

Agent Scott Boras says Adrian Beltre still interested in Oakland A's

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. -- After a standing offer to free agent third baseman Adrian Beltre was ignored and ultimately pulled by the A's, the conventional thinking was that Beltre simply wasn't interested in coming to Oakland.

Not so, Beltre's agent, Scott Boras, said Wednesday at baseball's winter meetings.

"We have told teams that we would tell them if we were not interested, and we have told those teams where we are," Boras said. "Certainly, Oakland was a team (Beltre) said he would be interested in looking at. We had meetings with their club, so that's where we're at now."

The A's, as has been widely reported, made a five-year, \$64 million offer to Beltre, but it was subsequently withdrawn. Asked about Oakland rescinding its offer, Boras was unfazed.

"Offers are like curtains," he said. "There's opening and closing, but they're still in the room."

Boras said Beltre provided him a list of teams with whom he'd be interested in signing and that the A's always have been in play.

"This was conveyed to the A's long ago, as well as all the other teams we've dealt with that Adrian's interested in."

Boras said a number of teams already have approached him about Beltre's availability and been told it "would not be an environment they would go into." Baltimore, he intimated, was one of those clubs.

Among other suitors, the Los Angeles Angels -- the A's counterparts in the American League West -- are expected to be major players in the Beltre chase, and Boras acknowledged that Southern California brings advantages.

"Obviously, Adrian has a home in L.A. and he's played in L.A., so he's very comfortable in that marketplace," Boras said.

A's assistant general manager David Forst offered the standard club response to Boras' statements.

"I did see Scott's quotes, but we don't comment on free agents or individual players," Forst said.

The A's began winding down their winter meetings operation and, aside from today's Rule 5 draft, are basically done here. Forst characterized Wednesday as slow -- the club did not have conversations with agents or other clubs and basically had internal discussions.

"I think everybody gets really excited the first couple of nights, stays up late and tries to do a lot, then kind of runs out of gas on Wednesday," he said.

If nothing else, the A's learned their next designated hitter won't be Jack Cust. Cust signed a one-year, \$2.5 million deal with the Seattle Mariners.

"Good for Jack," Forst said. "I know he wanted to do something quickly and go somewhere he was wanted, so it's good for him."

As for their own DH targets, the A's might have to play a bit of a waiting game. Left-handed hitting veteran Hideki Matsui has been identified as the top choice, but the A's also might try to bid on Vladimir Guerrero. Sources indicate Guerrero is intent on returning to the Texas Rangers. When asked at a lunch meeting about Guerrero returning to the Rangers, Texas manager Ron Washington liked his team's chances, saying, "We're talking to him almost every day."

So was it a disappointing week for the A's? Forst said no.

"Just because we're not going to complete or announce anything, certainly doesn't mean it hasn't been a productive few days," he said. "I think the more chips that fall into place around us, the better our vision is of what the realistic options are."

I think we'd like to start working as soon as we get home on actually doing some things, but we don't always get to decide the time frame. It's a two-way street."

Chin Music: Boras says Beltre still interested in the A's

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune, 12/8/2010 12:18PM

Carl Steward here, subbing for Joe Stiglich on the A's doings at the MLB winter meetings in Lake Buena Vista, Fla. ...

Adrian Beltre's agent, Scott Boras, dropped a bit of a surprise Wednesday afternoon when, among a horde of reporters asking about myriad clients, I asked about whatever happened to the A's reported five-year, \$64 million offer to the veteran third baseman and the notion that he wasn't interested in Oakland. Boras said that wasn't the case.

"We have told teams that we would tell them if we were not interested, and we have told those teams where we are," said Boras. "Certainly, Oakland was a team (Beltre) said he would be interested in looking at. We had meetings with their club, so that's where we're at now."

It has been widely reported that the A's made a five-year, \$64 million offer to Beltre, but it was subsequently withdrawn in recent days. Asked about Oakland rescinding its offer, Boras was unfazed.

"Offers are like curtains," he said. "There's opening and closing, but they're still in the room."

Boras said Beltre provided him with a list of teams he'd be interested in signing with and that the A's have always been in play as a possibility ... and still are, as far as their side is concerned. It remains to be seen if the A's, who have a strict policy of not commenting on unsigned free agents, might open the curtain again on Beltre. But the agent said Oakland has been on the list of options since Day 1 of the process.

