremont is out of contention and San Jose is on hold awaiting baseball Commissioner Bud Selig's ruling on whether an A's move south encroaches on the San Francisco Giant's fan base. Oakland's \$750,000 ballpark study is a wish on a distant star.

Berkeley as the model: Quiet as it's kept, the lovely City of Berkeley has not experienced the economic shortfalls that have afflicted virtually all of its neighboring East Bay cities. Three-term Mayor Tom Bates, who served two decades in the California Assembly, should receive his due as a city leader. Berkeley has retained its ultra-liberal image while providing some of the best services in the region.

Back to business: After a tumultuous year in Alameda fraught with infighting, accusations and investigations, look for the East Bay's Quiet Island to get back to business, and identify a new developer and a new plan to redevelop the city-owned Alameda Naval Air Station. In the last week, City Attorney Teresa Highsmith has announced her departure and interim City Manager Ann Marie Gallant was not rehired.

Up in Sacramento: In the first of two-terms as Oakland mayor, Gov.-elect Jerry Brown immersed himself in the city. He took on everything from woeful redevelopment efforts to increasing the size of the Police Department to adopting the city's then-state-controlled school district. Expect no less exuberance in his first year as governor. Brown will shepherd through previously rejected unpopular tax hikes and budget cuts and be compelled by fiscal circumstance to make drastic changes in the pension retirement system.

A's appear out of the Beltre sweepstakes

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

It appears free agent Adrian Beltre is holding out for the new year to pick a new home, but come decision time, Oakland reportedly won't be among his options.

According to Ken Rosenthal of FOXSports.com, the A's pulled out of talks with Beltre this week after making multiple offers to the most sought-after infielder on the market.

Oakland's initial offer to Beltre -- which surfaced more than a month ago -- was reportedly worth \$64 million over five years. While the A's, per club policy, never confirmed or denied that figure, Rosenthal maintains the club improved its offer at least once before saying "enough."

Beltre's agent, Scott Boras, is looking to reel in at least a five-year, \$85 million contract for his client, according to Rosenthal's sources. The Angels, who have reportedly made a five-year offer worth \$70 million, are now seen as the frontrunners, with the Rangers expressing interest as well.

However, Texas already boasts Michael Young at third base and would have to face a compromising scenario if they signed Beltre -- trade Young or move him to first base or designated hitter.

As a result, the Angels are favored to come out the winners of the Beltre sweepstakes, while Oakland now appears primed to redirect its remaining 2011 resources to other players, notably relievers.

According to Rosenthal, righty Chad Qualls and lefty Hideki Okajima are among the free-agent hurlers of interest to Oakland, who could also pursue another infield addition to platoon with incumbent third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff.

Though Beltre is seemingly out of the mix, the A's have already upgraded a previously lackluster lineup, thanks to the offseason acquisitions of designated hitter Hideki Matsui and outfielders David DeJesus and Josh Willingham.

They've also solidified pitching depth in the form of hurlers Rich Harden and Brandon McCarthy, who figure to be key additions to either the rotation or bullpen if healthy.

Ex-Tiger Boros, manager of A's, Padres, dies

Nearly 50-year career began as player with Detroit in 1957

By T.R. Sullivan / MLB.com

Steve Boros, 74, who spent almost a half-century working in baseball and managed both the Athletics and the Padres, passed away Wednesday night at his home in Deland, Fla.

The cause of death was complications from multiple myeloma, which he had had been fighting for four years, said his son, Steve Boros Jr.

Boros, a native of Flint, Mich., who graduated from the University of Michigan with a degree in literature, was originally signed by the Tigers in 1957 and was working for them in various front-office capacities in his last nine years in the game before retiring to Florida in 2004.

"The Detroit Tigers were saddened to hear of the passing of Steve Boros," Tigers president Dave Dombrowski said in a statement. "Steve started and finished his career as a Tiger, first as a player, and most recently with us in the front office. Steve was a life-long baseball man, who we respected for his years of experience as a player, manager and teacher of the game. We've lost another long-standing member of our Tigers' family and the organization extends its heartfelt condolences to the Boros family."

The Tigers lost former general manager Bill Lajoie earlier this week. Hall of Fame broadcaster Ernie Harwell and manager Sparky Anderson also passed away in 2010.

"There was only one Steve Boros," said Glenn Ezell, who succeeded Boros as Tigers director of player development in 2004 and served in that post until this past summer. "You can't make a mold and then produce another one, because he was absolutely one of a kind. Conscientious, wonderful, cared to instruct. Ain't none better, none better at all."

Boros, a well-known proponent of the running game, was one of the first coaches to use a stopwatch to time pitchers moves. He was instrumental in developing Royals outfielder Willie Wilson and Expos outfielder Tim Lincecum into top-flight running threats.

"Steve might have been the nicest person in the game as a player, coach or manager, whichever direction you want to go," said Rangers coach Jackie Moore, who knew Boros going back to their early days together with the Tigers. "He was a quality individual. I will always remember, as a young player, he took me under his wing and made it a lot easier for me."

"He was a real sound baseball man in all areas. He covered just about everything you could: player, coach, manager and farm director. He obviously had a very sound baseball career."

Boros, primarily a third baseman, made his Major League debut for the Tigers on June 19, 1957. After being named the American Association's Most Valuable Player in 1960, Boros became the Tigers' regular third baseman in 1961 and hit .270 with five home runs and 62 RBIs in 116 games and 485 plate appearances.

The following season he batted .228 with 16 home runs and 47 RBIs in 116 games and was then traded to the Cubs that winter. His last full season in the Major Leagues as a player was in 1964 when he played 117 games for the Reds and batted .257 with two home runs and 31 RBIs.

He continued to play Minor League baseball through 1969 before beginning his post-playing career in 1970 as a manager in the Royals farm system. He was on Whitey Herzog's coaching staff with the Royals in 1975-79, when they won three American League West titles.

In 1983, after coaching for the Montreal Expos, he replaced Billy Martin as manager of the Athletics. He was 74-88 in his first full season in 1983 and 20-24 to begin the following season before being dismissed. He took over as the Padres manager in 1986 and spent one season in that job, going 74-88 again.

Boros then worked for the Dodgers and, along with Mel Didier, was one of their advance scouts who prepared them for the 1988 World Series against Oakland. The Dodgers won in five games.

"He was one of the most thorough guys I have ever been around," Didier said. "When we won the World Series, he was one of the advance scouts and did a great job. He broke down hitters really well and was just a really thorough guy. He was one of the best people I have ever been around. He had fun but was a no-foolishness guy. He took his job seriously."

Boros spent his final nine seasons with the Tigers organization as the Minor League field coordinator (1996-2002), director of player development (2003) and special assistant to the general manager (2004).

"He cared about what he was doing," Ezell said. "Steve Boros absolutely cared about the players. And you know what? He never cheated the players, nor did he cheat his staff. This man was phenomenal. He had a smile on his face from the moment you ever met him. He was a pretty good man that helped a lot of people put themselves in a position to be in the big leagues."

Ex-Oakland A's manager Steve Boros dead at 74

Oakland Tribune staff and wire report 12/31/2010

Former A's manager Steve Boros, who later played a key behind-the-scenes role in one of Oakland's most heartbreaking World Series moments, has died. He was 74.

Boros, who gained notoriety for helping bring baseball into the computer age with his use of electronic data while serving as manager, passed away in Deland, Fla. on Wednesday night., the Detroit Tigers said. No other details on his death were available. Boros worked with the Tigers for the past nine years.

Boros managed the A's in 1983 and led Oakland to a 74-88 record, good for fourth place in the American League West. Boros was fired in 1984 after the A's got off to a 20-24 start.

In his only other big-league managerial job, Boros managed the San Diego Padres to a 74-88 record in 1986, which was also a fourth-place finish.

But it was his work as an advance scout for the Los Angeles Dodgers in 1988 that really showed off his baseball smarts.

Boros was part of a scout team that filled out reports that fall on the A's, the Dodgers' opponent in the World Series. Among the traits that Boros and his co-workers noticed: Oakland relief ace Dennis Eckersley tended to throw a backdoor slider on 3-2 counts to left-handed hitters.

That was exactly the pitch that pinch-hitter Kirk Gibson launched off Eck for a two-out, bottom-of-the-ninth homer to win Game 1. The Dodgers went on to upset the mighty A's in five games.

Boros, who played in the major leagues, hit .245 with 26 home runs and 149 RBIs in parts of seven seasons with Detroit, the Chicago Cubs and Cincinnati.

Born in Michigan, Boros made his major league debut with Detroit in 1957 and mostly played third base. He hit three homers in a game in 1962 -- no other Tigers player accomplished the feat until Bill Freehan in 1971.

