

A's News Clips, Saturday, February 19, 2011

Oakland A's notebook: Healthy Coco Crisp eager to be A's table setter batting ahead of offseason additions Hideki Matsui, Josh Willingham

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The new power hitters in the middle of the A's lineup generate plenty of discussion.

But the man charged with setting the table for them holds a big key to Oakland's season.

Center fielder and leadoff hitter Coco Crisp arrived at spring training camp Friday, eager to be the catalyst for a team that must push across more runs to be a factor in the American League West race.

"We're going to be a more exciting team than last year," Crisp said. "Last year, we were (mainly) speed and defense. Now we've got another element to our team."

He was referring to the power expected from newcomers Hideki Matsui and Josh Willingham. But Crisp must get on base for them to do damage. And for that to happen, he must remain healthy.

Crisp gave A's fans a tease last season, hitting .279 with 51 runs and 32 stolen bases in just 75 games.

He missed the first 42 games with a fractured left pinkie -- suffered when his hand got smacked while he dived into second base. He strained a rib cage muscle in May and was sidelined another month. Then he broke his left pinkie again in mid-September -- this time diving into third base -- and missed the rest of the season.

The A's picked up Crisp's \$5.75 million option because they were a more dynamic offense with him atop the lineup. He's also excellent defensively.

Crisp has been injured plenty in his major league career -- he required surgery on both shoulders in 2009 -- but chalks up last year's finger injuries as "fluky."

"You can't go out there saying, 'Oh, I don't want to get injured,' " he said. "That's when you get injured."

Position players aren't required to report until Sunday, but Crisp and outfielder Conor Jackson were among those arriving Friday.

Manager Bob Geren said he expects utility man Adam Rosales to miss the first month of the season while Rosales recovers from right foot surgery.

Rosales saw a doctor Thursday and is off crutches -- "I threw them in the Dumpster," he said -- but he will be in a walking boot for two more weeks.

That means the A's must identify a backup infielder, particularly one who can play shortstop.

Geren said Steve Tolleson, Eric Sogard and Andy LaRoche would split time at shortstop in early exhibition games, as starter Cliff Pennington works his way into shape after left shoulder surgery.

Tolleson might be a front-runner, as he has big league experience and plays second base, shortstop, third base and the outfield.

Grant Green, a 2009 first-round draft pick, is "a ways away," according to Geren. Green is expected to start the season at Double-A Midland.

Although Matsui hasn't reported to camp, his father, Masao, was given a tour of Phoenix Municipal Stadium by A's public relations director Bob Rose.

Masao Matsui was presented a jersey and posed for pictures with Geren, pitcher Trevor Cahill and catcher Kurt Suzuki, who was born in Hawaii but is of Japanese descent.

"He's a very nice guy," Suzuki said. "He spoke in Japanese. It's funny. I know Japanese, but it's hard for me to put words together."

Hideki Matsui is expected to arrive today and shoot a commercial at Papago Park Baseball Complex.

An Internet video that alleges the A's were ripping off fans on beer sales last season has created a buzz. The video, shot last May, alleges that fans were getting the same amount of beer in an \$8 cup as they were for a \$4.99 cup.

A statement from the A's sought to clear up the situation. According to the team, Aramark, which provides food and beverages for the Coliseum, mistakenly provided a larger cup for the \$4.99 beers "for a short period of time." Once the mistake was discovered, Aramark began serving the \$4.99 beers in a smaller size by late May.

"So, while those who purchased \$8 beers received their due amount, those fans who bought the \$4.99 size actually received more than they were entitled to," the statement read.

Josh Outman, trying to become the fifth starter after missing the past 1½ seasons with elbow problems, threw from the mound.

"I haven't seen him (up) close throwing the ball that well, so that was exciting," Geren said.

Inman: The Oakland A's are NOT the 2010 Giants

By Cam Inman, Bay Area News Group

The A's reported to spring training under the guise they could parlay their strong pitching into a playoff run like the 2010 Giants.

If you buy that, we've got an \$8 beer to sell you. (The only difference between an \$8 beer and a \$5 beer at the Coliseum is \$3, according to a fan video that has gone viral.)

Spring training optimism can go only so far. These A's do not have the makings of the unbelievably unique 2010 Giants. Best scenario: The upstart A's forge their own identity and contend on their own merits.

Here are the results of a five-prong investigation discounting the A's-might-be-Giants myth:

Theory No. 1: The A's pitching staff is as promising and capable as the 2010 Giants.

