

A's News Clips, Friday, January 8, 2010

DH Jack Cust rejoins A's

By Joe Stiglich_Oakland Tribune 1/8/2010

The A's were the first team to give Jack Cust a legitimate shot in the major leagues.

So after the two parties went their separate ways last month, it wasn't a complete shock to see them reunite Thursday.

Cust agreed to a one-year, \$2.65 million contract with the A's, supplying much-needed power that Oakland has yet to land elsewhere in free agency. Incentives could bump his earnings to \$3 million.

Cust, expected to be the regular designated hitter, led the A's in homers each of the past three seasons. But when they didn't tender him a contract by the Dec. 12 deadline, the arbitration-eligible slugger became a free agent.

The A's left the door open to bring him back, and Cust credited the team for rescuing his career and said he hoped a deal might still come together.

He made \$2.8 million last season and would have received a healthy raise had the A's offered arbitration, so this deal is team-friendly.

"There was a good comfort level for Jack (in Oakland)," his agent, Bobby Barad, said. "He enjoyed his teammates. It made sense for him to go back there. There was a lot of interest (from other teams). Of that interest, probably three or four legit opportunities."

Cust's deficiencies as an outfielder likely made him more of a DH option and thus more attractive to American League teams. But Barad said he drew interest from AL and NL squads.

No doubt the A's need his offensive production most.

"All along, our hope was to keep Jack here," assistant general manager David Forst said. "I think we wanted to let Jack explore — for us and for them — to see what the market finally developed as."

Cust did not return phone messages left by Bay Area News Group on Wednesday.

Before Cust's return, recently acquired Jake Fox appeared in line for considerable DH time. Now his playing time likely will have to come at third base, first base or the outfield. And with the A's bringing top prospects such as first baseman Chris Carter and outfielder Michael Taylor to spring training, even Fox may not have a guaranteed roster spot.

The A's continue to search for a potential everyday third baseman before pitchers and catchers report Feb. 20 in case Eric Chavez isn't healthy.

Felipe Lopez and former Athletic Miguel Tejada are two of the more intriguing free agents available, and Forst said the A's have "some open-ended trade discussions" going involving third basemen.

Oakland was in serious pursuit of Adrian Beltre — reportedly offering a three-year, \$24 million deal — before Beltre signed with Boston.

"We have plenty of (financial) flexibility still," Forst said.

The A's are interested in Cuban left-hander Aroldis Chapman, but recent reports identify the Angels, Blue Jays and Red Sox as the front-runners to land him.

A's name ex-Giant Scarfone as their new Stockton Ports manager

Oakland Tribune staff and wire services 1/8/2010

The A's named former Giants infielder Steve Scarfone manager of their Single-A Stockton team on Wednesday.

Oakland also announced that Aaron Nieckula, who was Stockton's manager in 2009, will take Scarsone's place as manager of its low Single-A Kane County affiliate.

Scarsone returns for his second season as a manager in the A's farm system after guiding Kane County to a 76-64 record and playoff appearance last year. He also spent two seasons managing in the Arizona organization and has a 209-207 record in three seasons overall.

Scarsone spent seven seasons in the majors, including four seasons with the Giants (1993-96). He also played briefly with Philadelphia, Baltimore, St. Louis and Kansas City.

Don Schulze returns for his second consecutive season as pitching coach at Stockton and Tim Garland is in his fourth season as hitting coach.

Nieckula returns to Kane County after managing the Ports to a 61-79 mark. He began his coaching career as hitting coach for the Cougars from 2004-05 and managed at Kane County from 2006-08. Nieckula has a 275-281 record in four seasons as a manager, including playoff appearances in 2006 and 2007. Jimmy Escalante is in his second season as pitching coach with the Cougars and Haas Pratt returns for his third season as hitting coach.

The A's also named Nathan Brooks trainer for Stockton and Brian Thorson trainer for Kane County. All other minor league coaching and staff assignments remain the same.

