

A's News Clips, Monday, March 5, 2012

Oakland A's: Cuban Yoenis Cespedes confident he can make quick transition to major leagues

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The mystique around Yoenis Cespedes began to lift Sunday when the A's finally got their prized outfield acquisition on the field.

Now one question remains: When will he actually make an impact?

A's general manager Billy Beane wouldn't predict when Cespedes will join the lineup. Nor would he guarantee Cespedes will be on the opening-day roster.

All that is known is the A's expect big things from Cespedes, a highly pursued free agent who defected from Cuba and joined Oakland on a four-year, \$36 million contract.

"He is a pretty unique physical talent," Beane said. "You don't see guys like this come along too often."

Cespedes donned a white No. 52 jersey for his introductory news conference at Phoenix Municipal Stadium. He said through a translator he is confident he can acclimate to the major leagues quickly.

Cespedes missed the first two weeks of spring training while his visa paperwork was completed. The A's open the season March 28 against the Seattle Mariners in Tokyo, giving them more than three weeks to evaluate the outfielder.

"I know this is a process, I know it takes time," Cespedes said through translator Juan Navarrete, an A's minor league coach. "But I feel I can make any adjustments I need to play in the big leagues."

Cespedes -- listed at 5-foot-10, 210 pounds -- is said to have a combination of power and speed that led Baseball Prospectus to label him as arguably the best prospect to come out of Cuba in a generation.

Neither Beane nor A's manager Bob Melvin revealed much about where Cespedes might fit in the outfield. His usual position is center field, where the A's have Coco Crisp.

They could play Cespedes in center and move Crisp to left. If they don't want to uproot Crisp -- a solid defender in center -- they could try Cespedes in one of the corners.

"I'm not too concerned with that yet," Melvin said. "Typically, these things find a way of figuring themselves out."

Cespedes hasn't played competitively since December. But his agent, Adam Katz, said Cespedes has worked out diligently in the Dominican Republic, where he established residency after defecting from Cuba with his mother, aunt and four cousins. Cespedes said five or six days of workouts will have him prepared for exhibitions.

Aside from the adjustment to major league pitching, Cespedes also must get comfortable in a new country and learn a new language.

The A's plan to have Ariel Prieto -- who pitched for them after defecting from Cuba in the mid-1990s and is a pitching coach in their farm system -- help him along.

"We're going to want to make sure he's comfortable," Beane said, "because if he's comfortable off the field, it's going to help him on the field."

Cespedes has a willing mentor in teammate Manny Ramirez.

They hit in the same batting practice group Sunday before the A's 12-10 victory over the Chicago Cubs. Ramirez is eager to take Cespedes under his wing.

"The guy's got incredible talent," Ramirez said. "I saw him running in the outfield. He's unbelievable. And hitting, he's got pop."

Ramirez told hitting coach Chili Davis he is going to try to get Cespedes to the field at 7 a.m. Ramirez is also eager to dispense advice pertaining to his own suspensions for a second positive test for performance-enhancing drugs.

"(I'll share) all the things that I went through," Ramirez said. "Make sure you take the right vitamins. ... Don't do what I did -- make two mistakes."

The A's are walking a fine line between easing Cespedes into a comfort zone and getting him game-ready as quickly as possible.

Beane, asked when he expected Cespedes to be ready to play, smiled and replied: "Based on the contract, the sooner the better."

Yoenis Cespedes by the numbers

26 Cespedes' age

33 Season home run record he matched in the Cuban League

36 Million dollars over four years, making him the highest-paid player on the A's roster

52 Cespedes' uniform number

Oakland A's notebook: MLB says no decision has been made on A's pursuit of stadium in San Jose

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

A Major League Baseball official said Sunday that no decision has been reached on the A's efforts to build a ballpark in San Jose.

The issue came to light after the New York Daily News reported Saturday that commissioner Bud Selig was likely to uphold the Giants' territorial rights to San Jose, which would end the A's plans to relocate there.

"Nothing's changed," said the source within the commissioner's office. "The committee has been meeting. We were very surprised by (the New York Daily News story). No determinations have been made at all regarding the A's situation."

A's general manager Billy Beane said he read the story but declined to address it in detail.

"There's no sense in commenting on a writer's speculation, which is exactly what that was," Beane said.

It has been nearly three years since Selig dispatched a committee to study the A's stadium options. The A's wish to build a ballpark in downtown San Jose, but the Giants oppose a team moving to the South Bay.

First-base candidate Brandon Allen had seven RBIs, including a grand slam, as the A's beat the Cubs 12-10 to move to 2-1 in Cactus League play.

The last A's player to have seven RBIs in a regular-season game was Jack Cust on Aug. 10, 2007, against Detroit. Past Cactus League results are tougher to track down.

"Every time I got up, somebody was on," Allen said. "Hopefully I'll be in that position, driving in runs."

The A's entered camp with no clear front-runner at first base in a pool that includes Allen, Daric Barton, Chris Carter and Kila Ka'aihue.

Brandon McCarthy pitched three innings and allowed two earned runs and four hits in his first spring start.

Sean Doolittle, converted from a first baseman, threw a scoreless inning with a walk and two strikeouts.

In the day's oddest sequence, catcher Kurt Suzuki picked two consecutive Cubs runners off first base.

Barton, who just recently had a cortisone shot in his surgically repaired right shoulder, is being bothered by biceps tendinitis that might require another shot.

His inability to stay on the field makes him a long shot for the first-base job.

A's newcomer Céspedes makes solid first impression

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

- Yoenis Céspedes has no doubts about his ability to play in the major leagues.

"I'm ready to take the challenge," the Cuban outfielder said through interpreter Juan Navarrete during an introductory news conference at Phoenix Municipal Stadium on Sunday.

Céspedes, 26, has missed eight days of camp, and the A's expect it will take him five or six days to be game-ready, a time frame that Céspedes also suggested as reasonable.

Since the A's agreed to terms with Céspedes on a four-year, \$36 million deal three weeks ago, indications have been that he will be on the Opening Day roster - barring major difficulties adjusting to big-league pitching.

Sunday, A's general manager Billy Beane said the A's will take it day-by-day, but at one point, Beane grinned and said, "Based on the contract, the sooner the better. We're going to be open-minded."

