

A's News Clips, Monday, March, 12, 2012

Oakland A's notebook: Rotation hopeful Tommy Milone has another strong outing

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Tommy Milone was not perfect Sunday, but he continued his strong bid to make the A's starting rotation.

The lefty worked 32/3 innings in a 10-8 victory over the Kansas City Royals. He allowed four hits and walked none, the only damage coming when he hung a 1-2 changeup that Eric Hosmer bashed for a two-run homer in the third.

Milone continued to draw praise for his ability to work both sides of the plate and mix his pitches.

"I wouldn't say he's a favorite, but he's certainly deep into the mix," A's manager Bob Melvin said of Milone's rotation chances. "When you're talking about three (open) spots, he isn't hurting himself by the way he's pitching."

The A's don't expect starter Dallas Braden to be ready until May, so five pitchers are battling for three rotation spots behind Brandon McCarthy and Bartolo Colon.

Milone is competing with Graham Godfrey (who allowed four runs in two innings Sunday), Jarrod Parker, Brad Peacock and Tyson Ross -- not necessarily in that order. Melvin said he expects the battle to last through the A's season-opening two-game series March 28-29 against the Mariners in Tokyo.

Oakland can take 30 players on that trip but must pare down to a 25-man roster for each game. The A's will return to the Bay Area afterward and play more exhibitions before settling on a final 25 players.

Milone has made five major league appearances, but this marks his first big league camp. He said

his command is sharper than usual at this point.

"I think it has a lot to do with being in big league camp," he said. "There are actual fans at the games. You get the adrenaline going."

Yoenis Cespedes had a quieter day Sunday than in his debut, going 0 for 3 with a walk and strikeout. He served as designated hitter and batted third.

Melvin said he might also try Cespedes in the cleanup spot. The outfielder will get a scheduled day off Monday and be back in center Tuesday, when Coco Crisp gets the day off.

Cespedes fouled a ball off the top of his left ankle in his final at-bat but stayed in the game.

The A's improved to 7-3-1 in exhibitions with a come-from-behind win over the Royals. Eric Sogard delivered a three-run double in the eighth to erase an 8-7 deficit.

That came after Sogard, playing shortstop, got flattened by Kansas City's Mitch Maier during a rundown in the top of the eighth. Maier was caught between first and second, put on the brakes, and Sogard rammed into him while applying the tag.

"He put me on my butt," Sogard said. "Maybe it woke me up for that last at-bat."

Sogard is hitting .370 (10 for 27) in nine games. He has a good shot to make the team as the backup infielder, but Melvin isn't counting him out at third base, where Josh Donaldson is getting most of the time.

First base candidate Kila Ka'aihue hit his first homer with the A's and did it against his former team. He crushed a two-run shot over the elevated wall in right-center in the fourth off Mike Montgomery.

Ka'aihue is 3 for 15 in seven games. He's competing with Brandon Allen, Chris Carter and Daric Barton at first, though Barton's chances appear slim as he's been slowed by injuries.

Barton is slated to make his exhibition debut Monday, serving as D.H. against the White Sox.

□ Closer candidate Fautino De Los Santos walked two and threw two wild pitches in an adventurous ninth inning. He was bailed out by second baseman Adam Rosales, who made a diving stop of Kevin Kouzmanoff's sharp grounder and threw to first to end the game and strand the tying runs at second and third.

□ The A's made their first round of cuts. Among the 12 players sent down: first baseman-turned-pitcher Sean Doolittle, outfielders Michael Choice and Grant Green and right-hander Sonny Gray, the A's first-round pick last June.

Doolittle, a standout pitcher/first baseman while at the University of Virginia, made a permanent switch to the mound in August.

The A's are grooming the lefty as a reliever and want him to sharpen his slider.

A's rotation may get settled in Japan

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

The five-man competition for three rotation spots is expected to go international.

"I think it'll go to Japan," said manager **Bob Melvin**, who doesn't need a No. 3 starter until the fifth game of the season because **Brandon McCarthy** and **Bartolo Colon** will start the first two games in Tokyo (March 28, 29) and the first two in Oakland (April 6, 7).

The A's also will play two exhibitions in Japan, giving Melvin more time to look at the candidates. Sunday, lefty **Tommy Milone** continued to help his chances with 3 2/3 innings in which he threw one regrettable pitch: a changeup that **Eric Hosmer** hit for a two-run homer.

It was Milone's third appearance (he tossed three scoreless innings in his second), and he has walked one batter in 7 2/3 innings.

"He's big-league ready," Melvin said. "I have no doubt about it."

That doesn't mean he's a favorite. "No, but he's deep in the mix. He isn't hurting his chances by the way he's pitching," Melvin said.

Milone said, "It's a great opportunity. I can't complain with the hand I was dealt."

The other contenders: **Jarrod Parker**, **Brad Peacock**, **Tyson Ross** and **Graham Godfrey**, who gave up four runs and five hits in two innings Sunday.

Céspedes back to earth: As the DH in his second Cactus League game, **Yoenis Céspedes** went 0-for-3 with a strikeout and walk. The A's held their collective breath when he fouled a pitch off his left ankle in his final at-bat, falling to the ground, but he was OK and finished the at-bat, striking out.

"He didn't have the results he did yesterday, but I think we can give him a break," Melvin said.

Céspedes, who was 10-for-18 with three homers in three simulated games and Saturday's Cactus League game, won't play today (determined before he was plunked) and is scheduled to play center on Tuesday.

Roster cuts: Outfielder **Michael Choice**, the 10th overall pick in the 2010 draft, and **Sean Doolittle**, who converted from hitter to pitcher, were among 12 players shipped to minor-league camp.

Doolittle and outfielder **Jermaine Mitchell** were optioned, and 10 non-roster men (pitchers **Fabio Castro**, **Edgar Gonzalez**, **Sonny Gray**, **Jim Miller** and **Merkin Valdez**, catcher **Max Stassi** and outfielders **Grant Green**, **Cedric Hunter**, **Jason Pridie** and Choice) were reassigned.

