

A's News Clips, Tuesday, February 7, 2012

Monday's baseball notebook: A's have eye on Magglio Ordonez

Tom Gage, Detroit News

Former Tigers outfielder **Magglio Ordonez** is drawing some interest from the A's, **Peter Gammons** reported.

The Rockies acquired right-hander **Jeremy Guthrie** from the Orioles for reliever **Matt Lindstrom** and right-hander **Jason Hammel** .

The Nationals agreed to minor league contracts with outfielder **Rick Ankiel** and utilityman **Mark Teahen** .

Infielder **Alex Cora** has agreed to a minor league contract with the Cardinals.

Left-hander **Joe Beimel** and first baseman/outfielder **Conor Jackson** agreed to minor league deals with the Rangers.

Right-hander **Alfredo Aceves** and the Red Sox agreed on a \$1.2 million, one-year deal.

Leading Off: Super Bowl's over; it's time for baseball

Tom Couzens, Sacramento Bee, 2/7/2012

So that was fun, Eli Manning and the Giants knocking off the Patriots – and the hoodie – in Super Bowl XLVI.

But enough already with football.

Some trees are blooming, and bulbs are starting to pop up, meaning spring is in the air.

In 11 days, the Giants and A's start spring training when pitchers and catchers report. Position players report Feb. 23 for the Giants and Feb. 24 for the A's.

The A's begin play first, against the Mariners on March 2 in Phoenix. The Giants host the Diamondbacks on March 3 in Scottsdale, Ariz.

For fans, spring training means lots of sun, warm weather – and hope. It's when all fans think their team has a shot at the World Series, no matter how poorly it did the previous season or how lousy its offseason moves were.

For the Giants, there is hope that Buster Posey, Freddy Sanchez and Aubrey Huff will return to their 2010 form. Plus the Giants added a solid No. 3 hitter in Melky Cabrera and a leadoff man in Angel Pagan. Giants fans should be excited.

Across the bay, fans must be scratching their heads after the A's traded starters Trevor Cahill and Gio Gonzalez and All-Star closer Andrew Bailey, among others. It looks like another rebuilding year.

What to watch

NBA, Kings at Minnesota, 5 p.m., CSNCA: With no Love tonight, there will be more rebounds for DeMarcus Cousins.

What to do

Pebble Beach Charity Shoot-Out, 1:30 p.m., Pebble Beach Golf Links: See the Giants (Mike Krukow, Dave Flemming, Matt Cain, Will Clark) vs. the 49ers (Harris Barton, Dwight Clark, Brent Jones, Jerry Rice).

Oakland A's Spring Battles: Corner IFs

Spring training is just around the corner and things figure to be busy at the Oakland A's camp, as the team has several positions up for competition. Over the next week, we will be looking at the various position battles that are expected in A's camp this spring. We begin the series with a look at the A's corner infield position battles.

A Look Back At 2011

It was a disappointing season all around for the Oakland A's, who began the 2011 season with dreams of the playoffs and finished the year with fewer than 80 wins. Perhaps no two positions in their mostly futile line-up were more disappointing than the starting corner infield spots.

At the beginning of the 2011 campaign, the A's were counting on solid contributions from their starting corner infielders – first baseman [Daric Barton](#) and third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff. Barton was coming off of a breakthrough 2010 campaign with the A's, during which he hit .273/.393/.405 in 159 games while turning in one of the top defensive performances of any first baseman in the American League. It was assumed that Barton would be an everyday player for the A's at first and that he would build on his 2010 effort with an even better 2011 campaign. Instead, his season was anything but positive.

Barton did lead the A's in games played at first base, but that total was a mere 65 contests. He injured his shoulder in April and while he never went on the disabled list in the big leagues, his production at the plate vanished and his defense declined, as well. The A's stuck with Barton despite his struggles until late June, when he was finally sent back to Triple-A Sacramento. Barton's struggles continued with the River Cats. He hit only .197 with a 576 OPS in 17 games for Sacramento before finally admitting the shoulder pain was too great for him to continue. He was shut-down on July 16th and eventually underwent season-ending shoulder surgery.