"This was conveyed to the A's long ago, as well as all the other teams we've dealt with that Adrian's interested in," the agent said.

Boras said there have already been a number of teams that have approached him about Beltre's availability to them and been told it "would not be an environment they would go into." Baltimore, he intimated, was one of those clubs.

Among other suitors, the A's counterparts in the AL West, the Los Angeles Angels, are expected to be major players in the Beltre chase and Boras admitted Southern California had attractive advantages.

"Obviously, Adrian has a home in L.A. and he's played in L.A., so he's very comfortable in that marketplace," Boras said.

Herhold: The San Jose council whiffs in allowing town homes near Santana Row

By Scott Herhold, Mercury News Columnist 12/8/2010

The San Jose City Council made one of its uglier mistakes of the year around 8:30 p.m. Tuesday. On an 8-3 vote, the council pretty much confessed that it was open to a deal, a shoddy deal, for baseball.

I know deals are the lifeblood of politics. And I like baseball. But this deal followed the long and sorry litany that has helped drive our fair city toward financial crisis.

Bear with me: The tale is a little tangled. At stake was a plan by Silverstone Communities to build 104 town homes on a 5.2-acre lot southeast of Santana Row, a piece of property now occupied by a vacant and largely unmaintained AT&T building. It's valuable land that is now an eyesore.

Twice before, in 2007 and 2008, the council declined requests to change the designation on the property from office to housing. It had a very good reason for doing so -- the financial health of the city.

Every study shows that housing is eventually a net loser for the city's treasury: Once they move in, residents need libraries, police, parks and firefighters. Offices and shops, meanwhile, pay for themselves. They require fewer city services and produce more taxes.

Ballpark land

One aspect of the AT&T transaction Tuesday night, however, made it different. AT&T also owns a key chunk of land in the path of the city's planned A's ballpark near the main train station. And there was plenty of council discussion about whether the fate of the two properties was entwined.

The charge of the folks who believed in this linkage, led by Councilman Pierluigi Oliverio, who represents the area, is that AT&T dangled the ballpark area land before the city as the quid pro quo for allowing housing on the Santana Row lot.

Ergo: Let us make a profit on property we no longer use near a fancy shopping center, and we won't stand in your way of acquiring the ballpark land.

Mayor Chuck Reed insisted there was no linkage. I couldn't immediately reach an AT&T official for a response. But Planning Director Joe Horwedel acknowledged that he was lobbied hard early on by the redevelopment agency, which wants the ballpark badly, to approve the Santana Row deal.

"It smells like and looks like a quid pro quo," Oliverio said.

Office building

The developers, it must be said, were clever. As part of their proposal, they reached an alliance with Barry Swenson Builder to maybe, someday, build a seven-story office building next to the housing. This was the sweetener to a council worried about preserving tax-generating office space.

But with local office vacancy levels above 20 percent, there's no guarantee that office building will ever be constructed. Council members Sam Liccardo and Rose Herrera, the two other dissenters, were skeptical about this aspect.

The history of San Jose over the last 60 years can be explained partly in terms of the preference for homes over businesses. As a largely bedroom community without an adequate tax base, the city is now laying off city workers.

After a wave of conversions of industrial property to housing under ex-Mayor Ron Gonzales, the council has looked at such requests more skeptically.

This time the council blinked. The A's ballpark hangs on lots of things, not least Major League Baseball. If need be, the city can always use eminent domain on the ballpark parcel. Is it so bad to do a deal for baseball? No. But doing a deal at Santana Row now gives away the store before it's necessary.

Kawakami: Giants not making A's path easy

By Tim Kawakami, Mercury News Columnist

Your December reset: The Giants are the Zen franchise, and the A's are scrambling to remind people they're still actually a living, breathing franchise after all.

Yes, these two teams are more intertwined now than ever, which is not working out so well lately for the A's.

For the Giants, the winter meetings activities this week have been mostly about addition by inaction.

Owner Bill Neukom's strategy: You get stronger if you quietly and sanely tend to your own business and watch your rivals get weaker.

Hard to argue with the positioning, especially when Neukom shows off that large and shiny 2010 championship trophy.

Surely, the Giants did not mind seeing San Diego trade away Adrian Gonzalez; meanwhile, the messy divorce of Dodgers owners Frank and Jamie McCourt remains bitterly unresolved.

And the essence of the Giants' 2010 run remains mostly unaltered. The magic may or may not be precisely repeatable, but the Giants haven't done much to screw it up, either.

