

A's News Clips, Monday, March 22, 2010

Chavez redefines back-to-back

By Joe Stiglich, Contra Costa Times, 3/22/2010

Progress for Eric Chavez won't always be judged by his box score numbers.

This spring, simply pay attention to how often he appears in the box score.

Chavez finished off back-to-back games starting at first base during the A's 4-3 loss Sunday to the Cincinnati Reds. It marks the third time he's played the field in consecutive games this spring and gives an indication that his troublesome back is coming along well.

That's no small development for the A's even though they don't anticipate Chavez being an everyday player. Getting even a sliver of consistent production this season from the oft-injured veteran would be a boost.

"The last 2½ days I was real stiff and sluggish," Chavez said after exiting Sunday's game. "Today I rebounded really good, which was unexpected for me. It was a good sign for me to come back after a day I felt bad."

A six-time Gold Glover at third base, he also turned in a play at first that shows he's getting accustomed to that position.

With runners on first and second in the top of the fourth, the Reds' Todd Frazier hit a sharp grounder to the right side. Chavez, who was holding the runner, made a tough backhanded stop and fired a strike to second base for the force.

The A's would have had an inning-ending double play, but pitcher Dallas Braden dropped the relay throw at first from Adam Rosales.

Braden was kicking himself for the error afterward, but Chavez's work wasn't lost on him.

"Anytime you put gold out on the field, it's going to shine. It doesn't matter what position it's at," Braden said.

Two scouts who were asked about Chavez's adjustment going from third to first said he would make the transition fine. One said the biggest hurdle might be plays on which Chavez has to stretch to take a throw, because that will put strain on his twice-surgically repaired back.

The other said Chavez's skills as a third baseman will translate better to first than an outfielder trying to make the switch.

"You saw the plays he made (Sunday). That's instinct, it's reaction," said the second scout. "At the plate, I just think now it's a matter of timing. What I was a little concerned about was seeing if he would finish his swing. Sometimes guys coming off back injuries don't finish their swing.

"I don't think his bat's as quick as it once was, but he finished off his swing."

Chavez went 0-for-3 and is batting just .192 with two homers and five RBI in nine games. But he was encouraged by how he felt.

"The last two or three days that I was stiff, it was hard to get the bat through the zone," he said. "(Sunday) it felt so free. I didn't get any hits but that's the feeling I'm looking for."

The A's brass, and Chavez himself, won't get too excited over nine games in March. He'll likely sit today against Seattle, which would give him two days of rest since the A's don't play Tuesday.

But his fourth-inning play Sunday was his most challenging at first yet. Chavez said he was glad he made a throw to second in order to test his right shoulder, which also has been operated on twice.

"He just reacted. He made a great play," A's second baseman Mark Ellis said. "That's Chavvy. He's going to be fine."

A's notebook: Bud Selig says still no stadium recommendation

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Commissioner Bud Selig made his annual stop at A's spring training headquarters Sunday and said he's still awaiting a committee's report on the team's options for a new stadium in the Bay Area.

Selig dispatched a three-person panel last March to research the best locations for a new A's ballpark. It was thought he would have had the panel's findings in hand by now, but he said that's not the case.

"They're getting reasonably close to completing their work, but they have some left," Selig said. "They're working their way through a lot of things and they've made no recommendations to me."

The commissioner said he would try to act swiftly with a recommendation of his own for the A's once he receives the report.

He wouldn't say whether he sees Oakland and San Jose as the finalists to host the A's new stadium, or whether Fremont is still a contender.

Selig met with A's owners Sunday morning.

The Giants own the territorial rights to San Jose and are vehemently opposed to the A's moving there.

Selig said there's no precedent to look at involving territorial rights, in any sport, that serves as a guideline over the San Jose issue.

But he stressed once again his belief that the A's need to leave the Oakland Coliseum.

"They cannot compete in the venue they're in now," Selig said.

Lefty Dallas Braden allowed two earned runs over five innings as the A's lost 4-3 to the Cincinnati Reds.

Braden still has numbness in two of his left toes due to nerve damage, and he sprung off the mound awkwardly in the fifth.

"We're trying absolutely everything," Braden said. "I think a witch doctor is coming tomorrow with a bucket of chicken."

Reliever Michael Wuertz made his Cactus League debut. He said his right shoulder felt OK but he had no feel yet for his bread-and-butter slider in one inning of work. Justin Duchscherer will pitch in his first exhibition today and could go 3-4 innings, A's manager Bob Geren said.

