

A's News Clips, Monday, December 6, 2010

Report: Iwakuma turns down Oakland A's offer, returns to Japan

Oakland Tribune staff report 12/6/2010

The Oakland A's have reportedly lost out on another free agent as Japanese pitcher Hisashi Iwakuma, has decided to return to the Rakuten Golden Eagles of Japan's Pacific League.

Iwakuma and the A's had until Monday's 9 p.m. deadline to reach agreement on a contract after Oakland won the bidding rights for the Japanese star. However, the Mainichi Daily News reported Monday morning that sources say a frustrated Iwakuma has already decided to remain in Japan.

Iwakuma would join Lance Berkman and Adrian Beltre as free-agent targets who the A's weren't able to sign. Berkman, whom the A's saw as their potential designated hitter, signed with St. Louis over the weekend and the A's have reportedly withdrawn their bid for Beltre, who showed little interest in Oakland.

Iwakuma reportedly lost his motivation to play for the A's after receiving what he considered below-market contract offers, beginning with Oakland's original offer of four years and \$15.25 million.

The A's bid \$19.1 million for negotiating rights for Iwakuma, a 10-year veteran of Japanese professional ball who was regarded as the second-best pitcher in Japan behind Yu Darvish. The A's will recover their \$19.1 million bid.

The A's have four-fifths of their rotation set with Brett Anderson, Trevor Cahill, Gio Gonzalez and Dallas Braden. They have decent fifth-starter candidates in Josh Outman, Bobby Cramer and Tyson Ross.

But Outman missed all of last season recovering from elbow surgery, and Anderson, Braden and Ross battled injuries last season.

A report two weeks ago suggested the A's have interest in former Texas Rangers right-hander Brandon McCarthy, currently a free agent.

A's likely to test free agent market at winter meetings

By Carl Steward , Oakland Tribune 12/5/2010

ORLANDO, Fla. -- The A's haven't been big players at recent winter meetings, and if that's going to change, it may be up to any number of free agents that general manager Billy Beane could be trying to lure to Oakland.

"Finding a bat for the middle of the lineup continues to be what we're looking at," Beane said. "Most of our activity, at least to this point, has been exploring free-agent possibilities. We're not currently engaged in any trade discussions and we don't anticipate engaging in any at the winter meetings. I think our focus will continue to be on the free-agent market."

The A's lost out on one of their free-agent targets when veteran Lance Berkman signed a one-year, \$8 million deal with the St. Louis Cardinals over the weekend.

Several sources indicate the A's have withdrawn their five-year, \$64 million offer to free-agent third baseman Adrian Beltre.

Apparently, the A's grew weary of waiting on Beltre, who earlier this week expressed a desire to return to Boston. Beltre spurned a multiyear offer from Oakland last season, and he doesn't seem interested in coming to the Bay Area despite this year's repeat lucrative offer.

With Berkman off the market and the Beltre chase cooled, there are a number of other targets the A's might zero in on to provide much-needed power for the middle of their lineup.

Beane said the A's are determined to change the dynamic at that spot after non-tendering Jack Cust, and that could unfold this week.

Options include Vladimir Guerrero, Hideki Matsui, Carlos Pena, Jim Thome, Derrek Lee and Nick Johnson. Among second-tier possibilities are Matt Diaz, Xavier Nady and recently non-tendered Edwin Encarnacion.

If the Beltre pursuit is completely dead, it's doubtful the A's will try to upgrade at third base since they already have Kevin Kouzmanoff to play the position.

Beane has been vocal in recent years that the winter meetings actually impede the process of making deals. He reiterated that again heading into these meetings, so a breakthrough might not happen here.

"I think if you ask most of the (GMs), given their choice, they would probably rather work out of their office, because you can be more effective there," he said. "Once again, it has turned into such a media event it can be somewhat cumbersome to actually have face-to-face conversations. They're usually done by phone now."

One A's decision definitely will come during these meetings. The A's negotiating rights for Japanese right-hander Hasashi Iwakuma will expire today at 9 p.m. PST. The A's would have to complete a deal and a physical with Iwakuma before the deadline. There were reports late Sunday that Iwakuma was still in Japan.

"We said at the beginning that we're not going to comment on it until it's either concluded successfully or the deadline runs out," Beane said.

A's winter meetings preview

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune 12/5/2010

ALREADY ACCOMPLISHED: The A's have kept plenty busy so far this offseason. They've picked up options on second baseman Mark Ellis and center fielder Coco Crisp, altered their outfield by acquiring David DeJesus and trading Rajai Davis, and shelled out a \$19.1 million bid for Japanese right-hander Hisashi Iwakuma, with whom they are now negotiating.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: Despite their early activity, the A's offseason will be defined by whether they can import a power hitter or two to juice up their offense. Their decision to nontender Jack Cust proves they're looking for a fresh face at designated hitter. Adding pitching depth -- in the rotation and bullpen -- wouldn't hurt either, though signing Iwakuma would give them five solid starting pitchers.

WHOM THEY'RE TARGETING: The A's were zeroed in on Lance Berkman as a prospective DH until he signed with the St. Louis Cardinals on Saturday. Free agent Hideki Matsui would seem a logical fallback plan, and Oakland was linked to him at last year's meetings. As they refocus their search for a DH, the A's might step up their pursuit of third baseman Adrian Beltre. And this week could provide sit-down time with his agent, Scott Boras.

