

A's News Clips, Monday, December 21, 2009

Cuckoo for Coco: Beane set to sign longtime target

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer 12/21/09

By this afternoon or Tuesday, free-agent outfielder Coco Crisp - a longtime target of general manager Billy Beane - officially will be a member of the A's, pending a physical.

Oakland is expected to give Crisp a one-year deal worth about \$4.5 million that includes a team option, according to sources.

Crisp is among the premier defensive center fielders in the game, leading to speculation about Rajai Davis' future. The A's have been adamant that Davis earned a starting job for next year after a breakout season in 2009, and that remains the plan, although Davis might have to shift to a corner-outfield spot.

"That's OK, as long as I'm out there," Davis said cheerfully after spending the day snowblowing away 2 feet of snow from his driveway in Connecticut. "I'm just for winning and whatever allows us to do that, and adding Coco adds more fuel to the fire, really. It just enhances our team."

Ryan Sweeney is also likely to retain a corner spot, making Scott Hairston either potential trade bait or primarily a fourth outfielder and DH.

The move makes it more difficult for recently acquired Michael Taylor to crack the Opening Day roster - the minor-leaguer would make the team only if he could play every day - though Crisp or another outfielder could be 2010's version of Matt Holliday or Joe Blanton, traded away in midsummer.

And if Taylor doesn't make the roster to start the season, the A's will retain his rights longer, and potentially would avoid going to arbitration with him for four years rather than three.

Oakland doesn't mind having extra players in certain positions, considering the high number of injuries the past several years. Beane has taken to saying that "having too many good players hasn't been a problem" for his club recently, which might explain why, when the team's most glaring immediate need is power, the A's are adding something of a redundancy in a speedy center fielder. Plus, Beane has tried to get Crisp at least twice before.

Crisp is coming off two shoulder surgeries, but his agent, Steve Comte, said that Crisp will be ready to play center field on an everyday basis.

Crisp's contract amount will be right about what it might have taken in arbitration to keep DH-outfielder Jack Cust, who led Oakland in homers each of the past three years. Signing Crisp doesn't preclude continuing to talk to Cust, as the team appears to have some payroll flexibility, but the A's might want to move fast; Cust is expected to get some offers in the next few days and is hoping to make a decision soon.

If Cust doesn't return, though, where will the A's find any power? The team has had initial discussions with the agents for third baseman Adrian Beltre (eight home runs last year) and corner infielder Troy Glaus (hurt last year), although no significant developments have taken place. Former A's shortstop Miguel Tejada remains a longshot at best.

Oakland also is pursuing several international free agents, including left-handed pitcher Aroldis Chapman.

A's close to signing outfielder Coco Crisp

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune 12/21/09

The A's outfield is about to get more crowded, with free agent Coco Crisp close to signing a one-year contract with the team.

A team source confirmed Sunday that the A's and Crisp are nearing a deal, reportedly in the \$4.5 million to \$5 million range. It's likely the agreement will include a club option for 2011.

Nothing will be official until Crisp passes a physical. He hit .228 in just 49 games last season with the Kansas City Royals and had season-ending surgery in June to repair the rotator cuff and labrum in both shoulders.

His agent, Steve Compte, told Bay Area News Group last week that Crisp should be healthy by the start of spring training.

"If everything goes well, the physical and so forth, then we might be moving forward," Crisp told Bay Area News Group over the phone Sunday. "Right now, (the deal) still is not 100 percent."

The A's long have had interest in Crisp, 30, a speedy switch-hitter and excellent defender who also has played for Cleveland and Boston. He has posted four 20-steal seasons, and his best statistical year came in 2005, when he hit .300 with 16 homers and 69 RBI for Cleveland.

Crisp has played primarily center field throughout his eight major league seasons, and his addition would leave the A's with some decisions regarding their outfield.

Rajai Davis, coming off an impressive 2009 season, was given a hearty endorsement by general manager Billy Beane as the starting center fielder

going into 2010. If the A's inserted Crisp in center, they could shift Davis to left field. With Ryan Sweeney in right, the A's have the potential to be one of the majors' top defensive outfields.

