

The Kansas City A's lifespan was brief (1955—67) and inglorious. In 13 seasons, the team never managed a winning year. Part of the problem may have been the dizzying rate of turnover of the club's players. I can not imagine any other team has had such an itchy trigger finger when it came to swapping players in and out. One result of all the losing and the constant turnover is that there are not really any legendary KC A's players. Some great ones played for the A's briefly, but no player really made a name for themselves with just the A's.

In spite of that, I wanted to take a look at what players were able to contribute the most to the A's. I've compiled a completely objective list of the top 15 players by Wins Above Replacement (WAR) accrued while with the KC A's (using Sean Smith's implementation of WAR as found on Baseball-Reference.com). Few players were able to hang with the A's long enough to compile much in the way of counting stats like WAR. Some players who manged even a couple of decent seasons for the A's make the list.

Here are numbers 15 through eight on the list, to be followed by the top seven next week:



15. Roger Maris · RF · 1958—59 · 221 GP · 5.0 WAR

Maris makes this list in spite of playing basically one and a third seasons with the Athletics, which is a testament to Maris's superb talent as well as the lack of talent that stuck in KC. Had the A's held on to Maris, he could have been that one legendary player associated primarily with the KC A's. That Maris was traded to the Yankees is especially galling because he wanted to stay with the sad sack A's and loathed being dealt to the powerful Yankees. According to the recent Maris biography from Tom Clavin & Danny Peary, Maris had this to say about the trade: "It doesn't thrill me, and it sure fouls things up. I just built a home and expected to spend a lot of time with my family. Now they've traded me about as far away as they could. Kansas City is my home now. I've got nothing against the Yankees, but I'm sorry to leave." Game-for-game, Maris was probably the greatest KC Athletic.



14. Tom Gorman · P · 1955—59 · 214 GP · 5.1 WAR

Gorman spent most of 1946-54 in the Yankees farm system, which included stints with the Kansas City Blues from 1951—54. He was used sparingly by the Yanks from '52-'54 before the A's purchased his contract prior to their inaugural season in KC. Gorman was a fixture in the A's bullpen for the next five years, and provided an occasional start. The side-armed was steady and effective: his ERA stayed between 3.51-3.83 in his first four seasons.



13. Orlando Pena · P · 1962—65 · 100 GP · 5.2 WAR

The Cuban Pena had a long and winding career that took him to eight major league teams in 14 seasons. His four years as an A was his longest stay with one team. He was pretty good in '62 and '63, but ineffective in '64 and '65 before the A's released him mid-season. Pena became a member of the Royals organization in 1968, and pitched for the Omaha Royals in '69, but never did get the call to pitch for the big league Royals. He spent some time on the other side of the state with the Cardinals in '73 and '74. A 1963 Sports Illustrated article on the prevalence of the spitball mentioned Pena: "Orlando Pena of the Kansas City Athletics, that team's best pitcher, supposedly loads his pitches. Does Pena throw a spitter? 'No sir,' says Hank Bauer, who managed Pena last season... 'What Pena throws is a Cuban fork ball.'"



12. Bert Campaneris · SS · 1964—67 · 500 GP · 5.3 WAR

"Campy" had a long, distinguished career, and it all started with the Kansas City A's, and a home run on the first big league pitch he faced. (He homered a second time in his debut game, then hit just two more homers the rest of the season.) The speedy shortstop led the AL in stolen bases every year from '65—'68, and again in '70 and '72. On September 8, 1965 Campaneris became the first player to play all nine positions in a game (resulting in one of the most bizarre box scores you'll ever see) thanks to one of A's owner Charlie Finley's publicity stunts. Campaneris moved to Oakland with the team in '68 and remained with them through '76. He holds the distinction of having played the most games with the 110 year-old franchise.

From Bill James's Historical Baseball Abstract (which ranks Campy as the 25th best shortstop of all-time): "There was a game in 1966 that symbolized what he meant to the organization. Nobody else in the lineup got a hit; nobody else, as I recall, even reached base, but Campy went 4-for-4, stole several bases, and scored 4 runs. The A's won the game, I think 4-2 or 4-3."



11. Bill Tuttle · CF · 1958—61 · 450 GP · 5.4 WAR

Tuttle was acquired in a 13-player swap with the Tigers. Much of his value for the A's came in his career year of 1959: His hitting was good though not great that year (113 OPS+), and his defensive numbers were especially strong, including 17 assists from center field. Tuttle was a heavy user of chewing tobacco, which led to oral cancer later in his life. He spent much of the last five years of his life speaking to big league players about the risks of tobacco use before his passing in 1998.



10. Bud Daley · P · 1958—61 · 118 GP · 6.4 WAR

Daley represented the A's for the All-Star games in 1959 and '60, and was especially good for the A's in 1959 when he posted a 3.16 ERA and 4.4 WAR. It was the only outstanding season of his career. The lefty relied on breaking balls, particularly the knuckleball and curveball.



9. Vic Power · 1B · 1955—58 · 582 GP · 6.6 WAR

Power was familiar with Kansas City and Municipal Stadium after spending '52 and '53 with the Kansas City Blues. He broke into the bigs with the Philadelphia Athletics in '54 and starred at first base for the KC A's for their first four years of existence until being dealt to Cleveland in exchange for Roger Maris. According to Bill James, "Power was a spectacular defensive first baseman, an acrobat who would dive for ground balls half way to second base" (Historical Baseball Abstract).



8. Ned Garver · P · 1957—60 · 115 GP · 6.7 WAR

Garver's biggest claim to fame is being the only modern pitcher to win 20 games on a team that lost 100 games or more (the 1951 St. Louis Browns). The 14 year vet spent the latter portion of his career with the A's, and pitched long and well enough in his time in KC to have the second most WAR among KC A's pitchers. According to Garver, he was "a sinker-slider pitcher" (The Neyer/James Guide To Pitchers