

A's News Clips, Friday, December 3, 2010

Oakland A's Edwin Encarnacion, Jack Cust, Travis Buck become free agents

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's made a critical call with their third basemen Thursday night, tendering a contract to Kevin Kouzmanoff and deciding to let go Edwin Encarnacion.

Ultimately, however, they may have grander plans for the position.

Multiple reports Thursday suggested the A's are in heavy pursuit of free agent Adrian Beltre, though there were no indications a deal is imminent. Beltre told The Boston Globe that he's waiting out his options and prefers re-signing with the Red Sox, though he also told the paper he could sign a deal "right now if I wanted to." He didn't specify with which team that deal might be.

A's officials, who don't comment on free agents as a policy, declined to comment on Beltre.

Designated hitter Jack Cust, the A's leading home run hitter from 2007-09, also was not tendered a contract on the final day for teams to make offers for players eligible for arbitration, nor was outfielder Travis Buck. Cust, Buck and Encarnacion, who spent all of three weeks with the organization after being claimed off waivers from the Toronto Blue Jays, become free agents.

The A's did tender contracts to pitchers Dallas Braden, Craig Breslow, Joey Devine and Brad Ziegler; outfielders Conor Jackson and Ryan Sweeney; and Kouzmanoff. That means all are under team control, and the A's will try to negotiate contracts with them and avoid the arbitration table.

ESPN Deportes reported Nov. 17 that the A's offered Beltre a five-year, \$64 million deal. That offer hasn't been confirmed by anyone associated with the A's, and there were no signs then that a deal was in the making.

But it's clear the A's are casting their net wide to find ways to score more runs.

"We have some guys in mind that we think are fits for this team," A's assistant general manager David Forst said.

Cust's departure was no surprise considering the A's are making a major play for free agent Lance Berkman to be their new DH. Team officials had dinner with Berkman on Tuesday in Houston. It's believed the A's would consider Berkman on a one- or two-year deal, with an annual salary likely to be in the \$7-8 million range.

That would leave the A's the financial flexibility to add another hitter. Berkman alone doesn't figure to cure an Oakland offense that's been among the majors' weakest in recent years.

Third base traditionally is a position where teams look for production. Kouzmanoff, who hit .247 with 16 homers and 71 RBIs last season, is better defensively than Encarnacion, surely a factor in the A's decision to keep him.

But it's still possible the A's could trade Kouzmanoff if they work a deal for Beltre.

Chin Music: A's non-tender Jack Cust, Edwin Encarnacion and Travis Buck; is Oakland making play for Adrian Beltre?

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 12/2/2010 6:26PM

The news was slow to trickle out of A's headquarters today regarding their non-tender decisions. But the team just announced they have non-tendered DH Jack Cust, third basemen Edwin Encarnacion and outfielder Travis Buck. That means all three players become free agents. The A's tendered contracts to the other seven players eligible for arbitration: pitchers Dallas Braden, Craig Breslow, Joey Devine and Brad Ziegler; outfielders Conor Jackson and Ryan Sweeney; and third basemen Kevin Kouzmanoff.

Last year, the A's made the same move with Cust, but the two sides wound up agreeing on a one-year deal later on. Not sure I'd expect either side to want to travel that same road again. Cust's departure isn't a surprise, given the A's are making a big push for Lance Berkman as their DH. Adam Dunn reportedly will sign with the White Sox, so he's out of the A's picture, though he was never a strong possibility for Oakland anyway, from what I gathered.

The biggest news was the A's decision to retain Kouzmanoff over Encarnacion at third base. But the A's may not be done addressing that position. Multiple reports today claimed the A's are in serious pursuit of third baseman Adrian Beltre, with ESPN saying a deal could be close to happening. But Beltre told the Boston Globe today that he's waiting to see what other offers develop, and that his preference is to return to the Red Sox. He added that he could sign a deal "right now if I wanted to." Is he referring to a deal with Oakland?

As things stand, Kouzmanoff is the A's starting third baseman. I'm not surprised they retained him over Encarnacion. The A's brass is placing a heavy emphasis on infield defense, and Kouzmanoff is better defensively than Encarnacion. In all likelihood, he'll also come a bit cheaper.

The A's will now try negotiating contracts with all seven players they tendered, and avoid actually going to the arbitration table. The team has had great success avoiding arbitration in the past, usually agreeing to one-year deals with players as the offseason moves along.