The Giants lost Juan Uribe to the Dodgers but added Miguel Tejada and kept Aubrey Huff for fair prices and kept Pat Burrell for a bargain.

They have prospect Brandon Belt coming down the pipeline, possibly as soon as this spring, and they still have those bedrock pitchers.

The Giants are not in on any of the mega-free agents, but they have stayed out of that market since Neukom took over two years ago. And back when they were in that market, all it got them was Barry Zito and Aaron Rowand, anyway.

General manager Brian Sabean said this week that the Giants' payroll will probably be bumped up 20 percent to \$120 million, thanks to the Huff and Tejada deals and built-in raises to several players.

But I figure that's fairly covered by the post-Series money now pouring into the Giants' accounts.

Oh, and Neukom cannot be displeased that baseball's special committee continues to delay a recommendation on the site for a new

A's stadium.

By the way, the Giants have steadily increased their profile in the South Bay, up to and including outfielder Andres Torres and reliever Sergio Romo serving as grand marshals for San Jose's holiday parade last weekend.

Not so subtle, eh? Neukom isn't budging on the Giants' territorial rights to San Jose, and now he has the power of the World Series behind him. And the A's desperately need a new stadium, preferably in San Jose.

You see the entanglement?

For the A's, the meetings -- really, the last few years -- have been about frustration and a self-fulfilling stadium prophecy.

If they do not build it, nobody will come. Doesn't help the mood if you deride your current ballpark along the way, too.

You can smell the desperation. Players with other options usually stay away from moldy ballparks, and from desperate teams. Heck, the A's aren't even trying to hide it.

And the longer Bud Selig's appointed committee stalls, the less likely it seems that the A's will get a resounding declaration that they are free and clear to pick up for San Jose.

Which grinds the gears for all franchise endeavors, of course.

The A's were a solid young team in 2010, they want to get better, and yet they are having a tricky time getting free agents to accept their money.

The A's 2010 roster was not so different from the Giants' a year earlier -- a bevy of impressive young pitchers and some serious offensive question marks

But general manager Billy Beane has been, to this point, rejected by Adrian Beltre, despite offering large money. They were absolutely rejected by Lance Berkman, who went to St. Louis.

Beane is reportedly chasing Hideki Matsui and/or Vladimir Guerrero, and yet both are weighing the field.

The A's also maneuvered to acquire Japanese pitcher Hisashi Iwakuma -- putting in the winning \$19 million posting fee -- but the A's couldn't come to terms with Iwakuma by the deadline to sign.

The A's need a break. They need a stadium. Maybe it will come in San Jose, maybe they will be forced to redirect everything back to Oakland, maybe with new ownership.

But they are getting suffocated right now, either way. They chose this path. It's not the Giants' fault that they have the power and inclination to make the A's journey very difficult.

A's aren't getting hopes up for Adrian Beltre

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

On Day 3 of the winter meetings, the most notable A's items were not necessarily news, as it turned out.

One tidbit that is newsy, to start with: **Arn Tellem**, the agent for **Hideki Matsui**, told The Chronicle on Wednesday evening that he's expecting to start getting some proposals from teams this weekend, and that there are several interested teams. Matsui is strongly in the running to be the A's DH, although **Vladimir Guerrero** remains a possibility if he doesn't re-sign with Texas.

Early in the afternoon, agent **Scott Boras** said that third baseman **Adrian Beltre** is "open" to playing for Oakland, but when asked about how recently Beltre had relayed that information, Boras said that Beltre gave him a list of teams that he was interested in at the start of the free agent process and the A's were on it. Since then, Oakland made Beltre an offer of at least \$64 million over five years, waited on his response for weeks, and withdrew the offer Sunday.

There's no particular indication that the A's would consider renewing talks unless Beltre's options dwindle to the point that he's a relative bargain. The team is now convinced that he doesn't wish to play in Oakland.

Stadium speculation: Ballpark Digest reported on its website that "talk at the winter meetings" was that Major League Baseball's stadium committee would recommend Oakland for a new A's venue rather than San Jose, based on Oakland's "better financial shape."

A's owner **Law Wolff** told The Chronicle via e-mail that the team had heard no such thing and that the A's are convinced they have exhausted every opportunity to develop a stadium in Oakland.

