

Oakland A's expect Manny Ramirez to be in camp Friday

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

PHOENIX -- Manny Ramirez will report to A's camp Friday, an arrival as highly anticipated as any involving an Oakland player in several years.

Despite the hoopla, general manager Billy Beane stressed that playing time won't simply be handed to the designated hitter.

But A's manager Bob Melvin, addressing reporters before Beane spoke, said he anticipated plugging Ramirez in as the everyday D.H. once Ramirez comes off suspension.

"He could jump out of bed in December and hit," Melvin said.

Inserting Ramirez at D.H. would seemingly take away opportunities for players such as Seth Smith and Jonny Gomes, both acquired over the winter as D.H. possibilities. Playing Ramirez could also block prospects such

as Chris Carter and Brandon Allen, who appear to better fit into the A's plan to build for the future.

"We haven't made any promises (to Ramirez)," Beane said. "The opportunity for anybody who's in camp to fill that role and hold onto it is there."

Ramirez, who agreed to a minor league deal on Monday pending a physical, can't play until he serves a 50-game suspension for violating Major League Baseball's drug policy for a second time.

Ramirez's contract is in the neighborhood of \$500,000, but once it's prorated to account for his suspension, the A's will be paying him just upward of \$300,000 -- assuming he's added to the major league roster.

"There's little risk," Beane said in his first public remarks since signing Ramirez. "Anything we're uncomfortable with at any point, we could end it (by releasing him). There's very little commitment here."

However, the A's believe Ramirez -- who turns 40 on May 30, the first day he's eligible to play -- can be a productive cleanup hitter and at least resemble the form that's led to a .312 career average and 555 homers.

Beane and his staff had Ramirez on their radar for about two months and were convinced he was the best choice out of all the veteran D.H. options available. Magglio Ordonez, Hideki Matsui and Vladimir Guerrero are among the other unsigned free agents.

By the time Ramirez gets off suspension, it will have been 12 months since he has played in a regular-season major-league game.

Ramirez was with Tampa Bay last April when he abruptly retired after testing positive for performance-enhancing drugs for the second time.

"When you take in health and recent production -- albeit Manny didn't play last year -- we thought he has the chance of being the most productive," Beane said.

Beane compared this decision to adding Frank Thomas before the 2006 season. The A's signed Thomas, who was considered a huge injury risk, for \$500,000 and he proceeded to hit 39 homers.

Ramirez's controversy over the years is no secret. He's been charged with domestic violence and has twice tested positive for performance-enhancing drugs, among other issues.

Beane never spoke with Ramirez during negotiations -- dealing strictly with agent Barry Praver -- but others in the organization endorsed him.

Former A's first baseman Scott Hatteberg, who played alongside Ramirez in Boston and now scouts for Oakland, gave Ramirez a thumbs-up. A's director of pro scouting Dan Feinstein, who spent last season in Tampa Bay's front office, also gave Ramirez solid reviews from his short experience with him.

"We took a lot of opinions in," Beane said. "We tried to make sure it was first-hand opinions as opposed to what people had heard. Everyone who had first-hand experience came back and said it was very positive. "

Said Melvin: "At this point in his career, I'd think he'd want to be an example."

The A's are expected to finalize a four-year, \$36 million contract with Cuban outfielder Yoenis Cespedes in a week or two.

But Beane estimated the chances of any other roster additions as less than 50-50.

A's notes: Tom Milone making bid for rotation spot

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

PHOENIX -- No decisions will be made for a while regarding the A's open rotation spots, but left-hander Tom Milone has made a strong early impression.

"Anyone who throws it over the plate every single time this early in camp always impresses you," manager Bob Melvin said.

Milone, 25, came over from Washington along with pitchers Brad Peacock and A.J. Cole and catcher Derek Norris in exchange for Gio Gonzalez over the winter. All four are ranked among Oakland's top 10 prospects by Baseball America, but Milone comes in lowest at No. 10.

His fastball doesn't blow up the radar gun and scouts don't project him as a front-of-the-rotation guy. But he's impressed with his command of four pitches -- fastball, curve, cutter and changeup.

"He definitely knows where the ball is going," Melvin said. "If he stays at 86 or 87 (mph), he's got 89 in his pocket when he needs it. He seems like he's a polished guy."

Milone made a splash in an unusual way in his big league debut last September -- smacking a homer on the first pitch of his first at-bat.

Milone grew up idolizing Ken Griffey Jr., and always thought he'd be a hitter, but he was converted to a full-time pitcher at USC, where he played alongside A's outfield prospect Grant Green and relief prospect Ryan Cook.

"Everything worked out for a reason," Milone said.

Now he's trying to win a rotation spot. Brandon McCarthy and Bartolo Colon are locked into two slots, Dallas

Braden has a third if healthy, but it's wide open after that. Peacock, Graham Godfrey, Jarrod Parker and Tyson Ross are also candidates.

Milone isn't getting caught up in the competition yet.

"I'm trying to not think about it that way," he said. "I'm just going out there and doing my thing."

The A's landed six players on Baseball America's annual list of top 100 prospects.

Outfielder Yoenis Cespedes, the Cuban free agent whose four-year \$36 million deal has yet to be finalized, came in at No. 14. Parker (26th), Peacock (36), Cole (57) and Sonny Gray (65) followed and outfielder Michael Choice came in 80th.

Parker was acquired this past offseason via trade. Gray and Choice are the A's most recent first-round draft picks.

Brett Anderson felt fine a day after throwing off the mound for the first time since reconstructive elbow surgery

A's hope Ramirez is low-cost cleanup hitter

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Here's the quick summation of why the A's signed Manny Ramirez: If he isn't the player the team hopes, they simply let him go, no fuss, no muss.

"We really couldn't find a reason not to," Oakland general manager Billy Beane said Tuesday. "Low risk, high reward, and we have time to evaluate him and time to evaluate some of our younger guys with little or no commitment. It seemed foolish not to take the chance."

Ramirez will report to camp Friday, according to manager Bob Melvin, assuring the A's of a media crush that day. On Monday, the 39-year-old agreed to a minor-league deal worth no more than a prorated \$500,000; the most Oakland will pay if he plays the rest of the season after his 50-game, performance-enhancing-drug suspension is about \$330,000.

Melvin said that if Ramirez produces, he'll be the A's designated hitter upon completion of his suspension.

"If he performs the way he has in the past, I don't know why he wouldn't be," Melvin said. "He's been a dominant player in the past."

The A's spent the first part of the winter trading All-Star pitchers in order to acquire numerous younger prospects, and Beane talked of rebuilding toward a potential new park three or four years down the line. In the past month, however, the club signed Ramirez, plus 38-year-old Bartolo Colon and dealt young pitchers Guillermo Moscoso and Josh Outman for outfielder Seth Smith, who is older than both men and who is likely to platoon at DH with Jonny Gomes until Ramirez's arrival.

So have the A's moved away from their original plan?

"The first trades were made to enhance the system, get younger prospects and more of them," Melvin said. "Now, you go out and see what you have financially and try to make your team better" for this season.

Beane said that the A's did add a great number of young players this winter, but in spots where there isn't a young player quite ready, the team tried to acquire some more immediate help.

That sounds as if Oakland believes neither Chris Carter nor Kila Ka'aihue is the answer at DH, but Beane said such players will have time to prove themselves. What the team is seeking is a prospect to really grab a spot, much the way Jemile Weeks did at second base last year.

"There is still an opportunity, even in this case," Beane said. "We haven't made any promises." And having too many good hitters isn't something anyone is accusing the A's of having right now, Beane noted.

Beane said the Ramirez signing was not done as a public-relations move, nor was it to provide Cuban outfielder Yoenis Cespedes with a mentor, although Beane said that would be nice if it happens. The reason was sheer need - a lack of oomph in the cleanup spot.

"What we needed was someone with presence in the middle," Beane said. "We have a lot of guys who can surround the fourth spot, but I don't think we had a lot of guys to fill that spot."

Ramirez comes with a lot of baggage, including two positive tests for performance-enhancing substances, and charges of domestic violence filed against him in the fall. He also pushed Boston's 64-year-old traveling secretary to the ground several years ago.

The A's are comfortable with Ramirez's past, though, and they have heard only positive things about Ramirez from those who've worked with him.

That includes Dan Feinstein, the A's director of professional scouting, who was with the Rays last year and said that Tampa Bay's experience with Ramirez, brief as it was, was very good. Former A's first baseman Scott Hatteberg, who works in the front office, played with Ramirez for a year in Boston and also attested to Ramirez's work ethic.

The main attraction, though, Beane said, is that "he can hit. He can *hit*. ... He's quite a force."

Melvin said that finding at-bats for all the DH candidates plus first baseman Daric Barton, who is limited to DH-ing until mid-March as he recovers from shoulder surgery, won't be that taxing because the team is adding only one player, and one who cannot play in the first 50 games, anyway.

Ramirez can play in all spring games, but he is not expected to go with the team to Japan for the two exhibition games there before the regular season opener at the Tokyo Dome on March 28. He will go to extended spring training and then play 10 minor-league games, probably at Triple-A Sacramento, beginning in mid-May, although it will depend on the minor-league schedule. That means possible games with Class A Stockton, too.

