

## A's News Clips, Tuesday, January 3, 2012

### Coco Crisp decides on next team, but won't say

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Departures are the norm for the A's this winter, with pitchers Trevor Cahill, Gio Gonzalez and Craig Breslow all traded and free-agent outfielders Josh Willingham and David DeJesus officially leaving.

One of the A's free-agent outfielders, however, remains on the team's radar. Oakland wants to bring back Coco Crisp, according to A's sources. With so many young pitchers on the staff, Crisp's defensive ability is especially valuable.

Crisp's agent, Steve Comte, confirmed that he has continued to talk to the A's, and he said Monday that Crisp has decided where he will play this season.

"Covelli has made up his mind," said Comte, using Crisp's given name. "Basically, we just have to let that team know."

The Cubs and Dodgers are other teams recently linked to the Crisp. The Orioles also are interested, according to cbssports.com. Comte estimated that he has spoken to 13-14 teams about Crisp this winter.

Crisp has said that he wants to play for a contender, and though the A's are clearly in rebuilding mode, Comte said, "They're intriguing. It will be interesting how it plays out. They've moved a tremendous amount of personnel, but there is a plan there."

The A's have spoken to many free-agent outfielders, including onetime Oakland prospect Ryan Ludwick, according to a major-league source. Other possibilities include ex-Giant Cody Ross and Conor Jackson, whom the A's traded to Boston in late August.

### Scott Ostler sees the future: Read it and laugh

Scott Ostler, San Francisco Chronicle

Gazing into my crystal ball - actually a vintage Ebonite Tornado **Billy Welu** model bowling ball - I see events that are certain to occur in 2012 ...

-- Stanford comes under NCAA scrutiny. An investigation is launched to discover how a certain "student athlete" quarterback was able to afford to ride around campus on a bicycle with custom chrome wheels and a high-powered stereo sound system.

-- At Penn State, trials are held, all the secrets are revealed, and legal judgments are handed down. With some quickie fencing and some simple alteration of signs around campus, Penn State becomes State Pen.

-- The Denver Broncos win the Super Bowl as **Tim Tebow** goes 0-for-16 passing but runs for three long touchdowns and drop-kicks the winning field goal. Within days, every NFL expert commentator, announcer and writer resigns, admitting they know jack diddly about football.

-- Riots break out among old people lining up to purchase Nike's throwback/retro Air Mikans.

-- The owners of the Oakland baseball team, stressing that they mean no disrespect to the city, change the team name to the Tarpland A's. More tarp is added, covering all but 43 seats behind home plate. Of the 81 home games, nine are sellouts, thanks to \$1 hot-dog nights and "Generic A's Player" bobblehead giveaways.

-- Sports wedding of the year: Beef O'Brady and Lis Franc.

### **Knucklehead of the Week: Me**

What the heck, surely I did something KOTW-worthy, so I'll take one for the team and give everyone else a free pass to start the new year.

I'm just grateful that whoever's running The Show apparently is giving me another crack at it.

### **Deep thoughts, cheap shots & bon mots ...**

-- You know it was a good year when we went down to the wire in heated debate over whether **Alex Smith** deserved to go to the Pro Bowl.

-- Whatever happened to: **Colin Kaepernick** and **Terrelle Pryor**?

-- Most tepid "I can't wait to join your team" declaration: **Josh Reddick** is traded from the Boston Red Sox to the Tarpland A's. He says it will be tough to leave Boston, "But whoever you're with at the time, you've got to focus."

-- Ah, the warmth and human intimacy of social media: **Tyson Chandler** says he came very close to signing with the Warriors, and he's friends with two Warriors' assistants and coach **Mark Jackson**. So when Chandler opted for the Knicks, "I texted coach Jackson ..."

-- Familiar name: **Quintin Dailey**, a senior reserve guard for Eastern Michigan, scored nine points in two games at the Cable Car Classic in Santa Clara. Yep, he's the son of Quintin Dailey, the USF star who helped get the university's basketball program shut down for three years. Dailey the elder played 10 NBA seasons. Most memorable moment: eating snacks on the bench during an NBA game in 1985. He passed away last year.

-- Impress-your-friends trivia: The last NFL player to play without a helmet? **Dick Plasman**, Chicago Bears end, Dec. 21, 1941. He caught two passes for 48 yards that day against the Giants. Plasman then went into the service, and helmets became mandatory in 1943.

-- Guy I feel sorry for, sort of: **Jemile Weeks**, the lone untouchable A. Weeks, a budding star with a game suited for prime time, stands idly by and watches his team slip from Triple-A status, to Double-A, to ...

-- Looking back, a favorite moment: Fairly early in **Ryan Vogelsong's** comeback with the Giants, his place on the roster was far from secure. **Bruce Bochy** was asked what will happen when certain injured pitchers got healthy. Bochy, who rarely makes public commitments, said, "Vogey's not going anywhere."

-- **Joe Paterno** has treatable lung cancer. Says JoePa's son, "He's a fighter." But he sure chooses his battles.

