

A's News Clips, Thursday, January 5, 2012

Coco Crisp passed on Rays' offer to rejoin A's

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Coco Crisp very nearly became a member of the Rays over the weekend, but the A's stepped up their offer to their free-agent outfielder Sunday, and Crisp decided to return.

"The team that had my attention the most was Tampa Bay," Crisp said by phone Wednesday.

Crisp called that ironic, because he had a well-known scuffle with the Rays in 2008 when he was with Boston, charging the mound and starting an on-field fracas that later turned into off-field taunts. But Crisp said he loves Rays manager **Joe Maddon**, and he liked the idea of playing for a competitive team in a great division.

He had to weigh that against a better offer from Oakland and a chance to play on the West Coast, closer to his family in Southern California. And while he wants to play for a contender, Crisp said he isn't going to count the A's out, even if they've traded three All-Star pitchers in less than a month.

"That's on paper," he said, "but I know the talent these young players have. We could be a surprising team. I know there are a lot of players who could step it up, including me.

"It was a very tough decision, but I've loved playing in Oakland. I've had a lot of fun there, and I'm happy to be there again. We have a lot of kids with a lot of potential, and underdogs can shock some people. I'm excited to be a part of it."

Crisp's two-year, \$14 million deal, which includes a \$7.5 million team option for 2014, will be official today after he completes a physical. Crisp will receive an additional \$250,000 if he is traded, something that might happen if the A's are well out of it in July.

Front-office loss: Dan Kantrovitz, the team's coordinator of baseball operations and international operations, was named the Cardinals' director of amateur scouting. Kantrovitz was a key figure in the A's increased efforts to acquire international talent. The A's promoted **Sam Geaney** to take Kantrovitz's spot. Geaney, 26, was scouting coordinator and has worked for the A's since graduating from Cal in 2007.

Baseball Hall of Fame should include Tim Lincecum

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

We're spoiled in the Bay Area because we saw so much of Rickey Henderson. Four different A's stints, in fact. He still wishes it could be five.

When you're playing in the shadow of the grand pooh-bah of leadoff hitters, it's tough to get noticed, and that's Tim Lincecum's dilemma.

If not for Henderson, the all-time steals and runs leader, Lincecum would be in the best-leadoff-man-in-history conversation.

Lincecum stole 808 bases, fifth all time - the top four are Hall of Famers - and his 84.7 percent success rate is tops among thieves with at least 350 attempts. Rickey's 1,406 steals came at an 80.8 percent clip.

When compared with Henderson, Raines' numbers aren't so startling. He reached base 3,977 times (Rickey: 5,343), including 2,605 hits (Rickey: 3,055) and 1,330 walks (Rickey: 2,190). His on-base percentage was .385 to Rickey's .401.

But let's be real. There's just one Rickey.

Hall of Fame leadoff hitter Lou Brock, whose career steals crown was swiped by Henderson, reached base fewer times than Raines (3,833) and had a lower on-base percentage (.343) and lower stolen-base success rate (75.3 percent). In fewer plate appearances, Raines had more homers and RBIs.

The switch-hitting Raines was a seven-time All-Star, won a batting title and hit .294. Teammates spoke of him as they did of Henderson (and Brock), a dynamic table-setter who established the tone of a game with his bat and speed. He did things considered important before the Steroid Era sucker-punched the game, though his well-chronicled cocaine use can't be overlooked when judging his legacy.

The Hall of Fame will announce its 2012 inductees Monday, and Raines won't be named. He received 37.5 percent of the vote last year, his fourth appearance on the ballot. I voted for Raines along with Barry Larkin, who figures to be the only inductee, and Lee Smith, who was Trevor Hoffman before Trevor Hoffman.

The guess here is that Raines in time will be inducted. He's worthy. Cooperstown can never have too many Expos.

Drumbeat: Coco Crisp says he chose A's over Rays

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser 1/4/2012, 1:32pm

I just spoke to old-new A's center fielder Coco Crisp, whose two-year deal will become official tomorrow after his physical, and he told me that his decision came down to Tampa Bay and Oakland.

There were pros and cons to both – the Rays are more likely to be contenders, and Crisp liked the idea of playing for manager Joe Maddon, while the A's are on the West Coast, they have spring training in Arizona and he's closer to his family in Southern California as a result. Plus, he told me, he already knows the A's players, likes them a lot, and he thinks the team has more potential than people might think.

Plus, the A's came in with a better offer at the last moment. Crisp's agent, Steve Comte, said that Tampa Bay was "not only a viable option but the best option" as of Saturday, and on Sunday, the A's had a new proposal that was more to Crisp's liking. As I have previously reported, the deal is worth \$14 million over two years, with a \$7.5 million team option for 2014. New information: Crisp also gets \$250,000 if he is traded, and should the A's be a long way out come July, with numerous young outfielders waiting for playing time, it's more than likely Crisp would be on the move.

