

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

Drumbeat: Iwakuma info from Japan; pursuit almost officially over

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser 11/22/2010 12:10AM

Update: I've received more detailed information from Japan since posting this, so will note that where necessary.

I just got a call from Japan at midnight California time, and a source with knowledge of the A's talks with Japanese pitcher Hisashi Iwakuma told me that it is more than likely that Iwakuma's Pacific League team, Rakuten, will announce his return to the Golden Eagles today.

Talks with the A's? "Ended," the source said. "I think so. I don't even know why they bid on the posting."

New information: I'm told that the posting fee was \$18 million, a bit higher than the \$16 million that had been estimated in the U.S. That info came from Japan, not from a major-league source.

According to the source in Japan, the A's were offering \$3.8 million per year, a figure that did not include the posting fee; that's right in line with the \$3-5 million per year average the Chronicle reported on Sunday. The A's, the source said, wanted to use Texas pitcher Colby Lewis, who pitched in Japan before returning to become a top-notch starter with the Rangers, as a comparison; Lewis will make \$3 million next season. Kei Igawa's five-year, \$20 million deal with the Yankees was also mentioned.

"They basically said take it or leave it," the Japanese source said of the A's. "They didn't move an inch."

Major-league and industry sources told The Chronicle that the Iwakuma camp was using Barry Zito's \$18 million per year figure as a starting point, but the Japanese source said that was not so, saying that Iwakuma "wasn't seeking Barry Zito or Daisuke Matsuzaka money." The source did not provide a specific figure that Iwakuma was looking for, saying it never even got that far, adding that the good thing is that Iwakuma will be a full-fledged free agent this time next year.

*New information: Matsuzaka and Zito in fact **were** mentioned by Iwakuma's camp. The Iwakuma side suggested that with the posting fee thrown in, Matsuzaka's compensation was \$17.2 million per year - not far off of Zito's \$18 million. Taking that into consideration, the argument was that because Matsuzaka's total deal was comparable to the top contract for a U.S. pitcher, that a top U.S. pitcher should be used as a comparison now for Iwakuma; Jason Schmidt, say, who earns \$15.7 million per year. With the posting fee factored into that, as Matsuzaka's was, that would be \$11.2 million/year in salary for Iwakuma over the course of a four-year deal.*

So it does sound very much as if talks have broken down for good, and the A's will get their estimated \$16 million (update: \$18 million) posting fee back. If, as expected, Iwakuma's team announces his return to Rakuten today, there will be some interesting questions to answer:

***Could this all be some sort of bargaining ploy?*

That seems pretty unlikely. We'll know as soon as there's an official announcement, and that could be by the time you're reading this on Monday morning. If it is a ploy, it's fooled me. I've been convinced in talking to sources both here and in Japan that these talks are over. There was a halt in the Matsuzaka talks, but I don't recall it getting to this point.

***Did the A's intend to sign Iwakuma? Or did they bid on the posting to keep division rivals from getting him?*

Having spoken to A's officials over the past two weeks, I'd be stunned if their intentions were anything other than to sign Iwakuma - they wouldn't have known what the posting fee bids by their competitors would be, and they traded Vin Mazzaro two days after winning the bid. That indicated some degree of optimism about signing Iwakuma. Plus, with the posting fee factored in, the A's offer was more in the range of \$7-9 million per year.

It's difficult, in sifting through various reports, to know whether the posting fee is factored into the totals mentioned. I've tried to do so whenever possible, because that \$18 million is not insignificant for a team like the A's. Of course, none of that goes to the player, so his side looks at just the straight salary-per year.

I just saw one report based on Japanese newspaper accounts that suggested three years, \$20 million as the figure Iwakuma might find acceptable, with no mention of the posting fee. It's obviously not included, otherwise Iwakuma's actual salary would be under \$2 million per year. With the fee factored in, though, it would be three years, \$38 million. A pretty big

difference as far as the A's are concerned. And I'd heard \$12 million a year bandied about several times today as the figure Iwakuma would find acceptable, so that fits.

***Will this affect any hope the A's might have of signing Hideki Matsui?*

It's unclear if adding Iwakuma would have persuaded Matsui one way or the other, though it probably wouldn't hurt to have a countryman on the team. If he winds up being the A's primary target, I'd presume that the nationalities of his teammates would be fairly low on Matsui's list of priorities. It might have helped, it probably won't hurt.

***Will the A's working relationship with Rakuten suffer? And will the team have trouble signing Japanese free agents in the future if it's thought that they didn't pony up enough for Iwakuma?*

Rakuten might have hoped for a deal to be signed in order to pocket the posting fee; on the other hand, the team gets back its best pitcher. Might be a wash. Oakland might be a harder sell to some top Japanese players, but the team probably wasn't going to be pursuing any major high-priced stars, anyway.

***Will the A's spend the \$16 million or so for the posting fee and the salary budgeted for Iwakuma on a free-agent pitcher or will they go with a mix of Josh Outman, Tyson Ross and Bobby Cramer as fifth-starter candidates? Or will they apply that money toward their pursuit of a big bat this winter?*

No one from Oakland is talking right now, but Oakland general manager Billy Beane mentioned on a conference call recently that the team is comfortable with the starters mentioned above if the Iwakuma talks fell through. The team's biggest need is for power - it's likely any extra in the budget goes there.

Of course, this is the A's. They seldom do what's expected.

Drumbeat: Iwakuma talks have broken off

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser 11/21/2010 2:12PM

Talks between the A's and Japanese starter Hisashi Iwakuma have broken off, industry and major-league sources told The Chronicle today. A major-league source said that Iwakuma is looking for a Barry-Zito-type deal - a Giants-style, \$18 million per year deal, not an A's style Zito deal. (The most Zito made in Oakland was \$7.9 million in 2006.) It had been thought that Oakland was looking at paying Iwakuma more like \$3-5 million per year. The Zito-type deal would also factor in the posting fee....but still, not numbers a budget-conscious team such as Oakland would consider.

Zito got seven years from the Giants, but Iwakuma wasn't looking for seven years - just the \$18 million per, posting fee included.

One industry source characterized the negotiations as stalled and "just short of done."

The team still has until Dec. 7 to sign Iwakuma, who is considered the second-best pitcher in Japan after Yu Darvish, but it's not looking likely: One Japanese source told me that Iwakuma is expected to announce his return to the Rakuten Golden Eagles at an upcoming fan fest.

The A's appeared to be optimistic about signing Iwakuma, 29, after paying a \$15-16 million posting fee for his rights - two days later, they traded fifth-starter candidate Vin Mazzaro. Team officials would not comment on Sunday; the A's, like all major-league teams now, have a strict policy of not discussing free agents.

If Oakland cannot sign Iwakuma in the next two weeks, the team will be repaid the posting fee, and it's possible the A's could then look for another starter for the rotation, though the emphasis this offseason is on adding a power hitter or two. Hideki Matsui is one potential free-agent target, and it had been thought that by adding Iwakuma, Oakland might make a more attractive landing spot for Matsui.

Fifth-starter candidates with Mazzaro gone, if Iwakuma is not signed: Bobby Cramer, Tyson Ross and Josh Outman, who if fully healthy after a year of recovery from Tommy John surgery is the likely frontrunner.

One final thought: I was talking to a high-level scout from a National League team recently about something completely different when he brought up Iwakuma, whom he'd seen in Japan. "Nothing special," the scout told me. "'Just a guy.'"

