

A's News Clips, Tuesday, February 2, 2010

Oakland A's trade Antioch High grad Aaron Miles to Cincinnati Reds

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune 2/2/2010

The A's sent the transaction wire buzzing Monday, trading infielder Aaron Miles and a player to be named to the Cincinnati Reds and signing free-agent outfielder Gabe Gross as part of a flurry of moves.

Miles, an Antioch High product who had been acquired from the Cubs on Dec. 3, was shipped to Cincinnati in exchange for infielder Adam Rosales and outfielder Willy Taveras, the latter of whom immediately was designated for assignment.

The A's also claimed minor league infielder Steve Tolleson off waivers from the Minnesota Twins.

Rosales, 26, was the key player for the A's in the Reds trade, as the move with Taveras indicated. Taveras wasn't the only one removed from the A's 40-man roster; left-handed pitcher Dana Eveland and infielder Gregorio Petit also were designated for assignment.

The A's had been searching for a backup infielder even after acquiring Miles, an indication the seven-year veteran may never have been in the team's plans. Miles, who has been traded four times in his career, said he's looking forward to playing for Reds manager Dusty Baker.

"The A's were straight up with me in the beginning," Miles, 33, said in a phone interview. "I thought I might get dealt when they first acquired me, so I always had my eye looking out for the scenario that happened (Monday). It would have been nice to stay local and play for the hometown team. But in the end, you gotta go with what's best for your career, and I think that's definitely in Cincinnati."

Rosales is younger than Miles, and the A's seem to think he's better suited to handle shortstop if need be. Cliff Pennington is expected to be the Opening Day starter at the position.

Scouts have given Rosales high marks for his "high-energy" play — on display last year when he sprinted around the bases after two of his homers — and A's general manager Billy Beane compared him to former A's fan favorite Eric Byrnes. Rosales is a .212 hitter in 105 major league games.

The A's aren't likely to keep Taveras, a speedy player whose tools would replicate those of Coco Crisp and Rajai Davis. If they can't work a trade for Taveras and he goes unclaimed on waivers, the A's likely will release him and eat the majority of his \$4 million salary for 2010. They saved \$1.7 million by trading Miles.

The A's have 10 days to trade or release Taveras, Eveland and Petit, or send them to the minors if they clear waivers.

Gross, 30, is seen as a potential fourth outfielder and left-handed hitting option off the bench. He was given a \$750,000 deal, with incentives that could push it to \$1 million.

He hit .227 in just 282 at-bats last season for Tampa Bay.

"He can play all three outfield spots," Beane said.

Gross' signing means the A's won't be pursuing Johnny Damon, but Beane said it doesn't mean top outfield prospect Michael Taylor can't play his way onto the big league roster. Same goes for other top prospects.

"When you get to this level, you go with the best you have," Beane said.

Oakland set on backup outfielders and infielders

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer 2/2/2010

In one big flurry of activity Monday, the A's addressed their top need by obtaining not one but two backup infielders, and also added a fourth outfielder, signing Gabe Gross to a one-year deal.

Oakland sent infielder Aaron Miles and a player to be named or cash to the Reds in exchange for versatile young infielder Adam Rosales and outfielder Willy Taveras.

The A's immediately designated Taveras for assignment, and it's unlikely they'll be able to trade him and his \$4 million salary. Miles, who is from Antioch, is making \$2.7 million so, in essence, the A's are looking at the transaction as if they paid \$1.3 million for Rosales, who is considered a better shortstop than Miles and who, at 26, is seven years younger.

Miles and Jake Fox came from the Cubs in December along with \$1 million.

In addition, Rosales has options left, which will make the A's roster more flexible if Eric Chavez is healthy enough to be the utility infielder as planned. Steve Tolleson, 26, picked up on waivers from the Twins on Monday, also has options left and the son of former big-leaguer Wayne Tolleson can play in the infield and in the outfield.

Gross, 30, has been a backup most of his big-league career, and he said Monday that playing behind Coco Crisp, Rajai Davis and Ryan Sweeney is OK with him.

"At this point, I'm coming in as a reserve outfielder and I feel like I can back up all three spots, but if the opportunity is there for everyday at-bats, I feel I can be successful there, as well," he said.

Gross, a .239 lifetime hitter, will earn \$750,000, with another potential \$250,000 in incentives. Travis Buck also remains in the mix for the final outfield spot, and the A's now have more outfield depth after trading Scott Hairston and Aaron Cunningham.

