

A's News Clips, Wednesday, December 1, 2010

Power-hungry Oakland A's ready to wine, dine former Houston Astros slugger Lance Berkman

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

A's officials were scheduled to have dinner Tuesday night in Houston with free agent Lance Berkman, two sources with knowledge of the situation confirmed to Bay Area News Group.

Berkman, a switch-hitter who's slugged 327 homers over 12 seasons, is known to have been on the team's radar. Presumably, the A's view him as their designated hitter if they sign him.

Berkman hit just .248 with 14 homers and 58 RBIs last season, which he began with the Houston Astros before being traded to the New York Yankees. But Berkman, who turns 35 in February, told Fox Sports last week that he's fully recovered from arthroscopic knee surgery that bothered him much of last season.

He hit 25 homers as recently as 2009 for Houston.

Adding power is the A's most pressing need. They would have a hole at DH if they decide not to tender a contract to Jack Cust, which is a strong possibility.

The A's must decide by 9 p.m. Thursday (PT) whether to tender contracts to their 10 arbitration-eligible players, including Cust. Other logical non-tender candidates: outfielder Travis Buck, reliever Brad Ziegler and either of two third basemen -- Kevin Kouzmanoff or Edwin Encarnacion.

It's believed the A's would consider signing Berkman to a one- or two-year deal, though the team doesn't comment on free-agent negotiations.

Berkman told Fox Sports that eight teams were showing interest in him and that the A's were the "most aggressive." He said he believed the A's were searching for a DH but that he still wants to play first base or the outfield.

Berkman played first base last season for Houston but hasn't played outfield since 2007.

The A's have until next Tuesday to sign Japanese right-hander Hisashi Iwakuma. If they don't, they keep the \$19.1 million they bid for his rights and Iwakuma returns to the Rakuten Golden Eagles.

ESPN Deportes reported Nov. 17 that the A's offered free-agent third baseman Adrian Beltre a five-year, \$64 million contract, but it's unclear whether Beltre is a realistic option for Oakland.

In other news, the A's named Darren Bush the new manager at Triple-A Sacramento. Steve Scarsone will manage Double-A Midland, and Webster Garrison will lead Single-A Stockton. Todd Steverson, formerly the A's first base coach, will serve as Sacramento's hitting coach.

Planning commission meeting first step in A's ballpark plan

Angela Woodall, Oakland Tribune

Baseball season may have ended, but the challenge to keep the A's in Oakland has just begun. And opening night is today, when the Oakland Planning Commission meets to discuss a proposal for a 39,000-seat ballpark.

The meeting promises to be a lively one even though no decisions will be made on the proposal to build the Victory Court Ballpark, as well as retail and housing, within sight of Jack London Square. The public instead will be able to weigh in on what should be included in a study of the environmental impact that the construction and operation of the proposed development could have on the area.

Concerns may include several fuel lines that run nearby. Federal regulators have levied a \$3.5 million fine on one of the operators -- Kinder Morgan Energy Partners -- after several incidents, including a 2005 spill into the Oakland Estuary. The Houston-based energy giant pipes jet fuel underground past the estuary to Oakland International Airport.

Other potential issues include the impact on neighbors and nearby businesses -- air quality, noise and especially traffic.

The plan calls for 2,500 off-street parking spaces including what is now the Laney College parking lot owned by the Peralta Community College District.

Gary Knecht from the Jack London District Association, which represents businesses around the historic square, is worried that tens of thousands of fans arriving at the same time will cause gridlock on Interstate 880 and city streets.

Once a year for the Fourth of July fireworks is one thing, he said.

"Everyone wants to see the A's stay in Oakland," he said, "But (81) home games is a little different."

The association also wants the city to include in the environmental impact report a proposal to build a ballpark above I-980 between 14th and 18th streets.

