

## A's News Clips, Tuesday, January 18, 2010

### A's complete trade for Kouzmanoff

By Rick Hurd, Oakland Tribune 1/16/2010

No sooner had third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff entered the A's fold Saturday than he was heaping praise upon the man he figures to be replacing on more than a part-time basis.

Eric Chavez "has actually been one of my favorite players to watch," Kouzmanoff said after his acquisition from the San Diego Padres officially had been completed, finishing the A's search for a third baseman. "I've admired him for a long time. I've loved his game, and loved watching him play."

What the A's would love just as much would be watching Kouzmanoff and Chavez playing on the same infield at the same time. General manager Billy Beane, who sent outfielders Scott Hairston and Aaron Cunningham to the Padres for Kouzmanoff and minor league second baseman Eric Sogard, acknowledged that Kouzmanoff's presence could be a precursor to Chavez switching positions, most likely to first base.

"Eric's a real good athlete and "... probably wouldn't have any trouble transitioning to another position," Beane said on a conference call. "We'll play it by ear, but his athleticism and versatility will be a good thing. "... The first thought is that Eric could move over to first and take some pressure off his shoulder."

Chavez, who didn't return multiple calls to his home in Arizona, has played only one inning at first base during his 11 seasons. His achy right shoulder has been just one of the myriad health woes he's endured while being limited to only 121 games over the past three seasons, including just 31 the past two. Of more concern, however, is how the six-time Gold Glove third baseman will respond after enduring his second major back surgery in as many years.

Chavez, according to assistant general manager David Forst, has been throwing and taking grounders in Arizona and "feels great." But Beane, who said he talked with Chavez before the trade, added that Chavez "also hedges a little bit knowing that the real test will be when he gets out there on an everyday basis in spring training."

The A's, too, have been hedging their bets on Chavez. The acquisition of Kouzmanoff comes only two weeks after defensive whiz Adrian Beltre turned down a \$24 million, three-year offer from the A's to sign a \$10 million, one-year contract with the Boston Red Sox.

Kouzmanoff isn't a bad consolation prize. Like Chavez, he entered the majors with a reputation as a shaky defender. But last season he emerged as a Gold Glove candidate after committing only three errors in 311 chances for the Padres. His .990 fielding percentage was a National League record for a third baseman.

He also averaged 19 home runs and 82 RBI in his three full seasons with the Padres despite playing half his games in Petco Park, a notoriously unfriendly stadium for hitters. Last season, he hit .287 with 52 RBI on the road and just .220 with 36 RBI at home.

"I'm just gonna hit the baseball. That's what I get paid to do," Kouzmanoff said of moving to a new park that historically has been difficult for hitters. "I'm gonna think about hitting lite drives and hitting the gaps. I haven't hit a whole lot in Oakland, so I don't know what that'll be like, but we'll see."

Beane said that with third base solved, the A's will turn their attention toward finding a utility guy, particularly one who can play shortstop. Cliff Pennington is slated to be the team's regular shortstop, but offseason acquisition Aaron Miles (of Antioch High) and backup infielder Eric Patterson have little experience at the position. Chavez played shortstop as an amateur but has played only six innings there in the majors.

### Sports Digest: Oakland A's may move Eric Chavez to first after trading for Kouzmanoff

Associated Press 1/17/2010

Having completed a trade for third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff on Saturday, A's general manager Billy Beane acknowledged a possible new role for Eric Chavez: first base.

"Eric's a real good athlete and "... probably wouldn't have any trouble transitioning to another position," Beane said on a conference call. "We'll play it by ear, but his athleticism and versatility will be a good thing. "... The first thought is that Eric could move over to first and take some pressure off his shoulder."

Chavez has played only one inning at first base during his 11 seasons. He is a six-time Gold Glove winner at third base but has been plagued by injuries and has had two major back operations in two years,

Kouzmanoff, who was traded by San Diego along with minor league second baseman Eric Sogard for outfielders Scott Hairston and Aaron Cunningham, entered the majors with a reputation as a shaky defender. But last season he set an NL record for third basemen with a .990 fielding percentage.

He also has averaged 19 home runs and 82 RBI in his three full seasons with the Padres despite playing at Petco Park, a notoriously unfriendly park for hitters.

"I'm just going to hit the baseball. That's what I get paid to do," Kouzmanoff said of moving to another park that historically has been difficult for hitters.

## **The A's have it on bragging rights**

By Ev 'Ace' Parker, Napa Valley Register January 16, 2010

The other day I found myself in the lunch room at the Napa Valley Register, enjoying a cup of coffee and prepping for a meeting that would begin in a short while.

I'd just breezed through the St. Helena Star and The Weekly Calistogan, checking on what my pal Doug Ernst — publisher of the weekly newspapers and the Valley's No. 1 San Francisco Giants fan — was up to and began to zone in on notes and background information for a meeting that would soon begin.