Boros worked for more than four decades in baseball, and coached for Kansas City, Montreal, the Dodgers and Baltimore. He spent the last nine years of his career in the Tigers' organization as their minor league field coordinator (1996-2002), director of player development (2003) and special assistant to the general manager (2004).

Boros' son followed him into the game and worked as a scout.

"The Detroit Tigers were saddened to hear of the passing of Steve Boros," team president and general manager Dave Dombrowski said in a statement. "Steve was a lifelong baseball man, who we respected for his years of experience as a player, manager and teacher of the game."

Boros signed with the Tigers in June 1957 out of the University of Michigan and did well as a rookie, hitting .270 with five homers and 62 RBIs. He missed more than a month in midseason after breaking his collarbone in a collision with Tigers pitcher Frank Lary on a bunt. Boros hit 16 homers in 1962, including his big game at Cleveland, but did not match that total again.

Boros was known as one of the most genial people in baseball. In fact, that was often the knock on him as a manager, that he was too nice. Boros liked to read books on various subjects, too, and some critics a quarter-century ago said that didn't fit in with the game's hard-nosed nature.

Boros, however, always kept his eye on the ball.

In the middle of the 1986 season, Boros was ejected before the first pitch of a game at Atlanta. He had gone to home plate for the exchange of lineup cards and tried to hand a videotape to umpire Charlie Williams, who had made a call the previous night that resulted in a triple play against the Padres. Williams was sure he'd gotten the play correct and quickly tossed Boros.

Replays showed Boros was right.

2010 Oakland A's Position Analysis: Left Field

Sam McPherson, examiner.com, 12/30/2010

Left field was literally a black hole for the Oakland Athletics last season, as 14 different players manned the position for the team in 2010 -- with the now-departed Rajai Davis getting the most action (44 games).

Considering there are only 162 games in the season, do the math: no one stepped up to deliver anything consistently good in left field if 14 guys got cycled through the spot.

Davis really was the A's best left fielder in 2010, hitting .306 in 44 games as the Oakland leftfielder. But with injuries to Coco Crisp, the speedy Davis spent a lot of his time in centerfield last year. But he was really at his best in left, contributing a .758 OPS to the offense as a leftfielder.

He also stole 13 bases and had ten extra-base hits in only 121 at-bats in the position. Over a "full" season, that translates to 65 SBs and 50 XBHs, which would be pretty good.

Alas, there was a serious drop-off from Davis to everyone else who played the position, in terms of offensive production -- demonstrating how the A's repeated injury problems have really taken their toll on the team's capabilities over the past few seasons.

Journeyman Gabe Gross (40 games, 82 at-bats) and former prospect Eric Patterson (25 games, 81 at-bats) saw the most time in leftfield when Davis was playing elsewhere. Gross hit .280 with a .735 OPS in his 82 ABs, while Patterson hit .210 with a .642 OPS in left field.

Patterson also whiffed 23 times in his 81 leftfield ABs, while only walking four times -- and by the end of the 2010 season, he was in Boston.

Two other players of note got some time in left field for the A's last year: Conor Jackson and Chris Carter. Oakland traded for the former before the All-Star break in an attempt to stop the bleeding at the position, and of course, Jackson promptly got hurt. In only 52 ABs in left field, he hit .212 and did little to distinguish himself or justify the trade.

Carter, the organization's top prospect perhaps, struggled at the plate early (remember his oh-fer streak?), but he actually finished solidly -- although his .200 average in 65 leftfield ABs doesn't stand out, he's probably going to see more time in the lineup in 2011 (albeit as a designated hitter against lefties, primarily).

Overall, A's leftfielders in 2010, buoyed by the production of Davis and Gross primarily, hit .257 overall with 14 home runs, 65 RBI and 23 SBs. If that was one player, he'd be a slightly-below average hitter at the position, and the fact the organization needed 14 different guys to put together those below-average numbers says a lot about the outfield problems the A's suffered last season.

One can only hope the 2011 season will bring better production from a significantly smaller cast.

2010 Oakland A's Position Analysis: Third Base

Sam McPherson, examiner.com, 12/29/2010

The Oakland Athletics traded for Kevin Kouzmanoff last winter as a solution to their third base woes.

After years of watching Eric Chavez not play third base while collecting hefty paychecks, Kouzmanoff was supposed to be some kind of answer.

Well, he provided some answers, but probably not the ones the A's were looking for when they acquired him. Of course, they were probably dreaming anyway at the time, but no one expected him to be as bad as he was in 2010.

Kouzmanoff had the worst season of his career at the plate, posting a .679 OPS. After putting up much better numbers than that in San Diego's spacious Petco Park from 2007-09, the veteran was even worse at the not-as-spacious Coliseum. He hit the fewest home runs in a single full season of his career, too.

His .247 batting average was his career-low, as was his .283 on-base percentage and his .396 slugging percentage. By the way, he drove in a career-worst 71 runs, too.

Suffice it to say, Kouzmanoff was an embarrassment at the plate in 2010, even though he led the A's in home runs and RBI - and that says more about the A's offense than it does about Kouz, in truth.

Yet all of these poor batting numbers would have been tolerable if KK had just been able to replicate his 2009 defensive effort. In that last season in San Diego, Kouzmanoff set the all-time National League fielding percentage record for a third baseman (.990), while making only three errors all that season.

But like his plate prowess (or lack thereof), Kouz's defensive game nosedived in 2010, too: he made 12 errors at third for the A's last season and posted his worst fielding percentage since 2007. He was still an average defender in comparison to his peers, but the team was expecting a lot more.

Overall, Kouzmanoff was a huge disappointment for Oakland, and he'll have to be much better in 2011 if the A's want to close the gap on the Texas Rangers to compete for the American League West division title.

With Kouzmanoff getting 142 games in at the hot corner, only one other player (late-season, scrap-heap acquisition Akinori Iwamura) logged as many at 30 at-bats while playing the position in 2010. That doesn't figure to change much in 2011, even though the A's did try to make a pitch to Adrian Beltre again to sign with them.

They shouldn't hold their breath on that pipedream, and while Kouz isn't cheap (he made \$3.1M in 2010), Beltre surely would cost a lot more. But he might be worth it, considering how badly Kouzmanoff played last year.

New Year's resolutions for every America League team

Cliff Corcoran, SI.com, 12/28/2010

With 2010 drawing to a close, and 2011 about to begin, it's time for the 30 major league teams to make their New Year's resolutions. Here are my suggestions for the 14 American League clubs...

AL East

The Tampa Bay Rays resolve to prove that there's life after Carl Crawford. The Rays have won two of the last three AL East titles, but, heading into the New Year, just two players remaining from their 2008 starting lineup (Evan Longoria and B.J. Upton), and only two men remain from that year's rotation (James Shields and Matt Garza, with Garza a possibility to be traded before spring training). More recently seven members of their 2010 bullpen, including all six pitchers who made 50 or more appearances, became free agents this winter, and none have re-signed with the Rays thus far. With homegrown products Jeremy Hellickson, Desmond Jennings and Reid Brignac ready to step into full-time jobs, the Rays aim to prove that their window didn't close with Crawford's departure.

The New York Yankees resolve to trust their young pitchers. Given all of the young pitching talent that has come through the Yankees' system in recent years and the bounty still to come, there's no good reason that the team should have spent the most active part of the offseason waiting on Cliff Lee and Andy Pettitte to make up their minds about where, or if, they wanted to pitch in 2011. Now, facing the possibility of landing neither veteran, and with all of the viable Plan B free agents off the market, the team is scrambling to fill its final two rotation spots. Meanwhile, Joba Chamberlain remains inexplicably exiled in the bullpen, despite his 4.18 ERA and 206 strikeouts in 221 2/3 career innings as a starter, nearly all of them compiled before his 24th birthday. The Yankees do seem to have established Phil Hughes as a solid starter, and rookie Ivan Nova remains in play for the Opening Day rotation, but with three top prospects having reached Double-A last year (Dellin Betances, Manny Banuelos and Andrew Brackman), the time has come for the Yankees to make their in-house solutions Plan A.

The Boston Red Sox resolve to strike with all their hatred and make their journey toward the dark side complete. The Red Sox had the best team in baseball entering the 2010 season, but injuries decimated their lineup and, in part due to their resulting defensive downgrades, their pitching staff was riddled with disappointing seasons. The Sox finished in third place, out of the playoffs for just the second time in the last eight years. Given the fluky nature of that collapse and the fact that they still won 89 games, the Sox could have largely stood pat this winter and expected a significant improvement. Instead, they at long last consummated their flirtations with the Padres over Adrian Gonzalez, then dropped \$142 million to lure Carl Crawford on a whopping seven-year contract, the 10th-largest in major league history, at least until the Sox come to terms with Gonzalez on an extension likely to be in the seven-year, \$150 million range. The echoes of the Yankees' spending spree in the wake of their 89-win, third-place finish in 2008 are deafening, but then the few remaining differences between the two age-old rivals are purely cosmetic.

