

A's News Clips, Monday, December 13, 2010

Oakland A's: Deal with Matsui appears to be close

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Multiple sources have indicated to Bay Area News Group that the A's and free-agent slugger Hideki Matsui are very close to finalizing a contract.

An announcement could come as soon as Tuesday. Terms are not known, but it's believed the A's have been considering Matsui on a one-year deal. Team officials don't comment on free agents until deals are finalized, but A's general manager Billy Beane met with Matsui's agent, Arn Tellem, during last week's winter meetings, and those talks were fruitful.

The A's are in search of a designated hitter to replace Jack Cust, who was non-tendered and signed with the Seattle Mariners last week.

The left-handed hitting Matsui, 36, moved to the top of the A's DH wish list after Lance Berkman signed with the St. Louis Cardinals.

Matsui hit .274 with 21 homers and 84 RBIs last season with the Los Angeles Angels. He spent his first seven major league seasons with the New York Yankees.

The A's main priority this offseason is finding an impact hitter or two to inject some life into an offense that ranked near the bottom of the American League in every major category in 2010.

To this point, Oakland has come up empty on players it has targeted this winter. The A's reportedly offered a five-year, \$64 million contract to third baseman Adrian Beltre but withdrew the offer after it was clear Beltre was looking elsewhere.

The team offered Berkman a reported two-year deal only to watch the switch hitter sign with the Cardinals.

The A's also bid \$19.1 million for the rights to Japanese right-hander Hisashi Iwakuma, but they couldn't come to a contract agreement and Iwakuma returned to the Rakuten Golden Eagles. The A's recovered the \$19.1 million.

A's on verge of signing Hideki Matsui

Staff and News Services 12/13/2010

The A's inched closer to a one-year contract with free-agent designated hitter Hideki Matsui on Sunday, with a source close to the negotiations telling The Chronicle that the deal might be finalized today, with a news conference likely to be held Tuesday if the details are finalized in time.

Matsui's agent, Arn Tellem, told The Chronicle last week that proposals were expected over the weekend. The A's are considered the strong front-runner for the Japanese power hitter; though several other clubs have expressed interest, Oakland would offer the most playing time among the potential contenders.

- Susan Slusser

-- The St. Louis Cardinals traded shortstop Brendan Ryan to the Seattle Mariners for minor-league right-hander Maikel Cleto, 21. Ryan hit .223 last season.

A's system thrived at every level in '10

Five teams saw postseason action while developing talent

By Bailey Stephens / MLB.com

It's often hard to know what to expect from players who are fresh out of high school or college and just embarking on their professional careers. Some bumps in the road are to be expected for this level of players, of which the A's had a solid group heading into 2010.

That group, however, turned out to be a pleasant surprise this season for the Athletics who saw many of their first year players turn in strong campaigns in 2010. In fact, the performances of players like Grant Green and A.J. Kirby-Jones were among the highlights of the Minor League year for the organization, according to A's farm director Keith Lieppman.

"We had a lot of first year players who had really great years," Lieppman said. "Guys like Grant Green and Stephen Parker were All-Stars at the A level. ... Last year, we had just these new players. This year, all three of those guys had really good years. That's how you build. That's a really good group. It's pretty exciting to see how they can impact the organization."

Of course, the Minor Leagues are rarely about individual accomplishments and the A's organization saw plenty of success on a team level as well. Each team in Oakland's farm system finished the year with a .500 record or better, an outcome the organization was pleased to see.

"It went really well in terms of win-loss records," Lieppman said. "We had five teams in the playoffs. It's the opportunity for guys to play in playoff games. That's one of the agendas we have in player development is for guys to get in the playoffs, in more stress-related situations where there's a little more pressure."

Those opportunities prepare players to perform in the limelight at the Major League level, an opportunity that several prospects received in 2010. Highly touted outfielder Chris Carter got his first taste of the big leagues and, despite struggling, got the opportunity to gain some valuable experience.

"We had some guys going to the big leagues and so other guys had to advance," Lieppman said. "I think we had close to 200 players moves at Triple-A Sacramento. That's always encouraging for the system. When you look at four to five guys are being put on big league rosters at this time of year, it kind of culminates a good year."

Some of the organization's player moves weren't the result of player promotion but rather injuries. While injuries are a part of any season, some proved especially frustrating for the A's last season. Injuries slowed the development of prospects like Sean Doolittle (knee surgery), right-hander Michael Ynoa (Tommy John) and righty Tyson Ross (elbow).