Incoming Mayor Jean Quan has thrown her support behind the Victory Court site, which would sit between Fourth Street and the Embarcadero. The ballpark, Quan and other supporters say, fits into the overall redevelopment of the area which includes the Oak to 9th waterfront development and Jack London Square. The ballpark could give both a boost, prompting support from their developers.

But the city will still have to account for the 16 businesses that would have to make way for the ballpark. The land is occupied by a three-unit live-work building and facilities belonging to BART, the Peralta Community College District and the Oakland Fire Department.

City staff expects a draft of the environmental impact report to be complete by the spring of 2011. Meanwhile, many questions remain unanswered. Foremost is whether Major League Baseball will allow the A's to move to San Jose, where the San Francisco Giants have territorial rights. A's co-owner Lew Wolff has long expressed a desire to move to San Jose. He and majority owner John Fisher could still opt to sell the team if MLB stands in the way. Or they could move the team elsewhere.

A's ballpark measure unlikely to be on March ballot

By Tracy Seipel, San Jose Mercury News, 12/1/2010

San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed says it's unlikely the city will be able to put a downtown ballpark measure on the March 8 ballot, because a committee appointed almost two years ago by Major League Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig still hasn't decided whether the Oakland A's should move to town.

"The commissioner's delay is certainly making it more difficult to figure out when is the best time to go to the voters," said Reed, who added that he has been "pestering" Selig weekly for a meeting but has yet to make contact.

In order to meet the city charter's 88-day deadline before an election date is set, MLB would have to return to the council no later than 2 p.m. today, when the council's Rules and Open Government Committee meets to decide its Tuesday meeting agenda.

Even if MLB was able to meet the deadline, A's owner Lew Wolff and the city have yet to hash out any negotiations about any deal, which would need to be explained to voters in the ballot language.

So while the mayor believes a March election "would be the best" for maintaining the project's momentum, he admits a ballot measure in April, May or June might be more realistic.

In July, when MLB pressured San Jose officials not to place such a measure on the November ballot, it offered "to help cover the taxpayer cost if a special election was required in the spring." City Clerk Lee Price had said the soonest an election likely would occur was March 8, though the league's offer did not pertain to a specific date.

The hurdle to any election lies with the World Series champion San Francisco Giants, who hold baseball's territorial rights to the South Bay and have argued the A's move would destroy their sponsorship and ticket revenues.

Wolff, meanwhile, has been trying for years to find a new home for his money-losing team. In March 2009, Selig -- Wolff's college fraternity brother -- appointed a high-powered committee to study the ballclub's options. Frustrated by the wait, Reed decided in July to go ahead and place a measure on the November ballot until stunned MLB officials intervened with their compromise.

Even if Selig were to give the nod tomorrow, it would also take three-quarters of MLB's owners to agree on the matter. MLB owners just wrapped up their quarterly owners meeting last month in Orlando, Fla., but league insiders said the A's move was not among the topics of discussion.

Spokesmen for both MLB and Selig's committee declined to comment on when the commissioner is expected to receive the committee's report.

Price said the next dates to hold a special election would be on April 12, June 7 or Nov. 8. She said the deadlines for the council to place a measure on the ballot for those respective dates would be Jan. 14, Feb. 14 and Aug. 12.

Rumors that Gov.-elect Jerry Brown might place a tax hike measure on a statewide ballot as early as May could add that month to the list of possible election dates, said Price. She added that it would cost at least \$1 million to stage a single-issue election, though the cost could come down if at least one other measure was printed on the same ballot.

There could be some peril in such a scenario, however. For example, if Brown's tax hike measure were to land on the same ballot, it could affect the outcome of the ballpark proposal, said San Jose State political science professor Larry Gerston.

"If I was with the A's group, I would want to talk to [state officials] to see what they've learned during polling," said Gerston. "If there appears to be strong public support, it may be a reason to attach something like" the ballpark ballot measure, he said.

For now, Reed and the City Council have no choice but to wait for MLB's decision.

"The more time we have to make those decisions, the better," he said.

