

A's News Clips, Sunday, February 20, 2011

Hideki Matsui is welcome sight to Oakland A's

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

PHOENIX -- On a stormy Saturday afternoon, there was visual evidence of why the A's believe they will be a contender this season.

Designated hitter Hideki Matsui appeared for the first time in a full Oakland uniform.

It was merely show business, as Matsui was shooting a commercial for Komatsu, a Japanese construction company, at Papago Park Baseball Complex.

But there's nothing phony about the A's expectations regarding Matsui this season.

As center fielder Coco Crisp put it, "He's proven he's a thumper."

Starting Monday, when Matsui joins in the A's first full-squad workout, he will begin work on trying to help resuscitate Oakland's floundering offense of recent years.

Matsui's father, Masao, who attended Saturday's shoot, was asked what he predicted from his son in 2011.

Thirty homers and a .300 batting average, he cheerfully responded.

How close Matsui, 36, gets to those numbers will go a long way toward determining whether the A's end a four-season playoff drought.

He's game to give it a go.

"I'm really excited to wear the uniform of the team I've always dreamed of," Matsui said through interpreter Hiro Murakami.

Masao Matsui shared how the A's were the first baseball team his son rooted for while growing up in Japan.

That's when the A's of the Bash Brothers era were dominating the American League, and more of their games were televised in Japan than were those of most other major

league teams.

Hideki Matsui was asked how he felt wearing an A's uniform.

"I like it very much," he said, adding with a smile: "I'd like to ask around what other people think."

Though the A's also added outfielders Josh Willingham and David DeJesus to bolster their offense, Matsui's track record suggests he's most equipped to provide the power bat that's been missing from Oakland's lineup over the past four years.

He hit .274 with 21 homers and 84 RBIs for the Los Angeles Angels last season. The latter two categories would have led the A's by a wide margin.

As recently as 2009, in his last of seven seasons with the New York Yankees, he had 28 homers with 90 RBIs.

Can he anchor the A's lineup at this stage in his career? And can he do it playing half of his games at the Oakland Coliseum, hardly a hitter's best friend?

Matsui's .294 mark at the Coliseum is his fifth-highest career average of any ballpark in which he's logged at least 100 at-bats. But he's hit just four homers in 119 at-bats.

A big factor will be whether Matsui's knees, which have given him problems in past years, remain sound.

The A's plan to use him as their full-time DH, though Matsui was an outfielder earlier in his career. He was asked if he plans to use his glove during spring training.

"I hope so," he said.

Matsui's arrival was met with great anticipation. A large number of Japanese media gradually trickled into Phoenix Municipal Stadium this week, a sign of the large international contingent that will cover Matsui all season.

Many Japanese reporters waited hours for his plane to arrive at Phoenix's Sky Harbor Airport on Friday night.

The crowded press corps is a far cry from the sparse media gathering that typically covers the A's on a daily basis.

When A's manager Bob Geren went to grab a jacket in Phoenix Municipal Stadium's clubhouse Saturday, he saw a surprising sight.

"In the parking lot, 15 to 20 people were hoping to get a first glance of him driving up," Geren said. "That's a different feel."

A's notebook: Left-hander Josh Outman is happy camper after missing 2010 spring training, season with elbow injury

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

PHOENIX -- The monotony of spring training can wear on players as the weeks drag on.

Left-hander Josh Outman plans to embrace it.

After some time-consuming setbacks in his recovery from elbow ligament replacement surgery in June 2009, Outman is healthy and squarely in the running to become the A's fifth starter.

He threw his second bullpen session of camp Friday and earned praise from manager Bob Geren. Last spring, Outman could only watch as his teammates took the field.

"It felt really good to be back part of the team, going through the drills," Outman said. "As much as we grumble about spring training, I sat here last year and watched everybody out there. It was aggravating."

Outman, 26, was 4-1 and opening eyes in 2009 when he left a June start against the San Diego Padres with elbow pain. He had surgery soon after.

The A's remain high on Outman, whom they acquired with second baseman Adrian Cardenas and outfielder Matt Spencer from the Philadelphia Phillies in July 2008 for pitcher Joe Blanton.

With Rich Harden sidelined by injury, Outman has a strong chance to be the fifth starter. But he said pitching in his first Cactus League game will be the real test.

"I worked hard in the offseason to show I'm healthy enough to handle the workload," he said. "I still haven't been in a game and cut it loose."

Catcher Josh Donaldson has an interesting side business -- he owns a dance club near his hometown of Daphne, Ala.

Donaldson, who could challenge Landon Powell for the A's backup catcher job, purchased the establishment in 2009 and named it Club 44 after the uniform number he wore for Double-A Midland at the time.

He was just 23, and he bought the bar as a gift for his mother, Lisa French. She's been in the bar management business for many years and now runs Club 44.

If you're picturing a scene from "Road House," think again.

"I've been in there for two offseasons, and I've only seen two fights," Donaldson said.

Outfielders Josh Willingham and Chris Carter reported to camp. The reporting deadline is Sunday with the first full-squad workout Monday morning at Papago Park Baseball Complex.

Monte Poole: Oakland A's GM Billy Beane moves on from 'Moneyball'

By Monte Poole, Oakland Tribune

The casting of "Moneyball," particularly that of Brad Pitt in the role of A's general manager Billy Beane, is appropriate insofar as the actor possesses the disarming dash of the character he plays.

But any resemblance between Pitt's A's on the screen and Beane's A's on the field this season will be strictly coincidental. And unwelcome.

Though Michael Lewis' bestseller on which the movie is based has remained the same since published in 2003, the individual at its center has not.

Pitt's Beane, if accurate, will be a confident, intense young executive enthralled with an unconventional baseball philosophy positing, among other beliefs, that defense and physique and athleticism are overvalued while experience and comprehensive statistics are underappreciated. Rather than visualize the future, those A's relied on past performance.

Defense was optional. College players were coveted, high school stars a risk rarely worth taking. Regardless of pedigree and physical appearance, any batter who could work the count was glorified in Oakland.

