

A's News Clips, Tuesday, March 13, 2012

Oakland A's notebook: General manager Billy Beane wants to see more from outfielder Yoenis Cespedes

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

GLENDALE, Ariz. -- A's general manager Billy Beane is impressed with Yoenis Cespedes thus far, but he insisted Monday that the outfielder must be judged on a larger body of work than two exhibitions.

Cespedes homered and had an RBI single Saturday in his first Cactus League game, then went 0 for 3 with a walk Sunday. He was off Monday but is expected back in center field Tuesday against the Milwaukee Brewers.

Beane would not guarantee Cespedes will be in the lineup March 28 when the A's open the regular season against the Seattle Mariners in Tokyo.

"Whether we think he'll be ready to handle it the first game of the year or the 10th game, we just don't know," Beane said. "I think we'll just have a feel. If we think he can handle it up here, we'll make that decision."

Unless Cespedes struggles mightily between now and the opener, it's difficult envisioning that he won't occupy a spot in the middle of the batting order that day.

In the meantime, the A's are getting to know Cespedes, who defected from Cuba last summer and signed a four-year, \$36 million contract on Feb. 13.

"He seems to be a very serious kid, which I think is what's impressed us most," Beane said. "Sometimes you don't know when you bring guys in and you don't have a lot of background on them. You see baseball talent but don't know how they are off the field."

Beane confirmed that Ariel Prieto, the pitching coach for the team's short-season Single-A club, will instead join Oakland for the regular season to serve as Cespedes' interpreter and offer support.

Cespedes knows little English, as was the case with Prieto when he defected from Cuba before the A's drafted him in 1995.

Manager Bob Melvin said he will choose between Grant Balfour and left-hander Brian Fuentes to be his closer. Until Monday, he had maintained it was a four-way battle that included Fautino De Los Santos and Joey Devine.

Regarding De Los Santos, Melvin said: "He's a guy that has the ceiling to close at some point. I don't know if it's now."

Fuentes, who has 199 major league saves, went 1-8 with a 5.09 ERA through his first 38 appearances last season but rebounded for a 1.57 ERA over his final 29.

But Melvin said he would only feel comfortable using Fuentes in the ninth if the A's break camp with a second left-hander in the bullpen. Jerry Blevins is the leading candidate to fill that role, but Melvin cautioned that carrying another left-hander would not guarantee Fuentes is the closer.

Melvin said he could see other key roster competitions -- finding a first baseman, third baseman and filling three rotation spots -- lasting until the A's return to the Bay Area from Tokyo and complete their exhibition schedule.

Brandon Allen drew the start at first Monday and delivered a two-run single in the A's 9-4 win over the Chicago White Sox. He ranks second in the majors with 10 RBIs this spring, though seven came in one game against the Cubs.

"It's typically a power position and production position, and certainly he has the ability to do that," Melvin said. "Whether he does it consistently is certainly a question we're looking at."

Kila Ka'aihue (.200, 3 RBIs) and Chris Carter (.278, 0 RBIs) are also in the mix at first. And Beane would not rule out Daric Barton, who played in his first exhibition Monday at D.H. after being slowed by complications from shoulder surgery.

Because Barton still hasn't been cleared to play defense, he remains a long shot.

Tyson Ross, a rotation candidate, threw three shutout innings against the White Sox and has tossed six scoreless innings in his past two outings. He is working to hone his changeup.

"It's going to be a pitch that down the road will be huge for me," Ross said.

Collin Cowgill played all three outfield spots and went 3 for 3 with a three-run double.

Manny Ramirez will serve as D.H. on Tuesday, but Melvin added that he wants to devote more D.H. at-bats to players who will be with the team to start the season. Ramirez will miss the first 50 games while on suspension for violating MLB's drug policy.

A's Lew Wolff denies team for sale

By Angela Woodall and Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The newest turn in the Oakland A's tale of two cities helped add some suspense to what has been an ongoing drama pitting San Jose against Oakland.

The latest development in the three-year saga came recently when two, and possibly three, suitors called Major League Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig to say they want to buy the team and keep it in Oakland.

A's managing partner Lew Wolff is intent on moving the team to San Jose and said he has no knowledge of any prospective ownership group interested in buying the A's.

"No one has contacted me," he said in a phone interview in Arizona. "It's not for sale, but no one has contacted me. Someone made that story up, I think."

That came in response to a San Francisco Chronicle story published Monday that claimed that two groups have expressed interest in buying the A's and keeping them in Oakland.

