

A's News Clips, Wednesday, February 16, 2011

Fame game is not one Oakland A's All-Star pitcher Trevor Cahill plays

By Joe Stiglich_Oakland Tribune

PHOENIX -- Trevor Cahill may be an All-Star pitcher, but he has yet to master the lifestyle of one.

The A's right-hander still hangs with the same group of friends he had while growing up in Oceanside.

And unless a Thanksgiving trip to South Dakota is your idea of a wild time, he didn't splurge on any extravagant vacations this past offseason, either.

Winning 18 games last year and becoming a Cy Young Award candidate did little to change Cahill's personality -- or perspective -- as he enters his third major league season.

"I don't really feel much different at all," Cahill said Tuesday as he reported to camp with Oakland's other pitchers and catchers. "I still come in feeling like you always want to try to do your best. I don't really see a difference."

But consider the position Cahill -- who doesn't turn 23 until March 1 -- finds himself in this spring compared with a year ago.

He arrived to camp in 2010 coming off an inconsistent rookie season and he was battling just to become the A's fifth starter.

Gio Gonzalez won that job. Cahill began the season on the disabled list with a left shoulder injury and upon recovering, entered Triple-A Sacramento's rotation.

He was called up to the major leagues in late April. He allowed six earned runs against Toronto in his first outing but quickly righted himself, finishing 18-8 with a 2.97 ERA and punching his ticket to the All-Star game along the way.

He learned to spot his fastball, making him more effective against left-handed hitters. A curveball that began as an experiment became a go-to weapon.

Cahill's win total in 2010 was the highest by an American League pitcher 22 years old or younger since Kansas City's Bret Saberhagen went 20-6 in 1985.

"His breaking ball obviously progressed a little bit, and his confidence, I think, was a big thing," fellow A's starter Brett Anderson said. "After Toronto, it seemed like he had 20 good starts in a row."

Scouts rave about the abilities of Anderson and Gonzalez. Dallas Braden's age (27) makes him the grizzled veteran of the rotation.

But it's Cahill whose resume would suggest he's the ace.

If you want to make the soft-spoken Cahill break out in a grin, try suggesting he's emerged as a leader of the staff.

"I don't think that's me," he said. "If anybody, I think Dallas would be that guy."

Given that Cahill will be arbitration-eligible after this season -- and thus more expensive -- it's logical the A's might consider locking him up with a contract extension that buys out his arbitration years, as they did in signing Anderson to a four-year, \$12.5 million deal last season.

General manager Billy Beane declined to comment on whether he was entertaining such thoughts with Cahill.

Asked how Cahill could improve on his breakout season, Beane responded: "We don't want to get too greedy, but if he just repeated his (2010) year we'd be happy. But given his age, there's always a chance he could be better."

Cahill is ready to get back to work after his uneventful offseason.

His All-Star selection didn't exactly bring a rush of attention back in Oceanside, just north of San Diego. That's because Cahill's entourage goes back to his Little League days.

"When I go home, it's the same friends I've had since kindergarten, that I played baseball with," Cahill said. "I mean, they ask me questions. But it's not like they look up to me."

Oakland A's notebook: Closer Andrew Bailey confident he'll be ready for season opener on April 1

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

PHOENIX -- Closer Andrew Bailey said Tuesday that his surgically repaired right elbow feels good and that he's confident he'll be ready for opening day.

Bailey was shut down in September to have three bone chips and three bone spurs removed. He and the A's labeled it a precautionary procedure, but when a two-time All-Star closer has any type of elbow surgery, it raises concern.

A's manager Bob Geren expressed no doubt Bailey would be ready for April 1 against the Seattle Mariners after Bailey threw his first bullpen session Monday since his surgery.

New A's pitching coach Ron Romanick has Bailey on a conservative throwing program, and Bailey said he might miss the first week of exhibitions to be safe.

His condition was a bright spot for the A's as they prepare to hold their first official workout of 2011 on Wednesday morning.

Bailey drew praise from Geren for another aspect of his physical state. He shed 15 pounds over the winter, dropping to 235.

"It's all about eating right and maintaining it," Bailey said. "If I can stick around 235 for the season, that's where I want to be."