Some observers in and out of baseball mocked the approach, concluding the A's were trying to reinvent the game with one-dimensional plodders better suited to beer-league softball. Exhibit A was their use of the 35th overall pick of the 2002 draft - known throughout baseball as the "Moneyball" draft -- on Jeremy Brown, a productive college catcher whose round, low-slung body made him a target of ridicule.

One of Billy's flippant justifications, something he would remind scouts concerned about a player's shallow chest or flabby gut, was that the A's were "not selling jeans."

Eight years later, the A's still aren't selling jeans. Yet as they prepare for their first full-squad workout Sunday in Phoenix, plenty of players in camp are fit enough to model.

"Oh yeah, our guys look good in jeans," concedes Beane.

That's because Billy, who became something of a polarizing figure in the wake of the book, has adjusted and reshaped his philosophy. The alpha dog has expanded his dogma.

If the 2011 A's develop as he hopes, they'll spend the season playing solid defense, exhibiting well-toned bodies and running like jaguars. And, furthermore, they will contend for the playoffs for the first time since 2006.

"One of the things over the course of the last 10 years that's gotten easier is the ability to more accurately measure a player's defensive abilities," Beane says. "Not just with us, but other teams are getting better at measuring it. We think we're getting better, and it reflected in our team defense last year. So in that sense, I would say, it's changed."

It had to, partly because none of the seven players the A's took in the first 39 picks of 2002 draft is on the roster.

Brown retired three years ago. Outfielder Nick Swisher (16th overall) and right-hander Joe Blanton (24th) were traded in 2008. Shortstop John McCurdy (26th) and right-hander Steve Obenchain (37th) were released in 2007. Right-hander Ben Fritz (30th) was left exposed in the 2007 Rule 5 draft, and third baseman Mark Teahen (39th) -- one of the worst fielders in baseball -- was traded in 2004.

When all should be at their physical peak, they're as gone from Oakland as other "Moneyball" stars such as first baseman Scott Hatteberg and assistant GM Paul DePodesta.

Nowadays, the A's welcome high school talent, invite speed and value defense.

The 2010 A's, featuring speedsters Rajai Davis and Coco Crisp, along with defensive whiz Daric Barton, ranked third in the AL in steals and tied for fifth in fielding percentage.

Because Beane uses a broader scope to evaluate players, the A's are trying to build a multidimensional roster -- especially among the developing nucleus -- to better support a strong and deep pitching staff.

Young infielders Grant Green and Jemile Weeks, the No. 1 and No. 5 prospects, according to Baseball America, can sell jeans. No. 2 prospect Chris Carter and No. 3 prospect Michael Choice swing power bats. Aaron Shipman, No. 7 on the list, turned 19 two weeks ago and may be the team's center fielder of the future.

"The game is constantly changing, and what you want to do is maximize where you're choosing," Beane says. "For us, there have been some younger players -- high school players -- who have seemed like the better value. I don't know if it's necessarily a philosophical difference, but maybe it's just trying to take advantage of what was there."

The '02 draft threatened to follow Beane, haunting his career like that infamous MTV Video Music Awards show interruption haunts Kanye West, perhaps until he won it all.

But Billy has moved beyond the "Moneyball" draft, as well as the book and the movie, which is scheduled to reach theaters Sept. 23. If he can't outrun the image that was presented, he might as well outgrow it.

Hideki Matsui's arrival puts A's in unusual glare

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Oakland has had its share of high-profile players join the team late in their career: Nomar Garciaparra, Mike Piazza, Frank Thomas.

But Hideki Matsui is a sensation on a different plane. He's an international phenomenon who comes with his own media, his own entourage, and seemingly nonstop activity. From landing Friday night at the Phoenix airport, where he was greeted by Japanese reporters who'd waited for five hours, to his father's news conference on Saturday afternoon, the vibe was one of massive celebrity.

"The market we're playing in doesn't really have a sense of star power," A's left-hander Dallas Braden said. "And then you bring in a guy who is an international megastar, like Lady Gaga."

Most of the A's are eagerly anticipating Matsui's arrival at the park today, but Braden is tops in that category and he's designated himself as the welcoming committee. He ordered a 6-foot tall inflatable Godzilla and on Saturday, he and relievers Andrew Bailey and Craig Breslow dressed it in a Matsui jersey, an A's cap, white cleats and various other bits of equipment. It's a tribute to the new DH, long known as "Godzilla."

"There is definitely excitement in the air," Braden said. "For me, it's someone with a championship pedigree, and now he's with our team. Why can't he be the nucleus in the atom that is the Oakland A's?"

That might sound like hyperbole until one sees the bustle around Matsui.

"I was going over to the back field this morning and there were 15 to 20 media just standing in the parking lot, hoping to be the first to glimpse Matsui," A's manager Bob Geren said. "That's different from what we're used to."

On Saturday, the A's Papago Park minor-league complex, usually sleepy and uncrowded, was packed with ad people, technicians, and Japanese and American reporters and photographers. Matsui was the center of the whirlwind while shooting a commercial for Komatsu, a Japanese equipment manufacturer that employed Matsui's father, Masao, for 23 years as a programmer.

Is this what his life is usually like, media, film sets, floods of attention?

"I'm used to being surrounded by the media," Matsui said through translator Hiro Murakami during a session with American reporters. "It's not a problem. ... My life has been like that. I think it's kind of slowing down. That's good for me."

After Matsui's news conference, Masao Matsui also answered questions, with Murakami translating. Asked if this level of craze is normal, Masao Matsui smiled and said, "It's been like that. That surprises me once in a while."

Masao Matsui confirmed his son's assertion after signing with Oakland that the A's were his favorite team as a youngster; Masao bought Hideki a television, and he started watching the A's on a satellite station. His first baseball jersey was an A's jersey and he was a particular fan of the Bash Brothers.

Asked what predictions he might make for his son this season, Masao Matsui didn't hesitate, replying that he expects a .300 average and 30 home runs.