The A's also have Scott Hairston, who was starting in left field when an assortment of injuries ended his season in September. And they just traded for Michael Taylor, a premier prospect who will command playing time as soon as he appears major league-ready.

A trade would make sense for the A's to unload some of their outfield surplus, which also includes Travis Buck, Aaron Cunningham and Eric Patterson. It's likely Davis or Hairston would fetch the most interest when considering the players the A's might be willing to move.

Editorial: City finally enters the talk about A's ballpark

MediaNews editorial 12/21/09

WE WERE BEGINNING to wonder whether the city of Oakland was going to surrender the A's without a fight. But in what can be considered a ninth-inning pitch, the city went public recently with three potential waterfront sites for a new downtown ballpark to host the A's. At least we got a pulse out of City Hall on this issue.

Oakland officials unveiled three potential sites: Howard Terminal at the Port of Oakland; Jack London Square North, near Interstate 880; and Victory Court, between the Lake Merritt Channel and I-880. The latter two sites have not been studied previously by the A's. This is intriguing because a project like this could be a big step toward revitalizing the downtown area.

One need only look across the Bay to see what impact a ballpark can have on a once-blighted area.

By the way, even the Coliseum site was mentioned, but it seems neither the city nor the team is interested.

Meanwhile, there is a committee from Major League Baseball floating around the Bay Area trying to determine whether the A's can move to San Jose. That is an area that's attractive to owner Lew Wolff after he got the door slammed in his face in Fremont earlier this year.

San Jose is a growing city, already hosts a National Hockey League franchise, and is adjacent to many businesses in Silicon Valley. Financing a stadium there, however, will be a tricky issue among voters and a local citizens commission is wondering whether the city's revenue projections are inflated.

Wolff has made no secret about it. He says Oakland officials have panned ideas for a new stadium in the past, and he's not thrilled with dwindling attendance although he hasn't been a big help bringing in or holding onto talent that would attract fans. This has been a two-way street.

But the reality is that Wolff is a developer and he has his eyes on much more than a typical stadium plan.

The MLB committee is set to decide next month whether San Jose is a viable option. It has to consider the territorial rights held by the Giants in that region, and San Francisco's city attorney recently sent a letter to MLB Commissioner Bud Selig protesting any A's-San Jose marriage.

Which brings us to Oakland's timing. With the committee's decision only weeks away, the city of Oakland suddenly decided to come out with its plans. "We believe that this has been a real process, that this has not been a sham," Oakland Mayor Ron Dellums said.

We, like most A's fans, welcome Dellums to the festivities and hope he had a pleasant nap.

Dellums said any new stadium would be built with money either from Major League Baseball, the A's or both. That might be a hard sell. Land, parking and infrastructure upgrades would be the city's responsibility and likely would be paid for with redevelopment money and, possibly, federal assistance. But that's providing Sacramento doesn't suck up redevelopment funds and it's hard to picture federal assistance for a stadium. After all, that didn't even happen for the Washington Nationals' new ballpark in the District of Columbia.

The bottom line is no stadium should be built if it's a financial hardship to Oakland residents. No new stadium is worth that.

But at least there's something on the table, and Wolff can never say the city did not come forward, albeit at such a late hour. And, if the Giants or the MLB committee say no to San Jose, these options may be considered.

Stay tuned.

San Jose Giants fans outline gripes with A's stadium plan

By Tracy Seipel, Mercury News 12/21/09

The attorney for a group of San Jose Giants fans fighting a proposed A's ballpark downtown said a revised report being prepared on the park's environmental impacts is seriously flawed.

Todd W. Smith, a senior associate at Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman in San Francisco, filed a nine-page letter last week with the city that outlines objections by the group, which is partly supported by the San Francisco Giants.

The Giants are fighting the Oakland A's move to San Jose, saying they own Major League Baseball's territorial rights to Santa Clara County.

Beyond the fan group's primary argument that building a ballpark would divert tax money from essential services such as schools, libraries and firefighters — a claim San Jose leaders deny — Smith details a handful of problems he said planners need to address. They include:

- Updating the potential traffic impacts on Interstate 880 from A's fans driving down from Alameda and Contra Costa counties;

- Analyzing if the original environmental impact report certified in 2007, before current talks with the A's began, considered whether a stadium in the Diridon/Arena area was consistent with San Jose's land use policies; and

- Studying the impacts of residential, commercial and mixed-use projects proposed near the stadium site.

