

A's News Clips, Thursday, December 23, 2010

Oakland City Council OKs money for new A's ballpark study

By Cecily Burt and Sean Maher, Oakland Tribune

The Oakland City Council voted Tuesday to spend as much as \$750,000 on an environmental study for a new ballpark south of Jack London Square, even though the owner of the Oakland A's is trying as hard as he can to move the team to San Jose.

The council voted 6-2 to hire LSA Associates to conduct a study that examines the physical and environmental impacts of building a 39,000-seat, baseball-only stadium at the so-called Victory Court site southeast of Jack London Square, between Fallon Street and Lake Merritt Channel Park. In order to build the park on the site, businesses such as Peerless Coffee would have to move.

Councilmember Ignacio De La Fuente (Glenview-Fruitvale) is the plan's most vocal opponent. He said it is foolhardy to spend money for a study when there is no commitment from A's owner Lew Wolff or Major League Baseball to keep the team in Oakland. He was joined by Councilmember Nancy Nadel (West Oakland-Downtown) in saying the city should not fund the report.

"Let's also be realistic about Major League Baseball's tactics and how they play," De La Fuente said. "I think they're trying to play off one seat against the other in order to get best deal they can (between Oakland and San Jose)."

Council President Jane Brunner said she sympathized with De La Fuente's concerns, but says, "If we did not do this, we would be out of the game tomorrow."

Redevelopment funds that were earmarked for a new parking garage in the city's bustling uptown entertainment district will be used to pay for the report. Nadel said the city should not be taking money from a much-needed parking garage, though no plans to build a lot are in progress.

The proposed area is near the Laney College athletic fields, a site that was discounted as a viable ballpark location in a 2001 draft study by HOK Sport. That study looked at several sites and concluded that the blocks behind the Fox Theater, where Forest City's Uptown mixed-use development was subsequently built, had the most potential, followed by the Oakland Coliseum's north parking lot.

Baseball: Rich Harden returns to Oakland A's, could compete for fifth starter's job or pitch in relief

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's signed right-hander Rich Harden to a one-year, \$1.5 million contract Tuesday, a deal that was agreed upon last week but not finalized until Harden passed a physical.

Harden, 29, who spent five-plus seasons with the A's before they traded him to the Chicago Cubs in 2008, could be used in the bullpen, but he's also a possibility for the fifth starter's spot.

"I think that will play out in spring training," A's assistant general manager David Forst said. "Rich still feels he can be an effective starter, but he's intrigued by what he could do in the bullpen as well."

Harden has made just 10 relief appearances in his career. His competition for the No. 5 starting job includes Josh Outman, Brandon McCarthy, Tyson Ross and Bobby Cramer.

But the question is whether Harden can avoid the injuries that have plagued his career.

He served two DL stints last season with the Texas Rangers, first for a strained gluteus muscle and later for right shoulder tendinitis, and finished 5-5 with a 5.58 ERA in 20 appearances (18 starts).

Forst said improving the bullpen remains a priority for the A's. Considering the 40-man roster includes just two left-handers who are pure relievers (Jerry Blevins and Craig Breslow), they might focus on lefty relief help. Arthur Rhodes is one of the more intriguing free agents available.

Luxury tax: The New York Yankees were hit with an \$18 million luxury tax by Major League Baseball. The tax was New York's lowest since 2003 and down from \$25.7 million last year, when the Yankees won the World Series. Boston is the only other team that will have to pay. The Red Sox exceeded the payroll threshold for the first time since 2007 and owe \$1.49 million.

Webb: The Texas Rangers and Washington Nationals continued to show strong interest in Brandon Webb, while a third reported suitor, the Chicago Cubs, fell off the pace in their pursuit of the free-agent starter, according to ESPN.com. Webb, 31, the 2006 National League Cy Young Award winner with Arizona, pitched a total of only four innings in 2009-10 because of shoulder problems.

Indians: Former A's outfielder Travis Buck, 27, has signed a minor league contract with Cleveland that includes an invitation to spring training. Buck, who has been slowed by injuries over the past three seasons, is a career .250 hitter and has not made an error in 170 games. He has been in the A's opening-day lineup each of the past three seasons.

Trade: The Seattle Mariners traded catcher Rob Johnson, 28, to the San Diego Padres for a player to be named later or cash considerations.

Blue Jays: Toronto signed speedy outfielder Corey Patterson, 31, and five other players to minor-league contracts with invitations to spring training.

Red Sox: Boston completed a two-year, \$12 million contract with former Chicago White Sox closer Bobby Jenks, 29, adding him to the back of the bullpen with closer Jonathan Papelbon and the pitcher who had been in line to inherit that role, Daniel Bard.

Brewers: The team and infielder Craig Counsell, 40, have agreed to a \$1.4 million, one-year contract, a person familiar with the negotiations told The Associated Press.