Crisp is happy enough to stay in Oakland, though. While he had wanted to play for a contender, it also was important for him to stay near his family. He had thought at one point that the Giants would be an option, and then the defending champion Cardinals appeared to be an even more likely landing spot, but both teams decided on different options.

And even if the A's aren't going to be spoken of as contenders any time soon after trading three All-Star pitchers in less than a month, Crisp said that the idea that the team won't be in the hunt is all just speculation at this point.

"That's on paper," he told me, "but I know the talent these young players have. We could be a surprising team. I know there are a lot of players who could step it up, including me.

"It was a very tough decision, but I've loved playing in Oakland. I've had a lot of fun there, and I'm happy to be there again. We have a lot of kids with a lot of potential, and underdogs can shock some people. I'm excited to be a part of it."

Crisp compared the A's to his favorite NBA team, the Clippers, saying, "You know the Lakers are going to be good, but that's not that exciting. The Clippers, they're young, they're exciting to watch – and they've done well."

On a separate note, the A's lost a key member of their front office, Dan Kantrovitz, to the Cardinals. Kantrovitz, the A's coordinator of baseball operations and international operations, was spearheading the team's increased efforts to add international talent. Oakland currently is pursuing Cuban outfielder Jorge Soler, and Kantrovitz assuredly was a part of that push. There is no way the A's will lessen their pursuit, but Kantrovitz was a major asset when it came to acquiring international players.

Kantrovitz was named the Cardinals' director of amateur scouting today.

Who will pack a powerful punch for A's?

Beat reporter Jane Lee answers A's fans' questions

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

What are the chances of the A's signing a veteran guy with some pop to be their designated hitter? Maybe Vlad Guerrero or Derrek Lee? Right now, the A's don't really have anyone who can hit the ball out of the ballpark.
-- Bryant A., Chandler, Ariz.

Don't hold your breath on this one. The A's are ready to pluck from within when deciding who best suits the designated hitter's role this year. That means Chris Carter or Brandon Allen could be seeing time there -- two names that yield the most power potential among anyone on the team. It also means the Guerreros and the Lees of the DH world are not on Oakland's radar, given the organization's rebuilding efforts and frugal ways.

Home runs will again come at a sparse rate, given the current roster makeup. But general manager Billy Beane isn't willing to insert power via a costly rental player just to win a few extra games in 2012. The A's won't be contending, anyway, so they plan on using this year to not only give the unexperienced guys experience, but also take advantage of their many Draft picks -- on whom they plan on spending three times as much as they have in the past -- to develop these missing power bats.

With all the news about Billy Beane making a team for the future, what do you project as a future lineup and rotation for 2016 based on players currently in the system?
-- Frank A., Manteca, Calif.

2016? As things stand, it's tricky enough predicting the 2012 lineup and rotation, let alone ones that will follow in four years, so let's start there. Jemile Weeks at the top of the batting order is, oddly enough, the only sure thing right now. Coco Crisp naturally slides into the second slot -- on any team not named the A's, who really don't have a true fit for the No. 3 hole. Consider that Crisp's job, then, with Scott Sizemore in front of him. If you're already disheartened, skip to the next question, because the fourth spot proves equally uninspiring. I'd suspect Kurt Suzuki sees his name here plenty this season, especially if Brandon Allen -- who I'd pencil in behind him, likely as a first baseman -- gets off to a sluggish start. No sense in putting any added pressure on him.

Right fielder Josh Reddick and Carter -- I envision him DH'ing -- can both dance around the sixth and seventh spots, while left fielder Michael Taylor or possibly Collin Cowgill bats eighth, leaving Cliff Pennington to round out the lineup in the ninth slot.

As for the rotation, I suspect Brandon McCarthy, Guillermo Moscoso and Dallas Braden will be joined by Josh Outman and Tom Milone. Purely a guess, though. Tyson Ross, Jarrod Parker and Brad Peacock all have the chance to prove me wrong come spring, and there's no guarantee Braden will be 100 percent by Opening Day.

If the A's current roster remains as is, how many wins do you predict they'll have this year?
-- Chris S., San Leandro, Calif.

I'm hesitant to pencil them in for 65 wins -- they won 74 with the now departed Trevor Cahill, Gio Gonzalez, Hideki Matsui and Josh Willingham last year -- but at the same time believe manager Bob Melvin wouldn't allow for a 100-loss season, so perhaps it's best to settle somewhere in the middle and project about 63 victories for the green and gold.

If the A's are rebuilding, why the interest in free-agent outfielders and why re-sign Coco Crisp? It doesn't make sense to collect a bunch of rent-a-players who are just going to eat up payroll and steal playing time from the young guys.
-- Brandon M., Livermore, Calif.