TRADE WINDS: Oakland is focused on adding free agents right now as opposed to swinging a deal. But the Colorado Rockies are known to have interest in third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff, and if a Beltre signing approached fruition, Kouzmanoff would be expendable. The A's traded Vin Mazzaro but have no interest in dealing their remaining young pitchers.

DON'T BE SURPRISED IF: A contract agreement with Iwakuma can't be reached by Monday's 9 p.m. deadline, and you start hearing the A's linked to starting pitchers on the open market. There are plenty of back-of-the-rotation arms available. One of the most intriguing free agents is Brandon Webb, who's garnering interest despite missing most of the past two seasons with shoulder problems. But after last year's failed Ben Sheets experiment, the A's might shy away from a pitcher coming off a serious injury.

Chin Music: With Lance Berkman out of the equation, where do A's turn next?

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 12/4/2010 4:51PM

It's back-to-the-drawing board time for the A's with today's news that Lance Berkman signed a one-year, \$8 million deal with the St. Louis Cardinals. Berkman was the A's No. 1 free agent target, and now they'll be looking elsewhere to find a DH they hope can provide some power to this offense. It's also logical to assume that the A's will turn up the heat in their pursuit of third baseman Adrian Beltre. You have to think the A's have made their pitch to Beltre and now are waiting for an answer. Could they go back and make an even more enticing offer?

I think the A's chances at landing Beltre are partly tied to two of their AL West rivals. The Angels — who could use an upgrade at third base — are thought of as a possible destination for Beltre. But the Angels covet outfielder Carl Crawford as their top free agent target. Now it's also being reported that there's mutual interest between the Texas Rangers and Crawford, who was born and raised in Houston. Granted, several teams are in on him, including the Yankees and Red Sox. But let's say the Rangers were to swoop in and sign Crawford. Would that spur the Angels to then push hard to sign Beltre, just to keep up with the defending AL West champs? And would the Angels' potential interest in Beltre doom the A's

chances? I don't know. Perhaps Oakland overwhelms him with a great multi-year offer and perhaps Beltre doesn't want to wait around forever, and the A's get their third baseman.

As for Berkman being out of the picture, I can tell you the A's ranked a list of hitters they wanted to target this winter. Now they're having to work further down that list for DH possibilities. You have to think Hideki Matsui now becomes a strong possibility, and it adds intrigue to the Hisashi Iwakuma negotiations if you believe the theory that signing Iwakuma would help Oakland get Matsui. It's believed the A's still hold hope they can sign Iwakuma, a right-hander who would bolster the depth of their rotation. Tuesday is the deadline to get him under contract, or he remains the property of the Rakuten Golden Eagles in Japan.

Any thoughts on what hitters you'd like to see the A's pursue moving forward?

Chin Music: Ryan Sweeney agrees to one-year, \$1.4 million deal; doing well in recovery from knee surgery

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune 12/3/2010 1:29PM

The A's took care of one of their seven players up for arbitration, signing outfielder Ryan Sweeney to a one-year, \$1.4 million deal that includes some incentives. That leaves six arbitration-eligible players left to sign: Pitchers Dallas Braden, Craig Breslow, Joey Devine and Brad Ziegler; third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff and outfielder Conor Jackson. Remember, all of these players are under contract w/the team now. It's just a matter of whether the A's can agree to financial terms with them, or whether they go through the arbitration process, in which a third party would assign a salary sometime in February. Players and teams generally try to avoid arbitration, and the A's have had great success coming to terms with players before that stage. Over the next several weeks, we'll hear of more of the remaining six agreeing to deals.

I talked to Sweeney over the phone, and he said his surgically repaired right knee is coming along well. He's heading to Colorado on Tuesday for a check-up with Dr. Richard Steadman, who performed the July 30 procedure that was aimed to ease tendinitis in the knee. Sweeney said he's hopeful he'll be cleared to start running and doing hitting drills. His left knee also has caused him trouble, but Sweeney chose rehab over surgery for that knee, and he said it's also responding well to treatment. Overall, he sounded very upbeat about his health, and his goal is to be full strength by the start of spring training.

The A's have Sweeney penciled in to play either left or right field, with David DeJesus manning the opposite corner spot.

A's rescind offer to Adrian Beltre

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

For the second year in a row, the A's failed to land free-agent third baseman Adrian Beltre.

On Sunday, the team withdrew an offer to Beltre worth at least \$64 million over five years, according to a source in the organization. The A's had been talking to him for weeks and met with the All-Star once, but they decided it was time to move on to other options when Beltre did not accept terms before the start of the winter meetings.

In addition, Beltre had stated his preference for Boston last week, though he might get squeezed out of a spot there; as of late Sunday, the Red Sox's deal for San Diego's Adrian Gonzalez appeared back on. Last year, Beltre turned down more years and money from Oakland to go to Boston; it's clear to the A's that he's not interested in coming to Oakland.

The team still must add at least one or two power bats to the lineup. Available remaining sluggers include Vladimir Guerrero, Hideki Matsui, Carlos Pena, and possibly Adam LaRoche or Derrek Lee. Paul Konerko is expected to return to the White Sox and Jim Thome to the Twins.