A'S 10, ROYALS 8

Notable: **Eric Sogard**'s three-run double in the eighth inning erased Kansas City's 8-7 lead. In the top of the inning, Sogard was flattened by large **Mitch Maier** (who seemed twice his size) in a rundown. "He caught me square. Maybe it woke me up," said Sogard, who had redness near his chin, a result of the collision. ... Sogard, a candidate for the third-base job, is hitting .370 with a team-high 10 hits and has reached base with a hit or walk in all nine of his games. ... **Kila Ka'aihue**, a first-base candidate, homered against his old team. ... **Fautino De Los Santos** earned a save with a scoreless ninth. ... Yoenis Céspedes was the DH in his second Cactus League game, and **Daric Barton** will DH today in his Cactus League debut. **Manny Ramirez** is Tuesday's DH.

Quotable: "We probably all expect him to get three more hits today and hit a couple home runs or whatever. They threw him some good pitches. They pitched him a little tougher today."

- Bob Melvin on Céspedes, the only man in Oakland's lineup to go hitless.

Today's game: A's (**Tyson Ross**) at White Sox (**Jake Peavy**), 1:05 p.m.

Hosmer homers, drives in four for Royals in loss

San Francisco Chronicle

After a strong debut, Yoenis Cespedes struggled in his second spring game in the majors.

A day after the Cuban defector homered in his first game, he went hitless in three at-bats, with a walk, in the Oakland A's 10-8 victory over the Kansas City Royals on Sunday.

"I thought he had some decent at-bats," Oakland manager Bob Melvin said. "He didn't have the results he had yesterday, but I think we can give him a break. We were probably all expecting him to get three more hits and hit a couple home runs, but he looks good up there. They threw him some good pitches."

Cespedes flied out, lined out and struck out. He also drew a walk and was shaken up briefly when he fouled a ball off the top of his left foot, but stayed in the game.

He is 2 for 6 in his two games with the A's, who signed him to a four-year, \$36-million deal earlier this month. Cespedes, who was the designated hitter on Sunday, is scheduled to play next on Tuesday, when he'll be back in center field.

Kansas City's Eric Hosmer drove in four runs, including two on his first homer of the spring.

"It kind of gets the monkey off your back a little bit," Hosmer said. "It's a good feeling getting that swing and building off it for the rest of spring training."

Hosmer, who hadn't homered in his first 17 spring training at-bats, hit it off left-hander Tommy Milone. Last year Hosmer hit .237 with only one of his 19 homers against left-handed pitchers.

"This was a guy who keeps you off balance and changes speeds a lot, so I was just focusing on taking that ball to left-center," said Hosmer, who lifted his average to .316. "It was a changeup, and I stayed on it."

Milone, a leading candidate for one of the three vacant spots in the rotation, gave up just those two runs in 3 2-3 innings. He's allowed three earned runs in 8 2-3 innings this spring.

"I feel good," he said. "Since the first bullpen session, I've really had the command that I want. I've thrown strikes and kept the ball low. I've felt more in season form now than in previous years. Usually it comes a little later."

Royals starter Bruce Chen bounced back for a rough first start to give up one run in three innings.

NOTES: Eric Sogard's three-run double in the eighth gave the A's a two-run lead. ... With two outs in the ninth and the potential tying run in scoring position, A's 2B Adam Rosales saved the game with a diving stop of Kevin Kouzmanoff's grounder. ... The A's optioned LHP Sean Doolittle and OF Jermaine Mitchell and reassigned RHP Edgar Gonzalez, RHP Sonny Gray, RHP Jim Miller, RHP Merkin Valdez, LHP Fabio Castro, C Max Stassi, OF Michael Choice, OF Grant Green, OF Cedric Hunter and OF Jason Pridie. ... Oakland 1B Daric Barton is scheduled to make his spring debut as the DH on Monday against the White Sox. Barton has been out because of a biceps problem. He also underwent shoulder surgery last year. Barton is unlikely to be ready to for the opener on March 29 in Japan. ... Oakland's Kila Ka'aihue hit a two-run homer against his former team. ... Royals reliever Jonathan Broxton gave up an unearned run in 2-3 of inning in a `B' game against the Rangers. Broxton gave up a hit and two walks and he struck out one. Broxton, who has been coming back from elbow surgery, is scheduled to pitch Wednesday in a regular exhibition game. ... Mike Montgomery, one of the Royals' top prospects, was charged with five runs in 2-3 of an inning against the A's.

A's may have 2 suitors to keep team in Oakland

Phillip Matier, Andrew Ross, Chronicle Columnists

Two investment groups - including one that recently dropped out of the high-priced bidding for the Los Angeles Dodgers - have expressed serious interest in buying the Oakland A's and keeping the team in its current home.

One outfit is from the L.A. area and is headed by a financial services industry executive, according to a behind-the-scenes adviser who said his client didn't want to be named for fear of running afoul of Major League Baseball.

That group recently bailed from the Dodgers bidding when it looked like the final asking price would approach a staggering \$1.5 billion.

The second group, which also didn't want to be identified publicly, is led by a longtime executive from a high-profile Silicon Valley company. The exec already owns a minor league baseball franchise.

We're told the first group has already made its interest in the A's known to Major League Baseball. The second will probably do so soon.

The possible suitors are making their moves after nearly three years of indecision by baseball about allowing the A's to move to San Jose. The feeling is growing that baseball won't challenge the San Francisco Giants' claim to territorial rights in the South Bay - even if Commissioner **Bud Selig** won't come out and say it.

That could leave **Lew Wolff** and his deep-pocketed partner, **John Fisher**, who bought the A's in 2005 for a bargain \$172 million, with few good alternatives short of cashing out for what could be a handsome profit.

As to why either investment group thinks it can succeed in Oakland when the current owners have all but given up on the city:

First, Oakland is a proven market, and the A's have drawn as many as 2.9 million fans when they were winning.