Etc.: A game-worn Sandy Koufax Brooklyn Dodgers jersey, hand signed by the seven-time All-Star pitcher, sold for \$80,000 on Lelands.com.

Wire services contributed to these notes.

Rich Harden returns to A's, but role is unclear

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Rich Harden's one-year, \$1.5 million deal with the A's became official on Tuesday.

"I started my career with this organization," the right-hander told The Chronicle by phone. "It kind of feels like home."

Adding their onetime ace to the roster leads to two more questions for the A's: What role will Harden fill, and is Oakland done with roster moves?

According to assistant general manager David Forst, the team is still talking to free agents, and that's potentially significant. It's known that Oakland has interest in some relievers still on the market, but the biggest remaining free agent, third baseman Adrian Beltre, could turn the team from a potential contender to division favorite.

The A's took their initial offer to Beltre, five years and at least \$64 million, off the table when Beltre didn't respond by a deadline; he also turned down a better offer from Oakland to go to Boston last year. The A's don't comment on specific free agents, so it's unclear whether they would jump back in on Beltre.

Harden will be stretched out to start, according to Forst, but it's possible that he will wind up in relief, with recently signed Brandon McCarthy now in the fifth-starter mix along with Josh Outman, Bobby Cramer and Tyson Ross.

Harden told The Chronicle he would prefer to start, but, he said, "When I have pitched out of the bullpen, I've enjoyed it, and I've always wanted to do it sometime in my career, so I'm not opposed to it."

Harden, 29, went 36-19 with the A's before being traded to Chicago in 2008, but his tenure was marred by injuries. He's been on the DL nine times, six with Oakland.

Forst said Dr. Doug Freedberg saw Harden and he has no issues of concern. Harden said he feels good, adding that the best he has felt was in 2008 after working all winter with then-A's bullpen coach Ron Romanick. Romanick is now the team's pitching coach, and Harden is looking forward to working with him again.

Romanick said that with Harden's ability, he can pitch in any role. "He's a fit, whatever the organization wants him to do," Romanick said. "It's just a matter of being healthy. And we'll do everything we can to keep him on the field, because when he is, we know what he can do."

Harden is also excited about Oakland's prospects for the coming season.

"I want to contribute," he said. "I want to help the team out. I'm really looking forward to getting out there and showing what I can do."

Rich Harden's career stats

Year	Tm	W	L	ERA	IP	SO	BB
2003	OAK	5	4	4.46	74.2	67	40
2004	OAK	11	7	3.99	189.2	167	81
2005	OAK	10	5	2.53	128	121	43
2006	OAK	4	0	4.24	46.2	49	26
2007	OAK	1	2	2.45	25.2	27	11
2008	TOT	10	2	2.07	148	181	61
2008	OAK	5	1	2.34	77	92	31
2008	CHC	5	1	1.77	71	89	30
2009	CHC	9	9	4.09	141	171	67
2010	TEX	5	5	5.58	92	75	62
Total		55	34	3.63	845.2	858	391

Drumbeat: Harden is back on board; what's his role?

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser 12/21/2010 2:55PM

Rich Harden passed his physical, and the one-year, \$1.5 million deal that was agreed to last week is now official. The question now is: Where will he pitch?

I'd first heard bullpen last week, from people with the A's, and it turns out that Harden is the one who has expressed interest in going to the bullpen, something of a surprise because he wasn't always wildly enthusiastic at the prospect in past years.

Assistant GM David Forst said that Harden will be stretched out enough to start, just in case, and the team will wait to see how everything plays out this spring. Given the A's experience with pitching injuries every spring in both the starting and relief corps, Harden really could wind up anywhere. His ex-Texas teammate Brandon McCarthy was recently signed to compete for the fifth spot in the rotation with Josh Outman, Bobby Cramer and Tyson Ross, and of the group of (now) five, only Cramer was healthy all of last year.

The A's have had a lot of little injuries in the bullpen, too, and hard-throwing Henry Rodriguez just went to Washington in the Josh Willingham trade. So Harden's role on the Opening Day roster is a toss-up for now. Pitching coach Ron Romanick told me that Harden has the talent to do either, he'll just need to adjust his routine a bit to move to the bullpen fulltime. "Rich warms up like a reliever already, though," Romanick said. "He doesn't need a lot of pitches."

Harden was a closer in college, and while Oakland has a terrific closer in Andrew Bailey, there always has been an assumption that Harden could be a phenomenal reliever. Romanick pointed to Harden's game against the Angels on June 8, 2009, when he struck out the first three batters with just nine pitches - that screams dominant reliever.