In Barton's absence, the A's turned to a myriad of players at first base. In total, the A's had eight players (including Barton) log time at first base in 2011, a motely crew of players that included second baseman [Mark Ellis](#) and catcher [Landon Powell](#). Veteran Conor Jackson (47 games) and rookie [Brandon Allen](#) (41 games) would log the most time at first after Barton, although neither made much of an impression at the plate. Jackson posted a 702 OPS in 47 games as a first baseman (657 OPS in 102 total games with Oakland before being traded to the [Boston Red Sox](#) late in the season). Allen was acquired at the July trading deadline from the [Arizona Diamondbacks](#). He got off to a fast start with the A's, which included an impressive multi-homer game at Yankee Stadium, but he faded badly down-the-stretch and managed only a 616 OPS in 41 games as the A's first baseman.

The only other player to log more than 15 at-bats as a first baseman for the A's in 2011 was prospect [Chris Carter](#), who had two short stints with the big league team. Neither of those stints was productive, although Carter was never an everyday player during his time in the big leagues. In 30 at-bats as a first baseman, Carter managed only four hits and he struck-out 14 times. In total, A's first basemen managed a combined slash-line that would please only a pitcher: .219/.294/.316 in 598 at-bats.

Across the diamond, things also failed to go according to script. Kouzmanoff, like Barton, was expected to be the A's everyday third baseman after playing everyday for Oakland in 2010. Kouzmanoff didn't have great numbers with the A's in 2010 offensively. He posted only a 679 OPS. However, he did homer 16 times and his defense was solid throughout the season. That didn't stop the A's from spending much of the off-season pursuing free agent third basemen, to no avail.

Perhaps the A's flirtations with other third basemen bothered Kouzmanoff or perhaps it was just one of those seasons for the Southern California native, but the 2011 campaign was a disaster for Kouzmanoff. It began with an error-filled effort versus the Seattle Mariners before a sell-out crowd on Opening Day and never got better. In 46 games at third with Oakland, Kouzmanoff committed nine errors (.922 fielding percentage) and saw his range factor and zone rating fall precipitously from their 2010 levels. At the plate, he managed only a .222/.264/.356 line in 135 at-bats. The A's sent Kouzmanoff down to Triple-A in June and he would appear in 61 games for the River Cats before being traded to the [Colorado Rockies](#) late in the season. He played well for Sacramento (890 OPS) but didn't hit much better in a stint with the Rockies late in the year than he had with Oakland.

Unlike the first base situation, the A's third base picture did solidify after a mid-season acquisition. [Scott Sizemore](#) was picked up by the A's in a May 27th swap with the [Detroit Tigers](#) for reliever [David Purcey](#). Sizemore was originally assigned to Triple-A Sacramento, but he spent only nine games with the River Cats before the A's called on him. A natural second baseman, Sizemore was moved to third base when he was brought up to the big leagues. He struggled defensively at times, but offensively, he managed a solid rookie season. In exactly 300 at-bats while playing the hot corner, Sizemore posted a .243/.341/.417 line with 10 homeruns.

In total, six players appeared at third base for the A's in 2011. The other four were Jackson (six games/11 at-bats), [Andy LaRoche](#) (26 games/52 at-bats), [Adam Rosales](#) (six games/19 at-bats) and [Eric Sogard](#) (10 games/27 at-bats). A's third basemen had 544 at-bats and posted a combined .228/.306/.375 line with 16 homeruns.

Good-Bye And Hello

Much of the A's turnover at the corner infield spots took place during the 2011 regular season, when Oakland bid adieu to Opening Day roster members Kouzmanoff, LaRoche and Jackson. Since the 2011 season ended, the A's have added only one corner infielder onto the major league roster – first baseman Kila Ka'aihue, who was acquired in a trade with the [Kansas City Royals](#) at the start of the off-season. On the minor league side, the A's re-signed free agent [Wes Timmons](#) and invited him to big league camp. Timmons saw time at first base and third base with the Sacramento River Cats and Midland Rockhounds last season, but he is primarily a middle infielder.