Guerrero is thought to be a decent bet to go back to Texas, though the A's have put in a call on him. The team's interest level in Pena isn't believed to be high, so Matsui likely is on the list of top potential targets for now.

The A's still have not come to terms with Japanese pitcher Hisashi Iwakuma, but according to a source, Iwakuma would not have to take a physical before the teams reached an agreement on a contract. He could take the physical after any agreement and if he fails, the contract would be voided. The deadline is midnight Monday.

Winter meetings preview

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle, 12/5/2010

Cliff Lee: Yankees or Rangers, until further notice. If he wants biggest bucks and most years, it's the Yankees. If he wants to be a team's biggest difference-maker, it's the Rangers.

Carl Crawford: Torii Hunter said the Angels "need" the gifted outfielder, and someone would say the same on behalf of the Tigers and Rangers. Yankees in, of course. At 29, the best all-around available player, able to take over a game offensively or defensively.

Jayson Werth: Like Crawford, Werth's average annual salary will be in high teens. Right fielder will hear from Yankees, Red Sox, Angels, Rangers, Tigers and, of course, Phillies.

Adrian Beltre: A's became a favorite to sign third baseman once Red Sox traded for first baseman Adrian Gonzalez (Kevin Youkilis now plays third). Beltre said he enjoyed full houses in Boston. Playing in Oakland might be adjustment.

Vladimir Guerrero: Just an AL player, as Giants fans witnessed in Game 1 of World Series. Rangers still want him after declining his \$9 million option. They might get him on cheap if market is sparse.

TRADE BAIT

Justin Upton: New Diamondbacks GM Kevin Towers would be bold to trade gifted outfielder, but Towers needs a bunch of pitching. Upton would be big prize for low-revenue teams that avoid free agency. Brother B.J. of Rays also to be asked about.

Prince Fielder: With Gonzalez dealt, Fielder may be next power first baseman to go. Brewers need pitching and would rather deal immense Fielder, one year from free agency, than Ryan Braun. White Sox were interested before signing Adam Dunn.

Zack Greinke: Free agent after 2012 season. Has no-trade clause to 15 teams and wants no part of Yankees. Could wind up Ranger if Lee goes to Bronx. Could be lots of bidding - not much depth among free-agent starters.

Heath Bell: Next Padre to go? If GM Jed Heyer is starting over, why keep All-Star closer? Highest value could come after free-agent closers Rafael Soriano, J.J. Putz and Bobby Jenks are signed. Another closer, Boston's Jonathan Papelbon, also a trade possibility.

Jason Bartlett: The Giants had serious interest in the Rays' shortstop but no more, now that Miguel Tejada is aboard. Other available shortstops: Minnesota's J.J. Hardy, Boston's Marco Scutaro and Kansas City's Yuniesky Betancourt.

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

Yankees: Because they can. That's why they're in on any big-name free agent. Lee, Crawford. Werth. Everyone but Barry Bonds. Expect equal chitchat from Red Sox camp.

Dodgers: GM Ned Colletti signed infielder Juan Uribe and solidified rotation by signing Jon Garland and re-signing Hiroki Kuroda and Ted Lilly. Dodgers far from done. Keep an eye on Matt Kemp rumors. It's possible catcher Russell Martin could return as utility guy.

A's: Billy Beane has money to spend and wants to beef up offense. Hope is that David DeJesus is just start of upgrading process. Hideki Matsui a fallback? Hisashi Iwakuma fate determined at meetings.

Mets: Sandy Alderson is new sheriff in town and wasn't hired to stand pat. Mets have been embarrassing, underachieving team, and new blood coming, starting with manager Terry Collins. Does Alderson trade Jose Reyes, who'll make \$11 million next year? Carlos Beltran's contract too colossal to move.

Diamondbacks: Justin Upton isn't only chip. Most everyone available (not Stephen Drew). Towers wants to cut down on all those strikeouts, and trading third baseman Mark Reynolds would be big step. Teams crave his power, but did he really hit .198?

Drumbeat: Berkman chooses Cardinals over A's

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser 12/4/2010, 12/55PM

Lance Berkman is the latest free-agent target to spurn the A's, choosing to go to St. Louis for one year and \$8 million. He'd called the A's "aggressive" in their approach, and general manager Billy Beane flew to Houston to meet with Berkman, but he's chosen to return to the National League. I doubt he'll be playing first base much: St. Louis has Albert Pujols.

I'm sure the A's could offer Berkman more at-bats than he's likely to get as an outfielder with the Cardinals, but I'm not sure about the money side. The figures kicking around the past week or two were in the \$7 million range, but there has been no confirmation to date of an exact A's offer.

This means two things: The A's are likely to step up their pursuit of third baseman Adrian Beltre even more, and they now need to find another DH possibility.

With Adam Dunn off the market, Hideki Matsui, onetime Oakland player Carlos Pena and Sacramento native Derrek Lee are all sure to be mentioned. Jim Thome is considered likely to return to the Twins, and he's 40. Another Sacramentan, Nick Johnson, was once an A's target earlier in his career, he's had numerous injuries, insert easy joke here about how perfect a fit that makes him for Oakland.

Earlier in the day, it appeared the A's might get the upper hand in talks with Beltre when the Red Sox acquired Adrian Gonzalez from the Padres - the thinking is that Kevin Youkilis will shift to third, leaving no spot in Boston for Beltre.