Wolff has said that if he receives baseball's blessing, he will build a \$461 million stadium with no public money. But the city's redevelopment agency so far has spent at least \$24.4 million to buy less than half the 14 acres needed to complete the ballpark site. Two large parcels remain to be purchased, and agency chief Harry Mavrogenes has estimated the price tag at around \$20 million.

Recently, Mavrogenes admitted the RDA may not have the money to buy those last two pieces, and Wolff might step up to buy some or all of the land, if necessary.

San Jose, however, would still have to pay tens of millions more for more land related to road improvements and the cost of infrastructure linked to the proposed ballpark.

The election delay may frustrate some civic boosters and local A's fans, but it is welcome news to local opposition groups that say the stadium's costs would drain city services.

"A later election will be beneficial to people of San Jose to give them more of a chance to understand the pros and cons of a proposed stadium," said Marc Morris, a spokesman for the anti-baseball group called Better Sense San Jose.

City officials disagree that spending on a stadium would take away from other priorities, since redevelopment money can't be spent on things like public safety salaries.

An economic analysis San Jose commissioned last year said the development of a 32,000-seat ballpark in the Diridon Station area would lead to \$130 million in annual spending throughout the local economy.

Drumbeat: Chronicle report: A's met with Adam Dunn yesterday

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser 12/1/2010 9:33AM

The Chronicle learned this morning that the A's met with Adam Dunn in Houston yesterday, and according to an industry source, Oakland is considered a serious candidate to land a deal with the 31-year-old slugger.

Dunn, the top available power hitter this offseason, could command more than \$70 million with his next contract, and he has indicated that he would prefer to play in the field rather than to DH, so the A's might have to consider putting him at first base or at a corner outfield spot in order to convince him to come to Oakland.

Dunn hit 38 homers each of the past two seasons with Washington and 40 or more each of the previous five seasons with Cincinnati.

The A's met with Lance Berkman in Houston yesterday as well; Berkman, 34, potentially would be a much cheaper option because he might be signed to a one- or two-year deal rather than the four- or five-years that it would take to get anything done with Dunn.

Drumbeat: Berkman, Iwakuma pursuits, and much more

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser 11/30/2010 1:20PM

As was reported [in this morning's Chronicle](#), the A's are meeting with Lance Berkman today - they're going to him, not the other way around, further evidence that Oakland is among the teams pursuing Berkman the most aggressively, as he has been saying the past few days.

Is Berkman a better option than Jack Cust at DH? I'm not totally convinced. His big homer numbers have come in a small park, and his totals were down last year. And look at two seasons ago: both hit 25 homers, while in 2008, Cust hit more, and playing in a big ballpark. And he's younger and presumably cheaper. Yet on Thursday, he'll be among the A's top non-tender candidates along with Travis Buck. (Brad Ziegler is also a possibility because he, like Buck, became eligible early for arbitration with super-two status, but he's more likely to be retained, even if it's not a slam dunk.)

I'm not among those who sings Cust's praises non-stop, and at this point, the A's know what they're getting, that's for sure. But I still think that for the price, he hits more homers than most, and he walks a ton. I could do with fewer strikeouts, and he's worked on that a lot over the years. The main point, though, is that it's not clear if there's a huge difference between Cust and Berkman right now, and Berkman's career trajectory is likely downward.

I've heard from two sources that the A's have resumed talks with Hisashi Iwakuma; I don't believe it's out of the realm of possibility that Oakland will get the Japanese pitcher signed by the Dec. 7 deadline. I doubt he'll be looking at \$12 million per year in salary, but if it's around the \$9.5 million mark per year, including the posting fee costs, that might get it done.

Adrian Beltre might be a very good add - but it remains unclear how strong the A's pursuit is. They don't talk about free agents, and I have yet to hear a U.S. source confirm the offer that ESPN Deportes reported. As I mentioned on the Drumbeat recently, the fact that Beltre turned down Oakland last year for fewer years makes a massive offer this winter a little less likely. I'm sure they've talked to him, but until there's some more firm sourcing on the offer, I'll remain at least a little skeptical about the numbers.

