

## A's News Clips, Friday, December 10, 2010

### Oakland A's come home from winter meetings without a designated hitter

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. -- The A's didn't bring home a designated hitter from Disney World, but neither did 10 other American League teams who have vacancies at the position.

The only DH to sign at the winter meetings this week was Jack Cust, who was Oakland's primary DH for the past four seasons. He got a one-year deal from Seattle.

As the A's departed the meetings Thursday morning empty-handed -- they didn't even make a Rule 5 draft pick -- they at least appeared to have identified their top target, 36-year-old veteran Hideki Matsui. General manager Billy Beane had discussions with Matsui's agent, Arn Tellem, this week.

The Mariners are now off the board as a possible destination for Matsui, but he may have several other options. Of the 14 AL teams, only four appear to have their DH spot settled -- Boston (David Ortiz), Baltimore (Luke Scott), Toronto (Adam Lind) and the Mariners (Cust). Jim Thome, 40, wants to return to the Minnesota Twins, so that's probably a fifth.

But that means the New York Yankees, who are currently preoccupied with pitcher Cliff Lee, may want to revisit Matsui, their 2009 World Series hero. So might the Los Angeles Angels, Matsui's team this year. An Angels source said there might be interest in bringing back Matsui, but it's a back-burner priority for now. Tampa Bay, Chicago, Detroit and Texas also could jump in on Matsui, depending on how certain high-ticket free-agent dominoes fall.

In other words, unless the A's make an offer to Matsui that he can't refuse, it could turn into a waiting game. The same goes for several of the remaining candidates on the A's priority list.

"A lot of it is a function of how the market itself is playing out, other teams' aggressiveness," said Beane. "It can sort of change radically overnight or it can take awhile."

So who are the other potential candidates? The A's aren't divulging their list, but here are the most notable availables besides Matsui:

Vladimir Guerrero: Texas GM Jon Daniels said the Rangers will make every effort to bring back Guerrero and are currently in negotiations with him. Other clubs surely will be interested, including the A's, if Texas can't get him re-signed.

Derrek Lee: A Sacramento native, Lee would seem an excellent fit in Oakland. Good clubhouse guy, and can play first base. But Lee still has a market in the NL because of his glove.

Magglio Ordonez: Ordonez underwent ankle surgery at the end of this season but is expected to be ready for spring training. He worked out for the Tigers this week to test the ankle, so Detroit could try to bring him back. He's a Scott Boras client.

Johnny Damon: He's played in Oakland before, and suitors may be difficult to find. He may not offer enough power, though. Damon was floating about the meetings hotel this week sporting a spiked mohawk.

Manny Ramirez: It's unlikely the A's would want Ramirez's act in their young clubhouse, and his production diminished last season.

Troy Glaus: Hasn't been mentioned much as an A's possibility but fits their profile of a power guy who also could play multiple positions. He had 16 homers and 71 RBIs for the Braves in 128 games in 2010. Has a history of injuries and is 34 years old.

Nick Johnson: Considering his and the A's recent history of injuries, it would seem a horrific match. Another Sacramento native.

Russell Branyan: Hit 25 homers with Cleveland and Seattle in 2010 but may be too much of a Cust clone -- low average (.237), high strikeouts (131).

### Chin Music: Winter meetings: That's a wrap

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune, 12/9/2010 12:35PM

Just a quick final note from Lake Buena Vista, Fla., to say the A's are out of here. Shortly, I will be, too.

They will go home now and continue to pursue their DH candidates. That could take awhile, as I wrote for tomorrow's editions. Hideki Matsui is clearly their top target, but as I wrote, there are 10 DH vacancies around the American League and Matsui could have some attractive options — New York, Los Angeles Angels, Chicago, Texas, as well as Oakland.

If Matsui falls through, there's still a long list of available, albeit not quite as desirable. Vladimir Guerrero has been bounced around in other media reports, but I would surmise that's quite a longshot. I talked to both Rangers GM Jon Daniels and manager Ron Washington in the past two days and they both said they want Vlad back and he wants to come back. And even if Texas can't get him under contract, like I said, it's a wide-open marketplace. Jack Cust was the only DH type that signed here.