To make room on the 40-man roster, the A's designated left-hander Dana Eveland and infielder Gregorio Petit for assignment.

Oakland also signed right-hander Dan Giese to a minor-league deal. Giese had reconstructive elbow surgery while with the A's last year but he is on track to be pitching in games again by mid-May.

Former A's scouting director Grady Fuson is expected to rejoin the team this month as an adviser to general manager Billy Beane, team sources confirmed.

A's get Rosales from Reds, sign Gross

Miles goes to Cincy; Taveras acquired, but then designated

By Jane Lee / MLB.com 2/2/2010

OAKLAND -- In a swarm of moves Monday, the A's acquired infielder Adam Rosales and outfielder Willy Taveras from Cincinnati for infielder Aaron Miles and a player to be named.

Oakland also officially announced the signing of free agent outfielder Gabe Gross to a one-year contract -- initially reported by MLB.com on Sunday -- and claimed infielder Steve Tolleson off waivers from Minnesota.

Rosales, 26, essentially represents the final piece to the A's offseason puzzle as a young utility infielder. It became obvious he was the key player in the trade when Oakland immediately designated Taveras -- along with left-handed pitcher Dana Eveland and eventually Gregorio Petit -- for assignment.

"He's exactly what we needed for a utility infielder," A's assistant general manager David Forst said of Rosales. "He plays some outfield too, and he's a relatively young guy with not that much Major League service time who we feel could potentially be here for a while.

"Our scouts have seen a lot of him over the past few years, and every single one of them just loves the way he plays the game and really likes his versatility."

Rosales, who will most likely be used to spell Cliff Pennington at shortstop this season, played all four infield positions while batting .213 with four home runs and 19 RBIs in 87 games with Cincinnati last season.

On the flip side, the 33-year-old Miles -- acquired by the A's along with Jake Fox from the Cubs on Dec. 3 -- has more experience at shortstop but is primarily a second baseman and comes with a heftier price tag. He hit .185 in 74 games for Chicago last year and will make \$2.7 million this season, \$1.7 million of which the A's are on the hook for.

Meanwhile, the A's have a 10-day window to take care of Taveras, who departed Cincinnati after one unsuccessful season as the Reds' leadoff hitter. In 102 games, he hit .240 with a .275 on-base percentage and 25 steals.

Taveras is due \$4 million in 2010 -- a fairly large price tag the A's are hoping to unload soon.

"We're making contact with teams to see if there's someone interested," Forst said. "We've got 10 days to figure that out."

If the A's can't unload the 28-year-old Taveras, they will have essentially paid \$2.3 million for Rosales' rights. But it's safe to say they are not in need of another outfielder, especially with the signing of Gross, who hit .227 with six homers and 36 RBIs in 282 at-bats last season for Tampa Bay. He can play all three outfield spots and figures to provide a left-handed hitting option off the bench while at the same time pushing aside any notion of a Johnny Damon reunion in Oakland.

"Gabe's always been a solid defender, a guy who hits right-handers well," Forst said. "We just felt like he was a good fit for the team, whether it's spotting some of our guys against tough righties or filling in at times since he can play both corner outfield positions. We've always liked the way he plays, and we feel he's a good fit for the team the way it's constituted right now."

The move begs the question of where Gross' presence leaves a handful of other outfield options, most notably Travis Buck and Eric Patterson -- the latter who, according to Forst, seems to have the edge in competing with Gross as the team's fourth outfielder.

At the same time, Forst made sure to note Buck "has every opportunity to play well and make this team, but he needs to earn his way here."

Joining Buck -- and several others -- in the hunt for a spot on the Opening Day roster will be 26-year-old Tolleson, who combined for a .266 average, eight home runs and 40 RBIs in 130 games for Double-A New Britain and Triple-A Rochester in the Twins' farm system last year.

"He's another guy our scouts have liked since seeing him play in the Arizona Fall League in 2008," Forst said. "He's somewhat similar to Rosales, just a couple years behind. He can play a number of positions and helps add to the depth."

Both Rosales and Tolleson have options left, which affords the team plenty of flexibility as it enters the season with question marks surrounding another utility infielder named Eric Chavez.

More than enough depth will be on display at Spring Training in just a few weeks' time, but Forst said Monday's hoopla of transactions doesn't necessarily mean the club is quite done wheeling and dealing.

"We've got three players on designation, so we need to make moves and figure out how to resolve those situations," he said. "We never close the door on anything. I think we're very happy with the roster as it looks right now, but we'll certainly sign guys right up until the first day of Spring Training and even, like last year, into Spring Training."