I do think that Crisp's two-year, \$14 million deal is a large investment for a 32-year-old outfielder on a team that is years away from contention, but at the same time I believe there's something to be said of veteran presence both on the field and off, and of having a dynamic player like Crisp around a bunch of unproven ones. It doesn't make for a great developmental

environment if there are no veteran players around. I don't foresee the A's handing another player a deal like the one Crisp received, but expect them to pick up one or two who can be there when the youngsters need to sit.

Should I believe all the rumors about Kurt Suzuki possibly being traded? Please tell me no.
-- Will B., Berkeley, Calif.

No -- at least not right now. Suzuki's trade value isn't particularly high, so he'll likely stay put. But that could change by the time July 31 rolls around, so expect his name to remain in the trade-rumor mill for the next seven months. In the meantime, I'd like to see what he can do with the club's young pitchers. He's excellent with the entire pitching staff, and his work ethic is arguably unmatched -- something all the young guys can take note of.

Cards tab Kantrovitz to run amateur scouting

By Matthew Leach / MLB.com

ST. LOUIS -- The Cardinals have filled their most pressing vacancy, and it has nothing to do with the active roster or the field staff.

St. Louis will name Dan Kantrovitz, currently in the Oakland Athletics' front office, as its new director of amateur scouting. Kantrovitz fills the void created when Jeff Luhnow departed to become Houston Astros general manager.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch first reported Kantrovitz's hiring in a Wednesday story. A baseball source confirmed the move to MLB.com on Wednesday evening. The club has not announced the move, and neither Kantrovitz nor Cardinals general manager John Mozeliak could be reached for comment on Wednesday.

Kantrovitz, 33, played briefly in the Cardinals organization before an injury derailed his playing career. He was a 25th-round selection in the 2001 Draft and played in one game for rookie-level Johnson City. A St. Louis native, he attended Brown University in Rhode Island.

Kantrovitz has previously worked in the Cardinals organization, serving as director of college scouting after his playing career and also working as an intern with the club while he was in college. He has most recently worked as director of international scouting for Oakland.

Luhnow spent eight years with the Cardinals, working for a while as the farm director as well as scouting director. He was hired by Houston in early December to replace Ed Wade.

Sig Mejdal, who had been the Cards' senior quantitative analyst, also recently departed to work for Luhnow in Houston. Mejdal will be the Astros' director of decision sciences.

Luhnow's departure was one of three major changes in the organization since the season ended. Manager Tony La Russa retired shortly after the season ended, and superstar first baseman Albert Pujols signed with the Angels as a free agent.

The A's promoted Sam Geaney to the position of coordinator of international scouting. He previously served as a coordinator in the scouting department, a scouting assistant and video coordinator.

West primed for thrills after offseason shakeup

By Greg Johns / MLB.com

Looking to shake up a division that has fielded the best pitching in the American League the past few years, the Angels pulled the blockbuster of the offseason by signing Albert Pujols. But the question now is whether that will be enough to unseat the two-time AL champion Rangers atop the West.

Change is definitely coming on baseball's left coast. The Houston Astros will join the four-team AL West in 2013 as Commissioner Bud Selig finalizes his plan to even up the American and National Leagues. Yet what is the forecast first for 2012?

Is the AL West headed toward a haves and have-not division, with the Rangers and Angels engaging in an arms -- and bat -- race at the top while the Mariners and A's face hopeless odds of competing with their young, rebuilding rosters?

It's worth remembering that many were picking Oakland as the preseason AL West favorites just last year, with a pitching staff that had the lowest earned run average in the league and some nice offensive offseason additions in Josh Willingham, Hideki Matsui and others.

A year earlier, the Mariners were the dark horse pick after adding Cliff Lee to a rotation that led the AL in ERA in 2009 while going 85-77.

Texas wound up winning the West both those years while making back-to-back World Series appearances, and the Rangers now have a firm grip on the division. But after finishing 10 games back last season at 86-76, Angels owner Arte Moreno made it clear he's conceding nothing.

After hiring general manager Jerry Dipoto, the Angels added Pujols and plucked left-handed free agent ace C.J. Wilson from the Rangers on the same December day.

Texas answered that \$329 million shopping spree by posting the winning \$51.7 million bid for Japanese star Yu Darvish and now has until Jan. 18 to sign the hard-throwing right-hander for what figures to be at least a \$100 million total outlay. And with or without Darvish, the Rangers aren't flinching at the Angels' aggressive offseason.

"We believe we have the best team," said Rangers second baseman Ian Kinsler. "You can talk about all of the signings. You can talk about all of the shifts of power, all of the things that have been talked about and that will probably continue to be talked about. But it's just like the past with us, we're not worried about what's going on outside our locker room. We're worried about ourselves."