A planned regional transportation hub at Diridon Station also must be considered, he said, along with a pro soccer stadium A's owner Lew Wolff is proposing to build nearly three miles away.

Finally, Smith said the revised report must analyze the potential for urban decay around the Oakland Coliseum that could result from the A's relocation.

Smith, an environmental and land-use attorney, told the Mercury News he hopes his points will be considered before a draft of the revised environmental report is made public early next year.

Akoni Danielsen, a principal planner with the city of San Jose, said Smith makes fair points that "by and large, we were already considering."

Smith and city officials agree that some parts of the 2007 environmental impact report for a then-proposed 45,000-seat ballpark must be updated to reflect the smaller 36,000-seat stadium currently under review.

At the time, for example, the city indicated that because it had yet to identify a specific major league baseball team to occupy the ballpark, analyzing impacts on I-880 traffic could be deferred. Now that the city has decided to pursue a ballpark for the A's, Smith said officials must address that issue.

Smith also questions the 2007 report's assertion that traffic distribution for A's games would likely be similar to that for San Jose Sharks games. He said that while Sharks fans mostly come from the South Bay, the A's fan base comes from the East Bay.

And Smith noted that since the 2007 report, planning for two significant regional transit projects — a high-speed rail line from San Francisco to San Jose and the BART Silicon Valley project — have advanced, and both identify Diridon Station near the A's site as a proposed hub.

"High-speed rail will deliver 15,000 people a day to Diridon Station," Smith said.

That, taken together with the BART project and the many cars that will likely transport people to and from the station, will impact not only traffic but air quality, he said.

Danielsen said planners will be studying traffic impact from not only I-880 but I-680 as well.

And he said the city is in touch with representatives of both rail projects Smith cites, noting that the transportation confluence is a key focus for city officials.

As to the matter of urban decay, Smith cites as legal precedent a case in Bakersfield in which a state Court of Appeal held that two environmental impact reports for large commercial shopping centers failed to analyze the centers' potential to indirectly cause urban decay in that city's downtown.

In his letter, Smith says the Oakland Coliseum, where the A's now play, is a centerpiece in the city's Coliseum Redevelopment Area Plan. Since the A's use the Coliseum more than any other tenant, their exit would mean the facility could sit empty and unused on at least 81 additional dates.

Under the California Environmental Quality Act authority, Smith said, the potential adverse impact on the redevelopment area must be analyzed in the revised environmental report.

Danielsen said San Jose will give that "careful consideration" — and that, in fact, planners may look to what happened when the Giants left Candlestick Park in 1999 to move to what is now AT&T Park.

Athletics close to deal with Crisp

Outfielder coming off injury-shortened 2008 season

By Ed Eagle / MLB.com 12/20/09

The A's are close to signing veteran outfielder Coco Crisp to a one-year deal worth between \$4.5 million and \$5 million, according to an ESPN.com report citing multiple sources.

Crisp, 30, batted .228 with three home runs, 14 RBIs and 13 stolen bases in 49 games with the Royals last season before undergoing surgery to repair the rotator cuff and labrum in both shoulders. The Royals decided not to pick up their \$8 million club option on Crisp for 2010, thus making the switch-hitter a free agent.

Crisp told MLB.com earlier this month that he expects to be at full strength for the start of Spring Training.

"I'm not worried about the capability of playing 100 percent as far as the season goes," he said.

A veteran of eight big league seasons with the Royals, Red Sox and Indians, Crisp has a .277 lifetime average and .377 on-base percentage to go along with 59 homers, 327 RBIs and 137 steals in 832 games.

The addition of Crisp will likely force incumbent center fielder Rajai Davis, who batted .305 in 125 games with the A's last season, to move to one of the corner outfielder spots.

The Padres, White Sox and Cubs also reportedly had interest in Crisp.

A's close to deal to acquire Crisp

By JANIE McCAULEY (AP) 12/20/09

OAKLAND, Calif. — The Oakland Athletics were closing in on a deal Sunday with free-agent outfielder Coco Crisp on a one-year contract with a club option for the 2011 season.