One of the two groups is reportedly based in the Los Angeles area and recently dropped out of the bidding to purchase the Dodgers. The second group, according to the Chronicle, is led by an executive from a high-profile Silicon Valley company.

Former A's executive Andy Dolich was rumored to be a possible candidate for the mystery suitor. But when asked about the A's, he said, "Categorically no," because the team is firmly in the hands of Gap heir John Fisher and Wolff.

"In this case, possession is much stronger than nine-tenths of the law," he said.

If they change their mind, Dolich said, then maybe he would change his. Until then, the answer remains "absolutely no."

A group led by Dolich came close to securing the A's in 1999. MLB owners tabled the vote at the eleventh hour, and in 2005 Fisher and Wolff paid \$180 million for the A's.

Forbes estimated the team at the end of the 2011 season was worth \$307 million, up from \$295 million in 2010.

In 2011, the team brought in the highest revenues since 2002: \$161 million.

The Chronicle also reported that one of the groups has already alerted Major League Baseball of its interest and that the other one intends to do so.

A third investor group is reported to be interested.

Oakland Mayor Jean Quan said she wasn't surprised that investors would want to buy the team and called the overture to MLB "credible."

If there is a group willing to buy the A's and keep them in Oakland, Quan said she would consider putting the Victory Court ballpark back on the table, even though the city is still moving forward with the alternative Coliseum City site.

A's closer role will go to either Grant Balfour or Brian Fuentes

By Joe Stiglich, Bay Area News Group

PHOENIX — The A's closer decision basically comes down to a two-man race between Grant Balfour and Brian Fuentes, manager Bob Melvin said Monday.

Those veterans were shaping up as the favorites, but it was the first time Melvin didn't call the closer battle a four-man race, with Fautino De Los Santos and Joey Devine being the other possibilities.

Asked about De Los Santos specifically, Melvin replied: "He's a guy that has a ceiling to close at some point. I don't know if it's now."

The A's have other roster issues to sort out, including finding a starting first baseman, third baseman and DH, as well as filling the final three spots in the rotation.

A's still evaluating outfield options

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

PHOENIX -- **Yoenis Céspedes** and **Coco Crisp** are sharing time in center field for now, but eventually the A's must decide on one man. Will it be Crisp the incumbent or Céspedes the newcomer?

"That's going to come down to putting the best defenders in the right place," said general manager **Billy Beane**, who's also including **Josh Reddick** in the outfield mix. "It's not going to revolve around one person. It's the best combination of guys. It's all three of them."

If Céspedes plays center, Crisp probably would move to left. Asked if he looks at himself as the center fielder, Crisp said, "I look at myself as Covelli Crisp."

As for Céspedes, "He's got a great arm and, so far, is getting good reads. He's definitely going to make our team better. We're all excited about his potential to help the ballclub."

Crisp played center the past two days, and Céspedes will play center today.

Closer duet: Manager **Bob Melvin** said the closer will be lefty **Brian Fuentes** or **Grant Balfour**, adding the bullpen would include another lefty if Fuentes were to close.

As for hard-throwing **Fautino De Los Santos**, "He's a guy who has a ceiling to close at some point. I don't know if it's now."

Pridie suspension: Major League Baseball announced **Jason Pridie's** 50-game suspension for violating the minor-league drug policy, having tested positive for a "drug of abuse" (recreational drug). The outfielder had been among Sunday's cuts and reassigned to the minor-league camp.

Briefly: Daric Barton, in his Cactus League debut, was 0-for-3 (two walks). He's a long shot to make the roster after a late start because of shoulder surgery. ... Manny Ramirez will be the designated hitter today.

A'S 9, WHITE SOX 4

Notable: **Tyson Ross**, in competition for a rotation spot, threw three scoreless innings and has allowed one earned run in seven innings this spring. Ross and **Travis Schlichting** were among the pitchers to earn **Bob Melvin's** praise. ... The A's, who have won four straight, collected six runs and eight hits off **Jake Peavy**, who was pulled in the third inning amid a five-run rally. ... Peavy exited with the bases loaded, and **Collin Cowgill** hit a three-run double off **Layson Septimo**. ... Cowgill and **Kurt Suzuki** each had three of Oakland's 15 hits. Cowgill played all three outfield positions. ... Play of the game: 5-3-5 double play in the ninth with both third baseman **Josh Donaldson** and first baseman **Kila Ka'aihue** making impressive stops.