Yet, all AL teams will have to be a little more concerned about the Angels now, as Wilson joins a rotation that already led the league in ERA last year behind the strong right arms of Jered Weaver, Dan Haren and Ervin Santana.

Pujols should slide nicely into a batting order that hopes to regain slugger Kendrys Morales and has up-and-coming youngsters Mark Trumbo, Mike Trout and speedster Peter Bourjos bolstering veterans Torii Hunter, Bobby Abreu, Vernon Wells, Howard Kendrick and the like.

"I think the last couple of years since Kendrys went down, we were missing that big bat in the middle of the lineup," said Bourjos, who took over in center field last season. "[Pujols] would fit in there with any team. But it's going to be great with all those guys helping in the middle of the order, and I think he's going to help out the whole lineup in general. It just makes our whole team better."

On the other end of the division stand the Mariners and A's. Coming off a 67-95 season, Seattle has been relatively quiet this offseason. Other than having their name tossed in to the Prince Fielder sweepstakes, the Mariners' lone moves to date have been signing left-handed reliever George Sherrill and trading for Rays catcher John Jaso.

General manager Jack Zduriencik is looking for trade opportunities to help his offense, but he's also preaching patience, believing his club is building a solid foundation with upcoming pitching prospects and a team that used 18 rookies last season.

Zduriencik is well aware of the big splashes made by his AL West rivals, but he doesn't think that changes the long-term view he's adopted with a rotation led by Felix Hernandez and Michael Pineda, with top talent Danny Hultzen, James Paxton, Erasmo Ramirez and Taijuan Walker waiting in the wings.

"There's no question that both those clubs have helped themselves, and both were really good as it was," he said. "But we're not going to deviate from our course. We're a little further away than those clubs, but we have a plan in place."

Seattle left fielder Mike Carp, who teamed with top Draft pick Dustin Ackley to give the club a midseason offensive infusion last year, insists his team will be ready to play the big boys in the West.

"I live in Southern California and everyone is talking about the Angels and Rangers," Carp said. "I keep saying, 'Don't count out the Mariners.' We competed last year while getting some experience. Now everybody is pretty excited to build on that and move forward. We'll be young and still need a few pieces, but we'll be fine. We'll be players in this thing."

The A's are taking an even longer-term approach, with GM Billy Beane trading away talented young starters Gio Gonzalez and Trevor Cahill, and closer Andrew Bailey, for a flock of even younger prospects.

Coming off a 74-88 season, Beane appears to be punting the immediate future in an effort to line up his forces for if and when the A's can get their stadium issues resolved in Oakland or San Jose.

"The fact of the matter is, for us to compete, we're going to have to have a new stadium, and I don't think there was a move we could have made that would put us in a position to compete with a club like the Angels or Texas given what they have and where they're headed and some of those signings," Beane said.

"You're talking about two clubs in the division that are probably in the \$150 million to \$170 million range, and we're not a business that can put that payroll on the field."

Beane cites the example of the Indians, a team which opened Jacobs Field in 1994 with a young core just hitting its stride, and then sold out 455 straight games while racking up five consecutive playoff appearances and eight successive winning seasons.

"They did it first, and they did it best," Beane said. "Nobody's done it the same way since. We're going to take the same approach, and if there's a little bit of pain in between, so be it."

Some of that pain figures to be delivered by the Rangers and Angels, two clubs that clearly have won the attention of baseball with their offseason moves. Now, the question is how that spending translates to the baseball field.

For one more year, the four-team group will be the Major League's smallest division. But small doesn't mean quiet. Not this offseason. Not in this nuclear winter. Not with Pujols and Wilson, and possibly Darvish, changing the landscape atop the suddenly wilder West.

Working at disadvantage, Oakland looks ahead

Beane operating on minimal salary as A's pine for new park

By Lyle Spencer / MLB.com

While the Angels and Rangers have spent the winter stockpiling armaments for a nuclear American League West summer, the Athletics have been ... well, the Athletics: quiet and out of the way. Way out of the way.

Great expectations are for other locales, not Oakland.

Farewell, Trevor Cahill and Andrew Bailey. Adios, Gio Gonzalez and Craig Breslow. Sayonara, Ryan Sweeney and Jai Miller (we hardly knew ye).

In return for their two starting stalwarts, two bullpen anchors and Sweeney, the A's received 10 youngsters, most of them requiring advanced research engines -- unless you're an authority on prospects.

For Miller, an outfielder with unmistakable athletic ability, cash arrived from Baltimore on Tuesday.

The A's might reap enough productive talent from these deals with the Red Sox (for Bailey and Sweeney), Nationals (for Gonzalez) and D-backs (for Cahill and Breslow) to make a move -- in 2014 or '15.

There's always a shot at magic, of course, but the future clearly is well down the road. This leaves Oakland's cavernous structure to true baseball purists, those who cheer visiting teams and beautiful dreamers.

