

## **A's News Clips, Friday, February 24, 2012**

### **National media spotlight awaits Manny Ramirez' arrival to Oakland A's camp**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

PHOENIX — A big media turnout is expected Friday when Manny Ramirez reports to camp, and his presence will garner the A's more national attention than they've been accustomed to.

Manager Bob Melvin, for one, welcomes it.

"We could use a little excitement around here," he said. "At times we can lack for notoriety."

The A's haven't made the playoffs or posted a winning record since 2006. Since then, their time in the national spotlight has usually revolved around their quest to move to San Jose or the "Moneyball" movie.

The addition of Ramirez, who signed a minor league deal Monday, should change that -- at least for the short term. Once the regular season begins, Ramirez must serve a 50-game suspension for his second violation of Major League Baseball's drug policy.

For now, Ramirez will be a hot story.

"I think exposure is good," A's reliever Brian Fuentes said. "Obviously you want to have a large fan base. There might be guys who are big Manny fans who become A's fans. It's always good to be noticed. But I'm more concerned with our play on the field than how much media attention we're getting."

Catching prospect Max Stassi is just 20, but he's already participating in his third big league spring camp.

This one holds plenty of significance for the Yuba City native. Stassi is returning from surgery last May on his throwing shoulder that sidelined him for the remainder of the season.

He's hopeful the procedure cures an injury that dated back to his senior year in high school.

"It really cleared out my head getting the shoulder thing out of the way," Stassi said. "It would feel good and feel bad. It was a nonstop cycle."

Stassi was one of the top prep players in the 2009 draft. He had committed to UCLA and was considered a tough sign, but the A's took him in the fourth round and gave him a \$1.5 million bonus -- first-round money -- to persuade him to sign.

He's expected to begin this season at Single-A Stockton.

The A's will play an intrasquad game Thursday. They open Cactus League play the next day against the Mariners at Phoenix Municipal Stadium.

### **Coco Crisp not giving up Oakland A's center field job without a fight**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

PHOENIX -- Defense is a big part of Coco Crisp's game, but he never expected to be defending his job.

When the A's agreed to a four-year, \$36 million contract with Cuban outfielder Yoenis Cespedes on Feb. 13, they provided one juicy storyline regarding the center field position.

Do they stick with Crisp, the veteran who has patrolled center with such efficiency when healthy over the past two seasons? Or do they insert Cespedes, letting their prized acquisition play his natural spot, and shift Crisp to left field?

Crisp is confident he's the best option for center but proclaimed himself ready for competition.

"If anybody is better than me, I'll give him that," Crisp said. " ... I'll take my cap off. But if you're not, then I'll say that too."

It's a delicate issue and one that won't likely be resolved until A's officials get an extended look at Cespedes, 26, in exhibition games.

He defected from Cuba and was declared a free agent after establishing residency in the Dominican Republic. But he can't report to camp until he obtains a worker's visa and his contract gets finalized, which the A's hope will happen in the next week or so.

Several factors come into play with the center field decision.

Crisp is as sure-handed as they come and has impressive range to help compensate for a below-average arm.

But Cespedes is believed to have power and speed and is said to be the best position-player prospect to come out of Cuba in a generation.

If the A's want him to thrive as he transitions to a new country and increased competition level, they may want him to play his most comfortable position.

"It's a fine line," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "Coco's a good center fielder. And I think (the O.co Coliseum) is one of the more difficult parks to play center field in during the day. If another player comes in that you expect to be a center fielder and that's what he's done his whole career, you take a look at that. You play some games and do some things and make decisions probably later."

Crisp, a 10-year veteran, was asked about the possibility of moving from center in order to make a younger player feel more comfortable.

"Of course I can see that, but I'm not going to be happy with that," he said.

One option is to install Cespedes in center and shift Crisp to left -- Crisp has big league experience there. But if Cespedes' arm is as strong as reports indicate, it might make sense for Oakland to try him in right and keep Crisp in center.

Josh Reddick is a strong candidate to be the A's other starting outfielder, and the A's believe Reddick can handle all three outfield spots.

Crisp has earned the confidence of his teammates in center.

"I don't know if there's anyone else who can go get a ball as good as he can," third baseman Scott Sizemore said. "If it was my vote, he's going to be out there."

A's pitcher Dallas Braden said the situation is murky because Cespedes is an unknown quantity.