Youkilis also could be moved to the outfield, though, and Beltre stated a preference to remain in Boston the other day.

With Berkman going to St. Louis, the A's now need to sign Beltre even more, though, or they'll have lost out on their top two free-agent targets. That might put Beltre - and hard-driving agent Scott Boras - back in the driver's seat.

The pieces are all starting to fall in free-agent world. Will the A's land Beltre, or will he snub them for the second year in a row? He really doesn't seem to want to come to Oakland much, which, even as good a player as he is, might be cause for concern should the A's manage to sign him. Can Oakland then land a second-tier DH? Or will the team turn back to Edwin Encarnacion, non-tendered by the A's just two days ago?

If the Coliseum really is scaring off top-notch talent, as the A's insist, then there really is a problem. I'd assume the committee exploring the A's stadium issue is taking note, but Oakland is working at a competitive disadvantage if offering more money than other teams and still not getting the players they'd like.

Meetings begin with A's looking for a bat or two

GM Beane likely to address offensive needs with free agents

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. -- A's general manager Billy Beane's status at the Winter Meetings has varied over the years, depending on his club's needs.

Some Decembers have seen him play the role of the ball's belle, others the cautious wall flower.

This year, Beane is expected to maintain more of the latter's qualities, as his staff isn't looking to jumpstart any more trades with other clubs but, rather, focus on the free-agent market -- where an upgraded bat or two is expected to be found.

However, don't assume that stance will take away from any news. All MLB.com club reporters are now officially here at the Walt Disney World Swan & Dolphin Hotel in Lake Buena Vista, Fla., and will be through Thursday when the meetings come to an end. Thus, A's readers can expect constant coverage here at oaklandathletics.com on a daily basis.

Beane is slated to hold court with local reporters in a round of informal sessions in his suite Monday and Tuesday night, and assistant general manager David Forst will take over those duties Wednesday. Each of those nights, readers will be offered a breakdown of these talks, as well as any other news that may come up.

In addition, manager Bob Geren is scheduled to greet media in a half-hour session on Monday evening -- the results of which can also be found here.

All fans are encouraged to have at it in the "Comments" section. What do you think the A's should do moving forward in the offseason? What questions and/or issues would you like addressed during Geren's meeting with the media and Beane's gatherings?

Let us know, and look for those answers as the meetings unfold.

A's not likely to reach deal with Iwakuma

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. -- Shortly after the conclusion of the World Series, the A's greeted the offseason with a surprise move when they won negotiating rights for Hisashi Iwakuma with a \$19.1 million posting fee.

Now, as the 30-day window to complete a deal narrows, the A's appear primed to be getting that cash back, as there has been no indication that a deal is in place, or even close to it.

The A's have until 9 p.m. PT on Monday to sign the Japanese right-hander, but as of late Sunday he had not undergone a physical.

Though an official announcement on the final verdict isn't expected until Tuesday at the Winter Meetings, all signs indicate Iwakuma is poised to return to the Rakuten Golden Eagles of Japan's Pacific League after reportedly asking Oakland for a deal that would average \$12 million per season over three years -- numbers that reflect the earnings of fellow Japanese pitcher Hiroki Kuroda, who re-signed with the Dodgers for one year at \$12 million in November after completing a three-year, \$35.3 million deal.

However, the A's were said to only be willing to offer Iwakuma \$7 million-\$9 million per year, which would take into consideration the posting fee. Iwakuma has never pitched in the Majors, and he figured to be part of the back end of Oakland's rotation, which already boasts the likes of All-Star Trevor Cahill, Brett Anderson, Gio Gonzalez and Dallas Braden.

The A's will use the money presumably recovered from the posting fee to bring in free agents in an effort fill a strong offensive void. However, the club has already endured problems of alluring such hitters to Oakland. In the past week, the A's have seen potential power additions Lance Berkman and Adam Dunn go elsewhere. Even free-agent third baseman Adrian Beltre, whom Oakland has reportedly offered a large contract for a second straight year, appears disinterested in joining the green and gold and primed for another location.

With Beltre seemingly out of the picture, the A's will turn their focus toward other available hitters -- a group that could potentially include former Oakland player Carlos Pena, as well as Hideki Matsui.

Major League: Iwakuma update: Talks still ongoing

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 12/6/2010 7:51am

Greetings from Orlando. The A's have until 9 p.m. PT -- 12 a.m. ET here at the Winter Meetings -- to sign Japanese right-hander Hisashi Iwakuma. Talks are reportedly still ongoing, but there is no indication that the two sides are close to finalizing a contract. My understanding is that Iwakuma does need to have a physical done by the time of the deadline (which has yet to happen) if a deal is reached, a notion that was confirmed by a Major League source. That ruling could be lenient, though -- I'm not entirely sure. The A's are still not commenting on the situation and don't plan to until negotiations are complete. I wouldn't be surprised if the club uses every possible minute up until that deadline, though an announcement could seemingly come as early as 6 p.m. ET, when Billy Beane is scheduled to meet with reporters. I believe both sides are focused on getting a deal done, but money seems to be talking here -- and Iwakuma's agent wants lots of it.