The A's had hoped Cespedes would report by the end of the week, too, but he has not yet obtained a visa.

A team source said Ramirez will wear No. 99; No. 24 is retired for Rickey Henderson.

Anderson's fine: Brett Anderson reported that his reconstructed left elbow felt fine the day after his first bullpen session since July 17 surgery.

"I'm sore everywhere but my elbow," he said happily.

Anderson was extra excited Tuesday because he was an Indians fan when he was young and is a big fan of Ramirez's.

"At dinner last night, I was looking up his stats, and they're absolutely ridiculous," Anderson said. "Now I'll probably be spending a lot of time with him at extended spring and get to know him. I might show up with dreadlocks when I come back to Oakland."

Drumbeat: Bob Melvin speaks about A's new addition, Manny Ramirez

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Papago Park, 2/21/2012, 9:08am

A's manager Bob Melvin will have something of an outfield/DH crunch as the team tries to pare down earlier than usual because of the season-opening series in Japan, but he said he's not worried that Monday's addition of Manny Ramirez will overload the DH at-bats.

Melvin said that Ramirez – who is expected to report Friday – is just “one more guy. He's not going to come in and get every DH at-bat.” He said Ramirez might get a little time in left, if he'd like to do so.

With Ramirez sitting out the first 50 games for violating baseball's performance-enhancing drug policy, the team should get plenty of time to evaluate other options, Melvin said. And there will “waves” of evaluation for Ramirez – first during spring, including exhibition games, then at extended spring training, and finally in 10 minor-league games.

I asked if those will definitely be at Triple-A Sacramento, and Melvin said that while he has not been told that, he assumes Ramirez would go there. So get ready for Manny in a River Cats uniform beginning in mid-May, Sacramentans.

Melvin isn't concerned about Ramirez's readiness. “This a guy over the course of his career who could jump out of bed in December and hit,” he said, adding late that if Ramirez performs as he has in the past, “I don't know why he wouldn't” be the team's DH when eligible.

But does Manny have anything left? “We'll see if there's something there,” Melvin said.

Scouts differ on that topic; some argue that he isn't the power hitter he once was, and some believe that without enhancement, he's not the hitter he was, period. Melvin said that a homer drop-off would be expected at the Coliseum, anyway, but he believes Ramirez will produce.

“You don't have to hit home runs to drive in runs,” Melvin said. “And if we get to the point where he's DHing in the middle of the season, he brings stability and experience in that role we don't have now.”

I asked about the apparent shift in personnel philosophy – the team started off the winter “rebuilding,” trading three All-Star pitchers, all young, for every young prospects. In the past month, though, the team signed 38-year-old Bartolo Colon; traded pitchers Guillermo Moscoso and Josh Outman for outfielder Seth Smith, a platoon player who is older than both the men he was traded for; and signed Ramirez, who will be 40 by the time he's eligible to play in regular-season games. (Yoenis Cespedes fits more into the rebuild mode, at 26, though the deal the outfielder agreed to last week is only for four years.)

Melvin – who hates the word “rebuild” and prefers “reshape” – had a good answer for that.

“The first trades were made to enhance the system and get younger prospects and more of them,” Melvin said. “Now you go out, see what you have financially and try to make your team better” for this year.

I was told this morning that Ramirez will be issued uniform No. 99; his other frequent jersey number, 24, was retired for Rickey Henderson.

Friday should be quite a media circus here – something we weren't anticipating for the A's a month or so ago.

Brett Anderson said he bounced back well from his first bullpen session since Tommy John surgery, saying he had normal first-time-out soreness everywhere except that new elbow.

“All good soreness,” he said.

He's on a once-a-week bullpen session schedule initially, so expects he'll go again Monday.

Beane: Why not take a chance on Manny?

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- In greeting a handful of media members on Tuesday, A's general manager Billy Beane took several questions about his decision to sign Manny Ramirez. More than half, it seemed, could be broken down to two words.

Why Manny?

Beane, over and over, came back with his own question: Why not?

"There was need, and we really couldn't find a reason not to," Beane said. "It's low-risk, high-reward. We've got some time to evaluate him, evaluate the [designated hitter] situation with some of the younger guys. There's little to no commitment. It would be foolish not to."

Ramirez's contract details fall in line with this thinking. The Minor League deal is worth a meager \$500,000 -- but will be prorated after he serves a 50-game suspension stemming from his second performance-enhancing drug violation, meaning the most he can earn comes out to less than the league minimum of \$480,000. It reads more like \$340,000.

But even that's not guaranteed. Nothing is, and the A's can choose to part with Ramirez -- scheduled to arrive at A's camp on Friday -- at any point should he become a distraction or not perform at the level he's expected to maintain.

In the meantime, Beane realizes Ramirez could very well embrace the mentor role, perhaps fill a few more seats in the spacious Coliseum and, in doing so, generate a little revenue -- all the while lending the A's a dose of national attention they normally might not get.

All of the above could easily matriculate, but Beane assures this is no PR move.

"It was a 'We need a fourth hitter who can hit' move," Beane said. "What we need is someone with some presence in the middle, someone who's hit there before. I think we have some guys who surround that spot, but don't know if someone has presence to fill the No. 4 slot. I think there's something to be said for that."

Before the news of Ramirez's signing broke on Monday, the A's already had several in-house candidates for the DH role, including Kila Ka'aihue, Jonny Gomes, Chris Carter and Brandon Allen. Even Daric Barton is expected to see time there this spring, because of restrictions related to his surgically-repaired shoulder.

Manager Bob Melvin assured, though, that Ramirez's presence won't take away from any player's need for at-bats.

"Really, it's one more guy," Melvin said. "It's not like he's going to come in and get every DH at-bat. To get him ready for a 50-game layoff, it doesn't make sense to give him all the at-bats. He'll go through regular batting practice, hit off pitchers like everybody else will, and we'll get him into games enough to where we feel like we can evaluate him. I don't think it's wise to give him every DH at-bat."

The A's manager said "it would make sense" to immediately slot Ramirez into the DH spot once he's eligible to play on May 30, should all go well leading up to that point. Beane, though, noted it's possible such a scenario is voided if another player steps up and claims the job while Ramirez is out of the mix.

Beane contacted Ramirez's camp months ago, all the while staying in touch with a number of other unspecified DH candidates. Just how many other teams were in on Ramirez -- interest appeared weak because of his tarnished reputation -- was not of concern to Beane. "It was either going to work or wasn't going to work," said Beane. "I don't think, at any point, any of us were going to get into a competition. It was going to have to work perfectly for us. If it did, great.

"We kept an open mind that there were other guys out there. It just felt like this had no risk, and had the chance of providing the most production."

Even so, Ramirez' arrival, perhaps, doesn't appear to fit into the rest of the club's offseason picture -- which included the departures of Trevor Cahill, Gio Gonzalez and Andrew Bailey in exchange for a combined 10 prospects. The A's seemed primed for a rebuilding year when, really, it was more about retooling.

"We did acquire a lot of young players, and in areas we felt we needed immediate help," said Beane. "If we thought we didn't have a young player ready to step in, we would try to acquire someone who can help in the short term."

"I think the first wave was making the trades to enhance our system, and get a wealth of ... younger prospects," Melvin said. "We liked Cahill, we liked Gio, but we brought back more, and I think that was the focus to begin with. Now, you go out and you see what you have left financially, and try to make your team better."

For the present? Absolutely, says Melvin. But Beane isn't so quick to equate the addition of Ramirez, combined with all the other winter moves, to a playoff berth -- or even a competitive team.

"We'll see," Beane said. "We haven't even started games. Health is a huge thing for us and any club. I think we've got a chance to be a team that gets better starting Day 1, and gets better the next day and so on and so on."

Still, Beane admitted his most recent transaction to be "pretty unique" in comparison to any of the other moves he's made in his previous 14 seasons as the club's decisionmaker. But in no way does he view it as the wrong one.

"From the first conversation I had with his representative, he made it clear money was not an issue, and he wanted to play and make sure he went out the right way," Beane said. "From everything I've heard about Manny, he loves to play. He loves to hit. A lot of guys who play that long, that's the reason. It's obvious by the contract that we negotiated with him."

"At this point in time in his career," Melvin said, "I'd think that he'd want to come in here and be an example."

Manny a low-risk, high-reward option for A's

Move gives Oakland's Beane many different options

By Lyle Spencer / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- The Oakland A's have a long, proud history of acting independently and ignoring society's norms, of responding to their own beat and rhythms without much regard to public opinion.

If that doesn't describe Manny Ramirez, what does?

What we have here is a perfect fit, if you look at it in those terms. A man with 555 career home runs signing a Minor League contract as a non-roster player with a club that spent the winter unloading assets somehow makes sense, in an Oakland kind of way.

"This one is pretty unique," said A's personnel maven Billy Beane, a man well known now beyond baseball's corridors for moving talent around, courtesy of Brad Pitt.

At first blush, the union of Beane and Ramirez seemed baffling. What could they possibly do for each other? The A's are building with youth, virtually from scratch, while Manny is deep in the fourth quarter -- if not overtime -- of a distinguished, highly controversial career.