"I don't know Cespedes from Adam, but according to YouTube, he's a tremendous talent," Braden said. "When you're thinking about a guy that's as talented as Cespedes, and Coco is proven, it's a win-win."

Crisp, a free agent this past winter, said he received multiyear offers from St. Louis and Tampa Bay, among other teams. He also said he thought he was bound for the Rays until Oakland came in with a two-year \$14 million offer.

"The thing that kind of swayed it was the financial situation," Crisp said.

He said he's excited about the A's roster, especially if Cespedes proves to be the middle-of-the-order threat as he's projected.

But Crisp must iron out one detail before Cespedes arrives.

"I swear I'm gonna get his name wrong," he said. "I'm just gonna call him 'C'."

## **Ian Krol says he's matured since slur suspension**

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

**Ian Krol** is back on the field with the A's minor-leaguers, older and, the team hopes, a little wiser.

The left-hander, the A's organizational pitcher of the year in 2010, was suspended for more than two months last season after a tweet that included a homophobic slur. On Thursday, the 20-year-old was thrilled to be suiting up for a minicamp for pitchers and catchers, and he said he has grown up quite a bit after his punishment.

"I screwed up," Krol said at the A's Papago Park complex. "But I've matured greatly. I feel like going through all of this helped me. It was difficult, it was harsh, but I learned my lesson, and it's all in the past."

Sitting out for such a long time was tough, especially because the suspension came just as Krol was preparing to return to action after a forearm injury.

"It was miserable," Krol said. "I missed baseball like crazy. But I feel like the team did the right thing. They dealt with it professionally."

There had been a few other off-the-field issues with Krol, team sources said, and Krol had been suspended from his high-school team for his senior season for an alcohol-related incident. But there never was a problem on the field, according to minor-league pitching rehab coordinator **Garvin Alston**.

"When he's on the field, Ian is mature and confident," Alston said. "He understands baseball better than anything, including himself. ... The perfect word for him is 'knucklehead.'"

"He's a good kid, but he's so full of assurance, he thinks he can do or say anything. He definitely needs to understand his words and actions have consequences."

Krol said that he'd only been on Twitter for a month when he posted his offensive tweet, which included a derogatory term for gay men. "I didn't know how public it was," Krol said of Twitter. "But that doesn't excuse it. It was bad, I know that, and they definitely made an example of me."

Said Alston: "When I heard the length of the suspension, I thought, 'That's about right. That will sting a little bit.' I think it was a good thing for Ian."

Krol said his arm is healthy now, and he threw in instructional league. The A's believe he has a bright future if he gets his act together.

"He's got great stuff, and he's one of the fiercest competitors I've ever seen," said catcher **Max Stassi**, who was Krol's first minor-league roommate. "He's had his issues, but he's putting it behind him - and he's going to have a big year this year."

The A's hope that Krol grows up much the way that another lefty with a big curveball did in recent years: **Gio Gonzalez** learned to control his emotions on the field and became an All-Star.

"I've had a couple of slipups," Krol said, "but I have a great attitude toward baseball. I'm getting there."

**Briefly:** The A's are still waiting for a visa for **Yoenis Cespedes**. Nothing unusual is causing the delay for the Cuban outfielder, according to a major-league source. ... **Brett Anderson** and **Dallas Braden** will throw bullpen sessions today. Manager **Bob Melvin** praised Anderson's conditioning (he lost 25 pounds) and said he'd made some athletic plays during defensive drills, unusual for Anderson. Braden said he has begun incorporating his changeup during his side work. ... **Coco Crisp** reported to camp and reiterated his desire to remain in center field despite the acquisition of Cespedes. Melvin planned to speak to Crisp immediately about the outfield situation. The manager said the decision is likely to come late in camp. ... **Manny Ramirez** arrives today, which means an influx of media. "We can use a little excitement around here," Melvin said with a grin.

### Secrecy of baseball's drug program is its weakness

Gwen Knapp, San Francisco Chronicle

People will always wonder. Ryan Braun is stuck with perpetual doubts instead of a 50-game suspension.

If he were an Olympic athlete, the arbitration panel that ruled in his favor Thursday would have been required to explain its findings. It would have laid out the reasons for negating his positive drug test and posted the results of its hearing on a website.