"We did have some injuries, which were the year's biggest downside," Lieppman said. "There were a pretty high number of those, but with that came opportunities for other players. ... Certainly, we showed that we are resilient. A lot of that has to do with the staffs at each level. Our guys were good at adapting."

Organizational Players of the Year

MLB.com's Preseason Picks

Max Stassi, C: Selected by the A's in the fourth round of 2009 First-Year Player Draft, Stassi was expected to make some noise in '10, after strong start to his career with Vancouver after the Draft. Just a year out of high school, Stassi struggled out of the gate for Class A Advanced Kane County. The 19-year-old did bounce back a bit at midseason, in time to make the Midwest League All-Star west division team. In his first full professional season, Stassi still managed to pop 13 home runs for the Cougars but has strides to make after striking out 141 times. Stassi showed some good signs of adjustment behind the plate, as well, throwing out 34 percent of would-be basestealers.

Tyson Ross, RHP: Ross seemed like a good bet to be an impact player heading into the season, and he did make a splash - just not in the Minors. The 23-year-old made the big league club out of Spring Training and appeared in 26 games with Oakland both as a starter and out of the 'pen. Ross' command issues continued to plague him, however, as the righty gave up 20 walks in just under 40 innings. In July, Ross returned to Triple-A Sacramento where he pitched exclusively out of the rotation to a 3.55 ERA in six starts. The 6-foot-5, 215 pound hurler had to be shut down later in the season with elbow issues, but he is expected to be healthy and potentially compete for a spot in the A's Major League rotation next season.

MLB.com's Postseason Selections

Grant Green, SS: In 2010, Green showed exactly what prompted the A's to draft him as the No. 13 overall pick in the '09 Draft. In his first full professional season, the shortstop erupted for 20 homers, 39 doubles and 87 runs driven in for Class A Advanced Stockton. Even in an offensive-happy league like the California League, Green shined earning a trip to the MLB

Futures Game in Anaheim. As a reward for his stellar offensive season, the Athletics sent Green to the Arizona Fall League, where he continued to make strides despite being slowed by a lingering calf issue.

Ian Krol, RHP: Krol, selected in the seventh round of the '09 Draft, was something of an unknown heading into the season as he was suspended for his senior high school season. The 19-year-old Krol began the season at Class A Kane County, where he quickly showed his value, owning a 2.65 ERA in 23 starts. His efforts earned him a nod for the Midwest League mid- and postseason All-Star squads. Krol's stats also earned him a late-season promotion to Class A Advanced Stockton, where he held his own in the midst of a playoff race. Krol would have likely gotten a chance to pitch in a playoff game, but the team opted to shut him down with a long season already under his belt.

Ziegler begins troop visit in Middle East

By Brad Ziegler / MLB.com

Editor's note: A's reliever Brad Ziegler is in the midst of an overseas trip in the Middle East, where he is visiting American troops. While he cannot specify his exact locations due to security purposes, Ziegler will be updating fans on his activities, as well as his thoughts on the adventure, throughout his stay. This is his first entry.

Hey, baseball fans!

It's been an eventful 24 hours so far here on base in the Middle East. I've thoroughly enjoyed meeting the many troops stationed here, and I've tried to do my best to pass along the gratitude that I (and many of you) deeply feel for the sacrifices they're making to protect our nation and preserve our many freedoms. And we don't ever want to forget the sacrifices being made by the families left at home by those who have been deployed -- a gracious "thank you" to all of you.

I'm here with Devon Harris, the captain and driver for the original Jamaican bobsled team. Devon is now a motivational speaker, and he's got a great story of perseverance to tell. Among the many things we have planned with the troops while we're here are a couple viewings of "Cool Runnings" -- a movie that helped make their team famous, but that Devon admits is very much Hollywood-altered. Even still, that should be a blast!

We got to take a tour of the city here outside the base, just to get an idea of what life here is like. It's a beautiful area with a very poor, simple way of life for many of the citizens. However, even when you see similar situations in stories on the news back in the U.S., the television simply doesn't do that scenario justice. It's pretty surreal to see people actually living in these conditions. It further emphasizes the fact that we are a very blessed nation.

After the tour, we returned to the base for lunch. Then we spent the afternoon shopping (both for everyday goods and for souvenirs) and resting. They had a busy evening planned for us, and despite the sometimes brutal travel schedule during the season, I've never before felt jet lag to this extreme.

After we rested up, we had the privilege of meeting the Commanding Officer (CO) on the base, as well as a couple of the other high-ranking officers stationed here (Executive Officer, Command Master Chief, et al). The CO presented both Devon and me with commemorative coins from the base as a token of appreciation for the visit. Awesome stuff ...