But then, a moment in the Tuesday afternoon sun at Phoenix Municipal Stadium brought clarity to the whole crazy idea. All it took was a smile from Beane, followed by a one-liner off the cuff.

"What makes you think we'd do something like that?" Beane said, tongue firmly in cheek, when asked if Ramirez could be an attractive trade chip in July or August if he's nailing line drives as Oakland's cleanup man.

There it is. For less than minimum MLB wage -- his \$500,000 contract prorated into the \$340,000 range with his suspension for performance-enhancing drugs -- Ramirez could be used to claim yet another nice young commodity for the future, whether it's in Oakland or San Jose.

For a contender looking for an infusion of offense in late July or late August at the Trade Deadlines, Manny could be an irresistible bargain.

And then there is the possibility, however remote, that all these young athletes Beane has collected in his busy offseason perform beyond all expectations.

If Oakland is still standing after the All-Star break in the loaded American League West, Ramirez -- even with only a few months of at-bats -- probably will have been one of the reasons. Stretching this unlikely scenario even further, Manny is just the guy you'd want leading an improbable charge down the stretch.

Beane and his companions in the Oakland think tank took all those possibilities into consideration before presenting Ramirez with a proposal he couldn't refuse: the opportunity to clean up for 112 games, max, and revive his career.

"We really couldn't find a reason not to do it," Beane said. "It's kind of low risk, high reward. We've got some time to evaluate him, our situation with the younger guys, with no commitment.

"It's foolish not to take a chance."

Manny being Manny, there is no way for Beane or anybody else to get inside his head and understand why he does what he does.

But in this case, it's clear the opportunity offered by the needy A's sealed the deal for the famous slugger coming off a 2011 consisting of five games for the Rays. Ramirez turns 40 on May 30, the day he becomes eligible to play.

Who else could virtually guarantee Ramirez a job cleaning up two months into a season? If Manny yearns to finish his career on better terms, this is a place that welcomes him.

"He just wants the opportunity," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "I haven't spoken to him. He just wants to be part of something and prove himself. Who knows when he leaves the game? Being the competitor he is, he probably feels there's more baseball in him -- and who knows if it's just this year."

Ramirez is a total hitter in a category with Frank Thomas and Albert Pujols from the right side, in Beane's judgment. When he's feeling it, as he was as recently as the second half of 2008 with the Dodgers after departing Boston on terrible terms, Manny can lift a team and carry it.

"Everything I've heard about Manny is that he loves to play," Beane said. "I've heard his work ethic is unparalleled. He's first to hit. He's in the cage all day long. A lot of guys who play that long, that's the reason."

Beane and Co. did their homework before coming to an agreement with Ramirez's representatives, talking with a number of players and personnel familiar with Manny from previous tours with the Indians, Red Sox, Dodgers, White Sox and Rays.

Melvin mentioned how favorably Ramirez impacted Matt Kemp in their time together in Los Angeles. Other commendable reviews came in.

"We tried to take [into account] first-hand experience with him," Beane said, "and everyone we talked to came back with positives.

"To me, it was either going to work or it wasn't going to work. I don't think we were going to get in a competition. We were very patient, and wanted to make sure we were perfectly comfortable."

Beane brushed aside the notion of Manny creating distractions, and was emphatic that this was a baseball move.

"It's really all about production," Beane said. "We'll see. It wasn't a PR move. It was needing a fourth hitter."

Brian Fuentes, hoping to nail down the closing job, is one of the few A's familiar with Ramirez on a competitive level.

"I've faced him a bunch -- when he was Superman in Boston, and the last time in Chicago," Fuentes said. "Hopefully, he's rededicating himself and looking forward to proving himself.

"He's one of the greatest hitters baseball has had. He could mean a lot as a mentor to the younger guys -- and as a force in our lineup."

And if it doesn't work? Adios, amigo.

A's likely to stand pat with bullpen group

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Though bullpen additions for the A's have long been anticipated, it appears the club is set to move forward with their spring campaign as is.

General manager Billy Beane said on Tuesday, just one day after signing Manny Ramirez to a Minor League deal, that the possibility of more moves was "less than 50-50, rather than 50-50," and insisted nothing was imminent.

That statement follows days of speculation surrounding the A's interest in a few relievers, including Texas' Koji Uehara and free agent Mike Gonzalez.

Still, the A's have plenty of relief options in addition to the current core group of Brian Fuentes, Grant Balfour, Joey Devine and Fautino De Los Santos. Jerry Blevins, Pedro Figueroa and Jordan Norberto are options from the left side, while the right side is represented by candidates Andrew Carignan, Ryan Cook and Neil Wagner.

Devine hopes offseason work pays dividends

PHOENIX -- More than three years have passed since Joey Devine stamped his rookie campaign with a 0.59 ERA, a marvel that has since been overshadowed by injury, following his 2009 Tommy John surgery.

The 28-year-old righty insists his elbow is now a non-issue. Ditto for his back, which affected his 2011 performance that spanned 26 games in Oakland and 23 with Triple-A Sacramento. Devine spent the offseason reacquainting himself with the weight room, and enters camp ready to return to his dominating ways as a late-inning relief option.

"I worked hard this offseason to try and get as strong as possible," Devine said. "Ever since pro ball started, I've tried not necessarily to stay out of the weight room, but limit what I do in there -- because I tend to put on bulk pretty [easily]. But I said, I need to get back in and get strong. That's what I did in college, and that became my mindset this offseason, getting back in there and mixing [weights] with cardio."

He's hoping the results equate to an uninterrupted 2012 season. Devine set and accomplished a goal of pitching in 50 games last year -- a realistic number after missing two full seasons -- and now has another one in mind.

"Last year was probably the toughest year of my career, even more than the two years I missed, because it was such a rollercoaster ... ride," he said. "So many ups and downs. But I feel like I'm the strongest I've ever been, and my goal is to be in the big leagues all year, and to be a contributing factor to this team. As far as roles, I'm not too concerned."

That doesn't mean he's indifferent toward the closer role, a job he'll be competing for alongside Brian Fuentes, Grant Balfour and Fautino De Los Santos.

"My vision is always as a closer," Devine said. "I was a closer in college and at all three levels of the Minor Leagues, and did it toward the end of '08."

"At the same time, I look at our bullpen and any bullpen and, typically, if you have a good bullpen, you have five or six guys who can close. Obviously, only one guy is going to be the one who does so in the ninth. But I think there are times to win the game in the seventh, and times to really shut it down in the sixth, seventh, eighth or ninth. Of course, I would love to be the team's closer, and that's what I'm going to work toward. But my biggest thing is going to be to stay healthy, and the rest will take care of itself."

Worth noting

- One day removed from his first bullpen session since undergoing Tommy John surgery, lefty Brett Anderson reported no troubles. Even manager Bob Melvin noted, "Everything but his arm hurts."

Ramirez expected to arrive to A's on Friday

By ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHOENIX — Manny Ramirez is expected to join Oakland at its spring training facility on Friday, yet another part of the Athletics' offseason overhaul.

After trading All-Star pitchers Trevor Cahill and Gio Gonzalez for prospects, the A's signed veteran pitcher Bartolo Colon, re-signed outfielder Coco Crisp, agreed to terms with Cuban outfielder Yoenis Cespedes and added Ramirez.

The A's also dealt A's two-time All-Star closer Andrew Bailey and outfielder Ryan Sweeney to the Boston Red Sox for outfielder Josh Reddick and two minor leaguers.

A's manager Bob Melvin defended the moves Tuesday, saying he avoids using the term "rebuilding," and looks forward to talking to the A's latest addition, who could add much needed power to the middle of the lineup should everything fall into place in Oakland.

INSIDE BASEBALL

Ann Killian: Signing Manny Ramirez another baffling move by the A's

SI.com, 2/22/2012

The Oakland A's are the clown car of baseball, a small market team crammed with weird ideas. Just when you think they've all emerged, another one pops out.

This week 's floppy-shoed, red-nosed development is Manny Ramirez, an almost 40-year-old, two-time drug violator whose last good year was in 2008. The A's agreed to a minor league contract with Ramirez; he's expected to be in camp on Friday.

General manager Billy Beane called the deal "low risk" on Tuesday. And that's true. The A's don't do high-risk financial moves. The A's will only be on the hook for less than \$500,000 when -- if? -- Ramirez joins the major league roster after serving a 50-game suspension.

So, yes, it is low-risk. But the question isn't about risk. It's about why?

Two months ago, the A's were in the process of shredding the foundation of a decent young team, a team built on its strong young pitching staff. That was a team that could have used a big bat to get it over the top.

But this winter Beane dealt two-thirds of his starting rotation, along with his closer Andrew Bailey. The message in December was that the A's were, once again, in rebuilding mode.

Then the calendar flipped to 2012 and -- for whatever reason -- the A's seemed to reverse course. Maybe Beane is too distracted about deciding who to wear on the red carpet at the Academy Awards next weekend but his plans seem to be in flux. He went from rebuilding to ... something else. First, the A's signed Cuban free agent outfielder Yoenis Cespedes in a surprising coup. And now the team has signed one of the great fallen sluggers of our time.