Matsui, 36, is likely to stretch and work out at Phoenix Muni this morning before resuming commercial filming. He said he brought his glove, and he's hoping to play some outfield this spring; his knees are OK.

"So far, so good," Matsui said.

In December, Matsui had expressed surprise about the A's white spikes, but on Saturday, he was in the full white home uniform, shoes included.

"I'm really excited to wear the uniform of the team I always dreamed of when I was young," he said.

Asked about the white spikes, he said, "I like them very much. ... I want to know what other people think."

Willie Eyre tries to make talented A's bullpen

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Scott Eyre was a nice pickup for the Giants in 2002 - he was acquired on waivers in August and wound up being part of a World Series team. Six years after that, the left-hander won a championship with the Phillies.

His brother, right-hander **Willie Eyre**, is in A's camp this spring and he hopes that he, too, can be a good luck charm for a new team.

"Scott went from being in Double-A to pitching in the World Series two months later," Willie Eyre said of his brother's time in San Francisco.

The younger Eyre is in camp on a minor-league deal, and since he signed with Oakland, the team added two prominent relievers, **Grant Balfour** and **Brian Fuentes**, along with two starters who could be used as relievers, **Rich Harden** and **Brandon McCarthy**.

So making the club out of camp might be difficult, but Eyre, who spent last season in the minors with Texas, has been through this before.

"You can't come in and look at how many guys are here," he said. "I just have to show them I can get outs, that I can consistently throw strikes and that I'm good in the clubhouse."

There's no doubt about that last one; Eyre already is friendly with the entire pitching staff, and his brother always was popular at every stop.

At 32, Eyre is one of the oldest players on the team. He noted that he would have been the second-oldest, after **Mark Ellis** (33), except the team signed **Hideki Matsui** (36), Fuentes (35) and Balfour (33) after he'd agreed to terms.

Another tidbit: Eyre's full name is William Mays Eyre. So he's Willie Mays Eyre.

Doolittle strides: First baseman **Sean Doolittle** was the pride of the A's farm system two years ago, but he's barely played since a nice spring camp in 2009. Two knee surgeries sidelined him, one to fix his patella tendon and the second an arthroscopic procedure to clean up the same area.

Doolittle said Saturday that he has been cleared for all activity, and he's running, throwing and hitting three days a week. He believes he'll be brought along slowly.

"It's been a very long haul," Doolittle said. "There were times it got pretty frustrating, but when the A's put me on the 40-man roster this winter, that was a huge boost for my confidence. That kept me going."

Drumbeat: More players report, and Matsui watch is on

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Phoenix, 2/19/2011 9:17AM

Josh Willingham and Chris Carter arrived in camp today a day early; tomorrow is the reporting day for position players. But the bulk of the media here, the 40-plus Japanese reporters, are focused on new DH Hideki Matsui, who is in town but who has not yet come to Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

The Matsui beat is no joke. He is still such a major figure in Japan that the reporters waited for five hours for him at the airport last night, after having already spent all day here at the stadium. He finally landed around 9 p.m. and spoke with the Japanese media briefly, but that's an international celebrity: 40 reporters waiting for your delayed flight most of the evening.

So today, everyone is on high alert. Matsui is scheduled to shoot a commercial at the minor-league facility this afternoon, but because rain is in the forecast, everything might be shifted here to Phoenix Muni instead. We aren't expecting an interview session with him until sometime this evening - so, again, a long day of Matsui coverage.

The A's players are excited about Matsui's pending arrival, too. Dallas Braden is planning a surprise, but he doesn't want me to give it away. He said I can say "it's looming larger than life," and I'm not sure that's all that oblique, but Braden has been having fun arranging things, and I'm sure Matsui will appreciate the effort. He's known for having a great sense of humor, and I expect he'll wind up good pals with Braden in no time.

As I've mentioned before, Matsui's previous teams have raved about his work ethic and professionalism, and there is a strong feeling around the A's clubhouse that he will be a good role model for the team's younger players.

At the airport last night, Matsui told reporters that he's not certain he'll play in any of the team's intrasquad games next week. He wants to make sure he's completely ready to go before taking the field.

He also was wearing a green vest, and when asked if that was because he's with the A's now, Matsui told the group it was just fortuitous. I'm told it's not a color he typically wears at all, so I think there was a sense that maybe it was a bit of a nod to his new team. If he starts to wear white shoes away from the field, we'll really know.

There's not much news here today except for the ugly weather. The clouds are dark, rain is expected, and the A's have moved up the time for pitchers to throw today to make sure they get their work in.

3-Dot Lounge

Bochy: an arms control expert

Bruce Jenkins, San Francisco Chronicle, 2/19/2011

Trends tend to catch on quickly in baseball, and everyone's looking at the Giants as masters of keeping a pitching staff intact.

There's always a certain amount of luck involved when a staff enters the postseason at around 95 percent of its full capacity, but the Giants mixed old-school thought with common sense to bring that championship to San Francisco.

Everyone wants to know if Bruce Bochy plans to "baby" his pitchers this spring, after so many of them pitched more innings than ever before. Nonsense, he said. He'll approach spring training like any other in his career, with a time-tested pattern that works. He described Madison Bumgarner, perhaps due to be the most scrutinized starter, as "a big ol' country boy" who doesn't need some pattycake treatment.

Bochy and Dave Righetti showed last year that, although they have a natural fear of overextended outings, they aren't at all shy about sending a Tim Lincecum or Matt Cain out for the ninth inning if they have a stress-free gem in progress, even if they've thrown more than 100 pitches. That makes a ton of sense — and it also applies in Texas, where owner Nolan Ryan is determined to make workhorses out of his starters throughout the organization — but you'd be amazed how many baseball people treat 100 pitches as some sort of life-and-death barrier, as if to cross it would send your pitcher into a career-ending spiral. Complete games have been on the rise over the past two years in the major leagues, and look for that trend to continue. People are starting to realize — dreadfully late, in many cases — that if you limit someone to 100 pitches, then that's what you get: a pitcher all too prepared to leave the game in the seventh inning.