An MLB spokesperson responded to the report with this statement: "Despite reports or speculation to the contrary, Major League Baseball has not completed its study of the Oakland A's stadium matter, nor has the Commissioner's Special Committee recommended any sites or territories for the development of a new ballpark for the A's. No date has been determined for the committee to issue its findings."

Narrowing the field: Ex-A's designated hitter **Jack Cust** agreed to a deal with Seattle that will be announced after the meetings, and that probably eliminates the Mariners as potential suitors for Matsui and Guerrero. The Angels aren't seen as major competition for Guerrero or Matsui, but Texas is a possibility for one or the other, and Tampa Bay has emerged as a potential spot for Matsui.

Drumbeat: Some Wednesday topics: Beltre, Vlad, stadium - updated

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the winter meetings 12/8/2010 1:12PM

UPDATE: An MLB spokesperson gave me this response when asked about the stadium reports below:

"Despite reports or speculation to the contrary, Major League Baseball has not completed its study of the Oakland A's stadium matter nor has the Commissioner's Special Committee recommended any sites or territories for the development of a new ballpark for the A's. No date has been determined for the committee to issue its findings."

Adrian Beltre would still be open to playing for the A's, according to his agent, Scott Boras, but this is not some recent development; when I asked Boras exactly when Beltre said this (is it because spots are drying up elsewhere?), he said the A's were on the list of teams Beltre was interested in before the free-agency process actually got underway.

So it's not really new news. The A's already have withdrawn their offer, which was five years and at least \$64 million (that was not the exact offer, Boras said, and I'd been told it as I've been writing it: at *least* \$64 million). I'm not sure if they're eager to sit back down with a player who, in essence, has spurned their offers two years in a row.

He took less money and years in Boston last year, and left this offer on the table for weeks before Oakland pulled it back. We don't know yet if it's the best offer he'll get, so it's hard to say he's turning it down for a lesser package, but if his options do dwindle, maybe it would have been the top offer. And, if he turns into a bargain, perhaps the team would consider talking again. Though I don't believe, "I couldn't find a job elsewhere," really translates into "I have actual interest in playing for Oakland."

As I reported in this morning's Chronicle, Vladimir Guerrero has dropped his demands significantly - he'd wanted three years from any team other than Texas, and now, for all four AL West teams, that's turned into one year and an option, which is basically what he had with the Rangers. Seattle figures to be out after signing ex-A's DH Jack Cust today (it won't be announced until after the meetings, but it is a done deal), and the Angels are looking at Carl Crawford and Beltre, among others. That might leave just Oakland and Texas on Guerrero's list. Texas has the upper hand, and if he re-signs there, Hideki Matsui becomes even more of a strong possibility in Oakland. I'm hearing Tampa Bay as a potential landing spot for Matsui, too, however. It might come down to straight money for both Guerrero and Matsui, because all those teams will offer full playing time and good teams with a shot to contend (particularly the Rangers).

The rumblings today are that the A's are looking for relievers. I know they liked Joe Beimel in the past and he's a free agent again. I'm presuming Oakland's interest is in lefties because they're stocked with right-handers; still, there are a lot of excellent right-handed relievers on the market. This time of year, every team is looking for bullpen help, especially left-handers, so finding them is tough. There will be many competing offers for anyone decent.

I am under the impression Oakland has zero interest in Dennys Reyes and Gregg Zaun despite some reports to the contrary out of these meetings.

Ballpark Digest is reporting that the Major League Baseball committee investigating the A's ballpark situation is favoring the new proposed site in Oakland; I am trying to determine the veracity of that, but there are no sources cited. The A's have not heard that and - stop me oh oh oh stop me if you've heard this one before - team owner Lew Wolff told me in an e-mail, "Not to my knowledge. We have, as I have said when asked, exhausted all options in Oakland."

If the A's are not granted the territorial rights they want in San Jose, they are under no obligation to move to a site recommended by the committee. They can spend no money at all and stay at the Coliseum, or the owners can sell the team. I'm not sure there are many prospective buyers who believe the better market is in Oakland right now, either, but maybe Joe Lacob can take another look at the club and try to inject some of the enthusiasm he's put into his new Warriors ownership. Lacob was part of a group that tried to buy the A's when the Wolff group got them. I can state with certainty that the current group does not believe that the optimal market is in Oakland. It's pretty obvious.