Many news outlets reported that Braun won his appeal because his urine sample was not sent to the lab on the same day, as required. Braun apparently became the first major-leaguer to file a successful grievance since MLB started penalizing performance-enhancing drug use in 2004.

We don't know if either piece of information is true. MLB and the players union committed to a veiled grievance process, on the theory that confidentiality protects the players. For all we know, the testing protocol has failed repeatedly, and arbitrators have overturned dozens of suspensions.

With Olympic-style transparency, we'd know whether a grievance had ever revealed that a courier took a sample home and stuck it in the fridge between half-eaten cans of dog food and leftover kung pao chicken. There would be a public archive of cases, like the one assembled by the international Court of Arbitration for Sport.

Braun can always lay out his defense for fans. He might have a great case to present. But without an arbitrator's formal ruling as support, he has a credibility problem. Meanwhile, baseball has no obligation to explain why its testing failed. In fact, the confidentiality clause effectively shelters MLB from scrutiny on the subject, prohibiting it from commenting on information revealed in the grievance process.

A chorus of athletes, led most vocally by Packers quarterback (and Braun buddy) Aaron Rodgers, said the media and MLB had smeared the Brewers' outfielder. ESPN reported in December that Braun had tested positive for artificial testosterone and was appealing a suspension.

Braun's supporters believe that if the network's sources hadn't breached his confidentiality, his reputation would never have been harmed. No one would have heard about the positive test. Braun could have collected his National League

MVP award without clouds hanging over him. The arbitration would have happened quietly, without an announcement from MLB and the union, which reached an agreement to reveal the results only because of the ESPN story.

Everything would have just gone away. None of Braun's teammates or opponents would have heard a thing. He wouldn't have confided in a soul, who accidentally told another person, who told someone else, who eventually told someone who knew someone in baseball. His lawyer's secretary or the arbitrator's assistant wouldn't have known and shared the secret over a few beers.

The story would never have been whispered in clubhouses. It would never have reached previously suspended players and infuriated them. No one would have heard the truth and wondered exactly how the golden boy from Milwaukee, the hometown of Commissioner Bud Selig, was cleared after Manny Ramirez and Rafael Palmeiro had been thoroughly busted.

That's not how the real world works. These things never stay buried. It's only a question of how long they fester.

Barry Bonds knew what Mark McGwire was doing, and he had every right to hate the willful ignorance that surrounded the 1998 home-run chase. How many of today's players, some of whom heartily supported growth-hormone testing in the new collective-bargaining agreement, would have felt the same corrosive distrust if Braun's test had stayed undercover?

In theory, the successful appeal cleared Braun's name. In reality, fans are free to think that he got off on a technicality, that he really had the excess hormone in his system and a misguided messenger saved his skin.

Transparency wouldn't appease every fan, but proper documentation might help reasonable people mitigate their doubts. A ruling could describe how a delayed transfer, while it might seem like a technicality, can undermine the validity of the process.

Years of drug stories and absurd excuses create a high level of skepticism. But the archives of the Court of Arbitration for Sport, the ultimate Olympic-level judge, contain stories of athletes who, even to the most cynical eye, appear to have been badly wronged.

The open records make the system better, not more damaging, for athletes. They allow a cleared competitor to answer doubts with a line once cherished in baseball: "You could look it up."

### **Drumbeat: A's day: Coco Crisp reports, Brett Anderson ahead of schedule?**

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Papago Park, 2/23/2012, 9:58am

Coco Crisp reported to Phoenix Muni this morning, and he reiterated his comments to me last week that he believes he'll be the A's best center fielder, and if that's the case, he should be playing there.

"If anyone's better than me, I'll give him that.... but if you're not, I'll say that, too," Crisp said this morning; last week, he told me it would take a "demigod come down from the heavens" to surpass his play in center field. "I believe in myself. I'm not saying I'm the greatest hitter in the world, I know my limitations on my throwing – and most things (said with a smile). But when it comes to the things I'm good at, I'm confident about base-stealing and my defense."

I asked if a young player comes in whose experience is entirely in center field – such as Cuban star Yoenis Cespedes, signed last week to a \$36 million deal – would Crisp be understanding if the A's leave the youngster in center purely for the comfort factor?

"I can see that," he said. "But I'm not going to be happy with that. No one should be happy with less than they want, but you have to make adjustments. That's life. You're not always going to get what you want."