Then it happened!

Enter two fine young ladies — Cherry Flathers and Lorelei Morehouse from the Register's accounting department — and a question they asked me stopped me dead in my tracks.

"Mr. Parker, how come when you write a baseball story, it's always about the San Francisco Giants? What about our beloved Oakland Athletics?"

It was a fair question, an astute question which deserved an honest answer.

Before I replied, other longtime Oakland A's fans came to mind like the late Dario Lodigiani, a dear friend and once a Philadelphia A's second baseman over 70 years ago.

Then other local A's fans came to mind like Rosalie Critchley, Ray Hatton (who once sold newspapers outside of Connie Mack's Shibe Park), Ray Nasuti and Pat Campbell, just to mention a few.

There really wasn't time for me to respond to Cherry's and Lorelei's question in depth other than to say, "The way I see it, the Giants arrived in the Bay Area in 1958 — 10 years before the A's arrived — and by the then a decade of rooting for the hometown Giants and their future Hall of Famers Willie Mays, Orlando Cepeda, Juan Marichal and Willy McCovey had made Giants fans forever on both sides of the Bay Bridge."

Back home that afternoon, I thought about that question and began doing some research on the proud and sometimes not-so-proud history of the Athletics.

The history of the A's is really a tale of three cities who have seen the best of times, and too often the worst of times, yet have proudly survived.

In 1901, Connie Mack, a former Major League catcher, was named manager of the brand new Philadelphia Athletics. Eventually, Mack would buy that club and manage it for an amazing 50 years.

The A's began as a dominant force in the brand new American League, and with pitching from future Hall of Famers Rube Waddell and Eddie Plank — plus batting and fielding from "Home Run" Baker and Eddie Collins — the team won five American League pennants and three World Series between 1905 and 1914.

Then the lean years set in, and Mack and his franchise struggled to stay alive until 1929-31, when a new generation of talented kids brought the A's back to where they belonged — on top of the baseball world.

Kids like the great "fireball" pitcher Lefty Grove and sluggers like Al Simmons, Mickey Cochrane and Jimmy Foxx led the A's to three consecutive American League pennants and two World Series wins in that three-year span.

But by 1932 the nation was in the depths of the Great Depression, and to keep his franchise afloat, Mack had to sell off — one by one — all of his future Hall of Famers.

The long drought had begun, and 20 years of futility and last-place finishes was the writing on the wall. The franchise moved to Kansas City in 1955 — leaving Philadelphia in the sole possession of the National League's Phillies — but the KC Athletics did no better in the Midwest.

Charles O. Finley, who owned the club by then, planted the franchise in Oakland, California in 1968, just across the Bay from the Giants of the National League.

Perhaps a miracle occurred in Oakland, but in no time it seemed, the green- and yellow-clad A's started to win, and win big time.

Of course, a team with a Jim "Catfish" Hunter, a Reggie Jackson and a bit later, a Rickey Henderson on board, will tend to win ballgames — and that they did.

Beginning in 1972, the Oakland A's, despite a 10-year handicap in terms of arriving in the Bay Area, have won six American League championships and four World Series — while our San Francisco Giants, in their over 50 years in town, have won only three National League pennants and have come up "zippo" in terms of a world championship ring.

There is no doubt in my mind that Oakland A's fans like Cherry Flathers, Lorelei Morehouse, Rosalie Critchley, Ray Nasuti, Ray Hatton, Pat Campbell and thousands of unknown A's camp followers, in terms of "Braggin' Rights," are light years above and beyond we Giants fans — who, in my case, have waited for over 50 years since the last Giants World Series championship.

That one came in 1954 in New York!

## **Chavez doesn't mind utility role**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer 1/16/2010

Kevin Kouzmanoff's arrival in Oakland means that Eric Chavez, a six-time Gold Glove third baseman, essentially will become a utility player if he is healthy.

"I've always been open to playing anywhere," Chavez said. "I've taken a lot of pride in being the best third baseman I can be, but I've never felt that third base is what I *have* to be."

The A's completed the trade Saturday for Kouzmanoff and minor-league infielder Eric Sogard, sending outfielders Scott Hairston and Aaron Cunningham to the Padres. Kouzmanoff will be Oakland's everyday third baseman, taking over for one of his idols.

"That guy is a heck of a ballplayer, man. I've got some competition," Kouzmanoff said on a conference call. "And he's one of my favorite players to watch. I've admired him for a long time."

When Kouzmanoff was a rookie with Cleveland, former A's hitting coach Dave Hudgens introduced him to Chavez.

"Hudgens told me, 'You're this kid's favorite player, can he get a jersey?' " Chavez said. "I talked to him and he was really polite. ... When I heard he was coming over, it was kind of exciting."