Cust signs with A's

[Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer](#) 1/8/2010

Jack Cust became the second A's free agent to return to the fold, signing a \$2.65 million, one-year deal with the team Thursday.

Cust, who is expected to primarily fill the role of designated hitter now that Oakland has another fulltime outfielder in Coco Crisp, can earn an additional \$350,000 in incentives, based on plate appearances.

The A's re-signed right-hander Justin Duchscherer last week.

Oakland had not offered Cust arbitration, but A's assistant general manager David Forst said, "We said all along that was not an indication of our desire to bring Jack back or not. We felt it was the right move from a resource standpoint."

Forst said the A's hope had been to "get the last crack at it" and top any other offers Cust received, but it never came to that. The A's made an outright proposal Wednesday that Cust accepted Thursday morning.

The A's agreed to terms with Cust - who hit 25 home runs last year and has led the team in homers each of the past three seasons - the same day that third baseman Adrian Beltre, an Oakland target, officially became a member of the Red Sox. The A's were competitive in their bid for Beltre, according to a major-league source, including offering the infielder more guaranteed years (three years at about \$25 million, or two at roughly \$18 million).

Beltre signed a one-year deal with an option that will pay him a minimum of \$10 million, according to reports.

The pursuit of Beltre indicates that Oakland is still hoping to land a third baseman or a shortstop who also can play third. So, might onetime A's infielder Miguel Tejada wind up in the picture? Oakland has contacted his agent, and if Tejada came at a bargain rate, as Orlando Cabrera did last year, there is a possibility that something could work out.

The A's still like another of their own free agents, Adam Kennedy, but the fact that he cannot play shortstop lessens the chances that he'll be back.

Oakland's own third baseman, Eric Chavez, is recovering from his second back surgery in two years, but he said Thursday that he already is throwing and he has fielded some groundballs.

"I've started to steamroll toward 100 percent," Chavez said.

Chavez is cautiously optimistic about his ability to return to third on at least a semi-regular basis. If he cannot, he and Cust probably would wind up sharing time at DH and both are left-handed hitters, not an ideal platoon situation.

The A's will make a move to put Cust on the 40-man roster today.

Cust staying with Athletics, after all

Free-agent designated hitter signs one-year contract

By Doug Miller / MLB.com 1/8/2010

Jack Cust will be returning to the Oakland A's in 2010.

The A's announced Thursday that they will bring back the 6-foot-1, 230-pound designated hitter for a one-year contract, reported by the Associated Press to be worth \$2.65 million. With an additional \$350,000 in performance bonuses, Cust's annual salary could eclipse the \$2.8 million he made in 2009. He can earn the full amount if he has 600 plate appearances in 2010.

Cust was not tendered a contract by the A's prior to the Dec. 12 deadline and became a free agent before re-signing with Oakland. He hit .240 in 149 games for Oakland in 2009 with 25 home runs and 70 RBIs and has led the Athletics in home runs each of the last three seasons, with 33 in 2008 and 26 in 2007.

The signing is another reward for the persistence of Cust, 31, who was a first-round selection of the D-backs in the 1997 First-Year Player Draft but toiled mostly in the Minor Leagues for the better part of 10 years before finally getting consistent playing time -- and a significantly-better-than-big-league-minimum contract -- from the A's last winter.

Last year, in fact, Cust told MLB.com, "My wife and I were talking and saying, 'This just goes to show that everyone gets their time as long as they keep at it.' It's just a really cool feeling to have worked so hard for something for so long and finally see what you hoped for to happen.

"It's not just the money, either. It's that I kind of have a home with the A's. It's awesome."

Cust fans in Oakland will be excited to see the slugger staying in that home for at least one more year.

Putting the best face on a Tigerless tour

Ron Kroichick, Chronicle Staff Writer 1/6/09

Once upon a time, the 2010 PGA Tour season bubbled with pure sporting anticipation. History drips off the schedule, after all, with Pebble Beach and St. Andrews returning to the major-championship rotation - together for the first time since 2000, when **Tiger Woods** memorably marched to victory at both storied venues.

