

## A's News Clips, Wednesday, December 9, 2009

### Yankees' DH Matsui could end up in Oakland

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer 12/9/09

Yes, it's a long shot. Yes, many, many things would need to fall in place first. But, no, it's not totally out of the question.

**Hideki Matsui** is seeking a home, and the A's have been mentioned by industry insiders, plus several members of the Japanese media, as a possible suitor.

Tuesday, A's manager **Bob Geren** spoke glowingly about the designated hitter, saying, "We're not opposed to bringing a veteran in that can help us in the short term until we create somebody from our organization to take that spot. He's certainly one of the better players in the league for sure. He's had some great years, great numbers in New York. He's helped them win a lot."

Before any Matsui talk gets serious, here's what needs to happen:

-- The Yankees must decide not to re-sign him.

-- He must agree to a one-year contract that's relatively cheap (no more than half of his 2009 salary of \$13 million).

-- The A's must have a need for a left-handed DH - first, they'd need to give up on **Jack Cust** by not tendering him on Saturday's deadline, making him a free agent.

The A's have a history of signing older players to smaller contracts late in the offseason. Though team officials said they'd rather end that practice, it's now considered an alternative again.

**Briefly:** The A's, seeking a long-term answer at third base, have mild interest in trading for San Diego's **Kevin Kouzmanoff**. ... Pitcher **Ben Sheets'** agent, **Casey Close**, plans to meet with the Giants. ... Though A's GM **Billy Beane** is leaving Indy tonight, the Giants' **Brian Sabean** is staying until Friday because the team will accept awards at a Thursday night banquet. ... Beane said **Brett Wallace** will enter spring training as a third baseman, not a first baseman. ... Giants manager **Bruce Bochy** is considering a lineup that begins **Eugenio Velez**, **Edgar Renteria**, **Freddy Sanchez** and **Pablo Sandoval**. ... Never mind any suggestions that the A's are a mystery team for **Milton Bradley**, who already wore out his welcome in Oakland.

### First ballot is all Alomar should need

Bruce Jenkins, Chronicle Staff Writer 12/9/09

There were times in the 1990s when I wondered, along with many baseball writers, if Roberto Alomar was the best all-around second baseman in history. It was a solid, worthy argument, and Alomar backed it up with both performance and style.

Just the fact that Alomar was mentioned in that company - along with Joe Morgan, Rogers Hornsby, Charlie Gehringer and others - solidified his Hall of Fame status for me. It was something you felt at the time, *while* he playing, not in retrospect.

Nothing could tarnish Alomar's status, including the notorious spitting incident with umpire John Hirschbeck. Just the other day, Hirschbeck reiterated his forgiveness and said he'd be gravely disappointed if Alomar didn't get in.

Alomar always struck people as a singular, innovative second baseman who literally invented ways to make the spectacular play. He was an unusually clever baserunner who mixed 210 home runs with an even .300 average for his 17-year career. He is perhaps best remembered for his epic homer in Game 4 of the 1992 ALCS at the Oakland Coliseum, stepping to the plate in difficult, late-afternoon light against Dennis Eckersley and belting a two-run, ninth-inning homer that sent the game into extra innings. Toronto won that game, and the series, and in its way, Alomar's homer was just as memorable as Kirk Gibson's 1988 World Series homer off Eckersley.

Hirschbeck's approval should cinch the deal for everyone, including the insufferable voters who have decided they'll make Alomar wait a year or two until they pull the trigger. (So the vote is all about *them*, in other words, instead of the player.) Alomar will be a first-ballot choice, and marking his name was definitely the highlight of my voting experience this month.

The Veterans Committee came through nicely with the election of umpire Doug Harvey, long revered for his distinguished National League career, and manager Whitey Herzog, mastermind of exceptional teams in Kansas City and St. Louis. But it's apparent, once again, that the late Billy Martin ticked off too many people.

Martin was listed among managers who received "less than three votes," and that's a disgrace. This is a man who pulled off miracles not just in Oakland, but in Texas, Minnesota and Detroit, crafting strong and dangerous teams out of rubble. He never could sustain the winning climates he created, especially in New York, but anyone who faced those Yankees (or those A's, or Twins, you name it) knew they were up against one of the sharpest strategists in baseball history.