Gary Peterson: Oakland A's future ballpark issue as murky as ever

By Gary Peterson, Oakland Tribune columnist

It's a scientific fact, proven time and again by Jerry Springer, supermarket tabloids and life in the great Twitterverse: Conjecture thrives in a vacuum.

Pertinent facts? Irrelevant. Breaking news? Humbug. Just run a tired talking point up the flagpole, and thrill to the sound of speculative whimsy.

Which leads us, as you knew it would, to the subject of the A's and their new ballpark. No, baseball commissioner Bud Selig hasn't made a ruling regarding the Giants' territorial rights to San Jose. No, his blue-ribbon, gold-plated, brown-bag committee has not filed its report.

Until Major League Baseball decides how it wants to proceed, no clear path forward exists on this issue. But that doesn't prevent us from trying to connect random dots in our spare time. In fact, it's been a good week for that.

Dot: The Oakland Planning Commission met Wednesday to discuss an environmental impact report that could clear the way for a new baseball stadium -- and a \$2 Wednesday broke out. So many A's fans showed up that they overwhelmed the 60-seat hearing room. That's right: an overflow crowd, no tarp necessary.

Some fans had to be relocated to other parts of the building. Wherever they stood, literally or politically, they heard plans for a baseball-only stadium at the Victory Court site near Jack London Square. They also showed the kind of passion usually reserved for opening day and perfect games.

Dot: This scene followed by one day the announcement from San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed that his city likely would be unable to meet a deadline to get its version of the A's new digs on the March 8 ballot. Reason being: Selig's disinclination to make a call on the territorial rights showstopper. This would be the second time the city has deferred to the Budster in this manner.

Dot: On Thursday, the Giants distributed a media advisory announcing that outfielder Andres Torres and relief pitcher Sergio Romo would be serving as grand marshals for the annual -- wait for it -- San Jose Holiday Parade.

The parade, to be held Sunday, will begin at the corner of Santa Clara Street and Delmas Avenue. That would be within spitting distance of the Diridon Station site on which San Jose hopes to build the stadium that the Giants wish it wouldn't.

Even if that is just the greatest coincidence ever: Heh, heh, heh.

You don't have to be an incorrigible wisenheimer to get a chuckle out of the not-so-subtle byplay going on. From here, it has the feel of three kids in the back of the family sedan. They're shoulder-bumping and dirty-looking each other because one wants to go to Good Burger, one wants to go to the mall and the third has to sit in the middle until they get wherever it is they're going to wind up.

As we all know from experience, nothing ever gets settled until Dad lays down the law.

And Dad? Well, our preferred vision of Selig has him holding San Jose's proposal for an A's ballpark in his hand, his head thrown back in rapturous sleep, a trickle of drool escaping the corner of his mouth, his wall calendar set to October 1982. That satisfies the whimsical speculator in our soul.

But our inner realist understands that Selig isn't nearly that disengaged. It's entirely possible, bordering on likely, that the great consensus builder knows how MLB owners feel about the Giants' territorial rights, has a pretty good idea what the

outcome of this conflict is going to be, understands why it has to be that way, and has figured out a way to get from here to there. The rest is just time-consuming mechanics -- glad-handing, horse trading, making the money work.

Maybe he's buying time so current A's ownership will become exasperated and sell the team. Maybe he suddenly needs to buy even more time to let the buzz from the World Series subside before he asks owners to rain on the Giants' parade. One way or the other, he'll serve his constituency.

Not that Selig will lose any sleep over it, but his circumspection comes at a cost to the baseball-loving Bay Area entities that keep shoulder-bumping each other while they await a decision -- Oakland making its case for keeping the A's, the Giants making their case for keeping the A's away from Silicon Valley, and San Jose caught in the middle, getting squeezed on a long ride to destination unknown.

Mercury News editorial: Selig's panel on the A's does a great job--of procrastinating

Mercury News Editorial 12/3/2010

Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. It's been 21 months and counting since Major League Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig appointed a high-powered (but plodding) committee to study the Oakland A's options for a new stadium. Two entire baseball seasons have elapsed, and still no decision. It's pathetic. The massive Mitchell Report on steroids in baseball studied all 30 teams and didn't take this long.

Baseball's winter meetings begin Monday in Lake Buena Vista, Fla. The city of San Jose and A's owner Lew Wolff deserve an answer to whether the team can move to Silicon Valley.

Even if Oakland could finalize a plan for a new stadium for the A's, which is highly unlikely, San Jose is at least two years ahead. It has a site and it's ready to go to the ballot for voter approval.