Quotable: "He's got lots of physical talent, and it's fun watching him go up there each at-bat as we learn more about him."

- GM Billy Beane on Yoenis Céspedes

Today's game: Brewers (**Mike Fiers**) at A's (**Jarrod Parker**), 1:05 p.m.

Drumbeat: Billy Beane talks Yoenis Céspedes at A's spring training

John Shea reporting from A's camp, 3/12/2012, 12:48pm

General manager Billy Beane addressed several topics before today's exhibition against the White Sox. Here are a few:

Early thoughts of Yoenis Céspedes: "He'll have good days and bad days. I don't know if there's any benefit in giving a daily evaluation. He's got lot of physical talent, and it's fun watching him go up there each at-bat as we learn more about him. Saturday was a lot of fun, but it was a spring training game."

Ariel Prieto's value as interpreter etc.: "Ariel is a pretty valuable member of our minor-league coaching staff, and losing him down there hurts. But we thought he's the perfect guy to help us and be with him for the day-to-day things."

Off the field, too? "Everything is completely new to Yoenis. He seems to be a very serious kid, which is what impresses the most. He's very diligent about getting his work in. Baseball definitely seems to be his priority. At least the first impression with Yoenis is that he's very serious about his career, but he'll need assistance off the field in opening a bank account etc."

Do you want Manny Ramirez as a mentor? "With another teammate, you don't just assign somebody. Guys will make their own decisions. Manny won't be here the beginning of year anyway. Mentorships, I mean, the GM saying you're his mentor, that doesn't work."

What do you need to see from Céspedes? "How we think he'll handle the major leagues and whether or not he'll be able to handle the first game of the year or 10th game of the year. We just don't know, and I don't want to set any timetables or statistical goals for him to reach. We'll just have a feel. If he can handle it up here, we'll make that decision."

Céspedes in center field: "When it comes to the outfield, Bob (Melvin) will decide who's the best and what's the best decision for each guy and who are the best three and the positoins. That's going to come down to putting the best defenders in the right place. It's not going to revolve around one person."

Response to Jason Pridie's 50-game suspension, which was announced today: "As with all suspensions, it's disappointing. ... We'll see. Just like in any spring training, a lot of it comes down to numbers and whether he'll be here or in Triple-A or Double-A. Certainly, being suspended doesn't help you battle for a job."

Consistency key to Allen's staying power

First baseman showing signs of overcoming plate deficiencies

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

GLENDALE, Ariz. -- Brandon Allen's Texas roots run deep.

The A's first baseman, a native of Montgomery, Texas, a small town with a population that amounts to just three digits, returns every offseason and is surrounded by essentially every family member in a 50-mile radius.

It's a place of comfort for Allen, who is looking for that same thing in Oakland, his third baseball home in less than 10 years. Just 26 years old, Allen has already been traded twice in his young career -- first by the White Sox in 2009, then from Arizona last July -- but is hoping a few changes to his swing have him primed for job security with the A's.

"Well, you always think that," Allen said, smiling, on Monday morning. "But I do enjoy it here so far, and I feel like this could be the place for me."

The organization sure hopes so, even though its front-office faces are also keeping tabs on first basemen Daric Barton, Kila Ka'aihue and Chris Carter -- all of whom are considered in the mix for the Opening Day job.

Oakland hasn't employed a first baseman of the power-hitting kind for an extended period since Jason Giambi's reign from 1998-2001. Allen, who stands 6-foot-2 and weighs in at 235 pounds, isn't expected to average 35 home runs, as Giambi did during that span. But he has the potential to bring power to a position that hasn't seen more than 16 home runs since 2007, when Nick Swisher and Dan Johnson combined for 24.

A's hitting coach Chili Davis and special adviser Phil Garner, who worked with Allen a handful of times during the offseason in Texas, are trying to help him have the opportunity to. Together, they've put in plenty of hours in the cage to combat Allen's struggles with inside pitches.

"What he showed last year is that he's got power to all parts of the field," Garner said. "Any time the ball was out over the dish, he'd hit to the middle of the diamond, and he'd hit it well. And then they started pitching inside to him, and that speeds up your bat."

The ball, then, would go foul or right by Allen's bat, and nearly 40 percent of his at-bats culminated in a strikeout. Since, he's improved on lengthening his hand path and staying on his legs to avoid a short swing.

"I can feel the results in the cage, feel my hands quicker," Allen said.