I know other scouts have had different opinions - some have said he could step right in and be a top-flight starter in the big leagues right away. And clearly the A's valued him highly. Just not \$18 million/year highly.

Iwakuma will be a free agent after next season and can sign with any team in the majors without a posting fee.

Talks break down between A's, Iwakuma

Right-handed hurler could be heading back to Japanese club

By Doug Miller / MLB.com

Japanese pitcher Hisashi Iwakuma might not pitch in Oakland or anywhere else in the Major Leagues in 2011, according to a published report.

The San Francisco Chronicle on Sunday cited Major League sources in reporting that talks between the A's and Iwakuma have broken down for the time being and are unlikely to resume and a Japanese source told the newspaper that Iwakuma will most likely "announce his return to the Rakuten Golden Eagles at an upcoming fan fest."

The Chronicle wrote that the likely sticking point in the negotiations with Oakland is that Iwakuma, 29, is looking for what would amount to an average of roughly \$18 million per year (including the posting fee of between \$15 and \$16 million), and that the A's were expecting to pay the veteran starter "more like \$3-5 million per year."

If Iwakuma does go back to Japan, the A's will be refunded their posting fee and could elect to pursue a free-agent arm or count on one of the following fifth-starter candidates expected to be in Spring Training camp in Phoenix in February: Bobby Cramer, Tyson Ross and Josh Outman. Oakland traded promising young righty Vin Mazzaro to Kansas City for outfielder David DeJesus two days after winning the rights to bid for Iwakuma.

The A's have two weeks left in the window of negotiation with Iwakuma.

There's a lot to like about A's pitching staff

GM Beane will look for ways to improve offense this offseason

By Anthony Castrovine / MLB.com

This concept of winning with superior pitching -- one that has generated increased attention in the wake of the Giants' unlikely run to World Series glory -- is not a novel one.

It's certainly a policy A's general manager Billy Beane, who enviously watched his Bay Area brethren go the distance, subscribes to as well.

Beane's teams of the early 2000s advanced to October primarily because of their pitching, with the "Big Three" of Tim Hudson, Barry Zito and Mark Mulder leading the way. By 2006, Dan Haren and Joe Blanton had filled the vacated roles of Hudson and Mulder, and the A's reached the American League Championship Series for the first time in 14 years.

These days, Beane once again finds himself in possession of a dominant pitching staff -- arguably the best in the AL in 2010. He also finds himself trying to piece together a lineup that can sufficiently support that starting five.

And yet, one of Beane's first moves this offseason was to place a winning bid for the rights to negotiate with right-hander Hisashi Iwakuma, Japan's supposed second-best pitcher. The A's followed that move by shipping 23-year-old right-hander Vin Mazzaro to the Royals in a trade that netted outfielder David DeJesus.

So, why tinker with a pitching staff that was such an obvious strength?

"Until you've given up zero runs," Beane said with a smile, "you still have room to improve."

Alas, if reports are to be believed, there is plenty of room between Oakland's thinking on Iwakuma's worth and the pitcher's asking price, as talks reportedly broke down over the weekend. Unless there is some significant common ground currently lost in translation, perhaps Iwakuma won't be in an A's uniform, after all.

That's a blow, certainly. But Iwakuma or no Iwakuma, the A's still have that first -- and most difficult to obtain -- building block in four young, quality starters.

Now, if they could only string together some runs.

Hitting .256 as a team and scoring 663 runs (124 fewer than the AL West-winning Rangers) obviously didn't do the trick in 2010. The A's were too often power-starved (109 homers, .378 slugging percentage), too often rally-killers (.241 average, .661 OPS with runners in scoring position). They asked a lot -- too much, it turned out -- of their pitching staff.

But, oh, did those pitchers deliver. Few staffs were better, in fact.

Sinkerballer Trevor Cahill had a coming-out party at age 22, going 18-8 with a 2.97 ERA, 1.11 WHIP and .220 batting average against in 30 starts. Luck was on his side, as an abnormally low .237 opponents' batting average on balls in play indicates, but that doesn't change the fact that Cahill was among the game's most efficient, effective starters.

Elbow issues hampered 22-year-old left-hander Brett Anderson, causing concern. But he finished the season strong and was 7-6 with a 2.80 ERA, 148 ERA+ and 3.41 strikeout-to-walk ratio in 19 starts.

Hard-throwing lefty Gio Gonzalez, 24, entered the year with a 7-11 career record and 6.24 ERA. So nobody saw his dynamic 2010 -- in which he went 15-9 with a 3.23 ERA and 171 strikeouts in 200 2/3 innings over 33 starts -- coming. The A's hope to see more next year.

When the Ben Sheets experiment resulted in season-ending surgery, Dallas Braden was left as the wily veteran of the bunch, at the ripe old age of 26. His May 9 perfect game was an attention-grabber nationally, but his 3.50 ERA and 1.157 WHIP in 30 starts were also quite respectable.

A's pitchers led the league in staff ERA (3.58), and the rotation led the league in starter's ERA by 36 points (3.47 vs. Seattle's 3.83 mark). Oakland pitchers turned in 103 quality starts, eight more than the Rays, who finished second in that category.

There's a lot to like about the bullpen, too, as it turned in the league's sixth-best relief ERA (3.83) and fourth-lowest opponents' average (.248), with closer Andrew Bailey (1.47 ERA and 3.23 strikeout-to-walk ratio) locking down the ninth.

"We do have the foundation," Beane said. "Our pitching staff is good enough to compete for a playoff spot. Our defense, our pitching staff and our baserunning are all outstanding. Now the challenge is complementing it with enough offense to push the Rangers and everybody else in the division."

Beane has been one of the game's busier GMs thus far this offseason, opening the bidding -- successful or not -- on Iwakuma, pulling the trigger on the DeJesus trade, claiming third baseman Edwin Encarnacion from the Blue Jays and sending speedy outfielder Rajai Davis, who had been deemed expendable after the DeJesus acquisition, to the Jays for Minor League relievers Danny Farquhar and Trystan Magnuson.

If the Iwakuma talks fail, the A's could be in the market for a back-end rotation arm, yet they're already ahead of the curve with regard to rotation construction. Adding another bat should remain a priority, and reportedly aggressive bidding for Adrian Beltre is a fine start. Still, as the Giants displayed, you don't need a dazzling offense. You can cobble together a lineup with just enough veteran pluck and youthful upside to stick around in the division race. And if you get to October, pitching prevails.

Of course, residence in a division in which the Angels and Rangers are likely to spend big this winter is a challenge for the A's. But they don't have to look far to see that the primary pieces are in place.

They can just look at their own history, or, failing that, look across the Bay.

Top prospect Taylor among roster additions

Athletics make adjustments in preparation for Rule 5 Draft

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

The A's on Friday, facing a deadline to finalize their 40-man roster, added five players to the list so as to protect them from being exposed to the upcoming Rule 5 Draft at the annual Winter Meetings.

Oakland selected outfielders Michael Taylor and Corey Brown and infielders Adrian Cardenas and Sean Doolittle from Triple-A Sacramento, as well as recently acquired right-hander Trystan Magnuson from Double-A Midland. By doing so, the A's have reached their limit on the 40-man roster.

Taylor, Brown, Cardenas, Doolittle and Magnuson are now all shielded from the Rule 5 Draft, which exposes players not on the 40-man roster to other teams. Anyone signed when they were 19 or older who has spent three full seasons in the organization, as well as anyone signed at 18 or older who has spent four full seasons in the organization, is eligible to be selected if they are not on their organization's 40-man roster.