The Toronto Blue Jays resolve to draw some dang walks. The 2010 Blue Jays had more than 20 percent more home runs than the next-best major league team in that category, but they were only ninth in the majors in runs scored because

their team on-base percentage was the fifth-worst in baseball. Despite that ever-present threat of the longball, the Blue Jays drew fewer walks than 23 other teams last year. The combination of the Jays' emerging young rotation and rookie manager John Farrell, formerly the Red Sox's pitching coach, bodes well for the Blue Jays on one side of the ball. Toronto is hoping that Farrell's coming from a pair of sabermetric-friendly organizations in the Red Sox and Indians will have a positive effect on the other side of the ball as well.

The Baltimore Orioles resolve to make the lives of the Rays, Yankees and Red Sox miserable. With each passing season the prospect of an Orioles renaissance seems to retreat from view, but there's little doubt that this team is getting better. Their 34-23 (.596) performance under new skipper Buck Showalter down the stretch in 2010 isn't something that they can repeat over a full season, but with their young pitching prospects emerging in the major league rotation; the solid-but-fragile lefty-righty combination of Mike Gonzalez and Koji Uehara in the bullpen; the ever-present hope of breakout seasons from Adam Jones, Matt Wieters and Felix Pie; and the additions of flawed-but-valuable infield upgrades J.J. Hardy at shortstop and Mark Reynolds at third base, as well as a full season from Brian Roberts at second; the Orioles seem likely to avoid serving as a soft spot on the schedule of their division's Big Three.

AL Central

The Minnesota Twins resolve to take the performance of their middle infielders more seriously. The Twins won seven more games in 2010 than in 2009, thanks in large part to their upgrades at second base and shortstop. Minnesota's middle infielders were barely over replacement level in 2009 according to Baseball-Reference's WAR (wins above replacement, which combines offensive and defensive contributions), but Orlando Hudson and J.J. Hardy combined to be 3.4 wins above replacement in 2010. The last Twins middle infield combo to match that total was Chuck Knoblauch and Pat Meares in 1997, and the last double-play combo not featuring Knoblauch to do it was Greg Gagne and Steve Lombardozzi in the Twins' championship season of 1987. Despite that, Minnesota let Hudson walk as a free agent and traded Hardy, who was due an arbitration raise. Japanese import Tsuyoshi Nishioka might prove to be a sufficient replacement for one of them, but even that's no sure thing, and if the Twins punt(o) those two spots in their lineup once again, they'll open the door for the White Sox to unseat them as division champions.

The Chicago White Sox resolve to avoid making the same replacement-level mistakes as the Twins. The White Sox finished six games behind the Twins in 2010 with the third-best record in the AL Central and West combined, and things are looking up for 2011, given the addition of Adam Dunn, Gordon Beckham's second-half success (.310/.380/.497), the prospect of a full season from Edwin Jackson, Jake Peavy's return and an increased bullpen role for 2010 first-round pick Chris Sale. What the Sox can't afford to do, however, is give away production in left field, third base or behind the plate, the first two of which, like designated hitter and second base, were below average in 2010, and the last of which is being manned by a 34-year-old A.J. Pierzynski, who hit for less power at age 33 (nine homers) than in any other full season in his career.

The Detroit Tigers resolve to aspire to something other than mediocrity. The Tigers had a ton of money coming off the books this offseason, and thus a big opportunity to make some major upgrades to their roster. They got off on the right foot by signing Victor Martinez to fill their gaping hole behind the plate and adding Joaquin Benoit to their bullpen, but as we reach the New Year, those remain the only upgrades they've made. The rest of their money this offseason has been spent on keeping the 2010 Tigers together, by re-signing Jhonny Peralta and Magglio Ordo ez and extending Brandon Inge for another run at a .500 record. That's a major missed opportunity given that, as I wrote nearly two months ago, outside of Miguel Cabrera, there wasn't a player in their 2010 lineup who couldn't have been improved upon, and there are no hitters of note in their farm system behind second baseman Scott Sizemore, who's not necessarily a future All-Star himself.

The Cleveland Indians resolve to at least hit a little. The Indians are at the apex (or nadir, depending on your perspective) of a rebuilding phase. Accordingly, in 2010 they were the third-worst team in the American League in both run scoring and run prevention. The Indians' pitching prospects are some combination of under-cooked and under-whelming, but their hitting prospects are beginning to emerge. Carlos Santana whet Cleveland fans' whistles prior to his season-ending

knee injury this year and should be back to raking in April, top prospects Jason Kipnis and Lonnie Chisenhall could take over at second and third base, respectively, at some point this season, and left fielder Nick Weglarz could join them. Add those four youngsters to Shin-Soo Choo and what Cleveland hopes will be healthy, bounceback seasons from Grady Sizemore and Asdrubal Cabrera, and at least one half of the next competitive Indians team could come in to focus in the second half of 2011.

The Kansas City Royals resolve to give their fans a glimpse of the future. The Royals have what is widely considered the richest farm system in baseball, and the bulk of their elite minor league talent saw action in Double-A in 2010. That puts the team's top prospects on course for late 2011 cups of coffee and a proper arrival in 2012, but in the wake of the Zack Greinke trade, those players can't reach Kansas City soon enough for Royals fans. That doesn't mean that K.C. should rush its top prospects; the team needs only to point to Alex Gordon's struggles since jumping from Double-A to the majors in 2007 as a lesson in the value of patience, but once one of those guys is ready -- most likely third baseman Mike Moustakas, who hit .293/.314/.564 with 15 homers in 52 games at Triple-A this year -- the Royals owe it to their rooters to give him a starting job in the major leagues immediately.

AL West

The Texas Rangers resolve to trust their young pitchers and sign Adrian Beltre. Combining the Yankees' and Angels' resolutions, the Rangers need not fret over losing Cliff Lee with young studs Neftali Felix and Derek Holland on-hand to reinforce the rotation, and losing Lee means that they now have money to spend on Beltre, who could improve the team by two wins on defense alone by pushing Michael Young and his limited range to DH. Add in how much Beltre's bat would thrive in Arlington, and he could be worth another two wins over what the Rangers got from Vladimir Guerrero's rebound last season. Bonus: Signing Beltre would keep him away from the Angels, clearing the Rangers' path to a second-straight division title. The only caveat is that they keep the contract relatively short

The Oakland A's resolve to confront their fear of commitment. When Billy Beane broke up his three aces after the 2004 season, the best player he got back was Dan Haren, but three years and one playoff berth later, Beane shipped Haren to Arizona for a six-player package. Three years after that, just two of those six players are still A's, and the best of the departed quartet has grown up to be Carlos Gonzalez. Gonzalez was traded to the Rockies for Matt Holliday, who spent less than four months in green and gold before being traded to the Cardinals for a three-player packaged centered on corner infield prospect Brett Wallace, and Wallace was the A's property for just five months before being flipped to the Blue Jays for right-field prospect Michael Taylor. With Taylor having struggled for the A's Triple-A team in 2010, one wonders how long it will be before Beane decides that Taylor wasn't the player he wanted, either.

The Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim resolve to sign Adrian Beltre. The big change in the AL West in 2010 wasn't the Rangers' three-game improvement, it was the Angels' 17-game drop. Getting Kendry Morales back from his fluke broken leg could add two wins to the ledger, or more if Mike Scioscia will just let Mike Napoli be his starting catcher *fercryinoutloud*. Having Dan Haren for a full season could add another three or four wins. Replacing Brandon Wood's 5 OPS+ (yes, five) with Beltre, however, could add anywhere from five to 10 wins, putting the Angels right back in the thick of the divisional race.

The Seattle Mariners resolve to avoid embarrassing themselves. The 2010 Mariners weren't just bad, they were embarrassing, both on the field and off. Their offense scored fewer runs per game than any American League team since the 1981 Blue Jays, a team in its fifth year of existence, and the second fewest by any AL team since the addition of the designated hitter in 1973. Off the field, things were no better, from Ken Griffey Jr.'s "napgate," to Chone Figgins' dugout fight with manager Don Wakamatsu, to Jack Wilson breaking his hand in a fall in his bathroom, to the front office's public ignorance of newly acquired relief pitcher Josh Lueke's criminal record. Beyond a natural correction, the 2011 team doesn't project to be meaningfully better on the field, but at the very least they could find a way to lose with dignity.