There have been flashes of it on the field, too. Allen has five hits in 21 at-bats this spring, including three for extra bases, and leads the club with 10 RBIs. Seven of those came March 4 against the Cubs, when Allen hit his first home run -- a grand slam on an inside pitch.

"One year ago," Garner said, "he would have pulled that foul."

Manager Bob Melvin likes what he's seen, too, but is looking for consistency, as the lack of it has plagued Allen's career to this point. When he was brought up to Oakland on Aug. 13, he went 0-for-2 with two strikeouts in his debut before putting together back-to-back three-hit games that jump-started a five-game hitting streak. But, in the month of September, he hit just .141 (10-for-71) with 34 strikeouts.

"Every hitter is going to have a few flat spells," Garner said. "But if a hitter knows where to go when he gets in trouble, he can cut that time down."

Allen's Minor League numbers suggest it's possible. In 83 games for Triple-A Reno last year, Allen hit .306 with a .579 slugging percentage and .427 on-base percentage, to go along with 18 home runs and 66 RBIs. Add in his above-average defensive ability and deceptive speed, and his potential grows.

"We really like what he has to offer," Melvin said. "You can tell he's working hard, and I think he's having a nice camp at this point."

"I feel good, I feel comfortable," Allen said. "I'm trying to win a spot on this team. I'm getting my at-bats and just trying to produce."

Allen's fate likely won't be known until April, as Melvin plans to keep the position battles open as long as possible. But continued production and growing confidence, Garner believes, will make him "that guy who forces himself into the lineup."

"The opportunity is there, and if he shows enough and keeps that going, there's no question he can play here," he said. "It's just about maintaining that level of consistency."

Cowgill, Allen set the pace for A's

Pair drives in five during third; Ross goes three scoreless

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com

GLENDALE, Ariz. -- Brandon Allen and Tyson Ross currently find themselves in the middle of Oakland roster battles to not only break camp with the team but to also secure starting roles.

And in Monday's 9-4 victory over the White Sox at Camelback Ranch, both players certainly helped their cause.

Allen, a former White Sox Minor Leaguer who is in the mix for Oakland's first-base job, singled home two runs during a five-run third inning against White Sox starter Jake Peavy. Allen has 10 Cactus League RBIs in 11 games.

Ross, one of the A's hurlers competing to fill three open rotation spots, hurled three scoreless innings with two strikeouts and two walks.

"My control is not as great as I want it to be yet, but you look at the positives," Ross said. "I've been able to pitch out of jams and put up zeroes."

Peavy wants the same kind of results posted by Ross, even if it was just his second start of the Cactus League on Monday afternoon at Camelback Ranch. But the right-hander remained upbeat and happy with his Spring Training work-in-progress, despite giving up six runs on eight hits over 2 1/3 innings.

He threw almost exclusively fastballs in his first home start against the Brewers but was able to work in more offspeed pitches in this trip to the mound.

"I threw a lot of breaking balls, some not so good," said Peavy, who walked two and struck out one. "I just had a hard time commanding the outer half of the plate, the glove side of the plate, getting the ball across.

"Obviously, I have a lot to work on as far as getting on time tempo-wise, getting your foot down and getting the ball away," Peavy said.

Oakland scored one in the first inning on Coco Crisp's single but took control with that five-run third. Collin Cowgill tripled home three off Leyson Septimo, who replaced Peavy with the bases loaded and one out when Peavy hit his pitch limit.

The White Sox rallied with four runs in the fifth off reliever Neil Wagner, with Alexei Ramirez, Kosuke Fukudome and Alex Rios all picking up RBIs.

Kurt Suzuki and Cowgill had three hits apiece for the A's, while Alejandro De Aza, Rios and Ramirez had two hits each for the White Sox.

Up next for A's: Yoenis Cespedes will be back in the lineup Tuesday when the A's host the Brewers at Phoenix Municipal Stadium for a 1:05 p.m. PT start. The Cuban outfielder, who homered in his first game on Saturday, is expected to play in center and will be joined in the lineup by designated hitter Manny Ramirez. On the mound, right-hander Jarrod Parker continues his bid for a rotation spot. The game will be broadcast via a free audio webcast on athletics.com.

Balfour, Fuentes top closer candidates

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

GLENDALE, Ariz. -- The right man for Oakland's closer job could be dependent upon how many left arms make the bullpen.

A's manager Bob Melvin said Monday that either right-hander Grant Balfour or left-hander Brian Fuentes will assume the role. The latter option appears to be the favorite as long as another southpaw, such as Jerry Blevins, resides in the bullpen.

