

A's News Clips, Tuesday, November 9, 2010

Oakland A's win bidding for negotiating rights to star Japanese pitcher Hisashi Iwakuma

By Joe Stiglich_Oakland Tribune 11/9/2010

The A's primary goal this winter is upgrading their offense, but their first major offseason player move involves a pitcher.

It was announced Monday that Oakland won the bidding for negotiating rights to Japanese right-hander Hisashi Iwakuma, generally considered one of the top two pitchers in Japan.

The A's have a 30-day window to work out a contract with Iwakuma, 29, who would join a starting rotation that's already considered one of the American League's best.

The upshot: Iwakuma's addition could give the A's enough depth to package a starting pitcher in a trade to acquire an impact hitter. That strategy would make sense in explaining why a pitching-rich team would open up the checkbook to bring in yet another arm.

The A's aren't commenting on Iwakuma beyond a statement that read: "The Oakland A's are excited to have had our bid for Hisashi Iwakuma accepted by the Rakuten Golden Eagles. Out of respect for the posting process and for Mr. Iwakuma and his representative, we will not have any comment until the 30-day negotiation period comes to an end."

The A's reportedly outbid American League West foes Seattle and Texas for the rights to Iwakuma, who would join the growing number of Japanese players to cross the Pacific and play in the United States.

Iwakuma posted a 2.82 ERA in 201 innings last season for Rakuten, which plays in Japan's Pacific League. The Golden Eagles reportedly were seeking a bid in the \$16-17 million range for his rights. It's unknown whether the A's bid approached that.

Players under contract with teams in Japan's Nippon Professional Baseball must be "posted" for bid if they want to jump to the major leagues.

It's quite a financial commitment, as the A's are on the hook for their bid amount, as well as whatever contract Iwakuma might sign. But if they don't sign Iwakuma, they don't pay the bidding fee.

Iwakuma, said to have an excellent forkball to complement a fastball and slider, is 101-62 with a 3.32 ERA over 10 seasons with Rakuten and the Kintetsu Buffaloes. He started for Japan in the 2009 World Baseball Classic final and he's considered the country's best pitcher behind Yu Darvish, who will create a frenzy if and when he jumps to the majors.

But if the A's were to sign Iwakuma with the intent of trading pitching for hitting, then why not cut to the chase and just invest money in a free-agent hitter or two?

Perhaps the A's will pursue a player such as Jayson Werth, who would fit a need as a corner outfielder with power. But general manager Billy Beane has said he's had trouble selling his team to free-agent hitters in recent seasons, in part because of the rundown state of the Oakland Coliseum.

Beane might believe he has a better chance trading for an impact hitter than signing one.

A's win bidding for Japanese ace Hisashi Iwakuma

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

The A's are close to adding Japan's second-best pitcher to a rotation that owned the American League's lowest ERA in 2010.

Oakland won the bidding for Hisashi Iwakuma, 29, and has 30 days to negotiate with the pitcher's agent, Don Nomura. Iwakuma, who probably would enter the middle of Oakland's rotation, is known for his command and a swing-and-miss split-fingered fastball that complements an 88-92-mph fastball.

The winning bid, paid to Iwakuma's team, the Rakuten Golden Eagles, was believed to be in the \$15 million range, topping bids by the Mariners, Rangers and Twins. Now the A's must negotiate a deal with Iwakuma - if they fail to do so, he'd remain in Japan and they'd be refunded.

But the A's have every intention to sign Japan's best pitcher behind superstar Yu Darvish to a multiyear contract. In a news release, they said they're "excited" that Rakuten accepted their bid. In the same release, the team said it wouldn't comment before a deal is struck.

Despite reports the A's would consider trading Iwakuma, it wouldn't happen because rules forbid teams from trading newly signed free agents. Plus, they want him.

"He would make a good No. 3 starter on most teams," said Robert Whiting, who authored several Japanese baseball books, including "You Gotta Have Wa" (1989). "He is not unlike Hiroki Kuroda on the Dodgers and is years younger. He should benefit from Oakland's big park. He's a nice guy, smiles a lot. Fans will like him."

Coincidentally or not, the A's have had a partnership with Rakuten since January 2009. At the time of the agreement, general manager Billy Beane said, "Without question, both organizations will benefit from this agreement, and we look forward to growing this relationship in the future."

Iwakuma, who turns 30 in April, won the Sawamura Award (the Japanese equivalent of the Cy Young Award) and Pacific League MVP in 2008, going 21-4 with a 1.87 ERA. In 2009, he was 13-6 with a 3.25 ERA. This year, 10-9 with a 2.82 ERA, topping 200 innings for the second time in three years.

The A's scouted Iwakuma the past three years. They also followed him in the 2009 World Baseball Classic - he was 1-1 with a 1.35 ERA.

'Out: Glenn Burke Story' review: Tragedy hits home

Peter Hartlaub, Chronicle Pop Culture Critic

Out: The Glenn Burke Story: Documentary. 8 p.m. Wed. and next Tues. Comcast SportsNet Bay Area. A screening of the documentary and fundraiser is scheduled for Wednesday night at the Castro Theatre, with doors opening at 6:30 p.m. A live town hall meeting will follow the screening at 9:15 p.m. More information and tickets available at www.csnbayarea.com/pages/out.

It's a baffling and depressing thought. Even with thousands of professional athletes competing in baseball, basketball, football and hockey over the past several years - many of whom are almost undoubtedly homosexual - not a single one has played a single game as an openly gay man.

"Out: The Glenn Burke Story," premiering Wednesday night on Comcast SportsNet Bay Area, delves deeply into one local gay athlete's meteoric rise to the pros, and the tragic ramifications when he stopped being guarded about his private life.

No punches are pulled by producers Doug Harris and Sean Maddison, local filmmakers who uses their contacts to tell a broad life story of the man they call the first openly gay Major League Baseball player. But there's a reflective quality to the hourlong movie, which features more than two dozen of the player's friends and teammates, many of whom speak very candidly about homophobic locker room attitudes and even their own prejudices.