After dinner on base, Devon and I changed into our workout clothes and headed over to the base softball/soccer field. We each gave a brief talk about how we've overcome adversity in our careers/lives, then proceeded to participate in a fun "celebrity" softball game with a group of troops and officers, as well as a handful of enthusiastic onlookers rooting for all of us! I played a sparkling shortstop (haha) and went 4-for-4 with 2 home runs (including the game-winner), and my team won, 15-14. We had a fantastic time, and we stayed around to sign autographs and pose for pictures for over an hour after the game finished. After receiving some more tokens of appreciation (so thankful!), we headed to "Chow Hall" (as it's commonly called) for a late-night snack with a little NFL action -- Bucs vs. Redskins on the Armed Forces Network. That brought a great sense of being home -- just wish they'd have been showing the Chiefs/Chargers game. On a good note (at least at the time I'm writing this), my fantasy team is in great shape against the team run by fellow reliever Jerry Blevins after the first round of NFL games, largely due to a monster game by Darren McFadden. It's early in the late-afternoon NFL games, even though it's in the wee hours of the morning here in the Middle East.

Follow me online for quick updates along the way, as well as pictures and videos that will come after the trip has been concluded: <http://twitter.com/bradziegler> and <http://www.facebook.com/bradziegler31>.

Thanks to everyone again for your thoughts and prayers for my safety and the safety of our brave men and women stationed all over the world... Hope to update you again soon! Only time will tell what our schedule holds and how much Internet access we'll have.

A's reportedly close to deal with Matsui

By Sunil Joshi / MLB.com

The A's and free agent Hideki Matsui neared completion of a one-year contract on Sunday, a source told the San Francisco Chronicle.

Matsui, a 36-year-old left-handed hitter, would be expected to serve as the club's designated hitter. A's general manager Billy Beane met with Matsui's agent, Arn Tellem, during last week's Winter Meetings in Florida, but no decision was made at that time. The deal developed over the weekend and could be finalized as early as Monday with a news conference to follow on Tuesday, the Chronicle said.

The A's have neither confirmed nor commented on the report.

Tellem declined to speak about Matsui's contract desires at the Meetings, but he said that his client preferred to sign with the club that offered him the most playing time while giving him a chance to win.

"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 on Dec. 6. "I believe we'll find one of those."

Oakland seemingly fits that mold, as the club believes it boasts the pitching staff and -- hopefully by offseason's end -- just enough added elements necessary to fight for a postseason berth.

Matsui, who made \$6 million this past year, finished the 2010 campaign with a .274 average and .820 OPS to go along with 21 homers and 84 RBIs. The latter numbers would represent an upgrade for Oakland, as Kevin Kouzmanoff and Kurt Suzuki led the A's last season with 71 RBIs. Kouzmanoff also led the team in homers with 16.

Matsui spent last season as the Angels' designated hitter, his first season on the West Coast after seven years with the Yankees. He has 161 home runs and a .290 average in his career. He was the Most Valuable Player of the 2009 World Series, won by New York over Philadelphia.

Selig's Decision Could Destroy A's

cbssports.com, 12/10/2010

The Oakland Athletics have been looking for a new stadium for over 10 years now and have been unsuccessful. In that time frame, they've exhausted all of their options in Oakland, attempted a relocation to Fremont, and now are hoping for one final stand to move to San Jose.

The problem?

The territory (once owned by both the A's and the Giants) now solely belongs to the Giants as the A's ceded the territory to them through an owners vote in the early 1990's when the Giants were looking for a new stadium. The Giants previous owners used the threat of building in San Jose and a possible relocation to Miami (the Marlins didn't exist at the time) to try to get into a new stadium in San Francisco. While it never came to fruition (ATT Park is privately funded), the Giants still held the territorial rights.

The only way the territorial rights can be returned to the A's now is if the owners vote the rights back to the A's.

It's not entirely out of the question as it's happened before with the Expos and the Orioles. However, the Expos were owned by Major League Baseball so Baltimore Owner Peter Angelos didn't really have a choice in the matter. With the A's, however, Bud Selig appointed a special committee to research why the A's haven't been able to reach a stadium deal and to make a recommendation to the commissioner regarding San Jose.

With the A's current stadium lease expiring in 2013, that recommendation should come sometime this winter.

With it holds the fate of the Oakland franchise as a whole.

The stadium issue has caused support of the franchise to decline steadily. Just last season the A's were 13th (out of 14) in attendance in the American League averaging only 17,511 people per game despite finishing the season with a .500 record and 2nd place finish in the American League West.