Harden and Romanick are close, one reason Harden's agent, Arn Tellem, called the A's right after the season to express interest. Romanick, then the bullpen coach, helped Harden to one of his best starts: He was 5-1 with a 2.34 ERA when traded to the Cubs that summer. Romanick also worked with Harden when Romanick was the minor-league pitching instructor, so their good working relationship goes back a long time.

Forst said that Dr. Doug Freedberg saw Harden and that Harden is physically sound; most of Harden's injuries over the years have been muscular, nagging things, rather than structural. His right shoulder is still in the same shape it was when he left the team.

There are always varying opinions about whether relief work might keep pitchers healthier. Many believe that that's so - the innings are reduced dramatically. But others feel that the frequent warmups, the back-to-back nights, can take more of a toll on arms. You'd think if there was a major difference, it would be seen in injury statistics, and I'm not aware of any studies that show any statistical advantage between bullpen and rotation from a health standpoint. I know Harden has had a lot of different little things over the years, and many coaches have felt that maybe he's *too* in shape - he's a workhorse in the gym, and some older coaches have that notion of "muscle-bound" pitchers not being a good thing. "You can't pull fat," one longtime baseball person told me, pointing to Joe Blanton and then to Harden.

I'd say it's more likely that Harden's devotion to fitness is a big reason for his success. He does have to be 100 percent to be at his best, though - a strained oblique, and that fastball/changeup combo suddenly doesn't work right. Everyone on the training staff and conditioning director Bob Alejo will be focused on making sure Harden is as ready as can be.

He's still only 29, he's got that great changeup/slidy thing that Romanick said that Felix Hernandez also now uses, and the contract isn't a killer. This could be a very nice pickup by the A's if Harden is healthy and comfortable. I haven't talked to him yet, because he's traveling today, but Harden texted me that he's "very excited" about coming back. He went 36-19 in Oakland, he's reunited with a pitching coach he trusts and he won't be under any pressure - the spotlight won't be on him anymore. The A's have new hotshot young starters, and the team can be patient with Harden, whatever his role.

Oakland to spend up to \$750,000 on ballpark study

Wednesday, December 22, 2010

Oakland City Council members have voted to spend up to \$750,000 on an environmental study for a new ballpark for the Athletics, even though the city has no guarantees that the club will stay in town.

The Oakland Tribune reports team owner Lew Wolff is trying to move the team to San Jose.

The council voted 6-2 Tuesday to hire LSA Associates to study the environmental and physical impacts of building a 39,000-seat baseball stadium southeast of Oakland's Jack London Square.

Councilmembers Ignacio De La Fuente and Nancy Nadel voted not to fund the study, saying it's foolish to spend money given the uncertainty of the Athletics' future in Oakland.

Council President Jane Brunner sympathized, but said, "If we did not do this, we would be out of the game tomorrow."

Harden returns to A's with one-year deal

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

Rumblings of a reunion began last week, but the A's made their second partnership with hurler Rich Harden official on Tuesday by announcing a one-year deal with the right-hander.

The 29-year-old righty, who received a contract worth \$1.5 million plus incentives, will begin his second tour of duty with Oakland vying for the fifth spot in the rotation. Though he appears a natural candidate for that role, he'll have several competitors, including newly signed righty Brandon McCarthy, as well as Tyson Ross, Josh Outman and Bobby Cramer. Thus, Harden could ultimately land in an A's bullpen where depth is needed.

Either way, pitching coach Ron Romanick -- who has closely worked with Harden since the time he was drafted by Oakland in 2000 -- believes the hurler can return to his old form, the same one that created whispers about his potential of joining the ranks of Oakland's "Big Three" unit of Mark Mulder, Barry Zito and Tim Hudson.

"He's got swing-and-miss-type pitches, and his arm is a nice fit for us in whatever capacity," Romanick said. "I think, in hearing him speak to the front office, he's got an open mind and just wants to pitch. Obviously there was a comfort level for him coming back here.

"I'm happy for Rich and hoping we can get him back on track to where he was a couple of years ago. I'm looking forward to reuniting with him. If you ask around, when he's on, he matches up with anybody's No. 1. He's got that kind of aura about him. He can go out and shut you down. It's just the consistency factor and the little hiccups that seem to derail him -- we're going to try to stay a step ahead of that."

All but 10 of Harden's 155 Major League appearances have come as a starter. While with Oakland from 2003 until July 2008, when he was traded to the Cubs, he went 36-19 with a 3.42 ERA in 97 appearances, 89 of them starts.

But since going 11-7 with a 3.99 ERA in 31 starts during the 2004 season, Harden's career has been hampered by a rash of various injuries. He has made at least 20 starts in just two of the six seasons that have followed and has endured nine disabled-list stints -- six of them coming in Oakland -- throughout his career.

Most recently, Harden battled shoulder and glute injuries with Texas during the 2010 campaign, pitching to a 5-5 record and 5.58 ERA in 20 games (18 starts). He didn't make any playoff appearances with the American League champion Rangers and was designated for assignment once the season concluded.