Next thing you know, you're taking away innings from your best pitchers and handing them to middle relievers who, in many cases, were lucky just to make the roster.

What's most interesting, of late, is Bochy's interest in an unbalanced rotation — starting out with Lincecum and Cain, then going with left-handers in the ensuing three games. A lot of managers wouldn't even consider such a thing, especially in the heat of a pennant race or the postseason, but it could work well for the Giants.

For one thing, there's something sweet about the Lincecum-Cain combination. Those are your two aces. Maybe it wouldn't be such a great idea to use an all-lefty rotation in a three-game series against the Cardinals, with Albert Pujols, Matt Holliday and switch-hitting Lance Berkman. But it would work against the Reds, whose two best hitters (Joey Votto and Jay Bruce) are left-handed, and the Phillies, whose power is almost strictly left-handed (Ryan Howard, Chase Utley, Raul Ibanez and Domonic Brown, the top-rated prospect likely to win the right-field job.).

The beauty of this season is that Giants fans, for the first time in their lives, can relax just a little. There won't be nearly as many wrong-headed calls to the talk shows, demanding a firing or a trade or a lineup change. As much as anything, baseball is a game of patience, of measured thought. The Giants' executives and coaches are seasoned practitioners. Fans might just discover it a pleasant way to go.

Lined up nicely

If Cain does follow Lincecum in the season's first two games, he probably would pitch the April 8 home opener against St. Louis, and that sounds perfect.

I'm a Barry Zito admirer (and the dummy who predicted a strong outing on the day he pitched his way out of the postseason), but he's the one guy who can't start that game ... So you're up next on the 12th green in Dubai, and there's a great big spitwad left by Tiger Woods.

Nice — exactly the kind of behavior Tiger promised to avoid when he launched his postscandal career. Even if you don't consider that a big deal, remember Tiger's explanation: "I wasn't thinking." That tells you all you need to know about his state of mind — now and indefinitely. And it was interesting to learn (through Golf Magazine) that Tiger and his Sunday playing partner, hated rival Sergio Garcia, spent much of the round playing subtle, insipid mind games while stinking up the joint ... Dan Jenkins, the greatest golf writer of them all, has it just about right: "Tiger was the greatest putter I've ever seen, but he's far from the greatest shotmaker. When you can't keep it in the fairway, and then can't make putts you've been making since 1996, who are you?"

Nick Watney?" ... This is hardly news to longtime Bay Area sports fans, but in honor of Black History Month, let's check out the 1952 McClymonds (Oakland) High School basketball team. There's Bill Russell, who in 1966 became the first black man to coach a pro sports team (the Celtics) in the United States. And there's Frank Robinson, who became the first African American manager in major-league baseball (1975 Indians). A stunning bit of history that speaks for itself.

Spotlight follows Matsui to A's camp

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Celebrities are almost synonymous with New York and Los Angeles, both of which have played host to famed Japanese slugger Hideki Matsui since his Major League arrival in 2003.

In comparison, Oakland has never been home to the lights and cameras and larger-than-life media following that come along with the presence of a worldwide superstar.

Until now, that is.

All of those things were present at Papago Park Sports Complex on a rainy Saturday afternoon when Matsui greeted local media for the first time since his one-year, \$4.25 million deal with Oakland was announced at a December news conference.

Matsui arrived in Phoenix on Friday night and was at the A's Minor League facilities early Saturday morning for a commercial shoot for Komatsu, a Japanese mining and construction-equipment manufacturer for which he represents. It's also the same company where his father, Masao, worked as a programmer for 23 years.

A steady rainfall shortened production, but that didn't interfere with plans for a photo shoot that saw Matsui don the complete A's green and gold uniform while cameras flashed multiple times per second for nearly half an hour as dozens of media members looked on.

It appeared to be quite the production from an outsider's perspective, but for Matsui, it was just another day.

"Yes, I'm used to all this," Matsui said through translator Hiro Murakami. "Life has been like this."

That life has now reached Oakland, where Matsui is expected to boost an improved offense from the designated-hitter's spot. Coming off a 2010 season that saw him hit .274 with 21 home runs and 84 RBIs with the Angels, the 36-year-old slugger is eager to improve upon those numbers with a new team.

His father has set the bar high for his son this season, predicting Matsui will tally 30 home runs to go along with a .300 batting average.

"He's more excited than ever to start the season," his father said through Murakami. "He was a big fan of the A's in junior high school, so he's real excited to play for the first team he started to like."

Matsui's interest in the A's stemmed from his days in front of the television, on which the green and gold would often appear.

"I'm really excited to play for the team I always dreamed of playing for," he said.

The A's are just as eager to welcome him. Oakland strength and conditioning coach Bob Alejo, who was around Matsui while serving as Jason Giambi's trainer in New York in the early 2000s, is looking forward to the veteran's interaction with the team's youth.

"He's a pro," Alejo said. "He plays hard, goes about his business the right way, says all the right things, does all the right things. He sets a great example of how to be a professional player. If anybody can be an example of how to handle stardom and success, it's him."

Matsui may not take to the field until Monday, when the A's are scheduled to hold their first official workout. But when he does, with healthy knees in tow, he'll look "to focus on what I love doing, which is baseball."

Well known around the league as a clubhouse leader despite the language barrier, Matsui said he relishes the opportunity to take on that role. In the past, he's posted a Japanese word in the clubhouse each day so as to slowly but surely teach his language to teammates, and he mentioned he'll do the same with the A's "if the players would like that."

"I'm ready to learn it all," Kurt Suzuki said with a smile. "I think it will be great having him around here. He's not just a great player, but you hear he's such a great person. We're lucky to have him."

Matsui arrives in Arizona early for A's camp

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- A handful of Japanese reporters greeted Hideki Matsui at a Phoenix airport on Friday night, when the new A's slugger spoke of his excitement about the start of camp while sporting a green vest.

Fresh off the plane, Matsui took about five questions, one which focused on his attire and possible promotion of his new team, for which he's expected to serve as designated hitter.