Adjusting to the big leagues at the same time as adjusting to a new country can be difficult for international players who do not play in the minors, but the A's probably will assign a seventh coach to the team, likely Cuban Ariel Prieto, the former Oakland pitcher, in order to help Céspedes' transition.

He and agent Adam Katz would not share details of Céspedes' flight from Cuba to the Dominican Republic, but Katz said that Céspedes' mother, aunt and four cousins came with him.

Céspedes exhibited no trepidation during his media session, giving expansive answers and flashing some smiles. On the field, Céspedes looked to be in tremendous condition, with a physique like an NFL running back, as many scouts have noted.

"He has laser focus. I've never seen anything like it," Katz said. "Enthusiasm, intensity, passion."

Céspedes and Katz confirmed that the A's willingness to do just a four-year deal, making Céspedes a free agent at 30, was the deciding factor in going to Oakland. Since that decision, Céspedes said he heard positive things about the team from his friend Miguel Tejada, who played winter ball with him for Aguilas in the Dominican.

"He told me how good the organization is and that you can grow up there," Céspedes said. "It is a good organization for a guy to develop into a good player."

The A's have considered leaving Céspedes in center field in order to help his comfort level, but Céspedes said Sunday that he has played both corner outfield spots, though not frequently.

"Whatever they want me to play," Céspedes said.

The A's players were curious to see a man they'd been hearing about all camp.

"I definitely want to see what he can do," outfielder Josh Reddick said. "Everyone does."

Reddick is projected to play right, but were Coco Crisp to remain in center - Crisp's strong preference - and Céspedes to move to right, Reddick said he'll be happy to go to left.

Manager Bob Melvin said that such decisions will come later in the spring.

"He has all the ability, from what I understand," Melvin said. "But we can't evaluate him until he's actually on the field."

With Céspedes' arrival, the A's now have 15 full-time outfielders in camp.

"I know who they all are," Melvin said, smiling. "I feel bad for some of them. I know they won't get all the at-bats they want."

A's 12, Cubs 10

Notable: Brandon Allen hit a grand slam and a double and drove in seven runs. ... Chris Carter had a double, single and a walk. ... Opening Day starter Brandon McCarthy went three innings and allowed four hits and three runs, two earned. ... Converted first baseman Sean Doolittle walked a batter and struck out two in his one inning.

Quotable: "Is he trying to make the team?"

- McCarthy's joking response when he heard Kurt Suzuki had picked two runners in a row off first.

Today's game: Angels (C.J. Wilson) at A's (Brad Peacock) and A's (Bartolo Colon) at Cubs (Ryan Dempster), 12:05 p.m. Webcast only.

Céspedes shows all the right moves

Bruce Jenkins, San Francisco Chronicle

Phoenix -- - The team bus was gassed up and ready to go at around 11:30 a.m. Sunday, and a bunch of Oakland A's hit the road for Mesa, bound for an exhibition game against the Cubs. The real story never left Phoenix Municipal Stadium. That's where people began fantasizing about exactly what's in store for the team this year.

Yoenis Céspedes had conducted a news conference in a room full of journalists and television crews, and the much-heralded Cuban star had taken eight rounds of batting practice with his teammates. As the bus pulled away, the empty field was left to a master class in hitting: Céspedes and Manny Ramirez taking turns in the cage while Chili Davis, the ex-Giant and current A's hitting coach, stood by.

It was a beautiful thing to watch. Ramirez's reputation harbors such nasty stains, there's no telling if he'll even be in uniform when his 50-game suspension expires at the end of May. The A's only know what they see: a content, energetic 39-year-old man who aims to end his career in style.

On this day, and probably for the rest of spring training, Manny's presence was curiously worthwhile.

He seems intent on being Céspedes' shadow, and for a player who has defected from Cuba into a daunting new world, the companionship is welcome. Céspedes speaks no English, and there's no one on the A's roster who can truly relate to his plight. But Céspedes, through his interpreter (Juan Navarrete, the A's roving minor-league instructor), said he has "idolized" Ramirez since watching him on television, years ago: "It is an honor to learn from him, to watch him hit, to have him tell me these things. That is very, very special."

For the better part of 15 minutes, the two of them traded searing line drives, with the occasional shot that either slammed into the advertising billboards or cleared them altogether. At one point, Ramirez insisted that Céspedes cast aside his conventional, all-white Louisville Slugger and try one of his jet-black versions. Navarrete threw the batting practice, expertly, while Tim Garland, one of the A's minor-league coaches, joined Davis behind the cage.

"I loved seeing Manny get into it, really working with the kid," said Davis. "That's a Hall of Fame hitter right there. Hey, *I'm* soaking up information from him."

Recalling the five-man scene later in the day, Davis smiled and said, "That was international, man. We had Cuba, the Dominican, Jamaica (Davis was born in Kingston), America and Mexico. If we get Hideki (Matsui) back, we're covered."

There's a 20-minute video on Céspedes, called "The Showcase" and readily available on YouTube, that reveals his astounding talent. But there's nothing like watching an elite athlete in person. Céspedes has massive thighs and powerful shoulders; his every movement exudes physicality. Although the A's four-year, \$36 million contract is a "gamble," in the words of player personnel director Billy Owens, he's no mystery to the A's scouts, who have seen him in person at various tournaments over the past four years.

"He's a tremendous athlete," said Owens, who scouted Céspedes over seven games at the 2010 Pan American Games in Puerto Rico. "Just the sheer speed, the strength, the big power, the arm, what he can do on defense. Being realistic, he's about to go up against the best players in the world. Getting used to the major-league breaking ball will be a challenge, getting thrown right into the fire. But the package is there."

Owens offered an interesting choice of words - "arrogant" - to describe Céspedes' presence in center field. Not so much that he's cocky, but that he can be an intimidating presence with his throwing arm and "closing speed," Owens said. As for his makeup, it's worth noting that, unlike many Cuban players forced to leave family behind, Céspedes has access to his mother, an aunt and four cousins in the Dominican Republic, where he established a home base upon his defection.

"He comes from tremendous lineage," Owens said. "His mother was a big-time softball player in Cuba, and he's a very grounded kid, focused, takes great pride in what he's doing. He's not a flamboyant guy by any means. He's here for business, to go to work."

(Good example: Not at all concerned with making a huge impression, Céspedes spent his first two rounds of batting practice hitting casual-stroke drives to the opposite field, only later shifting over to pull mode. That's how the pros do it.)