Outfielder Ryan Sweeney appears out of a starting job after the A's traded for David DeJesus and Josh Willingham. But Sweeney took the news in stride. "I've never really been a fourth outfielder or anything," Sweeney said. "But whatever they want me to do, I'll do. I kind of feel a little bit of motivation to go out there and work harder, to try to be in the starting lineup every day." Sweeney missed the final 2½ months of last season after undergoing right knee surgery to relieve tendinitis but said he has no restrictions.

Geren said shortstop Cliff Pennington (left shoulder) might be held out of the first week of exhibitions but considers Pennington on target for opening day. "... Utility man Adam Rosales, recovering from right foot surgery, is using crutches and wearing a soft boot. He's expected to miss the start of the season. "... Bailey wasn't the only player looking slimmer. Left-hander Brett Anderson has lost 10 pounds. "I'm on the CC (Sabathia) plan," he said. "He lost 30 pounds. I only lost 10."

Closer Andrew Bailey gets body, elbow in shape

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Andrew Bailey's All-Star season in 2010 didn't end as he'd wished: He was sidelined by pain in his right elbow that required a cleanup operation.

The A's closer is now close to 100 percent, however, and he's also leaner after losing 10 to 12 pounds this winter.

"After seeing wedding pictures, I was like, 'It's time to work out!,' " joked Bailey, who got married in November.

The weight loss should help his occasionally sore left knee, and, in the meantime, Bailey will be brought along a bit slower than the rest of Oakland's pitchers, who, along with catchers, officially reported to camp Tuesday. He said there is no schedule for him this spring - he'll pitch as often as his body dictates. It's possible he won't work in exhibition games out of the gate, but Bailey estimated he needs only eight to 10 games to be ready for the season.

After his first bullpen session went well Monday, Bailey said he has no doubt he'll be ready for Opening Day. Manager Bob Geren said Bailey "looked good, his body looks good, his body-fat percentage has improved, his knee is good, his elbow is good. Everything is as good as it could be."

Bailey threw 20 pitches, all fastballs, and said, "It felt good, like a normal first bullpen. The elbow issue, in my mind, is behind me."

Now it's a matter of proper maintenance, and the weight loss is one indication that Bailey is dedicated to his training. More evidence: Bailey subjected himself to some minor torture after his elbow surgery - he wore a splint on his arm for hours each day and as he slept in order to improve the extension. It straightened everything out, like orthodontia for an arm.

"I never want to do that again," he said.

It worked, though. Bailey has gained 15 degrees in extension from last year, as he demonstrated, straightening out his arm for reporters. That should make a positive impact on his delivery, while taking stress off the elbow.

Bailey arrived at the A's minor-league complex at the start of the week and found himself surrounded by other closers - the team has numerous men who can fill the role now, including recently signed Brian Fuentes and onetime projected A's closer Joey Devine, healthy at last, two years after Tommy John surgery.

The A's have emphasized that the closer role remains Bailey's, but some of his teammates joked with him Tuesday that he'd better keep performing well. Bailey has done nothing else when healthy, so he has little to worry about - plus, by adding Fuentes and Grant Balfour, Oakland has ensured that all of its talented relievers will have adequate rest. Chalk up another plus when it comes to Bailey's health.

A's Beat: Cliff Pennington back from shoulder surgery. **B5**

A strong relief corps

The A's have eight relievers who've thrown more than 45 innings of relief in a season, including two experienced closers. By comparison, the Rangers have four relievers who've thrown more than 45 innings of relief in a season.

CLOSERS*

Pitcher	Age	Most saves	Total saves
Brian Fuentes	35	48 ('09 Angels)	187
Andrew Bailey	26	26 ('09 A's)	51

*Fuentes is slated for middle relief; Bailey to close.

MIDDLE RELIEVERS**

Pitcher	Age	Most IP	Total IP
Michael Wuertz	32	78 2/3 ('09 A's)	380 2/3
Craig Breslow	30	74 2/3 ('10 A's)	219 2/3
Brad Ziegler	31	73 1/3 ('09 A's)	193 2/3
Grant Balfour	33	67 1/3 ('09 Rays)	273 2/3
Jerry Blevins	27	48 2/3 ('10 A's)	113 1/3
Joey Devine	27	45 2/3 ('08 A's)	65 1/3

**Excluding relievers without 45 IP in a season.

A's Cliff Pennington eases way back from surgery

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Cliff Pennington's surgically repaired left shoulder is coming along, but the A's shortstop is likely to be held out of games for at least the first week of the exhibition season, according to manager **Bob Geren**.