A person with knowledge of the negotiations confirmed an impending deal on condition of anonymity because a formal announcement had not been made by the club. That could come soon.

The 30-year-old Crisp can play all three outfield positions but is primarily a center fielder. While the A's have been happy with Rajai Davis, he might wind up playing one of the corner spots to clear room for Crisp in center.

Crisp underwent season-ending shoulder surgery in June and batted .228 with three home runs and 14 RBIs in only 49 games last season for the Kansas City Royals, who last month declined their \$8 million option to bring Crisp back in 2010.

Crisp, who could bat leadoff or high in the order for the A's, has said he expects to be full strength by the start of spring training in February.

He was traded to the Royals from the Boston Red Sox in November 2008. He spent parts of three seasons with Boston following four years with the Cleveland Indians. Before his shortened 2009 campaign, the speedy Crisp had stolen at least 15 bases in all but his rookie season with Cleveland in '02.

Crisp would be just the latest move in an active winter for Oakland general manager Billy Beane, who earlier this month acquired third baseman Jake Fox, second baseman Aaron Miles and cash considerations from the Chicago Cubs for three players.

Oakland also was included in the big four-team, nine-player swap Wednesday featuring Cliff Lee and Roy Halladay that brought outfielder Michael Taylor to the A's. Oakland sent third baseman Brett Wallace to Toronto.

Beane is committed to largely rebuilding the organization from the ground up, starting at the lowest levels of the farm system, while finding key pieces from the outside that fit the mix.

The A's finished with 75 wins for the second straight season and in last place in the AL West, losing their final seven games.

Internal Affairs: Larry Stone vs. Larry Baer: A Giant confrontation

Tracy Seipel, Ken McLaughlin and Denis C. Theriault, Mercury News 12/20/09

Are the San Francisco Giants getting increasingly nervous about the A's possible move to San Jose? You gotta wonder, considering last week's unveiling of a new San Jose Giants coalition — partially supported by the big-league Giants — that's fighting a proposed A's stadium downtown.

Then came the "sternly worded" letter from San Francisco City Attorney Dennis Herrera to Major League Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig, essentially warning MLB to back off from any notion of rescinding the Giants' territorial rights to Santa Clara County. While some considered Herrera's move to be political posturing (he's rumored to be interested in running for S.F. mayor), Santa Clara County Assessor and A's booster Larry Stone sees desperation in the latest fireworks.

Stone says he gained further insight into the Giants' state of mind last month, when he and wife Carmen attended the San Francisco 49ers-Tennessee Titans game in owner Jed York's suite at Candlestick Park. Among York's other guests was Giants President Larry Baer, who toward the end of the game approached Stone and asked, "What's going on with the A's?"

Stone said he told him the team's fate was up to Selig, to which Baer replied, "The commissioner will never rescind those rights."

"I said, 'Oh, really?' " recalled Stone, who asked Baer why Selig would appoint a committee to study all the options for the A's if he wasn't prepared to let the team move to San Jose.

Baer countered that the panel was appointed solely to study options for the A's in the East Bay, outside of the Giants' territorial rights. "And I said, 'That's funny, because just last week the panel and consultants were meeting with the mayor of San Jose and staff from the redevelopment agency and looking at the potential site in San Jose,' " Stone recalled. He added that Baer seemed surprised by the news and walked away.

Asked about the incident, Giants media honcho Staci Slaughter said, "I wasn't there, but it sounds like he (Stone) was overblowing the situation."

San Francisco Giants tactics opposing A's move to San Jose treats South Bay citizens like rubes

By Mark Purdy, Mercury News Columnist 12/19/09

The San Francisco Giants must be really afraid. They must also think we're totally stupid here in San Jose.

We aren't. And I expect we will prove it over the next year or so, as the issue of whether the A's can move here is finally resolved.

You see, I have the curious belief that San Jose residents should decide if a major league ballpark for the A's should be built in downtown San Jose. I'm sure most San Jose citizens agree.