Oakland has never given the A's the kind of support the team deserves. San Jose is the 10th largest city in the United States and a lucrative sports market. It offers a significant upgrade to a perennially weak fan base and a second-tier team.

Stop the stalling. Bring the A's to San Jose.

A's again decline to offer contract to Jack Cust

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

For the second year in a row, the A's declined to offer designated hitter Jack Cust a contract by the deadline, making Cust a free agent. At the same time, Oakland continued its hot pursuit of potential new DH Lance Berkman and third baseman Adrian Beltre.

A source within the A's organization confirmed that the team has made Beltre "a big offer," but did not provide numbers. On Thursday evening, the Boston Globe reported that Beltre's preference is to return to the Red Sox.

Last winter, Beltre turned down an offer for more years and money from the A's to take a one-year deal with Boston. Could Oakland be rejected by the same player two years running?

Cust, 31, averaged 28 homers per season with Oakland from 2007 to 2009, but was not tendered a contract last December. The A's re-signed him to a one-year deal, and then sent him through waivers and sent him down to Triple-A Sacramento before Opening Day. He did not return until mid-May, and he finished the season with 13 homers; he still led the team in on-base percentage and slugging percentage.

When reached via text, Cust declined comment.

Oakland also did not tender contracts to outfielder Travis Buck and third baseman Edwin Encarnacion. Buck, 27, has been sidelined by injuries much of the past three seasons, and Encarnacion was one of two arbitration-eligible third basemen on the roster. The A's chose to retain Kevin Kouzmanoff. That means if the team cannot sign Beltre, they still have a good defensive third baseman. Encarnacion has more power, with 21 homers in 2010, though Kouzmanoff's 16 led the A's last year. Kouzmanoff is also considered the better trade bait should a Beltre deal get done.

The A's are unlikely to try to re-sign Cust, but Encarnacion would be a possibility in the event that some of the free-agent pursuits fall through.

Though Berkman has been the A's top priority, Oakland also had expressed interest in free-agent power hitter Adam Dunn. Dunn agreed to terms with the White Sox on Thursday.

Oakland has until Tuesday to sign Japanese pitcher Hisashi Iwakuma, but the team will need to have an agreement in place before that date so it can bring the right-hander in for a physical in advance of any official signing.

Drumbeat: Jack Cust is non-tendered

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser 12/2/2010 3:20PM

A big-league source tells me Jack Cust has been non-tendered, as expected.

Is that an indication that Oakland believes a deal with Lance Berkman is close? Or is it just an indication that the A's believe Cust would make too much in arbitration? He could be awarded more than \$6 million, potentially, going on the three-year average of his numbers.

This happened last year, too. Not the most fun process for Cust, but maybe, if Berkman falls through - and Hideki Matsui, and so on - the A's wind up coming back to Cust. Again. Unlikely, and you'd have to think at this point, Cust might want a change of scenery. I know he loves his teammates and he's enjoyed playing in Oakland, but getting non-tendered twice and waived once is not necessarily the ringing endorsement from an employer that most players would like.

I'll add the other names when they come out. If you didn't see today's earlier Drumbeat post, Adam Dunn is going to the White Sox, and a member of the A's organization confirmed to me that the team has made "a big offer" to Adrian Belre.

Drumbeat: Dunn going to White Sox, A's pointed at Berkman, Beltre

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser 12/2/2010 2:04PM

We're still waiting on the A's nontenders today - and I'm expecting to see Jack Cust, Travis Buck and either Kevin Kouzmanoff or Edwin Encarnacion on the list - but Adam Dunn is heading to the White Sox, so he's out of the equation.

The A's have been more focused on Lance Berkman and Adrian Beltre, anyway - and it's conceivable that they could get both players for somewhere in the same ballpark as the \$60 million or so that Dunn will get from Chicago. A member of the A's organization confirmed to me today that the team has made Beltre a "big offer."

Many of the A's players felt the team needed to add two big bats to the lineup to really contend this year, and Beltre and Berkman would do that. Dunn, though, is the one real difference-maker this offseason in terms of power. Would you prefer Dunn and DeJesus and no other new players (well, we'll wait and see on Encarnacion), or would you prefer Beltre, Berkman and Hisashi Iwakuma?

I can see both arguments - three more players for maybe \$10-15 million more in total lifetime packages, or Adam Dunn, who even at the Coliseum would hit 30-plus homers?

Maybe the non-tender list will provide some hints about how optimistic the team is feeling about Berkman and Beltre, but my impression is that the A's believe they can get both men signed.