Updated: According to the Mainichi Daily News, Iwakuma is scheduled to give a press conference Wednesday in Japan announcing his return to the Rakuten Golden Eagles. "Oakland put a four-year, \$15.25 million offer on the table for Iwakuma on Nov. 19 and basically told him to take it or leave it," the Daily News said. "Iwakuma's camp believed that the terms were below the pitcher's worth and showed a lack of sincerity, leading to a breakdown in talks." However, the report did note that talks are still ongoing.

More updates to come as the day continues...

A's trio joins kids for shopping spree at Target

By Jane Lee / MLB.com 12/3/2010

SAN LEANDRO, Calif. -- A's right-hander Trevor Cahill has proven to be rather efficient on the mound.

In the mall, though, not so much. At least not when shopping with 8-year-old Brandon.

The pair, armed with Brandon's Christmas wish list and \$250, spent nearly two hours inside Target on Friday morning as the A's Community Fund's annual Caravan tour continued around the Bay Area.

Cahill was joined by fellow pitchers Brett Anderson and Tyson Ross in escorting 10 children from Oakland's Salvation Army Garden Center Shelter on a shopping trip.

Five girls and five boys from the shelter each received a \$200 gift card to Target in Bayfair Center in San Leandro, Calif., to purchase items of their choice for Christmas. In addition, each child received a \$50 gift card to buy items for a family member or other special person of their choice.

The children were chosen to take part in the experience by the Lend A Hand Foundation, which offers youth in transition the opportunity to engage in educational, sporting and cultural activities not otherwise available to them.

Cahill's pal, Brandon, took advantage of every minute of it, seemingly walking down every aisle while meticulously studying potential buys. One second a skateboard sat in his cart, and the next it was replaced with a Nerf gun set. Five minutes later, both toys were forgotten and set aside when a spy kit was found.

"He's a very careful shopper," said Cahill, being pulled every which way. "He's trying to find the most perfect thing in the entire store."

Anderson, meanwhile, found amusement in his teammate's journey around Target after finishing his own excursion with a couple of girls, who introduced him to the pink aisle -- otherwise known as the home of Barbie and friends.

"We did phenomenal today," Anderson said. "We got three kids to fill their carts and check out within 45 minutes. I'm now an expert on shopping with little girls. We picked out clothes, dolls, all the girly stuff."

Anderson admitted it helps having a 12-year-old sister.

"It's a process," he said of the female shopping experience. "It's not just about clothes. There are accessories, too."

"It's fun, though. This is a great opportunity for them around the holidays. When they found out they were shopping with us, the expression on their faces was priceless. And I've been surprised how generous they are, wanting to buy gifts for other people."

Brandon was no exception. With the help of Cahill and Anderson, he decided upon a green scarf -- mindful of A's colors -- along with a purse, umbrella and watch for his mother. And for himself? The spy kit and a handful of other spy gadgets won out over all other options. He was also able to purchase a few clothing items and an A's calendar, all the while introducing Cahill to everyone in sight as his "buddy."

After the shopping event, each child was treated to lunch at Chevy's, where they received autographs and took photos with the players before a visit -- and more pictures -- with Santa.

"Seeing all the smiles on the kids' faces is great," said Detra Paige, A's director of community relations. "They knew who the players were and picked out who they wanted to shop with. Most of their lives they've lived in a shelter, so this is a good break for them, and I love seeing them so happy."

A's, Sweeney agree to one-year contract

By Evan Drellich / MLB.com

The A's avoided arbitration with outfielder Ryan Sweeney, signing the 25-year-old to a one-year deal on Friday.

Sweeney led Oakland with a .294 batting average this past season before he went on the disabled list with right patella tendinitis after the All-Star break. He underwent season-ending surgery on July 30, finishing with one home run and 36 RBIs in 82 games.

Six A's players remain arbitration-eligible: pitchers Dallas Braden, Craig Breslow, Joey Devine and Brad Ziegler, outfielder Conor Jackson and third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff.

Potential A's Move to San Jose Looms in Background at Winter Meetings

By John Hickey , fanhouse, 12/6/2010

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. -- The Winter Meetings start Monday morning in the shadow of Disney World, and by the time they come to an end midday Thursday, there will be winners and losers, and plenty of people willing to tell you who they are.

You can take it as fact that the San Francisco Giants and the Oakland Athletics will wind up in separate categories. One will be a winner and one will be a loser.

And if recent history is anything to go by, San Francisco will come out on top.

The A's are looking to move operations to San Jose at a site not far from HP Pavilion where the NHL's San Jose Sharks play. There is a plan (and financing) in place to build a new ballpark if they can get the go-ahead to move the approximately 40 miles down from their aging Coliseum home.

They are just waiting for the approval of baseball commissioner Bud Selig, and Selig apparently is waiting for the results of a blue-ribbon panel he put together to study the situation. There are indications that the study is done, but baseball isn't saying so, and Selig isn't in any rush to make a call.

For three decades now the Giants have asserted that the San Jose area -- home to the largest city by population in Northern California as well as to the well-monied tech world of the Silicon Valley -- is their own personal fiefdom.

It appears that Selig isn't anxious to pick up the telephone and tell the Giants they are losing their exclusivity in the South Bay.

A's executives won't comment, deferring all comment to club president Lew Wolff. Last week Wolff said he was hoping to get word from Selig in the near future, but that's been true for the last year or so, and word hasn't been forthcoming.