Pennington said he is hitting only left-handed now, but the switch-hitter plans to begin swinging right-handed next week. He also is fielding and throwing without any trouble, but the team doesn't want him to get into a game situation and dive on his shoulder.

Utility player **Adam Rosales** remains on crutches after foot surgery in December. He will visit the doctor Thursday and hopes to be cleared to resume baseball activity, but he is not expected to play in games until mid-March, at the earliest. At this point, he's the only A's player who is unlikely to be ready for Opening Day.

Outfielder **Ryan Sweeney** (patella surgery) said he still needs to run bases, but his outfield range is fine and he's moving well.

All of Oakland's pitchers are healthy and able to throw bullpen sessions. Reliever **Jerry Blevins**, who is coming off hip surgery, has thrown three side sessions and said if he's behind the other pitchers at all, "I'm lagging by days, not weeks."

Net loss: Closer **Andrew Bailey** is not alone when it comes to shedding pounds. Backup catcher **Landon Powell** has lost 15 and looks to be in excellent shape, and All-Star **Trevor Cahill** and left-hander **Brett Anderson** have lost 10-12.

Dallas Braden, who didn't need to lose any, did "insanity workouts" to the point that he was down to 178 pounds. "I was the size of a 14-year-old boy," Braden said. "That's not going to get it done." He's regained the weight but said his core strength and flexibility are much better.

Briefly: Former A's first baseman **Scott Hatteberg**, of "Moneyball" fame, is working as a special assistant in the front office and he attended the staff meeting at Papago Park on Tuesday. ... Many position players are working out at the complex already, even though they do not report until Saturday. ... Many of the pitchers and catchers who reported Tuesday worked out, but three were not yet on site by early afternoon: starting catcher **Kurt Suzuki**, left-handed starter **Gio Gonzalez** and Triple-A catcher **Josh Donaldson**. ... High profile Dominican prospect **Michael Ynoa** (Tommy John surgery) expects to be throwing off the mound in July.

Bailey believes elbow injury is behind him

A's closer loses 12-15 pounds this offseason while rehabbing

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- A handful of A's pitchers reported to camp Tuesday in a noticeably trimmed-down fashion, a scene that had manager Bob Geren raving about his club's readiness for a season with an overload of expectations.

Much of that focus rested on Andrew Bailey, who admittedly lost between 12 to 15 pounds this winter while rehabbing from a September elbow procedure.

"I wouldn't say it was so much about losing weight," he joked, "just restructuring weight."

Either way, Bailey's 6-foot-3 frame appears primed for a big league mound again. The A's closer, embarking on his third big league season, threw his first bullpen session on Monday in a successful manner, tallying 20 fastballs along the way.

"I think the elbow issue is, in my mind, behind me," Bailey said. "It's just kind of maintenance right now, trying to keep up on it and doing everything I need to do to keep it healthy."

Bailey will attempt to take part in bullpen sessions every three days, continually mixing in a handful of offspeed pitches and staying on a schedule solely dependent on how he feels. He may not immediately make it into spring games, but the goal, he said, is to have 8 to 10 appearances under his belt by the beginning of April.

"I'm on track for Opening Day," he said. "In my mind, I'll be ready. As I continue throwing the first couple of bullpens, everything will kind of pan out after that. I'll get in enough games to where I'll be fine."

Bailey's late-season elbow injury marked his second time being sidelined in 2010, as he missed nearly a month while stationed on the disabled list with a right intercostal strain beginning in late July. Both setbacks meant he was not afforded the chance to match or surpass his save total of 26 from his rookie season. Yet, Bailey still managed to compile a 1.47 ERA, 25 saves and a 0.96 WHIP in 47 appearances while earning his second straight All-Star nod.