Some more comments from agent Don Nomura out of Japan; he called the A's offer to Hiashi Iwakuma "insincere." Considering the A's were going to make the pitcher their top paid player, at more than \$9 million per year including the posting fee, I'm not sure how that could be viewed as insincere. Add to that the fact that they traded fifth-starter candidate Vin Mazzaro two days after winning the right to negotiate with Iwakuma and it seems even less likely that they were insincere in their efforts.

The package Iwakuma's side initially asked for was comprable to Barry Zito's when the posting fee was taken into consideration - that's the one that seems pretty far out of whack to me. The A's just said again that they were "disappointed" not to get the deal done; they agree with Nomura on that part.

A's claim Castillo from Astros in Rule 5 Draft

Oakland prospects Sattler, Friend taken by Angels, Phillies

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. -- The A's, usually big players in the annual Rule 5 Draft on the final day of the Winter Meetings, chose to pass on the Major League portion of the proceedings on Thursday, instead waiting to pluck right-hander Jeiler Castillo from the Houston Astros' organization in the Minor League segment.

With 37 players already on their 40-man roster, the A's are likely leaving room for additions in the upcoming weeks. In the past few days, Oakland officials have consistently discussed their intentions of signing a bat, likely in the form of a designated hitter. They're also keeping an eye out for a starting pitcher, after failing to come to terms on a contract with Japanese righty Hisashi Iwakuma.

Castillo owns a career 10-12 record with a 3.89 ERA in 82 games, including 13 starts, over 201 1/3 innings in five professional seasons.

A total of 19 clubs participated in the Major League phase of Thursday's Draft, none of which took players from within the A's organization. There was thinking that speedy outfielder Corey Wimberly could represent a possible choice for other teams, but he proved safe by morning's end.

Meanwhile, the A's lost two of their own hurlers in the Minor League phase of the Draft, as they watched the Angels take righty Daniel Sattler and the Phillies choose right-hander Justin Friend.

The Draft, conducted in reverse order of finish from the previous season, allows teams to select players not on other teams' 40-man rosters and add them to their own. The selected players must be kept on the team's 25-man roster out of Spring Training or be offered back to the original team for \$25,000.

Any player signed when he was 19 or older who has spent three full seasons in an organization, as well as anyone signed at 18 or older who has spent four full seasons in an organization, is eligible for the Draft.

Meetings have A's in position to move swiftly

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. -- When A's officials first descended upon the Walt Disney World Swan & Dolphin Hotel at the beginning of the week, they were characterized as the bridesmaids.

They'll likely leave with the same label but are hoping that, through progress made at the Winter Meetings, they'll soon -- and finally -- be the bride.

Oakland has been turned down, often publicly, by potential free-agent targets multiple times this offseason. Lance Berkman and Adam Dunn represent two players who, despite heavy interest from the A's, chose to go elsewhere.

Assistant general manager David Forst, when speaking to Bay Area reporters on Wednesday, the eve of the Meetings' final day, acknowledged that Oakland's camp will likely leave the Sunshine State having not made a single move but that one could come fairly soon.

"We feel like we've learned a lot since we got here on Sunday," Forst said. "Just because we're most likely not going to complete or announce anything before we leave doesn't mean it wasn't a productive few days. I think the more chips fall into place around us, the better our vision of what the realistic options are."

At this point, realistic option No. 1 appears to be Hideki Matsui, who could greatly help the A's by ridding the club of its DH vacancy. Matsui's agent, Arn Tellem, met with general manager Billy Beane on Monday, and the 36-year-old Japanese veteran is said to be of great interest to Oakland.

Third baseman Adrian Beltre was also of interest before the A's rescinded their mega offer after the All-Star essentially expressed no interest in coming to Oakland. However, agent Scott Boras relayed to reporters on Wednesday that his client is still considering the A's, among "a lot of teams."

Forst admitted to seeing Boras' remarks but, per club policy on free agents, did not comment on the matter. However, he did say he sees the club ultimately making good on possible acquisitions.

"I am confident that we will add players, whether it's through free agency or through trade," he said. "We are committed to making upgrades, so I'm confident we will be able to."

The A's, of course, would like to stay away from trading away one of their own and would rather add via free agency. There's no telling, though, how close either scenario is from becoming a reality.

"It's not really up to us," Forst said. "It's a two-way street, so I think we'd like to start working as soon as we get home on actually doing some things, but we always don't get to decide a time frame."