Burke was a basketball and baseball star at Berkeley High in the late 1960s and 1970, remembered by locals mostly for his phenomenal hoops skills. The big money was on the baseball field, and he quickly rose through the Los Angeles Dodgers ranks, starting a World Series game in 1977.

But his increasing openness about liking men - one story involves Tommy Lasorda's son - apparently got him bounced from the Dodgers to the Oakland A's. Burke found new friends in the Castro district, and yet felt out of place with the A's. He retired for good at age 27 in 1980, and publicly came out two years later in a magazine article and on the "Today" show. He was diagnosed with AIDS and died of complications related to the disease in 1995.

The details of Burke's life, while interesting, aren't the revelation in "Out." While Burke's story may be unknown to most, much of it was told in "Out at Home: The Glenn Burke Story," written by Eric Sherman.

What's most fascinating is watching big-name players from the time - including Dodgers teammates Reggie Smith, Davey Lopes and longtime Giants manager Dusty Baker - speaking honestly about Burke and homosexuality in the locker room. Their perspective becomes especially important during one of the trickiest parts of the film: The circumstances surrounding his trade from the Dodgers, which Burke believed was orchestrated because he was gay.

"I think the Dodgers knew," Baker said bluntly. "I think that's why they traded Glenn."

Adds Smith, about Burke's prospects if he came out: "It was a kiss of death for a ballplayer. He would have been excused from the game."

Harris peppers the documentary with lighter moments that will interest pop-culture junkies and sports fanatics alike. "Cheers" writer/director Ken Levine makes an appearance, to talk about an episode that was based in part on Burke's life. Burke has also been credited for being on the delivering end of the first high-five.

Along the way, a nuanced portrait emerges. There are few heroes and villains. Lasorda and former A's manager Billy Martin - the latter figure reportedly introduced Burke to his teammates as a "faggot" - are the exception. The filmmakers don't try to make Burke something he isn't. Unlike Billy Bean, a gay former player interviewed in "Out" who has since become an activist, Burke just seemed to want to live his life.

Any shortcomings with the documentary are minor. While taped interviews with an ailing Burke a year before his death are a poignant addition to former KFOG host Dave Morey's narration, the viewer is left wanting for more footage of the player's on-field exploits, and proof of his oft-described life-of-the-party personality. (It would have been nice to see if Burke *really* danced better than John Travolta in "Saturday Night Fever.") Burke's final days are filled with little solace or dignity - the details are heartbreaking - and it seems like a strain to suggest he died with any kind of peace.

But there's a silver lining, and it's the number of ex-players who are willing to speak so warmly about Burke, and sadly about the way he was treated. "Out" should be required viewing for rookies who are entering professional sports. Then maybe the next story about an openly gay male athlete won't be such a tragedy.

Film examines struggle of gay athlete Glenn Burke

Ron Kroichick, Chronicle Staff Writer

There are moments when Glenn Burke's story flows with sporting achievement and playful exuberance. Friends and former teammates rave about his athletic ability and reminisce about his gregarious demeanor (a cross between Eddie Murphy and Richard Pryor, as one friend puts it).

But the tale soon turns tumultuous - and reaches a sad, premature ending. Burke's journey as major-league baseball's first openly gay player still makes for a compelling narrative in "Out. The Glenn Burke Story," a documentary to air at 8 p.m. Wednesday on Comcast SportsNet Bay Area. Also Wednesday, the documentary will screen at 7:30 p.m. as part of a fundraiser at the Castro Theatre, with doors opening at 6:30 p.m. At 9:15 p.m., a live town-hall meeting at the Castro will be telecast on CSNBA.

Burke made little secret of his sexuality during his time with the Dodgers and A's in the late 1970s. Several former teammates contend this bothered management of both clubs, to the point where the Dodgers traded Burke to Oakland and then-A's manager Billy Martin later ridiculed him in front of his teammates.

He abruptly retired from baseball in 1980, publicly revealed his homosexuality two years later and landed in San Francisco's Castro district, where he initially was welcomed warmly. But his life there eventually spun out of control, sending him spiraling toward drug use, prison time and AIDS.

He died of complications from the disease in May 1995, at age 42.

Doug Harris, an independent Bay Area filmmaker, co-produced the documentary with Sean Maddison of Comcast. Harris brought a unique perspective to the project: He grew up in Berkeley, as Burke did, and befriended him during summertime pickup basketball games at Cal's Harmon Gym in the 1970s.

Harris sat down with The Chronicle on Friday to talk about Burke and the documentary.

Q: What do you remember about the first time you met Glenn?

A: The first time I saw him was at Harmon, and Glenn was on the side waiting for winners. He took the ball, triple-pumped and slammed it backward - and he wasn't that tall. I was like, "Oh, my God!" I'd never seen anyone do something like that. Then when I started watching him play, he was the best, hands down.

Q: One thing highlighted in the documentary is his outsize personality - how evident was that during those games at Harmon?

A: Glenn had a dominant personality, but it was so much fun watching him play basketball. We called the trash talk "hoo-rah," and the hoo-rah on the court made you smile. There was nothing about him that made you sullen or mad. Shooty (Babitt) said it best in the film: Glenn was the kind of guy who would beat you up on the court, then take you out to get a soda or chips. He motivated and inspired a group of athletes who came along behind him at Berkeley High. He was like an icon in Berkeley, for all of us.

Q: As Glenn moved along through professional baseball, how aware were you of his lifestyle and the difficulty it caused him in that world?

A: I didn't find out Glenn was gay until I read about it in Inside Sports magazine, and by that time (1982) I was a senior in college at Central Washington. I remember catching hell from a lot of my classmates and teammates. They were ragging on me - "You're from Berkeley, too; you must be gay," all that kind of stuff. It was really a trip.

Q: Did these people know you were friends with him?