Outfielder Coco Crisp is likely to return from a hamstring injury.

The A's sent nine players to the minors: pitchers Lenny DiNardo, Fernando Hernandez and Marcus McBeth; catcher Josh Donaldson; infielders Adrian Cardenas, Gregorio Petit and Eric Sogard; and outfielders Corey Brown and Matt Carson.

A's send nine players down; Coco Crisp likely to return Monday

By Joe Stiglich, Contra Costa Times, 3/21/2010 11:00AM.

The A's sent a whopping nine players down to the minors today, though none were big surprises — pitchers Lenny DiNardo, Fernando Hernandez and Marcus McBeth; catcher Josh Donaldson; infielders Adrian Cardenas, Gregorio Petit and Eric Sogard and outfielders Corey Brown and Matt Carson.

That leaves 39 players in camp. Several more will be sent down before the A's leave Phoenix a week from Wednesday. But some "bubble" guys will accompany the team north so they can provide depth for the Bay Bridge Series vs. the Giants. Final cuts probably will come April 3, two days before the season opener.

DiNardo said he'll go to Triple-A Sacramento and work on his mechanics, as well as a sidearm delivery he's experimenting with against left-handed hitters. Cardenas will continue working at third base to see if he can establish himself there. That's still a position where the A's need depth.

Just a couple other updates:

Michael Wuertz makes his exhibition debut today against Cincinnati, and Justin Duchschere is scheduled to pitch 3-4 innings of relief vs. Seattle tomorrow. That will provide a good read on Duchschere's chances of being ready for the season-opening rotation.

Expect outfielder Coco Crisp to return tomorrow as well, either at DH or center field.

Here's your full lineup vs. the Reds:

Patterson CF
Ellis 2B
Suzuki C
Kouzmanoff 3B
Chavez 1B
Sweeney RF
Cust DH
Buck LF
Rosales SS

Braden P

Wuertz gets back on mound with mixed results

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Michael Wuertz made his first appearance of the spring Sunday and it wasn't all that memorable: two hits, a walk, one run.

Wuertz said it was about what he expected. The set-up man doesn't usually sparkle during the spring, and he threw only three sliders, his best pitch, in an inning of work during Oakland's 4-3 loss to the Reds. He used his changeup a lot and said he liked the results, and his fastball location was good. Plus, Wuertz said, it was helpful to get in work with runners on base.

Wuertz was brought along slowly this spring because of his heavy workload last year (74 appearances), then his debut was delayed five days when it took his shoulder a little longer to recover from an outing last week.

"What he brings to the game is special," starter **Dallas Braden** said. "You definitely like to see that horse out there running."

It was a good day for the bullpen: **Joey Devine** (tendinitis in his surgically repaired elbow) made 30 throws at a distance of 80 feet, said he felt great and that he'll do it again today. **Andrew Bailey** (tennis elbow) will throw today after a week off.

Braden allowed eight hits in five innings, and allowed three runs, two earned (the other one a result of his own error). He walked none and struck out six.

For the first time this spring, the nerve problem in Braden's foot bothered him. Braden, who can't feel two of his toes, said he slipped on one pitch because he couldn't feel that he was back too far.

He's using different wraps and toe guards in an effort to help.

"I'm trying everything," Braden said, adding jokingly, "I think a witch doctor is coming tomorrow with a bucket of chicken."

Selig on stadium: Commissioner **Bud Selig** said that the panel investigating the A's stadium issue is still looking into a few things, but that he expects a recommendation to be "reasonably close."

Selig said he met with the A's owners and general manager **Billy Beane** at Phoenix Muni and he met with the Giants last week. The A's would love to relocate to San Jose; the Giants do not want to relinquish their territorial rights to the South Bay. "I would say their messages are pretty consistent," Selig said.

Territorial rights are not assigned in other two-team markets.

"This is different, because of the history," Selig said of the rights granted to the Giants because of a stadium ballot initiative in San Jose in 1993.

Asked if the panel is strictly considering Oakland versus San Jose, Selig said, "They're looking at everything, but they have not delivered a report, so I'll wait until they do that."

Selig believes the A's must get a new stadium. "There is no question," he said. "They cannot compete in the venue they are in."

Payday? Kurt Suzuki, one of the top catchers in the league after Twins star **Joe Mauer**, is arbitration eligible following the season, and the A's are expected to explore a multi-year deal soon.