On Tuesday, the A's were linked to more than five free agents, some DH options and some starting pitchers. On Wednesday, the team found itself in the trade-rumor mill by way of relievers. Oakland is seemingly already stocked with an adequate bullpen, but Forst maintained, "We're looking at everything."

"We have options," he said. "We have some flexibility, both financial and roster-wise."

The only item on Thursday's Winter Meetings agenda is the Rule 5 Draft, which, as of Wednesday evening, the A's had yet to decide whether to take part in. The A's are often involved, but this year's version may take place without their participation, with 37 players currently on their 40-man roster.

The Draft, conducted in reverse order of finish from the previous season, allows teams to select players not on other teams' 40-man rosters and add them to their own. The selected players must be kept on the team's 25-man roster out of Spring Training or be offered back to the original team for half the selection price, or \$25,000. Anyone signed when they were 19 or older who has spent three full seasons in the organization, as well as anyone signed at 18 or older who has spent four full seasons in the organization, is eligible for the Draft.

For the A's, assessing the number of open roster spots, their slot in the plucking order and the pool of available players is all part of determining whether they include themselves in the annual event.

"We have open spots now, but we know we're going to sign guys in the coming days and weeks," Forst said. "We have to weigh that, because who you take is on the roster until the middle of March. So, it's a little bit of everything."

Agent: Beltre still considering Athletics

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. -- Amid talks that Oakland is officially off Adrian Beltre's long list of potential suitors, agent Scott Boras told reporters on Wednesday that his free-agent client is still considering the A's.

"We're open to discussions with all teams on Adrian," said Boras, holding court inside the Walt Disney World Swan & Dolphin Hotel. "We've been going through a number of negotiations with a number of teams. There have been a lot of willing participants. Certainly, Oakland was a team he said he would be interested in looking at. We had meetings with their club. That's where we're at now."

The A's reportedly rescinded their offer to Beltre -- said to be worth at least \$64 million over five years -- earlier this week, and they have since focused on attracting a designated hitter and starting pitcher while at the Winter Meetings. In Boras' eyes, though, "offers are like curtains."

"There is opening and closing, but they're still in the room," he said.

This marked the second straight year in which Beltre declined a large offer from Oakland, and it has not been determined whether the club will still pursue the All-Star, who hit .321 with 28 homers and 102 RBIs last season.

Boras relayed that there are several clubs that have been in contact with him about Beltre. Oakland's interest has been very public. Same for the Angels.

Although Boras wouldn't go as far as saying the Angels represent Beltre's top choice, he did indicate that the third baseman recognizes a handful of incentives that come along with playing for them.

"Our policy is on teams, I'm going to let them dictate who they announce publicly who they're interested in," he said. "Obviously, Adrian has a home in L.A. and has played in L.A., and he's very comfortable with that marketplace."

There's no timetable on when Boras would like to see Beltre sign, mentioning it could be relatively soon since "we're well down the road with a lot of teams." He added, however, that it could take a while before his client's new home is revealed, depending on how the market progresses as the winter unfolds.

"We're in the middle of a lot of negotiations with a lot of teams for him, and they're ongoing," Boras said.

"With the amount of interest and such, I would say there's a chance for those types of contracts for the hitters, the veteran hitter, those contracts would move a little quicker than normal because of the fact there's just so many people who need bats. Those 3-4-5 guys in the offense, there's just a real shortage of them."

Boston, who Beltre played for in 2010, is probably not one of Beltre's current suitors. The Red Sox completed a trade with the Padres this past weekend for first baseman Adrian Gonzalez, all but ending their pursuit of their former third baseman. The move came just days after Beltre openly expressed a strong interest in returning to the Red Sox, who are now expected to move Kevin Youkilis to third base.

"Adrian had a great time in Boston," Boras said. "It was really a situation for him where he really enjoyed his teammates, really liked the city. ... He played there in a way where he got to experience a different brand of baseball, being a West Coast baseball player his whole life. He got to see that. It puts him in a position to make a very prepared and informed decision about his free agency and what his choices might be as they go forward."

Though the offseason began with thinking that Beltre would prefer to stay on the West Coast, Boras shut down that notion Wednesday by saying that geography will not be part of his final decision. Aside from the A's and Angels, a handful of mystery teams are thought to be in on the infielder. All, Boras insisted, will be sized based on certain factors.

"He's got goals that he wants to look at as to what the organizations have in talent and ability to win," Boras said, "And, of course, the economics are a part of it, as well."