Season Ticket

By Chuck Nan, Martinez News Gazette, 12/28/2010

49ers Post 40-Points on Seahawks

Alex Smith threw for 255 yards and three touchdowns in a triumphant return to the starting line-up following a five-game absence, and the 49ers improved their once-slim playoff hopes with a 40-21 victory over the NFC West rival Seattle Seahawks.

Smith matched a career high by throwing for three touchdowns for the fifth time. The No. 1 overall draft pick in 2005 was back behind center in place of Troy Smith, who went 3-2 during his stint as San Francisco's starter.

Smith was booed after their first play from scrimmage, an incomplete pass intended for Delanie Walker — then again moments later after another incompleteness. Smith then hit tight-end Vernon Davis on a 22-yard gain then the touchdown three plays later for a 7-0 lead.

The 40-point outburst (all by the end of the third-quarter) was the first for the 49ers since they defeated the Arizona Cardinals in 2003 at Candlestick Park, 50-14. That day, Jeff Garcia had four touchdown passes, two going to Terrell Owens. For Smith, it was the first three touchdown/no interception game of his career, a high level of performance that Niners' fans might have taken for granted at one time. Steve Young had 17 such games for San Francisco, Joe Montana had 16, and Jeff Garcia had nine.

Nabby Suddenly Available

Longtime San Jose Sharks goaltender Evgeni Nabokov and Kontinental Hockey League (KHL) club SKA St. Petersburg have parted ways, the player's agent, Don Meehan, told ESPN.com.

Unable to land an acceptable NHL deal after his Sharks contract expired, Nabokov signed a four-year deal with St. Petersburg, one of the KHL's most affluent clubs, last summer. The split was "mutually agreed upon for family reasons," Meehan said.

According to Hockeydb.com, Nabokov was 8-8-5 with a 3.02 goals-against average and .888 save percentage with St. Petersburg this year.

The move opens the possibility for Nabokov, who's played all 563 of his career NHL games with San Jose, to return to the league this season. He would first have to pass through waivers if a team was to sign him. As the February 28 trade deadline nears, the 35-year-old Nabokov would no doubt become an attractive option for a team looking to bolster its goaltending for the stretch drive and playoffs.

Warriors Have Unique Formula

Monta Ellis (34) and Reggie Williams (26) scored the points, and Andris Biedrins (12) and David Lee (11) snagged the rebounds in the Warriors' 108-99 victory over the Timberwolves. The Warriors are the only NBA team to have two games like that this season — meaning, two players scored 25-or-more points and two others collected 10-or-more rebounds. On October 27 vs. Houston, Ellis scored 46 points and Stephen Curry 25, while Lee had 15 rebounds and Biedrins 11.

Travels With The Trophy

The Giants World Championship trophy is going to work. The team announced that its trophy will embark on a multi-city tour of Northern California, southern Oregon and western Nevada starting January 4. Before it is done, a Giants representative will accompany the trophy from the West Coast to New York state, where it will visit the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown and stop in New York City so that onetime New York Giants fans will have a chance to see it.

At each subsequent stop, fans will be able to view the trophy during specified times on a first-come, first-served basis.

They'll also be able to get a picture taken with the team's prize, although it's still unclear whether the photos will be done strictly by a professional and sold for a fee, or whether there will be time for fans to shoot their own pictures.

Giants' officials say they are looking into all the possibilities and will inform fans prior to the various appearances. One thing is clear though: Fans will not be able to touch the trophy.

The team then plans for the trophy to return to San Francisco for a tour of various neighborhoods before making its way to the home opener at AT&T Park on April 8.

Travel Partners

A's starter Dallas Braden and Giants relief pitcher Brian Wilson were travel partners on a recent vacation trip to Thailand. The two are frequent travel companions. However, after the success the two enjoyed this past season, things have changed. Wilson is a world champion. Braden pitched a perfect game. The dynamic has changed. The pair were very recognized and well received by their Thai fans.

Godzilla Arrives

The Oakland Athletics signed Hideki Matsui to a one-year contract to be the club's designated hitter. So, what does the man they call Godzilla in Japan bring with him? Well, according to the Chronicle's John Shea, how about this?

The A's had three traveling beat writers last season. Next year, that will be increased add 15 to 20 more. Plus, there will be the Japanese television crews. The Coliseum press box, rarely full for baseball games, could overflow. In the clubhouse, Matsui gets the Barry Bonds treatment, a swarm of reporters following just him.

A's games are expected to be televised live to Japan, just as Angels games were last season when Matsui was Anaheim-based.

One Japanese reporter said that Oakland will be very famous in Japan. But as Shea points out, will the A's be famous in Oakland?

The signing could also lead to advertising and sponsorship revenue for Oakland. Last year, the Angels had at least 10.

Rookie Couture Scores OT Winner

The Sharks won 4-3 at Dallas on an overtime goal by rookie Logan Couture. It was only the second overtime goal by a rookie in an NHL game this season. Taylor Hall, the first pick in the 2010 NHL draft, had an extra-time goal that enabled the Oilers to beat St. Louis on December 4.

Bailey not changed by All-Star status

BY KEVIN MINNICK • COURIER-POST STAFF • DECEMBER 28, 2010

MOUNT LAUREL — One look out the window and no one would blame Andrew Bailey if his mind was elsewhere.

Snow, wind and cold are the last things a professional baseball player wants to think about. Short sleeves, sunny skies and temperatures in the 80s are more like it.

With the start of spring training still more than a month away, the Paul VI High School graduate and two-time All-Star closer for the Oakland Athletics was back in the area Monday night. The 2009 American League Rookie of the Year lent a hand as part of an open house at the South Jersey Elite Sports Academy.

With an ever-present smile, Bailey signed autographs, posed for pictures and talked baseball to help kick off the grand opening celebration of this indoor facility. He came to support Cherry Hill West graduate and friend Shawn Senior, a former pitcher in the Boston Red Sox organization who's part of the academy's baseball staff.

"Shawn gave me lessons. He was my first pitching coach you could say," said Bailey, who taken by the A's in the sixth round of the 2006 draft out of Wagner College.

"(Being in the majors) is still kind of surreal to me. I still feel like I'm fighting for a position. They say the easy part is getting there and the hard part is staying. That's the way I think. It's weird when I think of the accolades I've received. That keeps me fighting and pushing."

With Oakland set to begin spring training Feb. 12, Bailey and his wife, Amanda, plan to leave for Arizona on Feb. 1. He's coming off surgery in late September to remove scar tissue and floating bone chips from his right elbow, but said he's been cleared by world-renowned orthopedic surgeon Dr. James Andrews to begin throwing.

"Staying healthy is important. In my short career, I've battled some injuries," Bailey said. "One thing that does is wake you up a bit. It could be over any day, so you have to enjoy the moment."

"I feel settled in. It's my job and I have to be 100 percent committed. Going through the minors, reaching the bigs was always my goal. Now, I'm making a career out of it."

Last season as Oakland's closer, Bailey went 1-3 with a 1.47 ERA and 25 saves in 49 innings. He converted his final four save chances and five of his last six before surgery ended his year in September.

As a rookie, Bailey went 6-3 with 26 saves and a 1.84 ERA in 83 1/3 innings.

Bailey's innings were down over his rookie year simply because he was the team's full-time closer. As a rookie, he spent time in long relief before taking over his current role.

"As the closer, my innings and opportunities or appearances were more limited (in 2010)," he said. "I was also on the disabled list for a month with an (oblique) strain. It was an injury-prone year, and that was frustrating."

"This year, I'm going in healthy. I got cleaned up and I'll be ready to go."

With several offseason moves, Bailey feels the A's are definitely headed in the right direction. They finished behind the Texas Rangers in the AL West last season.

"With the acquisitions we made this offseason hitting-wise, we definitely improved," he said. "I hope the opportunities - the saves and appearances - get some kind of kickback from that."

"I'm definitely settled in as a big league pitcher. The dream came true. Now my sights are on the World Series, winning it all and being on the big stage. It would be great to bring a championship back to Oakland."

That could possibly mean having to face the Phillies. Oakland is scheduled for three interleague games against the Phils this season (June 24-26) at Citizens Bank Park.

"That will be a nice little homecoming to see my family and everyone," Bailey said. "I've already been getting texts and phone calls from people who said they'll see me there. That will be pretty neat."

Barnidge: Why did Oakland squander \$750,000 on stadium study?

By Tom Barnidge, Contra Costa Times columnist, 12/28/2010

SHOPPERS tend to overextend themselves during the holidays. They get caught up in the Christmas spirit, spend more than they should and then suffer a case of the regrets when the bills arrive.

Perhaps that's what happened to the Oakland City Council. Maybe it was all that eggnog and mistletoe.

It is difficult to come up with any other explanation for last week's decision to spend \$750,000 on an environmental impact report for a baseball stadium near Jack London Square that no one is planning to build.