The selected players must be kept on the selecting team's 25-man big league roster out of Spring Training or be offered back to the original club for half the selection price, or \$25,000. Several teams choose not to make Rule 5 selections, but the A's are often involved, as they were last year when they chose reliever Bobby Cassevah before returning him to the Angels.

Teams must have room on their 40-man roster to partake in the Draft, and the A's are expected to have slots open by Draft day (Dec. 9) following the Dec. 2 non-tender deadline. Jack Cust is a strong non-tender candidate, as is Travis Buck. Other possibilities include Kevin Kouzmanoff, Edwin Encarnacion and Conor Jackson.

Taylor represents perhaps the most prized roster possession, as he is currently pegged the team's top prospect now that Chris Carter has made it to the Majors. He compiled a .272 average with 26 doubles, six triples, six home runs and 78 RBIs, along with 16 stolen bases in 127 games for Triple-A Sacramento this past season. He often struggled to find consistency at the plate, though, and is now facing a crowded Oakland outfield picture, so it's likely Taylor will again start the year in Sacramento.

Brown and Cardenas both split the 2010 season between Midland and Sacramento. The former hit .320 with 10 home runs, 49 RBIs and 19 stolen bases in 90 games for the RockHounds and earned Midseason and Postseason All-Star honors. The outfielder endured a rough stretch at Sacramento, batting 193 in 41 games, but then went 3-for-11 with a double and two RBIs in four playoff games for the River Cats.

Cardenas, meanwhile, finished the 2010 season as the fourth-leading hitter in the A's farm system with a combined .304 average. He hit .345 with three homers and 32 RBIs in only 51 games with Midland before moving on to Sacramento, where he batted .267 with one home run and 21 RBIs in 58 contests. Cardenas, 23, is expected to battle Jemile Weeks for a future at second base in Oakland.

Doolittle, often considered one of the organization's most promising prospects, has somewhat lost that label due to knee injuries the past two years. He missed the entire 2010 season while rehabbing a second knee surgery performed in July but is expected to try for a healthy 2011 campaign. He was limited to 28 games in 2009 following a 2008 season that saw him lead the A's farm system in hits (153) and doubles (40) while also ranking third in RBIs (91), fourth in walks (63) and fifth in home runs (22).

As expected, a roster spot went to Magnuson, who was acquired along with fellow right-handed reliever Daniel Farquhar from the Blue Jays in exchange for Rajai Davis on Wednesday. Magnuson, 25, was 3-0 with a 2.58 ERA and five saves in 46 appearances for Double-A New Hampshire this season. The 6-foot-7 righty is believed to be near Major League-ready.

Iwakuma unhappy with A's contract talks

AP 11/22/2010

Japanese pitcher Hisashi Iwakuma says he's disappointed after contract negotiations between the right-hander and the Oakland Athletics broke down.

Japanese media reported Monday that Oakland made a four-year proposal worth \$15.25 million. In terms of annual salary, its equal to what Iwakuma made with the Rakuten Eagles of Japan's Pacific League.

Iwakuma says if the negotiations remain stalled, then "the Athletics really didn't want me."

The deadline for negotiations is Dec. 7. If Oakland and Iwakuma don't reach an agreement by then, the pitcher goes back to the Eagles.

Oakland Tribune editorial: Good to see Oakland enter the game for the A's

MediaNews editorial 11/19/2010

AS WE continue to painfully wait for Major League Baseball's payoff pitch concerning the future home of the Athletics, we are pleased to see a concrete plan being advanced by Oakland city leaders in hopes of keeping the A's where they belong.

It's about time.

Oakland's Planning Commission revealed a fascinating plan for a 39,000-seat, baseball-only ballpark for the A's on a waterfront parcel east of Fallon Street, which is dubbed Victory Court, near Jack London Square. That's only the start. This project also contains 180,000 square feet of retail, as much as 540,000 square feet of office space, up to 700 residential units and about 2,500 off-street parking spaces.

Reading between the lines, this project offers much more meaning than preventing the A's from moving to San Jose. If the A's stay and this project goes through, the revitalization needed for the Jack London Square area would be on the fast track toward reality.

This is critical toward pumping dollars into Oakland's economy, giving an old landmark area some new life, and helping bring new life to the East Bay's biggest city.

This is a great jumping off point for newly elected Mayor Jean Quan. She has to be all-in for this project and she must convince city leaders to do the same.

Obviously funding is an issue and that needs to be worked out, but the cost of doing an environmental impact report is worth it because this will certainly pay dividends in the future.

We are pleased to see the Planning Commission is already committed to performing the EIR and wants public input as to what direction it should be headed. An expensive traffic study will follow, but again, this process has to begin somewhere and we support using city funds wisely.

Keeping the A's will also serve Oakland. One need only to look across the Bay for proof. The San Francisco Giants serve as a prime example of what happens when a team builds a new stadium in the right place. Clearly, the Giants and San Francisco have seen an economic boon for the last 10 years because of AT&T Park.

Still, this is a two-way street. We urge owner Lew Wolff to take a good look at this project and do so in good faith. We know he seems to have his heart set on San Jose, but he needs to seriously consider this newest proposal from Oakland. His fan base is here in the East Bay, the fans are loyal and so are local businesses.

The fans in the East Bay have put years of sweat, tears and dollars into this organization and they deserve a fair shake.

And Oakland deserves, as does San Jose, a fair shake from MLB. We are all tired of sitting on the edge of our seats to see if an MLB committee's recommendation will allow the A's to move to San Jose. Doing so would break the territorial rights that belong to the Giants in Silicon Valley.

With so much uncertainty, both Oakland and San Jose now have great plans that must go forward soon with millions of dollars at stake. It is unfair that Commissioner Bud Selig cannot seem to come to a fair conclusion.

In the meantime, we're happy to see Oakland stepping up to the plate and fashioning a proposal that certainly rivals San Jose's. We had begun to wonder if City Hall would ever take the prospect of losing the A's seriously.

But Oakland has come out swinging. Who knows? Maybe the game is starting to change.

A's and Japanese pitcher Iwakuma at a standstill

By JANIE McCAULEY AP 11/21/2010

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) Negotiations between the Oakland Athletics and Japanese pitcher Hisashi Iwakuma aren't getting anywhere, a person with knowledge of the situation said Sunday.

The person, who wouldn't go as far as to say talks had ended entirely, spoke on condition of anonymity to The Associated Press because it is an internal matter.

The San Francisco Chronicle was first to report Sunday that the parties were at a standstill.

Oakland won bidding rights to Iwakuma earlier this month and had 30 days to reach agreement on a contract, which no longer seems realistic. The pitcher wanted a total package comparable to the \$126 million, seven-year deal signed by San Francisco left-hander Barry Zito before the 2007 season, the source said.

The A's bid was accepted by the Tohoku Rakuten Golden Eagles of Japan's Pacific League under the bidding treaty between Major League Baseball and the Japanese commissioner's office.

The 29-year-old right-hander was 10-9 with a 2.82 ERA in 28 games this season with four complete games and one shutout. He struck out 153 and walked 36 in 201 innings.

In 10 professional seasons, Iwakuma is 101-62 with a 3.32 ERA and 46 complete games in 209 appearances.