"I have an idea who it will be, I just haven't announced anything yet," Melvin said. "The variables around them have just as much an impact. ... We're waiting to see what the makeup of the bullpen will look like."

Both were early favorites, but in recent weeks Melvin had initially included right-handers Joey Devine and Fautino De Los Santos in the mix. Devine's name was not brought up in Monday's conversation, and, asked specifically about De Los Santos, Melvin replied, "He's a guy that has a ceiling to close at some point. I don't know if it's now."

Fuentes, meanwhile, has plenty of experience in the ninth inning. The 36-year-old veteran has 199 career saves, including an American League-best 48 in 2009 while with the Angels. He converted 12 of 15 saves last season, and posted a 3.70 ERA in 67 appearances.

Manny to get at-bats in Minor League camp

GLENDALE, Ariz. -- Manny Ramirez's Cactus League appearances, already sparse, will continue to be fewer and far between, as manager Bob Melvin looks to hand time in the designated-hitter spot to players in need of at-bats.

Ramirez, meanwhile, will get his at-bats in Minor League camp, as he did Sunday and Monday. He's played in just three games with the A's, going hitless in eight at-bats, and will start for them at DH on Tuesday at home against the Brewers.

"Being as he has to start with the 50-game suspension and that camp is shortened, I think we've probably committed DH at-bats to finding out some other things about other guys," Melvin said. "But he wants to go over there [to Minor League camp]. He tells me, 'Hey look, don't worry about me. I know you're under the gun to get other guys at-bats.' He's been great about that."

Daric Barton started Monday's game at DH and will be limited to that role until his surgically-repaired right shoulder is cleared to throw in games. Jonny Gomes and Seth Smith are also expected to garner DH at-bats in the next week, as the club prepares for departure to Japan a week from Thursday.

Worth noting

- Making his spring debut Monday, Daric Barton went 0-for-3 with two walks as the designated hitter. There is no timeline on when he'll be cleared to play first base.
- Right-hander Tyson Ross made yet another impressive Cactus League start Monday, pitching three scoreless innings against the White Sox. He allowed three hits, walked two and struck out a pair. Ross has a 1.29 ERA this spring and is a strong candidate to break camp in the rotation.

"My control's not as great as I want it to be yet, but you look at the positives. I've been able to pitch out of jams and put up zeroes," Ross said.

- Left-hander Brett Anderson, still ahead in his rehab schedule, said he will add changeups to his pitch mix in his Saturday bullpen session. The club is still eyeing August for his return to the rotation.

"Everything's been going good," Anderson said. "I keep searching for something to be off, but I feel great."

Pridie suspended 50 games for drug violation

A's outfielder, who played for Mets last year, is on Triple-A roster

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

GLENDALE, Ariz. -- A's outfielder Jason Pridie has been suspended 50 games for a second drug violation under baseball's Minor League testing program, the Commissioner's Office announced Monday.

Pridie was reassigned to Minor League camp as part of the first round of cuts on Sunday, and he'll be allowed to continue play in Cactus League games, as Manny Ramirez is doing. Listed on Triple-A Sacramento's roster, his suspension will be effective at the start of the season.

"As with all suspensions, it's disappointing," A's general manager Billy Beane said.

Pridie, who hit .231 with four home runs and 20 RBIs in 101 games for the Mets last season, was signed to a Minor League deal by the A's this offseason and was never expected to break camp on the club's 25-man roster, given an already crowded outfield scene.

Monday's news simply ruled out the possibility.

"Just like in any Spring Training, a lot of it comes down to numbers and whether he'll be here or in Triple-A or Double-A," Beane said. "Certainly, being suspended doesn't help you battle for a job."

A's Pridie suspended 50 games for drug of abuse

By ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Oakland Athletics center fielder Jason Pridie has been suspended 50 games for a second violation of a drug of abuse under baseball's minor league testing program.

Pridie hit .231 with four home runs and 20 RBIs in 101 games last season for the New York Mets. He is on the roster of Triple-A Sacramento.

The suspension, announced Monday, is the 21st this year under the minor league drug program, and the eighth for a drug of abuse.

White Sox's Peavy roughed up by A's in 9-4 loss

Associated Press

Jake Peavy was roughed up again in his second spring start for the Chicago White Sox. He even crossed up a sign with catcher Tyler Flowers on a pitch that Brandon Allen hit for a two-run single.

At least his confidence is still intact.

"No doubt in my mind that if I'm healthy I will get people out," he said. "There is no chance I will give that up after a rough spring training start."