Early indications are that the A's will put Cespedes in center and move Crisp to left, a spot he has played quite a bit. Manager Bob Melvin – who cannot speak specifically about Cespedes because the deal is not official until he's had a physical and Cespedes is still waiting on a visa – noted that Crisp has played plenty in left. "So if we have another center fielder, we'll consider all the options," he said.

Melvin said he plans to speak to Crisp right away about the outfield situation. He noted this morning that the Coliseum is a particularly hard place to play in center field during the day, which might suggest Crisp would get such assignments, but really, things will play out during the spring. "We'll make some decisions, probably late," Melvin said.

Though his preference is to play center, Crisp is happy with the addition of Cespedes, or "C," as Crisp is calling him. "We got him, which is really cool," Crisp said.

Crisp is even happier to see the A's bring in his former Boston teammate, Manny Ramirez. "Obviously, I've played with Manny, I hit in front of him," Crisp said. "He hits home runs, he drives in runs, he's clutch. ... He just makes the lineup better.

"He has the 50-games (suspension), that's going to seem like forever before we get him."

Melvin mentioned that one plus with Crisp is his leadership by example, citing his sprinting down the line on every ball hit. Melvin wants to see that from all his veterans, to teach the many young players here.

So I asked how Melvin ensures that Ramirez does that; over the years, Ramirez often has been slammed for his failure to run balls out.

"He'll know," Melvin said. "He'll know he'll have to play like that here. And I don't foresee any problems with that."

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I checked in with Brett Anderson this morning, and the left-hander is feeling so good after his first bullpen session after surgery that he's throwing another again tomorrow – four days after that first bullpen session and three days earlier than we'd been told he was scheduled to throw.

"I feel great," he said.

The A's target date for Anderson to return to the rotation after his July 2011 Tommy John surgery is August, but it's possible it could be a bit sooner if he continues to progress as he is now. Most pitchers do have a setback or two, however, as they recover from elbow reconstruction, so the A's do not want to rush Anderson, nor set any unrealistic goals for him. That said, everyone is highly encouraged by how well his recovery has gone to date.

### **Crisp ready to compete to keep job in center**

### **Newcomer Cespedes could push veteran speedster to left field**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Coco Crisp isn't shy about his desire to stay in center field, nor about his abilities and his experience at the position that seemingly make him the right fit there, despite Cuban sensation Yoenis Cespedes' pending arrival.

The A's veteran relayed that much, and then some, when speaking to reporters shortly after arriving at the team's clubhouse on Thursday morning, one day before all position players are expected to report.

Crisp, who waved off several interested teams this offseason to return to Oakland on a two-year, \$14 million deal, is well aware of the competition Cespedes brings to the table. And he's even willing to let the youngster take over center-field duties without fuss -- if he earns it.

"If anybody is better than me, I'll give them that," Crisp said. "I have no problem with that. If somebody is better than me, then they're better than me. Whether it's base running, base stealing, hitting, catching, throwing -- whatever aspect of life, if you're better than me, you're better than me, and I will take my cap off and there you go. But if you're not, then I'll say that, too. That's the way it should be I think."

Cespedes has yet to make an appearance in camp and won't do so until he acquires a worker's visa and undergoes a physical, at which point his four-year, \$36 million deal will finally be made official. There's thought that, once aboard, he could immediately be placed in center field -- in part to make him feel comfortable in such an unfamiliar environment.

If such a scenario unfolds, Crisp would likely move to left field, as he did in Cleveland seven years ago when Grady Sizemore assumed the center-field job. Meanwhile, Seth Smith would then probably see most of his at-bats as a designated hitter.

Asked about moving positions to accommodate Cespedes for that reason, Crisp replied, "Of course I can see that, but I'm not going to be happy with that."

"I don't think anybody should be happy with anything less than what they want," he said. "Obviously you have to make adjustments accordingly. That's just life. You're not always going to get what you want, but you strive to get that, and that's what I'm going to be out there trying to do."

Team officials, including manager Bob Melvin, are not allowed to comment on the situation, given the fact Cespedes is not under contract yet. But Melvin assured Wednesday that he planned to immediately sit down with Crisp to discuss the plan for the outfield.

The Oakland manager very much likes having Crisp in center, particularly during day games at the Coliseum, but also mentioned his ability to man left field, as well. In the meantime, the outfielder joked, "I'm just going to go out there and have fun, catch every single ball that's hit to me, do a cartwheel, catch some balls between my legs, play hacky sack, do things that I do."