Inbox: Delving into the new outfield

Beat reporter Jane Lee answers A's fans' questions

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

Why did the A's trade for David DeJesus? Looking at his stats, he doesn't look all that special, aside from his good batting average. I don't see him as a big upgrade over Rajai Davis. In fact, I felt like Rajai was a sparkplug to the team and was always a threat on the bases. His batting average wasn't bad, either. I just don't understand these trades.

-- Albert Y., Fremont, Calif.

Albert, I don't think you're the only one still trying to wrap your head around these trades. Even though Vin Mazzaro's value dipped a bit toward the end of this season because of a rocky stretch, I think he could have been packaged slightly better to land more than an outfielder who mirrors that of Ryan Sweeney in a smaller frame. There's no doubt DeJesus is a good ballplayer who can rack up a pretty average on paper, but he doesn't have the power that's still missing in the outfield. He also doesn't carry with him the 50 steals that Davis brought to the table this year. But the A's seem to like DeJesus as an everyday left fielder, and it's likely -- barring any health issues -- that we'll see him there beside Coco Crisp in center and Ryan Sweeney in right on Opening Day. One thing you won't have to worry about is defense.

Do you really think the A's gave Davis a fair shot? It seems he was always being shuffled around for lack of better options.

-- Matt F., San Francisco

It might be easy to say he wasn't, based on the way he was used, but at the end of the day, I do think he was given a fair shot. Davis would likely agree, too. In fact, he extensively thanked the A's for the opportunities he was given when I talked to him the day he was traded. Playing time is playing time, and Davis played in 143 games this season. That's a good dose, no matter how it's given. Sure, there were plenty times this year when he sat out despite an impressive performance the night before, but he wasn't the only victim of a crowded outfield. Manager Bob Geren is big on matchups, so opposing pitchers often dictate his lineups more so than a hot bat.

I would have preferred to see the injury-free Davis as the club's fourth outfielder next season, as opposed to Conor Jackson, whose time in the trainer's room this year was extensive. But that's exactly why Davis was so attractive to other teams. That trade value paved the way for the club to add bullpen depth, something to be said of significance this offseason. Both relievers acquired in the trade, from an early look, seem like the real deal, and I wouldn't be surprised if we see at least one -- Trystan Magnuson -- in the bigs in 2011.

With Justin Upton being made available, what are the A's chances of acquiring him? He fits everything we need. He's young, under contract for several years, has good power and wouldn't even cost us our defense. We also have the necessary prospects to trade away.

-- Nick, Memphis

I don't see this one happening, Nick. Surely Upton is young and under contract for multiple years and carries a sack of potential, but he's also going to require a hefty package in return -- too hefty for the A's liking. Upton reportedly has nearly half of all Major League teams showing serious interest in him, and the D-backs are said to be looking for at least four or five players on the flip side to help their shaky franchise stay afloat with the fans. Kevin Towers is the new head honcho over there, and I can't see him moving Upton unless he comes away the genius, as dangling the outfielder as trade bait already has all of Arizona up in arms. How he's going to do that, I'm not so sure. But don't expect it to involve the A's, who now seem to be pretty set with their outfield roster of DeJesus, Crisp, Sweeney and Jackson, not to mention Chris Carter. The power, it seems, is going to come at another position.

Is there interest from GM Billy Beane and the staff in some ex-A's players like Miguel Tejada and Jermaine Dye, or do they fall into the "we don't want another Frank Thomas situation" bucket?

-- Jin W., Concord, Calif.

I don't think there's much -- if any -- interest in either player, but not because of the Thomas theory. The A's are set with middle infielders, and while the club's starting third baseman for 2011 seems far from determined, their list of options won't include Tejada. They're already having to decide what to do with incumbent third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff and newcomer Edwin Encarnacion while also making a run at free agent Adrian Beltre, who was reportedly offered a five-year deal worth \$64 million from the A's this week. The club is obviously looking to upgrade offensively at the hot corner, and Tejada wouldn't necessarily fill that need.

As for Dye, he appears to be gaining several National League suitors who are willing to include him in the first-base or outfield mix. He could obviously be a DH option for an American League team like the A's, who are looking to add power there, but they currently seem more interested in options like Hideki Matsui and Lance Berkman.

Since the A's are looking for a DH and paid \$10 million for Ben Sheets as a pitcher last year, do you think they should take a chance on Manny Ramirez at \$12 million for one year?

-- Jason F., Placerville, Calif.

Nope. I can't see the A's paying that kind of money for Ramirez, who wouldn't exactly fit the veteran-leadership mold the club is looking to also get out of their DH next year. This is a team that has no choice but to overpay free agents -- as they did Sheets -- to make up for a weak facility, so that means they have to choose wisely in that market.

The word is that Eric Chavez is working out five days a week now and wants to play somewhere in 2011. Considering no one is going to hand him an Opening Day job, is there any chance the A's might give him a Minor League deal in case he's healthy and wants to play off the bench? Or just rake in Sacramento? Seems pretty low risk.

-- Chris P., Portland

I'm sure many A's fans would love to see Chavez in green and gold again, but it's just not going to happen. After the A's declined his humongous option for next season, as was expected, Chavez made it clear that if he chooses to return to the game of baseball, it won't be in Oakland. At first, the notion sounds a little odd considering how much patience and support Chavez received from the A's during his last few injury-filled years. But when I talked to him last week, he explained he simply couldn't imagine disappointing the franchise yet again if he were to get injured again. He said it would be devastating for both parties so, as hard as it was for him to realize his whole career might not be spent in Oakland, he'd rather experience a change of scenery.

Chavez mentioned he's already garnered interest from several teams, and he's hoping one will give him a decent shot in Spring Training. No matter how frustrating it was watching his final years with Oakland unfold the way they did, there's still no denying Chavez is one of the greatest guys in the game. He's always been honest and shows nothing but respect and gratitude for the people who have helped him along the way. That being said, I wish Eric nothing but the best and, for his sake, hope he can latch on somewhere.

Put A's ballpark over Interstate 980

Bryan Grunwald, San Francisco Chronicle, 11/19/2010

With the 2010 baseball season ended, East Bay fans are again left wondering about the future home of their Oakland Athletics. So far, only pedestrian solutions have been pursued.

Recent efforts to move the A's to the Diridon Station area in San Jose will probably prove futile because Major League Baseball owners will most likely veto any attempt to poach territorial rights already granted to the San Francisco Giants. Furthermore, BART will not serve that area for decades.

The city of Oakland's lame-duck administration has recently initiated an environmental review for a ballpark and 1.4 million square feet of mixed-use development at Victory Court, plus a 2,500-space parking garage on the existing Laney College parking lot. Because Victory Court - located far from downtown south of Jack London Square and sandwiched between Interstate 880 and a railroad line - is a less-than-desirable site, the proposal has received lukewarm community support. Key among the concerns are the effects on traffic and a weak real estate market.

A viable alternative is hiding in plain view. In the 1970s, a giant trench was dug through state land for Interstate 980 that cut off the economically challenged West Oakland neighborhood from downtown. If a ballpark were constructed on a deck above the freeway, the A's could find a new home and the city could reunite its neighborhoods.

Can't imagine it? Visualize connecting the 14th and 18th street bridges over the freeway, as in the illustration above, to create the deck for the ballpark and an 800-car garage.

Such a "980 Park" would be:

- Downtown, near retail centers.
- Within walking distance of two BART stations.
- Accessible by two freeways.
- Near thousands of parking spaces.
- A new use for vacant land that is currently generating no jobs or tax revenue.