Owens recalled a touching documentary on Luis Tiant, the great Cuban pitcher who became a cult hero with the Boston Red Sox of the 1970s. "It was such a big deal that he pitched in the ('75) World Series, but it was like 15 years later when he finally saw his parents," said Owens. "That was big-time heavy. I think it says a lot about Yoenis' character that he brought his family with him."

The details of Céspedes' defection are sketchy, at best, and no details were forthcoming on Sunday from Billy Beane or Céspedes' agents, Adam Katz and Edgar Mercedes. This is a highly volatile situation in Cuba, where most of the top players subscribe to the political system and quite willingly stay home. If Céspedes succeeds in America, along the lines of Orlando "El Duque" Hernandez, the news will be suppressed, if not buried outright, in his homeland.

So the tone is cautionary, for now, with much to be learned in the coming weeks and months. First step: learning the pronunciation: Yo-ENN-ess SESS-ped-ess.

"If this kid can play, maybe they'll just call him Yo," I volunteered to a group of visiting writers.

"And when the A's play Texas," said Scott Miller of cbssports.com, "it will be Yo against Yu (Darvish)."

The mind does wander.

A's 1st base candidate Allen has 7-RBI game

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

- **Brandon Allen** is in a competition for the first-base job, and if Sunday is any indication, he is looking to distance himself from the pack, pronto.

Allen drove in seven runs in Oakland's 12-10 victory over the Cubs, hitting a grand slam and a two-run double in the process.

"It's nice to see some good results, but I want to play well, stay within myself," Allen said. "Competition brings out the best in everybody."

Allen credited his teammates for his big day, saying, "Every time I got up, someone was on."

"That was a pretty productive day," manager **Bob Melvin** deadpanned.

With **Daric Barton's** spring debut likely to be pushed back if he gets a second cortisone shot as he recovers from shoulder surgery, the primary battle at first is likely to be between Allen and **Kila Ka'iahue**, with **Chris Carter** also in the mix.

Eric Sogard, a potential candidate for the third-base job, hit his second homer in three games, a two-run shot in the fourth.

"I feel real quiet and relaxed at the plate," Sogard said. "I'm up there trying to hit line drives, and I'm putting some pretty good swings on it."

"Sogie has the most pop on the team," catcher **Kurt Suzuki** joked.

Sogard was more impressed with Allen's massive shot to right with the bases loaded in the fourth.

"That was up in the air a long time," Sogard said.

Woman joins front office: During the offseason, the A's hired **Kate Greenthal**, 31, as scouting assistant. She becomes the first woman in the team's scouting department. The Astros (**Stephanie Wilka**) and Orioles (**Sarah Gelles**) also have women working in scouting; **Pam Pitts** has worked in the A's front office for 31 years and has been director of baseball administration for 20 seasons.

The A's have assembled among the most diverse front offices in baseball, with an African American director of player personnel, **Billy Owens**; a director of baseball operations, **Farhan Zaidi**, who was born in Canada, grew up in the Philippines and is of Pakistani descent; and an Asian American director of scouting, **Eric Kubota**.

"We're proud of the makeup of our office," assistant GM **David Forst** said.

Like Forst, Greenthal attended Harvard, where she was a second-team All-American rugby player, and then the native of Niskayuna, N.Y., obtained an MBA at Stanford Business School.

Report disputed: Major League Baseball weighed in on the New York Daily News opinion piece that suggested, without citing sources, that the A's will not get permission to move to San Jose; on Sunday, a source in the commissioner's office said it is not true that Commissioner **Bud Selig** and team owners have all but decided to uphold the Giants' territorial rights to San Jose.

Drumbeat: Video and more from Yoenis Cespedes Day for A's

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle, 3/4/2012 10:18am

As I wrote in this morning's Chronicle, the A's expect Yoenis Cespedes to be in a game in five to seven days, and I'd hazard a guess his first appearance will come on the earlier side of that.

The star Cuban outfielder, 26, met the local media (and a few national reporters) today for the first time, and through interpreter Juan Navarrete, he said that he feels as if he is "close to achieving his dream" of playing in the United States.

I asked if he believes he can play in the majors right away, and he said he has been working out for seven months, he's in very good shape and, he said, "I'm ready to take the challenge."

He certainly appears to be in great condition; one national writer compared his physique to Deion Sanders in Sanders' prime.

Cespedes' agent, Adam Katz, described Cespedes as "laser-focused, I've never seen anything like it."

Cespedes said he's OK playing wherever the team wants him; the early indications from the team were that if Cespedes has a much higher comfort level in center field, he'll play there.

Cespedes agrees it will take 5-6 days to be game ready. He's already got an invite from Manny Ramirez to talk hitting, and Cespedes said Ramirez is one of the players he's most admired.

At Bat 12 - get your game face on

San Francisco Chronicle

In a nutshell: Spring training for the Giants and A's is under way, so now's the time to get the updated version of Major League Baseball's At Bat app. This app gives you news, scores, radio broadcasts, video highlights and everything else you need to keep track of your favorite baseball team.

Cool factor: New Spring Training features were added this year, so fans can keep up with all the Cactus and Grapefruit league news.

Note: If you liked last year's At Bat 11, you need to repurchase this app for the upcoming season. Users can pay \$15 for the entire 2012 season or \$3 monthly. If you subscribe to the MLB.TV service, you get the app for free.

Cespedes takes BP with Manny, meets media

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- There's much to learn about Yoenis Cespedes, the Cuban sensation who has taken what A's general manager Billy Beane deems "pretty unique physical talent" to Oakland.

That very process started Sunday, when Beane stood by Cespedes' side as he was introduced to the media for the first time inside a compact room at Phoenix Municipal Stadium, his perfectly white A's jersey accompanying a gracious smile and quiet confidence as cameras followed his every move. Two seats to the left of him sat agent Adam Katz, who calls his client calm, kind and charming.

Cespedes exuded all three in his lengthy chat with reporters -- he spoke for nearly 20 minutes -- and said through translator Juan Navarrete that he is "happy to be able to take my first step of my dream to play in the Major Leagues."

Soon enough, he was on the field making friends with Manny Ramirez, whom he admired from afar while growing up before a four-year, \$36 million deal with the A's brought him to the United States. The intriguing duo drew quite the crowd and plenty of chatter while taking batting practice together, before taking their conversation to the outfield for nearly half an hour.