"We really couldn't find a reason not to," Beane said of signing Ramirez.

A's fans have no idea what's going on. Are they trying to win? Trying to sell tickets? Trying to send a message about their desired move to San Jose? Or simply trying to stuff the clown car?

On Tuesday Beane tried to sell this signing as Frank Thomas Redux. "In terms of the Manny signing, the one I'd compare it most to is Frank," Beane said.

Thomas came to the A's in 2006 and led the team to its last playoff berth. But Thomas was two years younger than Ramirez and hadn't already been suspended once and forced to retire once because he had turned up dirty on drug tests. And he joined a team with a pretty solid roster and pitching staff.

That isn't the kind of team Ramirez is joining.

The A's starting rotation has major question marks. Of the remaining starters, both Dallas Braden and Brett Anderson are coming off season-ending surgery. Projected opening-day starter Brandon McCarthy won nine games last year. The A's signed ancient Bartolo Colon to fill the void. And aside from second baseman Jemile Weeks and catcher Kurt Suzuki, it's hard to even guess Oakland's starting lineup.

Since Thomas' productive time in green and gold, Beane has been trying to recreate the experience. The Oakland Coliseum has been a pasture for aging, unproductive sluggers. Mike Piazza grazed there in 2007. In 2009 it was Jason Giambi's turn. Hideki Matsui stopped by in 2011. None of them made an impact.

Will Ramirez? Who knows? Manny hasn't been Manny for a very long time. Now he's going to be asked to help lead a team of kids in a decrepit stadium with a few thousand people in the stands.

It's not exactly Fenway in October. More like a clown car packed with weird ideas.

2012 Top 100 Prospects

Baseball America 2/21/2012

ADDITIONAL TOP 100 PROSPECTS COVERAGE

Jim Callis Column: Seeing where unsigned players would fit in the Top 100

Comps: We ask scouts for comps on this year's Terrific Trio

Hard To Pick: We ask front office officials to tell us who they'd put No. 1

By The Numbers: Breaking down the Top 100 by position, age and other categories

Looking Back: In previous top trios, two usually star, one usually falters

This year's Top 100 Prospects list is a tribute to the power of three.

Our 23rd annual list features an amazing trio of prospects leading the way, with outfielders Bryce Harper and Mike Trout and lefthander Matt Moore. Any of the three could make a legitimate claim to the No. 1 spot this year, so in addition to our ranking of the players, we also turned to a cadre of industry professionals to see how they would line the trio up (see facing page). And we looked back at past power trios to find out how those players worked out.

Our Top 100 Prospects list is the definitive annual ranking of the best professional talent in baseball below the major league level and the culmination of our offseason prospect coverage. Eligibility for the list follows our standard prospect guidelines, which means any player who has not exceeded 130 at-bats, 50 innings or 30 appearances in the major leagues (without regard to service time) is eligible.

Eight people contributed to the voting this year: co-editors Will Lingo and John Manuel, executive editor Jim Callis, managing editor J.J. Cooper, associate editor Matt Eddy, assistant editors Conor Glassey and Nathan Rode, and contributor Matt Forman. Each person compiled a personal top 150, and we reviewed the composite numbers and made adjustments before locking down the final list.

Rk.	Player	Pos., Team	Age	ETA
1	Bryce Harper	of, Nationals	Age: 19.	ETA: 2012.
He should get to the majors as a teenager; settle in and enjoy it.				
2	Matt Moore	lhp, Rays	Age: 22.	ETA: 2012.
He makes it look so easy, and he's so good he'll make David Price a No. 2 starter.				
3	Mike Trout	of, Angels	Age: 20.	ETA: 2012.
His signing scout, Greg Mohrhardt, has since been promoted to Angels crosschecker.				
4	Yu Darvish	rhp, Rangers	Age: 25.	ETA: 2012.
It's hard to moderate expectations for proven Japanese ace, but he should definitely surpass the Dice-K bar.				
5	Julio Teheran	rhp, Braves	Age: 21.	ETA: 2012.
There's absolutely no link between his last name and Darvish's Iranian heritage.				
6	Jesus Montero	c, Mariners	Age: 22.	ETA: 2012.
He should face less pressure replacing Miguel Olivo rather than Jorge Posada.				

7	Jurickson Profar	ss, Rangers	Age: 19.	ETA: 2013	He should beat out golf, cheesy theme parks as Myrtle Beach's top 2012 attraction.
8	Shelby Miller	rhp, Cardinals	Age: 21.	ETA: 2013	He's looking to become the first big leaguer named Shelby, and it should happen soon.
9	Trevor Bauer	rhp, Diamondbacks	Age: 21.	ETA: 2012	The unique ones are the hardest to project, and no one's as unique as Bauer.
10	Dylan Bundy	rhp, Orioles	Age: 19.	ETA: 2013.	First goal: Beat big brother Bobby to Baltimore. Next: Make the Orioles relevant.
11	Manny Machado	ss, Orioles	Age: 19.	ETA: 2013	Power-hitting shortstop can restore honor to the phrase "Manny being Manny."
12	Gerrit Cole	rhp, Pirates	Age: 21.	ETA: 2013.	UCLA's second-best pitcher in 2011 still was good enough to go No. 1 in the draft.
13	Tyler Skaggs	lhp, Diamondbacks	Age: 20.	ETA: 2012.	He didn't get the 200-strikeout memo in 2011 and thought his 198 would be enough.
14	Yoenis Cespedes	of, Athletics	Age: 26.	ETA: 2012.	Athletics hope he works out better than their last blockbuster Cuban, Ariel Prieto.
15	Jameson Taillon	rhp, Pirates	Age: 20.	ETA: 2014.	Ready to throw Pitch 76 as a pro for the first time as Pirates should remove the bubble wrap in 2012.
16	Devin Mesoraco	c, Reds	Age: 23.	ETA: 2012.	The Punxsutawney, Pa., native expects to deliver at least six more years of slugging in Cincinnati.
17	Travis d'Arnaud	c, Blue Jays	Age: 23.	ETA: 2013.	Brother Chase beat him to the big leagues, but Travis' ceiling is higher.
18	Miguel Sano	3b/ss, Twins	Age: 18.	ETA: 2014.	You could see more errors than home runs in his first full season, but over time homers will go up and errors will come down.
19	Anthony Rendon	3b, Nationals	Age: 21.	ETA: 2013.	Even with one good shoulder, he was the top hitter in last year's draft.
20	Taijuan Walker	rhp, Mariners	Age: 19.	ETA: 2014.	Legitimate comparisons to Dwight Gooden (the good, pitching part)? Sign us up.
21	Danny Hultzen	lhp, Mariners	Age: 22.	ETA: 2012.	He's apples to Walker's oranges as a polished college lefty, but he offers plenty of upside himself.
22	Jacob Turner	rhp, Tigers	Age: 20.	ETA: 2012.	Already a graduate of the Rick Porcello school of accelerated Tigers timetables.
23	Mike Montgomery	lhp, Royals	Age: 22.	ETA: 2012.	Bauer's former prep teammate has to beat Bauer to the big leagues,

doesn't he?

24 Bubba Starling of, Royals **Age:** 19. **ETA:** 2015.

Won't even have to reach his ceiling to be baseball's best-ever Bubba (sorry, Bubba Smith).

25 Archie Bradley rhp, Diamondbacks **Age:** 19. **ETA:** 2014

Which Oklahoma prep product will get to the majors Sooner, Bradley or Bundy?

26 Jarrod Parker rhp, Athletics **Age:** 23. **ETA:** 2012.

Could be the next great A's pitcher to be traded away in three years.

27 Carlos Martinez rhp, Cardinals **Age:** 20. **ETA:** 2014.

No matter what his name is, his fastball's one of the minors' best.

28 Wil Myers of, Royals **Age:** 21. **ETA:** 2013.

Gets a mulligan for his injury-plagued 2011 after posting a 1.156 OPS in the AFL.

29 Manny Banuelos lhp, Yankees **Age:** 21. **ETA:** 2012.

Yankees player-development boss Mark Newman compared his poise to Whitey Ford—when Banuelos was 18.

30 Drew Pomeranz lhp, Rockies **Age:** 23. **ETA:** 2012.

Walk rate keeps dropping, from college (4.38 BB/9) to minors (3.74) to majors (2.45).

31 Martin Perez lhp, Rangers **Age:** 21. **ETA:** 2013.

His stuff is special enough that he ranks 31st in spite of a career 20-24, 4.22 record, including a 6.43 ERA in Triple-A last year.

32 Brett Jackson of, Cubs **Age:** 23. **ETA:** 2012.

Steadily moving up the charts (38th on last year's Top 100) like a Foo Fighters song.

33 Yonder Alonso of/1b, Padres **Age:** 24. **ETA:** 2012.

Must be happy to leave left field and backing up Joey Votto behind, even for Petco.

34 Jonathan Singleton 1b/of, Astros **Age:** 20. **ETA:** 2013.

Will move back to first base now that he's no longer stuck behind Ryan Howard.