We seem to recall that Oakland is still trying to dig out from under a \$32 million budget shortfall for the fiscal year. In fact, it has been so desperate to find savings that it has furloughed employees, shortened library hours and laid off 80 police officers, dropping the force to about 80 percent of what it should be.

Given that backdrop, you might wonder why the council would shell out three-quarters of a million dollars to study the feasibility of a baseball stadium.

That's an excellent question.

Indulging a stadium pipe dream while basic services suffer is like stopping for a manicure on the way to the Food Bank.

This hypothetical facility -- no one has said a word about actually building it -- apparently is intended to satisfy the A's appetite for new accommodations, which they desperately need. Trouble is, the A's already have site in mind: Anywhere But Oakland.

Club officials have fallen all over themselves whispering sweet nothings to San Jose. Before that, they proposed marriage to Fremont, which was politely turned away. Fremont would have been the smallest speck on the Major League Baseball map, but at least it isn't Oakland.

Oakland has acquired a hard-earned reputation in baseball as a city to escape. That comes from finishing 29th in attendance among 30 major league teams in 2010. Only Cleveland fans did a better job of staying away from games.

So embarrassing have been the baseball crowds at the Oakland Coliseum that upper-deck seats have been closed to the public and covered with tarps since 2006. That makes the stadium look less empty, and it keeps passing airline pilots from being blinded by the reflected glare of 25,000 empty seats. +

Oakland is not a booming baseball town, not in this economy.

That judgment pertains not just to fans but to the number of well-heeled corporate sponsors willing to purchase luxury boxes. Owners care more about luxury boxes than they do their mothers.

But let's imagine the impossible: Fans are abundant and corporations are willing to ply the A's with money. The idea of a city dedicating resources to a new sports facility still makes no financial sense.

And please don't tell us about how sports teams boost the economy.

The Cato Institute, a Washington, D.C., think tank, debunked that notion in 2004, when it released the findings of Dennis Coates, professor of economics at the University of Maryland, and Brad Humphreys, professor of recreation, sports and tourism at the University of Illinois.

"Our conclusion, and that of nearly all academic economists studying this issue, is that professional sports generally have little, if any, positive effect on a city's economy," they wrote.

"The net economic impact of professional sports in Washington, D.C., and the 36 other cities that hosted professional sports teams over nearly 30 years was a reduction in real per capita income over the entire metropolitan area."

Wonder if the \$750,000 report will include that information.

Braden helps make 2010 memorable for A's

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

The A's figure to be the subject of much attention in 2011, when the film "Moneyball" -- based on Michael Lewis' best-selling book narrating the story of how A's general manager Billy Beane built winning teams with small-market payrolls -- is scheduled to hit the big screen.

Beane will subsequently forever be linked to his on-screen self, Brad Pitt, and his club will likely garner national interest while at the same time promoting popcorn and candy sales in local movie theaters.

Until then, though, the A's are set to make headlines without the help of Pitt or fellow co-stars Phillip Seymour Hoffman, Jonah Hill and Robin Wright. Rather, they'll rely on their own promising up-and-coming cast of Trevor Cahill, Brett Anderson and Gio Gonzalez, among others, to create a fixture of buzz in Oakland and beyond.

That process seemingly already started in 2010, when the A's young core served as one of multiple highlights in an eventful year that included several memorable storylines as Oakland played to an 81-81 mark, good for second in the American League West.

Lefty Dallas Braden, one of the game's most desirable clubhouse personalities, made a name for himself in more ways than one in the 2010 season that was. Thus, when looking back at the year's notable events, it's no surprise the southpaw

receives mention twice. Here's a peek back at Braden's doings, as well as the other top storylines -- covering the good, the bad and the obscure -- that came out of Oakland this year.

5. Injury bug swarms Oakland ... again.

The 2010 season offered a mixture of hope and dismay for fans of the green and gold, the latter largely seen through a familiar dose of injuries that affected the likes of Ben Sheets, Justin Duchscherer, Eric Chavez, Brett Anderson, Andrew Bailey, Coco Crisp, Mark Ellis, Ryan Sweeney, Kurt Suzuki, Kevin Kouzmanoff and midseason acquisition Conor Jackson. All in all, the A's used the disabled list 23 times -- second-most in Oakland history -- and managed to have at least five players on the DL all season, which ended with the dismissal of head trainer Steve Sayles. The club's injury woes, to which Beane points when discussing his team's fourth straight non-winning season, left many wondering what could have been -- especially down the stretch in the AL West race -- given a healthy squad.

4. Godzilla comes to town.

Christmas came early in 2010 for the A's organization, which presented Japanese veteran slugger Hideki Matsui to more than 100 reporters at a welcoming press conference in Oakland on Dec. 14. Matsui, known around the league as "Godzilla," not only provides the A's with a proven clutch hitter, but also lends life to an ailing club that has watched crowds diminish in an outdated ballpark over the last few seasons. Matsui's arrival marked one of several winter upgrades for Oakland, which also brought in outfielders David DeJesus and Josh Willingham via trade. Thanks to this trio, led by a perpetual fan favorite in Matsui, the A's are subsequently entering relevancy again.

3. "Stick it, A-Rod."

A war of words ensued between Dallas Braden and Alex Rodriguez after the Yankees third baseman disobeyed what Braden maintains is one of baseball's unwritten rules by jogging across the pitcher's mound. Following the April 22 incident, Braden suggested A-Rod "take a note from his captain over there and realize you don't cross the pitcher's mound in between an inning or during the game." A-Rod, meanwhile, found all the commotion amusing, telling reporters, "I'd never quite heard that, especially from a guy that has a handful of wins in his career." Tension ultimately fizzled by year's end, but not before Rodriguez claimed a day after the bitter exchange he didn't want to extend Braden's 15 minutes of fame. A mere 17 days later, Braden threw a perfect game, after which point his grandmother playfully announced, "Stick it, A-Rod," with a smile.

2. Cahill, Gonzalez coming-out parties

On March 25, baby-faced hurlers Cahill and Gonzalez -- each vying to break camp as the club's fifth starter -- combined to strike out 11 over nine innings of work against the Dodgers in a Cactus League contest. Less than 10 days later, the latter was chosen to start the season in Oakland. By season's end, however, both had aided in the creation of one of the game's best young starting staffs. Cahill, 22, began the year on the DL, tiptoed around Triple-A Sacramento for two outings and then returned to Oakland and transformed into an All-Star worthy of mention in the Cy Young discussion. Gonzalez, without much ruckus, got his emotions in control and put up equally impressive numbers at age 24. The duo's ability to garner at least 15 wins each (Cahill 18-8, Gonzalez 15-9) while aged 24 years or younger represented just the 17th time in the post-World War II Era that a Major League team has done so.

1. Mother's Day perfecto secures Braden's place in baseball lore

With his late mother Jodie Atwood watching from above and his grandma Peggy Lindsey looking on from the stands in Oakland, Braden handed both women, not to mention an entire baseball community, an unforgettable Mother's Day in the form of the game's 19th perfecto against the Rays on May 9. Mr. Perfecto, along with his equally witty grandmother, became media darlings overnight and exited 2010 as one of baseball's best feel-good stories of the year. Lindsey, who raised Braden after his mother succumbed to cancer when he was in high school, joined millions in watching her grandson grace the cover of Sports Illustrated, deliver David Letterman's Top Ten List via satellite, wake up with CBS for "The Early Show" and become something of a household name.

Cactus League exhibit looks for more growth in third year

By Mike Sakal, East Valley Tribune 12/27/2010

A project dedicated to the history of spring training in Arizona is rounding second base and heading for third.

The Mesa Historical Museum's ongoing exhibit "Play Ball: The Cactus League Experience," is nearing its third year of showcasing the stories of how baseball teams were lured to the Grand Canyon State for spring training, built a fan base and became one of the largest draws for tourism.

The Mesa Historical Museum opened the exhibit in 2009 in a 1,000-square-foot room of the former Lehi School in Mesa, which houses the museum's collection relating to city history and the long-running "Wallace and Ladmo" show. During 2010 in its second year, the exhibit doubled and it was added to the Arizona Museum for Youth in downtown Mesa for more exposure.

During its third year, project leaders are hoping to better showcase the Mesa Historical Museum's credibility of organizing a first-class collection with hopes of garnering big-name sponsorship from statewide or national companies or organizations.

With a third phase of the exhibit set to open in February, Play Ball will be displayed in three locations: The Arizona Historical Society's complex at Papago Park in Tempe, the Arizona Museum for Youth in Mesa and the retail area of Terminal 4 at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport. The Arizona Historical Society is set to launch the exhibit on Feb. 19, and the Arizona Museum for Youth will open the exhibit the following week.