Second, the Oakland City Council's vote last week to explore redeveloping the Coliseum site with a new ballpark has given investors hope of partnering with the city in a deal that could make financial sense.

A's managing partner Wolff insists the team isn't for sale.

"We love being in baseball - we just want to have a good fan experience," Wolff said.

It's a deal: Look for a big multimillion settlement to be announced as early as today between San Bruno and Pacific Gas and Electric Co. to go along with the \$70 million fund that the company has set aside as restitution for the 2010 natural gas explosion that killed eight residents.

San Bruno officials have been pushing PG&E for up to \$100 million in extra compensation to pay for a new library or some other major project that would help heal the city's wounds - and now we're told they'll get a hefty chunk of it.

Medical alert: San Francisco Mayor **Ed Lee** has begun briefing supervisors on a deal for California Pacific Medical Center to relocate to the site of the old Cathedral Hill Hotel on Van Ness Avenue.

Details are still being worked out, but the two sides appear to be in agreement on charity care and keeping CPMC's St. Luke's Hospital open. And there are the usual contributions for affordable housing for anyone displaced by the project.

Whether the deal will sit well with the California Nurses Association - which is in a labor fight with CPMC parent Sutter Health - remains to be seen.

Some officials fear that if pushed too hard, Sacramento-based Sutter Health may opt to pull up stakes, leaving the mayor and the Board of Supervisors with another missed deal to create a boatload of jobs.

Breyer patch: **Michael Breyer**, a small-business owner, San Francisco library commissioner and son of U.S. Supreme Court Justice **Stephen Breyer**, has filed to run for the 19th Assembly District seat being vacated by the termed-out **Fiona Ma**.

Breyer's entry means city Assessor **Phil Ting** will have a real race on his hands.

Moving on: **Lance Greenfield** has been a San Francisco parking control officer for 25 years, and he's seen a lot - he chased down a robber in his three-wheeler, he had hot coffee tossed in his face by a Mercedes-driving teen, and he was hit by a stolen car.

Now he's hanging up his ticket book.

To mark the occasion, the Metropolitan Transportation Agency gave Greenfield a special commendation that didn't note any of the above incidents.

Instead, it zeroed in on Greenfield's most infamous accomplishment: giving out a record 500 parking tickets on a single day.

"It was kind of embarrassing," Greenfield said. "The room was filled with civilians, and half of them sat in shock when they heard. The other half started booing."

Deep thoughts, cheap shots & bon mots ...

Scott Ostler, San Francisco Chronicle

-- Why would **Peyton Manning** even consider signing with San Francisco? Here's Manning in the 49ers' huddle: "Vernon, you line up left and run a crossing route. Vernon, you line up right and run a post."

-- And why would the 49ers want Manning? Defenders don't need a bounty to smell blood, and the glass-necked Manning will be a deer with Christmas lights strung in his antlers.

-- Next step: superstar defenders demanding larger bounties. We'll have bounty holdouts. "I'm not gonna cripple a guy for a lousy \$2,000. Talk to my agent."

-- If **Ryan Vogelsong** pitches as he did last year, the Giants could stage a four-way battle for the Cy Young. If somebody hits.

-- **Lew Wolff** says when he recently chatted with **Bud Selig**, the subject of a ruling on the A's moving to San Jose didn't come up. Is Lew so respectful of his friendship with frat brother Bud that he won't press the commish on a matter that is killing the A's franchise? Wolff is a co-conspirator in the destruction of the A's.

-- Another wild-card team in the playoffs will add much excitement. Now all Selig has to do is lean on Congress to tack two extra days onto September.

-- If **Yoenis Céspedes** shows even a hint of living up to the hype, he has to be in center field for the A's. Can you imagine Mays, Mantle or DiMaggio playing left or right? The A's can't shove the kid out of center simply because he says he is willing to play anywhere, while **Coco Crisp** says he'll be miffed if he's not in center.

-- **Kobe Bryant's** suffocating arrogance surfaces again: Bryant told USA Today he never watched video of his 81-point game (January '06) because he might be frustrated at how close he was to scoring 100. Really? Bryant played 42 minutes, shot 28-for-46 (60 percent), 7-for-13 on threes, 18-for-20 from the line. Look, **Ekpe Udoh** has come as close to scoring 81 points in an NBA game as Kobe has to scoring 100.

-- Speaking of Udoh, if the Warriors fall a game or two short of the playoffs, coach **Mark Jackson** will have to explain why he waited so long to yank **Andris Biedrins** from the starting lineup.

-- Quietly, the Raiders took a big punch to the gut in losing **Michael Bush**. Is **Darren McFadden** walking yet?

-- **Miguel Tejada** says he flopped with the Giants because he was not happy there. Sure. An over-the-hill player was handed a starting job on a club that just won the World Series. That would make anybody grumpy.

-- Eagle-eyed reader **John Siamas** spotted, on a list of area prep hoopsters now excelling in college ball, these four: **Jazmine Davis** (Washington), **Jasmine Smith** (St. Mary's), **Jazmine Jackson** (Pepperdine) and **Jazmine Perkins** (Washington State). Yes, the Bay Area is a veritable gold mine of Jaz(s)mines.

Sogard stays hot with three-run double

Ka'aihue dials up first spring HR in A's comeback win

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- There was no shortage of hits between the A's and Royals on Sunday at Phoenix Municipal Stadium, but it was Eric Sogard's go-ahead bases-clearing double in the bottom of the eighth that gave Oakland a 10-8 victory.

Sogard is now batting 10-for-27 (.370) with three doubles and six RBIs this spring. He also has two home runs to his name, as he makes a big push for a roster spot as the everyday third baseman or as a utility infielder.

The Royals' Eric Hosmer enjoyed a 2-for-4 day at the plate with four RBIs, collecting his first home run of the spring -- a two-run shot to right field off Tommy Milone in the third -- and a two-run double two frames later. His former teammate, Kila Ka'aihue, now fighting for a first-base job with the A's, also homered in the game.