-- Strangest annual metamorphosis: **Tony La Russa** becomes **Ed Sullivan**. Next Saturday the World Series champion skipper hosts his "Stars to the Rescue" variety show in Walnut Creek for his Animal Rescue Foundation. Stars include **George Lopez** and **Wynonna Judd**. And, next Sunday, La Russa is hosting "A Champ's Perspective" - a season review with inside video, anecdotes and a Q&A. Be sure to ask La Russa about his bullpen phone. Tickets for either show: (925) 943-7469.

-- Warriors fans turn tepid: **Andre Ward** was in the house Wednesday for the Knicks game, was introduced and got a lukewarm hand. The homeboy is a living legend and he can't get a standing O in Oaktown?

-- Too little noted in the sporting media: The passing of North Korean supreme leader **Kim Jong II** (motto: "Freedom schmreedom"), a phenomenal athlete. The first time he ever picked up a golf club, Kim beat to death 63 political dissidents. Just kidding, the actual claim was seven holes-in-one in his first-ever round. That's darn good.

### **Busy offseason gives fans much to anticipate**

#### **Plenty of interesting storylines lie ahead for 2012 season**

By Richard Justice / MLB.com

You want storylines for this New Year's Day? Friends, we've got storylines. Boy, do we have storylines.

We've got stars moving. We've got brand new managers. For instance, Robin Ventura.

Welcome to the fun, Robin.

You too, Dale Sveum.

Enjoy the ride, buddy.

If you have a chance, send Mike Matheny a text message and wish him well. Matheny is also a rookie manager in 2012, but his situation is, well, different. Sveum (Cubs) and Ventura (White Sox) aren't with teams that just won the World Series. As the skipper of the Cardinals, Matheny has that distinction.

Fasten your seatbelt, Mike.

Bobby Valentine is back in the saddle. He's very smart, very competitive and in a very interesting situation with the Red Sox.

Another familiar name, Ozzie Guillen, has taken over the Marlins. Thus, the first prediction of the new year: Ozzie is going to be a superstar in South Florida. To know Ozzie is to love Ozzie. OK, maybe his employers haven't always loved Ozzie, but he loves to talk, loves being around people and loves to talk. Did I mention Ozzie loves to talk?

Six teams have new general managers, including the Twins, who've brought one of baseball's most respected men, Terry Ryan, back to run things after a four-year sabbatical.

Maybe you heard Albert Pujols and C.J. Wilson changed teams. So have Jose Reyes, Carlos Beltran, Heath Bell, Mark Buehrle, Jonathan Papelbon, Joe Nathan, Gio Gonzalez, Trevor Cahill and Andrew Bailey.

Prince Fielder is at the top of a list of players still shopping for a team.

Because so many significant players have changed clubs, division races will look different, sometimes dramatically so. I'll take the National League East for a thousand, Alex.

In other words, Happy New Year!

First, I know what you're thinking. You don't think baseball in 2012 could possibly be better than baseball in 2011.

Last September was one of the game's best ever, with the Rays and Cardinals coming from far back to capture playoff berths on the season's final day.

And then, baseball had a World Series for the ages, a seven-game thriller that was an instant classic.

The Rangers twice were a single pitch from winning. They were close enough to touch it and feel it.

Only they didn't win. The Cardinals battled back like champions, refusing to give in, doing themselves and baseball proud.

As we look forward to a new season, know this: predictions have become meaningless.

Too much stuff happens.

In the last 11 seasons, nine different franchises have won the World Series.

In just the last three campaigns, 15 of baseball's 30 teams have been in the playoffs at least once.

Money no longer dictates who finishes where. In 2011, seven of the 10 highest payroll teams didn't even make the playoffs.

Tampa Bay (No. 29) and Arizona (No. 25) did, and the World Series featured No. 11 (St. Louis) against No. 13 (Texas).

Money gives teams more margin for error, but money doesn't guarantee smart decisions.

Which brings us to the start of another season. Perhaps, the success of the Rays and D-backs has had a larger impact. There have been some high-dollar signings -- the Marlins and Angels have been especially busy -- but many more teams have spent cautiously.

Young players are the most valuable currency franchises have. And while some have spent that currency to bring in big league-ready talent they hope will have an impact, plenty more held onto it, hoping to develop their own stars or spend during the season when needs are easier to identify.

In the end, this shift -- if there has been an actual shift -- only serves to make the storylines better and the ability to figure out how it'll all turn out harder.

Still, with the start of Spring Training now roughly 50 days away, there are obvious places to begin:

## **Cardinals**

Don't sleep on the defending champions. They'll have Chris Carpenter and Adam Wainwright at the top of the rotation and Lance Berkman, Yadier Molina, Matt Holliday and Beltran in the middle of the lineup. David Freese, Jamie Garcia, Jon Jay and Allen Craig are making the transition to the next generation of Cardinals smoother.