Soon enough, though, the focus will turn to the questions that surround Cespedes' ability to be a success in the Major Leagues. He anticipates being game-ready in five to six days, but whether he starts the year in Oakland remains to be seen, with less than three weeks remaining before the team jets to Tokyo to open the regular season with the Mariners.

"I expect he'll see quite a bit of activity before the Japan series," Beane said. "I think we all just kind of want to get him out there. Based on the contract, the sooner [he gets to the big leagues] the better. I think we're going to be open-minded, but I think we also don't want to immediately say, 'He's going to be here on Opening Day.'"

"I haven't seen him out on the field doing baseball drills, and that's what you wait for," manager Bob Melvin said. "We hear he's a heck of an athlete. With a lot going on, coming in to a situation like this can be uncomfortable, so sometimes the solace is getting on the field and playing baseball, where those are instinctive things."

Cespedes, 26, is most comfortable in center field, where veteran Coco Crisp currently resides. It's plausible that the A's choose to keep Cespedes in his natural position and move Crisp to left field, but Beane and Melvin reiterated that the situation will work itself out in due time.

"It's not an issue right now, but ultimately, I think Bob's going to put the best center fielder in center field and the best left fielder in left field, whoever that may be," Beane said.

Cespedes said he will "play where they want me to play" and called his transition to the big leagues "a process."

"It will take time," he said. "I'll adjust and perform the way people expect me to play."

Expectations are high. The 6-foot, 215-pound Cespedes played eight seasons for Granma in the Cuban League, tallying a record 33 home runs to go along with a .333 average and 99 RBIs in 90 games during the 2010-11 campaign. He was also Cuba's starting center fielder during the '09 World Baseball Classic, batting .458 in six games.

The A's, though, are aware that plenty of cultural, social and baseball adjustments lie ahead of him and plan to help make the transition as seamless as possible without placing too many expectations on him in the early going. Ultimately, they're expecting his right-handed power bat to slot in the middle of a lineup that hasn't contributed to a winning record since 2006.

"Really, to find a potentially center-of-the-diamond player in the prime of his career, those players usually aren't available," Beane said. "Any time you're putting out that kind of money there's a risk."

"It's a risk, no doubt about it, but it didn't surprise me that Billy was interested in this sort of thing," Katz said. "It makes sense because it's hard for these guys to get that quality of a player."

The Cuban defector says he's been working out in the Dominican Republic for seven months and will give his new team "101 percent every day." Katz believes that's no exaggeration.

"He's laser-focused, and I've never seen anything like it," the agent said. "He's done everything we've asked with enthusiasm and passion and intensity. It's really just been a journey to get here."

Allen notches seven RBIs to lift A's past Cubs

By Carrie Muskat / MLB.com

MESA, Ariz. -- Brandon Allen drove in seven runs, including the tie-breaking run on a groundout in the ninth, to lift the Athletics to a 12-10 victory Sunday over the Cubs and spoil new Chicago manager Dale Sveum's Cactus League opener in front of 10,366 at HoHoKam Park.

Allen belted a grand slam in the fourth and a two-run double in the fifth. With the game tied at 10 in the ninth, Jason Pridie walked with one out in the A's ninth against Marcos Mateo, reached third on Chris Carter's double and scored on Allen's groundout.

The Cubs opened a 3-0 lead when Darwin Barney hit a two-run double in the second and another run scored in the third on a throwing error by shortstop Cliff Pennington.

Chicago lefty Jeff Beliveau walked the first two batters he faced in the fourth, and Josh Reddick hit an RBI single to pull Oakland within two runs. After walking another batter to load the bases, Beliveau was pulled in favor of Dae-Eun Rhee. Allen roped a 3-2 pitch from Rhee to right field to give the A's a 5-3 lead.

Wellington Castillo, competing for the Cubs' backup catcher's spot, hit a leadoff homer in the fifth.

Chicago rallied with a five-run sixth, scoring three on Adrian Cardenas' bases-clearing triple. Cardenas then scored on Jae-Hoon Ha's single to tie the game at 9.

With the game tied at 9 in the eighth, Oakland had Josh Donaldson at third with one out, and he scored when Brandon Moss grounded out to first baseman Anthony Rizzo. But Chicago tied it in the eighth when Dave Sappelt scored on Ha's infield single.

A's starter Brandon McCarthy gave up three runs (two earned) on four hits and one walk over three innings. Chicago's Rodrigo Lopez faced the minimum in two innings.

Up next for Athletics: On Monday, the A's will have split-squad games, as right-hander Bartolo Colon goes to Mesa, Ariz., to face the Cubs, while Brad Peacock, the team's third-ranked prospect, stays at Phoenix Municipal Stadium for a matchup with C.J. Wilson and the Angels under the watch of manager Bob Melvin. The A's skipper will also be joined by Manny Ramirez, who is scheduled to make his second spring start at designated hitter. Both games begin at 12:05 p.m. PT.

Carter encountering logjam to back up at first

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

MESA, Ariz. -- It was this time last year that Chris Carter was blocked by a bevy of outfielders. Now having made the transition back to his natural first-base position, he's again in roster limbo with three other competitors in the mix.

Such a scene has Carter maybe better positioned for the designated-hitter role, which many have assumed all along is the job he's best suited for in the Majors. But even there it's plenty crowded, with Jonny Gomes on board alongside Seth Smith, who is expected to see at-bats at DH once Yoenis Cespedes begins games in the outfield.

Where, then, does the 25-year-old Carter fit in?

"He'll get every chance to make this team," manager Bob Melvin said. "If he's out there producing for us, we'll have no choice but to put him on the roster."

Sunday's performance was a step in the right direction. Facing the Cubs just hours after speaking of his work with new hitting coach Chili Davis, Carter went 2-for-4 with a double and a walk in nine innings at DH.

Melvin is hoping Carter can continue teaming up with Davis to work to avoid the slow starts he's fallen victim to at nearly every professional level. Melvin has also noticed improved footwork from Carter at first.

"I think I've definitely gotten better over there," Carter said. "I've been taking ground balls all over the infield -- shortstop, third -- just to see different angles."