Maybe next year? Probably not, with Billy. He just burned too hot. Now on to the other players who got my vote:

**Barry Larkin:** He got lost in all the attention drawn by American League shortstops Derek Jeter, Alex Rodriguez, Cal Ripken and Nomar Garciaparra during his prime, but Larkin had it all: power, speed, excellent defense, an MVP award, 12-time All-Star, nine Silver Slugger awards (as the year's best hitter at his position) and leadership. Can't think of a single negative.

**Edgar Martinez:** I don't believe in the DH, one of the dumbest sports rules ever conceived, but it's lame to deny its existence. It's a significant part of the American League game and is certainly entitled to Hall of Fame representation. Martinez is the perfect choice to break that barrier. He was widely considered the best throughout his career, winning two batting titles (.343 and .356) and finishing at .312 lifetime.

**Don Mattingly:** He won't make it, and I'm well aware of that, but in the short time he excelled, Mattingly had that rare ability to stir the soul. His swing personified the uncoiling of a precise, well-conceived instrument, and he was revered by even the finest opposing hitters. His name must appear on the balloting somewhere.

**Jack Morris and Dave Parker:** Maybe they don't look worthy on the stat sheet, but they were *main* men. Asked to name one starter for a big game, or one batter to hit cleanup, you'd eliminate some big names, including Hall of Famers, in favor of these two.

**Close, but not quite:** Bert Blyleven and Andre Dawson.

**No disrespect intended, but no:** Harold Baines, Fred McGriff, Dale Murphy, Tim Lincecum, Lee Smith and Alan Trammell.

**Mark McGwire:** Absolutely, without a second thought. You can't just write off the entire steroid era as a cartoon. You can't summarily dismiss the likes of Barry Bonds, Roger Clemens, Sammy Sosa or McGwire, the ones who truly made a difference and made people care.

## **Oakland A's expected to leave winter meetings without signing anyone**

By Joe Stiglich\_Oakland Tribune 12/9/09

The A's aren't likely to sign any players by the time the winter meetings wrap up Thursday.

That doesn't mean they won't consider the week a success.

Oakland's brass has spent the past two days meeting with representatives for several free agents, according to general manager Billy Beane.

While those talks aren't likely to culminate with a signing, Beane said the foundation is being laid for future dialogue in weeks to come.

"What will happen here is (we'll) sort of lay out some parameters" for possible deals, Beane said Tuesday night.

Although the A's greatest need is hitting, talks have also involved pitchers.

Manager Bob Geren said Tuesday that he'd like to see his team add a free-agent starter to a young rotation.

Geren also was asked about New York Yankees free-agent slugger Hideki Matsui, whose name has been linked to the A's.

As a policy, the A's don't comment on their pursuit of specific free agents. But Geren offered, "He's certainly one of the better players in the league for sure. He's had some great years in New York."

Matsui, limited to a DH role last season because of knee problems, is expected to work out in front of scouts in the coming weeks to prove he can still play the outfield.

The A's would have interest in Matsui only if they don't tender a contract to arbitration-eligible Jack Cust. That decision must come by Saturday.

Geren said that, ideally, he'd like Chris Carter and Brett Wallace, the A's top hitting prospects, to open the season at Triple-A Sacramento to get more seasoning. Although Wallace is seen primarily as a third baseman, Geren mentioned that he eventually could move to first base.

Don't expect the A's to target first basemen in free agency. Beane and Geren both identified Daric Barton as the front-runner for the position. And with promising youngsters such as Carter, Sean Doolittle and Wallace waiting in the wings, the A's aren't looking to add a veteran to the mix.

Geren said he plans to play newly acquired Jake Fox at third base, first base and left field during spring training to see where he fits best. He described Fox as a "middle-of-the-lineup" hitter.

## **Young A's staff inspires Geren's optimism**

## **Manager knows pitching is cornerstone to winning in 2010**

By Tom Singer / MLB.com 12/9/09

INDIANAPOLIS -- You see Bob Geren sitting within an alley-oop of a mythical Indiana town, you listen to him wax on the 2010 A's, and you think you're listening to Coach Norman Dale.

"In my book we're gonna be winners ... "

OK, it's not exactly a "Hoosiers" sequel. But Geren sits literally a hundred feet from where minutes earlier Mariners general manager Jack Zduriencik had announced the signing of Chone Figgins, sits figuratively in the bottom of a division ruled by the Angels and challenged by the Rangers ... and he is talking about the A's having what it takes to be winners.

"The teams that go deep into the postseason are always the ones with the best pitching," Geren said. "We're into building that core group that could compete year in and year out.