The A's have [announced their spring schedule](#), as well as [the minor-league coaching assignments](#). It's great to see Darren Bush get the Triple-A Sacramento manager's job; he's done well at Double-A Midland, as has pitching coach Scott Emerson, who also moves up. Emerson gets lots of praise from the young pitchers, and considering that's the A's strength, he and minor-league pitching instructor Gil Patterson - as well as Rick Rodriguez, who is joining the A's staff - have all done great work. Todd Steverson, the A's first base coach the past two years, becomes Sacramento's hitting coach; he was the River Cats' manager three seasons ago.

Also, the [new orthopedists are on board](#).

For those of you unfortunate enough to have DISH network, CSN California has started a website, [IWantCSN.com](#), and a toll-free number, 888-527-6220, so that customers can let DISH know they want CSN California - the A's, Sharks and Kings - reinstated.

DISH doesn't come across well at all in this dispute. They went to arbitration over fees charged by regional sports networks, including CSN, and they *lost* the hearing. Instead of accepting that the fees had been deemed reasonable by the FCC, DISH dumped the programming instead. So, in essence, they only cared about the ruling if it went in their favor. And DISH initiated the proceedings - that's pretty amazing to then not give a hoot about the ruling. It must not be binding arbitration, obviously, but still, I can't imagine the FCC likes its time wasted like that.

Cust among A's non-tender candidates

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

Less than one year after the A' chose to non-tender the contract of Jack Cust, who was ultimately brought back to Oakland in January as a free agent, club officials are again facing the same decision on the slugger -- along with nine others.

Cust is one of 10 arbitration-eligible players on the A's 40-man roster whom Oakland must decide whether to tender contracts prior to Thursday's 8:59 p.m. PT deadline. Although the deadline affects all players under a club's control, the

focus befalls those eligible for salary arbitration. Most of Oakland's choices will be rather easy ones. The one on Cust, however, is murky.

Same goes for incumbent third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff and newcomer Edwin Encarnacion, who was claimed off waivers from Toronto on Nov. 12. Neither appears guaranteed a roster spot in Oakland next year, especially given the club's recent push at high-profile free agent Adrian Beltre. Thus, one could very well be let loose Thursday, though both could be kept to lend the A's trade flexibility.

Cust, however, sits at the top of the team's non-tender candidates list next to outfielder Travis Buck. Cust is coming off a roller-coaster year in which he started the season in Triple-A. Eventually brought back to Oakland in May, Cust managed to compile his best average (.271) since joining the A's in 2007 but saw his home run total (13) drop dramatically and his already prodigious strikeout totals continued while earning a \$2.65 million salary.

That's a low price for potential power, though, and the A's need all they can get. Much of Cust's status will presumably depend on how Oakland feels by day's end Thursday about filling the DH role through outside means. On Tuesday, club officials met with Lance Berkman, who is thought to be looking for a one- or two-year deal that would likely represent twice the amount the A's would spend on Cust. Furthermore, Hideki Matsui has also been linked to the A's.

Buck, meanwhile, endured another injury-plagued season in 2010 and wasn't offered much of a shot in Oakland when healthy. Already expected to be non-tendered months ago, his Super Two status has all but ensured the inevitable despite once being tagged as one of the franchise's top prospects.

Reliever Brad Ziegler also earned himself Super Two status this year, but he's more likely to be retained. The righty, who garnered a 3.26 ERA and 1.35 WHIP in 60 2/3 innings this season, made \$410,000 in 2010 and should not be demanding an especially hefty raise.

Fellow hurlers Craig Breslow, Dallas Braden and Joey Devine, along with outfielders Conor Jackson and Ryan Sweeney, represent the club's other arbitration-eligible players, and all are expected to be tendered contracts. Jackson's future with Oakland was rather unclear at season's end, but Rajai Davis' trade to Toronto now has him pegged as the team's fourth outfielder next year.