They may not be impressive in number, but hardcore A's partisans might be the most loyal in the sport. They remain faithful to their club even as they're trying to figure out what the new lineup and rotation might look like.

A's fans have been through this before, of course. They've grown sadly accustomed to bidding farewell to an artful pitcher, a slugger who launches them, a special outfielder with grace and style.

Checking that depth chart has become a routine part of life.

The A's own a proud and fascinating history, having showcased some of the very best teams in history.

Their faithful had it all in the early 1970s, packing the Coliseum with super-charged energy.

Then they stood by and watched the foundation collapse, brick by irreplaceable brick, with the exits of Reggie Jackson and Catfish Hunter, Joe Rudi and Rollie Fingers.

History repeated itself after Oakland powerhouses rose from 1988-92 and again from 2000-06, only to be razed.

Watching that '70s dynasty get torn asunder created for A's fans a necessary perspective for future disappointments. When you've been hurt like that, you tend to develop thick skin and form an invisible shield around your emotions.

Oakland's public relations and marketing departments are accustomed to the daunting challenges at hand. They are operating at disadvantages that will not be alleviated until the franchise is permitted to relocate.

The Giants have maintained that the preferred destination, San Jose, is their turf, leading to the formation of a committee in 2008 to study the complicated issue.

The A's are waiting, their patience thinning like their payroll, for Major League Baseball to sign off on their plan to land that new stadium, presumably in San Jose, that will put them on a level competitive field with their AL West rivals.

"We've been through this [rebuilding] cycle numerous times, and it gets shorter and shorter because the gap between us and everybody else grows," A's general manager Billy Beane recently said. "The fact of the matter is, for us to compete, we're going to have to have a new stadium. I don't think there was a move we could have made that would put us in a position to compete with a club like the Angels or Texas, given what they have and where they're headed [with] some of those signings.

"You're talking about two clubs in the division that are probably in the \$150- to \$170-million range -- and we're not a business that can put that payroll on the field."

The A's are expected to invest about \$50 million in their athletes, nowhere close to the same ballpark as the Angels, Rangers and Mariners.

The Coliseum's charms eroded long ago. This is not a preferred destination of Major League players, for a wide range of reasons.

Rookies making their first tour of big league parks come away shaking their heads as they chase down September singles landing on the 30-yard line, where Raiders spikes have created divots. Bad hops abound, to no one's amusement.

An easy drive from Oakland and its environs across the Bay Bridge, to San Francisco's golden-gated waterfront palace, sweeps one into another baseball world altogether.

Cavorting in a gorgeous ballpark, as alive as any in North America, are the Giants. The 2010 World Series champions offer those lovable Lincecums, Cains, Poseys and Pandas -- with a payroll swelling to twice the size of the A's.

In no way, shape or form can Oakland hope to compete with San Francisco's many assets. The A's are, without question, the most difficult product to sell in the sport.

Beane was represented by Brad Pitt on the silver screen in the hugely successful "Moneyball," a dramatic take on the A's in higher times. This was before Beane's new-age principles went mainstream, stripping him of his competitive edge.

Most franchises now employ multiple brains with laptops, seamheads who would have fit seamlessly into the movie. Beane now deals with general managers owning all the technological resources -- and more -- he employed so successfully.

The A's feel the answer to all their problems can be found to the south. San Jose is 35 miles -- and an enticing world -- away.

MLB's invisible salary-floor line

Buster Olney, espn.com, 1/4/2012

There is no hard salary floor established in the labor agreement, no specific minimum dollar amount that teams are required to spend. But there is an understanding between Major League Baseball and the players' association that the 30 teams will at least participate in the process and won't consistently work to field a bunch of minimum-wage players.

The [Oakland Athletics](#) signed [Coco Crisp](#) for \$14 million during the next two seasons, and that may help the Athletics avoid getting slapped on the wrist by MLB and the union, which rendered that punishment a few years ago to the Florida Marlins.

The Athletics' strategy this winter is transparent: Because the team doesn't believe it can compete with the [Texas Rangers](#) and [Los Angeles Angels](#), given the current circumstances, Oakland decided to invest its assets to fight another day. [Trevor Cahill](#), [Gio Gonzalez](#) and [Andrew Bailey](#) were swapped for prospects who may blossom in 2015 or 2016, by which time the Athletics hope to inhabit a new ballpark in San Jose.

The Athletics opened 2011 with a payroll of about \$67 million, but through the free-agent departures of players like [Josh Willingham](#) and the trades of players like [Mark Ellis](#), Oakland has dramatically slashed its payroll.