McCarthy scrutinizes first Cactus League start

MESA, Ariz. -- Right-hander Brandon McCarthy said he was "not displeased" with his first Cactus League outing on Sunday, words that reflect the pitcher's composed outlook on early spring performances.

"There were some good things, some bad things, but, really, [I was] not too far off where I'd like to be," McCarthy said after giving up two earned runs on four hits in three innings against the Cubs. "[I] just threw some pitches in certain counts I'd like to do differently."

The A's starter, who gets the nod for the regular-season opener in Tokyo on March 28, also struck out two and walked one in his debut. McCarthy felt physically tired after his three-inning day, but he noted a positive from the aftereffects.

"It gives me a good gauge of where I need to be," McCarthy said. "It's going to be venturing into ground I'm not familiar with yet and kind of find out what's normal, and when I need to back off and when I need to push."

"I've got to get moving fast and get the pitch count built up. It's early and it's quick."

Allen praises teammates for his production

MESA, Ariz. -- Brandon Allen said he doesn't yet feel locked in at the plate, but Sunday's box score against the Cubs suggests otherwise.

The first-base candidate tallied seven RBIs in Oakland's 12-10 victory, collecting a grand slam and a two-run double while also bringing home the go-ahead run in the ninth inning on a groundout.

"I'd say it was a pretty productive day," manager Bob Melvin said, grinning.

Allen handed all the praise back to his teammates.

"Every time I was up, somebody was on," said Allen. "Hopefully I can continue to be in that position to drive in those runs and have good at-bats and grind something out."

Allen, acquired in the same trade that sent reliever Brad Ziegler to Arizona, struggled to find consistency with the A's last year, hitting .205 in 41 games after being promoted to Oakland in mid-August. His power potential has always intrigued the club, but strikeout totals -- he had 55 in 146 at-bats with the A's -- have been an issue for the 26-year-old.

"You know he's going to strike out some, but we want to see him a little bit more consistent at the plate, and we know he's working real hard at it," Melvin said.

Allen's continued progress at the plate this spring could make him the favorite to land at first base come Opening Day. Chris Carter and Kila Ka'aihue are also in the mix, and it remains to be seen whether Daric Barton will garner enough at-bats by the time the club leaves for Japan to remain included.

"Competition is what brings out the best in everybody," Allen said.

Worth noting

- Aside from a handful of innings in Instructional League, Sunday marked the first real outing for southpaw Sean Doolittle, a converted first baseman. He fared well, striking out two and walking one in one inning of work against the Cubs.

"You look to see what the makeup is and the composure is, and he had all that," Melvin said. "On top of that, he was quick to the plate and had pretty good pop on his fastball."

A's look for young pitchers to step up

By Bernie Pleskoff / MLB.com

The Oakland A's will be counting on exciting young pitching to lead any potential resurgence.

The A's approach the new season with a totally revamped pitching staff and an influx of new position players. Very formidable pitchers such as Trevor Cahill (D-backs), Craig Breslow (D-backs), Gio Gonzalez (Reds) and Andrew Bailey (Red Sox) are now part of other organizations. In their place, general manager Billy Beane and his staff have introduced a group of high-profile pitching prospects.

New to Oakland are left-handed pitcher Tommy Milone, and righties Jarrod Parker, Brad Peacock and Ryan Cook. Each has the chance to eventually become part of a rotation that should include Brandon McCarthy and Bartolo Colon. The Major League arrival dates for Milone, Parker and Peacock may vary, but they will likely get their chances in the coming season. Cook may be the least advanced, but he has a chance to help.

Lefties Dallas Braden and Brett Anderson are two key components of the A's rotation. Braden had shoulder surgery in mid-May and he's being handled very carefully in camp. A possible mid-April to May return date for Braden is being discussed. Anderson is recovering from Tommy John surgery and has thrown off the mound in Spring Training. A later season arrival is planned.

Milone is a crafty, breaking-ball pitcher with good command and control. He has the ability to bust the ball inside on hitters. He doesn't try to overpower, using a lower velocity fastball as just another pitch. He is very poised on the mound, showing good mechanics and an ability to throw breaking balls at any count. When Milone is on, hitters will make contact but they won't get too many of their favorite pitches to hit.

At 6-feet, 205 pounds, Milone will slot extremely well behind a fastball pitcher such as Peacock. While Milone has been a starting pitcher in the past, he certainly has enough repertoire, command and control to work out of the bullpen if needed as either a lefty specialist or long reliever.

Peacock has shown consistent improvement in his velocity and mound presence since signing with Washington in 2006. Like Milone, Peacock was part of the trade that sent Gonzalez to the Nationals.

Peacock can be classified as a power pitcher with a deep repertoire of secondary pitches. He has a Major League quality curve ball and change up. He can mix in those pitches to change the eye levels and balance of hitters. Peacock has enough raw talent, and is savvy enough, to work himself out of trouble that may come with spurts of command issues. The large ballpark in Oakland will really help Peacock as he won't have to be perfect with every pitch.

Last season Peacock pitched at three levels. He won 17 games while losing only three. He started three games for the Nationals at the end of the season and finished with a 2-0 record and a .075 ERA.

Parker came to the Athletics as part of the deal with Arizona that cost the team Cahill and Breslow. Parker is more than a year removed from Tommy John surgery and is showing he is very capable of being a top-of-the-rotation starter. Parker won 11 games last season at Double-A Mobile, where he threw 130.2 innings. In his first outing with Oakland this spring, Parker threw his fastball between 93-96 mph with excellent command. He then flashed a devastating change up that averaged as low as 81 mph. He struck out four in two innings. Parker looked like an ace in the making.

Parker was a first round selection of the D-backs in 2007. He was believed to be a top-of-the-rotation starter for Arizona until Cahill and Breslow became available. The D-backs, looking for another berth in the playoffs, felt the stability of a proven starter like Cahill would complete their rotation and solidify their chances for continued success. The trade is one that could benefit both clubs, with Parker potentially becoming a special starting pitcher.

There isn't much question that Oakland will be challenged to score runs. Many of the A's prospects are still learning to hit Major League pitching. For example, Michael Choice is probably a year away from making an impact on the club. Choice is a strong outfield prospect with home-run power but little in the way of experience. For now, however, the club will create a bridge to future power hitters with outfielders like Jonny Gomes, Manny Ramirez and highly regarded Cuban star Yoenis Cespedes.