Buck Baffled by A's Mixed Messages

Mychael Urban, CSNBayArea.com 2/1/2010

Travis Buck knew the call was coming, knew the line of questions it would bring, and knew the only appropriate response.

Laughter. Incredulous laughter.

"It's crazy, right?" he told me via phone after a workout session with Yankees hitting coach Kevin Long in Arizona. "I have no idea what's going on. You tell me."

I couldn't. Because anyone who's followed the team knows only this about the strange situation: The A's, who buried Buck like an old bone shortly after he asked to rest a tweaked oblique in Texas last May, have continued to pile dirt on him all winter.

He is the invisible outfielder.

He's less than an afterthought to the A's, who have sent message after unflattering message to Buck over the past eight months.

The messages, delivered via demotions, challenges to his work ethic and manhood, silent treatments and, most recently, the signings of Coco Crisp and Gabe Gross and the rumors linking the A's to Johnny Damon, have Buck's head spinning -- if not on the verge of exploding.

Buck's words Monday afternoon, following Oakland's addition of Gross to an outfield that already had Crisp, Rajai Davis and Ryan Sweeney well above him on the depth chart, were not exactly explosive.

But they certainly had an edge that he'd previously been very careful to self-edit when discussing his clearly cloudy future with the franchise.

"I'm always going to try to take the high road, but this has definitely lit an even bigger fire under my ass," Buck said. "I'm gonna go into spring training with a vengeance and try to force their hand."

The hand Buck would most like to force, although he didn't come right out and say it, is one that would see the A's trade him. Somewhere. Anywhere.

And if you don't think there's a market for Buck, who hasn't played in more than 38 games or batted higher than .226 since his strong rookie season in 2007, you're wrong.

Long's Yankees would certainly take him off Oakland's hands, and it's no secret that Mariners manager Don Wakamatsu is a huge Buck backer. Several teams have talked to the A's about trading for Buck, only to be told he isn't available.

Why won't the A's move him? General manager Billy Beane points to the need for depth, and he's got a point. The A's of recent vintage have lost players to injury at a pace that makes the Warriors look downright hearty of health.

But being little more than an insurance policy, a fifth outfielder, is not the way Buck, who turned 26 in November, wants to spend what should be the prime of a once-promising career.

"Anywhere I go is probably going to be a better situation than what it looks like I have here," he said. "Especially based on what they've done in the offseason, after what happened last season."

What happened last season -- and this is according to multiple A's players -- is that Buck was singled out as something of a malingerer after he went into manager Bob Geren's office between games of doubleheader against the Rangers on May 29 and asked for the second game off.

He'd gone 3-for-4 with a home run in the first game, but while grounding out in the eighth inning he felt the muscle strain that he'd been nursing pull a little. Better to let it calm down, he reasoned, than to risk making the problem much bigger by playing through it.

Bad idea. Despite his insistence that extended down time wasn't needed, Buck was placed on the disabled list and was kept there until June 14, when the A's activated him -- and sent him to the minors.

They rushed him back to the Majors on June 29, ordering him to hop on a 5:30 p.m. flight from Las Vegas in order to be in uniform for the A's that night, but once he got to Oakland he found an all-too-familiar seat on the bench waiting. He didn't play for three days after the flight.

Eventually he was sent back to the minors, and there he stayed for more than a month and a half before getting a courtesy callup in mid-September, playing in eight games for the A's the rest of the way.

And to think, after that strong rookie season in 2007, Buck had the world by the tail. He was young, gregarious and gifted, and his long, blonde-streaked surfer 'do made him an easily recognizable figure as the rebuilding A's began to usher in a new era of homegrown East Bay baseball.

His mug was plastered on billboards and stadium signage. He got his own bobblehead doll day. The team was talking to him about a possible multi-year deal as he got off to a good start in 2008.

He didn't. And it's been all downhill ever since.

Buck openly admits to not handling the increased expectations in 2008, and injuries -- of course -- have been an issue at times, but what's happening to Buck now smacks a more than a little bit of being a personal matter as opposed to a personnel matter.

"I love the A's. It's the only organization I've known, and I respect Bob a lot," Buck said. "Obviously we don't see eye-to-eye in certain situations and there's a lot of tension there, but I respect his job and what he has to do."

There's a lot of tension there.

Hmmm. Sound like a change of scenery is in order here.