The San Francisco Giants don't. Which is why the last week has been such a comedy of clumsy, nearly desperate moves on their behalf, including a bizarre lawsuit threat. Also, the team has induced the formation of a bogus San Jose "coalition" to challenge a potential A's ballpark project.

The Giants evidently are expecting us to be South Bay rubes who can't figure out what's happening behind the curtain. Wrong.

For years you could say the Giants' company line was consistent: We possess the territorial rights to Santa Clara County, as granted to us by Major League Baseball. We will rely on MLB's authority and are confident that baseball's rules will not allow the A's to relocate in San Jose.

That company line has suddenly disappeared faster than a Tim Lincecum heater. And here is why:

Last spring, after the A's plans for a ballpark project in Fremont fell apart, baseball commissioner Bud Selig appointed a panel of "blue ribbon" experts to examine the team's future in the Bay Area. The panel has done diligent work in Oakland, Fremont and San Jose. It has twice met with San Jose city staff and Mayor Chuck Reed. The panel's report is expected to be filed early next year.

The Giants don't want to wait. They obviously are frightened that the panel will conclude that MLB will make the smart choice to permit negotiations between Wolff and San Jose. So instead of relying on MLB's authority, the Giants' honchos are attempting a panicky end-around. If this were second grade, I would use the term "fraidy-cats" to describe them. But since I probably write more at the fifth-grade level, I will refer to them as the Fraidy-Giants.

Under the rules of baseball and its precious antitrust exemption, owners cannot sue MLB — because they would be suing themselves in effect. And if Selig does grant the A's permission to negotiate with San Jose, he will also ask the Fraidy-Giants not to interfere. Because of this, the Fraidy-Giants and owner Bill Neukom apparently have decided on a surrogate strategy.

One of those surrogates is a nice guy named Jim Weyermann, who operates the very successful minor league San Jose Giants at Municipal Stadium. A sizable chunk of the San Jose Giants is owned by Fraidy-Giants. And so, under instructions from his "ownership group," Weyermann was ordered to host a meeting last week at Municipal Stadium and help form a "coalition" of San Jose Giants fans to challenge the "public process" of a potential downtown ballpark.

Only a handful of people showed up for the "coalition" meeting. Weyermann did most of the talking. But suspiciously, a public-relations person from a San Francisco agency was immediately representing the "grass-roots" group. And within a few days, a lawyer for the alleged "coalition" had prepared a nine-page document regarding the environmental impact report.

I also give Weyermann a ton of credit for keeping a straight face when he was forced to claim that San Jose Giants fans should be cautious about supporting any public subsidy to the A's — when Weyermann and the San Jose Giants have received \$1.3 million from the city over the past two years for ballpark improvements.

And here's the worst part: The "coalition" is also allowing the false belief to spread that the San Jose Giants would be forced to leave town if the A's move here. Not true. Under baseball rules, if the A's move to the South Bay, owner Lew Wolff and Major League Baseball would have the option of asking the San Jose Giants to stay or go. However, Wolff stated a year ago that he had no intention of forcing the minor league team to leave town, saying it would be the decision of Weyermann and his owners. Wolff has frequently reiterated this stance.

I did contact the Fraidy-Giants for a response to all this stuff. Staci Slaughter, the team's senior vice president for communications, responded courteously with this statement: "The San Francisco Giants are a minority owner of the San Jose Giants, and we support their and the coalition's efforts to understand the full impact of a major league ballpark in San Jose."

And who is paying the attorney who popped up last week to represent the "coalition"?

"I understand the coalition is forming and will raise funds to pay expenses," Slaughter said. "We will support the coalition in a variety of ways."

My translation: The Fraidy-Giants are pulling out their pocketbook and throwing it at the wall, hoping something sticks. Along those lines, please meet Dennis Herrera, the city attorney of San Francisco.

Last week, out of nowhere, Herrera announced he would sue Major League Baseball if it permitted an A's move to San Jose.

Herrera claimed that his threat was being made without prompting or input from the Fraidy-Giants. Right. Giants president Larry Baer was a featured speaker at Herrera's election campaign kickoff rally last summer. Baer also donated \$250 to Herrera's effort, according to official records. Slaughter's attorney-husband, Jamie, donated \$500 to Herrera.