"Honestly," Crisp said, "everything is going to fall where it falls. I welcome anything. Everybody in their career has always had some kind of competition, and that's the way it goes from beginning to end. That's what type of game it is. So, you just gotta deal with it and find some way to have fun and do what you do and see how it plays out."

Crisp's decision to continue his career with the A's was ultimately determined by financial opportunity. He was nearing a deal with Tampa Bay -- he liked what he heard about Rays manager Joe Maddon and was attracted to the team's direction - but, at the last minute, Oakland offered him a better deal to reel him back in.

Coming off a 2011 campaign in which he hit .264 with 54 RBIs and a career-high 49 stolen bases in 136 games, Crisp is expected to join fellow speedster Jemile Weeks at the top of the lineup again this year. The duo's presence there will represent one of few familiarities for A's fans, who are soon to be greeted by quite the new-look lineup that, depending on the day, could feature Manny Ramirez -- Crisp hit in front of him with Cleveland and Boston -- or Jonny Gomes.

"I think some of the moves we've done have been to kind of balance out the pitching as close as it can be with the offense," Crisp said. "It's more of a balanced attack rather than being so lopsided. I think, when Manny comes back, if Manny is Manny, we can expect a lot of home runs. That's what we need."

As for Cespedes, who Crisp is calling "C" for now, "That's to be determined," he said. "If he is able to be one of our star players, that will definitely help our lineup. Our team has definitely gotten better on paper."

In part because of an addition the team had all along.

"I think unless you're around Coco a lot, you really don't know what he means to a club and means to our club," Melvin said. "That's why [vice president and general manager] Billy [Beane] was so adamant about signing him."

### **Anderson progressing better than expected**

#### **Pitcher could return to mound for A's before August**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- The game plan for rehabbing lefty Brett Anderson has changed, but in a good way.

Anderson, who was originally slated to throw one bullpen session a week until further notice, is now set to undergo two sessions every seven-day span -- news that further emphasizes his encouraging progress.

The 24-year-old lefty, who threw off the mound Monday for the first time since undergoing Tommy John surgery, will take to the bump again on Friday, likely for another 25 pitches.

The A's have long been anticipating an August return for Anderson, but a sooner date could become a reality should he continue without any setbacks. The club has stated it won't rush the southpaw, though, and in the meantime has plenty of pitching depth to account for his absence.

The slimmer Anderson has also been making strides in other ways, and manager Bob Melvin has taken notice.

"He moved a lot better than I remember today," Melvin said, "and that probably has to do with the shape he's in. He's worked very hard, and there are certainly a lot of different reasons to be proud of Mr. Brett Anderson."

### **A's gearing up for Manny's arrival**

PHOENIX -- Though A's position players are not required to report to camp until Friday, almost the entire roster has been engaged in workouts for several days.

Almost everyone doesn't include Manny Ramirez, and a media circus will likely follow when he makes his scheduled arrival Friday morning.

"It probably goes without saying that comes with him," manager Bob Melvin said. "But we could use a little excitement around here. At times, we can lack for notoriety."

The A's will certainly get just that, but how long it lasts remains to be seen. The aging Ramirez is signed to a non-guaranteed Minor League deal worth just \$500,000 -- a number that shrinks to roughly \$340,000 following his 50-game drug suspension.

Left-hander Dallas Braden, who last year welcomed Hideki Matsui with an inflatable Godzilla dressed in A's garb, has considered borrowing Jemile Weeks on stilts to greet Ramirez.

"I might have to do that," Braden said, "because I don't think I can find a blow-up doll with dreadlocks."

### **Worth noting**

- The A's are slated to take part in an intrasquad game on March 1, one day before they begin Cactus League play at home against the Mariners. Manager Bob Melvin said he is anticipating the contest starting between noon and 1 p.m. MST at Phoenix Municipal Stadium.
- Among the new position player arrivals Thursday were outfielders Coco Crisp and Josh Reddick and non-roster infielder Wes Timmons.

