

A's News Clips, Monday, November 23, 2009

"Now, pitching for San Jose..."

Steve Kettman, San Francisco Magazine, 12/09

For the first time, the wily A's boss, Lew Wolff, and his billionaire partner, John Fisher, reveal their full plan to move their team to Northern California's biggest city, upend the Bay Area sporting landscape, and make the most of the A's famous eye for bargain talent. Longtime baseball correspondent Steve Kettmann reports the controversial birth story.

Hotshot Berkeley journalist Michael Lewis got the idea to write about the Oakland A's not too long after I ended four-plus seasons covering the team full-time for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, in 1999. Lewis's notion was that in baseball, as in business, a smart decision maker could throw orthodoxy out the window and discover great opportunity by buying up undervalued, underappreciated talent. The result was the megabestseller *Moneyball*, a certifiable cultural phenomenon. The book is both a lightbulb tract about intelligent management and an underdog story of the cheap, smart outfit that finds a way to overachieve.

So how could the post-*Moneyball* A's have become so pathetic? In the past three years, while Hollywood writer-directors Steven Soderbergh and Aaron Sorkin angled to do a film version of Lewis's story, the A's degenerated into one of Major League Baseball's least inspiring franchises. General manager Billy Beane, the dashing, brilliant, to-be-played-by-Brad-Pitt star of *Moneyball* (and, truth be told, a friend of mine), became a target of jeers from both sports columnists and formerly loyal fans.

But I think *Moneyball* still holds the key to understanding this once proud franchise: As widely as they are demeaned, the current A's are a great example of hidden value. Like the quirky talents Beane picked up and turned into valuable major leaguers, the A's have a tremendous upside that few can see. That's because their co-owner and managing partner, the surprisingly little-known developer Lew Wolff, along with his deep-pocketed partner, John Fisher, can—and will—move the team to a beautiful new stadium in the one city where they can reach the World Series, which has eluded them during the Beane years: San Jose.

How can I be so sure of the A's future, especially given the facts before us? If you follow Bay Area development, you know that just last year, Wolff and the A's were set on building a new stadium and shopping complex in *Fremont*, not San Jose; you also know that the San Francisco Giants have long threatened to thwart an A's move to San Jose, and that baseball's boss, Bud Selig, is a forced-consensus, Nikita Khrushchev type who won't tolerate such a public squabble over turf among those he's invited into baseball's club of owners. So, sure, Wolff and Fisher face some serious hurdles. But if you take another step back and consider Lew Wolff, San Jose, and both of their histories, those obstacles don't seem important. Indeed, the story of the coming San Jose A's has unfolded over four decades. And only by tracking its long arc can you see how inevitable its dénouement has become.

I've been talking to Wolff and Beane, along with other baseball insiders, over the past four months about the team's bid for San Jose, and this article will be the first place where the two A's owners have decided to make their case for San Jose. Wolff spoke at length, and Fisher, who never talks to the press, also weighed in passionately. Only Beane refrained from giving me a juicy quote about San Jose as the club's ideal future location. Though the A's have the lowest attendance among baseball's 30 teams and the biggest dump of a stadium, he's aware that the core fans who continue to come to the Coliseum deserve his loyalty, not taunts for theirs. So in our talks, Beane just restated Wolff's mission for the A's: a new stadium somewhere in the Bay Area. "In the last 10 to 15 years, it seems almost every team in baseball has a new venue, so you go on the road and see all the amenities that make the game more enjoyable—and not just for players, but for fans, too—and we're one of the few who doesn't," Beane said on the October day of the amazing storm that dumped a tenth of a typical year's worth of rain on Oakland. "When I go to the Coliseum to work out today and it's pouring, the toilets will all be overflowing in the clubhouse, and the clubhouse guy, Mikey—if we can get Mikey in there—will be going in to get buckets to capture the rain. It's a great venue for us, as far as history goes. But it's just time."

Wolff, though, is done being circumspect, done avoiding the hurt feelings that will come when the A's publicly abandon the East Bay and embrace the region's demographic shift to the South Bay, done staying quiet as the Giants claim that a San Jose major-league team will damage their fan base and their finances. Wolff spent three years, both before and after he took over as managing partner in 2005, actively exploring locations in Oakland, starting with the parking lot at the Coliseum. But from my own reporting on the city's stadium options the decade before, I suspected that was a dead horse, and Wolff probably flogged it long after it was clear it couldn't run. He next spent an extraordinary \$80 million of the ownership group's money pushing for a new Cisco Field 21 miles south of the Coliseum, off the Auto Mall Parkway in Fremont, that would have been the centerpiece of a luxurious, Santana Row-like mall surrounded by custom houses and more. Wolff was serious

about the Fremont plan, even deploying his franchise star, Beane, to promote the idea. The location was approved by Major League Baseball and couldn't rile up the Giants. But the bid did rile up Fremont—concerns included traffic, the threat to a neighboring mall, and Wolff's developer mentality—and in February, Wolff announced it was dead. Finally, *finally*, he could bring out the option he's had in his pocket ever since he and Fisher decided to purchase the A's.

"When we bought the team," Wolff told me, "I thought that we would resolve the ballpark situation in Oakland. Then we tried Fremont and spent a fortune on it. So over a great deal of time, five years now, we have determined that San Jose is the only option for us in California." Reached in late October, Fisher—the billionaire son of Gap founder Don Fisher and a wide-ranging investor—reiterated this chronology, then went out of his way to poke holes in the long-standing claim that a major-league team in San Jose would hurt the Giants franchise, which he and his dad helped save. "My grandparents went to every Giants game after 1958. I grew up a Giants fan. I love AT&T Park. We want the Giants to continue to be one of the most successful franchises in baseball. This is not a contest between the A's and the Giants."

The Giants will likely disagree. Though the team had no comment for this story, managing partner Bill Neukom was quoted in the summer as saying that the A's "can't have the South Bay." So let the jockeying begin. It was bound to happen. If you know Wolff and hear him insist, "We did not buy the team with San Jose in mind," you know from his voice that he means it in a certain way, like when you want to throw a look-away pass to your favorite receiver. That is: First you sell everyone, even yourself, on going to the guy you've got your eyes on. And if he's open, you do throw over there. But in the back of your mind, you've got the itch to go in another, much more rewarding direction.

An affable, wisecracking businessman of 73, Wolff grew up in St. Louis riding the streetcar to Sportsman's Park to watch his beloved Cardinals, and he likes to say he got his start in real estate development by posing in a tux in front of a vacant lot before a fraternity formal at the University of Wisconsin. An investor in numerous luxury hotels, he has always taken a particular interest in San Jose, though he has never lived there, preferring to live in L.A., partly to keep his wife, Jean, happy, he says. People thought he was crazy when he talked early on about San Jose's dreary, decaying downtown as having any future—but starting in the late 1960s, he built regional headquarters for both Wells Fargo and Bank of America there, and, in 2002, he made over the towering San Jose Fairmont to give the city its first luxury cachet. He is especially captivated by sport teams and their symbolic importance to a city. He helped get the San Jose Sharks arena built; as part owner of the Golden State Warriors, in the '90s, considered moving that team to San Jose; and, in 2006, with Fisher, bought the San Jose Earthquakes soccer team, for whom they're building a new stadium.

As an owner and partner, Wolff has an easy, selfmocking style; he's one of those guys who were successful enough at a young enough age that they like to keep things fun and light. Beane, who talks with Wolff daily during the season, describes him as "a soothing personality, inviting to talk to. He gets excited when you win and is comforting when you lose. With Lew, you view it as a personal relationship first, which is really unique in business." Fisher and Wolff are a generation apart, but Fisher told me that he considers Wolff "a tremendous partner and friend, who, while he values my input, is the final decision-maker and has been from the very beginning—despite what [*Chronicle* columnist] Ray Ratto may write." He talks to Wolff at least twice a week, Fisher said. "I'm very supportive of what he's doing to make the A's once again the storied franchise that it has been."

Having grown up in San Jose when it was the Prune Capital of the World and the most boring place on the planet, and having known Wolff from the time I was in college at UC Berkeley, I feel like I've been following this story forever without quite knowing it. When I graduated from high school in 1980, I understood nothing of my future except that I'd never live in San Jose again. But in 1993, covering the San Jose Sharks for their third season, when they moved into the gleaming new facility on the edge of downtown that Wolff had helped bring to life, what amazed me was how much the city had changed. It had been just a decade or so since I spent the summer lifeguarding at a downtown pool, kicking out winos before I could open the place up, still bummed after having broken up with, yes, Lew Wolff's daughter Kari. But here was a new San Jose, with Wolff as a key player in its redevelopment, and with its first real sports team.

Even I, who knew how desperately San Jose yearned to be counted as big-time, had no clue how out-of-their heads nuts the locals would be in their devotion to their Sharks. When the team made the play-offs for the first time, in '94, the giddy atmosphere in what was then called the San Jose Arena was so rarefied, it was like the place had been filled with helium. "For me, it was that extra power I was getting from the crowd," their diminutive, magic-wielding goalie, Arturs Irbe, told me by phone recently from Washington, D.C., where he is now a goaltending coach for the Capitals. "We were something new, and we experienced something that is hard to experience somewhere else: that unconditional support, like when a parent loves his child unconditionally."