Personally, and this is just my own opinion, Derrek Lee is the guy the A's should go after. He's a terrific clubhouse presence, he's semi-local (a Sacramento native) and he can play first base if Daric Barton is injured or needs a day off. He's lost a bit of bat speed but as a RH bat hitting behind Coco Crisp, David DeJesus and Barton, he could be quite productive. Another guy I'm surprised doesn't get any run is Troy Glaus, who admitted has had a checkered injury past, but hit 16 home runs with 71 RBIs for the Braves last year playing in just 128 games. He can also play multiple positions. He's never really been a full-time DH, but one wonders if he might thrive in such a role, and he'd come cheap.

Obviously, the A's don't appear to have a place for power prospect Chris Carter right now, and don't count on it being DH. The A's don't want to cast him in such a role at such a young age, and that's smart. If he shows he's ready to play at the major-league level this spring and they can't hold him back, they'll make a spot for him and move somebody else in the field, whether it be Barton or one of the corner outfielders. But there wasn't enough sample size on Carter late in the season to make an accurate judgment, and it doesn't help that Carter hasn't played in the Venezuela Winter League as planned.

I tend to think — nah, I'm pretty certain — agent Scott Boras' claim that his client Adrian Beltre is still interested in Oakland is nothing more than rhetorical leveraging. And now that the Angels have lost out in the Carl Crawford derby, expect them to go full bore to sign Beltre because they need his offense.

In the Internet age, you get websites trying to establish credibility for themselves by throwing things against the wall to see if they might stick. We had one this week when a site called Ballpark Digest, which I must confess I don't patronize, put out a report hinting that the MLB panel that will recommend the A's future home might be prepared to anoint Oakland soon as the preferable choice over San Jose.

My dilemma: Do I even report such hazy conjecture? Having followed this story pretty closely and understanding how commissioner Bud Selig operates, there are not likely any leaks of what this panel might recommend — at least to this kind of outfit. Ultimately, I chose not to report it at all because, quite frankly, I didn't want to even legitimize Ballpark Digest's "scoop" by publishing info from their non-bylined story. A passage in the story was also a tipoff:

"If Oakland has a site, the money and the will to put together a ballpark package, we're guessing MLB will take the safe route and recommend the team stay there, as opposed to creating a messy territorial battle by allowing a move to **San Jose**."

See the keywords there? "we're guessing." We who? Who are you? And what are your qualifications to offer such a guess? I found a contributing writer list buried on the website ... never heard of any of 'em. But "we're guessing" was all I needed to read.

Sadly, MLB and the A's were put in a position to have to respond to this nonsense. The A's passed along this statement from MLB Thursday night: "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."

Digest that.

## **A's quiet at meetings, but now ready for action**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Oakland's winter meetings experience might appear quiet from the outside, but the A's laid plenty of groundwork for future transactions.

Assistant general manager David Forst said everyone will be back in the office today, ready to "move forward."

The first move for Oakland might involve Hideki Matsui. Matsui's agent, Arn Tellem, told The Chronicle that proposals might start coming in this weekend, which points to a decision by the designated hitter/outfielder soon, maybe even early in the week.

There was some speculation Thursday among Japanese media that the Angels might join the teams interested in Matsui after losing top free-agent target Carl Crawford to Boston, but that seems unlikely. Opportunities for playing time still would be more limited in Anaheim, given that the team plans to use Mike Napoli at DH more often. The Angels are also expected to go after third baseman Adrian Beltre with gusto now that Crawford is gone.

Oakland is looking very much like the potential landing spot for Matsui, and one major-league executive said that such an addition would improve the A's.

"They need offense, and he's got power," the executive said. "He'll help them. But the problem for a team like the A's is they're always looking at their third or fourth choice rather than their No. 1 choice."

Much was made of the teams who missed out on their main targets, and Baltimore and even the Angels might be ahead in that derby; Baltimore has seen numerous free agents go elsewhere, while the Angels lost out on the biggest remaining free agent among the position players.

Forst spent much of the four days at the Dolphin Hotel in meetings with agents and teams, and he believes the team is in a good spot to start making some decisions. Oakland has explored adding a fourth or fifth starter through free agency and also has looked at the market for relievers, but the team's focus remains on adding a big bat.

"We feel like we learned a lot while we were here," Forst said. "Because we were not likely to complete anything before we left doesn't mean it wasn't a productive few days. ... We're committed to making upgrades, and we're confident we'll be able to do that."

As expected, the A's did not select or lose any players in the major-league Rule 5 draft. In the minor-league portion, they selected right-handed pitcher Jeiler Castillo from Houston and lost right-hander Daniel Sattler to the Angels and right-hander Justin Friend to the Phillies.