The Giants' rotation did not have the durability concerns plaguing the A's. Tim Lincecum, Matt Cain and Barry Zito have missed one start due to injury in their careers — combined. That's one start in 20 seasons. A's pitchers can't go 20 games without getting hurt. The 2010 Giants had a two-time Cy Young award winner in Lincecum. The A's have two Cy Young candidates --Brett Anderson and Trevor Cahill -- but no awards. While Giants closer Brian Wilson had the staying power to tally almost as many saves as facial whiskers in 2010, the A's Andrew Bailey is coming off elbow surgery, and that's worrisome.

Theory No. 2: The West is weak.

The 2010 Giants didn't need to unseat a World Series team from their own division. The A's do, and the Texas Rangers should not be easily dismissed, especially when they've added Adrian Beltre (the guy the A's couldn't buy at any cost). Yes, Cliff Lee is gone, but the Rangers had him for only 15 regular-season starts last season, and he won just four of them (against six losses). Also, the Rangers won their division by a wider margin (nine games) than any other division champ.

The A's finished .500 last season. The 2010 Giants went 88-74 -- not exactly .500, folks.

Theory No. 3: There's magic inside.

AT&T Park is arguably baseball's finest ballpark. Fans pack the Giants' waterfront gem, and that love affair has turned San Francisco from a 49ers stronghold into a baseball town. Panda caps, fake beards, red thongs and fist-pump chants are second-nature rallying cries.

Oakland is the polar opposite. Ownership has alienated the A's fan base with desperate intentions to move to San Jose. The A's can't draw at the outdated Coliseum, producing the majors' second-lowest attendance in 2010 with an average crowd of 17,511. (The Giants' averaged 37,499).

Theory No. 4: Newcomers will save the A's offense.

The Giants' pre-2010 rallying cry was to acquire a bat or two. In came Aubrey Huff, and he responded as an offensive, defensive and clubhouse savior. More reinforcements arrived during the season: Buster Posey, Pat Burrell and Cody Ross. Infielder Juan Uribe added offensive pop and was a jack-of-all-trades defensively, something the A's need.

Can the A's squeeze more production from the bat of Hideki Matsui, who'll turn 37 by the All-Star break? Josh Willingham and David DeJesus also arrived to help the anemic offense -- and, for what it's worth, that trio is costing the A's nearly twice as much (\$16.25 million) as the Giants' aforementioned newcomers.

Theory No. 5: If Bruce Bochy can do it, so can Bob Geren.

Bochy didn't win over the fans until last season, but he already had postseason experience, taking the San Diego Padres to the World Series in 1998. Geren has never had a winning season in four campaigns (nor anything worse than an 87-loss year, an admirable feat).

If the A's ever stayed healthy, maybe we'd find out what Geren -- a good dude -- can do with a consistent lineup. Is he capable of winning a division, of pulling out the rulebook (see: Bochy vs. Don Mattingly) and of dominating his esteemed peers the way Bochy did in the playoffs with Bobby Cox, Charlie Manuel and Ron Washington?

We'll find out the A's true capabilities in the ensuing months. For now, slow down on ordaining them as the second coming of the 2010 Giants.

Injuries have A's scrambling for backup infielder

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

With his recovery from foot surgery going more slowly than hoped, **Adam Rosales** won't rejoin the A's until a good month into the season.

Add to that the fact that shortstop **Cliff Pennington** is coming off left-shoulder surgery and will miss at least the first week of spring games, and the team's search for a backup infielder takes on greater urgency.

Pennington's status might suggest that the ability to play shortstop will factor heavily, and among the current candidates, the best defensive shortstop is **Josh Horton**, who played at Double-A Midland last season. The best all-around fielder is **Steve Tolleson**, who can play short, third and second and did so at times in Oakland last season, which might give him an edge.

Eric Sogard is the only candidate currently on the A's 40-man roster, and he is primarily a second baseman. He looked good at the plate in a short call-up in September, going 3-for-7.

The option with the most big-league experience is ex-Pirates infielder **Andy LaRoche**, who is considered a third baseman. He's coming off a season in which he hit .206, but LaRoche, 27, was considered among the best third-base prospects in the game a few years ago. He described last year as "brutal" because he never got on track after a back injury.

LaRoche said he was a shortstop when he was playing at a community college, but, he said, "I haven't seen an inning there since then." He took a lot of grounders there last year and he is doing so again this spring.

One of Oakland's top prospects, **Grant Green**, is a shortstop, but the A's want him playing every day and it's likely he'll get another full season in the minors. He'll probably start the season at Midland.

Rosales, who had surgery in December, was told he must wear a walking boot the next two weeks before being reassessed. He was happy about one development: He no longer has crutches after six months of on-and-off use.

"I threw them in the dumpster," he said.