From what I understand, the A's - and this is obvious from their pursuit of him - don't buy that "contract year" theory with Beltre. They love his defense, which makes sense, but no one in the organization thinks the Seattle deal was a poor one; there is plenty of statistical information that points to those seasons being better than people think.

Having seen so much of Beltre while he was with Seattle, I'm not so sure, and a Mariners fan in my household would definitely not agree; I heard a lot of complaining about Beltre during his Seattle years. But defensively, he's terrific, and he's an upgrade offensively from what the A's have had at third in recent years, even if he has another drop-off.

Offense remains A's most pressing need

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

As the A's prepare for the annual Winter Meetings, to be held next week in Lake Buena Vista, Fla., they're equipped with a roster that's still missing a big bat and a decision that will impact the fifth-starter spot.

The latter issue, which hinges on unsettled contract negotiations with Japanese right-hander Hisashi Iwakuma, must be settled by Tuesday's deadline. If they can't come to terms with the hurler, the A's would likely assess the free-agent market for a fifth starter or could easily choose to stick with several in-house candidates.

Pitching, though, is of no big concern for an Oakland team expected to boast baseball's best young starting staff for a second consecutive season. Combining that talent with an equally impressive offense, though, is another story. It's no secret the A's are in need of a couple of productive bats, which will be their main focus as they continue to trudge through the offseason.

Here's a snapshot of how things stand in Oakland as Billy Beane and Co. plan for the Sunshine State.

Club needs

Designated hitter By non-tendering the contracts of Jack Cust and Edwin Encarnacion, the A's are now left without any veteran DH possibilities. However, the decision to let the duo go signals thinking that the club feels confident about signing a free-agent bat sometime soon. The strongest possibility at the moment seems to be Lance Berkman, with whom the A's met in Houston on Tuesday. Though other clubs figure to be in the hunt for the veteran switch-hitter, including the Rockies, the A's are thought to be one of his strongest suitors. Berkman is expected to garner a one- or two-year deal that would bring him \$6-7 million each season -- numbers the A's can easily afford. Another possibility is Hideki Matsui, who has not been pursued as heavily by clubs as Berkman. Either way, there's no doubt the A's need upgraded production from this spot next season.

Who they can or need to trade

3B Kevin Kouzmanoff Kouzmanoff's name falls under this category with an asterisk attached, as his status in Oakland for the 2011 season solely depends on Oakland's pursuit of free agent Adrian Beltre, to whom the A's have reportedly offered a significant contract. If Beltre signs, the A's could trade Kouzmanoff to a team in need of a third baseman, such as the Indians. If they fall short on Beltre, though, they'd be hard-pressed to find another option -- especially one that boasts as strong of a defensive presence as Kouzmanoff. Thus, the 29-year-old Kouzmanoff could very well be starting at the hot corner again come April. Aside from him, the club is not expected to make any splashes on the trade front. Rather, the A's would like to focus on free-agent possibilities, having already dealt away Vin Mazzaro and Rajai Davis.

Top prospects

Names who may be brought up by other teams in trade talks, but are not necessarily available, include left-hander Ian Krol, right-hander Travis Banwart, first baseman Sean Doolittle, second basemen Adrian Cardenas and Jemile Weeks, shortstop Grant Green, third baseman Stephen Parker and outfielders Michael Taylor and Corey Brown.

Non-tendered contracts

Jack Cust, Travis Buck, Edwin Encarnacion

Arbitration-eligible

LHPs Craig Breslow and Dallas Braden; RHPs Joey Devine and Brad Ziegler; 3B Kouzmanoff; OFs Ryan Sweeney and Conor Jackson

Payroll summation

An exact figure is far from determined, but the club has the potential to reach the \$60 million mark next season, representing a boost from the \$50 million entering the 2010 season. Seven players are eligible for arbitration, but none will

affect the club's pursuit of outside talent. The A's have yet to spend much this winter and figure to have more than \$20 million available for the 2011 campaign, leaving plenty of room for roster additions.

A's part ways with Buck, Cust, Encarnacion

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Thursday's anticipated non-tender deadline didn't bring many surprises in Oakland, as the A's declined to offer 2011 contracts to Jack Cust, Travis Buck and Edwin Encarnacion.

All three players subsequently became free agents.

The loss of Cust and Buck were highly expected, as was the parting of ways with one of the club's two third basemen on the same day rampant reports spread about Adrian Beltre being close to a deal with Oakland. Beltre, however, told the Boston Globe late Thursday that his first preference is returning to the Red Sox.