[Kurt Suzuki](#) earns \$5 million this season, as part of his deal that runs through 2013, and [Brett Anderson](#) will make \$3 million this year. [Brian Fuentes](#) is set to make \$5 million in the upcoming season, [Grant Balfour](#) will earn \$4 million, [Daric Barton](#) will make \$1.1 million, [Adam Rosales](#) will make \$600,000 and [Dallas Braden](#) negotiated a \$3.35 million deal. That's about \$22 million in payroll obligations to go along with the cost of Oakland's arbitration-eligible players like [Brandon McCarthy](#).

With the signing of Crisp, Oakland will have at least \$30 million in payroll obligations, and with other moves, the Athletics figure to move closer to \$40 million -- which, some executives believe, is the unofficial budget floor that MLB and the union would like to see from its teams.

Billy Beane isn't to blame for the [sad state of the Athletics](#), writes Bruce Jenkins. Within this piece, he writes Oakland's payroll will be around \$55 million. Other Oakland players are [glad to have Crisp back](#), as Susan Slusser writes.

Notables

- The [Washington Nationals have met](#) with [Prince Fielder's](#) agent, Scott Boras, writes Bill Ladson.

The [Seattle Mariners](#) are in a holding pattern as they wait for [Fielder to make his decision](#), writes Geoff Baker.

- The [Houston Astros](#) feel like they made a ground-breaking hire: a [director of decision sciences](#).

- Earlier in this offseason, some executives say, the perceived asking price for [Edwin Jackson](#) was in the range of the [John Lackey](#) and [A.J. Burnett](#) deals -- in the \$80 million range. This has since come down, they say.

Running to catch an early flight this morning, so we'll hit the links.

Moves, deals and decisions

1. The [Los Angeles Dodgers'](#) bid deadline has been [backed up](#).
2. The [Minnesota Twins](#) have invited a [whole lot of folks to spring training](#).
3. [Carlos Silva](#) is among those [going to spring training](#) with the [Boston Red Sox](#).
4. Dan Connelly examines the [Baltimore Orioles'](#) dilemma with [marketing Adam Jones](#).

Here's the bottom line: Unless his OPS and offensive production changes dramatically, Jones' value in the trade market will go down markedly every year before he becomes eligible for free agency. He is a respected talent, but rival scouts do have questions about his approach at the plate. If he were to have a breakout year in 2012, the Orioles could get the impact-type of pitcher for him that they seek.

Jones: OBP/BB/K
2009: .335/36/93
2010: .325/23/119
2011: .319/29/113

5. A young [Colorado Rockies](#) infielder is eager for his [shot at the second-base job](#), writes Troy Renck.
6. The [New York Yankees](#) are setting their sights on the [free-agent class of next fall](#), writes Tyler Kepner.

They're hanging onto the resources until they can go after the right pitcher -- a strategy that worked in the year they landed [CC Sabathia](#), and one that didn't pay off in the year that [Cliff Lee](#) went into free agency.

7. Money [matters to the Red Sox](#), reports the Associated Press.
8. The [Philadelphia Phillies](#) are [content with what they have](#), writes Jim Salisbury.
9. The [New York Mets](#) signed a [shortstop with a PED past](#), writes Andy Martino.
10. The [Miami Marlins](#) re-signed [Greg Dobbs](#).

11. Yu Darvish is on a tour of Texas; no deal has been reached. It'd be a shocker if he fails to sign.

12. The Tampa Bay Rays are close to a deal with Fernando Rodney.

Other stuff

- The Red Sox need to toughen up under Bobby Valentine, writes Nick Cafardo.
- Jason Beck has some key questions about the Detroit Tigers in 2012.
- Aubrey Huff has stepped up this winter and gotten in better shape, as Henry Schulman writes.

And today will be better than yesterday.

Oakland A's Prospect Profile: Derek Norris

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Jan 4, 2012

Of the group of prospects the Oakland A's have acquired through their trades this off-season, the one with the most offensive potential is catcher Derek Norris. We take a closer look at the 22-year-old inside...

Name: Derek Norris

Birthdate: 02/14/89

Height/Weight: 6'0"/210 pounds

How Acquired: Traded along with Brad Peacock, A.J. Cole and Tom Milone for Gio Gonzalez and Robert Gilliam on December 22, 2011. Originally drafted by the Washington Nationals in the 4th round in 2007.

Background

Norris was originally drafted by the Nationals out of a Kansas high school in the fourth round in 2007. He was considered one of the better high school catchers in the draft, but most teams believed that he was headed to Wichita State. The Nationals were able to sign Norris away from his collegiate commitment with a \$210,000 signing bonus. Norris got his feet wet right away, appearing in 37 games in the rookie-level Gulf Coast League in 2007. Although his overall numbers in the GCL weren't eye-popping (726 OPS), Norris walked 25 times in 123 at-bats, a sign of things to come for the right-handed hitter.