Matter of degrees: Adrian Cardenas is another infielder in camp, but he isn't a shortstop and he remains a better prospect as a hitter than as a defensive player. Cardenas, part of the **Joe Blanton** deal with the Phillies, knows that his ascent has not been as quick as hoped, and at the age of 23, he decided to go back to school.

Cardenas, a top student when he was at Pace High School in Miami, enrolled at NYU during the winter, and he is double-majoring in philosophy and creative writing. He's taking some online courses during the season.

"This allows me to play without any inhibitions," he said. "When I'm here, I'm playing baseball. When I'm studying, I'm studying."

What was it like being five years older than the rest of the freshmen? "It was a little awkward," Cardenas said. "I was more nervous than any of them were."

Briefly: Josh Outman, fighting for the fifth spot in the rotation, had an impressive bullpen session. "Outstanding," catcher **Kurt Suzuki** said. "Out-man, out-standing." ... **Coco Crisp** and **Conor Jackson** reported to camp after working out at Athletes' Performance in Southern California during the winter, and both outfielders appear to be in top condition. Jackson is coming back from sports hernia surgery. ... **Hideki Matsui** didn't report Friday, but his father, **Masao**, stopped by the stadium and spoke to Geren and Suzuki. ... Suzuki delighted the group of Japanese reporters at the stadium by saying "Good morning" in Japanese.

Dallas Braden eager to bring on October

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

PHOENIX - Dallas Braden spotted me approaching his locker at Phoenix Municipal Stadium and said, "You ready to cover October baseball this year?"

He wasn't referring to the Giants.

"Bring it on," I said.

Braden, the pride of Stockton and the old hand (at 27) of Oakland's deep rotation, knows the Bay Area baseball dynamic as well as any player by the bay, and he can't help but notice a bunch of pub on the San Francisco side.

I asked Braden about the A's becoming the 2011 darlings and redirecting the spotlight toward them, and he reminded me that he vacationed in the Far East shortly after the World Series with Giants closer Brian Wilson.

"I have to stare at that damn beard as he's making appearance after appearance in the postseason, and then I have to hear about it all offseason," Braden said. "While he's a great friend and it's all well deserved, that definitely stirs the fire for us. We want to taste it."

Is the region big enough for two champions? Braden has no doubts. It's healthy to think big on the first day of spring training. It's something else to play it out on the field, and Braden realizes that. He also knows general manager Billy Beane beefed up the roster, making the A's a reasonable pick to win the AL West in a follow-the-Giants'-blueprint-to-the-playoffs kind of way.

A ton of pitching, solid defending, barely enough hitting.

"The way (the Giants) came together as a team and won those important ballgames, I think we have the exact same recipe to do the same thing," Braden said. "We have guys who have that playoff experience to help those of us who don't, and we have guys willing to do whatever it takes to get to that point."

The A's were 81-81, 10 games shy of the Giants' 91-71, and now they're feeling well equipped to end a four-year playoff drought.

"Hard work and well deserved," said Braden, reflecting on the Giants' 2010 season. "But, dammit, I'm tired of hearing about it. Now it's our turn."

Cahill, Gonzalez in A's Opening Day mix

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Gaining a job is one thing. Earning job security is another.

Just ask Trevor Cahill and Gio Gonzalez, as both entered last Spring Training still seeking both.

Cahill and Gonzalez were battling for the fifth spot in an A's rotation that already featured Ben Sheets, Justin Duchscherer, Dallas Braden and Brett Anderson.

Cahill seemingly entered camp holding the edge, having spent his entire rookie season in the big league rotation one year prior. But inconsistencies and command issues garnered improved attention if he wanted to keep Gonzalez, as well as fellow righty Vin Mazzaro, in the waiting room.

Cahill, though, figured the job to be his teammate's when he realized Gonzalez was always handed the ball first in exhibition games. Gonzalez, of course, thought the fifth spot was likely Cahill's. So did others.

"I thought Trevor had an advantage just because of the year he had before and the experience he gained, whereas Gio was up and down a little bit," catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "At the same time, Gio always had that stuff where when you saw him throw you thought, 'Wow!' It was a tossup. I love both of those guys like little brothers. I wanted both to be so successful."

What a difference a year makes.

As the story goes, Gonzalez won the job, in part because of a left shoulder injury that put Cahill on the disabled list to start the season. Once healthy, Cahill was immediately sent to Triple-A Sacramento, where he remained for just two starts before being called up to replace an injured Anderson in the rotation.

And, so, just a month after the spring's most desired battle had ended, both hurlers had both found their way into the same circle of five. At the time, Cahill was barely 22; Gonzalez, slightly older, at age 24.