Those numbers could see a bigger boost this season as a result of an added 15 degrees of elbow extension Bailey gained after surgery, which included the removal of three spurs and three chips. He was out of commission for a full eight weeks and then embarked on what's been a rather smooth rehab process -- but only after his November wedding to wife Amanda.

"During the season, I'm the guy that puts on weight," he said. "After seeing some of the wedding pictures, I was like, 'All right, time to start right now.'"

"Any time any athlete, in any sport, is in tip-top shape is going to help," Geren said. "Can that help him improve the way he pitches? He can't really improve much more than he already is. He's about as good as they get. But physically, anytime you shed a couple pounds, I'm sure you feel better."

Bailey will presumably be joined in the bullpen by fellow right-handers Grant Balfour, Michael Wuertz, Brad Ziegler and, if healthy, Joey Devine, along with lefties Brian Fuentes and Craig Breslow. Familiar faces Jerry Blevins, Josh Outman and Rich Harden are among candidates who could join that crowd.

"If we're all healthy, that's the best bullpen in the league by far," Devine said.

That very mindset is shared by Bailey, who relishes the thought of maintaining game-ending duties while sharing a bullpen with Fuentes, a respected veteran closer who is expected to primarily be used as a left-handed setup option.

"Fuentes has been around for a while and has a lot of playoff experience," Bailey said. "That's where we want to be. I'm looking to learn from him."

"The excitement around this team, you can see it on everyone's face already. It'll be a fun year for sure. I'm excited. It'll be awesome."

Major League: Day 1: Pitchers and catchers report

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 2/16/2011

Greetings from Phoenix, where A's pitchers and catchers reported to camp today at the club's Minor League facilities at Papago Park. Much of the roster was on hand, and several took part in group workouts even though the first official workout isn't scheduled until tomorrow. Notably missing from the bunch was **Gio Gonzalez**, **Kurt Suzuki** and **Josh Donaldson**, but they were all expected to check in at some point during the day. Players aren't technically required to show up on report day, but they at least have to notify the team that they've arrived. **Bob Geren** said he expects everyone to be present tomorrow at Phoenix Municipal Stadium, where pitchers and catchers are slated to work out the remainder of the week. Here's a hodgepodge of notes that came out of the morning's visit to Papago Park:

- Geren said **Cliff Pennington** is expected to miss the first week of exhibition games because of his surgically-repaired left shoulder. All things considered, that's relatively good news for the A's shortstop, who had surgery on his shoulder to repair a labrum tear in early October. Pennington's already in camp doing rehab work, and he hopes to be at 100 percent by Opening Day.
- Pennington's backup, **Adam Rosales**, is still strapped to crutches and playing the waiting game with his right foot. He'll see a doctor on Thursday, when he's hoping to say goodbye to the crutches and simply rely on his walking boot. From there, he'll work to get out of the boot and begin some legwork. As we learned last year, Rosales is always full of energy, so it's hard seeing him wandering around the weight room with nothing much to do. He's still hoping to make a return sometime in the middle of March, but he knows he can't rush the process. In the meantime, you can expect to see **Steve Tolleson** and **Eric Sogard** -- both of whom are already working out in camp -- get plenty of action in the infield.
- **Ryan Sweeney** said his knees are feeling great, and he's back to undergoing baseball activity at 100 percent. He knows he's currently thought of as the team's fourth outfielder, "but that only makes me want to work that much harder." Sweeney is also aware of the talk surrounding his questionable power potential, and while he said he would of course like to hit more home runs, he's not going to change his approach too much at the cost of lowering his average.
- **Joey Devine** has been in Arizona since January and has already thrown four bullpen sessions using all of his pitches. He said he feels great and is anxious to be part of the bullpen competition. At the same time, he doesn't think about the team's other candidates. "I've never wanted anything handed to me," he said. "If healthy, I know I can help any team, so I can't think too much about open spots or who is competing for them."
- The big talk in camp this morning was how much several A's players trimmed down this winter. **Andrew Bailey**, **Brett Anderson** and **Landon Powell** all lost at least 10 pounds during the offseason and look to be in prime shape. Anderson joked that **Dallas Braden** -- who has always sported a rather thin frame -- could take on all of the combined weight lost by everyone else. You can read more about Bailey and the progress of his elbow here.
- Former A's player **Scott Hatteberg** will intermittently be helping out in camp over the next few weeks. He's been named a Special Assistant to Baseball Operations in the front office, and he took part in all of the morning's staff meetings.