Ramirez will sit out the first 50 games of the season as a result of a second banned substance suspension. He didn't play last season, retiring from the Tampa Bay Rays. After coming out of retirement and signing with Oakland, Ramirez will serve his suspension this year.

Ramirez has been working in camp to energize his offense and become part of his new team. He can be seen joking with teammates and seemingly enjoying the game.

Ramirez, wearing No. 1 in A's camp, played in the team's first spring game, seeing three pitches in two at-bats. He rolled into a 6-4-3 double play on the second pitch he saw and grounded out weakly on the third pitch. Ramirez looks anxious and impatient at the plate. His swing appeared to be longer than usual and he looked as if he was fooled on the few pitches he saw. It will take some time for Ramirez to get his timing and feel for hitting. Once his suspension is concluded, it will be interesting to see if Ramirez can regain his hitting prowess.

Serious concerns remain about offensive production from all four corner positions, but lack of power at the corner infield positions is troublesome.

Last season, for example, first baseman Daric Barton did not hit a home run in 297 at-bats, 236 with Oakland and 61 at Triple-A Sacramento. He and fellow left-handed hitting Brandon Allen should compete for time at first base. Allen has a high strikeout tendency and does not yet look comfortable hitting quality pitching.

Veteran Kila Ka'aihue is also in the mix at first base, but he has not shown consistency in previous trials with the Kansas City Royals. Perhaps the once highly touted right-handed hitting Chris Carter could catch fire and win a roster spot. Carter does have some pop in his bat, but his numbers have come primarily in the hitter-friendly Pacific Coast League.

Similar offensive challenges exist at third base. Newly acquired Scott Sizemore has been lost for the season with a torn anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee. That leaves the job to unproven Josh Donaldson, heretofore a catcher in his professional career. The Athletics are not deep with corner infielders.

Strong young pitching led by Parker, Peacock and Milone will be counted upon to lead the franchise to better days. If Ramirez can still hit, perhaps the A's can trade him at mid-season for additional help at the corners. The jury remains out on Cespedes until he acclimates to this country and American pitching.

All eyes on Oakland's Cespedes

Associated Press

After watching the YouTube promotional video of the five-tool outfielder with a sculpted body and freakish athleticism, the Oakland Athletics were eager to see Cuban defector Yoenis Cespedes up close.

"He's finally here," catcher Kurt Suzuki said in Phoenix. "We hear about the potential and the tools and all that stuff. I'm not just excited to see him hit but excited to see him working out with the team."

Cespedes certainly didn't disappoint.

The 26-year-old Cespedes (Yo-EHN-ess SES-peh-des) worked out with the Athletics for the first time Sunday. The slugging outfielder performed some agility drills to measure his vertical leap and took batting practice with Manny Ramirez and Cedric Hunter during a highly anticipated session in which he sprayed pitches to all fields and sent a couple of souvenirs over the walls.

"I'm very happy to be here because I feel I'm very close to my dream to play in the big leagues," said Cespedes, who played in Cuba's top league for eight seasons before defecting in 2011 to the Dominican Republic with his mother, an aunt and four cousins.

YANKS LIKE PINEDA

While conventional wisdom suggests the Yankees are losing their dominance, they're as strong a bet to reach the 2012 World Series as any team. While the big-ticket free agents went elsewhere this winter, the Yankees strengthened themselves the old-fashioned way.

They made a big trade, with general manager Brian Cashman sending catcher Jesus Montero to Seattle for hulking right-hander Michael Pineda, who slots in behind CC Sabathia in a rotation that suddenly looks deep. Along with a series of trades that Cashman did not make — specifically two in which he almost gave away a young Robinson Cano, now the team's MVP candidate — the Pineda trade has the Yankees feeling good about themselves.

"I was shocked when we got Pineda," Jeter said. "We faced him a couple times last year. The guy's (23) years old, with an arm like that ... you don't get guys like that too often."

UNIONSPEAK ON LEAK

The players association thinks the leak of National League MVP Ryan Braun's drug test was an isolated occurrence.

Speaking at the Milwaukee Brewers' training camp in Arizona, union head Michael Weiner said "the leak was specific to this case" and "does not threaten the confidentiality of the program."

ESPN reported in December that Braun tested positive for elevated testosterone. Representatives of the Milwaukee outfielder argued during a grievance hearing that specified procedures for handling the sample were not followed, and arbitrator Shyam Das last month overturned the 50-game suspension Braun faced.

Weiner said "the idea that there is confidentiality to the appeals process is critical. If we felt there was a real threat to that here, we'd have a big problem."

SHORT HOPS

Right fielder Corey Hart needs surgery on his right knee that will sideline him for up to a month. About 15 minutes before the Brewers' spring training opener, the club scratched Hart from the lineup because of swelling in his right knee. He went for an MRI test that revealed the tear. ... Cardinals right-hander Adam Wainwright is one step closer to pitching in a game for the first time since being sidelined with an elbow injury that caused him to miss all of the 2011 season. Wainwright threw his final batting practice session without discomfort before his scheduled start Friday against Minnesota. ... Oft-injured reliever Joel Zumaya has told the Minnesota Twins he'll have reconstructive surgery on his right elbow in his latest comeback attempt.

Giants, A's territorial rights saga takes new, confusing turn

Ray Ratto, csnbay area.com

Bill Madden of the New York Daily News has been around baseball long enough to know where the bodies are interred, and who put them there. He also has people of influence whispering in his ear when they want something disseminated sans fingerprints, so when he drops a report, people tend to notice.

Saturday's item, though, that baseball's other 28 owners are inclined to uphold the Giants' claims to the territorial rights to San Jose, smacked not of resolution to the problem, but unsubtle arm-twisting to force the Giants and A's "to come to an accommodation," as Vito Corleone liked to put it 40 years ago.

The report, summarized briefly, was that the Giants' claim to San Jose was more persuasive to the other owners, who could if they thought it was good for the game make those rights go away with one vote and a round of drinks.

This of course came as a surprise to Lew Wolff, the A's front man, who said he hasn't heard a thing about it. Which means of course, that either he hasn't, or he has.

That's the beauty of baseball. You always have to guess how many lies you get to before the truth emerges. And because everyone in the business of baseball with any heat knows the art of misdirection even better than Sun-Tzu.