The two clubs combined for 24 hits overall, none of which came off the bat of Yoenis Cespedes. The Cuban sensation, who homered and singled in his debut Saturday, went 0-for-3 with a walk as Oakland's DH. He'll get the day off Monday.

Milone, making his second start and third overall Cactus League appearance, furthered his bid for a rotation spot with the A's by pitching into the fourth inning without much damage. Hosmer's homer proved to be his lone mistake, and the southpaw also escaped a two-on, no-out jam in the first. He walked none and struck out one.

For Kansas City, starter Bruce Chen pitched three innings and gave up just one run -- the result of back-to-back doubles off the bats of Cliff Pennington and Jemile Weeks in the third.

Up next for Royals: Luke Hochevar, who turned in two scoreless innings in his first spring start, will face the San Francisco Giants at 3:05 p.m. CT on Monday at Surprise Stadium. Royals starters have done well collectively of late, stringing together 10 consecutive shutout innings until Bruce Chen gave up a third-inning run to the A's on Sunday. Jake Odorizzi, ranked fourth on MLB.com's Top 20 Royals Prospects, also will pitch. Catcher Salvador Perez, after a day off, is expected to return to the lineup.

Up next for A's: First baseman Daric Barton, on the mend from right shoulder surgery, is slated to make his Cactus League debut on Monday, when the A's travel to Camelback Ranch in Glendale, Ariz., for a 1:05 p.m. PT meeting with the host White Sox. Barton will DH for the A's, who will place right-hander Tyson Ross on the mound for his third spring start.

Inbox: Will Cespedes make the trip to Japan?

Beat reporter Jane Lee answers fans' questions

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

Will Yoenis Cespedes travel with the team to Japan, and do you think he'll begin the season on the A's 25-man roster?

-- Dave F., Fremont, Calif.

I can't imagine the A's leaving Cespedes behind, not after what they've seen from him so far, even in a small sample size. I think they've been just as impressed with his plate discipline -- coming in, there were questions surrounding his ability to showcase that much -- as the power that was already well documented. No one else on the team reads like a three- or four-hitter as Cespedes does, and it doesn't appear that those expectations will hamper his progression, based on the calm manner he's displayed from the get-go. His adjustment period will surely continue. But unless he endures glaring struggles in the next week, expect to see him in the A's Opening Day lineup.

What's your prediction for the starting outfield? Any chance Coco Crisp and Cespedes rotate between center field and designated hitter?

-- Joey P., Walnut Creek, Calif.

The A's have enough options at DH without adding Crisp and Cespedes to the mix. I suspect they'll keep Cespedes in his natural center-field position and shift Crisp to left, with Josh Reddick in right. That leaves Seth Smith without a starting outfield job, meaning he'll likely start the season sharing DH duties with Jonny Gomes.

What do you think about Grant Green moving back to the infield? There's obviously no depth there, so why not let him play third base?

-- Kyle L., Chico, Calif.

It's a fair question, considering Green seemed destined for a career at shortstop before his transition to center field began last year. I'm sure Green wouldn't mind moving back to familiar territory, either, but the A's are intent on continuing his grooming process in the outfield. The A's believe his bat translates well there, and it's really what will get him to the Majors. How soon, though, is the question. It seems Green will have plenty of time to continue work in the Minors, as the A's have found a center fielder in Cespedes and also have another in Michael Choice waiting in the wings.

How do you think the rotation shakes out? I hope to see Tyson Ross in there.

-- Joey P., Walnut Creek, Calif.

It was long suggested that there would be two spots up for grabs in the A's rotation. But with lefty Dallas Braden seemingly out of the mix until May, there's really three jobs to be had by the time camp breaks. At this point, I think it's a safe bet that one belongs to Tommy Milone, whose sharp command and keen knowledge of the strike zone has been just as advertised. Beyond him, I'd think Ross and Jarrod Parker are strong bets for the final spots, which would leave Brad Peacock and Graham Godfrey behind at Triple-A to begin the year. Ross has quietly put together a solid spring, while Parker has, on many occasions, showcased the stuff that made the A's pull the trigger on the Trevor Cahill deal.

Are the games against the Mariners in Japan going to be televised?

-- Josh E., Oakland, Calif.

MLB Network will televise the two games on tape delay, to be played at 6 a.m. and 7 p.m. PST on March 28 and 29. Also, 95.7 FM The Game and the Oakland A's Radio Network will broadcast the games live, with the first game beginning at 3:10 a.m. PST on March 28 and the series finale being aired at 2:10 a.m. PST on March 29.

Barton to make spring debut at DH

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Confined to the sidelines for the past few weeks, Daric Barton will finally make his Cactus League debut on Monday, when he's scheduled to bat second as designated hitter in the A's road contest against the White Sox.

It marks a significant step for Barton, who has been nursing his surgically repaired right shoulder back to health in the backdrop of a first-base competition that includes Brandon Allen and Kila Ka'aihue. But he'll stick to DH duties until he's cleared to throw in a game, which may not happen for another week.

As a result, it may be too late for Barton to play catch-up and grab a roster spot by the time the club leaves for Japan on March 22. Though manager Bob Melvin is familiar with Barton's defensive skills, he would still like the infielder to get around 40 at-bats this spring -- a number that likely won't be reached by that time.

It would make sense, then, for Barton to stay behind and get those at-bats in Minor League camp and extended Spring Training without any added pressure, while either Allen or Ka'aihue get a shot at the everyday first-base job.

Three of Allen's four hits this spring have been for extra bases, and Ka'aihue flashed some power on Sunday, collecting his first home run of the spring against the Royals, his former team. He's 3-for-15 in seven games.

A's make first cuts, send down 12 players

PHOENIX -- The inevitable first round of cuts took place in A's camp on Sunday, with the club sending 12 big-league camp participants back to the Minors, including pitchers Sean Doolittle and Sonny Gray and outfielders Michael Choice, Grant Green and Jermaine Mitchell.

Doolittle and Mitchell, the only two represented on the 40-man roster, were optioned to Triple-A Sacramento, while the remaining 10 -- all non-roster invitees -- were simply reassigned to Minor League camp.