The ultimate goal within the next three years is for the spring training collection to have its own state-of-the-art museum, and expand its collection of baseball artifacts and images to better solidify a base of sponsorship. Leaders of the Play Ball project are hoping in the future that the Chicago Cubs will partner with the Mesa Historical Museum so it can permanently be housed at a \$99 million spring training facility at Riverview Park that was approved by voters in the November general election.

"We definitely plan to continue our phenomenal growth of this project," said Robert Johnson, project leader for the Play Ball museum project and a political consultant with Highground Public Affairs Consultants in Phoenix. "Whenever more people find out about it, the collection grows, but now, we are seeking higher visibility."

For the last two years, 15 Major League teams have made Arizona their spring training home, and all are featured in the exhibit. Planners also hope to have some kind of display at the 2011 MLB All-Star Game at Chase Field to create more awareness of the project on a national level. Receiving some kind of sponsorship from the National Baseball Hall of Fame Museum in Cooperstown, N.Y. or with the Hall of Fame also is on the Mesa Historical Museum's wish list.

With Arizona preparing to celebrate the state's centennial in 2012, spring training's roots go back more than half a century with the New York Giants (now San Francisco) and Cleveland Indians coming to Arizona to train in the late 1940s, and the Chicago Cubs coming to Mesa in 1952.

"Baseball is one of the great things that gives Arizona its identity," said Lisa Anderson, executive director of the Mesa Historical Museum. "We want to continue documenting one of the most iconic things in Arizona's history through artifacts, photographs and oral histories from the players who have trained here. We'd like get more items from the Giants', Indians' and Cubs' early years here, but we also hope to get more spring training artifacts from teams that used to train here such as the Boston Red Sox, Baltimore Orioles and Houston Colt 45s (now the Astros) when they trained at Geronimo Park in Apache Junction."

So far, Play Ball has collected more than 700 items for its collection and has raised more than \$1 million through admission costs, in-kind donations and two \$5,000 contributions from the Scottsdale office of Hunt Construction.

Hunt Construction has given the museum \$10,000 so items relating to spring training history in Arizona can be purchased whenever they surface at auctions or on eBay. Part of the funds from Hunt Construction's donations helped purchase numerous items relating to spring training history at the auction of memorabilia from the Pink Pony Steakhouse and Saloon at the Antique Centre in Scottsdale last summer.

Johnson, along with Robert Brinton, president of the Mesa Convention and Visitors Bureau and past president of the Cactus League, also have donated numerous items of their own for the collection from an era long before the state's building boom. Brinton's father was one of the Mesa businessmen who helped lure the Cubs to Mesa in 1952.

As a youngster, Brinton later sold programs at Rendezvous Park where the Cubs trained in the 1950s and 1960s.

Johnson, who has a love of baseball, used to work as a radio engineer in the broadcasting booth for WWWE (1100-AM) Cleveland with former Cleveland Indians pitcher Herb Score during spring training seasons at Tucson's Hi Corbett Field during the 1980s.

"We have a lot of personal interest in establishing this as a museum and making it a success," Johnson said. "Although the museum would be a great tourist draw as part of spring training, it also would be great to have year-round for families who live here and have attended spring training games for many years."

Among those items recently added to the Play Ball collection are rare spring training programs — one from 1951 — the only year the New York Yankees trained in Arizona when Mickey Mantle was a rookie and Joe Dimaggio played his last year. Another program is from 1969 when the Seattle Pilots played their only year as a team and trained in Tempe Diablo Stadium before becoming the Milwaukee Brewers. In fact, many of the pictures on 1969 and 1970 Topps baseball cards of Pilots players were taken in Arizona during spring training and show the Tempe buttes in the background. Many of those cards are scattered throughout the exhibit involving the Pilots.

Both the 1951 Yankees and 1969 Pilots programs were purchased on eBay. The Yankees program actually was bought from an individual in Elfrida in Cochise County. Johnson said.

Residents with spring training memorabilia or photographs — past or present — are encouraged to retrieve it from their closets or garages to donate or loan it to the collection. "We are trying to develop the Yuma story more as well as Casa Grande as it relates to spring training," Johnson said. "We'd also like to get more pictures of Rendezvous Park as it relates to the Cubs and the Oakland A's when they trained in Mesa. We have a lot of history sitting right in front of us, and the key is to continue uncovering it and organizing it to turn the Play Ball museum concept into a reality."

A sport-by-sport (baseball only) and team-by-team look ahead

Labor strife, rebuilding franchises and college teams in transition will mark 2011.

LA Times, 12/25/2010

BASEBALL

Easy labor? As the NFL and NBA brace for labor war, baseball players and owners are expected to negotiate a new collective bargaining agreement with relative ease. Owners can't cry poverty when the Washington Nationals spent \$126 million to buy Jayson Werth and the Colorado Rockies \$134 million to extend Troy Tulowitzki; the Oakland Athletics offered \$64 million to Adrian Beltre and the Florida Marlins \$48 million to Dan Uggla.

Movie time: With Brad Pitt playing Billy Beane, the long-awaited "Moneyball" movie is scheduled to hit theaters in September. However, the A's have not had a winning season since 2006, and the franchise has withered in the 21 months since Commissioner Bud Selig told them to let him determine where they could build their new ballpark. If the A's stumble this summer, the movie will have an oddly nostalgic feel to it.

Way to grow: The San Francisco Giants and Texas Rangers put on a nice World Series, and players like Buster Posey and Josh Hamilton should be household names. If the networks and MLB truly want to grow the game, give us a little less Derek Jeter and David Ortiz. If not, don't point the finger for low World Series ratings at anyone but yourselves.

TOP NEWCOMERS

The Philadelphia Phillies traded for Cliff Lee, Roy Halladay and Roy Oswalt within the past 18 months, each time refusing to surrender their top prospect, outfielder Domonic Brown. Now that Werth is gone, Brown's time has come. And, now that Carl Crawford has left Tampa Bay, rookie Desmond Jennings replaces him in left field.

--Bill Shaikin

ANGELS

Welcome back: Even if the Angels don't make a big free-agent splash, they'll add an impact bat in 2011 with the return of Kendry Morales, who suffered a season-ending broken leg last May while jumping onto home plate after a game-winning

home run. Morales in 2009 hit .306 with 34 home runs and 108 runs batted in.

Pitching in: The Angels have the makings of a top-notch rotation with right-handers Jered Weaver, Dan Haren, Ervin Santana and Joel Pineiro, but they'll be even better if Scott Kazmir (9-15, 5.94 earned run average in 2009) gets his act together.

Closing time: The Angels upgraded their bullpen by signing left-handers Scott Downs and Hisanori Takahashi, but they appear unsettled at closer. Fernando Rodney went 0-2 with a 5.65 ERA and four blown saves in September. If he struggles in April, he'll probably be replaced by Downs, Kevin Jepsen or even 99-mph-throwing rookie Jordan Walden.

NEWCOMER TO WATCH

Mike Trout, who hit .341 with 10 homers, 58 RBIs and 56 stolen bases at Class-A last season, is a 19-year-old center fielder with power, blazing speed and advanced defensive skills. He could reach the big leagues by next September.

—Mike DiGiovanna

DODGERS

Who's the owner: The ownership situation remains far from resolved. The marital agreement that Frank McCourt claimed made him the sole owner of the franchise was recently thrown out by a judge. The matter will likely be tied up in the legal system for a couple of years, as McCourt has vowed to prove in court that his ex-wife isn't entitled to a share of the team — something believed to be necessary for him to hold onto the team.

Kemp is key: Considering the limited upgrades the Dodgers made to their lineup, the team's fortunes could be dictated by the performance of the uber-talented but wildly inconsistent Matt Kemp. A Gold Glove and Silver Slugger recipient in 2009, Kemp regressed last season.

Donny Baseball: Don Mattingly will be managing in the major leagues for the first time. He faces the task of not only inheriting a team that was 80-82 last season, but also of replacing Joe Torre.

NEWCOMER TO WATCH

Juan Uribe. Unable to land the middle-of-the-lineup bat Mattingly wanted, the Dodgers settled for Uribe, one of the heroes of the Giants' World Series run. Uribe, 31, established career highs with 24 home runs and 85 runs batted in, but had an on-base percentage of .310.

—Dylan Hernandez

Willingham seeing holidays through kids' eyes

By Jane Lee / MLB.com 12/24/2010

Newest A's acquisition Josh Willingham hit .268 with 16 home runs and 58 RBIs in 114 games for the Nationals in 2010, before missing much of the last month and a half with a left knee problem. The 31-year-old Willingham, penciled in as Oakland's Opening Day left fielder for the 2011 campaign, recently said he's fully recovered and undergoing his normal offseason workout routine.