Corner Infielders Invited To Camp

Brandon Allen*
Daric Barton*
Chris Carter*
[Josh Donaldson](#)*
Kila Ka'aihue*
Adam Rosales*
Scott Sizemore*
Eric Sogard*
Wes Timmons

**Denotes player on 40-man roster*

Number Of Corner Infielders Likely On Roster – 3 or 4

Locks To Make The Team

Scott Sizemore: Unlike last season, there is really only one corner infielder coming into Oakland A's camp this spring with a strong hold on a roster spot: Sizemore. The battles for the first base and back-up infielder spots figure to be fierce and to last for most of camp.

Although Sizemore isn't 100% percent guaranteed to be the A's starting third baseman on Opening Day, he'd have to have a dramatically poor camp or suffer an injury to lose his spot. Despite his growing pains with the glove, Sizemore was quietly one of the A's top performers in 2011 after he joined the team. Offensively, he finished the year with the second-highest OPS on the team at 778. With Josh Willingham's departure for Minnesota, it can be argued that Sizemore is the A's best returning offensive weapon.

As the A's learned with Barton last season, young players can see their production levels vacillate wildly from season-to-season. However, there is optimism in A's camp that Sizemore will continue to improve on his 2011 offensive output and that he will develop into a more steady presence defensively at third base. He committed 13 errors in 196 total chances for a .934 fielding percentage, but he was learning a new position and the A's felt he made strides with the glove as the season progressed. Defense figures to be his main focus this spring.

Favorites For The Final Spots

It's hard to call out any favorites for the A's final roster spots for first base and back-up infielder. Player options and positional flexibility may be the biggest factors in the decision-making process if none of the corner infielders in camp distinguish themselves with standout performances.

Of the group of corner infielders at A's camp, only Ka'aihue and Allen are out of options. Being "out of options" under MLB rules means that a player can no longer be sent down to the minor leagues without first being removed from the organization's 40-man roster, thereby exposing that player to waivers. Consequently, if a team is not sure it will be able to get an out-of-options player through waivers, that team may be more inclined to keep the player over a player with options, if those players had similar performances during spring training.

That being said, there were rumors that the A's were looking to deal Allen at various points this off-season and Ka'aihue is a

newcomer to the organization, so it's difficult to make either of them the favorite for the first base spot. In addition, the battle for the back-up infielder spot appears to be equally wide-open. Consequently, no favorites will be named in this article.

Battling For A Spot

There are plenty of contenders for corner infield roster spots, however, starting with Allen.

Brandon Allen: When the A's acquired Allen in the [Brad Ziegler](#) trade last July, he was first assigned to Triple-A Sacramento. However, after a short time in the minors, Allen was recalled to Oakland and immediately stepped into the A's everyday first base spot. He had a strong first two weeks with the club at the plate, but he faded badly after those two weeks. Making contact was a particularly big problem for Allen. He struck-out 55 times in only 146 at-bats with the A's and 68 times in 175 major league at-bats total (he spent some time in the big leagues with Arizona before the trade). On the plus side, Allen showed promise defensively and occasional flashes of the big-time power he consistently displayed in the minor leagues. He will be only 26 years old during the 2012 season, leaving room for optimism that he will be able to replicate his minor league success at the major league level. He can also play a decent left field, giving him an advantage over some of the A's other first base candidates who are strictly first basemen or DHs. However, his contact issues are troublesome and they continued into his Dominican Winter League season. He will need to cut down on the strike-outs this spring to entice the A's to keep him. If it becomes clear that he won't make the team out of spring training, he is a strong candidate to be traded.

Daric Barton: All things being equal, the A's would probably love to have Barton take hold of the first base spot this spring. Of the first base candidates in camp, Barton is by far the best defensive player and he has the best major league track record. However, he is also coming off of a major shoulder procedure to repair a torn labrum, among other things, in his throwing shoulder. He is expected to be limited with his throwing early in camp and could be behind the rest of the A's players for much of spring training. Barton as a hitter, in many ways, is the opposite of Allen. Barton makes consistent contact and can work a walk with the best of them, but he has yet to show the kind of prodigious power that Allen has at the minor league level and, in brief spurts, in the major leagues. The A's have been searching for power in their line-up for the past several years and may feel they need more power from the first base slot than Barton can provide. Barton was a third baseman in high school and has some minor league experience at the position, but it wasn't a positive experience, so he is a candidate for first base only. He also has an option left, so if the A's believe he is healthy but still rusty, they could send him down to Triple-A for additional seasoning until he hits his way back to the big leagues.