Now, as the season kicks off today in Hawaii, golf wades in almost inconceivably impure waters. Woods dragged the game on a bizarre and fascinating journey these past six weeks, from fire hydrants and TMZ.com to countless mistresses and one Canadian doctor linked to performance-enhancing drugs.

Wow. There's a sentence we never figured would fit in this column.

Woods will not be on Maui for this week's SBS Championship, but he seldom makes the trip anyway. He wasn't there last year, as he recovered from reconstructive knee surgery. His astounding fall from grace still looms over the tour, with one question obscuring all others: When will Tiger come back?

Nobody knows, maybe not even Woods himself. If past seasons truly began when Woods decided they did - usually in San Diego, site of his customary debut - then this season might truly begin when his wife, **Elin**, decides it does.

It's staggering to think how much changed in the early-morning hours of Nov. 27, when Woods' accident launched his downfall. Take our little corner of the golf world here in Northern California, where the reshaped AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am counts as one of the most intriguing early-season events.

Ollie Nutt, president of the Monterey Peninsula Foundation - which runs the AT&T - left his office the Friday before Thanksgiving thinking Woods would return to the tournament for the first time since 2002. Nutt's understanding was that Woods, at his own event in early December, planned to announce he would begin his season in San Diego and then play at Pebble.

Nice thought, anyway.

Even without Woods, next month's AT&T will be more interesting than it has been in years. A new course joins the rotation (Monterey Peninsula), the rounds shouldn't take interminably long (with a reduced field of 156 players) and a parade of marquee international players will show up - from **Ryo Ishikawa** and **Retief Goosen** to, probably, **Padraig Harrington**, **Sergio Garcia** and **Camilo Villegas**.

Still, Woods' presence would have instantly restored luster to the tournament. Remember, he staged a dramatic comeback to win the AT&T in 2000, then returned to Pebble four months later to stage the most dominating performance in the game's history, winning the U.S. Open by 15 shots.

Now, without Woods on tour, the door swings open for players at various stages of their careers to make their mark. **Phil Mickelson**, who finished '09 strong and turns 40 in June? Garcia, who turns 30 on Saturday but is nursing a lingering sprained wrist? **Rory McIlroy**, the curly-haired, 20-year-old from Northern Ireland who played so impressively in majors last year?

These story lines might have to suffice until Woods answers The Question.

Briefly: Fred Couples, the victorious U.S. captain in last year's Presidents Cup, and **Corey Pavin**, the U.S. captain for this year's Ryder Cup, will make their official Champions Tour debuts Jan. 22 in Hawaii. Couples will first play in the tour's skins game Jan. 16-17. ... The entry deadline for the San Francisco City Championship is Jan. 15. More information: sfgolfchampionship.com.

A's bullpen ace

A's bullpen coach **Ron Romanick** will have one great story to tell when the team convenes next month for spring training.

Romanick, who briefly played the mini-tours after his major-league pitching career was cut short by a car accident, made a hole-in-one this fall - on a par-4. That's a rare achievement for a PGA Tour pro, much less a 49-year-old baseball coach who only plays golf four or five times per month in the offseason.

His ace came on the 340-yard 14th hole on the Outlaw Course at Desert Mountain in Scottsdale, Ariz. Romanick used his driver to smack a long, high shot, cutting the ball slightly on the downwind, left-to-right hole. He saw the ball land on the front of the green, take one bounce and roll toward the flagstick.

Even so, Romanick figured it trickled into a steep bowl beyond the hole. Then, when he reached the green, Romanick could not find his ball - not in the bowl, not on the collar, not anywhere. He jokingly asked another player in his group, A's first-base coach **Todd Steverson**, to check the hole. Bingo.

"I told him to stop messing with me, and then he reached down and picked up the ball," Romanick said. "I'll never forget it."