"He said it was just an accident that he happened to be wearing green," one reporter said with a smile, "but I've been covering him since 2003, and I've never seen him in anything but dark colors."

The Japanese contingent waited nearly five hours at the airport for Matsui, who endured delays on a connecting flight in Dallas while traveling from New York.

Matsui donned the green and gold on Saturday for a commercial shoot at the A's Minor League facilities, where he's expected to greet media at night. However, he isn't slated to join teammates at Phoenix Municipal Stadium until Sunday, when A's position players report.

The 36-year-old Matsui, who agreed to a one-year, \$4.25 million deal with Oakland this winter, told Japanese reporters that he's entering Spring Training in excellent shape and that his knees, plagued by injuries in recent years, are of no worry.

"That's why he's so excited to have a new season," one reporter said. "His knees are in good condition."

Major League: Day 4: Who's your utility guy?

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 2/18/2011 4:24PM

It's not fun being **Adam Rosales** these days. The normally energetic infielder has been hopping around on crutches off and on for much of the last five months. He was able to rid himself of the crutches when he visited the doctor on Thursday, but he's still stuck in a walking boot for at least another two weeks. At what point thereafter he can begin baseball activity is unknown, but the A's aren't rushing him. That much was made clear when **Bob Geren** announced this morning that **Rosales is unlikely to return before May 1**. That leaves the club without a backup infielder for at least the first month of the season, so they'll be looking at a variety of candidates to fill that role this spring.

Geren said "everyone" is a candidate, but we all know that doesn't mean **Chris Carter** or **Landon Powell** will be filling in at shortstop or second base come April. The main candidates at this point appear to be familiar faces **Eric Sogard** and **Steve Tolleson**, along with newcomer **Andy LaRoche** and highly regarded Double A prospect **Josh Horton**. Top prospect **Grant Green** is sure to demand some attention from fans for the spot as well, but the A's would like to start him in the Minors again this year so as to allow him time to continue improving defensively.

Geren mentioned Sogard, Tolleson and LaRoche will see the majority of action at shortstop this spring while **Cliff Pennington**, still recovering from left shoulder surgery, continues to rehab. Even when Pennington is in the mix, as he's expected to be the second week of games, he won't play every day so as not to push himself. In temporarily replacing Rosales, it seems the A's would prefer a player with a good presence at shortstop considering Pennington's status as a player coming off surgery. If the A's choose to keep Horton in the Minors, it would seem Tolleson has the upper hand given the fact he's not only spent more time at shortstop than any other position at Triple-A Sacramento, but he can play other infield positions as well. Sogard, on the other hand, gets rave reviews from Geren and Co. but is primarily a second baseman. And LaRoche, once a bigtime prospect, has seen most of his time come at third base.

Though this battle won't get much attention as the fifth starter fight, it's one worth watching, especially in the event Pennington isn't geared to go come Opening Day. The A's are fully expecting him to be ready, but there's no health guarantees with anyone here.

Among those to throw bullpens today were **Josh Outman**, **Tyson Ross** and **Trevor Cahill**. Geren was very impressed with Outman's showing, and he noted that Ross demonstrated a "real good changeup." Cahill, meanwhile, "obviously looked good," he said.

Also around camp, **Coco Crisp**, **Conor Jackson** and **Adrian Cardenas** showed up today. ("Coco, of course, came with zero percent body fat," Geren said with a smile.) **Hideki Matsui** was in the area, but he didn't make it out to the ballpark. His father, **Masao Matsui**, was present here at Phoenix Muni, though. He met Geren and **Kurt Suzuki**, who said he didn't realize it was Hideki's father until mid-conversation. "He's a really nice guy," Suzuki said. There's a possibility Matsui could be in camp tomorrow, though he could also wait until Sunday when all position players are expected to report.

One final note: Geren said he definitely considers the backup catching job to be open for competition. **Landon Powell** is seemingly the front runner because of past experience, but keep an eye out for **Josh Donaldson**, who enjoyed his first taste of the big leagues last season.

Rain is expected tomorrow, but that won't stop Day 5 of camp to continue as planned...

Matsui draws big crowd at start of spring training

JANIE McCAULEY, AP Baseball Writer

PHOENIX (AP) — Hideki Matsui stood in his sparkling new white No. 55 Athletics jersey offering quite a contrast to the dark skies and pouring rain around him.

With a huge crowd gathered under a covered area at Papago Park, Godzilla took repeated slow-motion swings, then tossed a baseball into his glove over and over again — all part of a Japanese commercial shoot for a company that makes heavy machinery.

"My life has been like that," Matsui said of the craziness of his schedule. "But it's slowing down."

Hardly.

Matsui arrived in the desert late Friday after being delayed and spent Saturday working on non-baseball activities, though he was eager to get started at spring training with the team he long admired as a kid. Oakland's first full-squad workout is Monday, but the team's new designated hitter planned to visit the clubhouse Sunday to say hello when position players were due to report.

"I'm looking forward to focusing on what I love, which is baseball," Matsui said through fill-in interpreter Hiro Murakami. "I'm really excited to wear the uniform of the team I always dreamed of."

White cleats and all.

"The whole uniform fits nicely," said Matsui's father, Masao, who held his own makeshift news conference Saturday. "He tells me he's been more excited than ever to start the season."

Matsui's commercial shoot, for the company where his father worked for 23 years, will finish up Sunday because of the bad weather, then he will get going on the field. And, yes, he did bring his glove just in case manager [Bob Geren](#) lets him spend some time in the outfield.

"I hope so," the slugger said.

He shouldn't plan on it. The A's are counting on the 36-year-old Matsui to deliver with his bat as a reliable middle-of-the order man to help them boost an offense that produced just 109 homers and scored 663 runs last season, the team's second fewest in the last 28 non-strike seasons.

Matsui batted .274 with 21 home runs and 84 RBIs last season with the Los Angeles Angels, the A's AL West rival. He spent his first seven major league seasons with the [New York Yankees](#) and was MVP of the 2009 World Series.