A: No, they didn't know. They may have heard me talking about the great players from Berkeley, and it turns out all of a sudden one of them is gay.

Q: Why do you think Dusty Baker, Reggie Smith and others interviewed in the film were so candid about Glenn's lifestyle and how it impacted his career?

A: They loved Glenn. But the thing about those guys is, they're still working in baseball.

Q: So they were still trying to be careful about what they said?

A: The people who didn't agree to interviews were the ones trying to toe the line, like Don Sutton. We had two opportunities to talk to him and he declined - and he was a teammate of Glenn's and supposedly they were real tight.

Q: You talked about being hassled just because you were from the same place as Glenn. Before making this documentary, what was your sense of what his life was like in baseball? And how did your view change in the wake of talking to all these people about him?

A: I never really gave it much thought at the time, because I wasn't in baseball's inner circles. But after doing this film, I think Glenn could have been a much better player if he didn't have the stress, this weight on his chest of constantly dealing with who he was. ... The players talk about it in the film. He wouldn't go with them after games; he would always disappear and do his own thing. But he never hid who he was in the clubhouse. Everybody knew this guy was gay. He wasn't sugarcoating anything.

Q: What was the most compelling example for you of the challenges he faced?

A: To me, the heaviest part of the film didn't even deal with baseball. It was probably the part where Glenn is here in San Francisco, and he's in a car accident. He was an icon in the gay community, and once he has this car accident - and he can't run, jump and dunk a basketball anymore - then he's not an icon anymore. ... Once he got hit by that car and he couldn't perform, they kind of shoved him to the side. To me, that spiraled into his heavy drug use and his crash and burn. So that's the part that really grabbed my heart. People have to realize the gay community turned on him just as much as baseball did, if you really look at it.

Q: The macho culture of professional sports does not exactly encourage a gay athlete to "come out," even in 2010. Could a pro athlete today acknowledge his homosexuality publicly, as an active player?

A: This is just my opinion: What Glenn went through could not happen today. Why? Because of gay rights and powerful attorneys. So if you're a player and you choose to be openly gay - but not necessarily come out, like if you were in Glenn's situation today - you could argue discrimination. Can you imagine a lawsuit against a professional sports team, if they did anything today like what they did to Glenn Burke?

Q: In a practical sense, though, would any player take that risk?

A: I think there are a lot of gay players in pro sports today. They're gay, but they're in the closet. The question is: Would somebody ever come out? We asked everyone we interviewed, and they were all pretty much in line in saying it would have to be a megastar, a superstar player who would be extraordinarily valuable to the team. Glenn was only a few years into his career and he was working his way up. So would it have been different if he was hitting .315 with 25 home runs? Would the Dodgers have gone along with it then? Maybe.

How to see it

What: "Out. The Glenn Burke Story"

On TV: Wednesday and next Tuesday, 8 p.m., **CSNBA**

Special event: Wednesday, 6:30 p.m. Castro Theatre. Screening, fundraiser, town-hall meeting.

Inbox: Which sluggers might the A's pursue?

Oakland beat reporter Jane Lee fields fans' queries

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

A handful of big names, particularly those who are owners of power, have already made circles around the rumor mill in relation to the A's. Many of those same names, along with others, have found their way to my Inbox thanks to your questions. Here's my take on a handful of them, along with other offseason queries.

With several contracts coming off the books, what are your thoughts about the possibility of the A's going after Adam Dunn for the big bat? I know he strikes out a bunch, but I would much rather have him than Jack Cust. Do you think he would consider Oakland?
-- **Chris C., Terra Linda, Calif.**

I don't think Oakland would be Dunn's first choice, but that doesn't mean he won't consider it. The team likely to get that top spot will be the one willing to let him play the field. Dunn has stated publicly that he'd rather see time at first base than in the designated-hitter slot. He has experience in both outfield corners, however, so the A's could be enticing if given the chance in either left or right field. Still, he's sure to have plenty of other suitors who could make good use of him at first base, including the Orioles and Cubs.

Much like Cust, Dunn does strike out a lot -- his 199 whiffs this year were only outnumbered in the Majors by Mark Reynolds -- but he does have that 30-plus home run tag of which the A's are in dire need. In fact, his career numbers have him averaging 40 long balls a season, not to mention RBI totals hanging around the 100 mark. This guy drives in runs, period, and I think the A's recognize that. Whether Dunn will seriously recognize them, though, is another matter. He's expected to land one of the bigger deals of the offseason.

What do you think of the chances of the A's signing Hideki Matsui? He could pose as a threat who still has some much-needed pop in his bat. Use him primarily in the DH slot, which would work best for him at this stage in his career.
-- **W. Tanaka, San Bruno, Calif.**

There's no doubt Matsui will strictly be limited to DH duty. That being said, if the A's choose to let go of Cust as they're expected to do, I believe Matsui could be a strong option as a secondary power bat to aid the middle of the lineup. It's

widely assumed that this club needs more than one added lineup threat to stay within contention, and Matsui could nicely complement whomever else the A's choose to bring into the fold. He's nearing the end of his career, but you're absolutely right in saying he could represent a true threat, likely in the lower middle of the lineup. If healthy, he can give you 20 homers and 80-plus RBIs.

Furthermore, Matsui may be one of the few free agents who actually has interest in Oakland, especially if fellow Japanese native Hisoshi Iwakuma comes to terms on a contract with the club in the next month. Either, or both, would lend the A's a new dimension, one that has potential to expand the fan base. Nevertheless, I think Matsui is a viable option for the low-budget A's, and he isn't expected to bring out as many bidders as the likes of Dunn and Jayson Werth.

Is Matt Kemp on the A's radar? He's young, right-handed, has some pop and is a guy that has been rumored to be acquirable. Any chance we see him in the green and gold next year?

-- Erik R., Jackson, N.J.

I like where your head's at, Erik. Kemp may be slow to agree because of his well-known love for Los Angeles, but he could play a large role in what could ultimately be a very sensible trade between the A's and Dodgers. The former needs hitting. The latter needs young pitching. Sounds like an easy swap to me.

