

A's News Clips, Friday, December 18, 2009

S.F. threatens suit if A's move to San Jose

[John Coté, Chronicle Staff Writer](#) 12/18/09

City Attorney Dennis Herrera gave Major League Baseball a little chin music on Thursday, firing off a letter suggesting San Francisco would sue the league if it approves moving the Oakland Athletics to San Jose.

The city has a financial interest in the Giants, including about \$3.6 million in annual rent a Giants affiliate pays the city for its waterfront ballpark and a nearby parking lot. The Giants have long-established territorial rights to San Jose, and say moving a team there would undercut their fan base and revenue.

"I need to make sure the interests of the city and its taxpayers are protected," Herrera said. "The city and county of San Francisco has a vital interest in making sure the Giants are successful and viable so they can make good on their obligations to the city."

The threat of a lawsuit could wind up being largely symbolic because of Major League Baseball's federal antitrust exemption, which gives the league broad power to assign territorial rights.

Herrera, though, contends a 1997 letter from the league approving the Giants' ballpark deal with San Francisco was an acknowledgment that Major League Baseball would not take "any action to undermine the financial viability of the Giants."

Herrera, in his letter to Commissioner Bud Selig, indicates his "grave concern" about a possible A's move to San Jose and notes his "obligation to protect the city's legal interests."

An A's spokesman and a league spokesman both declined to comment.

An attempt by the A's to move from Oakland to Fremont fell through in February after the real estate market collapsed and local officials, residents and environmentalists opposed the development.

In March, Oakland officials asked Major League Baseball to intervene. Selig appointed a three-person committee that has been meeting with city staff and researching the possibility of the A's moving to Fremont or San Jose. Major League Baseball has granted the Giants territorial rights to the latter.

As baseball fans and local officials across the region await the committee's findings, expected next month, Oakland last week unveiled three potential sites for waterfront ballparks in a bid to keep the team.

Herrera said he was driven to act after A's owner Lew Wolff voiced his wish to move the team to San Jose and Selig's committee met with officials there.

Beyond the roughly \$3.6 million in rent the city collects annually from China Basin Ballpark Co., the Giants affiliate also pays taxes to pay down \$16.5 million in bonds the city issued for public improvements around the park, Herrera said. The city also gets tax revenue on everything from tickets to parking for games.

"Our waterfront ballpark is a model for folks across the country and has done a tremendous service to Major League Baseball," Herrera said. "I hope they would not do anything that would disrupt that successful relationship."

S.F. city attorney expresses 'grave concern' over potential A's move

By Tracy Seipel, San Jose Mercury News, 12/18/09

The escalating battle over a proposal to build an A's baseball park in San Jose took a legal turn Thursday when San Francisco City Attorney Dennis Herrera sent a letter to Major League Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig expressing "grave concern" about the Oakland team's proposed move to the South Bay, which he says is the San Francisco Giants' exclusive territory.

The six-page letter outlines the history of the involvement of San Francisco leaders and voters throughout much of the 1990s to facilitate what is now AT&T Park and to prevent the team from relocating to Florida under its previous ownership. It also discusses binding legal agreements that Herrera says were acknowledged by the league in 1997.

The letter seeks to clarify legal concerns he has on behalf of San Francisco should the league "tamper with the Giants' territorial rights."

Oakland Mayor Ron Dellums' office declined to comment on the issue, aiming to stay out of the squabble between San Francisco and Major League Baseball.

However, Oakland officials long have hoped the Giants' territorial claims will be protected as they try to keep the team in their city. Last week, Dellums, other city officials and team supporters unveiled three waterfront sites in the Jack London Square area where they think a baseball-only stadium can be built.

Doug Boxer, son of Sen. Barbara Boxer and co-founder of the A's booster organization Let's Go Oakland!, said

Oakland's focus was to show the three-person committee appointed by Selig that there are viable sites in Oakland — which he says the city has done.

"Whatever San Francisco is going to do and what the Giants are going to do, they're going to do," Boxer said. "I couldn't tell you the effect or impact it's going to have on the process."

Asked if his letter was meant to lay the groundwork for a lawsuit his office might file against the league, Herrera demurred, saying he "won't speculate as to what it means."

"I will be watching closely as to the direction that the MLB moves," he said, "and will do everything possible to make sure that the interest of the city and county's taxpayers are protected."

Herrera said the timing of the letter, which was e-mailed to Selig's office Thursday, was driven in part by A's owner Lew Wolff's recent and "much more vocal" comments about looking at the San Jose site for his team.

San Jose city officials seemed unimpressed.

San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed characterized the territorial battle as "truly an inside baseball issue."

"The territorial rights belong to Major League Baseball," he said, "and they will have to decide what is in their best interests. When they take a look at San Jose, I think they will find this is a great place for a baseball team."

"I've seen better-orchestrated temper tantrums," said San Jose Councilman Sam Liccardo, in whose district the proposed A's stadium would be built.

"Clearly this was done at the manipulation of San Francisco team owners, who would like to retain the delusion that San Jose should be a subservient minor league suburb of our smaller neighbor to the north," he said.