While Wolff's vision of a passionately big-league San Jose was finally coming true, the hopelessness of the A's future in Oakland was being cemented. As late as 1989, the team had won the World Series, and while the Coliseum was never going to rival Fenway or Wrigley, it could be mighty fine to sit there on a gorgeous summer day, nursing a beer with that great view of the Oakland hills. Then the stadium went downhill, and by 1997, Oakland Raiders owner Al Davis had ruined it by negotiating to erect a huge, gray edifice in the outfield that was a middle finger to baseball fans, adding *ugly* to *decrepit* as the key adjectives heaped on the stadium. The A's ownership looked no prettier. When the team traded Mark McGwire in

1997, the year before he broke Roger Maris's single-season home-run record, it was in part because McGwire was appalled by the legendarily tightfisted Steve Schott and his partner, Ken Hofmann, and had the fortitude to say so. One of the game's best executives, Sandy Alderson, left the organization soon after having to make the heartbreaking McGwire trade, leaving his protégé, Billy Beane, in charge. Beane remembers that as the darkest time. "The apathy toward the franchise took off," he said. "We were basically a nonentity in the Bay Area."

It was my job in those days to cover that nonentity, and to me it was clear the team's gig in Oakland was done, no matter how smart Beane was. The A's needed to reboot and regenerate the franchise with the revenue stream and excitement of a dazzling new facility, the way the Baltimore Orioles had done with Camden Yards, and nearly every other team in baseball—including the Giants—would soon be doing. Even then, San Jose was the franchise's best bet. Two weeks after the McGwire trade, I had an exclusive that ran on the *Chronicle's* front page, under the headline "SAN JOSE MAKES A PLAY FOR THE A'S," and reported that the South Bay city's officials had approached the A's about building them a stadium. "The success of the NHL's San Jose Sharks has whetted the appetite of South Bay civic leaders for more sports teams," I wrote. The next spring, I published a follow-up in which I quoted a "major South Bay developer" who told me, "If I was going to pursue a ballpark...I wouldn't spend five minutes on any other city besides San Jose." That developer? Lew Wolff. But the A's owners lacked Wolff's political prowess and contacts, and they didn't pursue the option.

By the time Wolff was approved as the A's new managing general partner, in 2005, the buy-low, sell-high philosophy and scientific system of player analysis articulated in *Moneyball* had managed to turn the A's into a borderline play-off team for eight straight years. But there was a self-defeating aspect to the "moneyball" philosophy: The same bargain players who could make a team competitive in the regular season weren't necessarily the kind of transcendent players who could get the team through to the World Series (a Jeremy Giambi is not a Derek Jeter). Plus, anyone could see that there wasn't enough money to hold on to players, as rising star after rising star discovered by Beane thrived with the A's for a few years—hitters like Miguel Tejada and Nick Swisher, pitchers like Huston Street, Tim Hudson, and Mark Mulder—only to be traded or lost to free agency when the team could no longer afford them.

"Billy found inefficiencies—two guys to equal one Alex Rodriguez—but other teams with more money now have caught on to that," Wolff told me. "So we're effectively out of the market in terms of making a longterm contract to somebody." Beane agreed. "What we have yet to do," he told me this past summer, sounding depressed, "is show we can keep those really good teams on the field, together." Though it may seem surprising, the franchise is making a small profit, because baseball funnels the small-market teams money from the big-market teams. But it's not earning enough to, as Beane put it, "invest in a player we can draft and keep his whole career, so a fan can see him on the field and think they can see him again the next year." There's only one way to accomplish that, Wolff said. "We need revenue. We need to have a fan experience that allows us to attract 25,000 people, rather than 4,000."

That's been MLB commissioner Bud Selig's goal for the A's, too. Selig is the strange ex-Milwaukee car dealer who will ultimately decide the A's future. Despite his Don Knotts look, Selig is savvy enough to have presided over baseball during this past decade-plus of absurdly twitchy, steroid fueled muscular excess, yet have managed so far to avoid being widely derided as the Steroid Commissioner. His gifts are evading conflict, building consensus within baseball, and intimidating anyone who crosses him; he plays baseball's 30 owners like a violin, never allowing them to vote on a matter unless he has predetermined the result. When Wolff took over the A's, I figured San Jose might be the new owner's ultimate destination, though I wondered how he would get around Selig and the Giants' apparent willingness to create a conflict. Then I learned something I hadn't known, which made me think Selig might not be a problem: The commissioner had recruited Wolff as the A's owner—maybe because he and Wolff had been college fraternity mates.

Wolff claims that his bond with Selig doesn't guarantee his dream for the San Jose A's, and that neither does the commissioner's March 2009 decision (after the Fremont deal fell through) to impanel a three-person owners committee to make recommendations about the "current situation in Oakland." In fact, Wolff sounds impatient with his old friend's ways. "I joined baseball, and they told me there were two kinds of time, regular time and baseball time," he said. "Selig likes process and tells me he wants to be as thorough as he can. That's all I hear. I don't hear, 'I'll get back to you.' It can be frustrating beyond belief, obviously."

Still, Wolff can be forgiven for likely smiling as he gives his old University of Wisconsin fraternity brother Bud a job for his inherent cautiousness. Wolff has stayed friends with many of his fratmates, including three who've gone on to co-own sports teams: U.S. senator Herb Kohl (Milwaukee Bucks), attorney and movie producer Mel Pearl (Chicago White Sox), and Selig, the onetime harried fraternity president, who was the co-owner of the Milwaukee Brewers for years. Wisconsin was a formative experience in fun for Wolff, who said he was a "flake" who took "three years to find out where the library was." Selig, on the other hand, "wasn't a wild guy, like we were," Pearl said. "He was a fun guy but couldn't keep up with us. His biggest job was to make sure that we didn't do something that would get us kicked off campus." Selig, in a phone interview, enthusiastically confirmed the portrayal. "Mel and Lew had a penchant for getting in trouble from time to time, and it was my job to keep them in line. I guess it taught me a great deal about things."

Selig treasures those fraternity bonds, describing his old friends as "a remarkable group of people." So 40-plus years later, during the 2002 World Series, he tracked Wolff down in Paris and asked him to one of the Giants-Angels games. To get there, Wolff enjoyed the first of many police escorted trips with the commissioner. They

traveled from the Mark Hopkins Hotel to PacBell Park. Then, during the game, Selig leaned over to ask Wolff if he had any interest in talking to the A's owners, Hofmann and Schott. "Lewie, would you be interested in trying to purchase the interest of one of the partners in the A's?" Selig asked.

"I thought my role, if I bought in, might be to work on the venue and have a little fun," Wolff told me.

Soon enough, while investigating the idea, Wolff got a call from John Fisher, with whom he had been a co-investor in hotels such as the Carlyle in New York, the San Jose Fairmont, and the San Francisco Fairmont. Fisher and his father had been part owners of the Giants before largely dropping out in 1995, so Wolff asked about the idea of crossing the bay to buy out the A's owners. "I think it was around \$180 million for all of it, which required about \$100 million in cash," Wolff told me. That was too rich for Wolff's blood, so "I said to John, 'I'll just take a small piece, and I'll run it. Whatever you want.' So John called back and said, 'If you'll buy 10 percent now and commit to buying another 15 percent, I'll join you.'"

"I said, 'You know, once you ask someone to run a team, they can't be removed easily, unless I kill someone or something. So are you sure?' And John said, 'Oh, yeah, we've known you a long time.'"

Wolff told me he now has \$15 million invested. "This is a significant investment for me, and it's not chump change. I think my ownership position is as large as Peter Magowan's was in the Giants."

The theoretical threat that the Giants pose to the creation of the San Jose A's is the result of a ludicrous accident of history. In 1992, when the Giants—like the A's of today—were saddled with a terrible stadium and an urgent need to move, A's owner Walter Haas and team executive Alderson were asked if the A's would do the Giants a favor: give them "territorial rights" to San Jose, so they could go to South Bay voters with a ballot measure on building a stadium down there. The idea of the Giants' moving to San Jose sounded good from Oakland, Alderson told me; plus, he said, "Walter Haas was the kind of person who would extend himself for the benefit of others." But then, to everyone's shock, the Giants lost the stadium vote, and in baseball's scramble to secure the team's future, the onetime territorial rights were never rescinded. "The mistake on our part—and I take responsibility for it—was not to get a sunset clause," said Alderson, who later served as a Selig deputy and the CEO of the San Diego Padres. "And 16 years later, it remains an issue."

Wolff told me that "the Giants are unfairly using a flaw in a past action to hold the San Jose area hostage," but the Giants have been adamant. The team's managing general partner, Bill Neukom, told a Rotary Club gathering in Los Altos last summer, as reported by the *San Jose Mercury News*, that "it's our territory. We care a lot about it." His core argument: In making a large capital outlay to build their new stadium a decade ago, the Giants were banking on having exclusive territorial rights to five counties: San Francisco, Marin, San Mateo, Monterey, and Santa Clara. Presumably to strengthen their claim, they recently bought a big chunk of the San Jose Giants, the farm team that has long played near downtown.