"We all knew there was going to be somebody who was left out to start the year, but we knew it wasn't going to be because they're not a good pitcher," Braden said. "What was cool is they were pulling for each other while in competition and we all, as a starting staff, saw that and sensed that and felt that. It really helped bring us together early, even when we all weren't together. Just their overall excitement, to be in that heated battle, it was fun to watch them take it serious and prepare and try to make the team. Then, suddenly, they were both up there."

Armed with jobs, Cahill and Gonzalez began the process of latching on to the security that is so desired by big leaguers. Cahill, for one, didn't get off to the greatest start. In fact, in his first outing, he got knocked around in Toronto for seven hits, three of them home runs, and six earned runs in just five innings.

Gonzalez, meanwhile, endured his fair share of shaky starts, some which ended prematurely as a result of his inability to handle tough situations.

"It just seemed like his Achilles' heel was when he got in trouble, he'd get down on himself," Cahill said. "That led to bigger innings. The talent was always there, it was just about putting it all together."

Gonzalez did. He racked up a team-leading 200 2/3 innings by season's end, through which he tallied a 15-9 record with a 3.23 ERA and 171 strikeouts in 33 starts. Those numbers, as good as they were, were ultimately trumped by those posted by Cahill, whose whirlwind 2010 season included his first All-Star appearance and Cy Young consideration.

The young righty pitched to a 2.97 ERA and 18-8 record, which ranked him fourth in the American League in wins. That marked the first time a pitcher aged 22 years or younger won 18 games since Brett Saberhagen went 20-6 for Kansas City as a 21-year-old in 1985.

Even more, Cahill and Gonzalez's ability to garner at least 15 wins each before turning 25 represented just the 17th time in the post-World War II Era that a Major League duo had done so. All of those accomplishments, seen through both a physical and mental maturation process, have quickly elevated them to the national scene, where talk of Oakland's youthfully dominant rotation is common.

"You want to talk about coming into your own?" Braden said. "Cahill proved to be one of the dirtiest guys in the league last year, and it's not by a fluke. Gio's the same. To have two guys battling for the fifth spot at one point, and now clearly both are going to be staples in this rotation for a while, that's what you are excited about. It's fun to be a part of that and watch that evolution."

Suzuki, maybe more so than anyone else, has enjoyed a particularly nice view of what has transpired on the mound in Oakland. He's caught Cahill and Gonzalez through the bad times and the good times -- "It got to the point where, last year, I don't think I could put down a wrong finger with those guys pitching," he said -- and can only laugh when thinking about the road each has traveled.

"How much they've developed, and the year they had last year, you can see how much they've improved," he said. "It just goes to show the work ethic, those two guys. You talk to them, and they're goofy and easy-going and real laid-back, but when they get after it, they go hard, and it shows on the mound."

That's what comes with job security. Having gone from fifth-starter candidate to Opening Day candidate in just a year's time, both Cahill and Gonzalez have earned the advantage of working on certain areas of their game this spring rather than solely focusing on making the team.

"Last year, I felt like I was getting ready for Spring Training," Cahill said. "This time, I feel like I'm just getting ready for the year. Baseball is all about consistency, and for guys to put up great numbers year in and year out, that's the toughest part. I want to get command of everything, throw my fastball to both sides of the plate."

Cahill, who will turn 23 on March 1, still exudes a baby-faced look and is not so much viewed as the most feared pitcher on the mound based on appearances. But he's hoping a growing confidence level will make all that irrelevant.

"I never think I'm that great until I get to the mound," he said, "and that's when I feel like I'm in control. I'm not a confident guy at all until I get out on the mound."

Confidence hasn't always come easy for Gonzalez, either. His kid-like self, whose offseason highlight was a New Year's Eve trip to Disney World with his family, has often struggled to remind himself of his obvious abilities. That's when the recruits come to the rescue.

"I've always tried to let him know, you're here for a reason, don't let anybody tell you how to prepare yourself," Braden said. "Prepare yourself, but learn to prepare yourself the right way. I think he kind of took that to heart, and we saw the results of it -- him working hard in the gym, him spending time in the video room with me, him asking questions to find answers."

That confidence can only help Gonzalez, who is considered by many on the team to own the best stuff of the staff. He laughs upon hearing such a notion, instead delegating compliments elsewhere in typical Gio fashion.

"I just try my best to blend in with them," he said. "Dallas, in my mind, has one of the best changeups I've ever seen in my life. Brett Anderson has one of the best sliders I've ever seen, and well-located. And Cahill has one of the nastiest sinkers I've ever seen in my life. I'm just trying to contribute wherever I can to be a part of that rotation and show them I can hang with them."