## **With Meetings over, Athletics' work begins**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. -- The folks running Walt Disney World may beg to differ, but dreams can't always come true in a four-day span.

The A's, just like every other club that set up camp at the Walt Disney World Swan & Dolphin Resort for the annual Winter Meetings this week, entered with plenty of lingering reveries. A newly powerful lineup, a new stadium and a perfectly clean bill of health come to mind.

Reality told them to focus on the former, but the Winter Meetings sometimes can't fulfill even one item on a team's wish list, let alone the entire thing. Just ask Oakland officials, who exited the Sunshine State without any additions or any losses, neither by way of player or money, their big-bat dreams transported back to the Bay Area to sit a while longer.

Hopefully not too much longer, though. The A's may have stayed away from the transaction wire this week, unlike more than 15 other teams, but they feel rather confident about the productive conversations they had with agents and other clubs, possibly signaling a looming move that would bring in the fold a designated hitter and/or starting pitcher.

"I think we'd like to start working as soon as we get home on actually doing some things," assistant general manager David Forst said this week, "but we don't always get to decide a time frame."

Oakland's focus hasn't strayed from the free-agent market, where veteran sluggers such as Hideki Matsui, Vladimir Guerrero, Jim Thome and Derrek Lee still await their 2011 fate. Matsui, whose numbers continually fade by the year but whose power potential could still represent a difference-maker for a lifeless Oakland lineup, appears to be at the forefront of the A's priorities.

Matsui's agent, Arn Tellem, met with general manager Billy Beane on the first full day of the Meetings. Tellem, without going into specifics, later informed reporters that several clubs are in on the Japanese slugger, who is expecting a one-year deal within Oakland's price range. If Matsui isn't reeled in, Guerrero may be a possibility, if Texas doesn't bring him back.

The same presumably cannot be said of Adrian Beltre, whose offer from Oakland, said to be worth \$64 million over five years, was rescinded on the eve of the Winter Meetings, after the third baseman essentially turned the club down for a second consecutive year.

On Wednesday, however, agent Scott Boras said his client still has an interest in the green and gold. But given that speedy outfielder Carl Crawford signed a megadeal with Boston early Thursday morning, that could very well mean that the Angels' attention could turn to Beltre and the A's could opt to hang tight with incumbent third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff.

Pitching, meanwhile, is not of big concern for Oakland, but Beane and Forst have expressed an interest in signing an insurance piece in the form of a starter. Trevor Cahill, Brett Anderson, Gio Gonzalez and Dallas Braden are penciled into the rotation, with the fifth spot up for grabs and Japanese pitcher Hisashi Iwakuma, with whom the A's failed to reach a deal by Monday's deadline, no longer in the picture.

The parting of the ways with Iwakuma inevitably gives the A's more money to spend on the 2011 ballclub, and it seems the organization won't be afraid to spend money, if given the chance to infuse the lineup with a run producer or two in an effort to boast more than speed and offset the inconsistencies of hitters such as Kouzmanoff and Kurt Suzuki.

"I think the more chips fall into place around us," Forst said, "the better our vision of what the realistic options are."

**Deals done:** None

**Rule 5 activity:** Selected RHP Jailer Castillo from the Houston Astros organization; Lost RHP Daniel Sattler to the Angels and RHP Justin Friend to the Phillies

**Goals accomplished:** When a team exits the Winter Meetings without having made a single deal, initial thinking may assume that nothing was achieved. The A's view it all through a different lens, though. They leave Orlando with the same roster, but also with a refreshed outlook on what's next. With Iwakuma out of the picture, the A's gain even more payroll flexibility and are primed to finally fill the DH spot.

**Unfinished business:** Lots. Look for the A's to finally make headway on bolstering their lineup with a designated hitter as they continue to work to compile an offense that will match their talented pitching staff. Several attractive players are already off the board, and Oakland officials know they can't wait much longer if they want to reel in a legitimate power bat. They're also still on the lookout for a starter, a viable option to include in their fifth starter mix, which also currently boasts Tyson Ross, Josh Outman and Bobby Cramer. An additional reliever may be in the cards as well.

**GM's bottom line:** "Most of the guys who are free agents at this point do want to be a part of a team that can be successful," Beane said. "One of the first things they mention, one of the positives [is our] young pitching staff and the fact that it can get better, and it's good enough to probably compete for a division, if the right pieces are around."