- Among the early position player arrivals along with Sweeney, Pennington, Rosales, Sogard and Tolleson are **Daric Barton, David DeJesus, Michael Taylor** and **Matt Carson**. The latter two don't appear in a position to gain a roster spot, but both are glad to be back in camp and ready to prove their worth. Taylor enjoyed a nice offseason in Orlando, while Carson and his wife welcomed their second baby girl in Temecula, Calif. this winter.

- **Braden** walked outside the team's facilities today to find half a dozen Japanese reporters, to whom he exclaimed, "Where's **Matsui**?!" Matsui has yet to arrive at camp, but that didn't stop several media outlets from questioning Geren about him.

I'll constantly be updating this blog with all your Spring Training news, so make sure to check back here daily for any and all happenings around A's camp. Make sure to also visit the A's site for more news and follow me on Twitter for quick and timely updates.

Urban: Sweeney not worried about crowded A's OF

Mychael Urban, *CSNCalifornia.com*

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- Much has been made of the not-so-subtle, none-too-pleasant messages the A's appeared to send third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff through the offseason. Oakland's very public efforts to upgrade at Kouzmanoff's position prompted understandable curiosity about how the incumbent would handle the situation upon returning to the team this spring.

For whatever reason, Ryan Sweeney's very similar plight didn't draw nearly as much notice. A starting outfielder for the A's since he arrived in the Nick Swisher trade with the White Sox before the 2008 season, he watched this winter as Oakland acquired David DeJesus and Josh Willingham, who are expected to start in the outfield corners aside center fielder Coco Crisp, leaving Sweeney as, unofficially, a bench guy.

Sitting outside the clubhouse Tuesday at the team's sprawling Papago Park complex, where A's pitchers and catcher were required to officially report to camp, Sweeney told CSNBayArea.com -- convincingly -- that he hasn't given the situation much thought.

"They haven't said anything to me [about his projected role]," he offered with a shrug, "but it's not like I'm mad. ... We went out and got some good players that are going to help us get where we want to be."

He did admit, however, to coming to camp with a little extra in the motivational tank.

"I don't know if anything's set in stone, but yeah, that's just part of being competitive," he said. "A lot can happen in spring training, but I'm fine with everything. And I'm sure it helps that I can play all three [outfield] positions."

Sweeney, one of the better defensive outfielders in the American League, could end up being displaced as the everyday right fielder by Willingham, who was brought in almost exclusively because he provides much-needed power in the heart of the order; he's hit more than 20 homers in three of the past five years and never fewer than 15.

A 6-foot-4, 225-pound specimen who looks the part of a power hitter but isn't, Sweeney has never hit more than six home runs in a season.

Sweeney has long resisted making any significant swing changes that might produce more power at the expense getting on base as often as possible; he's a career .286 hitter with a .341 on-base percentage. He acknowledged Tuesday, however,

that he could stand to be in a heightened attack mode in certain counts, adding that he'd done some work with his physical therapist that might help him make better use of his imposing frame.

"I'm not going start trying to hit home runs," he said. "But there are certain times I'm going to be more aggressive."

Sweeney, who was limited to 82 games last year by tendinitis in his right knee, which led to season-ending surgery in July, said he's been cleared for all baseball activities and has been working out in Arizona for the past two weeks.

MYCHAEL URBAN'S INSIDE TAKE

The weight room at Papago Park was packed with players, none of whom were required to work out Tuesday. Particularly hard at work was newcomer David DeJesus, moving briskly from station to station, smiling at his new teammates along the way.

Meanwhile, outfield prospect Michael Taylor was among those pounding ball after ball in the covered outdoor hitting cage. While Taylor, who is about 6-foot-5 and built like a strong safety, walked from the cage to the clubhouse, and A's fan gushed, "Oh my! When did we sign the Incredible Hulk?"