Peavy left with one out in the third and was charged with six runs and eight hits in a 9-4 to the Oakland Athletics on Monday.

"It's early. I've got five, six more of these to get better," he said. "We all have to get better. I certainly will. You want results, you don't want to walk out there and give up runs and hits."

Peavy made his spring debut against Milwaukee on Wednesday and surrendered three runs and four hits over two innings in a 10-6 loss. The 2007 NL Cy Young Award winner threw more breaking balls in this outing.

"I threw a lot of breaking balls, some good and some not so good," he said. "Just had a hard time commanding the outer half of the plate."

Peavy said he has to work on his tempo. Injuries limited him to 19 games last season.

Collin Cowgill went 3 for 3 with three RBIs for Oakland, which finished with 15 hits. Tyson Ross allowed three hits in three scoreless innings.

A's slugger Daric Barton went 0 for 3 with two walks in his first spring game. Barton, who batted second and served as the designated hitter, is coming back from surgery in September for a torn labrum in his right shoulder. The first baseman has yet to make throws in a game.

"The velocity in his swings I think is better," Oakland manager Bob Melvin said. "I think the surgery has really helped him. It's going to take time to get your timing. This is his first time in games other than some swings yesterday, so it will take some time, but he got five at-bats today."

Ross, one of five contenders for three spots in Oakland's rotation, struck out two and walked two.

"I went out there and put up some zeros. In the end, that's always the most important thing," Ross said. "My control wasn't as great as I want it to be at. Just looking at the positives, I went out there three times, hit my pitch limit and was able to pitch out of some jams and ultimately get some ground balls and prevent runs."

Alex Rios, Alexei Ramirez and Alejandro De Aza had two hits apiece for Chicago.

NOTES: Oakland's Yoenis Cespedes was off Monday but is expected to play Tuesday. Manny Ramirez is expected to be the DH against the Milwaukee Brewers. . White Sox 1B Paul Konerko was back in the lineup after fouling a pitch off his knee Saturday. . The White Sox announced outfield prospect Brandon Short, a non-roster invitee to spring training, underwent surgery to repair a dislocated left shoulder and torn left labrum injured on Thursday. He is expected to miss the season. . Melvin said Travis Schlichting has been impressive. He got the save by throwing 2 1-3 scoreless innings. His ERA is 2.84. .White Sox manager Robin Ventura said he would like to see Dan Johnson at third base. He's a candidate for a bench spot. ... Peavy and the White Sox invited 13 wounded war veterans to spring training on Monday.

INSIDE BASEBALL

Spring roundup: Big Bay Area names make long-awaited debuts

Cliff Corcoran, Sports Illustrated

Adding a speed-and-power threat like Yoenis Cespedes or getting an emerging star like Buster Posey back from injury would have a big impact on any team, but the A's and Giants were each in the bottom three in their league in runs scored in 2011, making the potential impact of those players, both of whom made their spring debuts over the weekend, all the greater.

Cespedes, who is built like a running back and is reportedly as fast, made his A's debut in centerfield in Saturday's game against the Reds and impressed with a perfect day at the plate, drawing a walk in his first trip, delivering an RBI single up the middle in his second, and leading off the fourth inning with a home run in his third and final turn at bat in the game.

The home run came on a hanging breaking ball from non-roster lefty Jeff Francis, a chest-high pitch on the outside corner that the switch-hitting Cespedes lined over the left-field fence. Francis is no longer the same pitcher he was in his heyday with the Rockies, nor did it answer the question of whether Cespedes can turn around a quality major league fastball but it was nonetheless a good sign for an A's team that will take power any place it can get it. On Sunday, Cespedes went 0-for-3 with a walk and a strikeout against Bruce Chen and the Royals.

Posey returned to the Giants' lineup on Friday for the first time since his season-ending ankle injury last May, catching two innings and getting one plate appearance. Posey started behind the plate again on Sunday and has thus far gone hitless in three trips and thrown out just one of the three baserunners attempting to steal against him. Still, just having Posey healthy enough to be in the lineup is huge for the Giants, who will need the offensive infusion he can provide.