Chris Carter: Carter is another player in need of a good spring. One of the A's top prospects for the past several seasons, Carter has excelled at the minor league level but has failed to make a strong impression during limited time in the major leagues the past two seasons. He appeared especially lost both at the plate and in the field during his brief big league time last season. Given that the A's changed managers during the middle of the 2011 campaign, Carter needs to prove more to new manager Bob Melvin this spring than perhaps he would have if former manager [Bob Geren](#) were still at the helm. Carter is arguably the best power hitter on the A's 40-man roster at the moment, but he hasn't shown that power yet in the big leagues. He is also limited defensively. At his best with the glove, he is a slightly below-average first baseman, but he will always be a bat-first player. If the A's don't bring in a veteran DH before the start of the regular season, Carter will also be a major player for the A's DH role this spring.

Josh Donaldson: Donaldson will be in camp battling primarily for the A's back-up catcher position, but he could factor in the back-up infielder race, as well. Donaldson was a third baseman for most of his collegiate career and he has been spending an increasing amount of time at third base over the past few seasons, with positive reviews. This winter he played in the Dominican league and was exclusively a third baseman. The A's like the progress Donaldson has made defensively behind the plate, so it doesn't appear they are going to move him to third base permanently, but if he can show a major league caliber glove at third, he could give the A's roster some needed positional flexibility. He is also a solid emergency option at first base defensively. At the plate, Donaldson has shown an increase in power during his past two Triple-A seasons, but his plate discipline has slipped some and he had contact issues during his brief major league stints in 2010. Donaldson will need to show more patience and that he can keep up with a major league fastball this spring to earn a 25-man roster spot.

Kila Ka'aihue: Ka'aihue will be in an unusual situation this spring, trying to make an impression on a new organization while battling for a roster spot – all while having no options remaining. For the opportunity to evaluate Ka'aihue this spring, the A's gave up a decent pitching prospect in [Ethan Hollingsworth](#). Ka'aihue is joining the A's after spending his entire career in the Kansas City Royals' organization. A 15th-round pick in 2002, Ka'aihue had a relatively slow rise through the minor leagues, but he gained notice around baseball in 2008 when he posted a 1085 OPS in 124 games at the Double-A and Triple-A levels. Since that season, Ka'aihue has put up solid numbers at the Triple-A level, but he has failed to establish himself in 87 career major league games. Ka'aihue was the Royals' starting first baseman on Opening Day last year, but, in reality, he was only keeping the seat warm for uber-prospect Eric Hosmer, who took over for Ka'aihue in early May. Ka'aihue has a good eye at the plate and power, although his power-hitting track-record in the minor leagues isn't as strong as

Allen's or Carter's. Defensively, he is average, at best, at first base and is only an option at that position. Like Carter, he will also factor in the DH battle should the A's not bring in a veteran for that position. He will turn 28 in March and is the oldest of the A's first base candidates in camp.

Adam Rosales: Last year at this time, Rosales was rendered a non-factor thanks to a stress fracture in his foot that was still healing after off-season surgery. Rosales missed the first few months of the season and made his 2011 major league debut on June 6th. He homered in that game, but that would be one of the biggest highlights of his major league season. In 24 big league games, he had only six hits in 61 at-bats. Rosales spent much of the second half of the season with Triple-A Sacramento. In 40 games with the River Cats, he posted only a .697 OPS. Rosales' production in 2011 was a far cry from his A's debut season in 2010, when he had a .721 OPS and seven homers in 80 games as the A's primary back-up infielder. Rosales spent his entire 2010 season on the A's 25-man roster and won a lot of fans with his hustling style of play and occasional flashes of homerun power. Rosales is a valuable player defensively in that he can play all of the infield positions except catcher and has shown he can handle left field in an emergency situation. He doesn't offer much by way of speed off of the bench and he is an aggressive hitter, but his versatility and pop make him a strong candidate to be the primary back-up infielder. He will battle Eric Sogard for that position this spring and could have a slight edge over Sogard because of his longer track record in the major leagues. Rosales will need to show early on in camp that his disappointing production in 2011 was a product of coming off of an injury and not a trend, however.