Herrera said his action was taken independently from the Giants, though he said his office contacted a team representative Wednesday night to alert them of the letter.

Calls to the Giants and A's were not returned Thursday. In an e-mail, MLB spokesman Pat Courtney would only say, "We have a committee working on this issue and will have no comment until their work is concluded."

The letter comes on the heels of a new San Jose Giants fans coalition, unveiled earlier this week, which opposes public funds or subsidies that would bring the A's to a new downtown ballpark.

Jim Weyermann, president and chief executive of the San Jose Giants and a member of the coalition, said Wednesday that Municipal Stadium is a city asset that has not had major repairs over the decades. He said the team has spent more than \$2 million of its own money on repairs.

"We have an obligation to ensure that the facility is safe and accessible to all the fans. And the city is also responsible for that, per our lease," he said.

An A's spokesman declined Wednesday to comment on the coalition.

The group says a ballpark would divert city money from essential services, which San Jose officials say is untrue. An attorney for the group filed a nine-page letter with the city Wednesday that challenges a revised environmental impact report for the stadium.

However, a ballpark in San Jose will not materialize until a decision about the Giants' territorial rights to the area — which they will not relinquish — are resolved.

The decision lies with Selig, who has appointed a committee to study the A's options. That committee has met three times with San Jose officials, but its members will not say when they expect their work to be finished. It would also take a vote of three-quarters of baseball's owners to terminate the Giants' territorial rights and allow the A's to move to San Jose.

Justin grad Wallace smack dab in the middle of a dumb day in baseball

Randy Johnson, Napa Valley Register, 12/17/09

Yogi Berra once said, "it's déjà vu all over again."

Well, it's déjà vu all over again.

It seems like just a few months ago that we were covering the epic trade of Justin-Siena legend Brett Wallace from the St. Louis Cardinals to the Oakland Athletics.

To be more exact, we covered the trade of Brett Wallace from the Cardinals' Triple-A team to the Sacramento River Cats, with an ETA in the big leagues sometime next summer.

Well, now it looks like the only way you'll see Brett in Oakland is when the Toronto Blue Jays come to town, as he is most likely involved in the "Roy Halladay four-way trade that's not really a four-way trade" that was first reported Tuesday.

It's supposedly going to happen today, officially.

Here's the deal, as I understand it:

- The Phillies get pitcher Roy Halladay from Toronto for some minor league dudes.
- The Phillies make a "companion trade" to Seattle, sending pitcher Cliff Lee to the Mariners for some other minor league dudes to replace the minor league dudes they traded to Toronto.
- One of those minor league dudes is traded from Toronto to Oakland for Brett Wallace.

OK, now here's some vintage RJ thoughts on the subject, also placed conveniently next to those little black dots:

- The majority of baseball trades are stupid and don't really help anybody.

Case in point: To get Halladay, the Phillies have to give up Lee for financial reasons.

Over his 12-year career, Halladay's average season is 12-6 with a 3.43 ERA.

Over his 8-year career, Lee's average season is 11-7 with a 3.97 ERA.

They each have one Cy Young Award.

And no World Series titles.

- The perfect example of this is Brett Wallace.

Let's see. To get the players that Oakland needed to eventually trade Matt Holliday to St. Louis to get Wallace, they once had to trade future three-time All-Star pitcher Dan Haren to Arizona for Carlos Gonzalez, among others.

They then traded Gonzalez and former Rookie of the Year closer Huston Street to Colorado for Holliday.

In his five-eighths of a season in Oakland, Holliday did what we in the business call "jack crap."

Then, Holliday was traded for Wallace.

The A's could have just drafted Wallace 12th overall in 2008, but took Jemile Weeks instead. The Cardinals drafted Wallace 13th.

Ironically, the Blue Jays actually drafted Wallace out of high school in 2005, but he decided to go to Arizona State instead.

So actually, if Brett would have just signed with Toronto in the first place, none of this may have actually happened.

If you look at it that way, this is all Brett's fault.

- The Phillies, Mariners, Athletics and Blue Jays will NOT win the World Series in 2010, no matter how many stupid trades they make with each other.

- These general managers absolutely kill me.

They make how many six figures, and this is what they come up with?

Honestly?

- Our own Andy Wilcox made a great point about this whole debacle on Tuesday night.

Besides the ramifications between the lines, what about the people involved?

- Case in point: Brett Wallace.

As we've covered his pro career over the last few months, the Sonoma native has said that he grew up rooting for the A's and was elated to be back in the Bay Area.

His family could come see him play, and he would be in a relatively low-pressure situation swinging away for the green and gold.

Well, so much for that.

I admit, we here at the paper were also looking forward to covering Brett's career with the A's for selfish reasons, i.e. it's always fun to get out to a big league game.

But now he's got to pack up again, move halfway across the country — continent, really — and pay way too much in taxes in Canada.

Brett, if it goes down, we're sorry to see you go before you even got here.

But just remember, some general manager had to earn his salary, so pack your bags.