The Giants have always claimed they'd be happy to fight all day to keep San Jose free of a major-league team, but Selig doesn't allow that sort of rabble-rousing. He will insist on finding a gradualist, consensus solution that he can steer the necessary three-quarters of the owners to approve, likely during next season. In a clear sign of progress for Wolff and Fisher, Selig's committee quietly visited San Jose in late October to meet with city officials and scout downtown. Selig himself declined to discuss the A's future. But he did tell me: "I've asked everybody to let the committee do their work. They're hard at work, but I don't know the time frame. It's taking longer, but this is a very complex process. The goal is to get it done right, not necessarily to get it done in a certain time frame."

In the meantime, Wolff is busy behind the scenes, planning the San Jose A's. He has in mind the plot of land 500 strides directly south of HP Pavilion, where the Sharks play. Using no public money, on land the city has already bought and would lease or sell to Fisher and Wolff, the A's would build a ballpark with 32,000 seats that would be the most intimate in baseball. It would cost a relatively cheap \$400 million or so, because of the recession; look modern, rather than retro; feature all manner of Silicon Valley high-tech bells and whistles; and be sponsored by Cisco—and it could be finished two to three years after the go-ahead. Wolff wouldn't be able to develop a mall or anything else around it—to his chagrin. "The land we're getting is just for the ballpark, and we're not seeking land around it," he said. "We would like to, but others own it."

Still, there's money in it for Wolff. "This isn't philanthropic," he said. "If the Yankees are worth well north of a billion, according to a recent article in *Forbes*, and the Giants are worth close to half a billion, the A's today are worth around \$300 million. In 10 years, with baseball itself moving up in value, it may be two or three times more valuable." Given that scale, a successful San Jose A's franchise could someday be worth more than \$1 billion, even with the huge debt that will accompany a new stadium. "We can reach greater value," Wolff said.

I, for one, am convinced that the San Jose A's would be greeted with the same rush of excitement that the Sharks unleashed. But what Selig and the other owners will have to decide is whether the Giants' fan base and economic prospects would be hurt. As a lifetime Giants fan, I don't think so. Let's say the Giants have a base of 100,000 serious fans in the South Bay. Would they all instantly defect to the A's cool new ballpark in San Jose? It just doesn't work that way with a sports fan. My brother Dave, for example, lives in San Jose and

is another lifelong Giants fan—and he would still go to five games a year at AT&T Park, whether or not the A's started playing in San Jose. "I am a Giants fan," he said. "I'd probably go to a lot more interleague games, though: A's versus Giants in San Jose? I'd hit one of those." Meanwhile, to the Giants' advantage, disgruntled A's fans in the East Bay and points north could be expected to shift their allegiance and start making the trip to AT&T Park.

Wolff is so convinced that the San Jose A's wouldn't hurt a flea that you'd expect him to explode with anger over the fact that the move hasn't been approved already. But he's a developer who is embarking on a sensitive development play, and anyway, he isn't the type to blow his stack. It may frustrate him at times, but Wolff understands the Selig way of doing things more clearly than most, so he and Fisher stick to their talking points, addressing "baseball" as an institution.

"It's not me that can move to San Jose," Wolff said. "It's not the Giants who can prevent it. It's a case where baseball has to say what's fair for both clubs. When you look at the other two-market cities in baseball—New York, Chicago, and L.A.—they all share their territory. What's wrong with us doing that? Especially because the Giants have done a wonderful job of getting a great ballpark. We just want to do the same thing, and we want to be farther away from them."

I think Selig will be persuaded for his own reasons. He faces two potential legacies: one as the Steroid Commissioner, the other as the Ballpark Commissioner. He's overseen a revival in the national pastime through gorgeous new ballparks for nearly every team. An A's ballpark would be one more success story to hold up against arguments tarring him as the man who looked the other way when ballplayers were doing their best to resemble a young Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Fisher told me that he did not decide instantly to buy into the A's. Wolff was "very persuasive," and so was the commissioner, whom Fisher flew to meet in Milwaukee. And Selig's sales pitch included the ballpark, Fisher said. "He acknowledged the importance of building a new stadium. Certainly, he points with pride to the 20-plus stadiums that have been built and how that's been an integral part of baseball's renaissance."

"From the moment we bought this team," Fisher said, "the most important thing for Lew and I was to build a new ballpark to keep the A's in the Bay Area. Our conclusion is that the best opportunity to build a ballpark is in downtown San Jose. Of course, everything I say to you is all subject to what the commissioner of baseball and all owners decide. It's in their hands to see that this is in the best interests of baseball."

Q&A With Kane County Mgr. Steve Scarsons, P1

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Nov 23, 2009

In 2009, the Kane County Cougars welcomed a new manager, former major league infielder Steve Scarsons. Scarsons, who was also in his first season as part of the Oakland A's organization, led the Cougars into the Midwest League playoffs. He then served as the manager of the A's Instructional League squad. We spoke to Scarsons last week for an extended Q&A.

After years out of the game, former major league infielder Steve Scarsons returned to baseball in 2009, joining the Oakland A's organization as a manager for the team's Low-A affiliate, the Kane County Cougars. Scarsons came to the A's with 13 years of professional playing experience, including seven major league seasons with the Philadelphia Phillies, Baltimore Orioles, San Francisco Giants, St. Louis Cardinals and Kansas City Royals, and several more years of experience as a coach in the minor leagues with the Phillies and the Arizona Diamondbacks organizations.

The Cougars had a strong season under Scarsons, going 76-64 and winning the Midwest League Western Division's first-half title. After the conclusion of the season, Scarsons returned home to Phoenix, Arizona, where he acted as the manager of the A's Instructional League team. We spoke with Scarsons last week about his first season with the A's organization and the Cougars and his impression of some of the players he worked with this season. This is part one of that interview...

OaklandClubhouse: What were your thoughts on the Kane County season and on your first year as a part of the Oakland A's organization?

Steve Scarsons: Organizationally, I feel very fortunate to be with the A's. I really like what their mission statement is all about. It's about development first and doing whatever it takes to help the players get to the higher levels. Not that other organizations don't try to do the same thing, it's just that there is a sense [with Oakland] of listening to new ideas and trying to apply new concepts and not being stuck in the old ways of doing things and being stubborn about this is the way it's going to happen or it isn't going to happen – a 'my way or the highway' sort of attitude. With the A's, it seems to be very much like 'well, let's see what other ideas we have and present them and see if we can figure out a way to have these new ideas mesh with some of the old concepts and create a good atmosphere for everyone.'

As a coach, especially after playing quite a bit and having a lot of experience in the game, you kind of hone in all of the different experiences that you have built with all of the years prior. You are trying to throw a coaching philosophy together and it is hard to do if you are having to draw a line in the sand. Instead, you are able to take a little here and a little from

there and blend it all together into a good coaching style in an effort make the players better. That seems to be the A's approach, at least from a minor-league standpoint.

I appreciate as kind of a new guy coming in being able to voice my opinion and present some of my ideas that I felt were important and useful. They were received in a manner of 'okay, let's talk about them and see if that will work,' as opposed to 'how dare you bring up something new, we'll tell you what to think.' I really appreciated that and I feel like that really fits well with my personality. Hopefully they feel the same way.

OC: Bay Area baseball fans will remember you from your playing days with the San Francisco Giants, but how did you get connected with this opportunity with the A's? Had you been coaching since your playing days ended?

SS: I spent a couple years coaching after I got done playing. My final season playing was in 1999 with Kansas City. After that, I coached for a summer with Philadelphia with their Double-A team in Reading. I wanted to manage and the Phillies didn't have any managing spots open, so I jumped over to the Diamondbacks. That was sort of a dual-purpose move – both to get an opportunity to manage and to get out here in Arizona for spring training, being that is where we make our home. That went well for a couple of years, but then my kids were of the age where they had to start going to school, so we had to make a decision based on that. I decided to step away from the game for awhile so that I didn't have to be apart from my school-aged kids and miss out on that activity and leave all of that to my wife.

We took six years off and I came back this year with the A's predominantly because of some of the relationships I had with some of the other coaches with the organization. Greg Sparks, the A's hitting coordinator, he and I played against each other coming up and stayed in touch and had seen each other doing some baseball stuff here in Phoenix. He was actually the first guy I called just to say 'hey, I'm thinking about getting back into the game. What do I do?' He basically said, 'you're doing it. You talk to people you know and let them know that you are thinking about getting back in.' That conversation led to a couple more and that wound-up getting me in front of Keith Lieppman and we seemed to interact well enough for me to be considered for a spot in the organization. When a spot opened up, I jumped at it. It was really good timing and a couple of good people who were willing to go to bat for me. It's a pretty good situation.