Meanwhile, as the A's continue to call Oakland Coliseum their home, several free agents have spurned them in recent years including Rafael Furcal, Marco Scutaro, Lance Berkman, and Adrian Beltre (twice). The simple fact is that no player wants to play in Oakland and many are taking less money and years to do so. That is a major problem and should not happen.

Meanwhile, among the current fans of the A's, the issue of whether or not the team will move to San Jose has caused the fans of the team to split into competing factions ([Baseball San Jose](#) and [Baseball Oakland](#)). The A's current owners have agreed to pay for the entire cost of the stadium privately and have only asked of the city to pay for new infrastructure and land (a marginal cost).

San Jose has been lobbying for the A's for quite some time now and all the polls suggest that voters would be in favor of building a stadium there. They already have the land available and the Athletics have already conducted an environmental report on building a stadium in the city and everything came back positive.

In Oakland, however, the city blocked every attempt the A's ever tried to build there. The old owners, Ken Hoffman and Steve Schott found a piece of land downtown they were set to buy to build a new stadium only to have then Oakland Mayor Jerry Brown (now the Governor of CA) sell it to his friend (a developer) for much cheaper. It was only when faced with the reality of the team leaving that the city made any attempt to get a new stadium there, but the city has wasted a lot of time. There is only one spot the city was able to propose for a new stadium (Victory Court near Jack London Square) and its shaky at best as to whether or not it is viable as no reports have been conducted.

Further complicating the matter is that A's owner Lew Wolff preference is to move the team to San Jose. He will not build a new stadium if major league baseball decides the team is to remain in Oakland. Rather, it is more likely the team will be sold.

Major League Baseball is going to have one hell of a time finding another owner not only willing to shell out money to purchase the team, but willing to privately fund a stadium for the Athletics as well. No city in California will vote to do so and I'd bet against the team relocating in the current economic climate.

Quite frankly, if Selig suggests the A's remain in Oakland, it will be bad for baseball. You might as well just go ahead and contract the team. They can't draw flies, players will still not want to come, and the ownership has no reason to spend on a city that can't produce. Perhaps Lew Wolff can sell the team to Major League Baseball. Only then, when a team is in dire straights with no owners, will MLB act on anything.

The A's need to go to San Jose. As a diehard fan, this has been painful to watch. Selig, please put me out of my misery. For the A's sake.

San Jose considers break for soccer stadium developers

By John Woolfolk, San Jose Mercury News, 12/13/2010

In a bid to keep Earthquakes owner Lew Wolff and his partners from backing out of an \$89 million land deal, San Jose officials are recommending the city give them a potential multimillion-dollar break and more time so they can still move forward with a project to build a new soccer stadium near the airport.

The new terms, which could save Wolff and prominent valley builders Deke Hunter and Ed Storm up to \$4 million in purchase costs, would mark the second time the city has lowered its price to keep the already-negotiated project afloat since the real estate crisis plunged the country into economic quicksand. It also allows them to delay purchasing the land until 2015, two years later than the current deadline.

City officials say the council should approve the new terms or risk being stuck with a worse deal for the 75-acre property it bought five years ago along Coleman Avenue from defense contractor FMC.

Wolff's group has promised to buy the property and build offices, hotels, stores and a 15,000-seat stadium.

"The developer's independent financial capacity, proven track record for delivering projects and desire to continue with the project "... still represent an important opportunity during this recession," Interim Economic Development Director Kim Welsh said in a report to the City Council, which will consider the deal Tuesday. Without such a break, she added, the developers "would have to make the difficult decision to walk away from the project."

Wolff, who also owns the Oakland A's and wants to move the team to San Jose if Major League Baseball will allow it, said he's still committed to building a privately financed \$60 million stadium for the Earthquakes on 14 acres, but the current deal and economy are making that difficult.

"The economy is certainly a huge factor here," Wolff said. "We're the only soccer facility in the MLS that has to do it totally private, so we have to make sure we have the best option to move that along."

In 2005, San Jose paid \$81 million for the FMC property. Including cleanup costs, the city's cost for the site totaled \$100 million. The city wanted the land for a modernization project at Mineta San Jose International Airport, which has since been scaled back.

In May 2008, the city reached a deal with Wolff and his partners giving them an option to buy the land for \$132 million and build the soccer stadium plus 1.5 million square feet of office space, 95,000 square feet of retail space and 300 hotel rooms.