Eric Sogard: Last spring, Sogard was one of the A's final cuts, as he narrowly missed out on winning the back-up infield spot to Andy LaRoche. The A's eventually parted ways with LaRoche and Sogard emerged as the A's back-up infielder for the final nine weeks of the season. Sogard didn't receive much playing time with the A's last season despite being on the roster for more than two months. He appeared in 27 games and totaled only 70 at-bats. All but one of those at-bats came as either a third baseman, shortstop or second baseman (he had one pinch-hitting appearance). Like Rosales, Sogard is versatile, although he doesn't offer the ability to play first base or in the outfield. Sogard is the better defender between the two, however, and is a left-handed hitter, which could serve as a better compliment as a back-up to the right-handed hitting Sizemore at third. Sogard doesn't have plus power, but he has slugged better than .400 in each of his four full minor league seasons. His best assets as a hitter are his command of the strike-zone and his ability to make contact. For his minor league career, he has walked more than he has struck-out and he has only 243 strike-outs in 2,033 at-bats. Sogard has similar running ability to Rosales in that both players can swipe an occasional base but aren't big threats on the base-paths. Whether Sogard makes the team will likely depend mostly on how he performs defensively at all three of his infield positions. He has also been a slow starter in each of his two seasons as part of the A's organization, a trend that he'll need to break to win the job away from Rosales.

Looking To Make An Impression

Wes Timmons: Of the infielders the A's have invited to spring training, Timmons is the only player who isn't currently on the A's 40-man roster. Despite being the oldest infielder in A's camp, he is also the only player from this group who has never made his major league debut. Timmons will be starting his second season in the A's organization. He signed a minor league deal with Oakland before the 2011 campaign after nine seasons in the Braves' chain. Timmons had an excellent year in the minor leagues with the A's, posting an .888 OPS and batting .341 in 95 games with Triple-A Sacramento and Double-A Midland. The A's also liked what they saw from Timmons in big league camp last spring and kept him with the big league club for much of spring training. However, he will be playing in front of a different coaching staff this spring and, in many ways, will be looking to re-make the strong impression he made with Geren's staff last spring. Timmons is a better hitter than he is a defensive player, but he does offer versatility, having played second base, third base, shortstop and first base during his minor league career. Shortstop isn't as much of an option for Timmons as it was a few years ago, but he has handled second, third and first without major issues. The A's have a history of bringing up longtime minor league veterans who have strong big league camps during the regular season. With a strong showing in front of Melvin and crew, Timmons could position himself for consideration during the season.

Here For The Future

With a 40-man roster crowded with corner infielders (first basemen in particular), the A's have chosen not to invite any minor league corner infield prospects to camp, at least for the moment. A's third base prospects [Stephen Parker](#) and [B.A. Vollmuth](#) and first base prospects [Michael Spina](#) and [Miles Head](#) are all participating in the A's minor league spring training mini-camp that begins in late February. All four players could make appearances in big league spring games for the A's, especially early in camp when the veteran players are only appearing for a few innings at a time. Other than those appearances, however, the A's spring training camp will be focused less on the future and more on the present this spring.

Weeks Has Whole New Outlook For 2012

What a difference a year makes. Last season, Jemile Weeks entered spring training on a mission to prove that his two-plus, injury-plagued minor league seasons were not a true indication of his talent. Having accomplished that goal in 2011, Weeks now has only to worry about getting ready to be the Oakland A's everyday second baseman and leadoff hitter for 2012.

A lot has changed for Jemile Weeks in 365 days. This time last year, Weeks was coming off a season at Double-A Midland during which he hit .267 and missed two months with a hip injury. Making the big league club was a long shot at best with the veteran Mark Ellis blocking his path at the same position.

And this time last year, Weeks was ranked by OaklandClubhouse as the organization's ninth-best prospect. But after a series of trades moved some of the club's most notable players, many now consider the second basemen the face of the franchise. Club executives even went as far as publicly deeming Weeks untouchable in trade discussions – a notion virtually unheard of for any player in recent years.