There's no doubt Gonzalez will do just fine in that venture. He and Cahill were part of a 2010 staff that recorded a Major League-leading 3.47 ERA -- the lowest such mark by an AL team since 1990, when Boston compiled a 3.32 ERA. With the gang of Gonzalez, Cahill, Anderson and Braden all back, not to mention several top-notch fifth-starter candidates, Oakland's staff is only expected to get better this year.

Gio a one-man welcome wagon for A's

ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHOENIX — Gio Gonzalez works the room in the Oakland A's clubhouse as well as he works the plate.

Before the team takes the field, he stops at just about every dressing cubicle, telling a joke, imparting wisdom, swinging a fungo. He takes the pulse and increases it if he senses the need.

"I'm not necessarily trying to be a leader, but you've got to know your teammates. You've got to break the ice," he said. "A lot of these guys played here before. Some didn't. They're fresh faces. You want to make them feel loose, not feel so smothered. After all, you're with these guys for eight, nine months."

The left-hander developed into one of the most reliable starters on the team last season, posting a 15-9 record with a 3.23 ERA. He did not miss a start — 33 games.

He and the team are looking for a repeat performance, or an even better one, and he has the confidence that he can do it. The reason, he said, is that he has matured into a better overall pitcher, physically and mentally.

"I'm learning to make adjustments, not spiral out of control mentally if something goes wrong," he said.

"I'm learning to let my defense work for me. Strikeouts are good if you can get them, but they are not the only reason for success."

He recalls conversations with former Oakland pitcher Justin Duchscherer, now with Baltimore.

"He said, 'Would you rather have 15 strikeouts in five innings or have eight strong innings with only two strikeouts,'" said Gonzalez, who had 171 last season.

"It's easy to say 'strikeouts,' but then you start to think the other way. It took awhile for me to understand that, but a lot of it makes sense."

The learning process continues by analyzing opposing hitters. Many do that by watching video, but Gonzalez said he seems to get more out of seeing the hitters in person.

Growing along with some of the other starters in what is one of the American League's best young rotations involves talking with his colleagues.

"We build that friendship and we are there for each other," he said.

"We talk about certain hitters. We have a friendly competition. They are fun to watch and be around."

It is a rotation that, according to Oakland manager Bob Geren, "not too many managers wouldn't trade for. There's not just quality, but youth."

A'S NOTES

Geren will use several players at shortstop as he eases starter Cliff Pennington (left shoulder) back into action, probably by the second week of spring games. Backup Adam Rosales (right foot) might not be ready until May 1.

Kurt Suzuki will start most games at catcher, and Josh Donaldson is pushing Landon Powell for more time as the backup.

New DH Hideki Matsui was due to arrive from Japan late Friday, will film a commercial for a Japanese company on Saturday and join the club for the first day of full workouts on Monday.

A's notebook: Devine feeling fine so far

[Mychael Urban](#), CSNBayArea.com

Devine Feels Fine: Right-hander [Joey Devine](#) hasn't pitched since dominating American League hitters (42 games, 0.59 ERA) throughout the 2008 season, his first full year in the bigs. He took another encouraging step on his long road of recovery from Tommy John surgery Friday with a solid 30-pitch session off one of the mounds on the back field. "You add Joey to what we already have in the bullpen, it's like, 'Wow,'" said coach Tye Waller. "Talk about shortening the game."

Happy to be Here: Outfielder [David DeJesus](#), acquired from the Royals in an offseason trade, has been a daily presence at Oakland's various workout facilities for a while. Three reasons for that, he said. One is that he's always shown up early to camp. Another is that he was so excited to get to work with his new teammates, noting the the A's "have a chance to really do something this year. The third? He lives in the Midwest, and he and his wife were eager to get away from the storms and bone-chilling weather.

Godzilla Watch: [Hideki Matsui](#)'s arrival at camp will be chronicled by as many as 41 credentialed members of the media from Japan; there are so many of them that a media guide for the media of sorts has been put together, complete with mugshots and affiliations. It's unclear exactly when Matsui will make his first appearance at Phoenix Muni, but he's scheduled to film a commercial Saturday at Papago Park. Matsui's father was a guest at camp Friday.

BASEBALL: Vista grad Cahill wows with All-Star talent, unassuming demeanor

[BY BRIAN HIRO](#), North County Times - The Californian | Posted: Friday, February 18,

The young boy wearing the Oakland Athletics hat had been waiting patiently in the bleachers on a cool, late-January morning at Vista High.

During a break in the action at the school's annual alumni baseball game, the boy ventured onto the field to request an autograph from one of the best young pitchers in major league baseball.

"Thank you, Mr. Cahill," said the boy, clutching his freshly signed bat proudly, before leaving with his father.

And Trevor Cahill, his face almost red with embarrassment, trotted back out to his position in left field -- wanting nothing more than to blend into the background as one of the guys.