Kemp's average was way down last year, but I see him facing an upward trend in 2011 and posting a .280 average with 27 homers and 90 RBIs. Aside from the first number, not one A's player reached the second two figures in 2011. So you trade for Kemp and acquire your other bat via free agency, and the A's will be able to keep their checkbook intact.

And Rihanna gets to throw out the first pitch on Opening Day.

I think that Lance Berkman would be a great addition to the A's lineup. He has good power and has the potential for a high batting average and RBI numbers. He is a true No. 3 hitter and brings a solid veteran presence. What do you think of this possible addition?

-- Steele W., Auburn, Calif.

You make a good case, but I'm not completely sold on Berkman in green and gold. Without a doubt, his veteran stature would be great for the clubhouse, but unfortunately, I picture his numbers fizzing. That seems to be a veteran trend in Oakland, where Berkman might do nothing more than create flashbacks of Frank Thomas, Jason Giambi and Nomar Garciaparra's latter days. He'll get plenty of other suitors, though.

I don't see Chris Carter anywhere on the Venezuelan League Web site. Is he playing there or did he go somewhere else?

-- Ken S., Oneida, N.Y.

Carter is still planning to play winter ball in Venezuela, but not before he finishes physical therapy on his left thumb. The A's want to make sure he's 100 percent healthy before going down there, and you can't blame them given both Carter's potential and their history with injuries. It's the same thumb that kept Carter off the field for weeks while still with Triple-A Sacramento and then later bothered him during the last weeks of the season with the A's. Not many people know the extent of pain with which Carter was playing in those final days -- he often rated the pain a 5 or 6 on a 1-10 scale -- but wasn't about to let it get in the way of making a lasting impression. Luckily, he was able to do just that.

Do you think the Giants' success this year will have a significant impact on the A's when it comes to attendance? I can't stand the Giants, especially since their ownership's No. 1 agenda is to drive the A's out of the area.

-- Ashraf C., San Jose, Calif.

Based on the latter comment, it seems like you're probably a worried about more than attendance, but that's all I'm going to touch upon for now. I truly don't believe the A's attendance will be affected by what the Bay Area-rival Giants accomplished. The oomph that comes from the stands will still come from the same dedicated A's fans who make it out every year. There may not be a lot of them, but those who are present really do care, and I know the players appreciate them.

Of course, there are going to be some bandwagon fans who changed colors (and not because of Halloween), but that's to be expected. You also have to remember the A's and Giants only play at home at the same time for one or two weekends out of the season, so the best of both the American League and National League worlds can easily be seen.

A's win bidding for Japan's Iwakuma

Oakland has 30 days to negotiate a pact with 29-year-old

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- An already wealthy A's pitching staff may be getting even richer.

The club won negotiating rights to right-handed Japanese pitcher Hisashi Iwakuma on Monday and now has 30 days to come to terms with him on a contract.

"The Oakland A's are excited to have had our bid for Hisashi Iwakuma accepted by the Rakuten Golden Eagles," the team said in a statement. "Out of respect for the posting process and for Mr. Iwakuma and his representative, we will not have any comment until the 30-day negotiation period comes to an end."

The A's were said to be one of three teams, alongside American League West rivals Texas and Seattle, who submitted bids for Iwakuma to the Golden Eagles of Japan's Pacific League last week. The Golden Eagles were expected to make more than \$16 million on the posting, though Oakland's exact bid was unknown.

If signed to a contract, the 29-year-old Iwakuma would join an A's pitching staff that already boasts Trevor Cahill, Brett Anderson, Gio Gonzalez and Dallas Braden -- a group deemed by some to be among the best young rotations in the American League.

The thinking in Oakland is that, with an added bat or two this winter, the A's could be serious contenders in 2011. By landing Iwakuma, Oakland would essentially receive extra trade bait, as the Japanese pitcher -- along with righty Vin Mazzaro -- could be used to get that needed lineup power.

Iwakuma posted a 10-9 record and 2.82 ERA and averaged 6.9 strikeouts and 1.6 walks per nine innings this season. He has compiled an ERA of 3.40 or lower in each of the past four seasons.

He had 21 wins and a 1.87 ERA in 28 starts in 2008. A 10-year veteran, he pitched for Japan in the World Baseball Classic in 2009, earning a spot on the All-Tournament Team while helping his homeland to the title. He was the starting pitcher for Japan in the Classic's decisive victory over Korea.

Oakland A's Coaching Staff Q&A: Garvin Alston

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Nov 9, 2010

The Oakland A's pitching contingent at the Arizona Fall League have a familiar face on the Phoenix Desert Dogs' coaching staff, as A's rehab pitching coordinator Garvin Alston is the Desert Dogs' pitching coach. We spoke with Alston last Friday about the A's AFL pitchers, why the team had a forfeit one of their games in the 7th inning, his role as the rehab coordinator and more...

OaklandClubhouse: I heard that Carlos Hernandez had to go home early from the Arizona Fall League because of injury, but can you tell me about the other A's pitchers on your staff right now?

Garvin Alston: Actually, Carlos didn't have to go home. He's still here and he's actually going to be activated on Wednesday [November 10]. He was just a little tired more than anything else. He wasn't injured or anything like that. He was just tired. We didn't want to risk him possibly getting hurt or jeopardize him for the future. We just gave him some down time and we brought in Lance Sewell to replace him for that time.

OC: Let's start with Travis Banwart, since he's been the starting pitcher of the group. How has he looked thus far?

GA: I've seen so far Travis making a huge improvement from the beginning. He's leading the league presently with four wins, but his other numbers didn't play up. He was getting hit a little bit because the hitters were seeing the ball extremely well, so we made small improvements with his hands so that he could create some deception so that the hitters wouldn't be able to pick the ball up as soon. It worked out in his last game [October 30; 5 IP, 1 ER, 2 H, 5 K, 0 BB] and he's actually pitching tonight [last Friday, November 5; he wound up allowing 1 unearned run on 5 H and 3 BB with 4 K in 4.1 IP] so we will see if he can carry those improvements through.

