

Best Kansas City A's Players, Part 2, by Aaron Stille

Here are the final seven players on the list of top KC A's players as ranked by wins above replacement (WAR) as found on Baseball-Reference.com.



7. Ray Herbert · P · 1955, 1958—61 · 152 GP · 7.5 WAR

Herbert made a living as a serviceable pitcher for 14 years in the majors, including a standout year with the A's in 1960. The A's purchased his contract from the Tigers before 1955 and used him sparingly that season before sending him to the minors for '56 and '57. He returned to Kansas City in '58 and had a solid year, then regressed a bit in '59. Then came the big 1960, in which Herbert started 33 games for the A's, registered a miniscule 3.28 ERA (122 ERA+) and the second highest WAR (5.8) among pitchers in the AL. The A's sent Herbert packing to the White Sox in the middle of '61. That was enough to propel Herbert to the highest spot on this list for a pitcher.



6. Bob Cerv · LF · 1957—60 · 413 GP · 8.5 WAR

Cerv is another player on this list who spent time with the Kansas City Blues as a member of the Yankees farm before joining the A's. His contract was purchased from New York prior to the '57 season, and he spent the next three and a half years as a fixture in the A's left field. Much of his value came from one season, 1958, when he broke out with the greatest season a KC A's player ever had: 38 homers (a Kansas City record, A's or Royals), a .305/.371/.592 slash line (159 OPS+), an All-Star game start, the third highest WAR in the AL, and a fourth place finish in the MVP vote. The season would have been remarkable enough from a healthy player, but Cerv battled through serious injury. From the book *The Kansas City Athletics* by John E. Peterson: "(Cerv) was batting .344 on May 17 and led the American League with 11 home runs and 30 runs batted in when he broke his jaw in a collision at home plate...Cerv broke his jaw in two places when the left side of his face collided against (Red) Wilson's shoulder." Cerv forced himself back into the lineup after missing just three games, and continued playing at a high level in spite of his jaw being wired shut and living on a liquid diet for a month. He homered six times during that span. Again from Peterson's book: "By the end of the season Cerv suffered a broken jaw, a broken hand, two broken toes along with an injured knee and ankle." The season sticks out like a sore thumb in Cerv's long career, which was otherwise fairly unremarkable.

Cerv is the highest ranking outfielder on the list; the top five spots are all held by infielders:



4. Hector Lopez · 3B · 1955—59 · 586 GP · 8.9 WAR

Lopez shifted between various defensive positions throughout his 12 year career, but the A's deployed him primarily at third base. Bill James has called him "As bad a defensive player as you would ever want to see," but he made up for defensive shortcomings with his bat. He wasn't an elite slugger in his four and a third seasons in KC, but hit consistently. His final tallies with the A's feature 99 doubles, 67 homers, and a 107 OPS+. He was swapped to the Yankees (who else?) mid-season 1959 in a trade that netted the A's the other number four on this list:



4. Jerry Lumpe · 2B · 1959—63 · 715 GP · 8.9 WAR

A Missouri native, Lumpe attended Warsaw High School and Southwest Missouri State. As a college basketball player, he won back to back NAIA national championships. The Yankees signed him to play baseball, and he broke into the bigs with them as a part-time player between '56—'58. When he was sent to the A's in '59, he became the everyday second baseman for the next four and half seasons. He was a consistent presence in the A's lineup, and was especially good in his career years of '61 and '62. He was sent to Detroit in the trade that brought Rocky Colavito to KC for the '64 season.



3. Wayne Causey · SS · 1961—66 · 689 GP · 9.0 WAR

Causey was another consistent presence in the A's middle infield, and garnered some MVP votes in his career years of '63 and '64. Causey didn't hit for a lot of power, but was a tough out in his time with the A's (.350 OBP). According to Jane Charnin-Aker on baseballlibrary.com, Causey kept losing his position to hotshot rookies while with the A's. Dick Howser knocked him off short, then Ed Charles off third. He held down short in '63 and '64 before Bert Campaneris took over. After his playing days, Causey spent some time as a scout for the Royals.



2. Norm Siebern · 1B · 1960—63 · 611 GP · 12.1 WAR

Another Missouri native, Siebern hails from Wellston in the St. Louis area. He teamed with Lumpe on the back-to-back NAIA champion basketball teams at Southwest Missouri State. Siebern joined the A's in the Maris trade—it is ironic that even though the trade was infamously bad, the A's did get a terrific player in the deal. I rate Siebern as the best hitter the A's had for all four seasons he played with the club—a rare bout of consistency in the ever volatile A's lineups. His '62 was especially impressive: he played every game, bashed 25 homers, and got on base at an eye-popping .412 clip to go along with a .495 slugging percentage. He represented the A's at the All-Star games of '62 and '63. Like Causey, Siebern also went on to do some scouting for the Royals.



1. Ed Charles · 3B · 1962—67 · 726 GP · 14.4 WAR

Ed Charles, a 29 year-old rookie in '62, wore the KC A's uniform for more games than any other player, and judging by wins above replacement, provided the most value to the team. Signed by the Boston Braves in 1952, Charles racked up nine seasons and 1,148 games in the minors before finally getting his break in the form of a trade to Kansas City. He broke into the majors with style, fashioning a .288/.356/.454 hitting line (114 OPS+), and continued on as a supremely reliable presence as the A's third sacker for five years. According to Charles biographer Ed Hoyt, Charles "offered no standout skill, but usefully adequate levels of contact, power, speed, and defense." Like David DeJesus on recent Royals teams, Charles never rose to stardom or All-Star recognition, but quietly contributed in all aspects of the game. That steadiness over many years added up to significant value. Hoyt writes that Charles "achieved fame as a baseball poet, reciting his poetry on television a few times a year and mailing verse to young fans with requested autographs." Following his individual success with the A's, he was sent to the New York Mets in a 1967 trade. In his final playing year, Charles enjoyed the ultimate team success with the 1969 "Miracle" Mets. The 36 year-old provided a veteran presence on the mostly baby-faced champions.