Matsui joined the A's in December on a \$4.25 million, one-year contract that includes an additional \$100,000 in potential performance bonuses.

The A's were Matsui's favorite team as a boy back in Japan. He watched the games and his dad bought him Oakland gear so he could feel closer to the Bash Brothers he so loved to cheer: [Mark McGwire](#) and [Jose Canseco](#).

And what a treat Matsui will have if Hall of Famer [Rickey Henderson](#) helps out at spring training again this year on baserunning and outfield work as a special instructor as he did in 2010.

"He's a superstar. I look forward to seeing him," Matsui said. "He has a great record for stealing."

Matsui said his focus this spring will be on preparing himself on the field while also building relationships in the clubhouse, where he is expected to be a veteran leader despite the language barrier.

Taking care of his troublesome knees is a top priority, too.

"So far so good," he said with a smile, speaking perfect English.

Urban: Matsui rocks A's complex

[Mychael Urban](#), CSNBayArea.com

PHOENIX -- It takes a monster to make Big Hurt look small.

That's what happened Saturday afternoon at Papago Park, where the [A's](#) got their first taste of life with Godzilla.

Prior to Saturday, the biggest thing to happen on the covered patio outside the clubhouse door at Oakland's minor-league complex was the press conference held by Frank Thomas on the day he reported to A's camp in 2006. It was big because Thomas was coming off a nasty divorce with the [White Sox](#), so the gathering included reporters from Chicago and national media. It was big because Thomas was a star.

[Hideki Matsui](#) isn't just a star. He's a rock star. And his presence at Papago generated a buzz that even a charismatic future Hall of Famer such as Thomas could never create.

Of course, Matsui isn't really a rock star here in the United States.

Here, he's the damn good hitter who came over from Japan and had a number of very good years for the [Yankees](#), capping his time in New York by being named MVP of the 2009 World Series.

Here, he's a 36-year-old former outfielder whose balky knees forced him into full-time DH duty three years ago, and he's one of the three guys that Oakland brought in over the winter to upgrade what's been a dreadful offensive club for a few years.

In Japan, though, he's Mick Jagger, Steven Tyler and Freddy Mercury all rolled into one, and because Japan is every bit as in love (if not more) with baseball as are Americans, the country desperately craves any and all Godzilla news they can possibly get.

Thus, Matsui's every move in the U.S. since his arrival in 2003 has been tracked by a massive media contingent from the homeland that's been 100-plus people strong at times. This has led Matsui to travel with his own personal p.r. man to coordinate the almost-daily gatherings at which Godzilla gives the Japanese press a few minutes of his time and patience.

Matsui's life appears to be absolutely nuts. When he flew into the Phoenix airport Friday night, a swarm of Japanese reporters who had been waiting for *five hours* were there to chronicle his arrival. Packed into his agenda Saturday at Papago was the filming of a commercial, a photo shoot, a press conference with the American press, and of course a session with Japanese reporters, which his handler watched over like a hawk before swooping in to whisk Matsui away after no more than five minutes.

It wasn't Papago Park anymore. It was a movie set. Lights and technicians swarming, enough food to feed everyone crowding the area, and parked right in front of the covered batting cages sat Godzilla's trailer, an RV into which Matsui could escape the madness between his various obligations.

And get this: When Matsui was asked if his life is always this crazy, he smiled and, through his interpreter, said that Saturday represented a *slow* day.

The man is so huge that even his father holds court with the press, and he knows how to work it, too. On Saturday he predicted that his son will bat .300 with 30 homers and 100 RBIs for the A's this year.

Godzilla didn't make any predictions of his own. He didn't say much at all of note, really, other than noting that his knees feel great and that he's pumped to meet Rickey Henderson; the Bash Brothers A's were Matsui's favorite team when he was growing up.

No, Matsui isn't nearly as flashy as his nickname. You can tell he understands English quite well; he intently listens to questions, nodding frequently. He can speak some English, too, but not so much that he's comfortable speaking to the American press without his interpreter.

But Paul McCartney has never been flashy, either, and he's one of the biggest rock stars in history.

It isn't quite Beatlemania, but what Godzilla brings to the A's, whom Matsui hopes to lead into the playoffs, is a level of attention they've never quite experienced.

Question is, are they ready for the spotlight?

SUNDAY BASEBALL NOTES

A judgement call when it comes to the managers

Nick Carafdo, Boston Globe, 2/20/2011

Our annual spring training manager rankings:

1. **Bruce Bochy**, Giants — He has been a top 10 guy on this list for some time, but he moves to the top after a flawless postseason, leading the overachieving Giants to a World Series championship. Bochy, who did a nice job in San Diego for many years, had a pretty dynamite pitching staff in San Francisco but basically took a team of vagabonds to the highest peak.
2. **Terry Francona**, Red Sox — He is always around the top spot. He took an injury-riddled team and won 89 games last season. Two World Series titles go a long way. He is one of the best managers of people in the game and delegates responsibility to his coaches as well as anyone.
3. **Tony La Russa**, Cardinals — This future Hall of Famer is very much the commander of his ship and has the complete respect of his players. He invented modern-day managing and continues to get the most out of his roster. The current challenge is the distraction of the **Albert Pujols** contract situation.
4. **Jim Leyland**, Tigers — Some of his years haven't been easy, but Leyland, who has great baseball instincts, always seems to do the right thing by his team and his organization. His greatest challenge may lie ahead after superstar **Miguel Cabrera** was arrested for DUI.