Cust to Seattle helps A's in Matsui quest

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. -- The A's on Wednesday saw a familiar face head to a division foe, but in doing so, they watched their chances of landing another player increase on Day 3 of the Winter Meetings.

Jack Cust -- who was non-tendered by Oakland for a second straight year last week after a 2010 season that resulted in a .271 average, 13 home runs and 52 RBIs -- agreed to terms on a one-year deal with Seattle. Thus, the Mariners are seemingly now out of the race for Hideki Matsui, who appears to be at the top of Oakland's list to fill the club's designated-hitter role.

The A's have shown a strong level of interest in acquiring the 36-year-old slugger. On Monday, general manager Billy Beane met with Matsui's agent, Arn Tellem, at the Winter Meetings. Tellem refused to reveal any information that came out of the gathering but expressed important factors his client will be considering -- all of which the A's presumably could provide.

"I think he wants to play on a regular basis and contribute to a team, and be on a team with a chance to be competitive in the race and looking for the support of a positive environment," Tellem said. "I believe we'll find one of those."

Though some see Matsui on the downside of his career, he still boasts the potential to produce runs for the A's, who in 2010 had the league's fourth-lowest runs total. They also ranked second to last in the American League in home runs (109), extra-base hits (415), slugging percentage (.378) and batting average with runners in scoring position (.241).

Matsui, who made \$6 million this year, hit .274 with a .820 OPS, 21 homers and 84 RBIs in 482 at-bats with the Angels in 2010. Oakland's home run and RBIs leader was Kevin Kouzmanoff, who tallied 16 long balls and drove in 71 runs in 551 at-bats.

Meanwhile, Cust's agreement with Seattle officially ends his four-year stint in Oakland, where he hit .247 with 97 home runs, 281 RBIs, 377 walks and 673 strikeouts in 533 games during that span. The 31-year-old slugger's relationship with the A's endured a rough patch in April, when the club designated him for assignment in a surprising series of events just two days before Opening Day.

"It was just a weird circumstance," Cust told MLB.com on Wednesday. "I'm sure they'd say I struggled in spring and what I did the three years before wasn't good enough to make that team, I guess. But I'm just trying to stay positive with all this. When I talk about Oakland last year especially, it's definitely not a very positive experience for me. So I'm trying to block that out a little. My wife just tells me to stay positive. I don't know what happened. But things happen for a reason, and now I'm in Seattle."

Cust remained with the team the rest of the season but figured to be a prime non-tender candidate when the A's expressed interest in shaking up the lineup. He is expected to jump right into full-time DH duties with Seattle, another team looking to upgrade its offense after a disappointing 61-101 season.

"You want to go where you're wanted," Cust said. "In Oakland, even though I always did pretty well there and was kind of what the Oakland A's are about -- hitting home runs and walking -- I never really felt the love there. Being wanted and getting a fresh start is something I wanted last year, but it couldn't get done. This year, it's in place."

A's assistant general manager David Forst, while addressing local reporters on Wednesday evening, recognized Cust's desire for a new environment and expressed well wishes for him.

"Good for Jack," Forst said. "I know he wanted to go somewhere, do something quickly and go somewhere where he was wanted, so good for him."

Wolff refutes report regarding A's ballpark

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. -- A report from Ballpark Digest on Wednesday suggested that Major League Baseball's blue-ribbon committee is prepared to recommend that Oakland move forward with its waterfront ballpark and that the city of San Jose is not an option for the A's.

However, A's co-owner and managing partner Lew Wolff, when informed of the report, immediately shot down the notion, reiterating what he's told media for months.

"We have exhausted every option in Oakland," Wolff said when contacted by phone. "I have not heard anything of this nature."

In a statement addressing the matter, Major League Baseball issued the following on Wednesday evening: "Despite reports or speculation to the contrary, Major League Baseball has not completed its study of the Oakland A's stadium matter nor has the Commissioner's Special Committee recommended any sites or territories for the development of a new ballpark for the A's. No date has been determined for the committee to issue its findings."

Wolff mentioned that he has not heard "hardly anything" from the City of Oakland in two years. He has been awaiting a report from the three-panel committee which Commissioner Bud Selig appointed in March 2009 to study the A's stadium options, particularly one involving San Jose that potentially broaches territorial rights.

The City of San Jose is considering asking for voter approval to build a ballpark for the A's there, but the San Francisco Giants have publicly stated that they would oppose the move due to encroachment on their territorial rights to Santa Clara County, where they have a Class A team.