After the real estate market cratered, the city in May 2009 agreed to renegotiate: Wolff's group would pay \$89 million for 65 acres of the land. And \$5 million of the \$6 million they had paid for the option to buy the land would apply toward the purchase price. The developers would maintain their option to buy the property through June 2013 with nonrefundable option payments totaling \$7 million over that time.

Under the new proposal, the purchase price would remain \$89 million for the 65 acres, and the developers would still be credited for \$5 million in option payments already made. But their option to buy the land would be extended two more years through June 2015 and would cost \$2 million less over that time. If they buy the soccer site by June 2012, the first \$2 million in new option payments would apply toward the purchase price.

That would save the developers anywhere from \$2 million to \$4 million, depending on when they bought the land. The developers would pick up demolition costs for existing structures, however, estimated at \$3 million.

The city's economic development division manager Nanci Klein said the deal is still far better for the city than seeking a new buyer because continued erosion of land values suggest the city would receive less than the \$89 million under the current deal.

"The comparable costs are much lower," Klein said. "If the city were to go out and sell to another developer, we'd get much less than the purchase price we've agreed to."

Philip Mahoney, executive vice president at Cornish and Carey commercial real estate in Santa Clara, agreed and said that at \$89 million, the airport land is probably overpriced.

"It would not sell on the open market at that price today," Mahoney said. "Land is trading on North First Street at numbers below that -- better location, lesser price."

Wolff, who also developed the city's Fairmont and Hilton hotels, and his partners have proven themselves capable of delivering projects, Klein said, which would be a boost to San Jose amid the economic downturn.

And without them, the city would lose the stadium project to support Major League Soccer's Earthquakes. The team re-established in San Jose as an expansion franchise in 2007, two years after the original franchise moved to Texas.

The Earthquakes now play at Santa Clara University's Buck Shaw Stadium and made the MLS playoffs this year. But Klein said having its own stadium would help the team build both fan support and revenue.

"Having their own stadium contributes a great deal to community participation," Klein said.

City officials in 2008 projected the new stadium would pump some \$60 million a year into San Jose's overall economy, using economic models to show its ripple effect on hotels, restaurants and other local businesses.

As for the remaining 10 acres of the former FMC property, city officials are considering the site for a recreational soccer complex, which would have a natural tie-in with a nearby Earthquakes stadium. It would be built using some of the remaining \$26 million from a 2000 city park bond measure.

Baseball: U.S. government decision a victory for 104 major league players

Associated Press 12/10/2010

The government will not contest an appeals court ruling that investigators illegally seized a list of baseball players who allegedly tested positive for steroids, the Justice Department said Friday. That decision keeps intact a legal victory for scores of ballplayers snared in the doping investigation.

Justice Department spokeswoman Tracy Schmalzer said the solicitor general's office will not ask the Supreme Court to reverse the ruling by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit in San Francisco.

In September, the court ordered investigators to return the list of 104 players, effectively barring them from using the players to expand their eight-year-long sports doping probe. The list had been seized in a 2004 drug lab raid.

Lee update: The New York Yankees and Texas Rangers are waiting for a decision from pitcher Cliff Lee, who is evaluating offers made by both teams before making a decision on where to sign.

"For somebody of that stature, it would certainly behoove him to be a Yankee, which would probably be for the rest of his career," Hank Steinbrenner, the Yankees' co-chairman, said.

Texas owner Chuck Greenberg visited Lee in Arkansas and presented what he said were multiple offers.

Mariners: Seattle completed a \$2.5 million, one-year contract with Jack Cust to become its primary designated hitter after Cust passed his physical. Cust spent the past four seasons with the A's, who didn't offer him a contract last week, making him a free agent.

Red Sox: Carl Crawford passed a physical, allowing Boston to confirm its \$142 million, seven-year deal with the outfielder.

Angels: Los Angeles and lefty reliever Scott Downs, 34, have agreed to a \$15 million, three-year deal. Downs, one of the top middle relievers on the free-agent market, went 5-5 with a 2.64 ERA for Toronto last season.

Braves: Left-hander George Sherrill, who saved 51 games in two seasons with Baltimore before struggling last season with the Dodgers, has finalized a \$1.2 million, one-year contract with Atlanta.

Santo funeral: It didn't take long for the tears to give way to laughter at a funeral for former Chicago Cubs player and broadcaster Ron Santo on Friday in Chicago. Santo died of complications from bladder cancer at the age of 70 in Arizona on Dec. 3. The service drew several hundred people, including Billy Williams, Ernie Banks, Ryne Sandberg, Ferguson Jenkins, Randy Hundley, Ryan Dempster, Ted Lilly and Jesse Jackson Sr.