By any measuring stick, St. Louis is still a very good team, possibly a championship team. It is also a fascinating story because of the departures of Tony La Russa and Pujols. Everything the Cardinals have accomplished the last 11 seasons flowed from them.

There's no way of knowing how the clubhouse and lineup will be impacted. Beltran may do a nice job replacing Pujols in the lineup, but he's not likely to have the same effect on the players around him.

Matheny is respected throughout the game for his toughness and smarts, and that's why GM John Mozeliak picked him to replace La Russa. He should be comforted by the fact that even without Pujols, his team is good enough to compete. But there's just no way of knowing how all the new parts will fit together.

## **Angels**

They're as fundamentally different as the Cardinals because of Pujols. He changes their lineup from top to bottom, and every player -- Torii Hunter, Vernon Wells, Kendrys Morales -- should benefit from his presence.

There's also that pitching staff. Wilson slides in alongside Jered Weaver, Ervin Santana and Dan Haren to give the Halos a rotation that matches up with any in baseball.

There are questions, too. Closer Jordan Walden was shaky at times in 2011, and the Angels appear to be considering other options, possibly Ryan Madson. But the addition of veteran setup man LaTroy Hawkins deepens the bullpen. Regardless, Pujols and Wilson have made the Angels, arguably, the team to beat in the American League as 2012 begins.

## **Red Sox**

OK, truth be told, this is the story that could be the most interesting of all. It's not just that Boston finished 7-20 to open the door for the Rays to make the playoffs. It's what happened afterward.

There were reports of all sorts of bad behavior, including starting pitchers drinking beer, eating fried chicken and playing video games in the clubhouse *during* games.

When the dust had settled, the Red Sox had a new general manager, Ben Cherington, and a new manager, Valentine.

There's still plenty to like about this team, especially if Jon Lester, Josh Beckett and Clay Buchholz are productive and new closer Andrew Bailey puts together a full season.

## **Yankees**

How much does Alex Rodriguez have left in the tank? Derek Jeter? Mariano Rivera? Can a rotation with A.J. Burnett, Freddy Garcia and Bartolo Colon get the Bombers to the playoffs?

The Yankees had a quiet offseason, and because they're the Yankees, that's newsworthy in itself. We may look back on these last few months as a sort of transition period, as GM Brian Cashman relies more on his own player-development system as opposed to rounding up an assortment of big-ticket free agents and asking his manager to get them play as a team.

What we may discover is that Cashman has done an extraordinary job constructing a farm system. The Yankees spare no expense in accumulating talent, and they're good enough at the Major League level that Cashman will have the luxury of allowing the season to play out and then zero in on his needs at the Trade Deadline. He'll have the prospects -- and cash -- to do business whenever he chooses to.

## **Marlins**

With the signings of Reyes, Bell and Buehrle, the Marlins sent a couple of messages.

First, they're thanking their fans for buying all those tickets to the new stadium. Second, they've elevated the team to contender status in the NL East. That new stadium brings a sense of permanence.

If Josh Johnson stays healthy and if Hanley Ramirez accepts the shift from short to third, the Marlins are good enough to stay in a division race in which they, along with the Braves and Nationals, all appear to be good enough to challenge the Phillies.

When the going gets tough, Guillen will, uh, lighten the mood.

## **D-backs**

One of the toughest things for a general manager to do is look at his own club and evaluate it critically after a nice season. Kevin Towers fell in love with his team last summer, as it hustled its way to 48 come-from-behind victories and a NL West division championship.

However, he wasn't sure his club could repeat its 2011 magic carpet ride without some tweaks. So he traded for Cahill, who joins Ian Kennedy, Daniel Hudson and Josh Collmenter in an already solid rotation.

He signed free agent Jason Kubel to play left, adding both pop and presence. If Paul Goldschmidt builds on his rookie season and Stephen Drew recovers from a gruesome ankle injury, Arizona could be both substantially different and possibly better.

### **And finally ...**

Can Justin Morneau and Joe Mauer stay healthy for an entire season, and if they do, will the Twins be back in contention? Do the Rays have another remarkable run in them?

How much better are the Nationals after a busy offseason? The Brewers still have a solid rotation, even though the lineup will be different without Prince Fielder. But are they good enough to contend?

The Reds added Mat Latos and Sean Marshall, but need Drew Stubbs, Jay Bruce, Homer Bailey and Mike Leake to be what they were projected to be in 2011.

The A's and Astros could have baseball's two youngest lineups on the field, as they begin full-blown reconstruction projects.

These are the places where we will begin the 2012 season. But the truth is, we have no idea where the road will lead. Around the middle of last August, it looked as if 2011 wouldn't have much September excitement.

At least a dozen teams could win the 2012 World Series and surprise no one, and isn't that what makes the beginning of another season so much fun?

### **A's look ahead after busy winter of retooling**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Though the A's may finally appear ready to say goodbye to 2011, which resulted in their fifth straight non-winning season, they're not exactly prepared to welcome the 2012 campaign.

At least not yet.

Plenty of questions still face the A's as they flip the calendar, and what follows is MLB.com's attempt to address some of them.