Less encouraging was the performance of Cespedes' new Oakland teammate, Manny Ramirez, who returned from some back stiffness to go 0-for-3 and is now 0-for-8 on the spring without so much as a walk. In his first at-bat on Saturday, Ramirez had his first Manny Being Manny moment in an A's uniform when he lost track of the count and attempted to take first on ball three. He fouled a lot of pitches off on the day, suggesting a slow bat, which is a notable concern for a player who missed all but five games last season before his premature retirement. In all, Ramirez grounded out to the left side three times, though he did hustle to first base each time, twice reaching on an error. Ramirez and Cespedes are both expected to be back in the A's lineup on Tuesday with Cespedes alternating days in centerfield with positional rival Coco Crisp.

First Cuts

Several of the game's top pitching prospects were among the first players cut from major league camp on Sunday. The Mariners, who, along with the A's, are in something of an accelerated spring training due to their early opener in Japan on March 28, cut 15 players on Sunday including their trio of starting pitching prospects, Danny Hultzen, Taijuan Walker and James Paxton. That put an early end to speculation about Hultzen, the second-overall pick in the 2011 draft, making the Opening Day rotation.

The top pick in last year's draft, Gerrit Cole, was sent down by the Pirates on Thursday. Also on Sunday, the Orioles cut eight players, including Dylan Bundy, the fourth-overall pick in 2011. Cole, Hultzen and Bundy all received major league deals after being drafted and were thus automatically invited to major league camp but their demotions were hardly a surprise.

Nevertheless, all three are expected to move quickly through the minors. Hultzen could be the first to reach the majors, perhaps as soon as the end of this coming season, as Seattle continues its rebuilding efforts in the challenging AL West.

So Far, So Good

While young pitchers had their big league dreams put on hold, three pitchers with varying degrees of experience in the Show continued their climbs back to the majors. The Mets' Johan Santana, the Orioles' Brian Matusz and the Rockies' Jamie Moyer, each had strong second outings over the weekend. Santana, a two-time Cy Young winner who missed all of 2011 after shoulder surgery, threw 42 pitches over 2 2/3 innings on Sunday, striking out two and allowing just three baserunners (a walk, a single, and a Hanley Ramirez double) and one unearned run. Particularly encouraging was the fact that Santana threw more off-speed pitches than in his first outing, sat around 89 miles per hour with his fastball, and has yet to report any discomfort in his surgically repaired shoulder this spring. He's expected to get up to 60 pitches in his next start on Friday.

Matusz, a 25-year-old and former No. 4 overall draft pick who has posted a 5.53 ERA across parts of three seasons with Baltimore, threw four scoreless innings against something close to the Phillies' starting lineup on Saturday, striking out four against no walks and three hits. He has now struck out seven men against no walks in six innings this spring and hasn't allowed a home run, either, a particularly good sign given his gopheritis of a year ago.

Moyer, the 49-year-old southpaw who is trying to crack the Rockies' rotation as a non-roster player after also missing the entire 2011 campaign, allowed just one run on three hits and no walks while striking out two on Sunday against a White Sox traveling squad. He has allowed just that one run and no walks in five innings this spring.

Aches and Pains

The big injury news this weekend was that Cardinals ace Chris Carpenter was diagnosed with a bulging disc in his neck on Saturday. Per MLB.com's Jenifer Langosch, Carpenter first reported a stiff neck after throwing live batting practice on March 3 and has not thrown since, meaning he also hasn't appeared in any exhibition games. Carpenter claims his neck is improving, and the Cardinals are holding out hope that he can start on Opening Day, or close to it,

with just three spring starts under his belt, which is all he had last year. However, they plan to have a sixth starter ready to go if necessary, with that yet-to-be-identified pitcher likely to start Wednesday's exhibition game.

The Mets' David Wright, who also hasn't played in a game yet this spring, will be in New York on Monday to have his left side examined and likely receive a cortisone injection. Wright's injury continues to be described vaguely as "rib-cage discomfort," suggesting that the Mets, who have developed a reputation for ineptitude in handling player injuries, aren't sure what they're dealing with. Unless Wright starts to make progress soon, he could be in doubt for Opening Day, which will further reduce the potential market for a player who continues to be the subject of trade speculation.

Several players made news by being hit by baseballs this weekend. Giancarlo Stanton came out of the Marlins game on Sunday after being hit in the left wrist by a pitch. Fortunately his x-rays were negative. Orioles left fielder Nolan Reimold was hit in the jaw by a pitch on Friday but escaped with only a chipped tooth.

Among the top prospects whose pursuit of an Opening Day roster spot has been slowed by injury or illness, the Phillies' Domonic Brown just returned to the lineup on Sunday after missing five games with a jammed right thumb and the Nationals' Bryce Harper hasn't played since Tuesday due to a strained left calf. The Nats hope he can return this week.