On Sunday, Mauer agreed to a reported eight-year, \$184 million deal.

"I think I'm half as good as him," Suzuki said with a smile. "No, he's not human. The way he hits, catches, runs, throws, he's a freak of nature."

Briefly: The A's reassigned left-hander **Lenny DiNardo**, right-handers **Fernando Hernandez** and **Marcus McBeth**, catcher **Josh Donaldson**, infielders **Adrian Cardenas**, **Gregorio Petit** and **Eric Sogard** and outfielders **Corey Brown** and **Matt Carson**. ... DiNardo said he needs to iron out some mechanical issues and he'll continue to work on a sidearm delivery. ... Petit was batting .545 in 11 at bats. "The only thing you ask for is a chance to fight for a spot, but when you don't get a chance to play, well, it is what it is," he said. "The only thing I can do is to keep working hard and prove to everyone I'm a big-league player." ... The A's **Adam Rosales** homered against his former team, and also made an error at shortstop.

Devine throwing - updated, Bailey tomorrow; nine cuts this morning

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Phoenix 10:44AM

UPDATE: Devine told me he made 30 throws at a distance of 80 feet and it was "free and easy," he said. "It felt great." He'll do it again tomorrow and be off Tuesday.

The bullpen is getting better health news: Joey Devine is throwing today for the first time in more than a week after tendinitis interrupted his spring, and closer Andrew Bailey, shut down for a week with tennis elbow, will throw tomorrow. Craig Breslow (tendinitis) will throw at distance of 120 feet again today, and Michael Wuertz is making his Cactus League debut for this spring today. Coco Crisp (hamstring) is expected to start tomorrow, and Rajai Davis (ab muscle) is taking batting practice today.

A lot of players were sent over to minor league camp this morning: left-hander Lenny DiNardo, right-handers Fernando Hernandez and Marcus McBeth, catcher Josh Donaldson, infielders Adrian Cardenas, Gregorio Petit and Eric Sogard and outfielders Corey Brown and Matt Carson. This was mostly to make sure those players get more regular at-bats and innings now that the A's regular position players are getting three starts in a row and the starting pitchers are working into the fifth inning.

We'll see most of the above position players again this week; the A's have split-squad games on Friday. And for the most part, these are younger players who remain in the A's plans for the future, particularly Cardenas and Donaldson.

DiNardo is a slightly different case - he's 30, and he's been up and down a lot the last several years. He's struggled this spring with his mechanics, and the A's know that; he's worked with Curt Young to straighten some things out and feels as if he's on the right path, and he hopes that he'll be able to help out in Oakland at some point this season. He usually does, and if he's able to really get the hang of dropping down to the side, something else he's trying, DiNardo might be even more valuable as a mid-season fill-in.

Drumbeat regulars know that I've wanted to see Petit, 25, get more of an extended opportunity for a long time - why not give him a little shot last year along with Cliff Pennington? Needless to say, I'm not surprised he's getting sent out, despite his .545 spring average. That's pretty much standard. He seems to get some big hits whenever he gets a shot, but he seldom gets a real long look, and I think at this point, he's unlikely to. He knows that; I spoke to him this morning, and while he's disappointed, he's not surprised, either.

I know the arguments on the other side: Petit had a poor year at Sacramento last year, and any other team could have taken him when he was waived earlier this year and they didn't. All I can go by is what I've seen, and he's hit when we've seen him at the big-league level and hasn't embarrassed himself defensively. He's also a winner, with multiple titles in Sacramento (I know that doesn't mean a ton, but still) and a Caribbean Series title this past winter with Caracas. He reminds me a little of his countryman, Marco Scutaro, who wasn't valued maybe as much as he should have been while in Oakland.

This might be my last semi-annual Petit rant, though; I'm not sure we'll see him again much with Pennington, Adam Rosales, Cardenas and Sogard among those who appear to be in line ahead of him.

Goodwill alone won't save Ron Washington's job

Bruce Jenkins, Chronicle Staff Writer

It was early September 2005, about a week after Hurricane Katrina laid waste to Louisiana, and as the New York Yankees took batting practice in Oakland, **Jason Giambi** went looking for **Ron Washington**. Then an A's coach, and a native of New Orleans, Washington had been wiped out by the disaster. His property was in ruins.