#### **1. What have the A's done this offseason, and what still lingers on their to-do list?**

The A's have used this offseason to plant the seeds for a rebuild, evidenced by their decision to trade All-Stars Gio Gonzalez, Andrew Bailey and 2011 Opening Day starter Trevor Cahill, along with lefty Craig Breslow. Their unwavering stance as a team on a spending hold with no qualms on dealing other names while they await a stadium decision has held true.

In the meantime, they'd like to fill the outfield, which lost Josh Willingham, Coco Crisp and David DeJesus, and continue stockpiling talent that could potentially equate to a contending team as early as 2014, when a new stadium - if approved -- is expected.

#### **2. So what's the deal with the stadium issue then?**

The A's have been awaiting a decision on their future home since March 2009, when Major League Baseball appointed a three-person panel to assess the team's relocation options inside and outside the Bay Area. It's been well-documented that the A's would like to build a stadium in San Jose, but the Giants own territorial rights to the city and have made it clear that they will not negotiate to relinquish them.

However, Commissioner Bud Selig has reportedly met with A's officials this winter and was also scheduled to meet with the Giants brass to discuss the issue. In the meantime, Selig has continually declined to answer specific questions about the progress made on the situation, though many speculate a decision could come by February.

### **3. Cahill, Gonzalez and Bailey are gone. Who could be next on the move?**

While the A's appear done making headlines among trade rumors, it's possible they find a deal they like that could send relievers Grant Balfour or Brian Fuentes elsewhere -- and maybe even catcher Kurt Suzuki, who is under contract through 2013, with a club option for 2014. Everyone not named Jemile Weeks, they say, is available.

### **4. Who will join Weeks in the infield next year?**

Weeks, again, will have shortstop Cliff Pennington as his double-play partner, with Scott Sizemore set to be the everyday guy at third base. The A's expect Sizemore to continue making strides there, while third-base prospect Stephen Parker undergoes his own grooming process at the Minor League level. First base, then, represents the club's biggest infield concern, though the front-office folks appear rather content with the current choices in Daric Barton, Brandon Allen and Kila Ka'aihue. However, it would behoove them to reel in another strong option via trade.

### **5. Will there be any familiar faces in the outfield?**

Not so much. Ryan Sweeney was dealt in the Bailey trade, and Jai Miller was designated for assignment shortly before. The newly acquired Josh Reddick and Collin Cowgill are in the mix for a starting job in center field, with Reddick representing an option in left and right, as well. As for Michael Taylor, he's far from a lock to be a mainstay in Oakland and won't be, general manager Billy Beane says, until he displays more consistency at the Triple-A level. So expect the A's to look for upgrades at all spots in the coming weeks, whether by trade or low-cost free-agent signings.

### **6. Any chance that whoever they pluck from the free-agent crowd has some power?**

Power comes with a price, and the A's can't afford much of it right now. Even if they could, there are few offerings on the open market that can give the A's the power they need. That missing supply will have to come via trade through prospects that may not even be close to Major League-ready. And in the meantime, the A's will hope that now is the time for coming-out parties from the likes of Carter and Allen.

### **7. Who, then, will be the club's designated hitter?**

With Hideki Matsui seemingly out of the mix, the A's will look to stay young and try to pick from within. That means Carter is a possibility -- he would probably be the Opening Day DH as the roster stands now -- along with each of the club's first-base options. Should Barton steal the show in spring, manager Bob Melvin could choose to employ Allen or Ka'aihue in the DH spot.

### **8. Who will be the closer now that Bailey is gone?**

Hard-throwing righty Fautino De Los Santos is a definite option, as are veterans Balfour and Fuentes. Either way, the potential loss of Bailey won't leave the A's hunting for a replacement outside of the organization. Don't count out Joey Devine, either. He'll enter camp completely healthy with plenty of gusto after a roller-coaster 2011 season -- his first since undergoing Tommy John surgery.

### **9. What will the rotation look like?**

It's anyone's guess at this point. Plenty names abound, including Brandon McCarthy, Dallas Braden, Josh Outman and Tyson Ross. But that same quartet boasts a long injury history. Count Guillermo Moscoso in the mix, as well as Graham Godfrey. The A's also have their fair share of new faces to pluck from thanks to the Gonzalez and Cahill trades: Jarrod Parker, Brad Peacock and Tom Milone.

Left-hander Brett Anderson, who underwent Tommy John surgery in July, is expected to return in the second half.

### **10. Can the A's stay in contention?**

Probably not, given their current roster makeup doesn't quite match up with the likes of Albert Pujols' Angels and the powerhouse Rangers. But that doesn't mean they'll enter each day expecting to lose -- not under the watch of Melvin, anyway. Melvin is prepared to field the best team possible and, while he realizes that a true contending team may not

be in the works for another few years, he's a competitor at heart and will ensure his players boast that same winning desire.