"If they want to move on, fine," Buck said with a trace of defiance. "I'm going into spring training with a little bit of a chip on my shoulder, seeing it as an opportunity to show my potential. Maybe I can help them, either by playing well and getting them a [trade] proposal from a team they can't refuse, or maybe I show them I'm definitely back to being the player they thought I'd be and they want to keep me."

"I'm cool either way, because there's no doubt in my mind that if you put me on a big-league roster I'm gonna help that team."

"There's no way you can tell me I cannot help a team."

Who will go from invitee to indispensable?

Players on the bubble can make a splash in spring camp

By Doug Miller / MLB.com 2/2/2010

NRI isn't a new hit investigative TV series, and it isn't a political action committee.

But when the crunch-time roster-selection period known as Spring Training hits Arizona and Florida in a few weeks, it's one of baseball's most operative terms. It stands for "Non-Roster Invitee," and it signifies the players who go to big league camp under Minor League contracts in an all-out effort to make an impression and make the Opening Day 25-man roster.

Usually, it doesn't happen. Usually, NRI might as well stand for "Not Really Important," because many of these players, particularly veterans, will end up in Triple-A and, quite possibly, on waivers. Or perhaps they'll surface later on as they sign Minor League deals with other clubs and try the process all over again the following spring.

But you never know what will happen in baseball, and sometimes "Not Really Important" can quickly turn into "Now Rendered Indispensable." NRI guys have turned into 162-game stalwarts, and even October heroes.

Take Scott Spiezio, who showed up in the Cardinals' camp in 2006 as an NRI, made the team, then hit .272 with 13 home runs and 52 RBIs in 276 at-bats. He contributed to the club's World Series run with huge hits down the stretch and five RBIs against the Mets in the National League Championship Series.

And what about Mike Sweeney? The veteran first baseman and designated hitter who has been so hobbled with back injuries that he had to take a Minor League deal with Seattle just to stay in the game last year made the club, and, along with Ken Griffey Jr., was credited as being the driving force in turning around a clubhouse. The happy team went from an American League-high 101 losses to an 85-77 record in 2009, the best improvement in ball.

So who will strike NRI gold in 2010?

It's a good bet that D.J. Carrasco (Pirates), Josh Fogg (Mets), Brian Shouse (Red Sox), Eddie Guardado and Miguel Batista (Nationals), Jim Edmonds (Brewers), Derrick Turnbow (Marlins) and Scott Proctor (Braves) will surface on big league rosters before long. Carrasco, for example, is slated to make a base salary of \$950,000 if he breaks camp with the Bucs as expected.

But other NRI success stories would be big surprises, and here is a handful to watch for 2010.

Dallas McPherson, 3B/1B, A's: True, Oakland swung a deal for Kevin Kouzmanoff to play third base, and true, the team still has the veteran Eric Chavez on the roster. But injuries happen, and who would know about that more than McPherson? The former Minor League Player of the Year was the Angels' can't-miss prospect before back problems ruined his 2007 and 2009 seasons, but when he's healthy, he can mash. He has a career Triple-A line of .280 average, .360 on-base percentage and .635 slugging percentage, and he could give the A's a nice power option at the hot corner -- or maybe even at first if Daric Barton doesn't work out.

Gustavo Chacin, LHP, Astros: In 2005, while with the Blue Jays, Chacin finished fifth in AL Rookie of the Year voting after going 13-9 with a 3.72 ERA in 203 innings at the age of 24. He wore glasses on the mound. He had style. Injuries and eventual shoulder surgery in 2007 slowed him down, but he re-emerged in the Phillies organization in 2009 and was healthy enough to pitch 115 1/3 respectable innings, carving out a 3.20 ERA in 19 starts.

Tony Pena Jr., RHP, Giants: Pena, a former Royals shortstop, became a full-time pitcher last year after hitting .098 in 2009 in 51 big-league at-bats. Then he went out, flashed three pitches -- including a 90-plus-mph fastball -- and put up a .176 batting-average-against in three Minor League stops. It could be he's found his calling as a late bloomer -- he turns 29 in March -- and it's happened before. Troy Percival, for example, came up as a weak-hitting catcher before making the switch to pitching and becoming an All-Star closer.

Ryan Shealy, 1B/DH, Rays: Shealy has been on Major League rosters since breaking into the bigs with the Rockies in 2005, but he's never gotten more than 202 at-bats in a season. And though last year, at the age of 28, he put up an incredibly small sample size of 73 at-bats, he hit seven homers and put up a line of .301/.354/.602 that should at least earn him a decent shot of backing up Carlos Pena and seeing what progresses after that.