### **Major Lee-aque: Melvin talks De Los Santos, plus more**

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 2/23/2012, 9:56am

I think most everyone would agree that one of the more intriguing pitchers to watch develop on the A's roster is Fautino De Los Santos. He's obviously got a lot of talent and, with continued grooming, he's sure to position himself



as one of the premier relief arms in the league soon enough. His blazing fastball generates plenty talk — and for good reason — and he stands to move up the pecking order in the A's bullpen given improvements with his control. De Los Santos has been mentioned frequently in talks regarding the closer job, but I'd suspect the A's start the season with some else — think Brian Fuentes, Grant Balfour or Joey Devine — in that role, simply because there's obvious work left to do and no need to rush him.

Bob Melvin spoke extensively about De Los Santos this morning, noting he'd like to see a bit more consistency from his breaking ball.

"That's something he's working on," Melvin said. "He's a guy for us now, so this is a big year for him. He goes from a guy that was kind of a surprise last year and worked his way up really without the spotlight on him ... and now there's a little bit more of a target on him and we expect big things out of him."

As for his fastball, Melvin acknowledged how it will likely dictate his career:

"Typically closers have one special pitch. Rivera has the cutter, Hoffman had the changeup, and for him it's the exploding fastball. For him to get better, he's got to work on the other things — quicker to the plate, bring the walks down some, concentrate on getting ahead of hitters, making sure two of the first three pitches are strikes. Where that 1-1 count goes ... it's something we're going to stress once we lead into games."

Other notes from Melvin's early session with reporters:

- Lefty Jordan Norberto is penciled in as a relief option, but Melvin said he could very well work as a starter should he not make the team out of camp. That role may be better suited for Norberto, "so he's able to ease into some things, because he's a jumpy, high-strung kid," Melvin said. Norberto was a starter for the first three years of his Minor League career, before making the transition to a relief role in 2009. Said Melvin: "The trick for him coming out of the bullpen is going to be throwing the ball over the plate early. If you're coming in and facing one left-handed hitter in a specialist role, you have no room to settle in. I think the fact he has started now, maybe lends itself to him maybe being a long guy for us too, not just a short guy."
- Melvin said he really has no preference when considering how many right-handers and left-handers to carry in his rotation. The decision, he said, always comes down to performance, meaning he'll go with five right-handers if those are the best five guys out of camp. That scenario could very well happen, at least at the start of the season before southpaw Dallas Braden returns. With Brandon McCarthy and Bartolo Colon slated for the No. 1 and 2 spots, all the candidates that follow them are also right-handed — except Tommy Milone. But should he not make the cut, the A's will be deciding from a handful of righties: Graham Godfrey, Jarrod Parker, Brad Peacock and Tyson Ross.

Be sure to check the newsstands Friday for ESPN the Magazine. McCarthy and his wife, Amanda, are gracing this week's cover.

### **Why stop with Manny?**

#### **A's should go big, sign full squad of All-Star juicers**

By LOWELL COHN, THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

All of us applaud the Oakland A's for signing Manny Ramirez to a minor-league contract in hopes he can make it to the big club and bring a big bat to the middle of the batting order, and bring big thrills to the remaining fans.

Every major-league team needs a Hall-of-Fame-caliber player, even if, in this case, the Hall-of-Fame-caliber player won't ever make it to the Hall of Fame due to getting busted not once, but twice, for illegally taking performance-enhancing drugs.

We have a question, though. Why are the A's being small-minded and stopping with Ramirez when there are so many more washed-up, performance-enhancing drug users out there — or alleged users? The A's could make a big stir right now in spring training by signing lots of them to minor-league deals which might lead to big-league deals.

Billy Beane is a bright guy and should understand the untapped potential here. He even could give this spring a theme: "At the A's we bring back the druggies."

Like big-head Barry Bonds. It is likely Bonds could be one of the best hitters in the majors despite being out of the game since 2007. He long has been a Bay Area fan favorite. And, as you know, he's also a media favorite because of his gentle, sincere manner. I'm not sure if he's taking steroids at this point — not that he ever knowingly did — but with a quickie cycle of the stuff he could be up and blasting home runs in a matter of weeks. So, we ask Beane, "What's the downside with signing Bonds?"

Or Mark McGwire. It's true he's a mere coach and he's probably been off performance-enhancing drugs a while. And it's said he humiliated himself in front of Congress. To which we say, "Phooey on all that." He could take PEDs as needed, just like he used to. In his heart, he's always been an Athletic. The A's should find a place for McGwire near Ramirez in their batting order. Imagine the thrills. Imagine the media coverage. For once, fans would be talking about baseball instead of the invisible ballpark.