"I'm very happy with the bullpen. It is very, very good. And we have a bunch of young starters who are very aggressive in the strike zone. The young guys will have a chance every five days."

Geren's prospective lineup and batting order are as undefined as a Woody Allen movie in production.

He'll throw props at anyone -- newcomer Jake Fox, designated hitter Jack Cust, young first baseman Daric Barton, phenom-in-waiting Chris Carter -- then chase them with a qualifier:

"Depends on what we do the rest of this winter," Geren said. "Our team's gonna change. What we'll have going into Spring Training isn't what we have now."

That precocious pitching staff, however, is sacrosanct. Certainly, some veteran ballast in the rotation would be welcome.

"We could definitely use some depth in that position," Geren said. "Another starter would fit in real well. It's impossible to have too much depth in starting pitching,"

But the young pitching core is special, and it whet expectations during a 17-10 September.

During the 2009 season, the A's transitioned to a rookie rotation. Twenty-one-year-olds Trevor Cahill and Brett Anderson combined for 62 starts; Dallas Braden, all of 26, was the rotation's old man.

And, still, that rotation was trumped by a comparably green bullpen. Andrew Bailey was the second American League Rookie of the Year spawned in five years by that bullpen, and Brad Ziegler, Michael Wuertz and Craig Breslow were other key, fresh cogs.

If you want more, Joey Devine, the 2008 relief sensation, appears well on the way back from early-April elbow surgery.

"He came into town three, four days ago to see our doctors, and they all gave him the thumbs up," Geren said. "He's actually at the point we want him to take a break. He's coming along perfectly.

"And if we get Devine back, that adds another really good piece."

Being able to build around that young pitching corps heartens Geren -- because he concedes his team had a lot of building to do. It won't be accomplished in a few days at the Winter Meetings.

"We don't put any pressure on ourselves to get anything done here," he reminded.

"As an organization, we're always trying to develop talent from within, and get to a point where we can keep those young players for the long term.

"We'll go into Spring Training with a pretty young team, but with a lot of talent. It'll be different from what it is now. It'll be a fun team to watch."

Fun to see grow and mature ... and perhaps surprise.

"The second half [of last season] showcased our good, young pitching," Geren said, "and we'll have to use speed to increase our run production. Adding a power bat would definitely help."

But Geren didn't seem obsessed with that enhancement. As Norman Dale in a key "Hoosiers" scene, he doesn't need to have all the pieces on the court -- just the right ones.

## Meetings spark productive talks for A's

### Beane starts dialogue to 'set things up' for future deals

By Tom Singer / MLB.com 12/9/09

INDIANAPOLIS -- When Oakland general manager Billy Beane pulls out of here Wednesday night, he most likely won't be followed by any new A's.

That, however, won't mean that he hadn't had a productive three days at baseball's 2009 Winter Meetings. You measure true success here not by trades or by free-agent signatures, but by constructive dialogues.

And already by Tuesday night, Beane had the satisfied look of a man who had talked to his heart's content. With agents, even with another team with unexpected results.

That surprising subject could be Milton Bradley, who has one leg on an El train out of Chicago. That shall remain conjecture, because Beane devoutly respects baseball's code of silence on another team's player.

But Beane was forthright on how he has been spending his time at this conclave.

"We have talked to representatives of players in whom we have interest," Beane said. "Today, they were all about position players. If you include [Monday night], you can throw a pitcher in there, too.

"And one conversation kind of brought up talk of a trade ... nothing specific we're acting on, but just the idea of one. Historically, we've set things up at this event, and the action comes afterwards."

Beane, echoing A's manager Bob Geren, talks in terms of a 2010 lineup set, yet in flux. The young A's have incumbents or at least clear front-runners penciled into every position. Yet ...

"There's a difference between pencil and ink. Especially in December," said Beane, whose free-agent hunt is focused, as he reiterated, on "not high-profile, but fall-back guys."

Primarily, Beane is on the lookout for corner infielders and a left-handed bat with power -- a commodity acutely lacking on the current roster, which at the moment returns only 12 homers in 800-plus at-bats from the left side.

Bradley is a switch-hitter who, even in a miserable season on Chicago's North Side, had nearly that many left-handed by himself (11) in one-third the at-bats.

Bradley has something else: a positive history in Oakland, where he hit .279, with 16 homers and 59 RBIs, in 115 games in 2006-07.