And every day that call isn't made is a win for the Giants and a loss for the A's. Oakland can build its roster one way if there is going to be a ballpark in San Jose and the revenue streams that accompany that. If not, players the A's would like to make a run at will wind up elsewhere.

"The A's are hamstrung by the situation," a well-connected baseball insider told FanHouse Sunday as the vast majority of the sport's power brokers assembled in suburban Orlando. "They are always going to be a small-money, small-market team while they are playing in the Coliseum."

To be sure, there is a plan to keep the A's in Oakland in the area of Jack London Square, but access to Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) is five blocks away and access to I-880 is on business-lined surface streets that couldn't handle the flow of a baseball season. It might cost \$500 million to construct freeway access and "that's before the first brick is laid on the stadium itself," a source said. The A's can't afford that, and the cash-strapped city, county and state bodies certainly can't.

Add to that that the land in question does not all belong to the city and that over a dozen business would have to be relocated to make the proposed site available, and the Jack London Square plan has serious problems.

The easy play from Selig's view would be to keep the A's in Oakland or the East Bay if at all possible. But the last decade and a half has seen one East Bay plan after another fade into the mist as the A's soldier on in the Coliseum, one of just two major league teams -- Tampa Bay is the other -- playing in an old and unenhanced stadium in front of minimalist crowds.

The A's have already come up a loser this month. Last Tuesday was the deadline to let voters have a say on a March ballot in the A's move south. The city controls the land, it's true, but San Jose voters need to approve the use of the land for the ballpark. And now that vote won't take place until later in the year at the earliest.

Still, the question can't be dodged forever. Baseball in Oakland as currently constituted simply seems unviable.

For that reason, the commissioner is going to have to do what the A's want or do what the Giants want. Either way, he's going to infuriate the other side.

Will we learn the fate of baseball in Northern California this week?

Don't bet on it.

Baseball: Iwakuma decides to head back to Rakuten

Mainichi Daily News, 12/6/2010

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Florida (Kyodo) -- Right-hander Hisashi Iwakuma, who was aiming to move to the major leagues via the posting system, has decided to return to the Rakuten Eagles without waiting until Tuesday's deadline to make up his mind, baseball sources said Sunday.

The Athletics had until Tuesday, 2 p.m. Japan time, to close the deal but the Japanese ace appears to have lost his motivation to play for the team after questioning its seriousness to sign him. Iwakuma is scheduled to give a press conference on Wednesday.

Oakland put a four-year, \$15.25 million offer on the table for Iwakuma on Nov. 19 and basically told him to take it or leave it. Iwakuma's camp believed that the terms were below the pitcher's worth and showed a lack of sincerity, leading to a breakdown in talks.

The sides remained in contact and Oakland had said they would consider shortening the number of years in the contract but the bad blood had already been created. Iwakuma questioned Oakland's initial motive and rejected the move.

Oakland will get back the \$19.1 million it put up to win the 30-day exclusive negotiating rights for the 29-year-old Iwakuma, the Pacific League MVP and the Sawamura Award winner in 2008.

Athletics general manager Billy Bean said that the club is in contact with Iwakuma but he could make no further comment until after Tuesday's deadline.

A's players cheer young fans at East Bay holiday events

By: Laith Agha, Oaklandnorth.com | December 4, 2010 – 2:42 pm |

With no baseball games for Oakland A's fans to go see until the season starts in April, A's players are spending some time this offseason going to see their fans.

The A's began their four-day Holiday Caravan Thursday at the Oakland Zoo, where three A's pitchers—Brett Anderson, Trevor Cahill and Oakland native Tyson Ross—signed autographs for students from Thurgood Marshall Elementary School. Joined by the A's mascot, Stomper, the players have been whipping around the East Bay to different charity events, making stops in El Cerrito, Walnut Creek, and a Target in San Leandro, where the A's crew took 10 children on a shopping spree, each having \$250 in gift certificates to spend in the store.

The caravan continued Saturday with stops in Oakland, San Francisco and Pleasant Hill. It concludes Sunday with two appearances in San Jose.

Video: <http://oaklandnorth.net/2010/12/04/as-players-cheer-young-fans-at-east-bay-holiday-events/>

A's work out details to make doubleheader a reality

Brian Beese, examiner.com, 12/5/2010

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Not since Bill Clinton was in the White House and Beavis and Butthead were childishly giggling their ways into our living rooms have the Oakland A's done what they will do next year.

For the first time in 15 years, the A's will conduct a single-admission doubleheader. And they will not do it on a chilly April weekend or a possibly meaningless late September day. They will do it on a Saturday in the middle of summer against the popular and usually quite talented Los Angeles Angels.

On July 16, the A's will play a twin-bill against the Angels. There will be no clearing of the park, no second round of tickets, no second parking fees. It will be a summer day of baseball, a chance to spend a day at the ballpark. You get 18 innings of baseball for the price of nine - a deal unheard of in these days of multimillion-dollar contracts.

The A's hope the attention-getting event puts butts (hee-hee-hee-hee, he said 'butts') in seats and is a memorable experience for fans.

The organization is also reaching out to fans, surveying them on promotions and what they want to see happening at the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum this year.