And while they're at it, the A's should bring back Jose Canseco, the self-proclaimed granddaddy of all drug users. He could spread drugs around the team and generally upgrade the culture in the clubhouse. And the media possibilities would be limitless — a reunion of the Bash Brothers. That's if they're talking to each other.

Why stop there? The A's need grown-up, steroid-embracing players all over the field. Miguel Tejada would fit in just fine. How about Randy Velarde?

So far we've been talking about former A's. Beane could and should branch out. Roger Clemens would be a big help to his pitching staff — no one is saying Clemens used PEDs beyond a doubt.

And then there's Rafael Palmeiro. The poor man was hounded out of baseball and this could be his ticket back. He had one great PED moment and it came in front of Congress and under oath. He said, "Let me start by telling you this: I have never used steroids, period."

It later came out that he had tested positive for steroids. Sportswriter Neil Hayes, then of the Contra Costa Times, said this about Palmeiro at the time. "He said I have never used steroids, period. He meant to say semicolon."

Palmeiro would add great interest to the A's and would fit right into a Manny-dominated clubhouse. Perhaps, like Ramirez, he could guide the innocent young A's players and be a moral beacon to them.

It is surprising Beane has not seen the enormous possibilities of having an all-PED All Star team in Oakland, a team of proven veterans, while he awaits the maturation of his young prospects so he can trade them for even younger prospects. Beane could substitute for dot racing a game called Spot the User. On the big screen there could be photos of player bobbleheads, and fans would guess which player is using now.

Beane is a smart guy. He should not stop with Manny.

He needs to think big.

### **Brandon McCarthy ready for a leadership role**

Kate Longworth, csnbayarea.com

PHOENIX -- He's a routine guy, so trying to track down Brandon McCarthy to deviate from his "plan" to talk with me, wasn't an easy task.

Don't get me wrong, the 28-year old was more than willing and cooperative about talking, it was just finding the time between his workouts, lifting, treatment, eating, and activities with his teammates.

But we met in the dugout at Phoenix Municipal. I was able to take Brandon away from intently watching and cheering on the position players (who've arrived early to camp) during their batting practice.

The last time I spoke with McCarthy was back in September on the heels of his career-best season, but it feels like there's been no time lost since I follow him and his wife Amanda on Twitter for my daily dose of witty McCarthism (I'm going to have to let them know that's my new coin for their sarcastic banter).

Anyhow, back to baseball.... McCarthy is one of the smartest guys in the game, but once he stopped thinking about what he "had to do" on the mound, and just did what he knows how to do, the results were off the charts.

McCarthy finished 2011 with career highs in wins, starts, complete games, innings pitched and strikeouts. Below is our conversation - in a 140 characters, and many more...

Kate Longworth: How would you compare this Spring so far to the start of Spring last year?

Brandon McCarthy: It's the same for me this year because last year I was meeting everyone for the 1st time being new, and this year I'm meeting everyone for the 1st time because they're new. So it's the same on that regard, but it's a little more serious right now I guess - everyone's young and very quiet, so there isn't a lot of goofing off yet, and people don't know each other yet. It's just kind of good competition, it's a good vibe.

KL: Sounds like you and Dallas need to go liven this place up

BM: Yeah, eventually the personalities are going to start coming out. You know the young guys can't be this quiet and shy so eventually they'll start to come out and show their personality. Until then, it's up to me and Dallas and a few other guys to bring it out.

KL: Is there a difference in your preparation, knowing your role this year vs. last year trying to make the rotation?

BM: To be honest, there is no difference whatsoever. (30:20) Last year, my focus was doing everything had to do each day, and then that'd show up when I'd go out and pitch. And it's the same thing now. Where you throw in the rotation or what your situation is... I mean there's little things you're always working on, but they don't take over the bigger picture. It's just focus on what I have to do to become a better pitcher, and when I get into the game let that take care of itself.

KL: You're considered a leader for this team (although you're still young, you're part of the limited veteran presence here) What's that like for you?