Athletics set to meet with Berkman

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Veteran free agent Lance Berkman is set to meet with Oakland officials for dinner in Houston on Tuesday night, a source familiar with the situation confirmed to MLB.com.

Berkman, who will turn 35 in February, has been in talks with the A's for a while, but this will mark his first in-person meeting with the club's representatives. Last week, Berkman told FOX Sports that the A's -- looking to add a dose of power this offseason -- have been the "most aggressive" in pursuing him thus far.

The switch-hitting veteran, fully recovered from arthroscopic knee surgery, has said he would like to play in the National League because he still sees himself as capable of first-base and outfield duties.

However, he has also expressed that he won't rule out the A's, who likely see him as a potential designated hitter who can also intermittently play the field. Oakland already has a steady outfield group and is pleased with Daric Barton's progress at first base.

Berkman hit .248 with 14 home runs and 58 RBIs this season between Houston and New York, and he's a career .296 hitter with 327 home runs in 12 Major League seasons -- the first 11 1/2 of which were spent with the Astros.

A's shuffle Minor League coaching staffs

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The A's on Tuesday announced a multitude of coaching-staff changes within their Minor League affiliates, most notably at Triple-A Sacramento, Double-A Midland and Class A Stockton -- all of which will feature entirely new personnel for the 2011 season.

Leading the way in Sacramento will be Darren Bush, who was promoted to manager of the organization's Triple-A team following two seasons at the helm in Midland that resulted in Texas League championship appearances. He owns a 288-272

managerial record in four seasons in Oakland's farm system, which also previously included two years as manager of Stockton.

Joining Bush will be hitting coach Todd Steverson, who was the A's first-base coach on Bob Geren's staff the past two seasons, and pitching coach Scott Emerson, who served in the same capacity for Midland in each of the past four seasons. Steverson is no stranger to the capital city, as he held the managerial role with the River Cats in 2008.

Deep in the heart of Texas will be Steve Scarsone, who was promoted to manager of the Midland Rockhounds following a memorable 2010 season in Stockton. It was there he transformed a Ports club that posted a 31-39 record in the first half to a team that won the second half of the California League with a 43-27 mark. The 2011 campaign will mark Scarsone's third season in the A's Minor League system but first at the Double-A level.

Scarsone's staff will consist of pitching coach Don Schulze and hitting coach Tim Garland, both of whom worked under Scarsone in Stockton this year. Taking his managerial place in Stockton will be Webster Garrison, the hitting coach for Midland the past two seasons.

Garrison carries with him previous managerial experience, having managed Midland in 2004 and 2008, along with other stints in the A's farm system. Joining him in Stockton are pitching coach Craig Lefferts and hitting coach Brian McArn.

Meanwhile, Class A Burlington -- recently added as an affiliate to replace Kane County -- will be comprised of the same staff that held the reins at Kane County this year. Other appointments, including staffs at short-season Class A Vermont and the Arizona Rookie League, will be announced when staff assignments have been completed.

Non-tender deadline adds intrigue to Hot Stove

Clubs can decline offers to players, putting them in free-agent pool

By Doug Miller / MLB.com

The free-agent pool is about to grow, and it will happen at a precise minute. The baseball executives, players and agents can really get to work, and fans will have even more players to discuss and debate.

Thursday is known as "non-tender day," and at midnight ET that night, the annual free-agent-for-all will become wilder. It's one of baseball's lesser-publicized but intriguing and sometimes season-changing events, and it's further proof that one team's undercooked Top Ramen might be another team's sizzling top sirloin.

Eight years ago, for example, a part-time first baseman/designated hitter for the Minnesota Twins who supposedly couldn't hit lefties named David Ortiz was placed at the top of this pile. Now he's the larger-than-life David "Big Papi" Ortiz, the proud owner of two World Series rings.