5. **Joe Maddon**, Rays — “The little team that could” always finds itself stuck between the monsters in Boston and New York, but two out of the last three seasons, Maddon has won the division. One of the game’s most intelligent managers, he is dealing now with a decimated team, but he is adept at maximizing his roster.
6. **Joe Girardi**, Yankees — The easiest target in baseball is the manager of the Yankees, but Girardi is very strong in his convictions. And he has a Manager of the Year award with the small-market Marlins and a World Series title with the largest-market Yankees to justify doing things *his way*.
7. **Mike Scioscia**, Angels — As steady a manager as there is in the game, Scioscia has a method and sticks with it. He can be demanding, but there’s no doubt who’s in charge.
8. **Charlie Manuel**, Phillies — Old school all the way, but it works for Manuel and the Phillies. He keeps things simple, using plenty of common sense.
9. **Ozzie Guillen**, White Sox — Entertaining and unflappable, love him or hate him, his success speaks for itself. He makes it fun, and his fiery nature can make a difference in a team’s energy.
10. **Buck Showalter**, Orioles — Extremely prepared, organized, and experienced, he has changed the losing culture in Baltimore pretty swiftly and has been able to get the players and organization on the same page.
11. **Dusty Baker**, Reds — Baker, who has been around for a long time, jump-started his career last season when he led the Reds to an NL Central title. While he has had a rap for sometimes burning out a pitching staff, that was far from the case last season.
12. **Bud Black**, Padres — He has disproved the “pitching coaches can’t manage” stereotype. Black readily acknowledges that he knows pitching more than anything else, but he has learned to deal with the mind-set of the everyday player very well.
13. **Ron Gardenhire**, Twins — Always gets the most out of his roster, but his lack of postseason success is getting noticed.
14. **Ron Washington**, Rangers — Has come a long way, getting his team into the World Series last season. He did a fine job with his pitching staff and his roster, especially folding extra players into the lineup and giving regulars rest. His in-game managing is improving.
15. **Jim Tracy**, Rockies — Solid all-around, he saved the day in 2009 when he took over in midseason.
16. **Fredi Gonzalez**, Braves — Did a good job in Florida, but steps into more pressure.
17. **Clint Hurdle**, Pirates — He proved himself a respectable manager in Colorado, leading the Rockies to the 2007 World Series. Is he a miracle worker? We’ll find out in Pittsburgh.
18. **Eric Wedge**, Mariners — The 2007 American League Manager of the Year was out of the game for a year. Has a tough roster to handle in Seattle.
19. **Brad Mills**, Houston — His rookie season was thumbs-up, as he brought a new energy and organized manner to the Astros after they traded mainstays **Lance Berkman** and **Roy Oswalt**.
20. **Kirk Gibson**, Diamondbacks — New general manager **Kevin Towers** was so impressed he kept Gibson on after taking the job.
21. **Mike Quade**, Cubs — He brought so much order to the Cubs after **Lou Piniella** left, GM **Jim Hendry** had no choice but to make him permanent.
22. **Jim Riggleman**, Nationals — Very experienced and competent, he has the challenge of shaping an emerging roster.
23. **Ned Yost**, Royals — Another branch of the **Bobby Cox** tree. He was slightly under .500 in Milwaukee. In Kansas City, a few good prospects could make him look good the next few years.

24. **Bob Geren**, A's — Geren has a chance to significantly raise his rank with a team capable of winning the AL West.
25. **Terry Collins**, Mets — It has been 11 years since he last managed, but he's experienced, with gigs in Houston and LA (Angels). This may be his biggest challenge.
26. **Manny Acta**, Indians — Hard to judge Acta given the situations he's been put in, but generally he does a good job.
27. **Edwin Rodriguez**, Marlins — Owner **Jeffrey Loria** told him he deserved another chance after going 46-46. Players like to play for him.
- 28-30. **Don Mattingly**, Dodgers; **Ron Roenicke**, Brewers; **John Farrell**, Blue Jays — Three rookies.

PLAYING THE DISK MAN

Acquisition of Aceves comes with questions The Red Sox really like their signing of righthander **Alfredo Aceves** and the fact they got him so late in the free agent process. A big reason general manager **Theo Epstein** wanted him was to add depth to the starting pitching while also having a reliever who can pitch extended innings.

Aceves can do both — and this is the big caveat — if healthy.

The Sox hope Aceves can survive the entire year, but they're not banking on it. One reason he was out there so long, even with a 14-1 career record, is that he had a disk problem in his lower back that was never operated on after the Yankees shut him down last May 8.

Aceves also had radiating pains in his pelvic area, and in November he broke his collarbone in a bike accident. Amazingly, he says he feels fine after the long rest, well enough to go through his normal spring training routine.

Aceves does the same thing as **Tim Wakefield**, so is there room on the staff? The set bullpen spots are **Jonathan Papelbon**, **Daniel Bard**, **Bobby Jenks**, **Dan Wheeler**, and Wakefield. For Aceves to make the roster, there may have to be an injury, unless one of the "set" relievers is not so set.

Aceves said he opted for the Sox over the Mets because "they offered the best deal." He gets a \$650,000 base if he makes the major league team and a \$200,000 salary if he pitches in the minors.

While the opportunity seemed better with the Mets, Aceves feels his experience in the division and what he did for the Yankees will get him innings in Boston.

He wasn't pleased that the Yankees, who need starting pitching, didn't express more interest. He signed with Boston the day before the Yankees had scheduled a workout for him.

Asked why he thought the Yankees didn't act quicker on him, he said, "It's a business."

When pressed, he said, "I wish you would ask **Brian Cashman** that question."

Cashman said he offered Aceves only a minor league deal because "we couldn't get him back on the mound. All rehab attempts failed. He would always hit a wall."

CLOSING IN AFTER SURGERY

Hopeful Nathan says he's right on schedule Rehab, a success. First bullpen, tremendous.

Less than 11 months after having Tommy John surgery, Twins closer **Joe Nathan** feels he is on the right course for a full recovery after missing the 2010 season.

"It feels great to be on the field again with my teammates," said the 36-year-old righthander. "I feel like a rookie again. It's been a long process and I still have a long road ahead of me."

Nathan is optimistic about being ready when the bell rings, and Twins management feels the same way, which is why they didn't bring in another closer or add much to their bullpen even after losing **Matt Guerrier**, **Jesse Crain**, and **Jon Rauch** in free agency.

The Twins still have **Matt Capps**, who has closer experience, but they're counting on Nathan, who had a 1.87 ERA in 246 games over a six-year stretch, better numbers than **Mariano Rivera**.