If Chavez is fully recovered after two back surgeries and three shoulder surgeries, he believes the plan is that he will spell Kouzmanoff once or twice a week, maybe DH once or twice a week, play first base on occasion, perhaps even serve as the team's backup shortstop, because it's Chavez's natural position. He said he might play there once a week, and he is also intrigued by the idea of playing in the outfield.

A's general manager Billy Beane said that Chavez "probably wouldn't have trouble transitioning" to other positions because of his athleticism. "If Eric is able to come back, it would be a good problem to have," Beane said of finding Chavez a spot.

After dedicating himself to improving his defense, Kouzmanoff set a National League record for fielding percentage by a third baseman last year, when he made only three errors, and Beane said that moving out of spacious Petco Park might help Kouzmanoff offensively.

Beane said the team has liked Sogard since he played at Arizona State. According to Beane, finding a backup for shortstop Cliff Pennington is the top priority before spring training, although Aaron Miles and Gregorio Petit are both candidates and a healthy Chavez might be the surprise option.

"Everything is predicated on my health," Chavez said. "Right now, all I want is to get on the field. My goal is just to make it through the season, and Kouzmanoff is helping me do that.

"Everyone thinks this is a big insult thing, but it's not - this will help me."

#### **A's land Kouzmanoff in deal with Padres**

#### **Along with Cunningham, Hairston returns to San Diego**

By Alden Gonzalez / MLB.com 1/16/2010

Kevin Kouzmanoff admitted Saturday he's been a long-time admirer of Eric Chavez.

Now, he's headed to Oakland to possibly serve as his replacement.

The Athletics and Padres completed a four-player deal on Saturday, one that sent Kouzmanoff and Minor League infielder Eric Sogard to Oakland in exchange for outfielders Scott Hairston and Aaron Cunningham.

The slick-fielding Kouzmanoff -- who has also displayed pretty good power numbers despite playing three years at the pitcher-friendly PETCO Park -- fills a position of dire need for the A's, who don't believe Chavez -- coming off two back surgeries -- can play third base on an everyday basis anymore.

"Eric's a heck of a ballplayer, man," Kouzmanoff said in a conference call. "I've got some competition, you know? And he's actually been one of my favorite players to watch. I've admired him for a long time and love his game, love watching him play. It'll be exciting to get next to him and take some swings with him."

A's general manager Billy Beane didn't dismiss a possible platoon at third base if the lefty-hitting Chavez proves he's healthy, but he added that Chavez is also versatile enough to also handle other positions -- perhaps first base or the outfield.

"We had gone into the offseason realizing that with Eric's health the last couple of years, [third base] was a position we needed to fill," Beane said. "And if Eric was able to come back, then we had a good problem on our hands. So we were pretty determined the whole offseason to find somebody who could play the position on an everyday basis and hopefully play it well.

"I think this will actually help [Chavez], as well, because I don't think there will be the pressure on Eric, if we didn't have Kouzmanoff, to go over there and feel like he was going to have to man the third-base position for 140 games."

While speaking to The San Francisco Chronicle, Chavez said that if he's healthy, he believes the plan would be for him to merge into a utility player -- spelling Kouzmanoff once or twice a week, serving as a designated hitter, playing some first base and outfield, and maybe even being the team's backup at his natural position of shortstop.

"I've always been open to playing anywhere," Chavez told the Chronicle. "I've taken a lot of pride in being the best third baseman I can be, but I've never felt that third base is what I *have* to be."

Kouzmanoff, going into his fifth season in the Majors, batted .255 with 18 homers and a career-high 88 RBIs in 141 games for the Padres this past season. The 28-year-old, originally from Newport Beach, Calif., was a sixth-round Draft pick by the Indians in 2003 and had a 16-game stint with them as a rookie in '06.

He was then traded to the Padres that offseason, and in his three years in San Diego, he's hit .263 while averaging 20 homers, 82 RBIs and 147 games each season.

Like Chavez, Kouzmanoff is pretty good with the glove, too.

The right-handed-hitting third baseman committed just three errors at the hot corner in 2009, setting a National League record for fielding percentage for a third baseman at .990.

Each year in the big leagues, Kouzmanoff's fielding percentage has increased, from .857 in 2006, to .932 in '07, .974 in '08 and the NL record in '09.

"Years ago, when I first got into pro ball, I was told I had a good bat but I was a little rocky defensively," said Kouzmanoff, who's arbitration-eligible for the first time this offseason. "As soon as I heard that, I realized there was another aspect to my game I needed to work on, so I've been working just on my defense hard for years now, and I think it's finally starting to pay off now with a lot of reps."

In the deal, the Athletics will be returning Hairston to the club they acquired him from about six months ago. Upon hearing of the trade, Kouzmanoff was excited to be joining his old pal from San Diego. But then he gave Hairston a call and found out the two had essentially been swapped.