Plenty of other bargains are to be had, too, if the stars align for teams in search of new stars.

The fine print behind non-tender day reads as such: The Thursday deadline is for teams to offer 2011 contracts to unsigned players under their control, and the players who are not tendered contracts jump into the already-crowded free-agent pool. Usually, younger players are non-tendered because they're eligible for arbitration and their teams deem their value to be below what they would be awarded in arbitration.

According to the Basic Agreement, when teams tender contracts, they can't cut any more than 20 percent of what a player earned in salary and performance bonuses the previous season, or 30 percent of those figures during the past two seasons. Non-tendered players, however, can be re-signed by their teams at larger cuts.

"There are a lot of reasons why a guy might get non-tendered," Mariners general manager Jack Zduriencik said. "But just like with exploring trades or free agency, you go into it with an open mind. There could be guys waiting to resurface as quality players, or guys who just happen to be the right fit on other clubs. That's one of the challenges of this job."

The challenges continue to reap rewards.

Jonny Gomes was non-tendered in each of the past two offseasons and became a big part of the Reds' success in 2010. The Orioles picked up Ty Wigginton off the non-tender list in December 2008 and he became an All-Star in 2010. Breakout players from this past season, such as John Buck, Kelly Johnson and Matt Capps, were all non-tendered in late 2009.

Speculation is swirling as the deadline approaches, but until the ring tones start going haywire on the 30 cell phones of MLB's GM fraternity, all we have are "candidates."

Here are some of the players who might become available:

J.J. Hardy, SS, Twins: Rumored to be a non-tender candidate all season, Hardy's prospects of being offered a 2011 contract by Minnesota seemed to take a hit when it was revealed last week that the Twins placed the winning bid for exclusive negotiating rights with Japanese shortstop and 2010 batting champion Tsuyoshi Nishioka. Even though Hardy was limited to 101 games last season because of a wrist injury and will be in line for a raise from the \$5.1 million he made in 2010, the latest word is that he won't be non-tendered -- although that could mean the Twins have plans to trade him.

Bobby Jenks, RHP, White Sox: Chicago's World Series closer from 2005 made \$7.5 million last year, put up a career-high 4.44 ERA, and is in his third year of arbitration eligibility. Those facts add up to the 29-year-old being a strong candidate to be saving games somewhere else in 2011.

Russell Martin, C, and George Sherrill, LHP, Dodgers: This pair of Dodgers makes for an intriguing duo of likely non-tenders. Martin's production was down before he suffered a hip fracture that ended his 2010 campaign, and he'll probably be due for a salary north of \$6 million next year. GM Ned Colletti might decide to go elsewhere, which very much seems to be the situation with Sherrill, who made \$4.5 million last year, and despite crooked overall numbers, still took care of lefty hitters (.192/.286/.288) in 2010.

Jose Lopez, 2B/3B, Mariners: Coming off a 25-homer, 96-RBI season in 2009, Lopez regressed at the plate, hitting 10 homers and batting .239 with a .270 on-base percentage and .609 OPS. He made \$3 million last year, and if Seattle believes super-prospect Dustin Ackley is ready to take over at second base, the club would move Chone Figgins to third, paving the way for Lopez to start anew in a different big league city.

Hideki Okajima, LHP, Red Sox: He's going to be 35 next season, made \$2.75 million last year, and had by far his roughest year in the Majors, with a 1.717 WHIP and a career-low 33 strikeouts. His ERA also has gone up in each of his four big league seasons, which might make it easier for Boston to look elsewhere for less expensive and younger lefty-specialist help.

John Maine, RHP, Mets: Maine made \$3.3 million last year and could probably be retained for less since he's coming off shoulder surgery, but new Mets GM Sandy Alderson might find it in the best interest of the team to try to spend the same amount of money on a pitcher who hasn't had two consecutive injury-shortened campaigns.