In 2008, Washington sent Norris to short-season Vermont, where he put together a memorable season for the Lake Monsters (if the Vermont Lake Monsters sound familiar, it is because they are now an A's affiliate). Despite playing in a pitcher's league, Norris blistered New York-Penn League pitching to the tune of a 906 OPS in 70 games. He homered 10 times and he walked 63 times, leading to an otherworldly .444 on-base percentage. Norris was named a Topps short-season/Rookie level All-Star for his exploits.

The 2008 campaign pushed Norris into the prospect spotlight, and the heat of that spotlight would only intensify in 2009 after his performance in the Low-A Sally League. In 126 games, Norris posted a 926 OPS with a .413 OBP and a .513 SLG. He hit 23 homers and walked 90 times. Norris was named a Topps post-season All-Star once again and received MiLB.com's Best Hitter of the Year award for the Class A level.

Despite his outstanding numbers in 2008 and 2009, Norris continued to move through the Nationals' system at a one-level-a-year pace. In 2010, he moved to the High-A Carolina League, where he suited up for the Potomac Nationals. Norris would find the Carolina League a bit tougher sledding, as he saw his average drop to .235 from the 2009-level of .286 and his slugging percentage fell nearly 100 points from .513 in 2009 to .419. On the plus-side, Norris actually improved his on-base percentage despite the drop in average – posting a .419 mark – and he still managed a solid 838 OPS. His season was not without adversity, as he missed the first month with a wrist injury and some additional time after being hit in the head with a 97 MPH pitch in May.

Norris was a participant in the 2010 Arizona Fall League and performed well in the prospect showcase. He homered four times in 54 at-bats and walked 11 times against 18 strike-outs. Norris also flashed a little speed, tripling twice and stealing two bases.

Last season, Norris suited up for Double-A Harrisburg of the Southern League for the entire year. Much like in 2010, Norris struggled to hit for average, batting only .210. His power numbers improved from 2010, as he hit 20 homers and slugged

.446, but his walk totals declined, and he walked only 77 times in 104 games and posted a .367 on-base percentage. The injury bug bit him again slightly in 2011, as he missed a week early in the season with an ankle injury.

This fall, Norris returned to the Arizona Fall League. He got off to a strong start at the plate with the Scottsdale Scorpions but faded down the stretch and finished the AFL campaign with a .748 OPS. Norris' first-half of the AFL season was impressive enough that he was named to the AFL Rising Stars game and the AFL's All-Prospect team and scouts were generally pleased with what they saw from him before the fatigue from the long season set in. Norris was added to the Nationals' 40-man roster before his trade to the A's and he will be a roster player at the A's major league spring training this February for the first time.

Scouting Report

As a hitter, Norris is a classic A's prospect. He will likely never hit for a high average and he will always strike-out his fair share, but Norris has the two traits that the A's value most highly in a hitter – plus power and patience. Despite being only 6'0", 210 pounds, Norris can reach the seats in even the deepest ballparks. He tends to be a pull-happy hitter, but he has flashed opposite-field power on occasion. Norris is naturally a very selective hitter and he sees a lot of pitches per at-bat. Scout.com's Frankie Piliere posted a video of Norris hitting at the Arizona Fall League, which can be found [here](#).

Behind the plate, Norris still has work to do, but he has improved his defensive skills in each season he has played professionally. He grew up a catcher through Little League and junior high, but was moved to third base for his first three years in high school as there was an older player at the catcher position in front of him. He did spend his senior year of high school behind the plate, but those three years at third put Norris a little behind other high school catchers defensively at the time he was drafted.

Tools-wise, Norris has the ability to be an average to above-average receiver. He is a good athlete and he moves his feet well. He also has a strong throwing arm and he has improved his release on throws to second base. His overall footwork and mechanics behind the plate improved quite a bit in 2011, as well, and he is starting to get a better feel for calling his own game and working with pitchers. Despite moving up one level at a time through the Nationals' system, Norris has generally been younger than most of his minor league batterymates. He will turn 23 in mid-February.

Outlook

Although the A's were already deep at the catcher position in the minor leagues and seemingly set for several years at the major league level with Kurt Suzuki, Oakland couldn't pass on the opportunity to acquire Norris when negotiating with the Nationals. With his ability to hit for power and get on-base, Norris projects as an above-average offensive catcher. If he is able to continue to improve his work behind the plate, he could be an All-Star level player in the big leagues at his peak.

Although Norris saw plenty of playing time at the Double-A level last season, it isn't automatic that the A's will send him to Triple-A to start the 2012 season. If [Landon Powell](#) returns to the organization as a non-roster player, the A's will have four catchers with big league experience (Suzuki, Powell, [Josh Donaldson](#) and [Anthony Recker](#)) ahead of Norris on the depth chart. The A's could make a deal involving one of those catchers to make room for Norris in Sacramento. Wherever Norris does play next season, he will see the majority of the playing time behind homeplate.