So there was Giambi, walking across the field during batting practice with a check for \$25,000 in his hands. That's how much he thought of Washington, a friend for so long in the A's organization. Giambi felt it was the least he could do for one of the most respected people in the game.

In these times of bitterness and confusion in Texas, where Washington's positive test for cocaine has gone public, it's important to remember that scene. It's important to know that **Eric Chavez** felt so strongly about Washington a few years back, he gave the man one of his Gold Glove trophies.

And it's crucial to remember that as Washington stood before his players in private this week, **Michael Young** stood up and announced, "I've got his back."

On a young and inexperienced team, Young's voice is the only one that counts in the Texas clubhouse. He told his teammates that if they don't stand behind Washington right now, "you're not a Texas Ranger."

Not that they needed much prodding. Ballplayers understand weakness, and human frailty, and the qualities that make a good man rise above adversity. When Washington stood at a podium to answer questions from the media, the players gathered en masse behind him.

Such matters are relevant because in the firestorm surrounding Washington in Texas right now, some pitiful opinions have come forth. There are calls for Washington's immediate dismissal, the rationale being that if he can't manage himself,

outside the game, how can he manage his players? It's funny, too, because you can be certain that some of those critics have done their share of drugs, cheated on their wives or fallen off some other plateau of integrity.

It's all about perception now, and believe this: The players are fine with Washington. They're not going to quit on him. The organization just might.

Incoming co-owner **Nolan Ryan** isn't a Washington guy, never really was, and surely wants his own choice in the dugout. Perhaps an untimely losing streak will make it all too easy for Ryan to pull the trigger.

Washington knows, too, that a quick start is the key to his survival in baseball. **Billy Martin** made a habit of drinking himself into a blind rage, but he persevered. **Tony La Russa** had an ugly DUI incident, complete with unflattering video, and he hardly broke stride. Washington doesn't have that luxury. As far as the general public is concerned, Washington's first link with *anything* is cocaine. That doesn't bode well for a black man from New Orleans - "a cat," as one of his best friends in baseball said so fondly this week. "A New Orleans cat. He's **Miles Davis**."

Washington has admitted using marijuana and amphetamines during the crazy baseball days of the '80s, calling such activity "mistakes," and he misspoke. Those were choices, to have a little fun and get a little more ready for a ballgame. At the time he played, that lifestyle landed him squarely among the majority. But for a 57-year-old man to use cocaine, that's a mistake. For a *manager* to do so, that's a huge mistake. Now he has to win, right out of the gate, or he'll find that "second chance" applies only to some.

Subtle change

How did it come to pass that managers are tested for drugs? In the wake of the 2007 Mitchell Report, when so many players were implicated, a testing regimen was put in place (with little fanfare) for all clubhouse personnel. ... Quick word of advice to NCAA officials running the regional in San Jose: Don't keep people in the dark during timeouts. Run the scores from other games around the country, not those endless looks at the NCAA logo. ... Interesting sidelight to **Tiger Woods'** return to golf: Who will be his two playing partners at the Masters? It's up to Augusta National to make that call, and you'd imagine Tiger will have some input. **Steve Stricker** is a likely choice. It's a Masters tradition to pair amateurs in the field with past champions, and reigning U.S. Amateur Public Links champion **Brad Benjamin** told the New York Times, "That would be the best scenario possible." Others wouldn't be so thrilled. ... Arrogant to the point of absurdity, the Masters limits live television coverage to 3 1/2 hours over the first two rounds. That's ESPN's job, and a network source told reporters that if Tiger has an early tee time, it's entirely possible that his landmark moment will not be shown live. In fact, he could be done before the ESPN telecast even starts. Can you imagine the backlash? Even the green-jacketed blowhards might not be able to withstand that kind of heat.

Braden reaches five frames in loss

Reliever Wuertz allows one run in spring debut

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

REDS 4, ATHLETICS 3

at Phoenix

Sunday, March 21

Reds at the plate: Jonny Gomes hit his fourth home run of the spring, a shot to left-center in the fourth frame, while going 1-for-2. Chris Dickerson, who tallied his sixth RBI of the spring, and Juan Francisco collected two hits apiece. Jay Bruce and Todd Frazier also drove in runs.

Athletics at the plate: Adam Rosales went 1-for-2 with a walk and launched his second homer of the spring in the fifth after going 0-for-8 over his previous two games. Mark Ellis added a hit and scored two runs, one courtesy of a sacrifice fly from Kurt Suzuki. Also getting hits were Travis Buck, Anthony Recker, Landon Powell and Eric Patterson, who has hit safely in each of his past six games.