In the coming week, though, he'll step away from the baseball preparation to enjoy the holidays with wife Ginger and their children, Rhett and Ryder. As the year comes to an end, Willingham took some time to share some of his favorite holiday memories, both past and present, with MLB.com as a way for his new fans to get to know him.

MLB.com: Where do you usually spend the holidays?

Willingham: Well, we live in Alabama, and most of our family is here, so we usually just spend it here with everyone. For New Year's, we're actually going to Walt Disney World. We have two kids, so we'll be taking them, and then some other family is coming, too. My oldest son is 4, and we last went when he was 2 so he'll be able to enjoy it a little bit more this time. It's usually a fun place for everyone.

MLB.com: What are your best memories of the holidays from when you were growing up?

Willingham: We seemed to have a pretty set schedule every holiday season. We would get all the family together and get up on Christmas morning and open all our gifts. Nothing too crazy -- just the typical things you'd expect for the holidays.

MLB.com: What is your favorite thing about the holidays now?

Willingham: As my kids get older, it's fun watching them discover all the things that come with Christmas. There's Santa and all the lights and the gifts. They definitely like the gifts.

MLB.com: What's the best present you ever received as a kid?

Willingham: I don't know about when I was a kid, but the best present I've ever received came this year. My wife got me a Polaris Ranger. I knew it was coming, so I told her to go ahead and give it to me early.

MLB.com: Was there a present you always wanted but never received?

Willingham: I always remember wanting a dog but never getting one as a kid. My wife and I had one before we had our own kids, which was good preparation for us. Maybe we'll get one for our own kids now eventually.

MLB.com: What's the worst present you ever received?

Willingham: Well, I can't say who it's from, but a couple years ago I received a leather jacket. It was a nice leather jacket, but people wore leather jackets 15 years ago, not three years ago. I'll always remember opening that and thinking, "When am I going to wear this?" It's always the thought that counts, though, right?

MLB.com: How about the best present you ever gave someone?

Willingham: I guess it would have to be a trip to Disney World.

MLB.com: How would you describe yourself as a shopper?

Willingham: My wife is definitely the shopper in the family. I would say I'm the last-minute procrastinator shopper. I'm the guy that'll either do my shopping online or go out the day before Christmas for two hours and do everything at once. It doesn't take me long. All I need is two hours and I'm set. My wife takes care of the family's gifts, so she just makes a list for herself and gives it to me and I'm in and out of stores.

MLB.com: Does your family have any special holiday traditions?

Willingham: We've started taking our kids to the neighborhoods with all of the Christmas tree lights. They like riding around in the car and seeing all the lights, so that's become something of a tradition for us.

MLB.com: Do you make any New Year's resolutions?

Willingham: I usually do, but I can only keep some of them. I haven't thought about next year's, but now that you've reminded me I better start making a list.

Ziegler recounts final days of trip overseas

By Brad Ziegler / MLB.com 12.24.2010

*Editor's note: A's reliever Brad Ziegler just returned from an overseas trip in the Middle East, where he visited American troops. He updated fans of his initial adventures in his **first entry**, and is now back home to share the memories of his final days there. What follows is Ziegler's second and final journal entry.*

Hey, baseball fans! I'm home! And now that I'm back, I can go into detail about what we got to do and where we were, since there is no further security risk to myself or the troops.

As I mentioned in my first entry, I was joined by Devon Harris, the captain and driver for the original Jamaican bobsled team. The base we were at was Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, Africa. It may not seem like the most volatile and dangerous war zone, but anywhere there is poverty there is a threat of terrorism. The base there is in place to provide jobs for the locals as well as ensure that no terrorist organizations can plant themselves among the people in that area and use the power of a little money to persuade the citizens to do destructive things they wouldn't normally do.

Every branch, every unit, every person with a job there -- they are all just as important as anyone stationed anywhere else. They take their positions and duties extremely seriously, and they're ready for any action that might come their way at any point -- in fact, their mentality is almost to welcome it. It's a thing of beauty to see everyone in sync, working toward a similar goal and purpose.

Last Monday, we prepared for a two-day trip out onto the amphibious LH-3 ship USS Kearsarge. In the early afternoon, we put on flight gear and boarded a V-22 Osprey, which carried Devon and I, as well as a small unit of Marines out to the ship stationed in the Gulf of Aden, north of Somalia. And while we had a fantastic time on the base, the time spent on the boat was undoubtedly the highlight of the trip.

The sailors and Marines stationed on that boat had been out on water for nearly 110 days when we arrived. Typically, they receive port calls (two-day trips into land) every 45 days or so. But every previous time the Kearsarge was supposed to go to port over the last three months, they were called to another mission. The majority of the 2,500 or so troops there were a little stir-crazy, I think -- just really needing to get off that boat for a bit to recharge their batteries. But watching them work and fulfill their daily duties, you'd never have noticed it. It was awesome to watch them work, giving everything they had at every point, understanding the piece they each represent in the huge puzzle, and overcoming that potential dip in morale that came with the extended time on the water. It was absolutely inspiring.

When we arrived on the ship, we were greeted with red-carpet treatment -- literally -- as we walked into the deck triage room, where the ship's captain and his two highest-ranking subordinate officers were waiting for us. After a quick photo shoot and some basic instructions, we were shown our cabin and given an opportunity to rest. That evening, we were treated to a dinner in the captain's office with the three leaders of the ship. After a fantastic meal, prepared for us by the captain's personal chef, who coincidentally was also one of the personal White House chefs for President George W. Bush, we went back to our room to freshen up. We were then guests of honor at the captain's table for the nightly Intel Ops meeting, in which they give the minute-by-minute schedule of the following day's operations. It was incredible to see the coordination and preparation that went into everything -- absolutely impressive.

After the meeting broke up, we stayed around and visited with some of the officers that remained in the room. Devon went down into the racks where the lower-level troops sleep and played some dominoes with a few other Jamaican troops on the boat. I stayed in the wardroom and played some poker with a group of officers. Devon and I were ultimately escorted up to the top deck (essentially, the control tower for all the air ops on the ship) and were allowed to witness -- using night-vision binoculars -- nighttime take-offs for the Harrier airplanes aboard the ship, as well as a couple helicopter landings on the deck. Never, ever will the sound and power of a military jet get old to me. I've loved it since I was a kid, and I think I always will.

We slept well that night, knowing we had an early wakeup call on the ship for breakfast before a four-hour tour of the ship. When we embarked on the tour, we went to every level of the ship, starting at the bottom down in the engine/boiler room and working our way up to the top deck, having lunch in the Chief's Mess on the way up. We also got to sit in helicopters, Harriers, marine-land vehicles and hovercrafts, while learning the differences of various types of marine weaponry on board.

This is when I first realized exactly how many different jobs are required to keep a ship running smoothly and why the coordination is so important. There are so many things that I never thought about, such as the water-purification system that turns sea water into purified water (over 100,000 gallons/day). The toilets and dish-washing systems use straight sea water to do their jobs (dishes are rinsed with pure water at the end of the process). Also, their recycling/waste program is extremely environmentally friendly, with huge amounts of trash output daily to manage.

We were fortunate to have timed the visit perfectly to witness a very intricate process called an UnRep ("underwear replenishment") -- no, they're not really receiving underwear. But it is how they refill everything on the ship, as well as unload items that can no longer be used. This process best demonstrated the coordination needed to have success in missions on the ship.

It starts when another ship, the Amelia Earhart, lines up alongside the larger Kearsarge. After they station themselves about 200 feet apart, traveling on the same course at the same speed, the troops use a modified rifle to shoot three lines of rope across to the other ship. The other ship then connects the rope to a pulley and shoots it back. Then items are exchanged using the ropes, as huge pallets of all kinds of necessities (including cereal, toilet paper and mail) are traded back and forth over a four-to-five hour period. The storage on the ship, as well as the methods for exchanging the items, has to be extremely well coordinated to take on the huge volume of supplies to keep the ship running without a glitch. It was fascinating to watch.

After dinner that evening, Devon and I headed down to the Hangar Bay to give motivational speeches, as well as greet many of the troops on board while taking pictures and signing hundreds of autographs. It was at this time when the trip became the most rewarding for me, personally, as many of them really expressed a great deal of gratitude for our visit and helping them break up the monotony of the ship's activities.

At the same time, we did our best to express to them how much their service and sacrifice means to all Americans, whether everyone realizes it or not. We just wanted to make sure they understood that their role is in no way going unnoticed, and based on the level of emotion in that room, I think everyone walked away changed for the better.

Devon and I were exhausted after that, having spent nearly the entire day on our feet. We were asleep quickly, our last night on the ship. When we woke up the next morning, we grabbed a quick breakfast, then proceeded down to the level

below the Hangar Bay to experience a little fun: a joy ride out on the ocean in a LCAC (hovercraft). They even let us take over the driving for a few minutes each, and we obliged by doing our best to create seasickness for the others on board.