So let's break down the possibilities.

1. The Madden report is right, in which case John Fisher and Wolff are selling the team as quickly as possible, because they have already poisoned the Oakland well as comprehensively as possible.
2. The Madden report is wrong (meaning he was given disinformation, not that he wasn't told what he says he was told), in which case one can infer that whoever leaked it either works for or supports the Giants' claim.
3. The Madden report is wrong, in which case whoever leaked it was trying to push the process by which the two sides argue over the amount of the tribute the A's give the Giants.
4. The Madden report is wrong, in which case someone was just trying to do a little mischief and get the owners' attention from the Mets and Dodgers for a few minutes.

In sum, either we have reached the end game because the other owners are sick of the two sides and their tedious posturings, or we have reached the end game because the A's want some action one way or another.

Or someone (gee, I wonder who that could be) is trying to kill the plan via leak.

The question resides, ultimately, in which team baseball places its greater hopes, and by team, we mean ownership group. Wolff has Selig, but Selig's alliances shift with circumstances, as Bob Lurie can happily tell you with a map of the scars on his psyche.

The Giants have the economic might, but their ownership has now changed twice in three years and the new guy, Charles Johnson, isn't an insider by any means.

And yes, it's Johnson rather than Larry Baer, because baseball owners deal with the guy with the most money in the game, not the one who is the public face.

If Baer is a player here in any way, it's because he's had 20 years to make relationships with other owners. Not that that matters all that much, but in an argument, you use whatever weapons you have at your command.

In short, this is about lobbying, and effective whispering, and pressing buttons on the right keyboards. Bud Selig doesn't run baseball, but he has access to those who do, and he is not going to take the lead on an ownership

question of this magnitude. He will seek consensus among the strongest of his employers, and without knowing where they stand, we cannot know where the future of San Jose baseball stands.

And Bill Madden either has moved the story along, or he hasn't, depending on why whoever told him San Jose was dead told him San Jose was dead.

If you're confused, don't be. This isn't reading tea leaves. This is reading mulch.

Cuban defector Yoenis Cespedes finds instant friendship with Manny Ramirez at A's camp

By Steve Henson, Yahoo! Sports

PHOENIX – Yoenis Cespedes was 10 minutes into his first workout with the Oakland Athletics and he already had a buddy.

The spectacularly talented Cuban defector stretched, took a speedy sprint down the foul line and stepped into the batting cage for his first swings. The results weren't stunning – he admitted to nervousness and nothing he hit cleared the wall – yet when he exited the cage a teammate greeted him with a soul handshake, a shoulder bump and a smile.

Manny Ramirez has his own job to win, his own reasons to approach each day with focus and urgency, but he spent the entire workout Sunday talking to Cespedes, listening to Cespedes, soothing Cespedes. It was the oddest sight of spring training so far: a dreadlocked, all-but-washed-up 39-year-old facing a 50-game suspension for steroid use willingly taking under his wing a somewhat mysterious 26-year-old phenom with five tools and enormous expectations.

After they'd hit, the two men walked side by side to center field, where they stayed an hour, nothing but green grass stretching 100 feet in any direction, occasionally chasing down a fly ball, but mostly chatting. The prevailing topic was hitting because they took turns simulating batting stances. Ramirez seemed intrigued by the absence of a timing mechanism in Cespedes' stride and illustrated how an inward turn with his own left knee keeps him from over-striding.

As long as the advice doesn't stray to fertility drugs, testosterone levels or intimidating the traveling secretary, the A's have no problem with Ramirez mentoring Cespedes.

In fact, they planned it.

Cespedes agreed to a four-year, \$36 million contract Feb. 14. Ramirez, who hasn't played since walking away from the Tampa Bay Rays last April after testing positive for PEDs for a second time, signed a minor-league deal Feb. 20.

A's general manager Billy Beane implemented "Moneyball" a decade ago and has since doggedly explored other creative ways to compete despite a low payroll. Knowingly teaming Cespedes with Ramirez for introductory lessons and a comfort zone is his latest example of daring to try something nobody else would.

"Yoenis is a unique physical talent," Beane said. "He has strength and speed, and a history of producing. He's a center-of-the-diamond talent in the prime of his career. Any time you spend these kinds of dollars, there's a risk, but you don't see a guy like this come along too often."

What Cespedes doesn't have is professional baseball experience. Or familiarity with intense media scrutiny. Or an understanding of American culture. Ramirez, who is beginning his 20th season with his sixth team, has all of the above.

Because of his mental lapses, odd behavior and hot-and-cold relationships with reporters over the years, Ramirez is sometimes mistakenly portrayed as being a selfish teammate. Every manager he's played for is impressed by his work ethic, and he quickly assumed a leadership role with the Dodgers when they acquired him at the 2008 trade deadline, loosening a tight clubhouse and relieving pressure from young stars Matt Kemp and Andre Ethier.

The A's hope he can do the same for Cespedes, whose nervousness was noticeable Sunday. He ducked into the dugout before batting practice and went through a private ritual of knocking his knuckles against the bat barrel, then giving it a kiss. It was as if he were preparing for an at-bat with the bases loaded in the World Series. At the very least, Ramirez should help Cespedes relax.

It's hard to say how much assistance incumbent center fielder Coco Crisp will offer in making his new teammate feel at home. Crisp is in no mood to surrender the position and move to left field, telling the San Francisco Chronicle, "Unless he's a demigod come down from the heavens, no one is going to outshine me in center field."

Beane said the decision would be manager Bob Melvin's. It's conceivable that Cespedes could even begin the season in the minors if he struggles this spring. Not many of the 30 or so Cuban defectors have made a splash in the big leagues, and not a single position player has become an All-Star.

The A's are counting on Cespedes to buck the odds. He wore No. 51 in Cuba because nobody else had worn it, and he wanted the number associated with his accomplishments. He's No. 52 with the A's because pitcher Dallas Braden is 51 and it's the closest he could get. Cespedes should begin playing in Cactus League games in about a week.

"I've been working out every day, and I feel ready for this," Cespedes said through a translator. "I think if I hit .280, doing the things I need to do, that's good. I expect good numbers."