Slaughter's response: "Larry Baer and my husband and I are proud supporters of City Attorney Herrera and his commitment to working on behalf of the City of San Francisco."

Can this surrogate silliness possibly succeed?

It won't fool Selig, who should tell the Fraidy-Giants to knock off their silly tactics.

It won't fool the citizens of San Jose, who are smart enough to see through phoniness and are sophisticated enough to examine the factual arguments made by local folk about a downtown ballpark, pro and con. And it certainly won't fool the loyal fans of the San Jose Giants, who surely realize how the Fraidy-Giants are trying to manipulate them and create needless anger.

No savvy local fan would join a "coalition" that is being bankrolled out of San Francisco as a hidden-ball trick to benefit interests that lie nowhere near the South Bay.

If the Fraidy-Giants want to regain some respect, they need to make their own case and stop hiding behind Weyermann and Herrera. Because take it from at least one South Bay rube: That strategy won't hunt. And it is our territorial right to say so.

Baseball's big spenders dictate free-agent signings

By Gary Peterson, Oakland Tribune 12/19/09

Since details of these kinds of deals are rarely made public, we don't know how serious the Giants were in their pursuit of first baseman Nick Johnson, or how serious he was about them. But we do know he was a free agent, and we know the Giants need a better first baseman than the ones they've got, and we know Giants general manager Brian Sabean wasn't flummoxed into a spit-take at the mention of Johnson's name at baseball's winter meetings.

Now we know this: When the New York Yankees came sniffing around, Johnson signed faster than you can say, "Hi sailor, new in town?"

Finally, we know this: The Giants are now reconsidering their options where prospective first basemen are concerned. From here they appear to be a) Adam LaRoche, who may want more money than they're comfortable spending, b) Mark DeRosa, a better fit at third base, which would mean moving Pablo Sandoval to first, c) convincing Matt Cain to play first base when he isn't pitching, and d) coaxing J.R. Phillips out of retirement.

But this is less about the Giants' attempt to upgrade their lackluster lineup than it is baseball's economic stratification, which has never been more pronounced. Take Johnson, for example. Instead of becoming a prized piece of the Giants' would-be offensive makeover, he becomes an oh-by-the-way transaction during a quiet offseason by Steinbrenner standards.

The price tag — \$5.5 million for one year — is about what CC Sabathia earns for lacing his shoes before each game. But it's not just the money; it's what the money represents. Once Yankees GM Brian Cashman batted his eyes at Johnson, the Giants never had a chance.

It's not that the Giants are destitute. Their opening day payroll last season was \$82 million, which ranked 14th among 30 teams. The Yankees' payroll was \$201 million. You'd need blasting caps and earth-movers to level that playing field — same as it ever was.

Seven years ago, that kind of disparity was everybody's favorite topic. Commissioner Bud Selig was test-ballooning the concept of contraction, which would have wiped two financially underperforming franchises off the map. Ultimately the idea didn't fly. Neither was there much support for a salary cap.

A luxury tax was instituted instead, requiring big spenders to subsidize small-market clubs. It didn't stop the big spenders from continuing to spend big, and it didn't stop the communal hand-wringing — especially when Boston picked up a Johnny Damon or a Curt Schilling, or the Yankees picked up a Johnny Damon or an Alex Rodriguez, or the Mets picked up a Carlos Beltran or a Pedro Martinez.

The outrage was enough to make one forget, momentarily, that baseball has always operated under a caste system, as evidenced by the Yankees' 29 World Series appearances in a 43-year stretch from Woodrow Wilson's last year as President to Lyndon Johnson's second. Or by the 34-year run during which the Philadelphia/Kansas City A's finished last or next-to-last 24 times.

And then, well, it yielded the floor to other hot-button issues of the day such as the steroid crusade, the recession, Octomom and "Dancing With the Stars." Now we seem resigned to reality, content to stipulate the disparity instead of railing against it. In fact, if you asked Selig, he'd tell you the game has never been in better shape.