"It's kind of surreal," Cahill would say later while watching the highly informal game from the dugout. "To this day, I'm like, 'Why would they want my autograph?'"

This week, Cahill reported to spring training in Phoenix as the 22-year-old ace of the A's (he turns 23 on March 1). The former Vista star earned that designation on the strength of a second big-league season in which he went 18-8 with a 2.97 ERA and was selected for the All-Star game.

But the local kid made good hasn't forgotten where he comes from -- which is why he agreed to play in the Vista alumni game for the fifth consecutive year since Oakland drafted him out of high school in the second round in 2006.

"No, he hasn't gone big-time on us yet," Panthers baseball coach Rick Lepire said. "He's pretty level-headed."

The biggest purchase Cahill made this offseason wasn't a fancy sports car, but a French bulldog named Elston. He finally moved out of his mother's house in Oceanside, but his new digs were nothing more than a temporary apartment in San Marcos. As part of his winter throwing program, he often pitches at Vista, and afterward he often passes along advice to current Panthers players.

"He's the most down-to-earth athlete I've ever represented," said John Boggs, Cahill's San Diego-based agent, who counts among his current or former clients Adrian Gonzalez, Cole Hamels, Tony Gwynn and Steve Garvey. "He's void of any arrogance or ego. I think he lets his performance speak for itself."

This year, Cahill intends to let his performance speak even louder. Rather than coast on the merits of his breakthrough season, the 6-foot-4 right-hander attacked the offseason with a renewed vigor. Four times a week, he drove down to Fitness Quest 10 in Scripps Ranch -- the same gym used by LaDainian Tomlinson, Drew Brees and Shawne Merriman, Cahill notes -- to work out with a personal trainer.

That level of dedication to conditioning, unprecedented for Cahill, resulted in a sleeker frame and a more powerful body.

"I lost 10 pounds in the first month, and I feel a lot stronger," said Cahill, who was listed at 220 pounds last season. "I did a lot of things I never thought I'd do on my own, different kinds of jumping and that kind of stuff. Hopefully, it pays dividends as far as pitching goes."

If it seems like this has all happened awfully fast for Cahill, well, that's because it has. Last year in spring training, he was engaged in a battle for the No. 5 starter's job after a rocky rookie season in which he made 32 starts but posted a 4.63 ERA and allowed 1.4 home runs per nine innings, the second-highest rate of any American League starter. He started the season in Triple-A and was called up only when another pitcher went on the disabled list.

Two years ago, he had just completed a brief stint in Double-A and was barely even under consideration to crack Oakland's rotation.

And five years ago, he was a senior at Vista who had pitched only 19 innings while mostly playing shortstop the season before.

"It's about as quick a maturation as I've ever seen on a young pitcher," A's general manager Billy Beane told AOL FanHouse last year.

Cahill, who weighed only 160 pounds as a junior ("sticks and bones," as he puts it), began to fill out, gaining about 30 pounds by the following spring. With the added bulk came added velocity, as he went from throwing 86 mph in the fall of his senior year to 91 in January to 94 in March. And he finally received an opportunity, as the departures of graduated seniors Matt Dean to Cal State Fullerton and Wayde Kitchens to Chapman created an opening at the top of the Panthers' rotation.

"A couple of scouts I was closer to, I (told), 'You have to see this guy,' and when they saw him they said, 'Don't tell anyone,' " Lepire recalled.

But word travels fast in scouting circles, and by midseason he was pitching in front of dozens of major league talent evaluators.

"One game during the Lions Tournament, I was pitching and I ended up doing bad, but the stands were packed with people, and I felt like there were 100 radar guns on me," Cahill said. "It was intimidating. A lot of players are hyped from the time they're 12, so they expect it and it probably feels normal."

It didn't help Cahill's nerves that, just as the scouts were flocking to Vista en masse, he contracted a nasty case of strep throat that caused him to lose 17 pounds in 10 days. Beane happened to watch Cahill at his weakest, a CIF San Diego Section playoff game against Torrey Pines in which he lasted only three innings.

"He was out there with a fever," said JoAnne Cahill, Trevor's mother. "We were afraid he was going to pass out."

His late-season struggles might have cost Cahill a spot in the first round of the 2006 draft, but they didn't dissuade Beane from selecting him with the club's top pick (66th overall). The owner of a 4.3 grade-point average at Vista, Cahill had accepted a scholarship to Dartmouth and planned to study engineering, but Oakland's offer proved impossible to decline.

"I always wanted to play baseball," Cahill said, "and I thought my best shot to get to the big leagues was playing minor-league ball out of high school."