"(It's) flattering in a sense," Weeks said at the team's Fan Fest event. "Just to have that type of backing by your organization, by everybody up top. That's all I can say other than I'm just thankful for the faith in myself by the team."

In 2011, Weeks led Major League rookies with a .303 average and eight triples in 97 games for the A's. The switch-hitter became a fixture atop Bob Melvin's lineup by stealing 22 bases and having a .340 on-base percentage, good for third-best among American League rookies.

But while he impressed many during his rookie campaign, there's still plenty of room for improvement. Weeks was thrown out on one-third of his steal attempts, tying him for the fourth-lowest stolen base percentage in the AL. He also led AL second basemen in errors with 13 while having the lowest fielding percentage by an Oakland second basemen since Mike Edwards in 1979.

Weeks spent this offseason working out with his brother and current Milwaukee Brewers' All-Star Rickie Weeks, as well as All-Star Prince Fielder and recent Hall-of-Fame inductee Barry Larkin, among others, in his home state of Florida. The elevation from the minor leagues didn't change his offseason routine much, he said.

"I feel like I always have something to work on. You go into every offseason trying to perfect that. Maybe the focus of what I worked on has changed," Weeks said.

The team's first-round pick in the 2008 draft (12th overall) spent much of the end of 2011 working on his technique stealing bases and consistency with the glove. He credits his improvement in those areas to the relationship he has with Melvin.

"When he first came in, we sat down, he talked to me. He told me he felt like we were going to be a tandem for years to come. I said, 'OK.'"

"He pulled it out of me," Weeks said. "Letting me go out there and play every day – go out there and fight certain things...He's just been a real positive influence on my short career so far. I'm glad to be able to move on with him."

"He's not in awe of anything," Melvin said last August during a series in Cleveland.

"It really impresses me the fact that he'll go through a rough stretch and won't get down on himself. Each and every day he'll go out there and grind and expect to do well. For a rookie to be that resilient this early in his career is a real credit to him."

On a young team with a considerable amount of unproven talent, Weeks could find himself in a leadership role – something often unfamiliar to a 25-year-old. Players such as Brandon Allen, Michael Taylor, Collin Cowgill, Chris Carter, Jermaine Mitchell and Kila Ka'aihue have all spent considerable time in the minor leagues looking to take the next step in their careers. Having Weeks as a resource could prove advantageous.

"A lot of young guys maybe haven't had the little bit of time that I've had. I think they'd be able to cope with me and talk with me and figure out a few things that I've learned from last season," Weeks said.

Melvin wouldn't go as far to say that he expects any type of vocal leadership from Weeks this season, but he did mention his ability to lead by example.

If Weeks' knack for improvement over the last 12 months rubs off on those young players, the club's rebuilding process

could be much smoother than expected.

Prospects Pushing For A's Rotation Spot

Chris Biderman, OaklandClubhouse.com

Jan 31, 2012

Oakland A's manager Bob Melvin has made it clear that the final two spots in his club's rotation are there for the taking come April. With so many young starters in the mix, the battle is shaping up to become an interesting subplot in a spring training with no shortage of storylines.

FREE PREVIEW OF PREMIUM CONTENT

Oakland has plenty of options when it comes to filling out the rotation. There are the familiar faces of [Graham Godfrey](#), Tyson Ross and non-roster invitee [Edgar Gonzalez](#), or a mix of promising rookies acquired in the [Gio Gonzalez](#) and [Trevor Cahill](#) deals.

Right-hander [Jarrod Parker](#) headlines the A's latest bevy of high-ceiling young starters. Acquired from Arizona as part of the Cahill trade, he is currently the team's highest-rated pitching prospect and the No. 13 pitching prospect in baseball, according to Scout's rankings.

Last year was Parker's first season back after undergoing Tommy John surgery that caused him to miss all of 2010. Like many players returning from tendon replacement surgery in the elbow, he struggled initially to regain the feel in his pitches.

"Early in the year, I struggled," Parker said at his first introduction to Oakland's fans at the team's Fan Fest event on Sunday.

"I was brutal. Just wasn't the same and fought through a lot of things. I definitely learned a lot and was able to take what I learned from the failures and turned them into a pretty good second half."