Overall with Travis, I'm seeing a lot of improvements over the first time I saw him in Stockton three years ago. He has better command of his pitches, good action on his fastball and he's been sitting 90-91 every game that he has been out

there with a plus change-up. I'm excited to see him grow and he has been getting better and better every time out.

OC: I know that Justin James was claimed by Milwaukee. What happens to players who move organizations during the AFL? Do they have to leave the league or do they continue on and represent their new clubs?

GA: That's a great question. [laughs] I'll tell you exactly what I was told. I was told that he is going to stay in the league, but they are not sure if he is going to stay on our team or if he is going to go to the Surprise team, but presently, as of [last Thursday], he was still with us. He doesn't have a Brewers uniform yet, so he can't pitch for us. It has just been a little bit of a mess with him knowing that we might need him tonight. Hopefully, his jersey will show up and he will be able to pitch one way or another [James did wind-up pitching for Phoenix on November 5 and is still on the roster].

OC: I know you had a game where you guys actually ran out of healthy arms who were available to pitch and had to end the game early. Have you ever had a situation like that in all of your years of baseball?

GA: No, not at all. Don Mattingly [the Phoenix manager] said it best, it was the perfect storm. The situation was related to injuries. We had two starting pitchers who broke down [physically] one start prior to. To fill their innings, we had to use the bullpen. To use the bullpen, every pitcher in the bullpen is restricted to x-amount of innings and x-amount of pitches. Well, we have a total of 15 guys in our bullpen and two of them were also hurt, so we really had 13. And now we have to use four-to-five bullpen guys on an every other day basis because two of our starters went down. And that was the situation.

What happened is that Manny Banuelos was our starter and he was slated to go five. Unfortunately, he only made it through three with a high pitch count, so that put an extra stress on the bullpen, which we had five guys available. Once we got to that seventh inning, they just started hitting the ball, the ball started finding holes, and we actually used three pitchers in that inning and that depleted our available pitchers. There was nothing else we could do about it.

OC: At that point, it was something like 15-1. It's probably one of those things that you wish you could do in the regular season. [laughs]

GA: Exactly. I agree with you 100 percent. Here's the thing that many people probably don't know. We could have finished that game, but that would have put us in jeopardy for finishing the next game, which was the next day. We were trying to plan ahead knowing that this game was basically a done deal, being down 15-1, and why would we risk using a pitcher for an inning or inning and a half when we will probably need him the next day. Donnie made a great decision and he said, 'you know what? Let's be smart about this. We aren't going to jeopardize any organization's pitchers.' I said, 'you're right Donnie. Let's do it.'

We spoke with the league and, of course, they weren't pleased with it, but that was the best way to deal with that situation.

OC: Is it a hard balance knowing when to push and when to pull back with pitchers who are basically throwing 'overtime' and are often with other organizations?

GA: Absolutely, that's the thing that we have to be most careful of. Most of these guys now are starting their off-season programs in terms of working out and their bodies are starting to break down a little bit. Unfortunately, for some of the kids who are here, this is the first time they have played a full season. In talking to some of our pitchers, for some of them, it is the first time that they have gone to big league camp, so they started their seasons in February and now they are going into November. That's a long season for anyone, never mind a pitcher who is in his third or even second year, who is coming out here trying to give everything they've got to show everything they've got against very good hitters in this league.

It is a difficult task [for the pitchers]. We all know that it is an offensive-driven league and it is very few and far between that you get pitchers out here who absolutely dominate. The one name that comes to mind is Tommy Hansen when he was here a few years ago. But you find that rarely. For me, it is all about making sure that the health of the player comes first and then everything else follows behind that.

OC: Turning back to the A's guys on your staff, Michael Benacka has a lot of strike-outs and a lot of walks so far [10 K and 9 BB in 7 IP]. That has sort of been his M.O. in his career. What have you been working on with him?

GA: With Mike, we are just working on streamlining his line to the plate. He throws a little bit across his body and we are just trying to get that worked out so he is not pulling and pushing the ball as often as he did this season. He also, from time-to-time, his arm lagged behind a little bit. It's a Catch-22 with him a little bit because that [the arm lagging behind] is what makes his change-up really good. His arm lags behind and guys can't pick it up as well. But when he throws his fastball, he's late and the ball is up in the 'zone and it is arm-side wide. Those are the two things that we are trying to work on. Overall, we are trying to get him through this season. He's never really played this long. His body is a little tired and his arm is just a click slower, so we are just working on basically streamlining his delivery, keeping his hands in perfect order and making sure his timing and rhythm are good.

OC: Lance Sewell got into a few games when he was filling in for Carlos and he pitched in Instructs before that. Had you had a chance to see him in Instructs? Did any of those improvements carry-over into this season?

GA: I did. With Lance, one thing he wanted to work on was coming up with a better secondary pitch. We all know that he has that split-finger, which is pretty devastating, but when you go up in levels, hitters will lay off that pitch until they get to two-strikes. He's trying to find that pitch that he can throw behind in the count or that can get him to that two-strike split-finger, which has been the change-up or even a slower curveball. He has thrown the change-up a few times [in the AFL] and it has worked out pretty well.

For me, his issue is just getting ahead in counts. Once he gets ahead in counts, he's actually very, very good. That's been our main focus. Get ahead in the counts. You don't have to throw the ball over the middle. Work the corners. When you are going lefty-on-lefty, you know that they are going to swing at the first pitch, so make sure that you have good location. [As of Friday morning], he's held his own. He's only had one situation where he gave up a 3-2 homerun to, I believe, [Leslie] Anderson of the Rays. It was on an outside pitch that was down. So, to me, he has held his own. It was a tough situation for him because he was only down for a few days [after Instructs] and he had to get rebooted again, but he's doing a wonderful job.