Even if Norris does begin the 2012 season in Double-A, he is likely to spend a significant part of the year at the Triple-A level. A September call-up is a strong possibility for the Kansas native, and depending on how his season goes and whether the A's hold onto or trade Suzuki, Norris could be a candidate for the 2013 A's Opening Day roster.

Athletics' Carignan Returns From Injury Detour

By Casey Tefertiller, Baseball America

OAKLAND—Not long ago, righthander Andrew Carignan was on a skyrocket ride toward the major leagues.

"I was knocking on the door," he said. "I was on the ultimate fast track. Then I got hurt, and that derailed me pretty quick."

And he got hurt and hurt and hurt again. Carignan, 25, came to the Athletics as a fifth-round pick in 2007 out of North Carolina. With a big mid-90s fastball and a decent slider, he blew through the low minors and recorded 28 saves in 2008, spending most of the year with Double-A Midland, where he recorded a 2.22 ERA.

Then everything came apart. He started feeling pain in his forearm, and he made just two appearances in 2009. The next year he had surgery to remove bone spurs and two other loose bodies from his elbow. He went to extended spring and pulled an oblique muscle.

He managed 30 appearances for high Class A Stockton in 2010, but it was not the old Carignan—not with 34 walks and a 6.27 ERA. He even went to the A's complex in the Dominican to get more work, living in a dorm with the teenagers.

So the burly 5-foot-11 righthander reported to spring training in 2011 with hopes to revive his career. Again came the injuries. First he sustained a deep bone bruise in his ankle, then he repeated the oblique pull. The one-time fast-tracker suddenly was getting passed in the slow lane.

"It was definitely hard," Carignan said. "It's frustrating, especially when you work for a while and kind of get one part of your body healthy, then another part breaks down. You feel like it's a never-ending cycle. Being down there in Arizona with all the young guys is not easy, either. I saw a lot of Arizona."

Finally, Carignan began his comeback at midseason. He spent most of June at Stockton, not allowing an earned run in nine appearances. He then bounced from Midland to Triple-A Sacramento, where he had a 2.16 ERA in 13 appearances in August. That led to finishing the season in Oakland, followed by a stint in the Arizona Fall League.

Carignan's fastball hits 95 mph, and he says his slider and changeup have both improved. Now, if he stays healthy, he has a shot at a big league job.

A's ACORNS

- Todd Steverson moved up to the position of roving hitting coach, switching roles with Greg Sparks, who takes over as hitting coach at Sacramento.
- The A's retained their entire minor league staffs, but shuffled a few pitching coaches. John Wasdin moved to low Class A Burlington and Ariel Prieto moved to short-season Vermont. Jimmy Escalante took over in the Rookie-level Arizona League.

Feinstein Returns To Athletics To Assist In 'Everything'

By Casey Tefertiller, Baseball America

OAKLAND—The Athletics wasted no time this offseason to make a big acquisition, but not one that will take the field.

Dan Feinstein returned to the organization in late October as director of professional scouting and baseball development, but his position will encompass far more duties.

"I'm going to be assisting (general manager) Billy Beane and (assistant) David Forst in all aspects of baseball operations, from contracts to trade discussions," Feinstein said. "From what I understand, I'll be involved in everything."

Feinstein, 39, began his journey in baseball with the 1994 A's as the organization's video coordinator, eventually adding the title of assistant amateur scouting director. He moved to the Dodgers in 2005 as coordinator of baseball operations, then the next year landed in St. Petersburg as the Rays' director of baseball operations.

"Any time somebody has the opportunity to spend seven years with a general manager of the caliber of (the Rays') Andrew Friedman, who is one of the sharpest minds in the game, you can't help but absorb new information," Feinstein said. "With Andrew and the others there, you had no choice but to absorb new and different kinds of knowledge."

He will be returning home in many ways. Feinstein grew up in nearby Lafayette, Calif., where his parents still live. He graduated from UC Davis with a degree in medieval history. "I changed my major from political science to economics to medieval history, but I always knew I wanted to work in baseball," he said.

Feinstein's primary responsibility will be overseeing pro scouting, which is a combination of advance scouting other major league teams and scouting the minor leagues to keep apprised of talent in other organizations for potential trades and other acquisitions.

"We're going to have a pretty thorough advance scouting process," he said. "Whether that means a couple in the field or not is something we'll see."

The A's dropped their human advance scout last season and relied on electronic scouting, a move many teams have made in recent years. Feinstein said that evaluating whether that is the best direction will be a priority. "We'll talk to our coaches and see what's most important to them," he said.

A's ACORNS

- The A's promoted Chris Pittaro, pro scouting director for the last four years, to special assistant to Beane.
- The A's released center fielder Tyreace House, a sixth-round pick in 2008 who topped out at low Class A, where he batted .220/.348/.254 in two seasons.