In the past, the A's have proposed a deal in which the team owners would build the ballpark in exchange for the host city providing land and infrastructure improvements. This is similar to the agreement between San Francisco and the Giants that resulted in AT&T Park.

Current cost estimates for land and improvements for the Oakland Victory Court or San Jose sites could exceed \$200 million, well beyond the financial capacity of their respective redevelopment agencies. By contrast, I've estimated Oakland's cost for 980 Park freeway modifications at \$25 million to \$30 million, or roughly the amount San Francisco invested in AT&T Park. Future property taxes and land rent from 980 Park would give Oakland a return on its investment.

Decking over the 980 trench is not as far-fetched as one might think. Successful precedents for decking freeways for public uses are found in Seattle and, more recently, Minneapolis. AT&T Park is essentially a concrete deck supported by pilings over

the bay. And similar to what AT&T Park has done for San Francisco's Mission Bay, 980 Park could transform nearby blighted areas into a ballpark village. This will create jobs and bring in additional tax revenue.

Construction over a freeway does raise a number of issues, among them the need for assurances that freeway capacity will not be diminished during and after construction.

The 980 Park would be a noble public endeavor, one that would mitigate the social injustice of the divisive freeway barrier and retain 1,000 local A's jobs. Putting it together should be a priority for the incoming Quan mayoral administration.

Bryan Grunwald is an architect, city planner and urban designer who identified Mission Bay as the site for the UCSF campus. He is also an Oakland resident and an A's fan. To learn more, go to www.letsgooakland.com.

DeFrancesco Leaves For Houston Organization

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Nov 19, 2010

The Sacramento River Cats' coaching staff will have a decidedly different look in 2011. Last week it was announced that long-time pitching coach Rick Rodriguez had been promoted to be the Oakland A's bullpen coach. Now longtime manager Tony DeFrancesco has left the organization to manage the Houston Astros' Triple-A affiliate. "Tony D" leaves behind a long legacy.

When spring training begins for the Oakland A's in February, there will be a familiar face missing - Tony DeFrancesco. For the first time in 17 years, DeFrancesco will not be gracing the fields of Papago Park and Phoenix Municipal Stadium. Instead, he will be in Kissimmee, Florida, imparting his knowledge of the game to the [Houston Astros](#).

DeFrancesco, who has served as the [Sacramento River Cats](#)' manager for seven of the past eight seasons, will be managing the Triple-A Oklahoma City RedHawks, a Houston Astros' affiliate, it announced this week.

DeFrancesco may be with Houston next season, but his impact will still be felt throughout the A's organization, from the major leagues on downwards.

"Tony has been an integral part of our organization for many years. He has been able to influence Oakland players from rookie ball to the major leagues," Oakland A's Director of Player Development Keith Lieppman said on Friday.

"The winning tradition he has created for our affiliates and players is unparalleled. His energy, knowledge and passion for the game is recognized throughout the industry."

After a nine-year minor league playing career, DeFrancesco native joined the A's organization as a hitting coach in 1993. In 1994, the New York native was given his first managerial position, and he guided the Arizona Rookie League A's to a 32-24 record and a second-place finish. He would follow that season with two years in the Northwest League managing the A's Southern Oregon squad, followed by two more years in the California League guiding Visalia before leading the Texas League's Midland Rockhounds to four consecutive winning seasons.

In 2003, DeFrancesco took over as the manager for the Sacramento River Cats from current A's manager [Bob Geren](#). DeFrancesco quickly began what has developed into an unprecedented run of success for the A's Triple-A affiliate. He won the Pacific Coast League championship in 2003 and 2004 and made the playoffs in 2005 before finishing in second place in 2006. He led the River Cats to another crown in 2007 and also won the Triple-A Championship with a win in the Bricktown Showdown.

In 2008, DeFrancesco was finally given an opportunity to coach at the major league level. He served as the A's third base coach for one season, but was not brought back as part of Geren's coaching staff in 2009. Instead, he returned to Sacramento, where he put together yet another winning season and playoff appearance. The River Cats went to the PCL Finals, losing to the [Memphis Redbirds](#). In 2010, DeFrancesco put together arguably his best managerial season yet. He guided a Sacramento team that was 12 games out of first place midway through the season to a division title, his sixth in seven seasons with the River Cats.

During his time in Sacramento, DeFrancesco became a fan favorite, hosting pre-game chats with the fans, among other activities. His teams were marked by their professionalism and their passion for winning, two things that can sometimes be

hard to find in the minor leagues. While managing the River Cats, he helped develop a number of current major leaguers, including [Nick Swisher](#), [Joe Blanton](#), [Kurt Suzuki](#), [Daric Barton](#), [Bobby Crosby](#), [Brad Ziegler](#), [Aaron Harang](#), [Gio Gonzalez](#) and [Vince Mazzaro](#).

DeFrancesco joins the Oklahoma City staff in its first season as a Houston affiliate. It had previously been affiliated with the [Texas Rangers](#). He has a career managerial record of 1100-953.

Oakland A's MLN: 2010 Rule 5 Preview

Melissa Lockard, [OaklandClubhouse.com](#)

Nov 18, 2010

The deadline for protecting prospects from the 2010 Rule 5 draft is quickly approaching. The Oakland A's have had a whirlwind of activity impacting the 40-man roster this off-season, but the A's will undoubtedly be adding players to the roster to protect them from the Rule 5 draft in December. We take a look at the players who could be added to the A's roster or impacted by the Rule 5 draft inside

The Rule 5 Draft Rules

Any player not on a team's 40-man roster who signed his first professional contract in 2007 or earlier who was at least 19 years old at the time he signed and any player who signed his first professional contract in 2006 or earlier who was at least 18 years or younger at the time he signed is eligible for the Rule 5 draft this December.

Teams select in draft order until all teams have declined to select players. Once a player is selected from an organization, that organization can pull back another eligible player to be protected. Teams that select a player must keep that player on their 25-man roster for the entire regular season or offer him back to his original team. Teams generally set their rosters in advance of the 40-man roster in late November. There is a minor league portion of the draft, but determining what players are exposed to that draft is tricky because it involves knowing whether players have been placed on a Triple-A or Double-A roster during the post-season, information that is usually kept secret by most organizations, so we won't address that part of the draft in this article. As of November 18, the A's have five open slots on their 40-man roster.

Below we highlight some of the players who could be exposed to the Rule 5 draft this year and divide them up into three categories: likely to be protected, in the conversation to be protected and other names of note.

Likely To Be Protected

Michael Taylor: Taylor's first season in the A's organization was a disappointment, but one mediocre year doesn't negate his overall talent and he would undoubtedly be snapped up in a Rule 5 draft. The [Stanford](#) alum was drafted by the Phillies in 2007 and with the exception of his first half season in '07, Taylor has never posted an average lower than this year's .272 mark and his OPS has been higher than 900 in 2008 and 2009. He is currently batting .286/.400/.419 in the Arizona Fall League.

Corey Brown: Brown was the A's supplemental first-round pick in 2007 out of [Oklahoma State](#). The centerfielder has consistently put up good power/speed numbers while also compiling impressive on-base percentages since he signed. Brown has had some knee and hand injuries during his career, but he has managed to play through most of them. He got off to a rough start with Triple-A Sacramento this season, but he redeemed himself in Double-A by posting a 916 OPS and hit well upon his return to Triple-A for the final week of the season.