BM: It's different. I mean you think back and it's been 2 or 3 years since you were one of the young guys, and then all of sudden you're one of the old guys and your role kind of changes. But I think it's something, especially in the game of baseball, that you just go along and you start to pick up more things and guys gravitate to guys who have been there a bit longer. So, it's not a long window there where you have to be 3 to 4 years of experience, it's sometimes 3 or 4 years now where a guy knows a little bit more. I think you just sort of naturally roll into that role, and then try to take somethings on where you're pulling guys aside. But you hope to make it more natural, than a forced thing.

KL: What was the difference maker for you last year that fueled your success?

BM: Most of the changes I had made the year before. I had finally become comfortable, everything was where I wanted it to be. I was just able to get into a routine where I knew what I was doing each day. There wasn't a lot of guess work. I wasn't trying to do new things. It was just literally, take what I have and throw with it. So, I was able to gain confidence as the year went a long, and settle into the pitcher that I wanted to be. As in the past I kept trying to search.

KL: You and Kurt Suzuki are described as "routine guys" - take me through what that entails

BM: It's one of the things I like about Zuke. Most of the players that stay consistent have a routine where you know at any point in the day where you can go and find them at, it's what helps make them successful - they know what they're doing. You see Kurt in the same place, at the same time everyday. It's easy to count on a guy like that, especially when it's your catcher. You can create a relationship with him. We're in the weight room at the same time, the training room at the same time, it's it's easy to talk to him. It's a great trait for a catcher to have.

KL: And that works into the message Melvin is trying to send of pitcher and catcher becoming one - how is that thinking effective for your game?

BM: You kind of strip away everything else and becomes honesty. You ask how was that, and someone tells you 'it was awful, you sucked, you can't do that again', and I can say that to him. There's a good relationship that evolves there and it's not just (he says in a mocking voice) 'no, you're okay'. It becomes very soft and passive aggressive language. It's just straight to the truth, and that way you know you're getting something that's unfiltered and you know exactly what you have to work on and get better at. It's a great thing to have, and it's something that's taken me a long time to get in my career where I've become comfortable to a point with somebody that you can just strip away all that nonsense and just get to the truth

KL: What are you expecting and looking forward to with opening the season in Japan?

BM: I'm interested to see what it's like because by the end of spring, you just want to be anywhere else but Spring after six weeks of this. So at least there's the carrot at the end of the string for us, going to Japan and doing something most of us haven't done before. Everyone's described it as being a cool experience, so I'm very excited for

that at the end. Just wanting to get the Season started and have that experience with it, and be able to take your family over, it's going to be a great time

KL: You're a Twitter Phenom... why are you (and your wife) drawn to this Social Networking?

BM: We're both just really sarcastic and mean and for some reason that comes across in 140 characters or at least that's the reaction, we're getting so far. I just use it to be stupid and sarcastic, and then she kind of followed suit. And she has her pictures of food and whatever else that interests her. But everybody seemed to have a positive reaction, so we just sort of go with it. It's pretty much our usual selves that we put out on there, so maybe there's some honesty to it, I don't know.

KL: So many follow you, but who are "must-follows" for you?

BM: I follow comedians and baseball writers that are also funny... If you're funny, I'm going to follow you.

### **A's Donaldson bids for backup role**

Kate Longworth, csnbayarea.com

PHOENIX -- Manager Bob Melvin has said defense will be a theme for the A's in 2012 after the club committed 124 errors last year. That was the most by any Oakland team in 10 years, and the second-most in the majors in 2011.

So, some extra glove work was expected this spring. What wasn't expected was the sight of a player taking grounders the first few days of camp. After all, it's just pitchers and catchers right now at Papago Park. Aside from the occasional pitchers fielding practice (listed as PFP on the daily schedule), these workouts consist more of side work and conditioning.

But there was Josh Donaldson taking grounders at third on Thursday morning -- with Melvin looking on intently, just a few feet away. The A's have not determined who the backup to catcher Kurt Suzuki will be this year, but Donaldson is certainly in the running.

The 26-year-old out of Auburn University made his Major League debut back in 2010, but has had just brief stints in the bigs. He has experience both behind the plate, and at first. But being that it's already quite the "Who's on First?" riddle this spring for the A's, it can't hurt to show off what else you can do.

Melvin said having Donaldson take grounders is something the staff has built into his spring. Melvin also said that Donaldson played a little third in college. And Melvin expressed that seeing his versatility certainly makes him more valuable.

Melvin emphasized that the more a player can do, the better chance he has at making a team. Donaldson is taking it to heart, and to the field.