Reds on the mound: Righty Johnny Cueto tossed four solid innings, giving up one run on two hits and three walks while fanning four. Fellow right-hander Jared Burton pitched the next two frames and watched two runs (one earned) cross the plate. He allowed just one hit, walked one and struck out two.

Athletics on the mound: Left-handed starter Dallas Braden surrendered three runs (two earned) while scattering eight hits and striking out six. The southpaw was followed by Michael Wuertz, who pitched an inning of relief in his Cactus League debut. The right-hander, who was sidelined with shoulder soreness for the first weeks of spring, gave up two hits and a run while walking one with a slider he described afterward as "nonexistent." Wuertz is still gaining full arm strength for that pitch, so he said he mostly threw changeups.

Worth noting: The A's committed three errors on the day, the first a missed catch from Braden, who admitted to being rather "embarrassed" by the mistake. "It's pretty disappointing considering [pitchers' fielding practice] is the first thing we work on before even getting our uniforms." Buck (fielding) and Steve Tolleson (throwing) were also charged with errors.

Cactus League records: Athletics 8-10-1; Reds 8-8-1

Up next: Lefty Brett Anderson is slated to make his fourth spring start Monday, but surely all eyes will be on right-hander Justin Duchscherer, who is scheduled to follow Anderson and make his Cactus League debut. The A's righty, sidelined all of last year after minor elbow surgery and a bout with clinical depression before undergoing a nerve ablation procedure the first week of camp, hopes to throw 60 pitches. Anderson, Duchscherer and the A's will travel to Peoria to take on the host Mariners beginning at 1:05 p.m. PT.

Cuban sensation Aroldis Chapman is scheduled to get four innings of work from the bullpen when the Reds host the Rockies at 4:05 p.m. ET in Goodyear, Ariz. This will be Chapman's fourth outing of the spring. He has a 1.29 ERA with two walks and 10 strikeouts as he competes for the fifth spot of the rotation. Bronson Arroyo will start the game for Cincinnati and is expected to work five innings. Jorge De La Rosa is Colorado's scheduled starter. The game will be carried by MLB.TV, Fox Sports Ohio and 700 WLW.

Selig awaits report on A's options

Commissioner says no timetable on committee findings

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Commissioner Bud Selig knew the questions were coming, so he took them with ease, but he didn't offer much news during his brief visit to A's camp on Sunday.

The questions, of course, revolved around the club's ongoing stadium and territorial rights issue. Selig said he is awaiting a report from the three-panel committee he appointed to study the A's stadium options, particularly one involving San Jose that would involve territorial rights.

The city of San Jose is considering asking for voter approval to build a ballpark for the A's there, but the San Francisco Giants have publicly stated they would oppose the move due to an encroachment on their territorial rights to Santa Clara County, where they have a Class A team.

San Jose wants an answer by June so it can place a measure on the fall ballot, but Selig said there is currently no timetable for when the panel will have its report ready.

"They're getting close to completing their work," Selig said, "but they have some work that needs to be done. The committee is hard at work, and I have faith in all three of them."

The Commissioner met with Giants officials last week and held court with several A's executives, including Oakland owner Lew Wolff and general manager Billy Beane, on Sunday morning. Selig assured reporters that no news came out of either meeting, as "their message has been pretty consistent."

Still, Selig acknowledged the A's "can't play in the venue they are in" right now. The Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum is 43 years old and is one of just two stadiums in the country that houses both Major League Baseball and National Football League teams.

The Commissioner said the panel's proposal will heavily weigh on his decision of how to move forward, but "they're working their way through a lot of things, and they have no recommendations to me yet."

"There is information they're still looking for," Selig said. "They've been extremely thorough, though. It's a complicated, complex process. Each territorial thing is different, so they're working their way through it all."

"There's really no precedent. This one's different because of the history involved."

Wolff has expressed a strong desire to move the A's to San Jose after unsuccessful attempts to build new stadiums in Oakland and Fremont, Calif. However, recent reports have Fremont still in the picture. Selig would not comment on the situation, but according to the San Jose Business Journal, MLB officials have revived the possibility of building a stadium on land surrounding Fremont's New United Motor Manufacturing Inc. auto plant that is scheduled to close.