OC: Turing to your regular season position, now that you have done that for a few years, what do you see the rehab program being like and do you enjoy that position?

GA: I love the rehab pitching coordinator position. It's eye-opening. I listen more to the medical-side, understanding how the body works and how everything is kinetically linked. It's actually helped me on the pitching-side. The pitching philosophies that I had before, it's validated that those thoughts were right. I've learned pitching things that I never knew before and it's helped to bring everything all together.

As far as being on the field and missing that aspect of it, of course you do. You always want your own team and your own pitching staff to create the relationships and everything else. But I love my position and without a doubt I am looking forward to the possibilities of moving up and doing things. Hopefully when my time is right, and when Keith Lieppman and David Forst and those guys think that the time is right for me to go somewhere, I'll be rolling and ready to go.

Right now, I'm happy. I enjoy working with the major league guys and also being able to touch the minor league guys down here in Arizona and work with them along with Ariel Prieto [the A's Rookie League pitching coach]. It's been a very good situation. A lot of long hours. A lot of time being put in. I was talking to my wife a few days ago. I started [coaching] on January 6 and I am still going. I don't know too many guys who can stake that claim right there. [laughs] It has been a long year and I am looking forward to the end, but I can't wait for it to start up again.

OC: When you start in January, will you be working with guys coming off of rehabs who are getting ready for spring training or guys who are still in the middle of rehabbing injuries?

GA: It's both. It's a combination of both. Myself and Jeff Collins, and Jeff takes the lead on the guys who are in the rehab portion of their recovery. We write the programs together and stay in contact with those players to make sure that the program is going through. When January 6th comes, they are more than welcome to come out and actually do the program with me to get a jump-start on things so that when the season starts, they are ready to rock-and-roll.

And then we have the guys who are extremely ambitious. The young kids who are in their first year or second year who want to come out and get into a little bit better weather and get going on their throwing program. We set that up and Ron Romanick [former A's bullpen coach and current A's pitching coach] and when Curt Young [former A's pitching coach] was here, they came out and just watched the guys. It's not a situation of doing anything with them. It's just being there and just watching them go through the program. For myself, I put my work in and have the programs ready and they get their throwing programs and just go about their business in that fashion.

Oakland A's 2010 Minor League Free Agents

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Nov 8, 2010

The free agency period is officially open. The Oakland A's have 24 minor league players who have been granted free agency. We take a look at those players inside...

While the big names hitting baseball's free agency market are major league free agents, minor leaguers with at least six years of service time are also free to sign with any team. Twenty-four of the Oakland A's minor league players are now free

agents. We take a look at those players below:

Archie Gilbert: Gilbert was originally signed by the A's as a minor league free agent before the 2008 season. Since then, he has been a free agent each off-season and has returned to the organization each time. The East Bay native has earned two league titles (2008 with Stockton and 2009 with Midland) during his three years in the A's chain and has stolen at least 28 bases each season. In 2010, Gilbert hit .247 with a career-high 11 homeruns in his second season with Midland. In six minor league seasons, Gilbert has a .364 OBP and a 764 OPS.

Ryan Edell: Edell was acquired by the A's from the Cleveland organization in May and he spent the rest of the season with Double-A Midland, where he was arguably the Rockhounds' top starter. In 125 innings for Midland, the lefty had a 3.17 ERA and a 10-4 record. He should have no trouble finding a team for 2011.

Tom Everidge: The longtime A's farmhand was claimed off of waivers from the A's by the Seattle Mariners before the 2010 season. Everidge would spent half of the '10 season in the Mariners chain before being traded to the Houston Astros. After being released by Houston in July, Everidge was out of affiliated baseball until the final week of the regular season, when the A's brought him back to bolster the Triple-A Sacramento line-up. Everidge hit only .249 with 13 homers in 2010, but he hit .335 with 20 homers in 107 minor league games in 2009 and has some major league experience, so he should find a home in 2011.

J.C. Holt: Like Edell, Holt was acquired by the A's mid-season when injuries thinned Oakland's minor league ranks. The former Atlanta Braves farmhand appeared in 51 games for the Midland Rockhounds in 2010, batting .229 with a 549 OPS. Holt fared much better in 2009, when he hit .282 with Triple-A Gwinnett. Holt was a third-round pick of the Braves in 2004 out of LSU.

Kristian Bell: Bell was one of two pitchers acquired by the A's in the deal with the Toronto Blue Jays for Marco Scutaro before the 2008 season. While the other pitcher in the deal – Graham Godfrey – has experienced success since that trade, Bell never got on track in his three seasons in the Oakland organization. In 2008, he had a 8.85 ERA in 20.1 innings for High-A Stockton and Double-A Midland and in 2009, he had a 7.53 mark for the same two teams in 34.2 innings. Bell missed the entire 2010 season with injury. He was a fourth-round pick of the Blue Jays in 2004.

Josue Selenes: Selenes, a native of the Dominican Republic, also missed the entire 2010 season with injury. The right-hander was acquired by the A's before the 2009 season in the minor league Rule 5 draft from the New York Yankees. He pitched the entire 2009 season with the Low-A Kane County Cougars, for whom he had a 3.34 ERA in 56.2 innings. The 25 year old has never pitched above the High-A level.

Marcos Luis: Luis, an infielder, has been part of the A's organization since January 2004, when he signed as an international free agent. The Dominican never advanced past the short-season A level with the A's. In 2010, he appeared in 15 games with the short-season Vancouver Canadians, batting .205 in 39 at-bats. He hit .280 in 93 at-bats for Vancouver in 2009. His best season came in 2007 when he hit .298 with a 755 OPS for the A's Rookie League team in Arizona.

Gabriel Ortiz: Ortiz, like Luis, has spent his entire professional career in the A's chain. The native of the Dominican Republic spent the entire 2010 season with Double-A Midland, serving as a back-up catcher. In 115 at-bats, he hit .226 with a homer and a 567 OPS. Ortiz played at three levels (short-season A, High-A and Double-A) in 2009, when he hit .261 with a 643 OPS in 165 at-bats. The backstop is 25 years old.