Ballpark Digest proposed the idea that the condition of Oakland's redevelopment agency finances, along with the city's commitment to keeping the A's from leaving the city, resulted in a decision that Wolff said he's heard nothing of. Furthermore, Wolff noted that "Major League Baseball can tell us where we can't go, but they cannot tell us where to go."

Thus, the A's -- even if granted territorial rights to San Jose -- are under no obligation to move to a site recommended by the MLB committee, which has been silent since it was formed. A new ballpark would be privately funded, so the A's could choose to then spend no money and instead continue playing at the Coliseum, or Wolff and Co. could sell the team.

Though there is still no timetable on when an official announcement from Major League Baseball will be made regarding the issue, several people close to the situation feel it is coming soon, perhaps before Spring Training. Come April, the A's will be entering their 43rd season at the Coliseum, which stands in an outdated and rundown condition -- factors that have affected general manager Billy Beane's efforts to bring free agents to Oakland.

"The facility's a hurdle," Beane said earlier this week. "It's a fact."

A's don't miss a beat as Forst spells Beane

After Iwakuma deal falls through, pitching, DH are priorities

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. -- David Forst played the role of general manager Billy Beane on Tuesday.

Oakland's assistant general manager, taking over duties as head honcho because of a pair of ill children Beane is tending to at home, served as host to Bay Area media inside the club's suite headquarters at the Walt Disney World Swan & Dolphin Resort on Day 2 of the Winter Meetings.

Forst fared well at the task. Almost too well.

Channeling Beane's careful responses to queries regarding the club's next move, Forst was rather vague in discussing the organization's activity Tuesday, simply saying, "We've been doing stuff."

That stuff likely included hunting for one or two bats and an arm, the latter search a result of Monday's unsuccessful attempts at finalizing a contract with Japanese right-hander Hisashi Iwakuma before the 30-day negotiating window closed.

"We're certainly exploring replacing that spot," Forst confirmed.

That mindset does not so much come from a lack of confidence in in-house candidates Tyson Ross, Bobby Cramer and Josh Outman. Rather, the injury-plagued club recognizes that no member of that trio endured a fruitful 2010 campaign. Ross missed most of the second half with an elbow issue, Cramer has all of four Major League starts under his belt and Outman hasn't been a part of big league action since June of 2008 after undergoing Tommy John surgery.

"There's always a chance to upgrade," Forst said. "It's not like you can necessarily pencil any of those guys into the five spot. We've learned the hard way that you need more than five starting pitchers."

Oakland's Tuesday meetings involved both agents and clubs, the former group more prominent as the A's maintain their focus on the free-agent market -- "The ideal situation is to not have to give up players," Forst said -- while looking for DH types. They would preferably come in the form of a player who can also play the field, Forst noted, but not all of their current options match that preference.

The A's have been linked to a handful of potential designated hitters, some who can play first base -- think Derrek Lee and Nick Johnson -- and others with outfield experience, such as Hideki Matsui and Vladimir Guerrero. Matsui's agent, Arn Tellem, indicated Tuesday that the A's are not his client's only suitor, but it appears Oakland would be a fitting spot for the veteran slugger. Guerrero, meanwhile, will likely stay in Texas, but if not, he could represent another potential target.

"Our list [of possible targets] is not too short because we need to maintain some options," Forst said. "Realistically, we don't always get our first or second target, so we're trying to keep some realistic options for ourselves."

Oakland's interest in guys with first-base experience is no knock on Daric Barton. In fact, Forst confirmed Tuesday that Barton "is our everyday first baseman."

"That's probably the most relevant thing I'll say today or tomorrow," he said, smiling.

On Wednesday, Forst will continue to take part in meetings with agents and colleagues. He said the club is "not necessarily" close on any move and does not place a priority on finalizing anything while at the Winter Meetings.

"I think we've learned a lot today about some of our options, but realistically we were put in a new position 20-plus hours ago," he said, speaking of the ramifications that come with no Iwakuma deal. "We had to explore some new things based on that."

At the same time, the A's were not entirely surprised by Monday's results, as the addition of Iwakuma was never permanently inked into their offseason planning.

"We had some ideas lined up if nothing got done," Forst said. "The things that we set up for today and tomorrow were not so much in reaction to last night. These were things we talked about all month, all offseason."