

A's News Clips, Friday, January 15, 2010

Fremont council members and businesses open to A's move

Fremont lawmakers get first look at new ballpark approach

By Matthew Artz, Oakland Tribune 1/15/2010

If Major League Baseball and the Oakland A's want to reconsider moving to Fremont, the City Council and local business leaders clearly are interested.

Council members praised the efforts of City Manager Fred Diaz to revive Fremont's chances at landing the team, while the Chamber of Commerce assembled more than a dozen pro-A's business owners at Tuesday's council meeting.

The meeting was notably devoid of rancor — a marked contrast to the last time the council considered an A's stadium proposal, in January 2009, when hundreds of stadium opponents rallied outside City Hall.

Stadium supporters and opponents were present in equal numbers Tuesday, although more stadium supporters chose to address the council.

"In this past year, I've witnessed six businesses close down in Pacific Commons in my parking lot alone," said Audrey Scott, owner of Vida Y Vino Wine Bistro. "I just think that having the A's here would be absolutely wonderful for the city. It would create so many jobs."

She was among more than a dozen Chamber of Commerce members, including former Councilman Dominic Dutra, who spoke in favor of the new stadium plan.

Stadium opponent Russ Engel countered, saying, "All current research on stadiums show that they are not economic engines."

Kathy McDonald, who heads the Fremont Citizens Network, which organized last year's stadium protests, said the city needed to consider other options, such as a business park that could help replace some of the jobs that will be lost when NUMMI closes in April. She added that the group would not consider mobilizing opposition until it became clear that the A's were again interested in Fremont.

If Commissioner Bud Selig determines that a Fremont ballpark is viable, he could ask A's co-owner Lew Wolff to negotiate with the city rather than pursue a stadium in San Jose, which Major League Baseball considers to be San Francisco Giants territory.

The new plan outlined by city officials would put a 36,000-seat ballpark at the corner of South Grimmer and Fremont boulevards on 120 acres of land owned by the NUMMI auto plant.

The city's approach calls for Alameda County to buy the land and for the city to make as much as \$80 million in infrastructure improvements funded through future stadium rent, ticket surcharges and parking concessions.

City officials say that a stadium could spur development on the nearly 400-acre NUMMI site, while opponents say that many cities have not benefited economically from hosting professional sports teams.

While council members cautioned that a final deal structure still would need to be negotiated, they were receptive to bringing the A's back to the bargaining table.

"If it happens and it makes sense for Fremont, I'm happy to look at it," Councilman Bill Harrison said.

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Conceptual Deal Points

Annual stadium rent: \$1 million

Ticket surcharge to city: \$1 per ticket

Parking revenue: 75 percent to A's, 25 percent to public sector

Lease: 30 years

A's would receive all other ballpark revenue, but the team would be responsible for operating expenses, repairs and policing.

Stadium development: Phase one

36,000-seat ballpark

250,000 square feet of offices and baseball-related retail

A plaza and 7-acre pedestrian promenade connecting to the future Warm Springs BART station

9,500 parking spaces

Potential future development

More than 2 million square feet of offices, shops, restaurants and a hotel as part of an urban entertainment zone

Future homes east of the ballpark site and the redevelopment of the NUMMI plant south of the ballpark site

Oakland A's Off-Season Q&A: Farhan Zaidi, P.3

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Jan 14, 2010

In the final part of our interview with Oakland A's Director of Baseball Operations Farhan Zaidi, we discuss the overall health of the farm system, whether age should play a factor in deciding a role for a pitcher, the health of Michael Ynoa, the return of Fernando Hernandez and Marcus McBeth and more...

Click [here](#) for part one of the interview and [here](#) for part two.

OaklandClubhouse: Switching gears a little bit, earlier this off-season Baseball America ranked the A's farm system in the bottom half of major league teams. Did that ranking surprise you? How do you feel the system stacks up right now?

Farhan Zaidi: That question reminds me of when Kevin Goldstein wrote at one point a story about teams that he thought had systems in the top-10. As soon as he wrote the story, he got e-mails from 10 or 15 other organizations who thought they were in the top-10 or 15, too.

Everybody feels good about their farm system, I think. Asking a team where they see their farm system is probably one where I don't think you are ever going to be able to get an objective answer. I will ultimately say that we have a pretty good track record of producing major league players out of our farm system. I think that is going to continue partly because of the job our scouting department does and partly out of necessity because of the way we run this team and the finances we have to run it with.

I can understand why someone would say that our farm system has taken a step back because of attrition and because we graduated [Brett] Anderson and [Trevor] Cahill and [Andrew] Bailey to the big leagues, but we still feel pretty good about where we are, especially on the position-player side where I think over the next three or four years we are going to go through a transition in terms of the composition of the position-player roster. I do understand why someone would say that our farm system has taken a step back because we graduated a number of players and that is the reason that you want people to think that your system has taken a step back. We also think that we brought in some new talent that we are excited about. I think that over the next two or three years, we have a chance to produce a good core of talent and have a team that is going to be competitive.