Adam Heether: Heether spent a portion of the 2010 season on the A's 40-man roster after he was claimed off of waivers by the A's from the Milwaukee Brewers organization in June. He was later designated for assignment by the A's and remained in the organization as a non-roster player. Heether spent the entire season at the Triple-A level, hitting a combined .237 with 10 homers and a 737 OPS in 329 at-bats for Sacramento and Nashville. The third-baseman/outfielder missed the final three weeks of the regular season with injury. He had a big season in the Milwaukee chain in 2009, batting .296 with 18 homers and a 902 OPS.

Brandon Pinckney: The native of Sacramento was another mid-season acquisition by the A's. Pinckney joined the High-A Stockton Ports in June, but the infielder appeared in only 24 games over the final three months of the season. He hit well when given the opportunity, batting .320 with an 864 OPS in 75 at-bats. Pinckney was the Indians 12th round pick in 2003, but he has jumped around since 2009, playing for the Baltimore and Philadelphia chains before landing with the A's.

Fernando Hernandez: Hernandez was one of the A's minor league free agent signings before the 2010 season. The reliever was a workhorse for Triple-A Sacramento, pitching 77.1 innings. He had a disappointing 4.77 ERA, but he pitched very well at times for the River Cats and should garner interest on the free agent market. He had a 1.68 ERA in 69.2 innings in the White Sox chain in 2009. Hernandez was a Rule 5 pick of the A's in 2008 and made his major league debut with Oakland that April, but was returned to the White Sox early that season. The 26-year-old is currently pitching in the Venezuelan Winter League.

Alexander Valdez: Valdez, an international free agent signing by the A's in 2003, has been a solid prospect for the A's for several years now, but has never broken through thanks to an undisciplined approach at the plate. Still, there is a lot to like about the switch-hitting infielder, who batted .262 with 13 homers and 74 RBIs for Double-A Midland in 2010. Valdez can hit for power, has decent speed and can play the middle infield spots as well as third base. He was a minor league free agent last off-season but chose to re-sign with the A's. He should receive a lot of interest on the free agent market this year. Valdez is currently playing in the Dominican Winter League, where he is the reigning Rookie of the Year.

Jose Pina: Pina was signed by the A's as a minor league free agent last off-season and he spent the 2010 season split between Low-A Kane County and High-A Stockton. In 70.1 relief innings, he had a 5.76 ERA with 74 strike-outs. Before signing with the A's last season, Pina had spent his entire career in the Chicago Cubs' chain.

Val Majewski: Majewski was once a top prospect in the Baltimore Orioles chain and he has spent the past few seasons working his way into affiliated baseball by starting the season in independent ball. The A's signed him out of the independent leagues in May and he spent the rest of the season with Double-A Midland. The outfielder had a .262 average with nine homers and a .752 OPS in 302 at-bats for the Rockhounds. Majewski was a third-round pick of the O's in 2002.

Marcus McBeth: McBeth was a minor league free agent signing of the A's last off-season after spending the 2009 and part of the 2008 season in the Boston Red Sox chain. McBeth struggled with injuries throughout the 2010 season and he appeared in only 14 games for Triple-A Sacramento, posting a 6.46 ERA in 15.1 innings. McBeth was originally a fourth-round pick of the A's in 2001 as an outfielder. He converted to pitching in 2005 and was in the major leagues by 2007, when he debuted with the Cincinnati Reds (he was traded by the A's to the Reds in the Chris Denorfia deal).

Lenny DiNardo: Like Hernandez and McBeth, DiNardo signed with the A's as a minor league free agent before the 2010 season having had a history with the Oakland organization. DiNardo spent much of the 2007 and 2008 seasons on the A's major league staff and he also spent time in 2008 with Triple-A Sacramento. DiNardo spent most of the 2010 season with Sacramento, for whom he pitched well (3.40 ERA in 47.2 innings) in a starting role. The left-hander missed a significant portion of the season with an arm injury, however, although he did return at the end of the season. If healthy, he should have no trouble finding an organization to sign with.

Dallas McPherson: Not too long ago, McPherson was one of the brightest prospects in baseball and was considered the long-term solution for the Angels at third base. A bad back derailed McPherson's path to stardom, however, and he has moved from organization to organization the past few seasons. In 2010, he battled leg injuries, but appeared in 84 games for Triple-A Sacramento, hitting 22 homers and posting an .880 OPS. He had 42 homers in 127 games for Triple-A Albuquerque in 2008, but missed the entire 2009 season with injury. Like DiNardo, McPherson will have no trouble finding suitors if he is healthy.

Edwar Ramirez: After spending the 2007-2009 seasons on the Yankees' 40-man roster, Ramirez was released by New York during spring training, only to be claimed by the Texas Rangers, released again and claimed by the A's. The right-handed reliever made seven appearances for the A's at the major league level, allowing six runs in 11 innings before he was designated for assignment by Oakland. He cleared waivers this time around and stayed in the A's chain for the remainder of the season. Pitching for Triple-A Sacramento, Ramirez had a 3.62 ERA in 49.2 innings. He has struggled with his command at the major league level the past two seasons, but given his overall major league experience, Ramirez should be a popular commodity during the free agency period.

Matt Wright: Wright was signed as a minor league free agent by the A's last off-season and was invited to big league camp. After being re-assigned to minor league camp, Wright asked for his release to pursue an opportunity in the Korean professional league. An injury cost Wright his opportunity to play in Korea and he returned to the A's in June. He spent the rest of the season with Double-A Midland and pitched well for the Rockhounds, going 7-3 with a 3.20 ERA in 78.2 innings. Wright was the Atlanta Braves' 21st-round pick in 2000 and has a lot of Triple-A experience.