Despite his scant pitching experience, the minors were little more than a speed bump to Cahill, who breezed into Double-A by his second full pro season. The following spring, he unexpectedly earned a spot in the A's rotation alongside another touted prospect, left-hander Brett Anderson.

Now, Cahill, Anderson, 25-year-old lefty Gio Gonzalez and 27-year-old southpaw Dallas Braden (he of the perfect game last season) are drawing comparisons to the staffs led by Barry Zito, Tim Hudson and Mark Mulder that helped the A's make the playoffs four consecutive years in the early 2000s.

Anderson received a four-year, \$12.5 million contract last April, and Cahill could be the next young pitcher whom Oakland attempts to sign to a long-term deal, although his value certainly has shot up in the wake of the All-Star campaign. Boggs said he and Beane have held preliminary talks regarding Cahill, who's eligible for salary arbitration after this season.

"I would think the A's would try to lock him up, but it has to be the right deal," Boggs said. "At this point, the ball is in their court. ... The longer they wait on Trevor, the more he's going to produce."

Last spring, Cahill scrapped the knuckle-curveball that he taught himself as a kid and that had been a major part of his repertoire, and he adopted a traditional curveball. This spring, he plans to work on his four-seam fastball to go with a devastating two-seamer that has stamped him as one of baseball's best sinker-ball pitchers.

And, no doubt, he will continue to receive autograph requests that he doesn't quite think he deserves.

"He's very humble; he always has been," JoAnne Cahill said. "... I'm finally getting used to the idea that this is what he does for a living. I hope it continues."

Woman to pitch against MLB sluggers

Rocklin and Roseville Today, 2/18/2011

(Spring Training, Arizona, Feb. 21 & 23, 2011). Justine Siegal will become the first woman to throw batting practice to a Major League team when she throws to the Cleveland Indians (Feb 21) and the Oakland A's (Feb 23) during Spring Training. To honor the memory of Christina Taylor Green, Siegal will wear Christina's Little League's memorial patch in her honor while throwing BP.

A veteran at throwing batting practice, Siegal is the first woman to coach first base in men's professional baseball (Brockton Rox, 2009). She spent three years as the only female college baseball coach in the country (Assistant Coach, Springfield College, 2007-10). As the Founder and Executive Director of Baseball For All, Siegal is dedicated to providing opportunities for girls and women to get involved in the game of baseball. Siegal shares her objective behind throwing MLB BP, "I want to show that baseball is a game for all and that both boys and girls love this game. My throwing BP is proof that dreams really can come true."

A Cleveland native, Siegal will start her historic BP journey with the Cleveland Indians on Feb. 21. Siegal will first throw to early camp Minor Leaguers, and potentially throw to some of the Major League players later in the day. Excited for this opportunity, Siegal shares, "I grew up wanting to be a Cleveland Indian. This is a dream come true." On the 23rd, Siegal will continue her professional baseball dreams and throw BP to the Oakland Athletics.

When Siegal throws, she will be wearing a baseball memorial patch in honor of Christina-Taylor Green, the 9-year-old killed in the Tucson, AZ shooting attack on Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords. Christina was the only girl on her Little League baseball team and had her own dreams of baseball glory; she wanted to become the first woman to play Major League Baseball.

To prepare to throw to the A's and the Indians, Siegal has been throwing to various colleges, including Northeastern University, UMASS Amherst, American International College, and Springfield College. Siegal has also been strengthening her arm with personal trainer Mike Zolkiewicz, a former Braves intern and current Highland Games world-record holder. Siegal would like to continue throwing BP to other MLB teams. Off the field, Siegal is a Ph.D. candidate in Sport and Exercise Psychology at Springfield College (MA) and has a 13-year-old daughter, Jasmine.

For more information about this historic BP journey or to schedule an interview, please call Stephani Bee at 951-941-0621 or 951-941-0621, or e-mail her atStephBee@rocketmail.com. Siegal is blogging about her BP experience at <http://justinebaseball.mlblogs.com>. More information on Baseball for All can be found at www.BaseballforAll.com.

Baseball: Get into the swing of things

Jennifer Kelley, Special to The Chronicle

If you're pining to hear the crack of the bat, glimpse a spectacular warning track grab, or sing "Take me out to the ballgame" at the top of your lungs, join the crowd. But instead of lapsing into an off-season slump, visit these diamond-related destinations to get back into the swing of things.

1. AT&T Park Tours, San Francisco

Want a stadium experience without the game day hubbub? AT&T Park, home of the world champion Giants, offers behind-the-scenes visits to its press box, indoor batting cage, dugouts and visitors' clubhouse. The highlight of the 1 1/2-hour tour? Stepping out onto the perfectly manicured field, digging into the batters box, and imagining for a moment what it would be

like to face a 98 mph fastball in front of 40,000 screaming fans. 24 Willie Mays Plaza, San Francisco; (415) 972-2400,(415) 972-2400; sfgiants.com (click on AT&T Park).