It's a familiar scene for the 25-year-old Doolittle, but he departs feeling more encouraged than perhaps any other year, given his successful progression as a converted first baseman. Manager Bob Melvin, in meeting with Doolittle on Sunday afternoon, relayed that he no longer thinks of him as "a converted guy" but as a pitcher.

"I really appreciated that," said Doolittle, who struck out three in 1 1/3 Cactus League innings. "That's something I kind of set out to do, to be looked at as a pitcher and not a converted guy. It's such a unique situation. It's a process, and the only way to get better is to face hitters in game situations, coming in with runners on base, facing lefties, that kind of stuff."

As is the case around this time of year, there are not enough innings for pitchers such as Doolittle, who will continue work as a reliever while developing a slider. Right-handers Edgar Gonzalez, Jim Miller and Merkin Valdez, and lefty Fabio Castro were also sent down.

Meanwhile, catcher Max Stassi and outfielders Cedric Hunter and Jason Pridie joined the list of position players to be moved Sunday, leaving the club with 46 players in camp. Among that group are 10 outfielders, making Choice and Green's demotions all the more understandable.

"I came in trying to elaborate on where I finished last season," said Choice, the A's 2010 first-round Draft pick. "Competition is definitely a beast up here ... I feel like I've done well against it. I just want to try to work on consistency."

Worth noting

- Lefty Tommy Milone continued his bid for a rotation job in fine fashion Sunday, pitching into the fourth inning in his second start (third appearance). Aside from a two-run homer off the bat of Eric Hosmer, who launched a misplaced changeup over the right-field wall, Milone created little movement on the base paths. He walked none and struck out one, throwing 51 pitches total.

"He's certainly deep in the mix," Melvin said of Milone's chances at a rotation job. "He isn't hurting himself the way he's been pitching."

The A's manager acknowledged his decision on the three open rotation spots might not be made until Japan, since he can take 30 players on the trip and set a 28-man roster for each of the two regular-season games against the Mariners.

• Yoenis Cespedes, coming off his big debut that resulted in a home run and RBI single, went 0-for-3 with a walk and a strikeout in Sunday's contest, while batting third at DH. He'll take Monday off and be back in the lineup on Tuesday.

Major League: Barton, Cespedes and feats of strength

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 3/11/2012, 12:19pm

A quick roundup of the morning's news:

- Daric Barton will make his Cactus League debut tomorrow and will DH against the host White Sox at Camelback Ranch. Barton recently restarted his throwing program but is still at least a week away from appearing in a game at first base. That makes it very unlikely he'll be able to join the team in Japan, considering the charter leaves in 11 days. Like his other players, Melvin would like to get Barton around 40 at-bats this spring. Some of those, it seems, will have to come in extended Spring Training, while Brandon Allen or Kila Ka'aihue get a shot at the everyday first-base job to start the season.
- The A's have always envisioned Yoenis Cespedes in the middle of the order, and it didn't take long for him to land there. Just one day removed from his big debut, Melvin planted the Cuban sensation in the three hole for Sunday's contest with the Royals. He'll DH today and get tomorrow off and will follow a two-on, one-off schedule, like several other players are on.
- Seth Smith is in right field today, and Melvin says he and Josh Reddick will see time in both corners this spring. I imagine, though, that we'll soon see plenty games with Cespedes in center and Coco Crisp in left, so that the team can make a decision soon on how they want to handle the two outfielders moving forward.
- The A's received their annual motivational talk from team chaplain Donnie Moore on Sunday. Moore has been a steady presence with the team for more than 20 years, and like he's done for the past few, brought in a team to perform unusual feats of strength to convey a message of positive thought. What, you ask, are unusual feats of strength? Well, the 30-minute performance included Moore and Co. rolling up a metal frying pan, breaking stacks of bricks, tearing a phone book in half and breaking a soda can in half. Normal, right? Melvin, new to the show, thoroughly enjoyed it and was even a guest participant at the end. I didn't have the best view, but let's just say it involved the breaking of a brick over his chest with a sledge hammer — or something like that.

Marcos Breton: A's Yoenis Cespedes a refugee of Cuban baseball politics

Marcos Breton Sacramento Bee

PHOENIX – The highest-paid player on the A's is the same player the manager and coaches know least about.

He is a man without a country who fled communism and the indentured servitude of the Cuban national baseball team.

Yoenis Cespedes didn't defect from Cuba last summer out of any great love for America or hatred for Marxism.

"It never occurred to me that I would abandon my country," the outfielder said quietly to me in Spanish during his first at-length interview in the English press and without an interpreter.

Cespedes fled last summer and eventually signed with A's for \$36 million over four years for a very simple reason.

He was angry – not on a political level but on a baseball level.

He once thought of quitting baseball when he was left off Cuba's World Baseball Classic team of 2006.

"If they didn't pick me for the team in 2009, I was going to quit," he said.

Cespedes wore Cuba's colors in 2009, but the honor was fleeting.

He said he grew tired of being one of the best players in Cuba, if not the best – yet always getting jerked around by the politics of the national team.

"I was leading the league in home runs," he said. In fact, Cespedes' mark of 33 homers in one season still stands as the season record in Cuba.

At the World Baseball Classic in 2009, Cespedes' raw power opened eyes and dropped jaws in baseball's top international showcase.

He hit .458 in the tournament with two home runs and five RBIs in six games. Even then, the allure of America didn't move him. Cuba played its last two games in San Diego at Petco Park, beating Mexico and then being eliminated by Japan.

Cespedes went back to Cuba and would have stayed, but life became unbearable for him.

"The athletes don't get the treatment they deserve. What they earn, they don't receive. That's what motivates Cuban players to leave," he said.

At 26 and a sculpted 5-foot-10 and 210 pounds, Cespedes might have been a halfback had he been raised a hundred miles north in Florida instead of the isolated province of Granma in Cuba.

He evokes a young Sammy Sosa or Raul Mondesi.