OC: The Cougars have one of the bigger fanbases for an A-level team in the minor leagues. Was it fun to manage in front of relatively big crowds like the ones they often draw at Elfstrom Stadium?

SS: Yeah. That was one of the things that I considered when I was talking with Keith Lieppman about where I might fit into the organization. There was talk about staying here in Arizona and doing extended spring and then staying in Arizona all summer. That would have gotten me back into the game and I would have been able to stay home, which has its advantages, but one of the things I really enjoy about the game is the connection with the fans and getting a chance to know people in different communities and make new friends and that sort of stuff. So I wanted to go north and spend the season outside of Phoenix. Kane County is a unique situation because it is so close to Chicago and it tries to compete with major league ballclubs. They go above and beyond most A-ball teams in terms of the mentality of trying to get people into the ballpark.

When they put together a good crowd, it's a lot of fun. There is a lot of energy in the park. As a manager, or just a uniformed person on the field, you draw from that and you want to give it everything that you've got to please the home crowd. I thought we got a lot of good energy from the Kane County supporters and I think the team played better at home because of that. That is something that these kids enjoy, especially the kids just out of high school who have never played in front of more than a couple dozen parents and now they are out there in front of 14,000, that is a big charge. That gives them a chance to realize that this is something they want to do because the crowds are only going to get bigger as they move up. I thought it was a great experience for the players, as well as me and my staff.

OC: You guys put together a good season at Kane County. What were your overall impressions of your team and were there any players who really jumped out at you as having good seasons?

SS: We had a very, very good first half. We got off to a nice start. We had some players coming out of spring training that we were concerned about their health, whether they were coming off of injuries from previous years or where we weren't sure how far along they were [with their recoveries]. Steve Kleen, who had played at that level previously but had had an injury and had rehabbed through the previous season, was a guy who was a year removed from playing. We were hoping that he would get stuff done and play well enough to move him up. That was kind of a temporary thing from the beginning. At the All-Star break, he did move up, but before that he did some great things for us.

Outfielder Grant Desme, who is now playing in the Fall League and is making a very good name for himself – he's had a great year of baseball. He was coming off of an injury at the start of the season, as well. He was kind of untested. We didn't know what we were going to get from him. He not only did some great things on the field, but he proved to fill that mature leader role on our team. Not so much the guy who was yelling and screaming and telling people what to do and what not to do, but more of a guy who played hard everyday and gave his maximum effort. Some of the younger guys were able to feed off of him. That is an important aspect of a player. It's not necessarily teachable. It's just something that he naturally has. He's obviously continued to do so. It's nice to see him continue to have success.

We also had a couple of pitchers who were kind of coming into their own. Pedro Figueroa, a left-handed pitcher, he pitched extremely well. We also had Kenneth Smalley, and he really established himself as a consistent starter. Those are four

players right there that I think you are going to continue to see move up in the system. We lost three of those guys at the All-Star break, so that kind of made the second half of the season a struggle starting out. You lose your three top players and you have to battle through that, but that was why we had kind of a drop-off at the start of the second half. We played better after that and were a little more consistent at the end of the season.

OC: When they were healthy, what were your impressions of infielders Dusty Coleman and Jason Christian?

SS: Dusty Coleman is just a good professional player in the sense that he went about his work and gave his maximum effort. His goal everyday was to play the best that he could. As the season went on, he found himself getting into some slumps and getting frustrated. At that age, that's going to happen. These guys come out of college where they have always had success and now sometimes you have to see how they deal with their first adversity, so to speak, and how they can battle through. He had to make adjustments to continue to be successful at the professional level and he continued to work hard. I imagine that he is working hard this winter and I expect to see him next spring in an even stronger position to move up. I like him as a person, and that makes it all that much easier when you are a coach to have players that you just like as people. Christian is the same way. They are just good people who are willing to work hard to do whatever it takes to move up and to play this game as long as they can.

Jason Christian was kind of similar in some respects in that he has some real talents, but his game was really made on hustle and headiness to anticipate situations and take advantage of things as the game went on. An example of that was just him being on base and catching the infielders with their heads down and he'd take a base without the ball even being pitched. This happened several times and as a coach, you sit back there and go 'wow.' It's great to have a player who can give you an advantage during a game like that. These are both quality people and I think the A's should be proud of their scouting that there were able to find those guys.

OC: Another infielder who came up for you later in the season was Nino Leyja. He was one of your youngest players. Was it hard for him to fit in being only 19 years old or was he able to handle the level in your opinion?

SS: He acts older than he is. A lot of times we would be evaluating him and going back and critiquing the game to see what could have been done better. He would have some games, especially defensively, where he could have made plays differently. You'd have to remind yourself that he is only 19. He's got so much time to learn this stuff, and yet because he shows some great promise and ability, you get to where you have to catch yourself because you expect more from him because of the way he has proved himself up to this point. You have to remind yourself that he is young and has time to learn it. That is a compliment to him.

He's a guy who will be given plenty of opportunities to grow and progress. He'll probably repeat the Midwest League level. I think that will be a big advantage to him, coming into the league with some experience. He should be able to get off to a great start and I would think that he has an opportunity to play a lot of baseball in his life.

OC: Did you see any improvement with Leyja between when you saw him in Kane County and when you saw him in the fall at Instructs?

SS: I don't know if it was because he had done the Instructional League the year before or because he had spent some time at extended spring training that he was comfortable with that setting, but it appeared that he played more comfortable in the Instructional League as opposed to the regular season.

He came to us at Kane County and then he got injured. He actually had a freak injury where he was cut in the arm with spikes. It was just a really crazy play. He went to make a tag and the runner's foot popped up and there was just a freak accident. He ended up with some stitches in his arm, and that set him back some. Then we had some other players who were stepping up like Leonardo Gil. He was playing well, so when [Nino] got back, he had to split some time with other players. Unfortunately, he didn't really get a chance to get anything going after that. But at the time we were trying to get ourselves playoff-ready and I was playing my hottest guys, so that's just how it works sometimes. But I thought he made some great progress in Instructional Leagues and once he gets his confidence and builds up his comfort level, you are going to see him continue to get better.

OC: You had two guys join you in Kane County pretty much right from the draft – Michael Spina and Stephen Parker. Do you feel like it's more difficult to make that transition from college right to a full-season league?

SS: I think they made as good a transition as could be expected. They both did some very good things to make you realize that they had some special stuff to bring to the table. Still it took time for them to build confidence and they had to struggle a little bit. They had to make the adjustments that come with going from college to the pro game. Not only that, they went from college to the Midwest League, which is traditionally a tough hitters' league. To be thrown in that mix and play in a league that, like I said, is traditionally a tough league to hit in, that adds a little bit to the frustration with the transition.

But both of them have great work habits and they were in a good frame of mind and were giving it their max effort. I didn't see any quit out of them, which is a good sign. Stephen Parker was with us in Instructional League and he was one of the highlights of the camp. He played very, very well. I'm sure that he will show up in spring training with the same level of play that he showed at the Instructional League. Mike Spina will likely be in just as good of shape. You are going to see good things from both of those guys. They are good ballplayers. They know the game and they are not afraid to work and battle

through the tough times. They will become pretty good assets to our organization.

Owner of Triple-A River Cats dies at 58

Savage brought baseball back to Sacramento in 2000

By Daren Smith / MLB.com 11/23/09

Sacramento River Cats owner Art Savage, who brought baseball back to California's capital city a decade ago, died Saturday. He was 58.

Savage's son, Jeff, told the Associated Press that his father collapsed at his Sacramento home and died on the way to the hospital.

According to *The Sacramento Bee*, Savage was diagnosed with lung cancer in 2007 but underwent two months of treatment and was pronounced cancer-free by the start of the 2008 season.

"The entire River Cats family is shocked and deeply saddened by the passing of Art Savage," the team said in a statement. "Art was an extraordinary person whose dedication to his community was only surpassed by his commitment to his own family. All those who were lucky enough to have had their lives touched by Art were far better because of it. Our thoughts and prayers are with the Savage family during this incredibly difficult time."

Savage bought the Triple-A Edmonton Trappers in 1998 and moved them for one season to Vancouver, British Columbia. In 2000, he relocated to Sacramento, which had not had a Minor League team since the 1970s.

Under his ownership, the River Cats have been the premier team in the Pacific Coast League, winning eight division titles and back-to-back championships in 2003-04 and 2007-08. In 2007 and 2008, Sacramento was crowned Triple-A champion after capturing the Bricktown Showdown.

The team also enjoyed success off the field, leading the Minor Leagues in attendance for seven consecutive seasons. And as the top Minor League affiliate of the Oakland Athletics, Sacramento has sent more than 100 players to the Major Leagues, including 2002 American League Cy Young Award winner Barry Zito and 2004 AL Rookie of the Year Bobby Crosby.

"[Art] had a great vision and passion and level of perseverance, unlike anybody I've worked for before. That's what made the River Cats and Raley Field possible," River Cats president, general manager and COO Alan Ledford told the *Sacramento Bee*. "He did it with such humility. He never sought the spotlight."