35 Zack Wheeler rhp, Mets **Age:** 21. **ETA:** 2013.

Will have to pay Paul DePodesta to dress up like Dick Tidrow now that he's a Met.

36 Brad Peacock rhp, Athletics **Age:** 24. **ETA:** 2012.

Joined Parker and other trade acquisitions to make over Athletics farm system in days.

37 Francisco Lindor ss, Indians **Age:** 18. **ETA:** 2014.

Shockingly, he's the fifth Francisco in Top 100 history, but the first hitter (following Cordero, Liriano, Rodriguez and Rosario).

38 Gary Brown of, Giants **Age:** 23. **ETA:** 2013.

He has speed and defense to spare. Now he just has to perform outside the California League.

39 Anthony Gose of, Blue Jays **Age:** 21. **ETA:** 2013.

Physical dead-ringer for Nyjer Morgan has bigger tools than T-Plush.

40 Arodys Vizcaino rhp, Braves **Age:** 21. **ETA:** 2012.

Third trip to the Top 100 for the first Arodys should be the last.

41	Christian Yelich	of, Marlins	Age: 20.	ETA: 2013.	No one cares how you throw when you can hit and run like Yelich.
42	Nolan Arenado	3b, Rockies	Age: 20.	ETA: 2013.	Should be a better version of former Rockies prospect Ian Stewart—less power but more contact.
43	Mike Olt	3b, Rangers	Age: 23.	ETA: 2013.	See, not all the Rangers' top prospects are international signees.
44	Hak-Ju Lee	ss, Rays	Age: 21.	ETA: 2013.	Rays might reverse policy of moving prospects slowly, considering their big league shortstops posted a .539 OPS in 2011.
45	Nick Castellanos	3b, Tigers	Age: 20.	ETA: 2014.	No one will be more interested in the results of Miguel Cabrera's move back to third.
46	Randall Delgado	rhp, Braves	Age: 22.	ETA: 2012.	It feels like the mid-1990s with Atlanta's young pitching depth.
47	Anthony Rizzo	1b, Cubs	Age: 22.	ETA: 2012.	No prospect made as good a ballpark move as Rizzo's in going from Petco to Wrigley.
48	Billy Hamilton	ss, Reds	Age: 21.	ETA: 2014.	Posted the first 100-steal year in the minors in a decade; can he continue to do it at higher levels?
49	Rymer Liriano	of, Padres	Age: 20.	ETA: 2014.	The best ratio of talent to hype in the minors will put up loud Cal League numbers this season.
50	Jarred Cosart	rhp, Astros	Age: 21.	ETA: 2013.	Another key trade piece helping to make over the Astros farm system, he seeks to marry consistency with one of the minors' most electric arms.
51	Will Middlebrooks	3b, Red Sox	Age: 23.	ETA: 2013.	"Middle"brooks was No. 50 before Yoenis Cespedes signed. Pure coincidence.
52	James Paxton	lhp, Mariners	Age: 23.	ETA: 2012.	Long wait for him to begin his professional career was worth it, as fresh Canadian arm was better in 2011 than he had ever been as an amateur.
53	Yasmani Grandal	c, Padres	Age: 23.	ETA: 2013.	Sticks with former Hurricanes teammate Yonder Alonso in moving to San Diego, and likewise avoids a major league roadblock in Mesoraco.
54	Matt Harvey	rhp, Mets	Age: 23.	ETA: 2012.	He has the stuff to outperform recent Tar Heels alumni in a major league rotation, with the bullpen a good fallback option.
55	Jean Segura	ss, Angels	Age: 22.	ETA: 2013.	Premium tools, but just two spots higher than he ranked last year, thanks to hamstring problems.
56	Wily Peralta	rhp, Brewers	Age: 22.	ETA: 2012.	Best Brewers international signing since Juan Nieves? Maybe, though there's not much competition for the honor.
57	A.J. Cole	rhp, Athletics	Age: 20.	ETA: 2014.	

Projectable 6-foot-4, 190-pounder came over in trade with the Nationals and now will play the jeans salesman in "Moneyball II."

58 Xander Bogaerts ss, Red Sox **Age:** 19. **ETA:** 2014.

An Aruba native, Bogaerts apparently is Papiamento for "jaw-dropping, precocious power."

59 George Springer of, Astros **Age:** 22. **ETA:** 2013.

Figures to battle Rangers' Mike Olt for title of best UConn position player in the big leagues.

60 Josh Bell of, Pirates **Age:** 19. **ETA:** 2014.

Still waiting for the addendum to his mom's letter to major league clubs that says, ". . . unless you offer us \$5 million."

61 Javier Baez ss, Cubs **Age:** 19. **ETA:** 2014.

Bat speed, Florida high school shortstop background . . . let the Gary Sheffield comparisons begin.

62 Zach Lee rhp, Dodgers **Age:** 20. **ETA:** 2014.

Would he have made the difference as Les Miles' quarterback against Alabama? Unfortunately for Louisiana State, he really knows how to pitch.

63 Dellin Betances rhp, Yankees **Age:** 24. **ETA:** 2013.

Last year he became the 10th member of New York's 2006 draft class to reach the majors.

64 Matt Szczur of, Cubs **Age:** 22. **ETA:** 2013.

Exciting high-risk, high-reward talent who should take off with football in his rearview mirror.

65 Sonny Gray rhp, Athletics **Age:** 22. **ETA:** 2013.

Following David Price and Mike Minor, Gray should be next Commodore to sail on to the majors.

66 Addison Reed rhp, White Sox **Age:** 23. **ETA:** 2012.

Making his own way after being known as Stephen Strasburg's closer in college.

67 Jake Marisnick of, Blue Jays **Age:** 21. **ETA:** 2014.

Scouts doubted his bat as an amateur, but he's putting those doubts to rest.

68 Jake Odorizzi rhp, Royals **Age:** 22. **ETA:** 2013.

Part of the Royals' "next wave," which would be really their first wave of arms.

69 Trevor May rhp, Phillies **Age:** 22. **ETA:** 2014.

While he's not a finished product, you just can't ignore 11.88 SO/9 IP over his career. At least we can't.

70 Taylor Jungmann rhp, Brewers **Age:** 22. **ETA:** 2013.

His career 1.85 college ERA could double and he'd still be an effective pro.

71 Jed Bradley lhp, Brewers **Age:** 21. **ETA:** 2013.

Jungmann's wing man was drafted three spots later and sticks with him in Top 100 as well.

72 Blake Swihart c, Red Sox **Age:** 20. **ETA:** 2014.

He'd be on the list even if he couldn't catch thanks to his hitting ability.

73 Starling Marte of, Pirates **Age:** 23. **ETA:** 2013.

Good enough defensively to spur talk of pushing Andrew McCutchen to a corner.

74 Oscar Taveras of, Cardinals **Age:** 19. **ETA:** 2014.

Granted, it was only the Midwest League, but the highest average (.386) in the loop since 1956 is enough to get your attention.

75 Zack Cozart ss, Reds **Age:** 26. **ETA:** 2012.

Big league ready for most of the last two years; just needs to stay healthy.

76 Casey Kelly rhp, Padres **Age:** 22. **ETA:** 2013.

No longer young for his age, his stuff is fine, but it's time for him to produce.

77 Nick Franklin ss/2b, Mariners **Age:** 21. **ETA:** 2013.

Switch-hitting middle infielder with power needs to show 2011 was the fluke, not 2010.

78 Cory Spangenberg 2b, Padres **Age:** 21. **ETA:** 2013.

Athleticism, speed, hitting ability and a strong pro debut make him the minors' best second-base prospect.

79 Leonys Martin of, Rangers **Age:** 24. **ETA:** 2012.

He's likely good enough to beat out Julio Borbon, David Murphy in Texas, but will he be a star or just solid?

80 Michael Choice of, Athletics **Age:** 22. **ETA:** 2013.

Presents the classic tradeoff of huge strikeout totals for large home run totals.

81 Gary Sanchez c, Yankees **Age:** 19. **ETA:** 2014.

Took hits for his defensive ability and makeup in his first full season, but dished them out with his bat.

82 Jonathan Schoop inf, Orioles **Age:** 20. **ETA:** 2014.

His power potential and infield actions are far beyond his brother Sharlon's.

83 Garrett Richards rhp, Angels **Age:** 23. **ETA:** 2012.

He has the stuff for the front of a rotation, if not yet the command or polish.

84 Cheslor Cuthbert 3b, Royals **Age:** 19. **ETA:** 2014.

Hit his way from Nicaragua's Corn Islands to our Top 100; if he stays at third, he'll be special.

85 Mason Williams of, Yankees **Age:** 20. **ETA:** 2014.

Heads up a deep, athletic group of Yankees prospects headed to low Class A Charleston.

86 Chad Bettis rhp, Rockies **Age:** 22. **ETA:** 2013.

Tyler Matzek and other premium Colorado draft arms need to figure out what Bettis is doing.

87 Wilin Rosario c, Rockies **Age:** 23. **ETA:** 2013.

His prospect stock took a tumble when his performance slipped post-knee surgery, but he still offers power and defense.