Jim Leahey, the A's vice president of marketing and sales, had a question-and-answer session with examiner.com about the doubleheader and other promotions for the coming season:

Examiner.com: Did the Players Union have to give its consent to make this happen? Did the Angels and Major League Baseball also have to give it their blessing?

Leahey: In certain cases, you must have player union approval and in others it is not required (depending on timing of previous day's game). In this case, yes, we worked with the Players Union.

We also worked with the league and the Angels. The good news is that we gained an extra day off for the players coming out of the All-Star break so that made it attractive to all. We also have days off following the series which will help us maintain a normal five-man rotation.

When was the last A's regularly scheduled single-admission doubleheader at home?

Leahey: We have not done a doubleheader like this in about 15 years. To the best of my knowledge, the last one was in '95 or '96 due to a schedule conflict with the Raiders.

Why is the organization doing it - losing second parking fees and second gate admissions?

Leahey: We are doing this to provide a good value to our fans. It will be part of an '80s weekend (Sunday will be '80s Day). We hope that it will attract enough interest such that Saturday's doubleheader attendance and revenue will be close to what we would have had for Thursday plus a single game Saturday. In any case, it's consistent with our Green Collar Baseball initiatives that emphasize value and a return to a genuine baseball experience. Win or lose at the gate, it will be different, memorable and fun.

Is there anything planned for between games? Anything different planned for game two? Any concerns that people won't sit through five or six hours of baseball?

Leahey: Still working on the entertainment between games. It will likely have a retro feel (think Frisbee dog, at least metaphorically). There's not a lot of time especially with lineup intros and so forth. However, it will be something simple, throwback and fun.

Saturday mid-summer, what better to do than to catch two games? Of course, people can arrive and depart as they like.

Baseball games are another experience in terms of pace ... Maybe something close to a round of golf where most people prefer not to look at their watch, but rather to enjoy getting away from those metrics (back to baseball, to count time in innings vs. minutes).

Regarding the feedback the organization is seeking about promotions, are fans being asked for promotion ideas? Have you done this before? If so, what has been the outcome?

Leahey: As for fan feedback on promos, we have asked fans for input in the past (including through Facebook and Twitter this past season as we began planning 2011). This latest survey is intended to get some general feedback as well as help us make some final decisions regarding specific items. The decisions are a moving puzzle this time of year pending sponsor interest; the players on our team; key target dates; and special events, such as Little League Days and Fireworks Nights.

The overwhelming criteria is what will attract fans so any feedback that helps us with that is invaluable. I would say we have five to 10 promo days that are still pending. We constantly seek feedback. However, we are taking advantage of these new tools (e.g. e-mail surveys) like never before. Getting such instant feedback close to real time with order deadlines looming is a fantastic resource.

Fight to keep A's in Oakland is alive

Glenn Dickey, sfexaminer.com 12/3/2010

Oakland is fighting the San Jose attempt, aided and abetted by A's managing general partner Lew Wolff, to hijack its team.

A plan to build a 39,000-seat park at Embarcadero and Oak Street, was presented to the Oakland planning commission on Wednesday. The 20-acre site, adjacent to Jack London Square, would include a parking lot and possibly retail outlets. It is next to Interstate 880 and close to the Lake Merritt BART station.

The city must do an environmental impact report. Meanwhile, San Jose mayor Chuck Reed, who has been campaigning to get the A's to San Jose, did not put a ballpark measure on the March ballot because he has not received the green light he has sought from baseball commissioner Bud Selig.

Ever since Wolff and John Fisher bought the A's in 2005, it's been obvious that San Jose was Wolff's preferred location for the team. He has been involved in several real estate deals in San Jose, including the downtown arena which now houses the Sharks.

He attempted to get a new park in Oakland, across 66th Avenue from the Coliseum, but he wanted the city to help him buy the properties on the site at cheap prices, and for BART to schedule a new stop by the site. Neither happened, and Wolff turned his eyes south again.

The roadblock has been the deal the Giants owners made with major league baseball when they bought the team from Bob Lurie in late 1992: They would build a new ballpark if they got exclusive rights in San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties.

Santa Clara County includes Silicon Valley, which the Giants tapped for money to build their new park — and for “charter seat” subscribers. Having fulfilled their end of the bargain, they’ve expected MLB to honor its end.

Selig and Wolff have been friends for many years, and Wolff apparently believed that their friendship would influence Selig into moving to get the Giants’ territorial rights removed.

But Selig is the ultimate politician. He never brings an issue to the table unless he’s sure it will pass. He’s appointed a special committee to look into the sites in Oakland and San Jose, and the committee has not yet reported after two years — because Selig hasn’t wanted that report. He’s been giving Oakland every chance to come up with a ballpark plan. Now, the city has it.