Savage graduated with a degree in accounting from Texas Tech University and in the late 1970s oversaw the personal financial holdings of Cleveland Cavaliers owner George Gund. Savage later went to work for Gund as president and CEO of the National Hockey League's San Jose Sharks.

"He was a wonderful person for all who had the pleasure to know him. Professionally, it was Art's progressive thinking that helped bring the Sharks and major league sports to San Jose," Sharks president and CEO Greg Jamison said. "His innovative approach as the Sharks' first president is what allowed the club to thrive from the moment it was conceived. We will miss him greatly and send our best wishes to his family."

Savage's involvement in baseball began in 1997 as vice chairman of the Fresno Diamond Group, the parent company of the PCL's Fresno Grizzlies. In 2001, after overseeing construction of privately financed Raley Field, he was named PCL Executive of the Year. Three years later, the River Cats won the Bob Freitas Award for excellence in Minor League Baseball.

A's ink McPherson to Minor League deal

Injury-plagued third baseman given invite to Spring Training

By Tom Singer / MLB.com 11/22/09

The A's have signed free-agent third baseman Dallas McPherson to a Minor League agreement that includes an invitation to Spring Training.

ESPN.com first reported the transaction, in which Oakland hopes to have unearthed a competitor for its third-base vacancy.

The signing of the former highly rated prospect, now 29, is very ironic in one regard: McPherson missed the entire 2009 season, as he had 2007, with back problems. One reason the A's are searching for third-base help is their long-time mainstay at the position, Eric Chavez, has for years battled his own back problems and underwent yet another operation on June 23.

McPherson also had an operation on his back in July. His agent, Matt Sosnick, told ESPN.com that McPherson is "already working out. He's 100 percent."

Rated the Angels' No. 2 prospect by Baseball America in 2005, McPherson has slugged 150 homers in 608 Minor League games but has only compiled 371 big league at-bats. In them, he has 18 home runs and 126 strikeouts.

Desme wins Arizona Fall League MVP

A's outfield prospect leads AFL with 11 home runs

By Tom Singer / MLB.com 11/21/09

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- Grant Desme, the Oakland outfield prospect who led the Arizona Fall League with 11 homers, has been chosen as the recipient of the league's Joe Black Most Valuable Player Award.

Desme began the five-week season on a tear, drilling 10 of his home runs before the end of October, and maintained a consistent level of play that saw him also lead the AFL with 72 total bases while ranking second in RBIs (27) and runs scored (30).

Desme was presented with his MVP Award prior to Saturday afternoon's AFL championship game, in which he started in left field for Phoenix against the Peoria Javelinas.

And, on cue, he offered a glimpse of why the league's managers and coaches considered him worthy of the award, drilling a long home run in the fourth that tied a game his Desert Dogs would eventually drop, 5-4.

"This is a great honor, and it means a lot to me, to be so acknowledged with all the outstanding talent in this league," said Desme, who excelled against higher competition than he had previously met in his brief professional career.

"Grant Desme performed far beyond his experience during his six weeks in Arizona this fall," AFL director Steve Cobb said in making the presentation. "For a young man who has yet to face Double-A and Triple-A competition, his success against an array of the game's top prospects was remarkable."

Desme, 23, had split the 2009 Minor League season between Class A Kane County of the Midwest League and High-A Stockton of the California League, combining at the two stops for 31 homers and 40 stolen bases -- ranking as the Minors' lone 30-40 man.

Other players receiving MVP votes from league managers and coaches were shortstop Starlin Castro (Mesa-Cubs), outfielder Chris Heisey (Peoria Saguaros-Reds), infielder Brandon Laird (Surprise-Yankees), outfielder Jose Tabata (Scottsdale-Pirates) and outfielder Casper Wells (Peoria Javelinas-Tigers).

The MVP award, honoring 1952 National League Rookie of the Year Joe Black of the Brooklyn Dodgers, has been presented since the 2002 season.

Past recipients include Braves pitcher Tommy Hanson (2008), Eric Duncan (2005) and Chris Shelton (2004).

The newest inductee into that honor roll was grateful for the experience -- and for the short weeks of rest to come.

"It's been a lot of fun," Desme said of the AFL. "This was a good opportunity to get better.

"Now I'm going to have a chance to relax a little bit, but it will be a quick turnaround. Next year will be here soon."

Arizona native lifts Peoria to AFL title

Retherford hits decisive shot; MVP Desme homers in loss

By Tom Singer / MLB.com 11/21/09

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- White Sox prospect C.J. Retherford is a local product to whom the Arizona Fall League dynasty of Phoenix meant something.

So bringing the Desert Dogs' dominance to an end was particularly meaningful for the second baseman, whose two-run home run in the bottom of the eighth inning gave the Peoria Javelinas a 5-4 victory over Phoenix in Saturday's thrilling AFL championship game in front of 3,521 in Scottsdale Stadium.

"That was a big thing. They'd won the championship so many years in a row," Retherford said.

There was no sixth in a row for the Dogs.

Tampa Bay farmhand Shawn O'Malley's tiebreaking single had given them a 4-3 lead in the top of the seventh, but soon after right-hander Josh Perrault, the sixth pitcher deployed by Phoenix manager Gary Cathcart, was treated roughly by Peoria.

Jonathan Lucroy, the backstop out of Milwaukee's organization, singled sharply to left with one away in the bottom of the eighth to bring up Retherford, who, on a 1-0 pitch, knew what he wanted.

"Something straight, middle-in," Retherford said.

The resident of Chandler and product of Arizona State got it, and put "a nice, compact swing" on Perrault's fastball, sending it on a line over the left-field fence.

A few minutes later, Detroit prospect Robbie Weinhardt finished his two hitless innings, and the game, with a strikeout of one of Oakland's top prospects, Jemile Weeks, and the celebration was on.

The Peoria players, who dream of being big leaguers soon enough, emulated their Major League forebears by piling atop each other on the mound in glee.

You could have called it a dog pile -- but not a Desert Dogs pile.

Tampa Bay prospect Mitch Talbot, pressed into starting duty for Phoenix after scheduled starter and No. 1 pick in the 2009 First-Year Player Draft by the Nationals, Stephen Strasburg, incurred a left-knee dislocation and had to be scratched, did a credible job in three innings, allowing a pair of runs.

Then the Desert Dogs began to match Peoria's bullpen parade, which was by design.

Peoria manager Kevin Bradshaw's decision to start reliever Anthony Varvaro -- a righty out of the Seattle organization whose prior 10 appearances had all been out of the bullpen -- yielded the odd sight of a starting pitcher beginning the game working from the stretch.

Varvaro's preferred style proved appropriate when Mark Angle led the game off with a triple, scoring seconds later on Danny Espinosa's infield grounder.

Five more pitchers followed Varvaro to the mound, and collectively they did enough to contain the AFL's loudest offense. Phoenix averaged seven runs during the 32-game AFL regular season.

"If our pitchers could hold them to under five runs," Bradshaw said, "I knew we had enough offense to win."

The Javelinas pitchers did so by living up to their reputation for throwing fire, combining to pile up 15 strikeouts.

Phoenix answered Peoria's little-ball go-ahead two-run rally in the second -- the runs scored on a fielder's choice grounder and Dustin Ackley's infield single -- loudly in the fourth.

A's prospect Grant Desme, the AFL's freshly named MVP, homered with one away to make it 2-2, and an out later Nevin Ashley also homered, to right-center, for a 3-2 lead.

The Javelinas came right back in the bottom of the fourth to tie it up at 3, on another run-scoring force-play grounder, this one off the bat of Jordan Danks.

The Desert Dogs had one more punch, on O'Malley's single to deliver Ashley, who had singled, stolen second and continued to third on Lucroy's throwing error, but the Javelinas landed the decisive counter-punch.

"This was awesome, to be able to do this with my family and friends here," said Retherford, signed in June 2007 by Chicago as a non-drafted free agent, "and to do it in a game played at such a high level."

For the Desert Dogs, caught between a very long year of ball and a very short rest before again cranking it up, there was only disappointment.

"It would've been nice to win after leading for much of the game," Desme said. "And it hurt to lose the way we did, late. But that's the way it goes"

Art Savage, owner of Oakland A's farm club, dies

The Associated Press 11/21/09

SACRAMENTO, Calif.—Art Savage, the majority owner of the Sacramento River Cats, the Triple-A affiliate of the Oakland Athletics, has died. He was 58.

Jeff Savage says his father collapsed at his Sacramento home Saturday and died on the way to the hospital. He says his father had recently recovered from a long battle with lung cancer.

Savage bought the team when it was based in Edmonton, Alberta, in 1998. He moved the club to Vancouver, British Columbia, for a year before relocating to Sacramento in 2000. The River Cats won Triple-A championships in 2007 and 2008.

Jeff Savage said the family will retain control of the team.

Art Savage, San Jose Sharks' first president, dead at 58

By David Pollak, San Jose Mercury News 11/22/09

Art Savage, the first president of the Sharks and a man who played a crucial role in convincing the city of San Jose to upgrade its plans for a sports arena so it could attract an NHL team, died Saturday in Sacramento. He was 58.