And yet: "On the national team, they have an A team, a B team and a C team. I was leading the league in home runs, and they put me on the C team. The worst team," Cespedes said last week.

"That's when I decided to leave. It took me 15 days to make up my mind."

He arrived in the Dominican Republic with his mother, two aunts and four cousins.

Ask him how, and he says: "I really don't think I should talk about that now."

Like other Cuban defectors before him, Cespedes hooked up with an American agent. Adam Katz, who also represented Sosa, lured several teams to bid on Cespedes. The Miami Marlins, Chicago Cubs, Chicago White Sox and A's were the main suitors, Cespedes said.

"I told my agent I only wanted to sign for four years, and the A's were the only team to offer four. The others offered six," Cespedes said.

The man from the communist country had become a capitalist quickly. In four years, he'll be 30 and presumably can make more money than if he had signed a longer initial contract.

In the end, the team with one of the lowest payrolls in baseball emerged as the shocking winner of the Cespedes sweepstakes. At \$6.5 million this season, Cespedes easily will be the A's highest-paid player.

"To find a potentially center-of-the-diamond player in the prime of his career, those players usually aren't available to us," A's general manager Billy Beane said when Cespedes was signed.

Here, Cespedes has looked powerful and menacing in batting practice – and more than a little lost off of the field.

He rarely makes a move without Manny Ramirez, the busted cheat attempting a comeback with the A's.

"If I was dropped into a country where I didn't know the language and where there were high expectations? That's a lot of pressure," said A's manager Bob Melvin.

Though so serious he has to be reminded to smile, Cespedes has brought smiles to others.

On Saturday, in his first big-league game, Cespedes went 2 for 2 with a walk, two RBIs and a powerful home run to left field off Cincinnati Reds left-hander Jeff Francis.

It was an impressive at-bat as Cespedes showed patience and an ability to adjust pitch-by-pitch as he fouled off three consecutive curveballs, hitting each one harder than the one before. When Francis switched up and came with a high fastball, Ka-BOOM!

"I was nervous before the first at-bat," he said. "But then I let it go. As I was running the bases, I was so happy – and relieved."

The A's could end up being overjoyed. With Cespedes, the A's might have what every team craves – a big outfielder with speed and power.

They also have a guy who says he doesn't party and prefers quiet nights at home watching TV. He is a budding star who can't yet communicate with his teammates.

"I like them," he said of the A's. "I just don't understand them."

That's fine for now. His bat is speaking loud and clear.

No long ball for Cespedes on Sunday

In three at-bats, he goes 0-for-2 with walk

ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHOENIX — After a strong debut, Yoenis Cespedes struggled in his second spring game in the majors.

A day after the Cuban defector homered in his first game, he went hitless in three at-bats, with a walk, in the A's 10-8 victory over the Kansas City Royals on Sunday.

"I thought he had some decent at-bats," Oakland manager Bob Melvin said. "He didn't have the results he had yesterday, but I think we can give him a break. We were probably all expecting him to get three more hits and hit a couple home runs, but he looks good up there. They threw him some good pitches."

Cespedes flied out, lined out and struck out. He also drew a walk and was shaken up briefly when he fouled a ball off the top of his left foot, but stayed in the game.

He is 2-for-6 in his two games with the A's, who signed him to a four-year, \$36-million deal earlier this month. Cespedes, who was the designated hitter on Sunday, is scheduled to play next on Tuesday in center field.

Kansas City's Eric Hosmer drove in four runs, including two on his first homer of the spring.

"It kind of gets the monkey off your back a little bit," Hosmer said. "It's a good feeling getting that swing and building off it for the rest of spring training."

Hosmer, who hadn't homered in his first 17 spring training at-bats, hit it off left-hander Tommy Milone. Last year Hosmer hit .237 with only one of his 19 homers against left-handed pitchers.

"This was a guy who keeps you off balance and changes speeds a lot, so I was just focusing on taking that ball to left-center," said Hosmer, who lifted his average to .316. "It was a changeup, and I stayed on it."

Milone, a leading candidate for one of the three vacant spots in the rotation, gave up just those two runs in 3 2-3 innings. He's allowed three earned runs in 8 2-3 innings this spring.

"I feel good," he said. "Since the first bullpen session, I've really had the command that I want. I've thrown strikes and kept the ball low. I've felt more in season form now than in previous years. Usually it comes a little later."

Royals starter Bruce Chen bounced back for a rough first start to give up one run in three innings.

NOTES

Eric Sogard's three-run double in the 8th gave the A's a two-run lead.

With two outs in the ninth and the potential tying run in scoring position, A's 2B Adam Rosales saved the game with a diving stop of Kevin Kouzmanoff's grounder.

The A's optioned LHP Sean Doolittle and OF Jermaine Mitchell and reassigned RHP Edgar Gonzalez, RHP Sonny Gray, RHP Jim Miller, RHP Merkin Valdez, LHP Fabio Castro, C Max Stassi, OF Michael Choice, OF Grant Green, OF Cedric Hunter and OF Jason Pridie.

Oakland 1B Daric Barton is scheduled to make his spring debut as the DH on Monday against the White Sox. Barton has been out because of a biceps problem. He also underwent shoulder surgery last year. Barton is unlikely to be ready to for the opener on March 29 in Japan.

Oakland's Kila Ka'aihue hit a two-run homer against his former team.

Royals reliever Jonathan Broxton gave up an unearned run in 2-3 of inning in a 'B' game against the Rangers. Broxton gave up a hit and two walks and he struck out one. Broxton, who has been coming back from elbow surgery, is scheduled to pitch Wednesday in a regular exhibition game.

Mike Montgomery, one of the Royals' top prospects, was charged with five runs in 2-3 of an inning against the A's.

Rights issue between Giants-A's back in spotlight

By: [Mychael Urban](#), San Francisco Examiner

Turf tiff: A battle of press releases last week brought the A's-Giants territory issue back to the surface and to the public arena.

Let's call it Territory Purgatory.