Jared Price: When the A's lost Josh Donaldson and Anthony Recker to injuries in August, the team acquired Price from the Chicago White Sox to give Triple-A Sacramento some depth behind the plate. He appeared in 20 games for the River Cats, hitting .167 with two homers in 54 at-bats. He also had one appearance for Double-A Midland, collecting a hit in four at-bats. Originally a seventh-round pick of the Dodgers in 2000, Price spent three years in the White Sox chain after signing as a minor league free agent before the 2008 campaign.

Kyle Middleton: Over the past few years, the A's have been one of the most active teams in terms of scouting and signing players out of the independent leagues. One of those signings was Middleton, who joined the A's from the independent leagues in 2009. He starred for Midland in 2009, posting a 2.69 ERA in nine starts and re-signed with the A's during the off-season. Middleton spent the entire 2010 season with Triple-A Sacramento and pitched well, posting a 3.77 ERA in 102.2 innings. Unfortunately, he developed right shoulder soreness in early August and missed the rest of the season. His health will likely dictate whether he finds a job on the open market.

Matt Watson: Watson's return to the A's organization in 2010 was one of the most intriguing stories of the season. A member of the A's system from 2004-2006, Watson was signed by the A's out of the independent leagues in late May when

injuries cut into Oakland's outfield depth. He played so well with Triple-A Sacramento that he was called up to Oakland and appeared in 12 games for the A's, collecting his first major league homerun along the way. Unfortunately, a bout with kidney stones landed Watson on the DL and he was designated for assignment when he was activated from the disabled list. He remained with the River Cats after clearing waivers and wound-up hitting .288 with nine homers in 37 games for Sacramento. Watson had considered coaching before getting his opportunity with Oakland, so he may decide to go that route this off-season. If not, he should find a landing place with a team looking for a veteran presence and outfield depth at Triple-A.

Jason Jennings: The former National League Rookie of the Year signed with the A's as a minor league free agent just before spring training and he was expected to compete for a big league bullpen spot. That never materialized. Jennings has had numerous elbow problems throughout his career and he was limited to only 22 innings between the A's Rookie League team and Triple-A Sacramento. Jennings allowed nine runs in 13 innings for the River Cats. His health will always been an issue, but given Jennings' major league track record, he figures to get plenty of interest this off-season.

Brett Tomko: Tomko was signed as a minor league free agent by the A's during the 2009 season and he worked his way onto the A's major league roster before season's end. He pitched well for Oakland, posting a 3.77 ERA in 57.1 innings. However, he developed a nerve problem in his pitching elbow at the end of the 2009 season. He re-signed with Oakland for the 2010 campaign and rehabbed for the first part of the year, joining the Rookie League A's mid-season. He would make 14 starts for the AZL A's, the High-A Stockton Ports and the Triple-A Sacramento River Cats. He was mostly ineffective, posting a 7.18 ERA in 62.2 innings. He struck-out 50 and walked only 16, but he gave-up 17 homers. Tomko will turn 38 in April of next season.

Monday's Arizona Fall League roundup

Mariners' Tenbrink comes up big as Javelinas cruise to victory

By / MLB.com

Javelinas 16, Desert Dogs 8

Mariners prospect Nate Tenbrink homered, doubled twice and drove in three runs to pace first-place Peoria. Tenbrink also scored four times, while fellow Mariners farmhand Dustin Ackley hit a three-run blast to raise his average to .429. Brandon Barnes (Astros) and Ryan Lavarney (Red Sox) also went yard for the Javelinas. Red Sox Minor Leaguer Eammon Portice improved to 3-1 after allowing a run on one hit over three innings.

Rafters 6, Saguaros 5

Salvador Perez (Royals) slugged a three-run homer and added an RBI double for Surprise. Fellow Royals prospects Eric Hosmer and Johnny Giavotella each drove in a run, while Derrick Robinson (Royals) was 3-for-4 with two runs scored. Kris Negrón (Reds) went yard and fellow Reds farmhand Devin Mesoraco drove in a pair of runs for Peoria. Patrick Keating (Royals) pitched a perfect inning out of the bullpen for the win.

Scorpions 8, Solar Sox 3

Rockies prospect Jordan Pacheco raised his batting average to .413 with a 3-for-3 performance for Scottsdale. Pacheco also doubled twice and drove in three runs, while Brandon Belt (Giants) plated two. Fellow Giants farmhand Conor Gillaspie went deep for the first-place Scorpions. Angels third baseman Brandon Wood slugged a three-run homer for Mesa. Rockies farmhand Greg Reynolds earned the win with five shutout innings.

Friday's Arizona Fall League roundup

Mariners prospect Ackley continues to hit, flashes speed

By MLB.com 11/6/2010

Javelinas 13, Saguaros 5

Mariners prospect Dustin Ackley went 3-for-5 with his second AFL steal, three RBIs and three runs scored as the Javelinas won the latest Battle of Peoria. Juan Carlos Linares (Red Sox) enjoyed his best day of the fall for the Javs, plating four runs - two on a triple during a six-run second inning. Rays Minor Leaguer Henry Wrigley slugged a grand slam in the ninth for the Saguaros.

Scorpions 10, Desert Dogs 0

Southern League All-Star Josh Collmenter (D-backs) allowed two hits while striking out eight over five scoreless innings as Scottsdale improved to a league-best 14-8. Rockies prospect Charlie Blackmon had two hits, walked twice, drove in three runs and scored three times for the Scorpions, while Charlie Culberson (Giants) had his average dip to .417 after going 2-for-6. No. 1 overall pick Bryce Harper (Nationals) was 1-for-4 with a walk and two strikeouts for Scottsdale.

Solar Sox 13, Rafters 5

Mets prospect Josh Satin went 3-for-5 with a homer and five RBIs to help Mesa hand Surprise its their third straight loss. Pirates Minor Leaguer Josh Harrison doubled, singled twice, walked and scored twice and Brandon Wood (Angels) was 3-for-5 with an RBI double in the rout. Eric Farris (Brewers) had two hits and drove in two runs for the Rafters.