Kameron Loe, RHP, Brewers: The last time we saw this 6-foot-8 pitcher, he was cutting his teeth in the Rangers organization, going 19-23 with a 4.77 ERA in 47 starts and 60 relief appearances and filling every role from starter to middle reliever to late-inning mop-up man. He pitched in Japan in 2009, then in the Mexican Winter League, where he had a 3.20 ERA in five starts and one relief stint. He has a sinking fastball that should reach the 93-94-mph range, and he also throws a slider, a curveball and changeup.

Urban: Grading the A's, Giants

Mychael Urban, CSNBayArea.com 1/25/2010

Both of the Bay Area's big-league baseball teams have been busy this offseason, and appropriately so.

The A's came in last place in the American League West in 2009, and they haven't come remotely close to sniffing the playoffs since Bob Geren took over after the baffling dismissal of Ken Macha. Gifted (and inconsistent) young pitching aside, there was nothing *there* there last year.

The Giants, on the other hand, were in playoff contention through mid-September last season. But let's be real: They were never anybody's idea of a playoff team. Not with that offense.

So Billy Beane and Brian Sabean had their work cut out this winter, and both have made a whole mess of moves. At various points, you could have said either man was doing a better job of improving his club; it's been a week-to-week thing.

Now that we're counting down the weeks to spring training -- let's call it three -- it seems like a good time to take stock and hand out some grades.

But first, we need to quantify exactly what the A's and Giants have done in relation to their respective needs.

What did the A's need? With the exception of gifted young pitching, they needed pretty much everything. More than anything, though, they needed power and depth.

You see what's happened to the Warriors this year, with key contributors dropping faster than Tiger's Q-rating? That's happened to the A's for the past *three* years.

Ergo, the need for depth. And Beane addressed it by making sure the A's have, in the words of Eric Chavez, "backups for backups." Not that backups are particularly exciting, but it should be somewhat fun to see 2,700 outfielders in green and gold in Arizona.

As for the power need ... um ... well ...

Hey! They're un-tarpping part of the third deck!

Sorry, but when a pop-deficient club counts a cat with 41 homers over the past two years as its key addition, it's hard to get all that fired up.

That said, the A's are better today than they were in October. The signing of Coco Crisp gives the outfield three center fielders. Kevin Kouzmanoff, the aforementioned 41-homer man, will help the offense and solidify the hot corner. Adding Jake Fox and Aaron Miles provides versatility and multiple options.

And the return of Justin Duchscherer should be a boon to a starting rotation that almost certainly will be improved, and the return to health of Joey Devine might give the A's the best bullpen in the bigs.

So for now, I give the A's a C. But they're still in on Ben Sheets, and if they get him, the grade's a B+. They're also not finished talking with Johnny Damon, and if they get Sheets and Damon I'll go A-. If it's just Damon without Sheets, C+.

Johnny Damon is 36 years old. And that's all I have to say about that.

As for the Giants, I'm going to go with a B-.

They, too, needed power. They, too, fell a little short in that respect. Granted, Aubrey Huff and Mark DeRosa have longer and slightly better track records than Kouzmanoff, but they aren't what anyone would consider a masher at this point.

The biggest "acquisitions" for the Giants this offseason weren't acquisitions at all. Re-signing Bengie Molina and Juan Uribe were the best moves they made, and the Uribe move might prove to be the biggest of all if the Freddy Sanchez circus stays in town.

Are the Giants better now than they were in October? Absolutely. And the division is worse.

The AL West is better, though. So if you're looking for a Hot Stove winner, right now it's the Giants.

Oakland a dead zone for A's players, fans

Lowell Cohn, Santa Rosa Press Democrat, 1/24/2010

The A's will be an improved team in 2010 and they deserve praise for that, but there's still something fishy about their operation.

The A's may win half their games in 2010 because they have promising starting pitching and a lights-out bullpen and pretty good — not great or even very good — position players, but still they have insulted their fans and the city of Oakland the last few years, and none of that was necessary or smart or polite.

They held their Media Day at the Coliseum on Thursday and produced some players to talk to the media. No stars showed up because the A's have no stars. They don't deal in stars. They deal in deals. They want to get three players for the price of one player and a resin bag and a dozen baseballs. The A's are the Dollar Store of the big leagues.