88 Zack Cox 3b, Cardinals **Age:** 22. **ETA:** 2013.

Should be a steady performer at third at a minimum, but will need to show more power to be a premium player.

89 Chris Archer rhp, Rays **Age:** 23. **ETA:** 2013.

Still needs to prove his 2010 breakout wasn't a fluke, and might have

more impact in the bullpen.

90 Taylor Guerrieri	rhp, Rays	Age:	ETA:
		19.	2015.

High risk, but brings substantial upside to an organization known for developing pitchers.

91 Daniel Norris	lhp, Blue Jays	Age:	ETA:
		18.	2015.

Toronto has tremendous pitching depth, and even though power lefty Norris hasn't debuted yet he still tops the list.

92 Andrelton Simmons	ss, Braves	Age:	ETA:
		22.	2014.

Age-appropriate Carolina League batting champs who can defend are good bets.

93 Kolten Wong	2b, Cardinals	Age:	ETA:
		21.	2013.

Similar profile to Cory Spangenberg, with less speed but perhaps more polish.

94 Tyrell Jenkins	rhp, Cardinals	Age:	ETA:
		19.	2014.

One of Jeff Luhnow's parting gifts to St. Louis was drafting this premium athlete in 2010.

95 Allen Webster	rhp, Dodgers	Age:	ETA:
		22.	2013.

Despite low budgets, the Dodgers have scored in the draft with under-the-radar finds like Webster.

96 Nate Eovaldi	rhp, Dodgers	Age:	ETA:
		22.	2012.

Dodgers have intriguing arms to build around, if new ownership gives them the money to do so.

97 Matt Davidson	3b/1b, Diamondbacks	Age:	ETA:
		21.	2013.

Pushing his way past Diamondbacks draft peer Bobby Borcherding as a power-hitting third baseman.

98 Jedd Gyorko	3b, Padres	Age:	ETA:
		23.	2013.

Could be the best hitter from the state of West Virginia since Nick Swisher posted a .909 OPS in the minors.

99 Joe Benson	of, Twins	Age:	ETA:
		24.	2012.

Ready for his Target Field closeup . . . so he's probably headed to Rochester.

100 Christian Villanueva	3b, Rangers	Age:	ETA:
		20.	2014.

Best Hickory Crawdads third baseman since Jose Bautista in 2002.

Oakland A's: 5 Prospects to Make A's Fans Forget About Gio Gonzalez

Gean May, fowlernews.com, 2/21/2012

It's not exactly the same as before, but the losses of starting pitchers Trevor Cahill and Gio Gonzalez has to have A's fans shaking their heads. When Tim Hudson, Mark Mulder and eventually Barry Zito moved on, it sent a message on how things are done in Oakland.

Billy Beane will squeeze every last drop of talent out of a player and get them to reach their full potential.

Once this happens though, other teams start to notice and Beane is forced to sell, and he starts the process all over again.

Following is a list of prospects that eventually might have fans asking, "Gio who?" You never know, Beane knows talent and he's done it before.

Jarrold Parker

Baseball Newshound.com compares Jarrod Parker to Rich Harden and Tim Hudson. The hard throwing right-handed

pitcher was acquired in the Trevor Cahill trade.

Parker was the ninth pick in the 2007 MLB Amateur June Draft. He has a nice fastball with a filthy slider and has developed a change-up to go along with his two money pitches.

Parker's durability may be a question mark, as he has already had Tommy John Surgery.

Brad Peacock

Acquired in the Gio Gonzalez trade, Peacock was not a high draft pick like Parker (41st round, 2006). The A's are hoping he can eventually fill the No. 2 or No. 3 spot for the club.

Peacock does have command issues, but he has a huge upside that could help the A's in the future.

Sonny Gray

Sonny Gray is another guy that can help with the two or three spot in the rotation.

He's a young pup that the A's took with their first pick in the 2011 draft.

A good solid fastball and curveball make this right-handed pitcher someone to look forward to.

Michael Choice

know he's not a pitcher, but just in case you forgot, the A's need bats and this guy could be the slugger of the future for the A's.

In 2011 Choice hit 30 home runs in Stockton with a .285 batting average.

The A's did keep Coco Crisp, but this kid could be the future in the outfield for the A's.

Ian Krol

Ian Krol is a long shot with a history of elbow problems and acting a fool.

Krol served a suspension for an anti-gay tweet, and coupled with an elbow injury, he missed most of the 2011 season.

He is a lefty, and every team needs lefties. You really don't know with this guy, but Billy Beane sees something in this kid.

Beane adding Manny a perfectly A's solution

Ray Ratto, csnbayarea.com

PHOENIX -- Manny Ramirez is the perfectly A's solution we have seen before -- the ultraveteran with some dents in the frame and some recurring carburetion issues who might have one more year before the lemon squeezes out.

You know, like Frank Thomas on the high side, and Ben Sheets on the low.

He is indeed high reward-no risk for Wm. Lamar Beane, in that if he shows his best Manny, Beane gets some badly needed wizard points, and conversely if he has nothing left, well, he had nothing left.

That's the blunt truth of the signing -- one year, minus 30.8 percent for his 50-game suspension, and \$500,000 -- as close to the minimum as someone with Ramirez's resume will ever accept. It isn't a long-term solution to anything, nor is it the jump the A's need to get from the also-est of rans to division contender.

But it also isn't the quick-fix crowdpleaser that will turn those 25,000 empty chairs every night to concessions-sponge humans, either. It really is a deal that seems bigger than it actually is.

And no, we're not diving into the Manny-Being-Manny stuff here. One thing about showmen you can always count on is that they are less likely to put on a show when there aren't enough people willing to pay to view it. Ramirez also isn't playing for \$500K because he needs the money; by the accounts of those who know him, he is very careful with his cash -- no Allen Iverson he.

So the "seems bigger than it is" thing actually works both ways. This signing may get Ramirez seen by another team with pennant concerns come the trade-for-prospects deadline, but isn't in and of itself anything other than Ramirez going out with less of the shame of his last suspension. You know, the one where he went down last May while foundering in Tampa and was believed to be utterly and completely finished as a player.

Well, that didn't turn out -- one more lesson for those among us who like to declare someone's career over before it is. Ramirez can report to A's camp, work out in spring training and extended spring training, as well as begin a minor league rehab 10 games before being called up to the big team.

And so he shall, once the A's get around to announcing his signing, getting him to Papago Park and fitting him for his trademark oversized uniform. He will be available to provide designated hitting starting May 30 if there are no rainouts, and after that, he and his career will be day-to-day.

But that's the frustrating part for A's fans who want to see the master plan actually implemented and unfurled. Ramirez isn't part of that, and everyone understands that. He is one more part-timer who once was a big-timer, going back to Jason Kendall in 2005, Thomas in '06 and '08, Mike Piazza in '07, Mike Sweeney in '08, Nomar Garciaparra and Jason Giambi in '09, Sheets in '10 and Hideki Matsui last year.

Of those, only Thomas in '06 turned out to be worthy of the hype and the cash, leading the A's to their only ALCS since 1992. The others were as done as expected, and there is no particular reason to believe Ramirez will cheat the reaper either.

Except that he might, and if he does . . . well, there we go, getting drawn in again. High reward, low risk.

Five Spring Training storylines for Giants, A's

Rael Enteen, csnbayarea.com

With pitchers and catchers set to report to Arizona, it's time to examine five Spring Training storylines for both the [Giants](#) and [A's](#).

San Francisco Giants

Is Brian Wilson's arm back to full strength?

All the offseason talk surrounding the Giants involves Buster Posey's health, offensive improvements, and contract talks with Tim Lincecum and Matt Cain. But let's not forget that [Brian Wilson](#) did not pitch in a game from Aug. 15 to Sept. 18 with elbow issues. Even when on the mound, Wilson did not have the velocity or control that made him one of the game's most intimidating closers in 2010. While Wilson claims he feels fine, the Giants plan to hold him out of early Spring Training game action. A healthy Wilson gives the Giants a leg up in all the one-run games that are likely to litter their N.L. West schedule. But if Wilson still isn't one hundred percent healed, the Giants' bullpen -- and chances to return to the playoffs -- would take a major hit.

Will Buster Posey look like he did in 2010 when he returns?

I haven't seen [Buster Posey](#)'s latest X-rays, but if we are to believe him and the Giants' staff, Posey should be ready to start behind the plate on Opening Day. However, the Giants need Posey to do more than just start; they need him to produce like the middle-of-the-order threat he was in 2010. If Posey's health keeps him out of the lineup too often or if his bat speed and core strength isn't yet up to par with where it once was, the Giants' offense will be in trouble.

Will Brandon Crawford establish himself as a starting shortstop?

While his glove is obviously big-league caliber, [Brandon Crawford](#)'s bat leaves a lot to be desired. The offensively starved Giants can hardly afford a hole in the lineup, and Crawford, in all likelihood, is just that. But a strong showing in Spring Training could give the UCLA product a confidence boost heading into the regular season, which he needs if he expects to avoid a return trip to the minor leagues.

Is Aubrey Huff in shape and ready to return to his 2010 form?