But in these Tommy John cases, the last phase can often be the toughest.

"It could be," said Nathan. "It might be.

"So far, I don't want to say it's been smooth, because it's been tough, but it's going according to plan. I'm only 10 1/2 months in, so I'm thinking these next six weeks we're going to make big strides.

"As far as velocity, I can't even gauge that because even when I was healthy, I was throwing 88 m.p.h. at this time in spring training. Right now, nothing feels different to me."

When healthy, Nathan runs it up in the 93-94 range. He was throwing in the high 80s Thursday.

At present, Nathan said, he is not being held back, and the Twins haven't been cautious. But he added, "We're going to continue to have discussions. Communication is going to be important for us.

"As the games start, we'll have to play it by ear. You start getting the adrenaline mixed in with throwing.

"It's one thing to go out and throw a pen and give it a bounce-back. But it's another thing to be in a game with adrenaline and you really start to reach for that something extra. We'll see how I bounce back that next day."

ETC.

Apropos of nothing 1. Please get real. **Albert Pujols** isn't walking through that (Red Sox) door; 2. What part of **Joba Chamberlain's** brain tells him it's OK to show up to Yankee camp out of shape?; 3. Love the fact that new Rays teammates **Manny Ramirez** and **Johnny Damon** are separated by just two hits (2,573-2,571, in Manny's favor); 4. It's a shame that **Jim Edmonds**, who retired after 17 seasons, never played for the Red Sox. Another nice fit for Fenway; 5. This exemplifies what a great fundamental baseball man **Ron Gardenhire** is: I never saw anyone have so much fun running catcher popup drills.

Updates on nine 1. **Stuart Sternberg**, owner, Rays — He told me he could not envision it (and what else could this Mets season ticket-holder say?), but you can see where he would be the perfect owner of the Mets if the Wilpon family had to sell. **Bud Selig** is good at matching owners and teams, and such a move would not be unprecedented. **John Henry** sold the Marlins to **Jeffrey Loria**, who had to leave Montreal, and Henry then bought the Red Sox.

2. **Gary Sheffield**, OF, retired — Sheffield told the New York Post he's retired — after 509 homers (24th all time), a .292 average, 1,676 RBIs (25th), and 2,689 hits. He had a .907 OPS with eight teams, made nine All-Star teams, and won the 1992 National League batting title. The stats say he's a Hall of Famer, but will his mention in the Mitchell Report for using "the clear" sabotage his candidacy?

3. **Rich Harden**, RHP, A's — Just a few days into camp, he felt pain in his right side and will shut it down for two weeks. Harden, who has been on the disabled list nine times, is trying to resurrect his career under new A's pitching coach **Ron Romanick**, who worked with Harden in the team's minor league system. Harden, still only 29, is hoping to be a No. 5 starter or long reliever. He has made 30 starts only once in his career, yet sports a .618 winning percentage (55-34).

4. **Mike Cameron**, OF, Red Sox — If healthy, Cameron will likely wind up playing a lot, between right field, where **J.D. Drew** will get time off against lefties, and occasionally in center, when **Jacoby Ellsbury** will sit against particularly tough lefties. But don't discount Cameron becoming trade bait between now and the end of spring training. "Cameron is a guy who fits well on a team," said a National League scout, "because he's versatile, plays excellent defense, and can hit lefthanded pitching. A team like the Phillies would have to be interested, but he's a guy who could help a lot of teams. If he's OK, he can still be a starter."

5. **Miguel Cabrera**, 1B, Tigers — What a tragedy it would be if he can't work out his alcohol issues. He's one of the elite players in the game, with a legitimate chance to win a Triple Crown. He's also one of the nicest, most courteous players you'll ever meet. "He's a big kid," said one of Cabrera's former coaches. "He's really a puppy dog. You'd hate to see a Hall of Fame career derailed, because that's where he's heading if he's right. I think anyone who knows him is rooting for him."

6. **Kevin Millwood**, RHP, free agent — A pretty good name still out there in free agency. **Scott Boras** may be playing this one right. Rather than sign with just any team for small money, why not wait until there's a need and then be in position to ask for more? Millwood is a veteran who won't need a lot of time to get ready. He could be that nice mentor type on a younger staff or an end-of-the-rotation starter for a contender. He will pitch somewhere. It may be for the Yankees.

7. **Tony Thomas**, 2B, Red Sox — The infielder acquired in the **Robert Coello** deal may wind up being a pretty good get. Thomas, 24, has a chance to make it in the majors at least as a utility player. A scout who has watched Thomas a lot said, "Nothing he does wows you, but collectively he has skills. He runs well. Very aggressive, hard-nosed player who can drive the ball to the gaps. He doesn't have blazing speed but he can steal some bases and plays a decent second base." Thomas has played the last two seasons at Double A Tennessee in the Cubs organization and may be in the mix at Pawtucket.

8. **Bengie Molina**, C, free agent — At 36, he has gone back and forth on whether he'd like to play again, but he's precisely the type of insurance a team like the Red Sox wouldn't mind having. The problem is, he'd need playing time, a semi-starting job, and that isn't in the cards with Boston. At least not at this time.

9. **Francisco Liriano**, LHP, Twins — He showed up at Twins camp with a little soreness in his shoulder, but it's not considered serious. There have been reports of the Twins entertaining a deal for their top starter, but that doesn't seem to make sense right now. He could be trade deadline material if the Twins get off to a poor start.

Short hops From the **Bill Chuck** files: "For the Rays last season, **Jason Bartlett** hit .254 with four homers. For the Brewers last season, **Yovani Gallardo** hit .254 with four homers *and* went 14-7 with a 3.84 ERA." Also, "Through the first four years of his career, **Tim Lincecum** is 56-27 (.675) with a 3.04 ERA, pretty darn close to Giants Hall of Famer **Juan Marichal**, who was 62-31 (.667) with a 3.05 ERA in his first four seasons." . . . Happy 45th birthday, **Derek Lilliquist**.