Trystan Magnuson: Acquired on Wednesday in the [Rajai Davis](#) trade, Magnuson's name was being bandied about as a possible member of the Blue Jays' 2011 bullpen before the deal. Near-major league ready relievers are always popular in the Rule 5 and a reliever who stands 6'7" with a good fastball and plus-command would be almost certainly claimed.

Adrian Cardenas: Like Brown, Cardenas had a schizophrenic season, as he struggled early in the year at Triple-A but shined in Double-A. Also like Brown, Cardenas looked better at the plate during his second turn through Triple-A at the end of the season. Although Cardenas has yet to develop the power many thought he would when he was drafted by the Phillies out of high school in the supplemental first round of the 2006 draft, he has a career average of .300 and just turned 23 in October. No doubt a team would take a flier on him if he was left unprotected.

In The Conversation

Sean Doolittle: In April 2009, Doolittle was seemingly weeks away from making his major league debut. He injured his knee in early May, however, and hasn't been on the field since, as he has struggled through a series of rehabs and a patella surgery. The A's second pick in 2007 out of Virginia is still rehabbing, so his status for the 2011 season remains up in the air, but the A's are optimistic he will be able to play. Assuming he is healthy, it remains to be seen whether Doolittle will be able to play in the outfield or will be limited to first base. However, even if he is limited to first base, he is still an attractive prospect there, as he has good power and an above-average glove at the position. An interested team could take Doolittle and stash him on the DL with minor league rehab assignments for much of the season, which might make him an even more attractive Rule 5 pick.

James Simmons: Like Doolittle, Simmons is coming off of a season lost to injury. The A's top pick in 2007 was making excellent progress towards the major leagues when he ran into some shoulder soreness in 2009. He pitched through it, but not effectively, posting a 5.72 ERA in 119 innings for Sacramento. Simmons was never healthy in 2010 and wound-up having a clean-out of his pitching shoulder. When healthy, Simmons is a solid back-of-the-rotation pitching prospect and a team devoid of pitching talent could take a flier on Simmons and stash him on the DL with minor league rehab assignments before making a final decision on whether or not to keep him.

Andrew Carignan: Another member of the A's 2007 draft class, Carignan, like Doolittle and Simmons, has struggled with injuries. His injury came in 2009 in the form of elbow soreness. Carignan was mostly healthy in 2010, although he spent much of the year trying to regain a consistent release point. That showed in his numbers with High-A Stockton, for whom he posted an uncharacteristically high 6.27 ERA and walked 9.27 batters per nine innings pitched. He did strike out 12 per nine innings, however, and he was outstanding during the A's recent Instructional League camp. Carignan was considered a possible future closer before the elbow trouble and if a team saw him throwing well in Arizona, he might be snapped up.

Travis Banwart: Banwart, a 2007 fourth-round pick of the A's, is currently participating in the Arizona Fall League after putting together a solid season for Double-A Midland and Triple-A Sacramento. In six AFL starts, Banwart has a 3.86 ERA and a 17:7 K:BB ratio. The right-hander isn't a big name prospect, but he has a polished starter's repertoire and had an uptick in velocity this year, with his fastball sitting regularly in the low-90s and even touching 95 on occasion.

Brad Kilby: Kilby was on the A's 40-man roster throughout the 2010 season and pitched well in a short stint with the team early in the season. However, he developed shoulder soreness in late May while with Triple-A Sacramento and wound-up missing the rest of the season. Kilby, who had surgery to fix a slight tear in his rotator cuff during the season, was removed from the A's 40-man roster and cleared waivers earlier this off-season. He told OaklandClubhouse.com last week that his rehab was going very well and that he anticipated being ready for the start of spring training. Good left-handed relievers are hard to find and Kilby sports a 1.07 ERA and an 0.83 WHIP in 25.1 major league innings. If a team is paying attention to his rehab, they may make him a target. For that reason, the A's could add him back onto the roster before the Rule 5.

Other Names To Note:

Corey Wimberly: Mr. "Can-Do Everything" has been eligible for the Rule 5 draft the past couple of seasons and has gone unclaimed. Wimberly, a 2005 sixth-round pick by Colorado, hit .284 with a .373 OBP and 56 stolen bases in his first Triple-A season in 2010. The speedster can play the middle infield and all outfield positions, making him an intriguing candidate for a major league bench role. He is currently playing in Mexico, where he is hitting .266 with a .361 OBP for Culican.

Josh Horton: Horton was the A's second-round pick in 2007. He has seen other middle infield prospects such as Cardenas move past him on the A's depth chart, although he may have played his way back onto the A's prospect radar in 2010. Horton began the year in extended spring training after off-season shoulder surgery, but he still managed to play in 116 games. He hit .298 with a career-best .400 SLG for High-A Stockton and Double-A Midland. Horton's approach at the plate has always been excellent and that continued in 2010 with 42 walks against 55 strike-outs. He also showed vast improvement with the glove at shortstop. Horton is currently batting .459/.500/.514 in 37 at-bats in Mexico for Obregon.

Carlos Hernandez: Hernandez has been a workhorse since being selected as a draft-and-follow by the A's in 2006 out of a high school in Santa Clara. Signed in 2007, Hernandez has moved steadily up the A's chain and is currently pitching in the Arizona Fall League. The southpaw doesn't have overpowering stuff, but he has a good breaking ball and isn't afraid to challenge hitters. He is considered one of the top competitors in the A's system. Hernandez has pitched in relief at the AFL. He struggled early and was shut down with a case of tired arm, but has recently returned and has thrown 1.2 scoreless innings in two outings. He has been a starter for much of his career, but profiles in the big leagues as a reliever.

Anthony Recker: Like Wimberly, Recker has been available in the Rule 5 draft each of the past two seasons. The A's 2005 18th round pick spent much of the 2010 season with Triple-A Sacramento and he played well for the River Cats, posting a .288/.341/.496 line in 80 games. Recker has always had good power and he has improved his defense behind the plate dramatically over the years. He is blocked in the A's system by Kurt Suzuki, Landon Powell and Josh Donaldson and will be a

six-year minor league free agent after this upcoming season.

Matt Sulentic: The A's second pick in 2006 out of a Dallas high school is Rule 5-eligible for the first time. Sulentic has had an up-and-down pro career. After a huge debut in 2006, Sulentic struggled in 2007 before rebounding to put together solid seasons in 2008 and 2009. He struggled again in 2010 for much of the season. Although he finished with a .275 average for Double-A Midland, Sulentic managed only a .336 SLG, down from .481 in 2008 and .414 in 2009. He has become a solid defensive outfielder, but he is limited to the corners, so those power numbers will likely scare off teams.

Jeff Baisley: Baisley, like Recker, was a 2005 selection by the A's. Once one of the A's top prospects, Baisley played for Oakland during the final months of the 2008 season, but he was removed from the 40-man roster that following spring and struggled in 2009. After beginning 2010 in extended spring training rehabbing an injury, Baisley played well for Double-A Midland and Triple-A Sacramento. In 100 games, he hit .301 with an 845 OPS. He has had to deal with leg injuries for much of his minor league career, but, when healthy, Baisley has generally been productive.

Matt Carson: Carson was removed from the A's 40-man roster and then re-signed to a minor league deal this off-season. The outfielder was a career minor leaguer before signing with the A's in 2009. Since then, he has appeared in 46 major league games. He hasn't hit much at the major league level, but he has posted OPSs of 841 and 930 the past two seasons at Triple-A. Carson has decent power, some speed and can play all three outfield positions well.