The A's are in it; Bud Selig's "blue-ribbon panel" has kept them in it for more than three years now; and with an emphatic victory this week in a fairly comical battle of press releases, the Giants made it clear that they're rather enjoying — and are perfectly willing, able and expertly equipped to help extend — it.

Give the A's some credit for at least coming out with some information on the urban legend about late owner Walter Haas Jr. giving the Giants the rights to South Bay rights at issue way back when.

But take that same credit away for the ambiguity of the information, and for weakening the stand that the press release seemed to represent by bringing up the ludicrous aside about being OK with the Giants putting a Dugout Store in Walnut Creek, the heart of A's territory.

But the Giants strengthened the perception that they're better organized and informed with a release that leaned not a whit on ambiguity but on cold, hard, detailed facts. The Giants' rights to that region have been unanimously ratified or acknowledged — "unanimously" means the A's were down with it, too, gang — into the MLB constitution three times!

Look, I want to see the A's win this one. The market is more fun with two teams in it, no matter where they play.

But if this week's press-release pissing match were a prizefight, it was the Giants as Ali in his prime, beating down some emaciated stiff who stumbled into the ring after a day snuggled up with a plastic bottle of supermarket gin.

Makes you suspect that, as rumored of late, Territory Purgatory is in fact going to end up with the A's in Hometown Hell.

IN NEED OF 5-HOUR ENERGY: Anyone else troubled by the hangdog vibe of Warriors coach Mark Jackson these days? On Wednesday, the Dubs starters fell behind 21-4 and looked utterly pathetic with what Jackson called "just an embarrassing effort" — a demoralizing loss in front of yet another big crowd the deserves far better for packing Oracle on a nightly basis.

But what happened on the court wasn't as eyebrow-arching as what Jackson said afterward. After noting that the starters displayed a disturbing lack of "energy, effort and passion," the coach said coaches shouldn't have to coach

energy, passion and effort.

Huh?

Isn't Jackson supposed to be kind of a motivational guru? He sure as heck isn't a genius with X's and O's; he's never been a head coach at any level of the game. And while we'd love to think professional athletes bring energy, effort and passion to the table every time out, the truth is that they don't, and some coaches are lauded as great coaches solely because they can coax those things out of the players who might be lacking or short on them.

The comments just reeked of dejection, and it's a particularly bad look on Jackson, whose own energy, effort and passion was a big part of his hiring in the first place.

SPEED ROUND: If you're worried about Tim Lincecum, get a hobby and check back at the end of the month. It's not a big deal that the Rockies smoked him this week. ... Overlooked in the immediate aftermath of Peyton Manning being cut by Indy is that Andrew Luck, fair or not, is forever going to be seen by Colts fans as one of the reasons for Manning's clunky exit stage right. Nothing like a little pressure as you transition into the NFL. ... The A's didn't really suggest that Yoenis Cespedes wasn't quite in "baseball shape" when he arrived in camp, did they? Have you see this kid? He's every Greek god in one. And what is baseball shape? Was David Wells in it? Stop.

Oakland A's Spring Q&A: Todd Steverson

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Mar 12, 2012

Todd Steverson has filled a number of roles during his years with the Oakland A's organization, including hitting coach, manager and big league first base coach. Steverson is embarking on his first year as the team's minor league hitting coordinator. We spoke with Steverson on Friday about his work at the A's spring mini-camp, his thoughts on his new role and more...

OaklandClubhouse: You had a chance to watch the simulated game [on Friday] with Yoenis Cespedes and Manny Ramirez. How are they looking to you?

Todd Steverson: They are looking pretty good. Manny is starting to come around. It looks like his timing is getting to where to he wants it to be for spring training. Cespedes did really well his first couple of days there. He's striking pitches and taking good swings. He's got a lot of talent.

OC: Does Cespedes remind you of anybody?

TS: I can't really put a pinpoint on him like that yet. He's got a good body type, but I can't put a pinpoint on who he looks like though.

OC: You recently finished the spring training mini-camp. How did that go for you?

TS: It was good. These guys are taking their whacks and getting some extra time in before the regular season. It's a short spring training for the minor leaguers. It's tough to get going in such a small timeframe sometimes, so having a decent amount of the guys come out and get their arms ready to go for the season and be able to break camp and have some of our pitchers able to throw 100 pitches off the get-go and have our hitters prepared to get right into the business is a great thing.

OC: The camp was a mix of young players and guys who have been in the system for a few years. Did you have one program for everyone or was it more specialized depending on the hitter's individual skill level?

TS: Everybody is individual as it relates to their approach. Everyone has different sets as it relates to their hands. Everyone's got different loads, what have you. But what we like to say is that learning to approach the pitch is a lot more similar to everybody than their personal mechanics. The approach and putting yourself in position to hit mistakes that are thrown up there by the pitcher are really where it's a common ground. We want everybody to be able to be in the strongest position with their legs, so they can see the baseball. One of the biggest things about hitting is being able to see the baseball. To be able to do that, you've got to get ready and prepared with an early body movement to get your legs to be a strong base so you can see the ball longer.

OC: Did anyone stand out to you as really picking up things quickly or making a big improvement?

TS: Really almost all of them. Obviously it is kind of new to some of the guys because of what they used to do. We wanted it to be a lot more on task with one certainty and absolute that we wanted to see as coaches. We will work everything else around that absolute, but without being in position to hit consistently, we are really banging our heads against the wall trying to help you guys play.

OC: You got to see Miles Head for the first time since he was acquired this off-season. What did you think of him as a hitter?

TS: So far, I've only caught him for 10-15 at-bats and some BP, but for a young hitter, he's got a lot of tools. He's got quick bat speed, good balance, a good head on his shoulders. He's a nice acquisition, in my opinion. He's only 20 years old, so you can only get better from there and with the attributes that he has at this age, you can assume that he would be able to mature into a nice, solid hitter once he gets it all going.

OC: Yordy Cabrera got a chance to go up to a big league game and wound-up hitting the game-winning homer. Do you anticipate a better season from him this year than he had last season?