Lee's Leftovers: Wuertz back in action; Braden goes five

Michael Wuertz showed off his multitasking talents today by balancing nine-month-old son Braxton in one arm while talking to reporters about his first spring appearance. The A's righty gave up two hits, a walk and a run in his outing but said he felt good and saw results he was expecting. "That's kind of always how my Spring Training games have gone," he said. Since Wuertz missed the first couple weeks of spring with shoulder soreness, he's still building up arm strength and, subsequently, can't get much out of his slider right now. He said he threw three in the frame, one that was taken for a hit and another that led to a walk. At the same time, Wuertz said he expected it to be that way, so he heavily relied on his changeup. He mentioned his shoulder felt fine and, at the end of the day, "it was just good to get out in game action, especially against another colored uniform." Meanwhile, manager **Bob Geren** called it a "decent first outing."

Slightly in the shadows of Wuertz' outing was **Dallas Braden**, who started the game and threw close to 80 pitches in five innings of work. He gave up three runs (two earned) on eight hits while fanning half a dozen and was quite pleased with his fastball command and changeup. However, he wasn't too thrilled with his fielding. Braden committed an error by missing a catch and noted he felt rather "embarrassed" and "disappointed" since pitchers spend half of their spring doing fielding drills.

Braden also talked about how his numb foot affected him for the first time in a game situation this spring. He lost his balance on a pitch to **Chris Dickerson** in the fifth because he couldn't feel how far back he was. The southpaw half-

heartedly reached out to reporters for ideas to ease his foot, as he's already using insoles, metal plates and toe guards, among other things. "I think a witch doctor is coming tomorrow with a bucket of chicken," he joked. Braden isn't too worried about the foot, though. After all, he may never regain feeling in it. "I can't just wait around for it," he said. "I've got baseballs to throw."

Dribblers: **Coco Crisp** is slated to be back in the lineup tomorrow after having been diagnosed with a strained left hamstring March 10. He'll likely DH before making his first spring start in the outfield the next game. ... **Rajai Davis** (sore abdomen) took batting practice Sunday and told me he was planning on doing all baseball activity. He should be back in tomorrow's lineup as well. ... Rehabbing pitchers **Joey Devine** (shoulder) and **Craig Breslow** (elbow) played catch today, and there's a possibility **Andrew Bailey** (elbow) will pick up a ball tomorrow.

Selig meets with A's officials about new stadium

AP, March 21, 2010

Baseball commissioner Bud Selig met with Oakland Athletics officials on Sunday in regard to a new stadium but said there is no timetable on when a committee he formed to study the issue will put forth a recommendation on how to proceed.

"There is no question that the A's cannot compete (financially) in the venue they're in," Selig said, referring to the team's longtime home, the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum.

Selig met with San Francisco Giants officials a week ago to discuss territorial rights. The Athletics have considered a move to San Jose, among other Bay area locations. The Giants currently have a Class A team in San Jose.

"There still is information we are looking for. It is a complicated process with a lot of complex issues and is time-consuming," Selig said. "But we would still like to move as expeditiously as possible."

Rays and A's in need of rescue

Buster Olney, espn.com, 3/22/2010

Less than a decade ago, Major League Baseball threatened to fold the Minnesota Twins, indicating there were doubts about whether the franchise was viable. Since then, the Twins have evolved from a small-market little engine that could into a growing, middle-class powerhouse, taking a journey similar to that of the San Francisco Giants.

The Twins' payroll will be more than \$90 million this year in the team's first season at Target Field. And next year, in the first season of Joe Mauer's eight-year, \$184 million contract, we may see the unthinkable: Under owner Jim Pohlad, the club's payroll could climb to more than \$100 million, sharing the same silverware as teams like the St. Louis Cardinals and the Seattle Mariners.

The Twins are one of baseball's great success stories, and their contract with Mauer may well turn out to be the best story of the calendar year. Mauer might've walked away from the promise of another \$60 million to \$70 million in free agency to re-sign with his hometown team, and the Twins extended themselves to the point where they now have sizable risk.

But there was some irony in the fact that Mauer's deal was announced on the same weekend that MLB commissioner Bud Selig met with executives of the Oakland Athletics, a team that is drifting like a piece of some outdated rocket junk floating in orbit.

Selig's next challenge will be to find a way to give the Athletics and the Tampa Bay Rays the help they need. And it's hard to see how he can do this without sticking out sharpened elbows and forcing change.