His son, Jeff, told the Associated Press that Savage collapsed at home and died on the way to the hospital.

Savage, who became the majority owner of the Sacramento River Cats after leaving the Sharks in 1996, had been battling lung cancer, though the cause of death was not known.

"It was Art's progressive thinking that helped bring the Sharks and major league sports to San Jose," said Greg Jamison, who succeeded Savage as the hockey team's top official. "His innovative approach as the Sharks' first president is what allowed the club to thrive from the moment it was conceived. We will miss him greatly and send our best wishes to his family."

In the 1970s, Savage had been a financial adviser to George Gund, the owner of the Sharks from their inception until 2003. Savage served as president of the NBA's Cleveland Cavaliers, also owned by the Gund family, before becoming part of Gund's effort to return hockey to the Bay Area in 1989.

Initial conversations were to move Gund's NHL team, the Minnesota North Stars, to Oakland, according to Matt Levine, a longtime colleague of Savage's and the Sharks' top marketing executive in their early years. But the focus soon shifted to San Jose, and Savage pressed the

team's case to then-mayor Tom McEnergy.

"Art drove the negotiations to sort out what was necessary to redesign the San Jose Arena and how to finance the reconfiguration and expansion," Levine said of the need to change the original plans for the structure. Eventually the two sides came up with a plan in which the Gund family contributed about \$35 million.

Levine said Savage later decided he wanted to own a team and identified minor league baseball as the healthiest investment. He first worked in Fresno, then bought Vancouver's Triple A team and moved it to Sacramento, where he was involved in building a new stadium for the A's farm team.

River Cats owner, 58, dies suddenly at his home

Sacramento Bee 11/21/09

Arthur Lynn Savage, the man who changed summer evenings in Sacramento and gave baseball fans a home team to brag about, died Saturday at his East Sacramento home.

Mr. Savage, who with his wife, Susan, owned the Sacramento River Cats, one of the nation's most successful minor league franchises, was 58.

Mr. Savage, a non-smoker, was diagnosed with lung cancer in the fall of 2007, but after undergoing two months of treatment, he was cancer-free by the start of the season in 2008.

A team representative said Mr. Savage suddenly became ill Saturday and collapsed at home.

"He had a clean bill of health," said his son, Jeff Savage. "We were all very optimistic, so as you can imagine, this came as kind of a shock."

Mr. Savage was at the stadium late Friday, talking about plans for the 2010 season and had been working hard and full time, said Alan Ledford, the team's president, general manager and chief operating officer.

"That's why it's a shocking loss," he said. "He'd been doing fine."

Mr. Savage's team wrapped up its 10th season in town in October, a span during which the River Cats won eight division titles, four Pacific Coast League championships and two Triple A championships and sent as many as 160 players to the Oakland A's.

During the decade, River Cats fans broke attendance records year after year, outdistancing 200 other minor league teams in the country.

Mr. Savage, who was as modest and low-key as New York Yankees' owner George Steinbrenner is not, was named The Sporting News Minor League Executive of the Year in 2000 and the franchise was bestowed the Bob Freitas Award for excellence in Minor League Baseball for the 2004 season.

"He had a great vision and passion and level of perseverance unlike anybody I've worked for before. That's what made the River Cats and Raley Field possible," Ledford said.

Because of the team's success, other team executives often sought Mr. Savage's counsel and advice, he said.

"He did it with such humility," Ledford said. "He never sought the spotlight."

A Texas native, who never advanced his own baseball career beyond Little League, Mr. Savage graduated with a business degree from Texas Tech University, where he met and married his wife.

Working as a tax manager for a large accounting firm, Mr. Savage took on a client who owned the National Hockey League's Minnesota North Stars, George Gund.

When Gund later owned the San Jose Sharks, he hired Mr. Savage as CEO in 1990. By 1997, Mr. Savage was vice chairman of the parent company that owned the Fresno Grizzlies, a minor-league baseball team.

There, he met Branch B. Rickey III, grandson of one of baseball's legendary baseball executives and who is president of the Triple A Pacific Coast League.

The idea of a team in Sacramento brewed between the two. In a 2004 interview, Rickey said: "As soon as we talked about a situation I thought would be challenging, his eyes seemed to light up - there was a glint."

Mr. Savage plowed sometimes rocky fields to bring baseball back to Sacramento, which had not had a professional team in a significant way since the 1970s.

As many in town believed the River City should settle for no less than a major league team with a field near Arco Arena, Savage plunked down \$10 million in 1998 for the Oakland A's Triple A team in Edmonton. The team played in Vancouver for a year while Mr. Savage got a home field built in West Sacramento.

Mr. Savage brought his team to the area in 2000.

He seemed to enjoy the niche he had found and filled so well. In a 2006 interview, Mr Savage said: "What we provide is fan-friendly entertainment that is affordable, which you can't always do in major-league sports. And we can. People love the River Cats; they love coming to Raley Field, and that's been a fun part of it for myself."

In the fall of 2007, Savage noticed a cough so slight he almost didn't mention it to his doctor. Probably hay fever, he thought. Tests proved otherwise. After a two-month stay in a cancer clinic, he came home to run his team and his showcase stadium.

"He was a very private person and he was not one to complain. He just moved on," Ledford said.

"We've all learned a tremendous amount from Art. He wanted that long-term success for the team owned by the Savage family," Ledford said.

Mr. Savage's two sons, Jeff and Brent, both work for the team and on Saturday, Jeff Savage said his mother will retain controlling ownership of the team.

Mr. Savage envisioned the team as a legacy for his sons to inherit, Jeff Savage said.

Burial services have not been arranged yet.

A's Add Four To 40-Man Roster

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Nov 21, 2009

Friday was the deadline for teams to set their rosters for the upcoming Rule 5 draft and the Oakland A's chose to add four players, protecting them from the possibility that they could be taken in the annual draft, which takes place during baseball's Winter Meetings.

On Friday, the Oakland A's added four players to their 40-man roster. Chris Carter, Fautino De Los Santos, Pedro Figueroa and Justin Souza will now be protected from the Rule 5 draft, which will take place in early December during baseball's annual winter meetings.

The additions of Carter, De Los Santos and Figueroa were expected, as those three are among the A's top prospects. Souza's inclusion was a bit of a surprise, and it is a testament to how well Souza pitched at the A's recent Instructional League camp. Souza was one of the oldest players at Instructs, but A's minor league pitching coordinator Gil Patterson raved about Souza's stuff, calling him a "poor man's [Andrew] Bailey."

Souza was acquired by the A's during the 2009 season from the Seattle Mariners for Jack Hannahan. The Stockton native had a 3.35 ERA in 78 innings for Double-A West Tennessee before the trade, but he struggled in five starts with Double-A Midland after the deal, posting a 10.35 ERA. The A's are still deciding whether Souza's future lies in the starting rotation or the bullpen.

The 24-year-old was selected by Seattle in the ninth round out of Sacramento Community College in 2006. He is a hard thrower, with a fastball that sits in the 91-95 MPH range. Souza also features a hard slider and a curveball and Patterson mentioned that Souza may add a cutter before the start of next season. Souza was named the top pitcher at the A's US Instructional League camp in late October.

Carter is one of the A's top prospects and he could be contributing to Oakland's major league team as early as this season. The first-baseman/outfielder had a monster 2009 campaign, earning the Texas League's MVP award and batting .329/.422/.570 with 28 homers and 115 RBIs in 138 games between Midland and Triple-A Sacramento. Since joining the A's organization in a trade with the Arizona Diamondbacks before the 2008 season, Carter has hit 67 homeruns and has been an instrumental part of two league championship teams (the 2008 Stockton Ports and the 2009 Midland Rockhounds).

De Los Santos was also acquired by the A's via a trade before the 2008 season. The hard-throwing right-hander has been sidelined for much of the past two seasons. He had Tommy John surgery in May 2008 and has had a long recovery from that surgery, although De Los Santos is currently throwing at the A's Dominican Instructional League camp and the team expects him to be healthy for the start of the 2010 season. When healthy, he has one of the best arms in the A's system. He was a starter before the injury, but De Los Santos could be moved into a relief role if the A's want him to move through their system quickly.

Figueroa is arguably the hardest throwing left-hander in the A's system. The native of the Dominican Republic has been clocked in the mid-90s. He had a strong season for the A's two full-season A-ball affiliates, going 13-6 with a 3.38 ERA and 145 strike-outs in 152 innings. Figueroa will turn 24 on Monday. He was originally signed by the A's as a non-drafted free agent out of the Dominican Republic in 2003.

With the four additions, the A's have 39 players on their 40-man roster, meaning that they will have one open slot available to them to take a player in the Rule 5 draft, if they so choose. The A's have been active participants in the Rule 5 in recent years.

The Oakland brass will have to hold its collective breath during the draft that they don't lose any prospects in the draft. The A's have left some high-profile names available in the draft, including reliever Jared Lansford, starter Graham Godfrey (a Texas League All-Star this season), utilityman Corey Wimberly and catcher Anthony Recker.