TS: I would hope to anticipate better seasons from everybody, but Yordy had some struggles last year and the best thing about sports and the game of baseball is that you have the opportunity to reflect and learn from what just happened to you. You can then come out and try to compete in a better manner from what you know you were lacking.

I think he's come to grips with some of the things that held him back last year in terms of maturing as a hitter. He has now matured one full year as a hitter. Anybody will tell you who has played the game long enough – big leaguers included – that it's a process. It's not snap-snap, I'm there. Regardless of how talented you are, there are only a select few who have made that jump like that. Yordy, being as talented as he is, the sky is the limit for him regarding that. But it becomes an all-around game. Your whole game needs to be shaped your entire time in the minor leagues before you become a big leaguer. I think that is what Yordy is starting to realize that he needs to sync his whole game up so it fits the bill when he gets to the big leagues.

*OC: You only had two outfielders in mini-camp. Did that make outfield drills tricky or are **Aaron Shipman** and Rashun Dixon fast enough to cover the outfield by themselves? [laughs]*

TS: They were. [laughs] It was a little infielder-heavy in mini-camp. We are also using this time to hone in on some of our guys to give them a little extra work that we feel will really help them. Shipman and Dixon are two guys that we think highly of – not that there are guys who we don't – but we believe they deserved the opportunity to come out and get a jump-start on their season. As an organization, we'd like to see everyone do well, but we gave them that opportunity for the extra work. Especially with the big league camp being so outfield-heavy, a high amount of outfielders [in camp] was not necessary since we aren't playing real games yet.

OC: There are guys who have been working out at the complex who haven't officially reported to camp yet and aren't part of the mini-camp. What sort of work do you do with those guys?

TS: You treat them just like any other guy who is actually in camp. They may come out a little later [in the day], but they are still going to get their groundballs and flyballs and get their swings in. They are a commodity for the organization as much as the mini-campers. You have to applaud the kid for coming out and taking his job seriously enough to make the choice to come out early and be prepared before the reporting date. We take them and they do pretty much the same things that are going on during the mini-camp. The hitters get their tee-work in, their soft-toss, their mini-toss and their swings in. They get their verbiage and thought processes, everything.

OC: What changes on Sunday when everyone reports to camp? Is it just that the days are longer or are you teaching different things now that everyone is in camp?

TS: It's a lot different when everyone gets here because now you have to implement all of the different aspects of the game on defense also. Cut-offs and relays, bunt plays, pick-offs and rundowns, first-and-third defense. All of that stuff has to be addressed now that obviously we couldn't work on in the mini-camp with only two outfielders. We just go through the whole thing, the same process that the big leaguers go through when they first report. It's a fresh start and it's all about fundamentals and doing things correctly the first time and being precise about it and understanding what we are trying to do.

OC: Have you spent much time with the younger players in big league camp such as Michael Choice and Grant Green?

TS: The good thing about the A's and the guys we have in camp is that we've brought our guys up and we've seen them and we've had interaction with them before they have gotten to big league camp, whether it be the Fall League or they played for you during the season. Whatever it was, you've seen them along the way throughout their careers, coming up different levels and through the Instructional League. Everyone in our organization has talked to or worked with these players at some point. That's the good thing about the cohesiveness within the organization.

As for me personally, absolutely I've talked to Choice, I've talked to Greenie. Guys like the non-roster invitees, [Jeff] Fiorentino actually played for me on my team in the Fall League in back in '07 and he was on my Triple-A team in Sacramento in '08. [Jason] Pridie, I didn't know him but he came out early and he lives in town. I just met [Brandon] Moss and I've seen [Cedric] Hunter play across the way when he was with San Diego. I've seen [Kila] Ka'aihue for years, and I've had conversations with him as baseball comrades throughout the years. Obviously [Wes] Timmons played for me last year. Sogie [Eric Sogard] has played for me. [Chris] Carter has played for me. [Michael] Taylor has played for me. Even Coco [Crisp] has played for me. [laughs]

[Josh] Reddick I hadn't seen a lot of, but I learned a lot about him from Chili [Davis, the A's major league hitting coach]. That's the communication I'm speaking of. Anyone I know about, I talk to Chili and explain to him my knowledge and history with them and the player's history. And he does the same with me because you never know where they are going to be or where you are going to be.

OC: How has it been working with Chili Davis? Are you trying to coordinate hitting philosophies or are you bouncing ideas off of one another at this point?

TS: I knew Chili before he got the job over here with Oakland. Chili is a great baseball man. He enjoys the game. He loves talking about the game, as do I, so we've matched really, really well together. Our philosophies, if you want to go with that – I'd go more with our thought processes – on how things should go with hitters and what their thought processes should be, mesh pretty much evenly. We talked a lot during the off-season and we spent a lot of time together at the complex before camp opened up talking about these thought process.

We came to the conclusion that we are not very far off very much at all, if at all, with how we feel development of hitters should go. That includes Sparky [Greg Sparks], our Triple-A guy who was the coordinator before I was. Sparky has been talking with Chili and they are getting a good relationship and a good rapport so they can communicate properly throughout the course of the season when we send players up and down. That creates a cohesive unit between the minor leagues and the big leagues.

OC: What are you looking forward to the most about your new position?

TS: I'm looking forward to having the 60 guys or so that I will have under my belt and seeing their progression from last year or Instructional League through spring training. I like to see players mature, whether it be physically, mentally or both. I love the process. Hopefully every coach loves that process. I see players across the diamond that I had – whether it be when I was with the Cardinals or the A's – and I look at how they are grown from where they were or how they struggled with certain things and they are not anymore.

There is a maturation process that really gratifies me. There are people who don't really enjoy the process, especially the players, because they want instant gratification. But I enjoy the process because I love to see the final product after the process completes. It's kind of like raising a child. It's a process. You don't want them to touch the stove, so they watch and learn not to touch the stove. It's the same with us. I like to see them grow. That's what I am most looking forward to, that process happening.