Fred Lewis, OF, Blue Jays: Lewis hit eight homers and stole 17 bases last season and still considers himself an everyday player at the age of 29, but the Jays traded with Oakland for Rajai Davis and already have Vernon Wells and others who could man outfield positions, including 2010 American League MVP candidate Jose Bautista and Travis Snider. Lewis might have to find that consistent playing time somewhere else.

Travis Buck, OF; Jack Cust, DH; Conor Jackson, OF; and Kevin Kouzmanoff, 3B, A's: It's never easy to predict what A's GM Billy Beane might do when it comes to personnel, but one thing you can always count on is that he'll try to do things in an economical fashion.

Buck hasn't been on the A's everyday radar for years and is a natural non-tender contender. Cust was non-tendered and re-signed last year and could very well do the same in 2011. It remains to be seen what the A's will make of Jackson, the once-promising D-backs hitter who suffered from injuries and Valley Fever last year. And Kouzmanoff's sub-.700 OPS and \$3.1 million salary in 2010 have put him on the bubble, too.

Jeff Mathis, C, Angels: With young catcher Hank Conger on the rise and Mike Napoli's situation still unresolved (the Angels could package Napoli in a trade or keep him to start behind the plate until Conger is ready), the Angels could say goodbye to Mathis, who made \$1.3 million in 2010 and batted .195 while missing two months because of injuries.

Dioner Navarro, C, Rays: Count Navarro on the very likely list of non-tender candidates. He made \$2.1 million last year, the Rays found a starter -- and occasional leadoff man -- in John Jaso, and Navarro didn't exactly thrill the team's brass when he declined the Rays' request to work out and be ready for possible use in the playoffs after he learned he'd been left off the roster for the Division Series.

Kyle Davies, RHP, Royals: Davies said he turned a corner as a starter, but his 8-12 record and 5.34 ERA didn't exactly agree with that, nor did his \$1.8 million salary that's sure to go up next year. And then the Royals traded outfielder David DeJesus to the A's for young righty Vin Mazzaro, which makes it difficult to see where Davies stands with the Royals for 2011.

How the Tax Code Can Save Small-Market Baseball Teams

By Joshua Green, The Atlantic, 12/1/2010

Former Major League Baseball commissioner Fay Vincent had an intriguing op-ed in yesterday's *Wall Street Journal* wondering why star players like Albert Pujols don't demand an ownership stake in their ball club along with their eye-popping salaries. The tax advantages would be considerable, since capital gains income from ownership would be taxed at a much lower rate than ordinary salary, which is subject to the income tax. As Vincent writes, If modern stars are smart they will soon begin to emulate highly paid business executives and improve greatly their compensation by adopting more sophisticated tax planning. In the business and entertainment worlds, top executives and talent do not work exclusively for salaries. They want and get a piece of the action. They want to create and own assets, defer income and control their tax exposure. Vincent focuses on what players stand to gain from such an arrangement. But it's just as interesting to imagine how baseball teams could benefit--especially small-market teams that can't compete with big-market teams on salary alone. If teams like the A's, Padres, Marlins, etc., were to offer a small ownership stake to free agents, you'd have to imagine they'd instantly be able to compete with the Yankees, Red Sox, Tigers, and Yankees for the likes of Cliff Lee, Adrian Gonzalez, and other high-priced talent. If I'm not mistaken, the A's retained general manager Billy Beane (of "Moneyball" fame) by offering just such an arrangement.

There is nothing in the current baseball labor agreement that would prohibit a player from owning part of his team, although Vincent notes that the player would have to sell his stake if he were to leave for another team. But that should only increase the appeal of such an arrangement from a team standpoint--shouldn't it?--since the biggest concern for small-market teams with good players is watching them depart for greener pastures. Not only would small-market teams stand a much better chance of attracting such players; they'd be more likely to hold onto them in the long term, since the player would presumably come under some pretty serious pressure from his accountant to stay put and reap the tax benefits.