Cespedes, who will be paid \$6.5 million this season, \$8.5 million 2013 and \$10.5 million in each of the last two years of the deal, is expected to supply power in a lineup devoid of it. A now-infamous 20-minute highlight video includes several long home runs against top Cuban competition. It also includes Cespedes roasting a pig, hanging out with family and engaging in seemingly superhuman feats of strength and athleticism.

In one memorable sequence he leg-lifts a bar with two men crouched on 1,000 pounds of steel plates. In another, he jumps from a standing start atop boxes stacked 45 inches.

Cespedes wouldn't discuss the details of his defection, although he said his mother, an aunt and four cousins left Cuba at the same time and live in the Dominican Republic.

"I miss Cuba," he said, a rueful look crossing his face. "But I have part of my family here and that means a lot. It's a positive."

And as of Sunday, Cespedes has a friend in Manny Ramirez. The A's are hoping that relationship is a positive as well.

Cespedes still a bit of an unknown, so A's start him with known

By Scott Miller | CBSSports.com Senior Baseball Columnist

PHOENIX -- They're not stupid, these Oakland A's. Yoenis Cespedes had been in uniform for barely the amount of time it takes to get a pizza delivered, and already I was thinking back to Ted Williams.

Naw, not exactly while watching him hit. For one thing, he's a lanky right-hander. Teddy Ballgame, of course, batted lefty.

It was something else.

First thing the Athletics did with their exotic new Cuban import on his first day in the majors Sunday was run him through the requisite press conference. Which he did in full uniform, because the second thing the A's had him do was report immediately from there to the field for batting practice.

That's where I thought of Williams, and the tremendous story Twins coach Rick Stelmazek tells from when he was a young catcher with the Washington Senators in 1970 and Williams was managing.

One spring day, the Senators were working on rundowns when two veteran coaches -- one of them Nellie Fox -- became embroiled in a heated argument. Each coach insisted his way of doing it was the right way. The players stood still, riveted, watching and waiting. Stelmazek says it was so ugly he was sure the coaches were going to fight.

A few minutes later, Williams shows up on the field and wants to know what's going on. Fox tells his side of the story. The other coach tells his. The players wait for direction from the manager. Which was the right way?

"F--- it!" the great Williams finally boomed. "Let's hit!"

Eventually in this game, it's all about comfort level. If you've got skills, you've got skills. And Cespedes, by all accounts, is loaded with them.

Now it's up to the A's to make him comfortable, get him relaxed and put him in the best position for those skills to flourish. There is plenty for Cespedes to learn after defecting from Cuba. New culture, language barrier, new pitchers, the list goes on and on. That will all come in time.

For now, the A's figured, stick a bat in his hands.

As for the rest, well, don't ask vice president and general manager Billy Beane quite yet about what to expect from Cespedes, because no one knows for sure. Beane doesn't dare allow himself to dream of numbers and production. Yet.

"Based on the contract, the sooner the better," Beane deadpanned, grinning.

Here's what the Athletics do know about the brand new \$36 million outfielder who joined them Sunday: He starred in the 2009 World Baseball Classic, hitting .458 as Cuba's starting center fielder. He crushed 33 homers in 90 games during the 2010-2011 season Cuban National Series, which tied the single-season record for the best baseball league there. He plays a mean center field, is incredibly athletic and does some crazy things jumping (a 45-inch box jump!) and lifting (1,300-pound leg press! 350-pound bench-press!) on a YouTube video that long ago went viral (though the inclusion of Christopher Cross' 1980 hit *Sailing* as part of the soundtrack didn't appear to help sell Athletics manager Bob Melvin).

"We have great reports on him," Melvin said (of Cespedes, not Cross). "We hear he's a heck of an athlete. I'm sure he'll be pretty happy to be here.

"There's a lot going on. Coming into a situation like this can be uncomfortable. Sometimes, the solace is actually getting on the field and playing baseball."

Cespedes, through a translator (Juan Navarrette, a minor-league coach), said he has been waiting seven months to get back on the field, spending most of that time working out and preparing for the challenge.

"He's laser-focused," said his agent, Andy Katz. "I've never seen anything like it."

Wearing No. 52, Cespedes said, "I'm very close to my dream of playing in the big leagues. ... I feel in very good shape and I'm ready to take on the challenge."

He signed with Oakland, he said, because he was intent on getting a four-year deal. Many in the industry had pegged the Marlins as favorites, given their high level of interest and the huge Cuban population in South Florida.

"Oakland was the one interested in four years," Cespedes said. "Once I knew Oakland's offer was four years, I didn't hesitate."

He knew little about the organization. He did talk with former Athletic Miguel Tejada briefly in the Dominican Republic, his way station between Cuba and Oakland, and Tejada told him what a great organization Oakland is, with terrific people.

Lots and lots and *lots* of those people can be found here in the outfield. Incredibly, with the addition of Cespedes, the A's now have 16 outfielders in camp. Coco Crisp ... Jonny Gomes ... Josh Reddick ... Seth Smith ... Michael Taylor ... Manny Ramirez ... if you meet an A and don't know him, chances are he's an outfielder.

As manager, Melvin swears he knows them all.

"Just the last names," he quipped. "Not the first names.

"I know who they all are. I feel bad for some of them because they might not get the number of at-bats they want this spring."

Crisp does not want to give up center field, though most figure he'll wind up in left and Cespedes in center.

"It'll play out," Melvin said. "I'm not too concerned about that yet. From what I understand, center field is his most comfortable position."

When Cespedes finished hitting Sunday morning, he jogged out to center field with one of his hitting-group partners: Manny. The two of them stood and talked for the longest time, Ramirez demonstratively waving his arm at one point. Yep, folks around the batting cage figured, they're talking hitting.

The A's do not know for sure when they'll get Cespedes into a Cactus League game, though it sounds like he'll be ready within five or six days. They're unsure whether he'll break camp on the opening day roster -- remember, the A's open with Seattle in Japan on March 28 -- until they see him play.

"We thought he had unique physical skills," Beane said. "Strength, speed. Really, to find a center-of-the-diamond player in the prime of his career, those players usually aren't available to us.

"Listen, anytime you put that kind of money out, it's a risk."

With a bat in his hand, same way it was in Cuba, the A's are hopeful that it's low-risk, at worst.

"At the end of the day, it's the same game," Gomes said. "It's 90 feet to first. Sixty feet, 6 inches. Three outs in an inning.

"And whoever touches the dish most wins. That shouldn't be any different."