After spending some time chatting with fans in the Papago parking lot, left-hander Dallas Braden started to roll out in his massive truck before stopping to show off his new braces; they come off his top row of teeth at the end of March. He spoke briefly about his offseason trip to Thailand with Giants closer Brian Wilson but withheld anything juicy. "It's a long spring," he said. "More to come."

Former Gamecock battles auto immune disease while playing pro ball

By Rick Henry, WISTV.com, 2/15/2011

COLUMBIA, SC (WIS) - A former Gamecock star continues to play baseball, despite dealing with a very serious illness.

Landon Powell reported to training camp Monday in Arizona with the Oakland Athletics. Powell is managing to play pro baseball while dealing with a medical condition that could one day require him to have an organ transplant.

On a sunny January afternoon two years ago, former Gamecock catcher Landon Powell practiced with the USC baseball team. When Powell was getting himself ready for spring training he started having some health concerns.

"I started getting a little ill, a little sick," said Powell. "I lost my appetite and was losing weight and noticed my skin color was changing a little bit started getting a little yellow."

Powell went to the doctor, who discovered his liver levels were high. They didn't know why, and Powell continued training. "I collapsed during a workout in January had to be rushed to the hospital," he recounted. "They weren't exactly sure what was wrong, but they knew my liver was about to go into failure.

"They diagnosed me with an auto immune disease called auto immune hepatitis," continued Powell. "Basically my immune system tries to kill my liver on a daily basis."

There's no cure for Powell's condition. Once he knew it could be controlled with medication, he started thinking about his baseball career. "I was a month away from spring training," said Powell. "I was like, 'this is my job. This is how I put food on the table for my family. I need to know if I can go play.'"

That spring, Powell made the big league roster of the Oakland Athletics. One year later he was behind the plate, catching a perfect game by Dallas Braden.

Powell is hoping to play for seven or eight more years, but he knows his career could be interrupted at any moment. "They told me I would probably need a transplant at some point in my life," said Powell. "It just kind of depends how my liver reacts to the medication. Whether it was a five-year period or a 25-year period, they don't know."

In the meantime, Landon and his wife have started a charity called Donors on the Diamond. They want to bring awareness to the importance of organ and tissue donation. "My baseball career was already saved twice by tissue donation," said

Powell. "I had two ACL reconstructions, and both of those I received cadaver ligament. So I would not be able to continue playing baseball if it wasn't for an organ and tissue donor. Two of 'em."

Landon's charity event attracted 400 people last year in Greenville, and raised \$40,000 for donate life South Carolina.

AL West writers: A's have best rotation in division; Rangers have worst

By SportsDayDFW sports 2/14/2011

Evan Grant of The Dallas Morning News was joined by Larry Stone from the Seattle Times, Bill Plunkett from the Orange County Register and John Shea from the San Francisco Chronicle for a chat previewing the AL West. Here is an excerpt:

Who has the best starting pitching rotation in the AL West?

Larry Stone (Seattle Times): I'd say the A's rotation of Anderson, Cahill, Gonzalez, Braden and Mystery No. 5 has the potential to be the best.

Evan Grant (The Dallas Morning News): Oakland has the deepest rotation. In order, I'd go Oakland, Los Angeles, Seattle and Rangers. Yeah, the AL Champs have the worst rotation in the division. And they are still favored. Not sure what that says, but it can't be good.

Bill Plunkett (Orange County Register): Saw Baseball Tonight guys talking about top rotations in baseball the other night. Phillies were runaway choice. But Angels didn't even get a mention. That seems like a mistake. Front four of Weaver-Haren-Santana-Pineiro is pretty solid. A's young guys just a little more dynamic.

Beane facing pivotal year in Oakland

Bob Klapisch , Fox Sports, 2/15/2011

A's fans have been teased too many times to think this is the year Billy Beane finally clones that perfect summer of 2001. Still, there's a steady drum beat of praise from American League officials who say the A's quietly have turned themselves into a threat — if not to the Red Sox and **Rangers**, then at least to the Angels, the **Yankees** and the rest of the wild-card tier.

4GONE OR 4GET 'EM?

Smart money points to a Phillies-Red Sox Series. Smart money may not be so smart.