Encarnacion's departure, which came just 20 days after the A's claimed him off waivers from the Blue Jays, paved the way for the A's to tender incumbent third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff a contract. What that decision -- choosing a better defensive third baseman over one with more power -- says about the club's pursuit of Beltre is unknown.

Thursday's news marks the second straight year in which the A's have non-tendered Cust, whose exit could signal thinking that Oakland officials feel confident about signing a free agent such as Lance Berkman. A's representatives met with Berkman in Houston on Tuesday and are still considered to be strong suitors. Adam Dunn was also on Oakland's radar, but multiple reports confirmed Thursday he has reached a deal with the White Sox.

Cust, who earned \$2.65 million in 2010, would have likely doubled that figure for the 2011 season through arbitration based on recent performance. Last year, the A's wound up agreeing on a one-year deal with the slugger, but the two parties aren't expected to reunite again this time.

The 31-year-old Cust, who managed to compile his best average (.271) since joining the A's in 2007 but saw his home run (13) and RBI (52) totals drop, batted .247 with 97 home runs, 281 RBIs, 377 walks and 673 strikeouts in 533 games during his four years with Oakland.

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 all but ensured Thursday's inevitable news despite Buck once being tagged as one of the franchise's top prospects.

The club's other arbitration-eligible players, which included hurlers Craig Breslow, Dallas Braden, Joey Devine and Brad Ziegler, along with outfielders Conor Jackson and Ryan Sweeney, were all tendered contracts.

By tendering them contracts, the A's now begin the arbitration process, in which the player and club exchange offers on Jan. 18. If the sides can't reach an agreement on a contract, a three-judge arbitration panel will conduct a hearing and assign the player either the club's offer or his offer -- nothing in-between -- as his salary for 2011. The A's, however, have enjoyed great success with avoiding arbitration hearings.

Anderson, Cahill, Ross hit zoo with young fans

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The baby-faced trio of Brett Anderson, Trevor Cahill and Tyson Ross sat in front of more than 200 children, all of them looking back at the pitchers with big eyes and even larger smiles in a flurry of noise and activity at the Oakland Zoo on Thursday.

It wasn't too long ago Anderson, Cahill and Ross wore that same facial expression as youngsters. Ross, a hometown boy, remembers visits by Rickey Henderson at a local ball field in Oakland. Anderson, meanwhile, was always surrounded by the baseball type thanks to his father Frank's job as a renowned college baseball coach.

Yet, here they were, along with Cahill, standing on the other side of the spectrum, looking down to meet children's faces instead of the other way around.

"You can see them looking all wide-eyed," said Anderson. "For them, everything seems so grand, being able to meet ballplayers. That was me when I was younger. It's almost like it's come full-circle."

Thursday's outing was all part of the A's Community Fund's annual holiday party, held since 2003. The organization hosted children in kindergarten through fifth grade from Thurgood Marshall Elementary School in Oakland, handing them a break from class in the form of a zoo trip that featured player autographs and pictures, along with a wrapped gift courtesy of the Good Tidings Foundation.

In addition, the event included an animal presentation in the Wildlife Theater, lunch provided by Round Table Pizza, visits by Santa and A's mascot Stomper, and face-painting and arts-and-crafts opportunities.

Anderson, Cahill and Ross met with all the children, many of which shared their Christmas wish lists -- "One kid said he wanted a check for \$1,000," Cahill said -- and basked in the presence of professional athletes and Santa. Even when the players ran out of pictures to sign, several youngsters proceeded to receive a dose of body art courtesy of autographs on their arms.

"I'm not so sure the moms are going to be happy about that," Anderson said with a laugh. "If I was a mom, I wouldn't be."

Those same moms, though, are likely to hear nonstop stories about their children's newfound friends.

"That's why we're here," Ross said. "This is definitely a cool event. It's a good reason for the kids to get out of school for a bit, and it's great we can get out in the community and do this for them."

"It's an opportunity for us to give back and show our face out here," Anderson said. "It's really fun for the kids, especially around the holidays."

Thurgood Marshall's principal, Maya Woods-Cadiz, is a native of Oakland and mentioned there's a certain pride that comes with watching players from hometown teams, especially ones who can push aside all the negative connotations that come along with professional athletes these days.

"We run a really rigorous program at our school," Woods-Cadiz said. "It's a strict environment because we hold our kids to a higher standard. We want them to be career-ready, so we work them incredibly hard. All of this goes along with that model that there's something more. These players have so much passion for what they do, so what a great example for our kids."