When we got back, we spent some more time visiting with people we'd gotten to know in the short time there, eating lunch and preparing to return to base. Before leaving, we had the honor of being escorted to the deck triage room again by the captain for our final few minutes on the ship. It was really neat to see everyone in the room having casual conversation as we were approaching the room, but then the moment the captain walked in, someone yelled out "Attention on deck!" and the room was instantly silent and motionless -- a memorable display of the huge amount of respect they all have for their leader.

After a few more photos, the captain presented us with his commemorative coin, as well as a large framed photo of the two of us with the three ship leaders, taken the first day. We were then dressed in full-flight gear and escorted out to our ride back to land: a Huey (helicopter with no doors on the side). Our ride back was exhilarating, never getting more than 100 feet above the ocean as the wind whipped our clothes around while we leaned over to get awesome views of the sea below.

When we landed back on the base, we were escorted to our rooms where we were given the rest of the day to rest, pack, and say our goodbyes to the people who had made this trip possible for us. After some time to catch up on the Internet, as well as mixing in a game of cribbage with a couple troops after dinner, we headed for the airport and my 27-hour trip home commenced.

On the flights, I was able to reflect back on how truly special this trip was. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience -- one that allowed me to meet and express my gratitude to some truly remarkable people. I'm grateful to Armed Forces Entertainment for allowing it to take place. And I'm grateful to the men and women who serve this country selflessly and submit to fulfilling their individual roles, each playing an important part of protecting our rights and freedoms in this great nation. And I pray that they can all return home safely soon.

Oakland A's Position Analysis: Shortstop

By Sam McPherson, Oakland A's Examiner 12/24/2010

There were a lot of positives for Cliff Pennington in his first, full major-league season.

Oakland's 26-year old starting shortstop stole 29 bases, while only getting caught five times. Pennington also stroked 40 extra-base hits on the year, good enough for sixth-best in the American League amongst shortstops. And his .319 on-base percentage was fifth-best in the AL, too.

On the downside, Pennington struck out 96 times (third-worst), hit only .250 (also third-worst) and made a whopping 25 errors in the field (worst).

Overall, there's a lot to like about the A's somewhat-young shortstop, and his heads-up play -- combined with nice hustle -- gave the team a good sparkplug in a lot of situations last season. But he tired after the All-Star Break, hitting only .232 with a .636 OPS in the second half.

That will have to improve in 2011, if Oakland wants to make a run at the AL West division crown.

And the defense ... well, it's interesting. Pennington can make some amazing plays, yet he can also bobble the easy grounder. His range factor was the highest in the league at his position, while his zone rating was the lowest in the AL at the same time.

The best thing to be said about Pennington is that he's shown a lot of potential, and he's got nowhere to go but up. And in some cases (as noted above with his speed, power and ability to draw a walk), he's already a solid shortstop.

The A's are counting on improvement in 2011 from Pennington, and they'll probably get it from the former Texas A&M standout and first-round draft pick (2005).

One thing that could help Pennington stay sharper, especially in the second half of the season, is a quality backup. Only two other players saw time at shortstop for Oakland in 2010, for a total of only 42 at-bats over 23 games. Pennington played in 156 games last year, and the wear-and-tear of the position hurt his offense in the second half.

Adam Rosales, who spent most of his season filling in for Mark Ellis at second base, also saw some time at shortstop. But he was pretty bad, coincidentally or not, as the shortstop, hitting just .229 in 35 at-bats with just a .507 OPS.

The "best" A's backup at shortstop was Steve Tolleson, who hit .294 in 17 at-bats, filling in for Pennington.

Depth is always important in any team sport, and like the Oakland challenges at other positions previously discussed, the team needs some quality backups for the long haul of 162 games.

Oakland A's pull off minor league trade with Pittsburgh Pirates, acquiring Single-A pitcher

Wire services 12/24/2010

The A's traded utility player Corey Wimberly to Pittsburgh for right-hander Ryan Kelly on Thursday.

Kelly, 23, pitched for Single-A West Virginia last season, posting a 2-3 record and 4.20 ERA in 38 appearances.

Wimberly, 27, hit .284 with a .373 on-base percentage and 56 stolen bases for Triple-A Sacramento in 2010. He played at least 10 games at five positions for the River Cats.

Colorado bolstered its bullpen by acquiring right-handed Matt Lindstrom from Houston. The Astros got minor league pitchers Wes Musick and Jonathon Aristil from the Rockies. Lindstrom, eligible for salary arbitration, went 2-5 with a 4.39 ERA and 23 saves for Houston in 2010.

A person familiar with the negotiations says left-hander Arthur Rhodes agreed to a deal with Texas. Rhodes, 41, was 4-4 with a 2.29 ERA in 69 relief appearances for Cincinnati last season, when he became a first-time All-Star in his 19th major league season.

Left-hander Sean Burnett, 28, and Washington agreed on a \$3.95 million, two-year deal with a mutual option for 2013, avoiding arbitration. He went 1-7 with three saves and a 2.14 ERA in 73 appearances in 2010.

Arizona sold utility player Rusty Ryal, 27, to the Yomiuri Giants of the Japanese League. Ryal's father, Mark, spent two seasons with the Chunichi Dragons.

Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox expressed "extreme interest" in a 1970s criminal investigation of New York Yankees owner George Steinbrenner for illegal campaign contributions. Then-FBI Director Clarence Kelley relayed Cox's concern in a memo on Aug. 16, 1973, to the bureau's Cleveland office, saying agents needed to make sure the probe received "the same, immediate and preferred handling" as other criminal cases then growing from the Watergate scandal. The memo was included in a 400-page release of Steinbrenner's FBI file. He was convicted in 1974 for illegal contributions to disgraced President Richard Nixon.

A's send Wimberly to Pirates for righty

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The A's swapped Minor Leaguers on Thursday, sending speedy infielder Corey Wimberly to Pittsburgh for right-hander Ryan Kelly.

Kelly, 23, recently completed his fourth professional season in the Pirates organization. A 26th-round Draft pick by Pittsburgh in 2006, the righty owns a career 4.74 ERA with 171 strikeouts and 43 walks through 184 innings.

Most recently, Kelly went 2-3 and posted a 4.20 ERA while averaging nine strikeouts and 1.7 walks per nine innings with Class A West Virginia. He made 38 appearances, including one start.

Wimberly, originally acquired by the A's from the Rockies in early 2009, played at least 10 games at five positions for Triple-A Sacramento this past year. The 27-year-old tallied 56 steals while compiling a .284 average and .373 on-base percentage.

Wimberly never appeared in the Majors with Oakland but always proved to be a fan favorite in Spring Training by ending his pregame routine with standing backflips on the outfield grass.

2010 Oakland A's Position Analysis: Second Base

Sam McPherson, examiner.com, 12/23/2010

The Oakland Athletics were fortunate to have two solid players at second base for most of the 2010 season, and that depth will be necessary again in 2011.

Regular starter Mark Ellis was retained by the club for another year, but in 2010 -- for the third season in a row -- the veteran missed significant time due to injury. At age 33, he's not getting any younger, but Ellis has only played 150 or more games twice in his nine-year career.

He also missed the entire 2004 season to injury, so he's never been a healthy guy to begin with.

However, when Ellis *is* healthy, he's vital to the team's success. His defense is stellar (only three errors last season), and his bat is generally solid. In 2010, Ellis hit .291, his second-best season mark ever (he hit .316 in 2005), for example.

But his power last season was at its worst since his rookie season (2002): the A's veteran delivered only 29 extra-base hits, compared to 33 such hits in 2009 when he went to the plate 60 times less. However, his on-base percentage (.358) was one of the higher marks of his career, showing that Ellis is certainly using his experience to his advantage.

Due to his injuries, Ellis played in only 116 games in 2010, so the gap at second base was filled by utility man Adam Rosales. Until he went down with his own injuries in August, Rosales played 47 games in place of Ellis at the position and fared solidly for a young player with limited exposure to the majors prior to last season.

He hit .267 while playing second base, and his defense was impeccable: Rosales didn't make a single error at the position in those 47 games.

Rosales' value lies in his ability to play many positions, and it's good for the A's to know that if Ellis goes down again -- which is more than likely -- they have a capable replacement as they used to when Marco Scutaro was on the roster.

For a team like Oakland, it's impossible to have a great player at every position. And second base is certainly a position where the A's aren't exceptionally strong -- like catcher and first base, they have capable players.

But they don't have any stars.

This theme becomes very routine when examining the Oakland lineup, in truth, so it's important to at least have capable veterans at every position on the field.