

A's News Clips, Wednesday, November 25, 2009

Co-owner Lew Wolff says the Oakland A's are headed in right direction

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune 11/25/09

These can't be the rosier of times for A's co-owner Lew Wolff.

His battle to find a new home for his baseball team continues, with no obvious end in sight.

Discontent grows among the fan base, with the perception being the organization can't wait to bolt Oakland for greener pastures.

And the A's are trying to snap a string of three straight losing seasons in an American League West division that's getting stronger across the board.

But Wolff, 73, is optimistic the A's are pointed in the right direction. That was abundantly clear during a phone interview Tuesday afternoon with the Bay Area News Group.

"We could still use a hitter or two, but we could field the team we have, be a young team, and be very competitive next year," said Wolff, the A's managing partner.

Wolff is also certain that general manager Billy Beane "will make some additions as we move through the winter."

The A's have designs on moving to San Jose — partly because the Oakland Coliseum is seen as a relic and partly because of sagging home attendance that ranked last in the major leagues in 2009.

The poor crowds seemingly could be attributed, at least in part, to the belief that the A's can't — or won't — hold on to their big-name players.

That perception was reinforced after the 2007 season, when the A's traded pitcher Dan Haren and outfielder Nick Swisher, then dealt pitchers Joe Blanton and Rich Harden during the 2008 campaign.

Solid baseball reasons were given, and those deals netted prospects who helped transform the A's farm system into one of the majors' best. Still, the A's traded four core players who were under team control and making reasonable salaries. Wolff was asked if, in hindsight, he's considered the possible public relations backlash to the strategy.

"It isn't like, if we had a winning team, we would have had double the attendance," Wolff said. "If you trace it back for a long time, we're in a market that's difficult to tap. We're close to the Giants, who have a beautiful ballpark. I don't think the fact that we traded some guys ... When you look back at what we sent out, I think the balance sheet is in our favor thanks to Billy and his guys."

Wolff's optimism about next season stems from a promising core of young players - particularly on the pitching staff.

To retain their budding stars long term, the A's claim they'll need a new stadium that helps them draw bigger crowds and provide more revenue.

San Jose city leaders have secured the land where a proposed 32,000-seat stadium could be built. But plans are on hold until a Major League Baseball-appointed panel finishes its study of possible stadium locations throughout the Bay Area.

Wolff is aware of the scorn he's generated for recent comments about the futility of trying to build a new stadium in Oakland.

"We spent three solid years trying to (look) in Oakland. There are some people who think we didn't do anything," he said. "If you sat down with me (to examine) the details with the effort in Oakland, it takes me about an hour and 45 minutes to go through my notes."

Of course, to get that coveted revenue that a San Jose stadium could provide, it's assumed the South Bay fan base would jump on the A's bandwagon. Wolff was asked if he's worried about alienating the team's East Bay fans.

"I don't need heavy research to tell me that if we can get farther away from the Giants, that's the best option for us," he said. " In our East Bay market, especially around the city of Oakland, a lot of them may gravitate toward the Giants. I don't know. But you're talking about (a San Jose stadium) being the smallest ballpark in baseball at 32,000 seats. We're measuring our bet by not building 54,000 seats."

After the MLB panel concludes its findings, a big hurdle remains - the territorial rights to San Jose belong to the Giants. And major league owners would have to waive those rights before the A's could move there.

Wolff points to the Angels and Dodgers - who share territorial rights to common regions - and believes that no geographic distinctions are necessary.

"The Bay Area can have two football teams and survive," he said. "It should be looked at as one area."

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- A's co-owner Lew Wolff

Gary Peterson: It's time to play ball on possible Oakland A's move to San Jose

By Gary Peterson, Contra Costa Times columnist 11/25/09

The A's are on the offensive, and this time it has nothing to do with Jack Cust taking the 2-1 pitch for ball three.

In the current edition of San Francisco Magazine, A's managing partner Lew Wolff once again applies grease to the skids he hopes will carry the team from Oakland to San Jose. Remarkably, majority owner John Fisher, who puts the "silent" in silent partner, also chimes in.

"Our conclusion," Fisher said, "is that the best opportunity to build a ballpark is in downtown San Jose." In other breaking news, Yogi Berra sometimes talks in circles.

On Tuesday, Wolff did an interview with Bay Area News Group's own Joltin' Joe Stiglich to discuss, among other topics, the fertile climes of Santa Clara County as they relate to the care and feeding of a sports and entertainment empire.

Again, no surprise. Wolff, upon assuming part ownership of the A's in 2006, walked in the door talking openly of a new baseball-only stadium and doing little to hide his affinity for Silicon Valley.