Coco Crisp was in the room and Ryan Sweeney and Eric Chavez with his same old narrative — battling courageously through injury, a wealthy man set for life without a worry in the world. You and I should have such heartache. I thought I saw Gio Gonzalez at one of the tables. All nice young men.

But it's so fishy. Think about the role of Lew Wolff in the fishiness. Wolff is avuncular and that means he's like your favorite uncle. He's said to be a nice man. Billy Beane looks up to Uncle Lew as a mentor.

When Uncle Lew bought into the A's in 2005 and became the front man (front uncle) despite purchasing a small share, the A's had OK attendance. That first season they drew more than 2,100,000 paying customers, 19th in the majors. That's almost 26,000 per game.

How have the A's done in the attendance department under Uncle Lew's stewardship? Last season, they drew 1,408,783 suckers to watch their Triple-A A's. That was dead last in the majors at just over 17,000 a game. So, in five Uncle-Lew seasons the A's attendance has declined — plummeted, nosedived — 700,000 a year. This is what I mean by fishy, as in it really stinks, and it's no way to run a business.

Here's a quote from Billy Beane, which writers were puzzling over at Media Day. Beane had offered deals to Marco Scutaro and Adrian Beltre but both signed with Boston for less favorable contracts. The Beane quote: "You start to wonder if anyone wants to play here."

On the face of it, that quote sounds reasonable, although what sane man would play for the A's, a nickel-and-dime operation, when he could play for the Red Sox? The Beane quote means the A's labor under disadvantages. Their ballpark stinks, true, and they are a small-market team, true — from now on Beane should be fined five bucks every time he says "small-market team" — and they have the worst attendance in baseball and the atmosphere at the Coliseum is dreary.

But wait, we already saw their attendance wasn't so dismal just five years ago. Beane's quote is disingenuous because it ignores the role A's ownership has played in making the A's a team no one wants to play for. Uncle Lew has made watching games at the Coliseum so unpleasant even loyal fans stay away. They can't stand the rinky-dink product on the field or the loneliness in the stands. Then Uncle Lew turns around and says he needs a new ballpark because no one comes to see the A's in Oakland. That's not playing fair.

Uncle Lew has staked the A's future on going to "another place." The current place is no good — I'm not arguing with that. Before the Uncle allows Beane to get really good players, he needs another place, a swell place with techno gadgets, a state-of-the-art home where fans feel they're in heaven and choirs of angels sing the National Anthem.

The "another place" used to be Fremont until that became just another no place like Oakland. Now the "another place" is San Jose, forget the Giants who will fight to the death to keep the A's out of San Jose although, honestly, the Giants seem on shaky ground here and probably can get bought off.

But you see what I mean. The A's under the Uncle always will be better elsewhere and in the future — in the meantime, too bad for their fans in Oakland.

There's something else and for this I don't criticize Uncle Lew. I criticize his chief nephew, Beane, whom I will call Billy for the purposes of this argument. Billy sounds like a proper nephew name.

Billy is a good baseball man who knows how to create a team when he actually is creating a team and, as I say, he's creating a team for the upcoming season. But Billy is a trading addict, can't help himself. If there exists a group called Baseball Traders Anonymous, Billy should sign up. He trades players so often the fans can't keep things straight.

Before last season, the A's got Matt Holliday for Carlos Gonzalez, Greg Smith and Huston Street. On July 24, they traded Holliday to the Cardinals for minor leaguers Brett Wallace, Clayton Mortensen and Shane Peterson. You need to pay attention now because things move fast — it's like a game of Three Card Monte and you have to watch Billy's sleight of hand.

Wallace, a third baseman, was the centerpiece of the trade and the A's were high on him. Fans learned his name and began to feel excited. But on Dec. 4, Billy traded Wallace to the Blue Jays for outfielder Michael Taylor. Somehow this all goes back to the original deal to get Holliday but it gets murky.

It's customary to bring a guy up and see how he does before trading him. Not with Billy. The minute he had Wallace, he didn't want Wallace. He wanted what he could get for Wallace. He always wants the next thing. Now he has Taylor but, fasten your seatbelts, he could trade Taylor in a heartbeat. Billy trades.

Until the A's get their new ballpark, they will live on revenue-sharing checks they get from baseball. They are like the poor scrounging relative who shows up at Thanksgiving and eats three helpings of turkey and grabs both drumsticks and wipes his turkey-greased mouth on the starched white linen tablecloth. The A's continue to wait in a state of suspended animation for salvation by new stadium.