"You're right; he was pretty happy here -- and he did help us into the only ALCS [2006] we've had in all my years here," said Beane, before reverting to the code.

"But I can't comment on other teams' players."

Bradley's existing contract -- two years and \$21 million to go -- absolutely does not fit into Oakland's books. But the Cubs are known to be willing to cover a significant portion of that for the luxury of being able to start over without Bradley, so theoretically a trade could get down to the A's level.

*Someone* like Bradley, or like Eric Chavez, whose ability to make a convincing return from back problems is an unknown, could certainly be a valuable influence on an otherwise young team.

Signing that sort of veteran, interim player obviously is Beane's top priority. He talks about acquiring "short-term comfort" to ease the maturation of the likes of Daric Barton. And here, the talk apparently has been productive.

## **Bobby Crosby looks Pittsburgh-bound; thoughts on A's and Hideki Matsui, Vladimir Guerrero**

By Joe Stiglich, Bay Area News Group blog, 12/9/09

We had snow here in Indianapolis on Monday, then wind and rain yesterday. Today, it's a combination of wind and snow ... putting the "winter" in winter meetings.

A few thoughts as Day 3 of this four-day fiesta gets underway:

–Looks like former A's infielder Bobby Crosby is going to ink a reported one-year, \$1.5 million deal w/the Pirates. That would set him up for an Oakland homecoming June 25-27, when Pittsburgh visits the A's for an interleague series. That will mean a lot to Crosby's biggest fan, a young woman who sits in the second deck of the Coliseum and has yelled out "Bobby, you're hot!!!" approximately 1,367 times per game.

–It makes sense that the A's would at least entertain the idea of signing DH/outfielder Hideki Matsui. One school of thought says the Yankees' acquisition of Curtis Granderson might push Matsui out of New York. But it's also possible that Granderson's presence makes Johnny Damon expendable, and the Yanks may view Matsui as a better (or slightly more affordable) DH option than Damon.

–With the A's willing to consider signing veteran hitters, it opens up a lot of options. Vladimir Guerrero could be one, but he's similar to Matsui — an aging outfielder who may be relegated strictly to DH. And Guerrero's apparent wish for a two-year contract might keep the A's away

## **Bob Geren's thoughts on Hideki Matsui, Chris Carter, Brett Wallace, Jake Fox, etc.**

By Joe Stiglich, Bay Area News Group blog, 12/8/09

Here's a few quick hitters from A's manager Bob Geren's media Q&A that just wrapped up:

–Ideally, Geren would like to see top hitting prospects Chris Carter and Brett Wallace begin the season in Triple-A to get more seasoning. Though he said Wallace is currently a third baseman, he didn't rule out an eventual switch to first base.

–Geren was asked about Hideki Matsui, amid speculation that the free agent slugger could be a fit for Oakland. Surprisingly, Geren didn't shut down as A's officials usually do when asked about prospective free agents. "He's certainly one of the better players in the league for sure. He's had some great years in New York." Then he asked a reporter, with a slight smile: "Where's he going? Have you heard anything?"

–He said the A's could benefit from pursuing a free agent starting pitcher to bolster the rotation.

–Geren would like to play newly acquired Jake Fox at several different positions during spring training to see where he fits best. Fox is primarily a third baseman but can also play first or left field and serve as DH. Geren considers Fox a middle-of-the-order bat. "I don't think there's any one position where he stands out defensively. But he doesn't necessarily have any bad deficiencies anywhere. He's really known for his offense and his versatility."

## **Matsui looking for a home**

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle, from the winter meetings in Indianapolis . 12/8/09. .

Hideki Matsui doesn't mess around with small markets -- he has played in Tokyo and New York -- and the word is he'll probably wind up in a big market for the 2010 season.

If it's not New York again, the free agent would prefer another major metropolitan area, and a person familiar with Matsui's thinking mentioned three possibilities: the White Sox, Angels and . . . A's. That way, he hangs out in Chicago, L.A. or San Francisco.

Because of knee issues, Matsui never played defense in 2009. He has spoken about wanting to return to the outfield next year and is open to the National League, but as Giants GM Brian Sabean said, "I don't see it."

Matsui is strictly an American League player, and the A's would need a left-handed DH if they non-tender Jack Cust, who's eligible for arbitration. We'll know about Cust on Saturday.

Matsui, 35, hit .274 with 28 homers, 90 RBIs and .367 on-base percentage for the Yankees.