And now, seriously, the rhetoric needs to stop — at least long enough for us to receive a definitive ruling from baseball commissioner Bud Selig. Will the A's be allowed to pursue a move to San Jose or not?

As it stands, and has stood since 1992, the Giants own the territorial rights to Santa Clara County. The rights were granted during a campaign to secure voter approval for a baseball stadium in the South Bay. The attempt failed (the Giants, you may have heard, wound up building themselves a ballpark in San Francisco), but the rights live on.

So now, even as Wolff and San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed blow long-range kisses at each other, there is no indication that Major League Baseball will allow such a deal to happen. Absent such assurances, the future of Bay Area baseball remains maddeningly and needlessly in limbo.

True, as recently as July, Selig reiterated that "territorial rights are always sacred." But the perception is that there is wiggle room to be had. This is why Wolff continues to speak on the subject. It's why Reed has issued the team an open invitation. It's why Giants executive Larry Baer felt compelled to refer to territorial rights as a "bedrock asset" a few months ago.

Selig isn't ignorant of the situation. He and Wolff were college fraternity brothers. That's not to suggest Selig owes Wolff any favors. But he owes all of us an explicit and binding judgment.

He has three to choose from:

The ruling stands. Wolff shall return Reed's promise ring and the A's shall give up on San Jose immediately.

This is the least comprehensible of the options. The Giants didn't need territorial rights in Santa Clara County before 1992. Why did they need them after a failed vote?

Baer claims the Giants draw fans, a sizable TV and radio audience and corporate sponsorships from Santa Clara Valley. But an A's move south could open new opportunities in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. Plus, have you looked at the skyline in San Francisco's financial district lately? If you can't make a nice living off that corporate base, you probably shouldn't be in the game.

The territorial rights are no more, and I have the votes in pocket to prove it.

This presumes Selig in fact has those votes. He's known as a tediously deliberate consensus-builder, and three years is plenty of time to make a case to other owners against the Giants' rights to a territory they don't inhabit. So why the wait?

This makes the most sense, logically. If the Giants had a gripe, it was in 1968 when the A's arrived from Kansas City and set up shop right across the bay. Once they let that happen, they should've been left with no recourse.

Let's make a deal.

This is the way it'll likely play out. It's how the Montreal Expos relocated to Washington, D.C., over the protests of Baltimore Orioles owner Peter Angelos, who had claimed territorial rights stretching from central Pennsylvania to North Carolina.

Angelos' payoff from Major League Baseball included a guaranteed sale price if and when he divested himself of the Orioles. This is the most realistic scenario, given that money is at the crux of this debate in the first place.

But whatever the ruling, let it be soon. Because legal challenges could very well follow, the construction process is its own hellish tedium, and Brett Anderson isn't getting any younger.

South Bay lobbying for A's is expanding

Eric Young, San Francisco Business Times, 11/24/09

A growing number of South Bay cities are lobbying **Major League Baseball** to let the A's to move to San Jose.

Santa Clara County Supervisor Dave Cortese said that Mountain View and Gilroy each sent resolutions to MLB, requesting that baseball officials "eliminate the **San Francisco Giants** franchise exclusivity as to the County of Santa Clara."

Such a move would make it easier for the Oakland A's to move to San Jose, where city officials want the team to build a new stadium on a 23-acre site just south of HP Pavilion and the Diridon Caltrain station.

A number of cities in Santa Clara County have already submitted resolutions to MLB, including Cupertino, Los Altos Hills, Morgan Hill, Milpitas, Monte Sereno, Saratoga and San Jose.

The resolutions are not legally binding. But Cortese, who helped organize the lobbying campaign, said he hopes that if the county acts with a unified voice it could be persuasive to baseball officials.

The Giants have said they will not relinquish territorial rights, granted by baseball to the team in 1992, to Santa Clara County. The Giants also have rights to San Mateo and San Francisco counties. The A's have territorial rights to Alameda and Contra Costa counties.

Last March baseball's commissioner, Bud Selig, appointed a committee to study whether the Athletics can relocate in the East Bay. The three-member group was charged with analyzing the team's "current situation in Oakland and the prospects of obtaining a ballpark in any of the communities located in Oakland's territory."

MLB did not say when the group's work will conclude or whether it has already reached any conclusions.

The A's, which said a new stadium will generate more money, have played in Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum since 1968. The baseball team shares the facility with the **Oakland Raiders**. The A's lease in the coliseum expires in 2010 with three, one-year options to extend.