Despite his poor start, Parker went 11-8 with a 3.79 ERA while maintaining his status as the Diamondbacks' top-prospect and spent the entire season at Double-A Mobile. He yielded just 112 hits in 130.2 innings and struck out 112 hitters to 55 walks. On September 19, after winning the Double-A championship with his team in Mobile, he made his Major League debut in a start against the Dodgers.

Parker went 5.2 innings while giving up four hits and a walk without yielding a run. He left the game with no score as his team would go on to win 7-6 in extra innings. He also made a relief appearance against the Brewers in the Division Series where he gave up a run, two hits and a walk in 0.1 innings.

It appears that the former ninth-overall pick in 2009 is back to pre-surgery form. This year, he's looking forward to preparing with a full offseason for the first time since the operation and says he's 100 percent healthy and recovered. He also added a pitch to his repertoire since going under the knife.

"I actually started throwing a two-seamer now, opposed to throwing all four-seamers," Parker said. "It makes games a lot easier, more efficient."

Parker has a power fastball that sits in the low-to mid-90s that could get up to 97 or 98 when needed. His slider is his most effective off-speed pitch but he also throws a curveball and a changeup.

The A's have the luxury of bringing back pitching coach Curt Young, who resided over the team's outstanding pitching staffs of recent years before spending last season with the Red Sox. While he returns to a bunch of new faces, his philosophy remains the same. He played a major role in the development at the big league level of players such as Gonzalez, Cahill, [Brett Anderson](#) and [Dallas Braden](#).

"We're all here to win. Whether they're young or veterans, they're here to win games and expectations of these guys is going to be real high right from the get go," Young said.

"It was really kind of satisfying to all of us in the pitching department when you have young people come from the organization and do well. Hopefully as a pitching group here we can help these guys and make them understand what they need to do, and help them get to the level that those guys go to."

Another promising righty looking to crack the team's rotation is [Brad Peacock](#). While Peacock wasn't recognized as an

outstanding prospect as early on in his career as Parker was, he did make three appearances with the Nationals last year, going 2-0 with just a 0.75 ERA in two starts and one relief showing.

Peacock was drafted in the 41st-round in 2006 and signed just before the 2007 draft as a "draft and follow." But he improved his status dramatically and became Washington's Minor League Pitcher of the Year and Eastern League Pitcher of the Year in 2011.

Between Double-A Harrisburg and Triple-A Syracuse, Peacock combined to go 15-3 with a 2.39 ERA while holding hitters to just a .188 average. Those numbers improved dramatically from 2010, where he had a 4.66 ERA in Double-A Harrisburg.

"In spring training, me and my pitching coach were wondering why I was getting hit so hard the year before and he just changed one little thing in my delivery and it's all said and done from there," Peacock said at Sunday's Fan Fest.

"It just clicked. I had a good season last year."

Peacock remains a bit less refined than Parker, but is still ranked as the No. 44 pitching prospect in Scout's rankings and Oakland's fourth-best pitching prospect. He has three pitches and relied mostly on a hard fastball and changeup that sits at 82 to 83 with a curveball he also mixes in. He walked 4.5 hitters per nine innings on average, meaning his control still needs work if he wants to work into the starting rotation to start the year.

Other top prospects who will be in the running for spots in the starting rotation include Tom Milone and Sonny Gray.

Milone, acquired with Peacock in the Gonzalez trade, is not one to light up the radar gun but relies on his outstanding control. Without having overpowering stuff, he averaged more than nine strikeouts per nine innings over his last two seasons in the minor leagues before making five appearances with the Nationals last year. In the majors, Milone threw 26 innings with a 3.81 ERA while walking just four.

Gray, Oakland's first-round pick last year, made it Double-A Midland in just his first summer with the organization and he threw the ball very well for the Rockhounds. In five starts, the right-hander threw gave up just 15 hits in 20 innings while striking out 18 and having a 0.45 ERA. Scout has him ranked as baseball's No. 18 pitching prospect. It's likely that Gray will be allowed some more time for seasoning in the minor leagues, but an outstanding spring could vault him into the team's starting rotation.