Will Billy join Reggie in Hall of Fame?

By ROBERT RUBINO, PRESS DEMOCRAT STAFF COLUMNIST 11/21/09

Billy Martin and Gene Mauch, about as opposite as the class bully is from the class nerd, are on baseball's Hall of Fame ballot for managers.

Martin, who died in 1989, was quite a character. While managing the Twins, he got into a fistfight with his 20-game winner, Dave Boswell. While in one of his five managerial stints with the Yankees, he got into a fight with pitcher Ed Whitson. With that kind of animosity toward pitchers, you'd think he was Ted Williams.

But Martin was a scrappy-type player who learned about managing by paying attention to Casey Stengel, just as Stengel had been a scrappy player who learned about managing by watching John McGraw, the patron saint (or demon) of scrappy players-turned-managers.

Martin's charisma (or intensity or psychosis or anger-management issues) appealed to a cross-section of baseball owners. The patrician Calvin Griffith, the maverick Bob Short, the penny-pinching nonconformist Charlie Finley and the arrogant and bombastic George Steinbrenner all hired him.

And they all fired him.

With Steinbrenner, Martin was a yo-yo, replaced by Bob Lemon in the middle of the 1978 season (while 10 games over .500), then replacing Lemon in the middle of 1979; replacing Yogi Berra just 16 games into the 1985 season, then getting replaced by Lou Pinella after 68 games (and a 40-28 record) in 1988.

As a rookie manager, he won a division title with the Twins in 1969.

He won a division title with the Tigers in 1972.

He took the previously pathetic Rangers to 84 wins and a second-place finish in 1974.

He took the Yankees to the World Series in 1976 and won it in 1977.

In 1980 he took an Oakland A's team that had lost 108 games the previous season and, without any high-priced infusion of talent, managed them to 83 wins. The next year, the strike-torn 1981 season, new ownership promoted "Billy Ball," a rare instance in which a manager was designated the team's star attraction, and he responded by taking the overachieving A's into the playoffs.

But as a lifelong baseball aficionado, my favorite thing about Billy Martin was his quote describing the two Yankee prima donnas he had to work with, Reggie Jackson and Steinbrenner.

"The two of them deserve each other. One is a born liar, the other is convicted," he said, referring to Steinbrenner's suspension from baseball in 1975 after pleading guilty the previous year of making an illegal campaign contribution to Richard Nixon and obstruction of justice.

Whereas Martin was a full-blown character seemingly out of potboiler fiction, Mauch, who died in 2005, was a curiosity, a much-respected, almost revered master strategist for much of his 26-year managerial career — with a losing record (including an amazing 23-game losing streak with the 1961 Phillies) and the blemish of not one, not two, but three colossal meltdowns by his teams.

Mauch's 1964 Phillies blew a 6½-game National League lead with 12 games remaining.

His 1982 Angels blew a best-of-5 AL Championship Series after winning the first two games.

And his 1986 Angels were one strike away from the World Series but didn't make it, losing three games in a row.

I don't know if Martin belongs in the Hall of Fame (how can anyone know the Hall's standards, with Bowie Kuhn in and Marvin Miller out, with Phil Rizzuto in and Minnie Minoso out?), but I earnestly believe Martin at least deserves a barstool named after him — one in the Cooperstown tavern closest to the sport's museum/shrine wouldn't be entirely inappropriate.

Mauch? I don't know if he belongs in the Hall, either, but I've got to think he at least deserves a corner table in the saloon with the Billy Martin Barstool, where those with the saddest tough-luck stories can cry into their beer.

Stay tuned. Hall of Fame voting results are due Dec.7.

Key prospects square off in AFL finale

Title game to showcase plenty of talent; Strasburg out

By Tom Singer / MLB.com

By the very nature of the Arizona Fall League, team rosters are completely overhauled every year. But team rank apparently is more consistent, and the Phoenix Desert Dogs are barking for their sixth consecutive title.

Phoenix, winner of the East Division, meets the West Division kingpin Peoria Javelinas in Saturday afternoon's AFL championship game at 2:35 p.m. ET/12:35 p.m. MT at Scottsdale Stadium.

It will be meaningful baseball in November -- rather, *more* meaningful baseball this November, with the 2009 World Series being resolved earlier this month -- on MLB.com, which will carry the live stream, and on MLB Network, which will air the game.

However, contrary to original expectations, the game will not provide a competitive preview of right-hander Stephen Strasburg, the Washington Nationals' No. 1 Draft choice.

Instead of being on the mound for Phoenix, as scheduled, Strasburg will be in the nation's capital having a twisted left knee evaluated by Nats medical personnel. The injury, suffered during a Thursday workout and diagnosed as inflammation, is not considered serious and the right-hander was scratched as a precaution.

Strasburg had similarly missed a scheduled start in the televised Nov. 7 Rising Stars Game due to a neck strain.

Rays prospect Mitch Talbot will start for the Desert Dogs in Strasburg's place against Peoria's Anthony Varvaro.

TV and Web viewers will still get No. 2, in First-Year Player Draft terms.

Occupying the outfield and the batter's box for Peoria will be Dustin Ackley -- whom the Mariners made the overall No. 2 pick in June's Draft.

Saturday's one-game showdown is between the obvious lords of the AFL's 18th season.

The Desert Dogs (19-13) and Javelinas (18-14) had the only winning records among the league's six teams across the 32-game regular season. Fittingly, they split the six games against each other. They were the league's top offensive teams, by far.

One possibly telling difference: Phoenix also boasted the offensive-minded league's top pitching staff (4.35 ERA) and Peoria its worst (6.14). But even that one disparity is mitigated by the fact the Javelinas' power hurlers led the league in strikeouts, with more than one an inning.

Strasburg and Ackley both signed too late in the summer to taste any Minor League action, hence they faced their first professional tests in this league populated by top prospects from the Double-A and Triple-A ranks.

Both passed those tests. Strasburg finished the five-week league with a 4-1 record, 4.26 ERA and a 23-7 strikeouts-to-walks ratio in 19 innings.

Ackley overcame a slow start to hit .315, with 12 RBIs in 20 games.

The Javelinas are led by Russ Mitchell and Casper Wells, among the league leaders with 25 RBIs.

Peoria also lines up Jordan Danks, brother of John and also with the White Sox, a .343 hitter with 23 RBIs, and speedster Lorenzo Cain of the Brewers (eight steals).

The Desert Dogs will still have a featured Washington pitching prospect available in the title game: hard-throwing righty Drew Storen, who led the AFL with four saves.

Phoenix also packs Grant Desme, the Oakland prospect who topped the league with 11 homers and had 27 RBIs, and Corey Brown, another A's hopeful, who batted .333 and closed hot to grab the RBI title with 28.

For one brisk afternoon in November, both teams will be about securing a title. Phoenix has had it for a long time. Peoria longs to claim it.

A's add Chris Carter to 40-man roster — where does he fit best?

By Joe Stiglich, Bay Area News Group, 11/20/09

As you all know, the battle at first base will be one of the more interesting storylines for the A's come spring training. Clearly, they need more pop at the plate from whoever's playing first. The A's have a logjam of youngsters at the position, but things would be less crowded if stud hitting prospect Chris Carter could play the outfield adequately. Check out this interview at Minor League Ball, where GM Billy Beane addresses that very topic. He says the ideal scenario would have Carter playing the outfield once he's brought up to the majors. A couple different A's officials have told me for some time now that Carter has the tools to be a decent left fielder. And honestly, would he have to be that great? The A's have shown they're willing to use a defensive question mark in the outfield if it means getting a needed bat in the lineup.

Carter, by the way, was added to the A's 40-man roster Friday, along with pitchers Fautino De Los Santos, Pedro Figueroa and Justin Souza.

But here's a couple issues to consider: How soon will Carter be ready for the majors? Will one of the other first base candidates – Daric Barton, Sean Doolittle, Tommy Everidge, etc. – hit well enough to allow Carter to play somewhere else? Doolittle missed most of the 2009 season recovering from a tear in his left patella tendon, which he tried to rehab without surgery. He encountered road blocks in his recovery, and scout.com reported that Doolittle recently underwent knee surgery to fix the tear. It's unknown whether he'll be ready for the start of spring training.

Let's remember that Scott Hairston's status also will affect Carter, if Carter is indeed considered for left field. I honestly don't have a read on how the A's feel about Hairston at this point. They gave up three pitchers to get him from San Diego in July, and used him as the regular left fielder when he was healthy. Now Hairston is arbitration-eligible. I see the A's tendering him a contract, but he got a rather lukewarm endorsement from Beane at the end of the season.

How do you see Carter fitting into the A's puzzle???

An Interview with Oakland GM Billy Beane

by John Sickels., Sports Blogs for Fans 11/20/09

I spoke with Oakland GM Billy Beane this morning. Here is a transcript of the interview.

JOHN SICKELS:

Billy, thanks for taking the time to talk with me today.