### **Local names who made good in 2011**

By Daniel Brown, San Jose Mercury News

#### LOCAL NAMES MAKE GOOD

Champions from around the sports world had a familiar ring last year. A look at some Bay Area names who made headlines in 2011:

Tony La Russa, baseball: The one-time A's manager went out on top, saying goodbye to baseball shortly after his St. Louis Cardinals toppled the Texas Rangers in a thrilling seven-game World Series. LaRussa, 67, spent 33 years as a manager, including from 1986-95 in Oakland. He compiled 2,728 regular-season wins and retires trailing only Connie Mack (3,731) and John McGraw (2,763) on the all-time list.

Jason Kidd, basketball: It took the former Cal star until age 38, but he finally won an NBA title. The Dallas Mavericks ended his drought by beating the Miami Heat, capped by a 105-95 victory in Game 6 that included a late 3-pointer from Kidd. "I can't believe the journey," Kidd said.

Aaron Rodgers, football: Capping one of the greatest postseasons for any quarterback, the former Cal star was the Super Bowl MVP after leading the Green Bay Packers to a 31-25 triumph over the Pittsburgh Steelers. In four victories, Rodgers threw for 1,094 yards, with nine touchdowns, two interceptions and a 109.8 passer rating.

Alex Morgan, World Cup soccer: The one-time Cal standout picked a good time for her first ever World Cup goal, scoring the dagger in the U.S. women's 3-1 semifinal victory over France. Morgan, the youngest player on the roster, also scored in the 69th minute of the final before Japan roared back to win 3-1 in a penalty kick shootout.

Andre Ward, boxing: The superstar from Oakland pummeled Carl Froch to capture the Super Six Boxing Classic on Dec. 17, the latest reminder that Ward is the best super middleweight in the world. He remains unbeaten as a pro (25-0) and now owns the WBA and WBC super middleweight belts. Ward hasn't lost since 1996 -- when he was 12.

### **A's enter 2012 with no talent, no hope and no chance**

Sam McPherson, examiner.com, 1/2/2012

If Oakland Athletics are trying to force Major League Baseball's hand in letting them move to San Jose, they're doing their part by stripping their roster to the point of fielding a minor-league team in 2012.

The A's completed their offseason of shedding all their All-Star talent from the past three years by trading closer Andrew Bailey to the Boston Red Sox in exchange for a couple of bats and a pitcher on December 28.

Since every team must be represented at the MLB midseason All-Star game, it'll be a fun few months ahead trying to pick which mediocre A's player will get that cameo appearance in mid-July.

Bailey earned All-Star trips in 2009 and 2010, while pitcher Trevor Cahill made the grade in 2010 and pitcher Gio Gonzalez represented Oakland in 2011.

Now, all three are elsewhere, the A's are destined for last place in 2012, and there's still no word from the commissioner on the team's future in San Jose.

Happy New Year, A's fans.

In truth, Oakland is stripping its roster to claim poverty, which is a load of bunk. The team was economically viable when it was making the playoffs five times in seven seasons prior to Lew Wolff's management decisions that have now led the organization to five straight non-playoff seasons -- with many more clearly on the way.

The team has no offense, has now traded away all its All-Star pitching and also had one of the worst defenses in the American League last year.



The A's can win on small budgets: Moneyball proved that, as there are few other teams in the major leagues who have made the playoffs five times in a seven-year stretch during the wild-card era -- especially without a ridiculously-high budget.

But even the Oakland organization's draft choices in recent years haven't panned out well, which would be vital to any small-market team's long-term success.

Overall, it's a gloomy time for the A's right now -- immediately after one of its brightest stretches in Oakland history.

So what should an A's fan wish for in 2012?

Ask Bud Selig.

### **Oakland A's Top-50 Prospects: 20-16**

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Jan 2, 2012

It's that time of the year when we take stock of the Oakland A's organization and analyze the top prospects. For the next few weeks, we will profile our top-50 prospect list in groups of five. Today, we continue the series with a review of prospects, 20-16.

*Note: These rankings are from our original top-50 prospect ranking posted on November 17, 2011. We will re-rank the A's top-50 prospects to incorporate any newly acquired players in late January.*

#### **20. Jermaine Mitchell**

It was never a question of ability with Mitchell, but after three disappointing seasons, one could forgive even the most optimistic prospect watcher for deciding that the performance would never match that ability. Mitchell, the A's fifth-round pick in 2006, was one of the A's top prospects going into the 2008 season after a strong professional debut in 2006 and a solid 2007 campaign with Low-A Kane County. He was part of the uber-talented 2008 California League champion Stockton Ports' squad and, at times, looked like the best player on that team. However, far too frequently Mitchell would seemingly disappear and his overall numbers that season (715 OPS) were extremely disappointing.