"That was kind of surprising because he just came from San Diego, and I didn't think he was going to be going back," Kouzmanoff said. "But that's just the business side of things."

Beane said Sogard, the 23-year-old second baseman the A's got in return, is "a guy that we wanted to draft [out of Arizona State], and since he's signed, he hasn't disappointed."

In 117 games for Double-A San Antonio in 2009, Sogard -- a second-round Draft pick in '07 -- hit .293 with six homers and 51 RBIs. The lefty hitter sports a .292 batting average and .375 on-base percentage in his three years in the Minor Leagues.

As for parting with Hairston and Cunningham, Beane admitted he would've preferred to make his moves in free agency -- namely, third baseman Adrian Beltre, whom the club was reportedly interested in -- so they wouldn't give up young players in return.

But Beane said the club addressed its major need in acquiring Kouzmanoff.

"He's got power, he's a solid defender and he's really just made himself a solid Major League third baseman, which is exactly what we need right now with Eric being on the shelf the last couple of years," Beane said. "I think he's a great fit, especially at this time."

Now the A's will look to acquire a utility infielder, especially one who can spell Cliff Pennington at shortstop if needed.

"Cliff is going to be the guy [at shortstop]," Beane said.

"And I think the need we need to address immediately is a backup guy to Cliff and Mark [Ellis] at second base."

## **Davis, Wuertz file for arbitration**

### **Hairston files before reportedly being dealt to San Diego**

By Tom Singer / MLB.com 1/16/2010

Relief pitcher Michael Wuertz and outfielders Rajai Davis and Scott Hairston filed for salary arbitration on Friday, the final day for eligible players to do so.

The three were Oakland's last remaining players with unresolved situations of the six arbitration-eligibles A's at the start of the offseason.

Salary figures for potential hearings will be exchanged on Tuesday -- when Hairston is expected to be crunching numbers with the San Diego Padres instead.

According to reports that began circulating at about the same time the arbitration filings were released, the A's are on the verge of returning Hairston to the Padres -- from whom they'd acquired him on July 5 -- along with Minor League outfielder Aaron Cunningham for third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff.

Kouzmanoff also filed for salary arbitration on Friday.

Davis earned \$410,000 last season, when he was fifth in the American League with 41 stolen bases.

Wuertz was a key and workhorse setup man in the bullpen, posting a 2.63 ERA in a team-high 74 appearances. The 30-year-old right-hander had a 2009 salary of \$1.1 million.

Of the three arbitration-bound Oakland players, Hairston had the highest salary last season, the \$1.25 million contract he had signed with San Diego. Hairston combined to hit .265 for the two teams in 116 games, 60 of them with the A's.

Of the six Oakland players originally in line for arbitration, two have already been re-signed for 2010 -- reliever Joey Devine and DH Jack Cust, the latter as a free agent after not being tendered a contract by the club by the Dec. 10 deadline.

Reliever Santiago Casilla was released by the A's on Dec. 8 to free up roster space for the Rule 5 drafting of pitcher Bobby Cassevah.

## **Report: A's trade Hairston, Cunningham to Padres for Kouzmanoff**

Oakland Tribune staff 1/16/2010

The A's have acquired third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff and a minor league prospect from the San Diego Padres in exchange for outfielders Scott Hairston and Aaron Cunningham, the San Francisco Chronicle reported Friday.

The deal is contingent on the players passing physicals on Saturday.

Kouzmanoff, 28, will likely wind up as the A's starting third baseman, with Eric Chavez's return from back and shoulder injuries still a question mark and recently acquired Jake Fox more suited for designated hitter duty. Oakland came up short in its bid to sign free-agent third baseman Adrian Beltre, who agreed to terms with the Boston Red Sox more than a week ago.

Kouzmanoff, a four-year veteran, batted .255 with 18 home runs and 88 RBI in 2009, though his on-base percentage was just .302.

Kouzmanoff is considered an above-average third baseman defensively. He set a National League record last season with a .990 fielding percentage, committing just three errors in 311 total chances. Vinny Castilla held the previous NL record of .987 in '04 with Colorado.

The Chronicle reported that 23-year-old infielder Eric Sogard is the minor leaguer headed to Oakland. Sogard, the Padres' second-round pick in '07 out of Arizona State, batted .293 with six home runs and 51 RBI for Double-A San Antonio.

Hairston goes back to the Padres, who dealt the outfielder to the A's last season. Hairston was a disappointment in his 60-game A's career, batting just .236 with seven home runs and 35 RBI and a .262 OBP.

Cunningham, who has now been traded three times since 2007, batted .211 in 133 at-bats over parts of two seasons with the A's.

"I'm really excited," Cunningham told ESPN.com. "I've always told my wife that San Diego is the place where I want to finish my career."