From MVP candidate in 2010 to laughing stock in 2011, [Aubrey Huff](#) has had an interesting two years in Orange and Black. Whether it's the pilates routine or cutting down on the cigarettes and cheap beer, we're already hearing plenty of 'Best Shape of His Life' stories about Huff heading into Spring Training. But even if Huff arrives in Arizona looking like Mr. Universe, there are legitimate concerns that he is too far past his prime to rebound and produce like he did in 2010.

Will Brandon Belt make the 25-man roster?

[Brandon Belt](#) had a tough rookie season. He struggled at the plate to start his Major League career and just when he started to get hot, an injury derailed his momentum. Huff's Spring Training performance will help Brian Sabean and Bruce Bochy decide what to do with Belt, who has the potential to start at first base, in left field or in Fresno if things don't go his way.

Oakland A's

Is Yoenis Cespedes the real deal?

The A's turned what looked to be a dull team into a must-watch product when they signed Cuban defector Yoenis Cespedes to a four-year deal. The international spotlight will be on the 26-year-old slugger as soon as he reports to Spring Training. While he has faced some Major League pitching in the 2009 World Baseball Classic, most of Cespedes' monster numbers have come against inferior competition. How he fares against MLB starters looking to get their Spring Training work in should give fans a glimpse of what type of player he will be in the big leagues.

What will the starting lineup and rotation look like?

Before the Cespedes signing, the A's may have started the season with Coco Crisp batting in the middle of the order. Even with Cespedes on board, there are a lot of questions about who will bat where. Other than speedster [Jemile Weeks](#) in the leadoff spot, the rest of the lineup remains a mystery. The same goes for the starting rotation. Brandon McCarthy and Bartolo Colon are scheduled to open the season against the Mariners in Japan, but the 3-5 starters are still up in the air. Will Dallas Braden be healthy enough to join the rotation some time in April? Will Tommy Milone, Tyson Ross and/or Graham Godfrey stake a claim to a slot? While Spring Training lineups and rotations will feature a few players unlikely to end up playing in Oakland during the regular season, manager Bob Melvin should provide some hints as to what his 1-9 and 1-5 will look like come Opening Day.

What can Bob Melvin do with a full season at the helm?

Melvin went 47-52 in the final 99 games of the 2011 season after taking over for the fired Bob Geren in June of last season. He took over a team that was decimated by injuries and filled with players that had issues with their previous manager. With that in mind, Melvin getting the A's to play near-.500 ball is pretty impressive. While he will start the season with a clean slate, he is also dealing with less talent on the roster with the departures of Gio Gonzalez and Trevor Cahill, among others. While Spring Training won-loss records are meaningless, it will be interesting to watch Melvin work in his first season in Arizona as the A's manager.

Is Bartolo Colon capable of repeating his 2011 season?

[Bartolo Colon](#) can't fill the void left by Gio Gonzalez and Trevor Cahill on the mound, but he will surely try to at the clubhouse buffet table. Sorry, pardon the cheap shot. Colon, the 2005 Cy Young award winner with the Angels, had an impressive season with the Yankees in 2011 after not pitching in the majors in 2010. He went 8-10 with a 4.00 ERA against some tough offenses in the A.L. East. The A's don't seem to have an 'ace' for 2011, but they will need Colon to come into Spring Training as in shape as he possibly can and put up numbers at least as good as he did last season in pinstripes.

Will the A's new prospects be ready to contribute immediately?

Brad Peacock, A.J. Cole, Tommy Milone, Derek Norris, [Jarrod Parker](#), Collin Cowgill, Ryan Cook and Josh Reddick are among the plethora of prospects that are now part of the A's system after general manager Billy Beane shipped away players like Gonzalez, Cahill, Andrew Bailey, Ryan Sweeney and Craig Breslow. Many of these players need some more minor league seasoning, putting them in line for major roles with the A's in 2014 and beyond, when the team hopes to land a new stadium in San Jose. However, some of the acquisitions may get a shot to contribute right away. There is no doubt the loss of such fan-favorites as Cahill and Gonzalez will hurt, but if some of the youngsters put together a strong Spring Training and make the Opening Day roster, it could help fans with their postpartum depression.

Is Cespedes Oakland's Lin?

Ray Ratto, csnbayarea.com

This did not occur to me when it should have, which is not unusual, but watching Jeremy Lin up his own ante yet again Tuesday night in Toronto caused the small Christmas-tree-sized bulb signifying a freshly-hatched half-formed idea to illuminate itself overhead late last night.

Football has The Tebow. Basketball has The Lin. Baseball has to find its own now. And frankly, the team best positioned to make this otherworldly play is the downtrodden'est of all, your Oakland Athletics.

The Elephants have chosen as a management strategy to beat themselves with tire chains for the past six years waiting for a new stadium to magically appear in San Jose. Between that and some odd hires and personnel decisions, the most spirited arguing about the team this year has been reduced to whether it can reach the magical 70-win mark.

Enter Yoenis Cespedes, the likeliest new gift from our galactic overlords.

He fits the twin profiles of Tim Tebow and Jeremy Lin for extraterrestrial arrivals. He toiled in Cuba, which is much further away from the mainstream baseball firmament than it should be, for political reasons. He made his name putting up very good but difficult-to-translate numbers in the Cuban league, and a workout tape that made him seem more Borg than human. He was a much-desired commodity among teams that typically throw money around, only to fall to the team still working on the barter system.

If you replace Cuba with Yale, the workout tape with the combine, Cuban baseball with the SEC and the Ivy League, and throw in the A's as the once-proud but since-modest operation to compare with the Broncos and Knicks . . .

Well, okay. Maybe you have to squint to do it, but there is good reason to wonder why football, which doesn't need Tebowmania to make its monthly nut, or basketball, which just went to the trouble of closing up shop to break its union, got help from another planet while baseball has to do with Earthlings alone.

And the answer is, it doesn't.

Now we grant you there is some pretty fevered mythmaking going on with Tebow and Lin, to the point where they are now almost pitted against each other in a "Whose Phenomenon Is Better?" reality show. Somewhere, an attractive female celebrity is being warmed up in the bullpen as a potential romantic interest for Lin, since the Knicks were for a time the Kardashians' Stop-And-Shop, and because Tebow was linked for a time in a huge and ultimately untenable stretch with Katy Perry.

But as the Internet has shown us time and again, there is plenty of frantic off-your-meds hyperbole to go around for everyone, and logic suggests that if football, which didn't need Tim Tebow, got him, and basketball, which just devalued its labor stock, got Lin, why baseball, which has had labor peace for decades now, can't have its.

Of course, golf had Tiger, but that gift has been spent, and tennis runs through its best at a faster and faster pace. And hockey . . . well, it has plenty of teams in need, lots of unlikely places from which to unearth a Kryptonian spaceship crashed in the woods, and Edmonton has had the two most recent tries in Taylor Hall and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, but we're getting off the topic here.

This is baseball's chance to get its piece of "Eureka!" action, and Cespedes seems the logical choice. I mean, we'd say the Mets because they're so laughably destitute, but any good player to emerge from there would be tagged and bagged as part of the Madoff lawsuit, and it's hard to get lyrical about that. Kansas City and Pittsburgh could use a nice jump-start too, but there's only so much paranormal intervention a sport is entitled to – one to a customer seems the current ratio.

So, with full knowledge that Lins and Tebows are best formed from accident and circumstance, and that predicting the next one is the same as dooming the next one, let us propose Yoenis Cespedes anyway. He fits the profile, and we haven't had a healthy round of "What Athlete X's Rise To Fame Means To Me" stories in what, 17 hours?

Quakes stadium looms large for Wolff, A's

Ann Killion,csnbayarea.com

Lew Wolff is waiting to hear about a stadium in San Jose this week.

No, not that one.

The A's stadium in San Jose -- which is in the infancy stage -- gets all the headlines. But Wolff is much further along with plans for a soccer stadium for the San Jose Earthquakes.

On Wednesday night the San Jose Planning Commission is expected to make a decision on the building permit.

The permit was approved in December but was appealed by a neighborhood group.

The \$60 million, 18,000-seat Earthquakes stadium is the canary in the coal mine for Wolff. How this process goes could very much impact his plans to build a \$500 million baseball stadium in the same city, dealing with the same planning department and same public.

The history of the project shows just how difficult it is to get even a small stadium built that will host only 30-35 events a year.

A quick review of the Earthquakes' stadium plans would put anyone off from assuming they can be watching baseball in San Jose within the next few years.

Thoughts that the four-year contract the A's just gave Yoenis Cespedes could take the A's into a new ballpark? Well, maybe into the first round of neighborhood appeals.

The Earthquakes stadium was proposed in 2007 as part of larger mixed-use plan, complete with retail and a hotel. By 2008 the plan was reduced to a smaller site. By 2009, in the midst of a cratering economy, Wolff backed away from his planned 2012 opening date. Finally, in early January of 2011, Wolff submitted an application for a development permit. That was approved in December.

But in January a neighborhood group appealed, saying the impact of noise and lights hasn't been properly analyzed and that some of the language in the permit is too vague.