Stockton subsequently became somewhat of a purgatory for Mitchell. He repeated the level in 2009 and struggled once again. His OBP picked up to .350, but his SLG dropped to a paltry .327 (leaving him with a career-low 676 OPS). In 2010, he was sent back to Stockton for a third season and most prospect-watchers began to chalk Mitchell's career up as a lost cause. He did finally master the level in 2010, posting a 936 OPS, but he struggled in his first taste of Double-A baseball (629 OPS in 37 games). He got a brief taste of Triple-A at the end of the 2010 campaign, and while his overall numbers were not strong for Sacramento, he did have a couple of big hits for the River Cats down-the-stretch.

Going into the 2011 season, Mitchell was in a do-or-die situation. Despite his obvious talent, he was in danger of being let loose by the A's if he didn't put together a strong season. Playing with his back against the wall, Mitchell put together easily the best year of his career. He began his season with Midland and dominated the Texas League for the first half of the campaign. Mitchell posted a 1042 OPS, flashing power, patience, speed and solid defense in centerfield. He reached double digits in all three power categories in only 74 games and was leading the league with a .355 BA at the break.

After starring in the Texas League All-Star game, Mitchell was promoted to Triple-A, where he would play for the rest of the season. He started off slowly with the River Cats, batting only .248 with a 681 OPS in July, but he picked up the pace in August and September. He would finish his first extended stint at the Triple-A level with a solid .302/.401/.453 line. Mitchell also added 13 stolen bases and continued to shine defensively in center.

Unfortunately, he was unable to show what he could do at the major league level in September. It was revealed after the River Cats' playoff run ended that Mitchell was playing with a knee injury for most of the season. He went under the knife early in the off-season for what was expected to be a relatively minor surgery to repair a torn meniscus. It turned out to be anything but, as the surgery revealed that Mitchell not only had the torn meniscus, but also a defect in his knee that required much more extensive surgery. His rehab is expected to take six months and he may not be

ready for the start of spring training.

"He played through it the whole time, which is amazing and it says a lot more about the great season he had," A's Director of Player Development Keith Lieppman said.

"The [doctors] feel that he will have a complete recovery, but it will just take a little bit longer [than originally anticipated]."

Assuming Mitchell is able to make a complete recovery and that he is back on the field in March or April, he should have an opportunity to make his major league debut at some point during the first half of the 2012 season. The A's are completely remaking their outfield and they figure to audition several young players throughout the 2012 campaign.

When healthy and on his game, Mitchell brings a dynamic presence to the top of a line-up. He has always been a patient hitter who can turn on a pitch when given the opportunity, but is just as likely to take what he is given and go the other way. Mitchell is a stat-box filler – he reached double digits in doubles, triples, homeruns and stolen bases, and he walked 93 times in 130 games. A football player in high school, Mitchell has a muscular build and above-average speed. He hasn't always been the most successful base-stealer despite that speed, although he improved both his reads and his jumps during his time with Sacramento last season. Defensively, Mitchell can cover a lot of ground in centerfield and he has an average throwing arm.

Despite his talent, Mitchell has taken a long time to put all of the pieces together at the professional level. He will be entering his seventh professional season in 2012, but it is his first as a member of the A's 40-man roster. Mitchell isn't young, either. He turned 27 in November, meaning that his window to establish himself as a major league player is relatively small.

Major League Baseball history is littered with stories of late-bloomers, however, and the A's are hopeful that Mitchell will add his name to those annals. Given that he is already 27, Mitchell isn't likely to develop into a star at the major league level, but with his patient approach at the plate and his speed, he could be a valuable fourth outfielder/part-time starter at the big league level. The left-hander hits better versus right-handed pitching, so a platoon situation might be the best fit for him in the big leagues. He could split time in center in Oakland with the newly acquired Collin Cowgill, who bats right-handed.

## **19. Josh Donaldson**

After going back-and-forth between Triple-A and the big leagues in 2010, Donaldson spent the entire 2011 campaign with Sacramento. He sandwiched poor months of April and August around a strong three-month stretch of May through July and finished the 2011 campaign with a .261/.344/.439 line with the River Cats.

Since being acquired from the Chicago Cubs in the Rich Harden deal in 2008, Donaldson has been highly regarded within the Oakland A's organization for the offensive production that he brings to the catcher position. Recently, however, the A's have been looking at Donaldson at the third base position with more frequency as the team's depth at catcher has outstripped its minor league depth at third base. Donaldson was a third baseman in college and the transition between the two positions hasn't appeared to be too difficult for the Auburn alum.

Ironically, as Donaldson's playing time at third base has increased, his skills behind the plate have also improved. He drew praise for his work with Sacramento pitchers this past season and he threw out a solid 37 percent of would-be base-stealers. Donaldson still has work to do defensively behind the plate, however, as he led the PCL in errors with 14. Donaldson spent this winter playing in the Dominican Winter League, where he spent his time in the field at third base.

"I think ultimately Josh's versatility is going to help him out getting [to the big leagues] and hopefully staying here at some point. That said, he has improved a lot behind the plate and I know that the pitchers down there feel good about him," A's Assistant General Manager David Forst said.

"He's thrown out runners as well this season as he ever has. We have made a point to make sure that he has played some third base and has played some first base and his ability to do that is going to be valuable in a big league role at some point."