Jared Lansford: Lansford, a 2005 second-round pick out of a South Bay high school, was eligible for the Rule 5 last season but went unclaimed. Lansford has pitched well at the Double-A level the past two seasons, but has struggled at Triple-A. He has also had control problems the past two years, something he has been able to work-around in Double-A thanks to his high groundball rate, but has hurt him against more advanced hitters.

Graham Godfrey: Godfrey was a 2006 draft selection of the Toronto Blue Jays out of the College of Charleston. Passed over in the 2009 Rule 5 draft after an All-Star season with Double-A Midland, Godfrey struggled at Triple-A in 2010. He had a 5.59 ERA and a mediocre 87:53 K:BB ratio in 106.1 innings for the River Cats. Godfrey is currently pitching well in Puerto Rico, posting a 1.03 ERA in five starts with 16 strike-outs against seven walks.

Justin Friend: Friend was a member of the A's 2007 draft class out of Oklahoma State. The Tracy native spent all of the 2010 season with Double-A Midland. In 36 appearances, all but one in relief, Friend had a 3.70 ERA and 50 strike-outs against 38 walks in 56 innings. He had a stint on the DL with elbow soreness mid-season. Friend has an excellent slider and gets good sink on his fastball, but his control could stand to improve.

Jermaine Mitchell: Once thought to be a steal as a fifth-round pick in 2006, Mitchell's career stalled at the High-A level until 2010. The speedy outfielder spent two-plus seasons in Stockton before finally earning a promotion to Double-A for part of the 2010 season. Mitchell played well for Stockton (.309/.413/.523 in 78 games), but he struggled for Midland (.223/.331/.298 in 37 games). He has always had intriguing talent and a good approach at the plate, but he hasn't been able to put together a solid all-around season since 2007.

Julio Ramos: Signed as an international free agent in 2006, Ramos was one of the A's brightest young pitching prospects at the start of the season. The left-hander had a 2.57 ERA in 84 innings for short-season Vancouver and High-A Stockton as a 21-year-old in 2009. He never got on the field in 2010, however, as elbow soreness sidelined him and he eventually had Tommy John surgery. He is likely to miss most, if not all, of the 2011 season, making him an unlikely Rule 5 selection given than he hasn't pitched above the High-A level yet and has a long rehab ahead of him.

Justin Souza: Souza was one the A's 40-man roster throughout the 2010 season, but, like Kilby, was removed during the off-season. Acquired from Seattle in 2009 and then protected from the Rule 5 draft before the 2010 season, Souza has a mid-90s fastball and strike-out stuff from the bullpen. However, he suffered a stress fracture in his elbow at the end of the 2010 season and is currently rehabbing the injury.

Those with strong rotations best suited for '11

Some teams have it all, others are looking for it this offseason

Around and around they go, and where they take you, everybody knows.

A good starting rotation can take you to the postseason promised land, and a great one can take you all the way to the World Series.

As the American League Cy Young Award wraps up the major pitching accolades for what has been a remarkable season on the mound throughout the Major Leagues, the proof of a starting rotation's power is in the postseason pudding.

In 2010, of course, it was Tim Lincecum, Matt Cain, Jonathan Sanchez and Madison Bumgarner who provided the four-cylinder engine that drove the Giants to the World Series title. The year before, it was a three-man job -- CC Sabathia, A.J. Burnett and Andy Pettitte -- that covered all the postseason starting assignments en route to the Yankees' 27th championship.

It's obviously more tried and true than those two examples. Having a strong rotation that goes four or even five deep is as treasured as any asset on a baseball roster.

Perhaps the tale of Felix Hernandez is the most vivid example: He's a Cy Young favorite, yet with King Felix practically a solo act once Cliff Lee went to Texas, the Mariners' fortunes didn't follow his lead.

Moral: An ace does not a winning rotation make.

So, with the page turning to 2011, here's a look at some rotations around baseball that already look like strengths, and a few others that are rotations to watch this offseason.

Aces

Giants: The aforementioned foursome of twenty-somethings also has Barry Zito as the fifth Beatle, as it were, and coming off his best National League season, despite his postseason absence. With all five under control for at least two more seasons, the Giants are as well-armed as anyone.

Rays: Rookie Jeremy Hellickson is knocking on the door following a season in which he was a consensus Minor League Player of the Year, so a deep rotation gets even deeper. David Price became the hype this year, Matt Garza went all no-no and Wade Davis' arrival was impressive, giving the Rays starting talent and then some.

Phillies: There is no stronger, more established trio in the big leagues than NL Cy Young winner Roy Halladay, Roy Oswalt and Cole Hamels. They led the way to a Majors-leading 14 complete games and six shutouts for the entire Philadelphia rotation in 2010. Could they really be in the running for Lee? Or would that be a re-Lee?

Cardinals: If the Phillies have the trio, the Cardinals have the duo -- Chris Carpenter and Adam Wainwright, who both have put together back-to-back stellar seasons. Rookie Jaime Garcia joined the fun and should be that much better with another season of seasoning on his left arm, while veterans Kyle Lohse and Jake Westbrook round out a solid five.

A's: Oakland's starting staff led the Majors with a 3.47 ERA, so this young and confident group is one to really watch. Trevor Cahill blew up into a Halladay-type imposing right-hander, and if lefty Brett Anderson can rebound from injuries and Japanese right-hander Hisashi Iwakuma can add yet another dimension, the A's could have something special starting ... again.

Quality starts

Red Sox: Had John Lackey performed as hoped, the Red Sox would be among the elite. They still have the credentials with Jon Lester becoming one of the game's top lefties, Clay Buchholz winning 17 and Josh Beckett presumably in better stead next year if healthy. But wither Daisuke Matsuzaka's future in Boston?

White Sox: Ditto on the would-be elite status. With Jake Peavy's health an issue, the White Sox rotation wasn't what it could have been in 2010. But Mark Buehrle and John Danks lead a solid core that will be deepened with the anticipated arrival of rookie Chris Sale to the rotation after he shined in the bullpen -- and the hope of a healthy return from Peavy.

Angels: Adding Dan Haren to the mix made an Angels strength even stronger, and Jered Weaver is coming off a career year with a 3.01 ERA in 224 1/3 innings.

Braves: With Tim Hudson, Tommy Hanson and Derek Lowe back and top prospect Mike Minor ready after a bit of a bumpy baptism, the Braves have the foundation for another strong rotation. A healthy return of Jair Jurrjens would make it that much better.

Padres: The Padres like their trio of Mat Latos, Clayton Richard and Tim Stauffer, but they need a Jon Garland-type to eat innings and help hold the rotation together -- assuming Garland, a free agent, is priced out of their range.

Calling for relief?

Yankees: Mr. Lee, would you like to wear pinstripes? The Yankees are looking for another ace and -- gee, wouldn't you know it? -- they're hot on the trail of the one game-changer of a free agent on the market. With Burnett coming off a down year and Pettitte not getting any younger, Sabathia and Phil Hughes aren't enough to keep up.

Twins: They could try to bring back Carl Pavano, but they're not expected to get into a bidding war for him. That said, how will they replace those 221 innings, including seven complete games?