Blue to speak at Bees banquet

The Hawk Eye, 11/30/2010

Former Major League Baseball MVP and Cy Young Award winner Vida Blue will be the keynote speaker for the Eighth Annual Burlington Bees/Friends of Community Field Winter Banquet Jan. 14 at the Pzazz Convention & Events Center. The event will include a line of autographed memorabilia and collectible items that can be purchased through auctions or won through a raffle.

Blue made his professional debut in Burlington at the age of 18, playing the entire 1968 season with the Bees. He struck out 231 batters in 152 innings that year. Blue started the 1969 season in AA Birmingham before getting called up to the Oakland A's.

Tickets for the fundraiser are \$50 each or \$350 for a table of eight. The festivities start with a cocktail hour and the opening of the silent auction at 6 p.m. A full buffet-style dinner will be served at 7. Blue will leave time after his speech for a question and answer session.

Career Profile: Kristy Fick, Player and Media Relations Manager

Employed by: Oakland Athletics / Years in the industry: 13

By Charlotte Cusack, Oakland Tribune, 11/28/2010

What drew you to a career in sports?

I had a high school history teacher who was also the varsity baseball coach, and he asked me to help keep score and compile statistics. In those three years, I learned baseball and grew to love the sport. When the time came for me to attend college, baseball was one thing that truly interested me, so I continued working with the sport at a collegiate level, and now at a professional level. Believe it or not, I have never played sports; I prefer to stay behind the scenes.

What is your education?

I earned a Bachelor of Science from the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Iowa in Sports, Health, Leisure and Physical Studies, with an emphasis in Sports Studies, and double minor in Communication Studies and Business Administration.

How did you acquire a position with the Oakland Athletics?

My interest in baseball led me to work in the Iowa Sports Information Department, where I interned for four years serving as the primary baseball and cross country contact while assisting with football and basketball, among other sports. By my junior year in college, I hadn't chosen a specific career, but loved baseball and wanted to incorporate that into a career.

After graduating, I held a season-long public relations internship with the Chicago White Sox and gained valuable experience at the professional baseball level. In 2002, I moved to Arizona and interned during Spring Training with the A's PR staff and then worked part-time in the sports department for the Arizona Republic newspaper. In February of 2003, I was hired on full-time as the A's Media Relations Coordinator, and my role has grown exponentially since then.

Give us a glimpse of what you do.

The A's public relations department, which is comprised of four full-timers and two interns, serves as the liaison between media outlets and the team. In addition to assisting with daily media requests and day of game duties, I organize and publicize work associated with various community and charitable initiatives and coordinate all player appearances related to marketing or special events.

In my position, I do a little bit of everything, which includes traveling with the team to Spring Training and for a minimum of two regular season road trips, writing game notes, assisting with the production of the media guide, coordinating features for Comcast SportsNet CA's "All A's" show and assisting players with their charitable work. When the team is in town during the season, our typical day begins at 9:30 a.m. and concludes about an hour after the last out of the game, and during the off-season we work more of a typical 9-5 schedule.

What is your advice on starting a career in the sports industry?

A sports background does help when looking for an internship, similar to my experience at the University of Iowa, however it is not mandatory as long as one shows knowledge and interest in gaining experience. Internships are imperative to move up in this line of work as they give you the experience necessary to earn an entry level position. My advice to aspiring students looking to gain an edge over other candidates is to work in either the sports information department or school newspaper to gain an understanding of media relations.

What do you enjoy about your current position?

I love baseball and the experiences that come with working with a Major League baseball team, such as traveling to other cities and countries, building relationships with local and national writers, producers, reporters and photographers, and working with a number of players and coaches. I would have to say that my favorite part of my position is using the resources to get out into the community and help make a difference. When I take a player to visit a school or children's hospital or to host a clinic or meet and greet - it's all about that look in a child's eye and knowing that you made a difference.

For more information, visit www.oaklandathletics.com