I want to start with a general question, then get to more specifics about some of the youngest players and prospects in your organization. First of all, you've spoken frequently of the necessity for a smaller-revenue team to build from within, and the Athletics clearly had to do that this year. Is it difficult to decide when you're in rebuilding mode, and when you're in win-now mode? Obviously you always want to win, but how you assess your current position is going to impact how you handle trades and free agency. If your team is really good or really bad, you know it, but how do you assess this if you're somewhere in the middle? For example, in 2009 you finished 75-87, but your Pythagorean won-loss record was 81-81, so maybe this team is better than it looks. How does this impact your decision making for 2010 and the future?

BILLY BEANE:

Good question. I think one of the General Manager's most important jobs is to figure that out, to always know where you are in the organization development process. Sometimes the public perception, in the media and with the fans, of where the team is, can be different than what the private internal perception is. The way I look at it, you are either building something special or you have something special. Our market is challenging as you know, and we are in rebuilding mode right now, but I think there are a lot of good things to look forward to.

As I see it, our organization has two "waves" of players. We have a strong group of young pitchers up in the majors right now....Anderson, Cahill, Bailey, Gonzalez and others. . that's the foundation for a great staff, and we have a group of young hitters coming up behind them who will be ready soon. It's a process we went through in the 1990s so we know how it works.

JOHN SICKELS:

So you do see yourself as in the rebuilding phase right now.

BILLY BEANE:

Yes, but these things can change quickly. What you want is for a young group of players to come up at roughly the same time, but it's a case by case thing for each player, and you have to give them time to adjust to the major league level. Expectations can get very high when you're bringing up young talent, sometimes too high, but it is our job to factor that in. Even if our won-loss record doesn't change next year, we will still be light years ahead of where we are now in the development process itself, just by the young guys getting another year of experience.

Even a level-headed guy like Brett Anderson will need adjustment time. He's a very good pitcher now, but how will he look in three or four years? He should be outstanding.

When a player first reaches the majors, he's in survival mode, just getting use to the pace of the game, the big league setting, the travel, playing against the best guys he's ever faced before. Eventually they move beyond that survival mode, they get comfortable, and then you see how good they really are. The time it takes is different for every player, some of them the adjustment happens fast, sometimes it takes longer, sometimes there are setbacks. Right now, we have a lot of players who are making that transition from survival mode to realizing they belong. But once it clicks, the upward improvement can be incredibly rapid, and it is a beautiful thing to watch happen, for the specific player and when it happens to a team as a whole.

The draft is incredibly important for us, of course. When you're in a rebuilding mode, you can't miss on your early round draft picks, especially if you're in the top half of the first round. If you have a top five pick especially, you can't miss on those at all. The research is very clear on the value of a top five pick compared to the bottom half of the first round. We picked 12th last year and 13th this year, and are happy with what we have to show for it. (ed.-Jemile Weeks and Grant Green). When we built up the team in the 1990s, early round picks were critical for us.

JOHN SICKELS:

That's interesting that you mention the importance of the early choices, but sometimes guys can be a big surprise. Andrew Bailey, rookie of the year, was a sixth round pick.. I've been an optimist about him but I didn't expect something like this. At what point did you realize you had something special on your hands?

BILLY BEANE:

Well we always knew he had a lot of potential. We always felt he could make it as a starter, but he kind of hit the wall in that role at Midland (in 2008).

JOHN SICKELS:

Yeah, he had some problems down there. But then he moved to relief in the second half and was better, and I remember seeing him in the Arizona Fall League last year and thinking he looked really good. I thought he could be a good middle reliever, but he was much more than that this year.

BILLY BEANE:

He always had the strong strikeout rate, which I know is something you look at and we certainly look at as the best indicator of future performance for a pitcher. He looked good in spring training, throwing 92-94, and we felt he fit well into the pen. But then he got comfortable really quickly, and his confidence took off. He got really fired up, his stuff went up to 94-96 even 97 with the cutter. We didn't see that coming. We thought he'd be fine in the pen, but he just got better and better. It built on itself and you saw the final results.

JOHN SICKELS:

He wasn't a high-round draft pick.

BILLY BEANE:

No, and you can't count on finding a rookie of the year with a sixth round pick. That's why the early rounds are so important. But it also shows you can find players who have potential, and in Bailey's case it was the strikeouts that indicated it to us.

JOHN SICKELS:

You mentioned the young wave of pitching up this year, and as good as Bailey was, rookies held down the starting rotation. Your top six starters averaged 22.6 years of age, with Dallas Braden the "veteran" at age 25. Anderson and Cahill had to be very pleasing given how little Double-A experience they had. But what about Gio Gonzalez? You mentioned the importance of strikeouts. He's got the strikeouts but he still can't get anyone out.

BILLY BEANE:

Gio is a really interesting guy. Even when he's getting hit hard, he still strikes guys out. Ultimately we think it will play out in his favor. Gio is a very high-strung guy, high-energy, and sometimes that works against him. It will take him a little longer to get comfortable, but we understand that. Brett Anderson is the opposite, he's very calm and under control emotionally, but Gio is still learning to harness his emotions. We think he made a lot of progress doing that.

If you look at his game-by-game lines, you can see signs that he's pulling things together. Back in July, he had a really bad game against the Twins (ed.--10 hits and 11 runs allowed in 2.2 innings on July 20th), but he came back from that to pitch well against the Yankees (July 25th, one run in 6.2 innings) and Red Sox (July 30th, eight strikeouts in 5.1 innings) on the road. That's not easy in those environments, so he showed he could bounce back. We were also really happy with his last start, where he fanned 10 and didn't walk anyone (October 2nd against the Angels) in six innings. That shows the kind of potential he has. He just needs more time to put it together consistently, learn to channel his emotions when he gets amped up.

JOHN SICKELS:

You mentioned the wave of young hitters who will be ready soon. Where does Chris Carter fit into that? Can he really play the outfield?

BILLY BEANE:

Chris is far more athletic than people think. He needs work out there, but he has a better chance to stick in the outfield than the other candidates like Barton. We haven't given up on Barton at all by the way, we still believe in his potential. But Chris's bat looks special. It would really help us fit him into the lineup if he can play the outfield.

JOHN SICKELS

I saw him late in the year for Midland, and I agree, he is more athletic than people say. He's not just a slugger either, he looks like he's pretty polished with the bat.

BILLY BEANE:

Yes. Our people in Midland thought he was the best all-around hitter in the Texas League, a pure hitter now, not just a power guy. He's made adjustments as he's moved up and has improved his approach at a rapid rate. And he's still very young, too. We had some concerns about how he would adapt in Triple-A, but he handled the challenge well, hitting four homers for Sacramento. He will need some Triple-A time to make the final adjustments with the bat, and to settle on a position.

JOHN SICKELS:

So you will keep him in the outfield?

BILLY BEANE:

Well, it would help us if he could stick there. We'll see how things look in the spring. We still have Barton and Doolittle to find places for, too.

JOHN SICKELS:

You said you haven't given up on Barton. Do you still like Doolittle?

BILLY BEANE:

Yeah, we still like both of them a lot. It's too bad about Doolittle's knee, that was badly timed for him and for us, but we still think he's going to be a good hitter.

JOHN SICKELS

The other big bat in Triple-A is Brett Wallace. Can he stick at third base?

BILLY BEANE:

Well we don't know for sure yet, but we won't take him off third base until he proves he can't handle it. His bat has come very quickly, he was just a year out of college and hit well in Triple-A. The bat looks special to us. Sometimes with guys like that, the glove gets panned by scouts just because the bat has come so quickly and they are looking for something to criticize. Also, I think Brett's defense gets panned unfairly because of the way his body looks.

JOHN SICKELS:

It looks to me like he has a strong arm and decent hands, but his range is limited.

BILLY BEANE:

Maybe, but third base is a big hole in our system, and if he can make it there it would fit very nicely into the plan. The other factor is that Brett believes he can play third base, he's committed to it, and it is foolish not to let him try. So we're keeping him there until he proves otherwise.

JOHN SICKELS:

We are almost out of time, but there is one more guy I want to ask you about. Grant Desme had a great year in the minors, and was one of the big boppers in the Arizona Fall League. He's always had good tools but was slowed down by injuries. I like what he did in A-ball, but his strikeout rate is very high. Does that worry you?

BILLY BEANE:

Well, we drafted him high (second round, 2007) and we've always liked his potential. He got hurt, but he made up for lost time this year. You mentioned the strikeouts, and yes that is something we're aware of. The other concern is age; people point out he was kind of old for A-ball. But the bottom line is that he performed this year, he looked great this fall, and we can't worry about failure until it actually happens. The guy he reminds me of is Jayson Werth, a big guy who could run when he was young. Desme has a similar package, and that sort of power is hard to find in a right-handed hitter.

JOHN SICKELS:

Does he start at Midland or at Sacramento?

BILLY BEANE:

We'll decide that in spring training, but probably Midland. We'll have to see if the strikeouts become a problem, but we really like what we saw from him this year.

JOHN SICKELS

Billy, I know you're a very busy man, but thanks for taking the time to chat today!

BILLY BEANE:

Thanks, John!