Offensively, Donaldson appears to be caught between an identity as a power hitter and as a patient hitter more likely to hit for average and collect a lot of doubles. Early in his professional career, he was known more for his patience. He

had a .460 OBP during his pro debut season in 2007 with the Cubs and he walked 82 times with Double-A Midland in 2009. However, in recent years he has moved away from that approach, presumably to hit for more power. In his two years with Sacramento, Donaldson has posted OBPs of .336 and .344, but he has hit 18 and 17 homeruns in each of those two seasons.

Donaldson's aggressive approach was exposed during his brief stint in the major leagues in 2010 and he is likely to find more sustained success at that level by being more patient. Donaldson's most productive offensive month in 2011 came in July when he posted a 921 OPS. His SLG was actually lower that month than it was in May and June, but he had a significantly higher OBP and his BA was also the best he posted during the season.

The 2012 season will be crucial for Donaldson, who turned 26 in December. He likely won't ever be strong enough defensively to be an everyday catcher in the big leagues, but he could be a valuable utilityman in the big leagues as a part-time catcher and corner infielder. He is an excellent athlete with decent foot-speed and he is an excellent base-runner for a catcher/third baseman. Donaldson has some power, as well, and can work a work when he is waiting for his pitch and not jumping at the first fastball he sees. Donaldson plays the game hard and has found himself battling a myriad of minor injuries in each of the past two Augusts as a result.

As of January 2, the A's were carrying four catchers on the 40-man roster and were hoping to bring back Landon Powell (who was designated for assignment in December) as a non-roster player if he cleared waivers. However, the A's are much thinner on the 40-man roster at third base, with three natural middle infielders – Scott Sizemore, Adam Rosales and Eric Sogard – as the only third basemen on the roster. Given that, Donaldson's best chance to stick on the A's roster this spring could be by showing he can handle the hot corner defensively.

## **18. Josh Whitaker**

Outside of maybe Mitchell, no player in the A's system surprised more scouts and front office personnel than Whitaker did in 2011. Left back at extended spring training at the start of the season, Whitaker was given an opportunity with Low-A Burlington in late April and never looked back. In 113 games with the Bees, Whitaker put together an MVP-like season, batting .326/.402/.556 with 17 homers. He would spend the entire regular season with Burlington, but got a chance to play for High-A Stockton during the California League championship series and he homered during that series.

"He was one of the guys that forced his way into playing time. In this game, if guys produce you have to find a place for them. You admire people that maybe didn't get the best opportunity, but when they did get it and get their foot in the door, don't let you lose it," A's Director of Player Development Keith Lieppman said.

Whitaker was a 25th-round pick of the A's in 2010 out of Kennesaw State in Georgia. He flashed some power with the Low-A Vancouver Canadians at the tail-end of the 2010 season, but Whitaker stood out most during the team's fall Instructional League, where his power was on display on a more regular basis. That display continued once he had an opportunity with Burlington. Using all fields, Whitaker put together the best offensive season of any A's prospect in the Midwest League in recent memory.

Although Whitaker didn't technically qualify for the batting title (he was a few at-bats short), he finished with the best average (.326) and slugging percentage (.556) in the Midwest League. He also finished tied for fourth in doubles (34), third in on-base percentage (.402) and tied for 10th in homeruns. Defensively, Whitaker split his time between first base, designated hitter and right field.

At 6'3", 235, Whitaker is built like a classic corner outfielder/first base slugger. He has had some back problems in the past, which can make him run a little stiff at times, but he is a decent athlete for a player his size. Whitaker has had to split time at first base with fellow prospect A.J. Kirby-Jones the past two seasons and first base figures to be more crowded at High-A Stockton in 2012 with the addition of newly acquired prospect Miles Head to the mix. With the first base depth chart stacked, the A's may choose to have Whitaker concentrate more on playing right field next season.

Because Whitaker was a four-year player in college, he was old for the Low-A level in 2011. He will turn 23 at the start of the 2012 season. Whitaker doesn't have much projection left in his body, so what he is now as a prospect is likely what he will always be as a player. Because of his age and his lack of projection, Whitaker will have to shine offensively to remain on the prospect radar. However, as he proved in 2011, he is capable of putting up big numbers, even in a pitcher-friendly environment. Let loose in the hitter-friendly California League in 2012, Whitaker could be in store for a huge season.

## **17. Aaron Shipman**

When the A's took Shipman in the third round of the 2010 draft out of a Georgia high school, they were excited about the outfielder's raw athleticism and his ability to square the barrel of the bat to the ball. They also knew that the teenager was going to be a project to develop. That project began in 2011 and, as expected, Shipman's year was filled with ups and downs. Fortunately, most of the downs came at the start of the year and – while he ended the year on the DL – he put together a strong finish to his inaugural professional campaign.