2. Cactus League spring training, Greater Phoenix area

Leave the cold and rainy weather in the rearview mirror and head to Phoenix to watch the boys of summer suit up in spring. Enjoy the balmy weather as you watch your favorite players from 15 major league squads, including the Giants, A's and Padres, hit the diamond to perfect their swing and glove work. And, who knows - you might catch a glimpse of the next rookie phenom. Spring training games run from Friday to March 29. Tickets available at cactusleague.com.

3. McCovey's Restaurant, Walnut Creek

Sure, you're hoping Tim Lincecum pitches a gem, but munching on ballpark grub is an equally enticing reason to visit the yard. If you're jonesing for some stadium comfort food, check out McCovey's, a sports memorabilia restaurant named in honor of the Giants Hall of Famer. Grab some pine at the Ted Williams table, one of several named for famous players, and order a Grand Slam Burger followed by a Willie Mac Attack for dessert. 1444 North California Blvd.; (925) 944-9444, (925) 944-9444; mccoveys.com.

4. San Diego Hall of Champions, San Diego

San Diego's rich athletic history is on display at the Hall of Champions, the largest multisport museum in the country. Baseball exhibits of note include the history of local teams from the late 1800s, retrospectives on great Padres squads, and memorabilia from hometown heroes such as Tony Gwynn and Ted Williams (born and raised in San Diego). 2131 Pan American Plaza, San Diego; (619) 234-2544, (619) 234-2544; sdhoc.com/museum.

5. Broach Sports Tours, various West Coast cities

If you've ever dreamed of visiting iconic Major League Baseball stadiums, here's your chance to check several of these destinations off your bucket list. Broach Sports Tours offers over a dozen multipark trips including the West Coast Baseball Mini-Tour - a seven-day excursion that features five games at five stadiums. Want to do some stargazing? Sign up for the Deluxe West Coast All-Star Baseball Tour, a trip featuring visits to all seven West Coast ballparks plus tickets to the Home Run Derby and All-Star Game in Phoenix. (800) 849-6345, (800) 849-6345; broachsportstours.com.

Baseball Prospectus predicts an 83-win season for the Oakland A's

Sam McPherson, examiner.com, 2/18/2011

Baseball Prospectus releases its annual print yearbook on Tuesday, but the Oakland Athletics' offseason moves haven't impressed BP's PECOTA prediction system in numbers published online this week by the baseball analyst web site.

In fact, after finishing 81-81 in 2010, the A's are only projected to win 83 games in 2011 -- despite making a bundle of offseason acquisitions specifically designed to get Oakland into the playoffs.

The Texas Rangers are predicted to win the American League West again, this time with 84 wins. Meanwhile, the Los Angeles Angels (78 wins) and Seattle Mariners (70 wins) will bring up the bottom of the division, according to BP's projection system.

Of course, these projections are just ... projections, but it's a disappointing assessment for the A's, nonetheless.

The PECOTA projections do bring up some interesting ideas, however:

- The Oakland Coliseum has not been playing as a pitcher-friendly park for the past few seasons. The concrete monstrosity has been an average run-scoring park for awhile now, so the A's offense really was *that* bad last year. And the Oakland pitching staff really was *that* good, too.
- BP doesn't like first baseman Daric Barton's future potential, due to his lack of power at a premier power position. In fact, PECOTA is predicting a big drop-off for Barton in 2011, which could really cripple the A's offense. After posting a .273/.393/.405 batting line last year, the first baseman is projected to drop off to .245/.354/.370 in 2011.

The first thought is mixed for Oakland, of course. It means the hitting has a long way to go to get back to an "average" level, even with the offseason additions. Adding the bats of David DeJesus, Hideki Matsui and Josh Willingham should add more than two wins to the A's total in 2011.

But since it doesn't, that means the Oakland pitching staff will have a hard time replicating its 2010 performances. Maybe Trevor Cahill, Gio Gonzalez and Dallas Braden won't repeat their successes from last year, but a full season from Brett Anderson would help defray those potential drops.

In addition, if Barton truly plays to the level predicted above, Chris Carter will be seeing more time at first base. But PECOTA only projects him to have 250 at-bats total, between the designated hitter role and first base. If that's the case, Carter's projected line of .241/.331/.460 blends with Barton's numbers into a more platoon-like scenario for the A's offense.

Only time will tell, of course.

Overall, the two-win improvement might not be enough, if projections hold, to get Oakland back to the playoffs for the first time since 2006. But with Texas' regression, anything is possible.

Ask the San Francisco Giants