Weird, isn't it? The Pirates just set an MLB record with their 17th consecutive losing season. The Royals have finished an average of 21 1/2 games out of first place in the 24 years since their last playoff appearance. The Twins have replaced the A's as poster children for brains over purchasing power; since 2000 the two Little Franchises That Could have played a combined 12 playoff series, winning only two — one when the Twins beat the A's, and the other when the A's beat the Twins.

That sound you hear: crickets chirping.

Is it because we've become numb to the dynamic? Is it because we accept the landscape, and with it the conventional wisdom that baseball is better off when the Yankees are dominant? Is it because the World Series lost its cache when we stopped staying up past our bedtimes to watch it?

Whichever, you might be interested to know that vegasin Insider.com already has odds posted on the 2010 season, with the Yankees 3-1 favorites to win the World Series. Further proof that baseball, like gambling, is a simple game when you're playing with house money.

Get out the Christmas wish list: Santa Claus is coming to town

George Watkins, Salinas Californian 12/19/09

You better watch out, you better not cry, you better not pout, I'm telling you why, it's time for the annual Christmas wish list.

Raiders quarterback JaMarcus Russell: Off to the land of misfit quarterbacks.

City of Salinas: Mistletoe.

Al Davis: You're a mean one, Mr. Grinch.

Seaside High football: Merry Christmas and a Haka New Year.

Oakland Raiders: An offense other than one that goes pa rum pum pum punT, rum pum pump punT, rum pum pum, punT.

San Francisco 49ers: O come all ye (49er) faithful, joyful and sometimes triumphant.

College of Athletics (COA): Fruitcake, courtesy of Hartnell College.

Salinas High athletics: Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is right.

Monterey County prep basketball and soccer coaches: Santa baby, slip an MVP under the tree, for me, and hurry down the chimney tonight.

Football referees: Have a holly, jolly Christmas, it's the best time of the year, I don't know if they'll be snow but have cup of cheer (go ahead, make it a double, it was a long year).

Monterey County prep players: The big guy is making his list, checking it twice, going to find out who was naughty and nice. He sees you when you're practicing, he knows if you're a flake, so study and practice hard for goodness sake.

Alisal High School: Feliz Navidad.

Local soccer teams: Gooooooooooooals!

AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am: Unlike last year, 72 mostly dry holes.

Gonzales High football: The Ghost of Football past.

Carmel High football: It's the most wonderful time of the year. With the kids passing and running, and everyone telling you, "Stand up and cheer," the football season was the most wonderful time of the year.

King City High football: Health insurance.

Alvarez High football: A T-CAL victory for var, var, varsity.

Hartnell College football team: Four offensive linemen, three running backs, two wide receivers and a quarterback who can have an injury-free season.

To the Grinchiest person in town who decided to close the Salinas city recreation areas during the holidays: A one-way ticket to the North Pole.

North County High football coach Sean Gomes: A game-day tie.

North Salinas High: A seventh pillar of sportsmanship.

Tiger Woods: O come, let us adore him. O come, let us adore him. O come let us adore him. Uh, excuse me, I've been dipping into the egg nog again.

San Francisco Giants: A left fielder with power, a center fielder with power, a right field with power, a first baseman with power, a catcher with power...in other words, a Christmas miracle.

Oakland A's: Potter's Field? Bailey Park? A new stadium of any kind would mean it's a wonderful life for A's fans.

San Jose Sharks: All they want for Christmas is their two front teeth.

Golden State Warriors: Coach, Rick Barry.

Salinas Municipal Stadium: An artificial surface playing field, about 3,500 stadium-style seats and about \$5 million to get the job done.

California Rodeo Salinas: Make this year's 100th anniversary the real Cowboy Christmas week in July.

Pacific Grove High: For the football team to wave goodbye and say "Don't you cry," we'll be back again some day.

2010 U.S. Open: Affordable prices, speaking of Christmas miracles.

Soledad High boys basketball team: At least 12 more wins.

Big Sur International Marathon: A healthy and happy reunion of the Grizzled Vets, with a tailwind to boot.

Central Coast Section football semifinal round playoff pairing committee: A clue.

To the grandmothers of Salinas: Don't get run over by a reindeer.

To readers: We wish you a merry Christmas, we wish you a merry Christmas we wish you a merry Christmas...well, you get the point.