It's going to be a pivotal season in **Oakland**, for two reasons. First, Bud Selig will soon hear, and presumably act on, the findings of a committee investigating the pros and cons of moving the A's to San Jose. Second, the A's and Beane himself will learn what Hollywood can do for (or to) their legacies, as Brad Pitt portrays the general manager in the September release of the movie "Moneyball."

Beane is somewhere between flattered and embarrassed that Pitt was chosen for the role. When asked if makeup artists would attempt to create a likeness to the GM, Beane dryly said, "That would defeat the purpose of (casting) Brad Pitt."

Beane would much rather talk about the A's chances in 2011, or how important it is to relocate to a more favorable market with a brand new stadium.

Construction of a 32,000-seat facility could be ready in as little as three years, if and when Selig and MLB's owners green-light the move to San Jose. In the meantime, the A's are stuck in the Coliseum, which fans avoid as if it were diseased: Oakland was 29th in the majors in attendance last year and has failed to draw 2 million fans since 2005.

Small wonder **Adrian Beltre** told Beane he could keep the three-year, \$24 million contract being offered last year, choosing the Red Sox instead. Not one of the A's executives disagreed when Scott Boras, who represents Beltre, recently told Fox Sports' Ken Rosenthal, "When teams recruit against the Oakland A's, they say, 'Why do you want to play in an empty park?' It's not about the organization. It's not about ownership. It's about locale."

Selig's committee has been bogged down for nearly two years, still unable to answer the most obvious question: Why shouldn't the A's be allowed to move? Beane is careful to say, "It's a complicated decision, so I understand the reason for the deliberation." In the next breath, however, he repeats what's on the minds of everyone rooting for the A's to become perennial powerhouses again: "We need a new venue," Beane says.

Somehow, though, he's assembled a blend of young pitchers, modestly impressive run producers like Hideki Matsui, David DeJesus and Coco Crisp, and the West's best defense in 2010.

The A's obviously need the starting rotation, which led the AL with a 3.47 ERA last year, to sustain its excellence for another summer — pitching is still Oakland's most precious commodity. The A's will need external help, too: Any A's rebirth will have to be tied to the decline of the Rangers' pitching without Cliff Lee, to the Yankees' aging roster and **Andy Pettitte's** retirement, and the Angels' chronic lack of offense.

These are no small assumptions, although Beane says he's optimistic over his team's trend line.

"We're all excited by the foundation we've laid with the young pitching," he said. "It was a lot of fun being active this winter; it's the part of the job that re-energizes you, the ability to be aggressive and make baseball moves that have an impact."

What Beane doesn't say, of course, is that whatever renaissance the A's enjoy is likely to be short-lived. That's been the business plan since 2007 — building, reaping, then turning over the roster just before the young stars' careers mature into the money-making phase.

It's gotten so that Beane is forced to start disassembling his teams every two years — hence the perpetual tease that A's fans live with. Of course, Beane could get lucky with the current edition of the Little Green Engine, but if he doesn't, there's no reason to believe he'll keep walking that long, flat road to nowhere.

SPRING IS IN THE AIR

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In fact, Beane's friends say this is his last go-round — if the A's aren't allowed to move to San Jose, he'll officially pass the baton to assistant David Forst and look for a Plan B for the rest of his professional life. It's anyone's guess what would be next for Beane; remember, this is the same executive who turned down what should've been a dream job, controlling the Red Sox.

If nothing else, Beane will be remembered for the Moneyball craze of the early 2000s. Pitt might pull off a spot-on depiction of Beane's life and the arc of his career, but actually explaining the Moneyball philosophy to the masses is another matter.

That's because the master himself says the template keeps evolving.

"It's an objective process to ultimately find areas of value," Beane said, which is another way of saying Moneyball is about being predictively smarter than the other guys.

Trouble is, everyone's front office is populated by Ivy Leaguers and numbers geeks these days. Baseball's intellectual gap has closed so quickly, Beane is the first to acknowledge he no longer holds the edge that Hollywood almost certainly will idealize.

"There's less low-hanging fruit," is how Beane describes an industry that's memorized the Moneyball playbook. All things being equal, the A's might just have to rely on a decidedly low-tech strategy to get from here to October: tightly crossed fingers.