Shipman began spring training with an outside chance of winning a spot on the Low-A Burlington full-season roster, but he struggled and the A's held him back in Phoenix for extended spring training. Those struggles continued into extended spring and Shipman also battled some minor leg injuries during that time. However, to his credit, he worked hard and was in both a good frame of mind and had developed a plan at the plate when he was sent out to short-season Vermont in July.

His first few games with the Lake Monsters weren't overly impressive at the plate, but he improved as the season wore on. In July, he posted a .275/.389/.330 line and in August he hit .293/.418/.320. A broken hand ended his season a week early and he finished the year with a .254/.385/.303 line.

"[A]fter Aaron really struggled during spring training and extended – to see the progress he has made during the summer has been great," A's Assistant General Manager David Forst said of Shipman late in the 2011 season.

"He was stuck in the nine hole in that line-up for a long time, hitting around .200. He got a little more aggressive and brought his average up to about .260. He can really run it down in centerfield. That's never been a problem. His progress just over the past two months has been fun to watch."

Shipman has world-class speed and he used that to go 17-for-20 in the stolen base category with Vermont. He also showed an advanced approach at the plate, walking more frequently than he struck-out, an unusual trait in a 19-year-old hitter. Shipman didn't show any power with Vermont. He projects to be a top-of-the-order hitter ultimately, so power doesn't figure to be a big part of his game, but he should hit with more authority as he fills out his 6'0", 175 pound frame. His patience may also have worked against him in the power department, and the A's expect that he will develop a more selectively aggressive approach as he gains experience.

The centerfielder has the skills to be an elite defensive centerfielder. His speed allows him to cover a lot of ground and he has an above-average throwing arm. Shipman is the son of a former minor league baseball player turned high school baseball coach and the younger Shipman has the baseball smarts that one would expect from a player with that background.

Shipman will turn 20 at the end of January. The A's won't rush him, so he is likely to spend the entire 2012 campaign with Low-A Burlington.

## **16. Yordy Cabrera**

Like Shipman, Cabrera was a high-round pick (second) of the A's out of high school in 2010. Unlike with Shipman, the A's utilized a more aggressive approach with Cabrera's development in 2011. Because he emigrated from the Dominican Republic just before high school, Cabrera was held back a year to let his English skills catch up with his peers and he graduated high school older than most high schoolers. Cabrera also came from a professional baseball background, with his father being a coach in the Detroit Tigers' organization and a former top prospect himself. Given Cabrera's age and his background, the A's felt comfortable sending him out to a full-season league to start his professional career. He would spend the season with Low-A Burlington, appearing in 101 games in his first year as a professional.

The shortstop had his ups-and-downs with the Bees. Offensively, he got off to a fast start, posting a 747 OPS and making the Midwest League's mid-season All-Star team. However, after the break, he really struggled, batting only .210/.270/.317. He finished the year with a .231/.297/.368 line. Defensively, he struggled as well, committing 38 errors, one off the league-high total.

A's Director of Player Development Keith Lieppman believes Cabrera's struggles this year will be a foundation on which he can build going into next year.

"He's right out of high school and had a great experience. He didn't put up great numbers, but you're looking at a foundational level and starting your career. Some negative things happened and he had a few more errors than he liked, but I think he's learned to handle the game a whole lot better," Lieppman said.

"Sometimes the failures of the game are your best teachers. They promote you to make the changes and adjustments. Somebody like Yordy didn't have a great year, but he's learning how to make the adjustments."

A's Assistant General Manager David Forst said that in 2011 Cabrera flashed the tools that made him such a highly regarded player coming out of high school.

"He's hit for some power, but his average has struggled. He has struck-out a decent amount, but he has enough walks to make you think he knows the strike-zone," Forst said.

"Defensively, he's made some incredible plays at shortstop and then he has struggled with the routine ball at times. It really is sort of what you would expect if you drew up what a 20-year-old's first full season would be like. It has been almost exactly that. Overall, we are very happy with how he has done. In fact, I saw him make a barehanded play on a slow-roller that I'm not sure most big league shortstops make."

Although Cabrera is only 21 years old, he already has the build of a major league player. He is listed at 6'1" and he weighs in at a muscular 210 pounds. He has the potential to be a power-hitter at the higher levels, but he isn't just a slugger. Cabrera has above-average athleticism and good speed. Although there are questions as to whether he can stay at the shortstop position, most of those questions stem from the belief that he will grow to be too big for the position and not because his physical tools (hands, feet and throwing arm) aren't good enough to stay at shortstop.

The A's have never let big error totals for younger infielders scare them away from keeping a player at a position. Three of the A's best defensive infielders from the 1990s and 2000s – Scott Brosius, Miguel Tejada and Eric Chavez – had very high error totals early in their professional careers. Cabrera may see time at second and third base next season just to increase his versatility, but he should primarily be a shortstop for the foreseeable future.

Despite his struggles with Burlington in 2011, Cabrera has a good shot of moving up to High-A Stockton in 2012. The hitting environment in the Cal League will be more conducive for success and the A's like to challenge their most talented prospects when the situation warrants it. Cabrera will be 21 throughout the 2012 regular season.