Rangers: You know they want Lee back badly, having seen exactly what he can deliver as part of a postseason team. C.J. Wilson and Colby Lewis emerged as tremendous wing men to an ace like Lee, actually outperforming him in his regular-season stay. But if it's not Lee, you'd have to think the Rangers -- flush with an influx of payroll and the lure of being so close -- will make a move for a top-of-the-rotation starter, though it might take some dealing.

After all, a strong rotation helped the Rangers reach their goals this season, and they'd need another to reach them again in 2011.

Selig, general managers discuss labor issues

By Barry M. Bloom / MLB.com

ORLANDO, Fla. -- Commissioner Bud Selig was bullish on Wednesday after another two-hour session with the general managers, his third of the year.

Selig has asked the GMs for their input in what will lead to next year's collective bargaining process with the Players Association. The GMs also have been invited to sit in on Thursday's quarterly joint owners meeting.

The current Basic Agreement expires on Dec. 11, 2011, and negotiations with the union will begin in earnest next year.

"We had a good day today, a very constructive day," said Selig, after emerging from a meeting with his Executive Council. "The general managers have worked very hard and very skillfully and they gave me a report about what they had done. A lot of it dealt with labor issues. As you know, many things have to be collectively bargained.

"I'm glad to have them here. I told them that. They dealt with some very tough issues and they were good."

Baseball last had a work stoppage when the players went on strike in 1994, wiping out the end of that season, that postseason and pushing back the start of the 1995 season. In 2002, the two sides went down to the wire to negotiate a contract that was hammered out over the final night with a pending strike deadline looming. But in 2006, the current deal was essentially done in quiet behind the scenes without any public acrimony.

With the retirement of Don Fehr and Gene Orza and the election last year of Michael Weiner, who replaced Fehr as executive director, MLB will be dealing with a new cast at the union.

Rob Manfred, MLB's executive vice president of labor relations and human resources, will continue to be the chief negotiator for the owners just as he has been on the '02 and '06 deals.

Manfred said on Tuesday that he didn't expect any problems working now with Weiner, a long-time lawyer for the union, who has had a calming influence over the process.

"The way I look at it is that I've done a lot business with Michael over the years," Manfred said. "I don't expect a huge change. It's not like I'm dealing with someone who's unfamiliar."

This time, as well, there do not seem to be any hot-button issues to keep the sides from again reaching a peaceful agreement.

"We haven't really even started yet," Selig said. "That's what I told a lot of our committees today: 'Let's not forecast about that because we're just starting now to work on it.' One of the things I'm very proud of, though, is the 16 years of labor peace and I hope we can extend that."

The GM meetings the last two days have dealt wholly with labor issues, such as possible changes in both the First-Year Player Draft and the playoff format, issues which must be collectively bargained with the union. Though the GMs didn't want to get into a discussion of content, the feeling was that there was good verbal flow of give-and-take in the room, and that the GMs genuinely appreciate being asked by Selig for their input.

"I'm absolutely looking for as much of that input this time as I possibly can," Selig said. "Look, we have a lot of issues -- whether it's collective bargaining or anything else. And I like having them here. I think it's good."

The next step regarding the postseason format, evidently, is a meeting of Selig's 14-man special committee studying changes in the game. The group is scheduled to gather again on Dec. 7 when MLB officials return to Orlando for the Winter Meetings on Dec. 6-9.

To be determined is whether to expand to two Wild Card teams in each league and have them meet for either a play-in game or a best-of-three first-round series. Then the major issue is how to logistically handle another postseason round in the schedule.

Three members of that committee -- Frank Robinson of MLB, Andy MacPhail of the Orioles, and John Schuerholz of the Braves -- were in the room for the meeting on Wednesday.

When asked specifically about expanding the postseason, Selig demurred.

"We're not in any stage yet to discuss these things," he said, adding that he might have more to say about the issue when he speaks to the media after the meeting on Thursday.

Urban: MLB Mailbag

Mychael Urban, CSNBayArea.com 11/18/2010

Got a question about the Giants, the A's, or big-league ball in general? Click here, shoot me a Tweet at @MUrbanCSN or hit me up on Facebook and fire away. Include your name and where you live, and check back every Thursday to see which queries made the cut.

Have you spoken to Aubrey Huff lately? Any news on the negotiations between him and the Giants?
--David G., San Carlos, Calif.

I exchanged a few texts with Huff on Thursday morning, asking that very question, and he said there's nothing significant to report. He still wants to come back and the Giants still want him back, but he's drawing considerable interest elsewhere, too, so this one might take a little while.

Do you think the A's give Rajai Davis a fair shot?
--Daniel S. (via Twitter)

I do. He played in 143 games last season, and he was an everyday player in the second half of 2009. At the very least, the fact that he's one of the few A's without a significant recent injury history makes him more attractive to me as the fourth outfielder than Conor Jackson.

Then again, Rajai's trade value is higher than Jackson's, and the two minor league relievers that Oakland got in the deal are said to be legit prospects. Trystan Magnuson, the 25-year-old righty acquired, could be in the bigs as early as this season, and he addresses one of A's GM Billy Beane's secondary offseason priorities: adding bullpen depth.

Would a trade for Jose Reyes or Jimmy Rollins be possible for the Giants? What would you do to get one of them?
--James R., Lompoc, Calif.

Trading for one of them is possible but unlikely, given the team's reluctance to deal one of its starting pitchers. Reyes and Rollins are big-time shortstops who'd have a major impact on the offense as well, so it's going to take a big-time package in return.

Me? I'd make Dan Runzler a starter -- he's done it before and there have been talks of having him do it again down the road -- and package Jonathan Sanchez and maybe Pablo Sandoval (if he has any value and the Giants have lost faith) or solid prospect/big-league backup (Ryan Rohlinger?) and see if that's enough to get the Mets or Phils to pull the trigger.

Is Michael Taylor going to be in the big leagues in 2011?

--Frank D., Oakland, Calif.

Taylor, Oakland's top pure outfield prospect, did not have a good year at Triple-A Sacramento, and he's been just OK in the Arizona Fall League. He'll be in big-league camp, but he has a lot of work to do before he gets a shot in Oakland.

Unless he goes bananas early next season, he won't be in green-and-gold next year until September at the earliest. If he is, it'll probably mean the injury woes have continued at the big-league level.

Why doesn't Manny Burriss ever get mentioned as a potential solution for the Giants at shortstop in 2011?

--Wilson C., Alameda, Calif.

Because he hasn't shown that he can hit big-league pitching with any consistency. It's that simple.

How did Grant Green, Oakland's No. 1 draft pick in 2009, do in the minors this year. Is his path to the majors blocked by A's shortstop Cliff Pennington, or is Pennington a placeholder?

--Mark S., Alameda, Calif.

Green was named to the California League All-Star team after batting .318, hitting 20 homers and 29 doubles while driving in 87 runs with a .363 on-base percentage and an .883 OPS at Single-A Stockton. He'll likely start next year at Double-A Midland and have a shot at earning an in-season promotion to Sacramento.

The A's are very happy with his progress, and he's an absolute stud according to everyone I've spoken with about him, but his ETA in Oakland is probably 2012. Pennington is safe for now, but if I were him I wouldn't get too comfortable. I have a feeling Pennington will be a utilityman within a couple of years.

Expanding the MLB playoffs: good or bad idea? I don't like it.

--Janet R., Calif.

Neither do I. Terrible idea. It'd make everyone a little more money, but it'd further cheapen the integrity of the regular season, it'd probably lengthen an already too-long year, and I'm dead against it. Hate the idea.