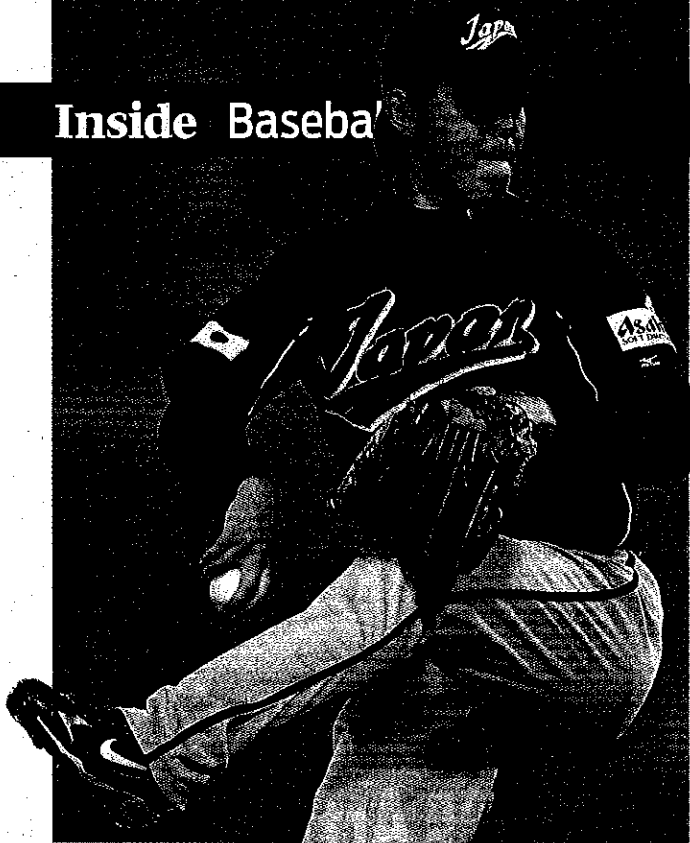
Meanwhile, Wolff has done everything he can to depress attendance in Oakland, from canceling FanFest to closing off almost all of the upper deck. Attendance has declined every year Wolff and Fisher have owned the team, except for a slight uptick last season.

The Oakland effort has been hampered by lack of support from the mayor. Jerry Brown actively opposed a new park while pushing an apartment building project in midtown. (Brown’s project has succeeded. With more residents downtown and cheaper rents than in San Francisco, Oakland has become a restaurant mecca.

Outgoing mayor Ron Dellums has been an empty suit, inactive on all fronts.

Incoming mayor Jean Quan, though, has promised support for the ballpark effort.

So, the fight to keep the A’s in Oakland is alive.



Whipping Post

Want a big-ticket Japanese starter? Beware the high price of negotiating with them—and their shaky history | BY JOE SHEEHAN

On Sunday the A's finished their third week of talks with Japanese pitcher Hisashi Iwakuma, a 29-year-old righthander whom they hope to add to a terrific young rotation. Last month Oakland won exclusive negotiating rights to Iwakuma for a 30-day period in a blind bidding process; it will reportedly pay the Rakuten Golden Eagles of Japan's Pacific League \$19 million should

they sign him. If the two sides can't reach an agreement by Dec. 7—Iwakuma, who has a 3.32 ERA in 10 seasons in the Japanese majors, reportedly wants a deal worth around \$40 million over four years; the team's best offer so far is \$15.25 million—the A's will pay nothing, and Iwakuma will remain in Japan for 2011.

Iwakuma would be a significant signing for the usually frugal A's, though the team might be better off letting him slip through their fingers. The track record of Japanese starters on this side of the Pacific is mixed, and those coming over through the posting system—created in 1998 so Japanese teams receive compensa-

tion when players who aren't free agents jump to the U.S.—have for the most part been expensive failures. Lefthander Kazuhisa Ishii, who signed with the Dodgers in 2002, cost \$24 million in posting fees and salary and produced a 4.44 ERA over four seasons for Los Angeles and the Mets. Southpaw Kei Igawa was brought over by the Yankees for \$46 million in 2006, including a \$26 million posting fee, and has thrown just 71½ major league innings. Most famously, the Red Sox paid a posting fee of \$51 million for the rights to Daisuke Matsuzaka in '06, gave him a six-year, \$52 million deal and have been largely disappointed since. In three of his

MINDING HIS BIDNESS

Iwakuma wants \$40 million on top of the \$19 million fee the A's would pay his team in Japan.

four U.S. seasons, Matsuzaka has had an ERA of 4.40 or higher.

Some Japanese pitchers have found success in the U.S., most notably starter Hideo Nomo in the mid-1990s, but generally they have been relievers who came here as free agents. Last season Takashi Saito (Braves), Hiroki Kuroda (Dodgers), Koji Uehara (Orioles) and Hisanori Takahashi (Mets) were all solid contributors; none reached the majors before turning 32. In fact, Japanese pitchers who have jumped here in their 30s have overall performed much better than those who came sooner.

The posting process exacerbates the risk for U.S. teams, who have to pay twice to sign a player. And getting accurate reads on Japanese hurlers has proved to be problematic. For example, no pitcher was as impressive to scouts as Matsuzaka was in the 2006 World Baseball Classic. But he has failed to adapt to the "take and rake" style of U.S. hitters, walking 4.3 per nine innings. Ishii and Igawa were desired for their power arms, but both have career strikeout rates here below 7.0 per nine.

The Iwakuma affair will be interesting, but a bigger story is on the horizon. Yu Darvish, a 24-year-old righthander who has had an ERA below 2.00 in his last four seasons, may be posted by the Nippon Ham Fighters next winter. Darvish, who is arguably more impressive to scouts than Matsuzaka was, would touch off a bidding war; the total investment to sign him will run well past the \$103 million the Red Sox spent on Matsuzaka. No matter his talent, that's a risky bet to make given the track record here of his countrymen. □

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