Most significantly, the Angels' Mike Trout has yet to play this spring due to the flu and has reportedly lost weight due to the illness. It's difficult to imagine him forcing his way onto the major league roster with just three weeks left in camp and no projected date for his return. On the flip side, Rays pitching prospect Matt Moore, who experienced some muscular pain in his abdomen during fielding practice in late February, threw batting practice on Saturday and will make his spring debut on Tuesday. He remains a good bet to open the season in the Rays' rotation.

California legislator proposes banning violent fans from pro sports games

Jim Sanders, Sacramento Bee

Take me out to the ballgame? Maybe not.

California would become the first state to create a "Ban List" prohibiting violent fans from attending professional sports events anywhere in the state under newly proposed legislation.

The list would operate much like a restraining order: Anyone listed who went anyway would be guilty of a misdemeanor.

Offenders' names and photos would be published on the Internet and sent to sports arenas, police agencies and ticket vendors by the attorney general's office, which would maintain the list.

Sure, banned fans could sidestep the law and have relatives or friends buy tickets for them, but if they subsequently caused a commotion and were discovered at a stadium, their presence could draw a one-year jail sentence and a \$10,000 fine.

Assemblyman Mike Gatto said his measure is aimed at senseless violence such as the nearly fatal beating of San Francisco Giants fan Bryan Stow outside Dodger Stadium last year.

"Violence is something that has made a lot of parents be a little afraid to take their kids to the ball games, so I think we need to step in and do something," said Gatto, D-Los Angeles.

Under Gatto's Assembly Bill 2464, a judge could place a violent offender on the ban list for up to five years for a first offense, up to 10 years for a second, and up to 25 years for a third. The bill also provides sentencing enhancements to extend offenders' prison terms.

Verbal harassment or throwing beer are not covered by AB 2464, only serious felonies ranging from robbery to assault with a deadly weapon or infliction of great bodily injury committed inside or outside a stadium, while tailgating, watching, entering or leaving a stadium.

Incidents like Stow's beating would be covered by AB 2464, for example, as would the violence last year at Candlestick Park during a San Francisco 49ers-Oakland Raiders preseason game that left one man unconscious in an upper level restroom and two men shot outside the stadium.

Gatto's measure would charge each professional sports team \$10,000 to create the ban list and a rewards fund for crime witnesses. Teams would supplement the fund if it fell below \$180,000.

AB 2464 would apply to the Sacramento Kings but not to the Sacramento River Cats. It would cover major-league baseball, football, basketball, hockey and soccer teams, beginning July 2013.

No professional league or team has taken a position yet on the bill, introduced Feb. 24. National Basketball Association spokesman Tim Frank said he is not familiar with AB 2464. Baseball and football officials could not be reached for comment Monday.

Italy and England have adopted similar laws to crack down on hooligans at soccer games, Gatto said.

"Everybody who is at these ballparks are sports fans," Gatto said. "So to take away what they love, to say, 'You can't attend a game anymore,' that's a real penalty to them."

Republican lawmakers have not yet seen AB 2464, but two interviewed Monday said they were wary of its \$10,000 cost to each team and the viability of requiring the state to maintain the ban list.

Assemblyman Kevin Jeffries, R-Lake Elsinore, questioned the wisdom of banning violent felons who commit their crime at a stadium but not violent felons who commit their crime elsewhere.

"I don't feel that we, with a straight face, can say that one violent felon is OK but another is not," Jeffries said.

Gatto countered that it makes no sense to penalize felons who committed their crimes decades ago, far from any stadium.

Sacramentans at MVP's sports bar Friday had mixed feelings about AB 2464.

Bill Witry, 48, said he sees no reason to create another layer of bureaucracy when violent offenders will be jailed "for a long time anyway."

Kelsey Taylor, 22, said she has worn opposing jerseys to Oakland Raiders and San Jose Sharks games and never felt threatened. She doubts that extreme violence at stadiums is common.

"I've never had a problem yet," she said.

Other sports fans applauded Gatto.

"I'm a hockey fan – I like my violence on the ice," said Douglas Mower, 29.

"You have people of all ages at the games, so I think people should be held accountable," said Craig Shoemaker, 37.

John Lovell, lobbyist for the California Police Chiefs Association, called the bill thought-provoking but said he has taken no position on it, pending analysis.

"I think it's a good idea," Lovell said of a ban list. "And I think what you're going to see is the general public look at that and say, 'Finally – someone's addressing this.' "