So even a small plot of industrial land hard by an airport and railroad tracks is going to face obstacles.

If the planning permit is approved tonight, the team will still have to apply for a building permit.

Anyone who is surprised that the process of getting any kind of a stadium built in California takes this long must be a) new here or b) not paying attention.

For five years Wolff and associates have had to play nice, massage the process and accommodate everybody for the rights to build a soccer stadium.

But the real goal isn't a soccer stadium. The real prize lies ahead.

Read more: [Quakes stadium looms large for Wolff, A's](#)

Tune to SportsNet Central at 6, 10:30 and midnight on Comcast SportsNet Bay Area for more on this story

2012 MLB Draft Top 100 Prospects 1.0

Frankie Piliere, ScoutingBaseball.com

Feb 21, 2012

The 2012 MLB Draft is more than three months away, but the scouting season is in full swing as college and many high school seasons are underway. The 2012 class is shaping up to be a strong one on the high school side, but appears to be wide open when it comes to the top college talent. Inside is our first '12 top-100 draft prospects list, which is likely to change quite a bit between now and June

The strength of the 2012 MLB Draft is clearly going to be its high school bats. In the early going it doesn't seem that we'll see the type of college pitching that we saw drafted in 2011. The top of the class is much more in flux than it was in 2011, but despite its weaknesses, this is not a draft to be underestimated.

Not only are the high school bats a strength, but the pitching from the high school side is quite a deep crop as well. Beyond Lucas Giolito, there may not be a Dylan Bundy in the lot of them, but there will be power arms available well beyond the top couple rounds.

Scouts will also spend the spring looking for some more college bats. Beyond players like Mike Zunino and Deven Marrero, polished collegiate hitters are not quite as plentiful this year as they've been in years past.

With all that said, we present to you Scout's first Top 100 Prospects list for the 2012 MLB Draft. This list will be updated several times between now and June, and first-hand scouting reports will continue to be added. Subscribe today and keep up with all of our extensive draft coverage throughout the season.

1. **Mark Appel**, RHP, **Stanford** - **Scouting Report**
2. **Lucas Giolito**, RHP, Harvard-Westlake H.S. (Calif.)
3. **Byron Buxton**, OF, Appling County H.S. (Ga.)
4. **Mike Zunino**, C, **Florida** - **Scouting Report**
5. **Max Fried**, LHP, Harvard-Westlake H.S. (Calif.) - **Scouting Report**
6. **David Dahl**, OF, Oak Mountain H.S. (Ala.) - **Scouting Report**
7. **Deven Marrero**, SS, **Arizona State** - **Scouting Report**
8. **Victor Roache**, OF, Georgia Southern - **Scouting Report**
9. **Chris Beck**, RHP, Georgia Southern
10. **Walker Weickel**, RHP, Olympia H.S. (Fla.) - **Scouting Report**
11. **Joey Gallo**, OF, Bishop Gorman H.S. (Nev.) - **Scouting Report**
12. **Kevin Gausman**, RHP, Louisiana State - **Scouting Report**
13. **Stephen Piscotty**, 3B, Stanford - **Scouting Report**
14. **Trey Williams**, 3B, Valencia H.S. (Calif.) - **Scouting Report**
15. **Michael Wacha**, RHP, Texas A&M
16. **Kyle Zimmer**, RHP, San Francisco
17. **Richie Shaffer**, 1B/3B, **Clemson** - **Scouting Report**
18. **Matt Smoral**, LHP, Solon H.S. (Ohio) - **Scouting Report**
19. **Tanner Rahier**, SS, Palm Desert H.S. (Calif.) - **Scouting Report**
20. **Lance McCullers**, RHP, Jesuit H.S. (Fla.) - **Scouting Report**
21. **Carlos Correa**, SS, Puerto Rico Baseball Academy - **Scouting Report**
22. **Ty Hensley**, RHP, Santa Fe H.S. (Okla.) - **Scouting Report**
23. **Nolan Sanburn**, RHP, **Arkansas**
24. **Carson Kelly**, 3B, Westview H.S. (Ore.) - **Scouting Report**
25. **Brian Johnson**, 1B/LHP, Florida
26. **Lucas Sims**, RHP, Brookwood H.S. (Ga.)
27. **Travis Jankowski**, OF, Stony Brook - **Scouting Report**
28. **Addison Russell**, SS, Pace H.S. (Fla.) - **Scouting Report**
29. **Gavin Cecchini**, SS, Barbe H.S. (La.)
30. **Marcus Stroman**, RHP, **Duke** - **Scouting Report**

31. Taylor Cherry, RHP, Butler H.S. (Ohio) - Scouting Report
32. Albert Almora, OF, Mater Academy (Fla.) - Scouting Report
33. Courtney Hawkins, OF, Carroll H.S. (Tex.)
34. Mitchell Traver, RHP, Houston Christian (Tex.) - Scouting Report
35. Kenny Diekroeger, SS, Stanford
36. Ty Buttrey, RHP, Providence H.S. (N.C.)
37. Adam Brett Walker, OF, Jacksonville
38. Rio Ruiz, 3B, Bishop Amat (Calif.)
39. Hunter Virant, LHP, Camarillo H.S. (Calif.) - Scouting Report
40. Branden Kline, RHP, Virginia
41. Nick Williams, OF, Ball H.S. (Tex.) - Scouting Report
42. Jake Barrett, RHP, Arizona State
43. Tyler Naquin, OF, Texas A&M
44. Jesse Winker, OF, Olympia H.S. (Fla.) - Scouting Report
45. Duane Underwood, RHP, Pope H.S. (Ga.)
46. Josh Henderson, OF, Home Schooled - Scouting Report
47. Shane Watson, RHP, Lakewood H.S. (Calif.)
48. Andrew Heaney, LHP, Oklahoma State - Scouting Report
49. C.J. Hinojosa, SS, Klein Collins H.S. (Tex.)
50. Lewis Brinson, OF, Coral Springs H.S. (Fla.)
51. Stephen Johnson, RHP, St. Edward's University
52. Zach Eflin, RHP, Hagerty H.S. (Fla.)
53. J.T. Chargois, RHP, Rice
54. Freddy Avis, RHP, Menlo School (Calif.)
55. Rhett Wiseman, OF, BB & N (Mass.) - Scouting Report
56. Nolan Fontana, SS, Florida
57. Brady Rodgers, RHP, Arizona State
58. Lex Rutledge, LHP, Samford
59. Jesmuel Valentin Diaz, SS, Puerto Rico Baseball Academy - Scouting Report
60. Corey Seager, SS, Northwest Cabarrus H.S. (N.C.)
61. Dylan Baker, RHP, Western Nevada College
62. Clate Schmidt, RHP, Allatoona H.S. (Ga.) - Scouting Report
63. Damien Magnifico, RHP, Oklahoma - Scouting Report
64. Tom Murphy, C, Buffalo
65. Nick Travieso, RHP, Archbishop McCarthy (Fla.)
66. Austin Fairchild, LHP, St. Thomas H.S. (Tex.) - Scouting Report
67. Fernando Perez, 3B, Central Arizona - Scouting Report
68. Cody Poteet, RHP, Christian H.S. (Calif.)
69. Martin Agosta, RHP, Saint Mary's College
70. R.J. Alvarez, RHP, Florida Atlantic
71. Hudson Randall, RHP, Florida
72. Ryan McNeil, RHP, Nipomo H.S. (Calif.) - Scouting Report
73. Patrick Wisdom, 3B, Saint Mary's College
74. Buck Farmer, RHP, Georgia Tech
75. Carson Fulmer, RHP, All Saints Academy (Fla.) - Scouting Report
76. Clint Coulter, C, Union H.S. (Wash.)
77. Brandon Thomas, OF, Georgia Tech
78. Eddie Butler, RHP, Radford - Scouting Report
79. Avery Romero, SS, Pedro Menendez H.S. (Fla.) - Scouting Report
80. Stryker Trahan, C, Acadiana (Ga.) - Scouting Report
81. Tyler Gonzales, RHP, James Madison H.S. (Tex.)
82. Teddy Stankiewicz, RHP, Fort Worth Christian (Tex.) - Scouting Report
83. Tony Renda, 2B, California
84. Hoby Milner, LHP, Texas
85. Josh Conway, RHP, Coastal Carolina
86. Jeremy Baltz, OF, St. John's
87. Josh Elander, C, Texas Christian

88. Pat Light, RHP, Monmouth
89. Kyle Hansen, RHP, St. John's
90. Anthony Alford, OF, Petal H.S. (Miss.)
91. Keon Barnum, 1B, King H.S. (Fla.)
92. D.J. Baxendale, RHP, Arkansas
93. Brett Mooneyham, LHP, Stanford
94. Daniel Starwait, RHP, Granite Hills H.S. (Calif.)
95. Zeb Sneed, RHP, Northwest Nazarene
96. Jamie Callahan, RHP, Dillon H.S. (S.C.) - Scouting Report
97. Barrett Barnes, OF, Texas Tech
98. Kevin Brady, RHP, Clemson
99. Alex Wood, LHP, Georgia
100. Robert Whalen, RHP, Haines City H.S. (Fla.)