OC: Bringing in younger talent such as [Max Stassi](#) and [Jan Krol](#) this year and [Michael Ynoa](#) and others last year, has it changed the way that you view those lower levels of the farm system that, in the past, might have been stocked with older players?

FZ: I think so. I have talked in the past with you about how we have had to adjust our development mentality and expectations for guys because we are used to players advancing on a pretty aggressive timetable because we are used to having pretty polished college players in the system who can move up sometimes one or two levels in a year and who you almost never see repeating a level. When you are bringing in high school guys – [Rashun Dixon](#) is a perfect example of this. He played Rookie ball in '08 and then struggled a little bit with Vancouver in '09, but that is to be expected when you bring guys in and move them up a level. You are much more likely to have to have a guy reinforce his skills at the same level or have him struggle at the next level [when they are younger players]. I think those jumps are a lot harder for younger players to make than for a college player to make. You could argue that college players who come from top, top programs, when they are playing other top teams, they are competing at almost an A-ball level already..

I think we have to exercise a lot more patience. Even with a guy like Ynoa, just having signed him when we did and still not having seen him in full-season ball over here, I think it is a little bit of an adjustment for us in terms of our expectations and having to be more patient. But it is exciting. I think that is what we like to see and that is what the people who follow our farm system like to see – really high ceiling talent at the lower levels. I think we are starting to see

that now.

OC: Ynoa got to throw in the Dominican Instructional League. Were the reports you got back good?

FZ: Yeah, the reports are great. He obviously threw very well. He is going to come to camp and the expectations are that he is going to be competing to get sent out somewhere. Like I said, we have to exercise patience because this is such a unique talent and it is a talent that we don't have a ton of experience dealing with. No team would have really experience in dealing with that kind of talent. But the reports, as we sit here right now, we feel really good about his prospects for next year.

OC: Two other pitching prospects from the Dominican Republic – Fautino De Los Santos and Pedro Figueroa – are both highly regarded and are both, for different reasons, at roughly 24 years old without having pitched at Double-A. Will age be a factor in determining whether they stay on as starters or get moved into the bullpen?

FZ: As a general rule, I don't pay a ton of attention to age when evaluating pitchers, whether it is age-adjusting their league stats or something like this when you are determining what the appropriate age is to move a pitcher from being a starter to a reliever. One, because aging profiles for pitchers don't look anything like they look for position players. For position players, there is a clear learning curve or development arc for a player in their 20s. You don't really see that with pitchers. With pitchers, there is so much uniqueness to every player's path.

A guy like Figueroa, coming from the Dominican Republic, went through a growth spurt and started throwing a little bit harder at a later age and so I don't think you can compare him to other 24 year olds in terms of his potential based on what he has done compared to other pitchers at age 24.

With De Los Santos, he's another guy who got started a little bit late and with his surgery, he has been set back a little bit. He doesn't have a lot of professional innings under his belt for a guy who is 24.

I think it is going to be a continued question of whether they have the stuff or the command or the endurance to continue on as starters. Age isn't really going to factor into that decision.

OC: How much generally do you guys follow how a player is doing when playing in a winter league, such as Henry Rodriguez in Venezuela? Is it more that you monitor things to make sure they are staying healthy, or would their actual performance in those leagues have an impact on their standing coming into spring training?

FZ: I think the health is the primary thing. We get updates on those players and how they are doing and certainly if they are dealing with any injuries, we hear about those immediately and keep close tabs on that. As far as performance, you always like to see your players do well in any environment, but whether the performance is really good or bad, I think you have to take it with a grain of salt. You generally don't see any carryover from what guys do in winter ball going into the next season.

I think the big issues for us are a) health and b) what the scouting reports say. As far as pitchers go, what their stuff is like. Have they had any increase in velocity or are they throwing more strikes? For position players, if they are trying a new position, how that is going and how they look over there. We certainly follow our players statistically and keep tabs on them that way, but I think we take the performance data with a grain of salt.

OC: Was it pleasant surprise to be able to bring back two guys – Fernando Hernandez and Marcus McBeth – on minor league deals after the team had to maybe regrettably let them go in recent years for different reasons?

FZ: Yeah. They both had terrific seasons in 2009 and they were both very high targets of ours when we began to approach minor league free agency. Even though relief is a position of depth for us in this organization, bringing in those guys, that gives you a chance to make a deal like we did with the Cubs when we had to give up Jeff Gray to get Jake Fox. Jeff Gray is a guy we liked a lot, but going out and pursuing these guys as minor league free agents is what gave us more comfort in making a deal like that.

We really like both guys. Neither of them throw 96-97 miles an hour, but both of them throw strikes and that has really been the template of success for relievers for us. Guys who will come in and throw strikes and make hitters beat them [are the guys who have had success with the A's]. These guys certainly fit the bill and both have a chance to be contributors in our bullpen at some point next year.