"Obviously he was disappointed he didn't do more for Texas last year, but health is not an issue anymore," Romanick said. "He passed his physical and says he feels great. Now it's about getting back to the things he did really well. He did it to us last year. I saw flashes of that when he started against us, and when I saw him on TV a couple of other times. He was just inconsistent.

"Whether it's in a starter or reliever role, you come in with that kind of arm, and you can make an impact. That's what I expect from him. He has all this potential, and it's a matter of keeping him on the field and keeping him motivated and hungry."

The motivation part figures to be of no worry. Romanick, who lives just 10 minutes from Harden during the offseason in Arizona, said he will gladly act as Harden's alarm clock if need be starting in January, when the two will begin work together on Harden's throwing program.

"I told him that us living so close could be a good thing or a bad thing," Romanick said, laughing. "You don't want me knocking on your door all the time, saying, 'Let's go!' He knows I've done it before, so I will if I have to -- even if he has a gated house.

"I've reminded him of all the work he put in during the '08 season when he was able to stay on the field. He was able to put together a pretty doggone good year. I'm looking to double down on that and more. He's given me every indication he's going to come to the table with that kind of motivation. It will be exciting when we start up again."

Overall, Harden owns a career 55-34 mark with a 3.63 ERA and 858 strikeouts next to 391 walks through 845 2/3 innings of work. His ratio of 9.13 strikeouts per nine innings ranks second among hurlers with 750 or more innings pitched since 2003.

"He's always worked hard and always kept himself in shape," Romanick said. "We've seen the numbers he can post, so with him you try to minimize all those little bumps in the road and keep him on a structured routine."

Harden represented Oakland's fifth signing in the past nine days, and his presence means the club has a full 40-man roster. However, general manager Billy Beane recently indicated that the club is far from completing its winter makeover, which could continue in the form of added bullpen help.

Major Lee-ague: Back in action

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 12/21/2010 9:40am

Rich Harden isn't the only one making a return. I've been on vacation for the past week, a time span which has seemingly felt like several weeks thanks to a multitude of signings while I was gone. I step away from the world of Twitter and blogging for a handful of days, and the A's proceed to bring in Hideki Matsui, Josh Willingham, Brandon McCarthy, Philip Humber and Harden. And while I know many of you were hoping I'd stay away until an Adrian Beltre signing got done, I have to say that one's looking unlikely. Impossible? Not necessarily. I'm not ruling him out until he signs elsewhere, but at this point it appears the A's have focused their attention elsewhere - hence the ultra-busy week I managed to miss out on.

There's no doubt Beltre would complete the 2011 A's package, so to say, but even if Santa ultimately drops him somewhere other than Oakland for Christmas, it's important to note that this A's team has improved this winter. They've been active from the start, and not all of their division rivals (Texas? Los Angeles?) can say the same. Matsui may be past his prime, but he still poses as a threat and commands the respect of opposing pitchers -- something no member of the 2010 A's team could really do. He's an on-base machine and has proven himself countless times (several times against the A's) in clutch situations. Willingham, meanwhile, adds the perfect amount of pop to a much better outfield than the one (well, there were multiple) the A's threw out last season. He may not have a perfect health record, but who does in Oakland? The A's may now have the best outfield bench in the league, and Ryan Sweeney and Conor Jackson offer the club options from both sides of the plate. Any team can have depth, but this one's got above-average depth.

McCarthy and Harden likely don't have you jumping for joy, especially given their injury history, but they give the club options -- both in the rotation and in the bullpen. It should make for an interesting Spring Training and yet another intriguing fifth starter competition.

Despite last week's madness, I doubt the A's are done from adding and subtracting from their roster, even though the addition of Harden puts them at the 40-man mark.

I know I'm late to the party, but I'm still open to your thoughts on the newest green and gold members...

Harden rejoins A's for \$1.5 million

Oft-injured starter may be converted to reliever

By JANIE McCAULEY, ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Rich Harden is rejoining his first major league team.

The right-hander and the Oakland Athletics finalized a \$1.5 million, one-year contract Tuesday after he passed a physical.

Harden went 5-5 with a 5.58 ERA in 20 appearances and 18 starts last season for the AL champion Texas Rangers. But he was designated for assignment after the regular season to give him his unconditional release after he struggled with injuries and control.

Harden, who began the season as the Rangers' No. 2 starter, walked 62 batters in 92 innings. The A's aren't sure yet about whether Harden will be a reliever or starter. Manager Bob Geren has a formidable starting rotation heading into 2011 but the No. 5 job is up for grabs.

"We're open-minded on Rich's role here," assistant general manager David Forst said. "I think it will play itself out in the spring."

Harden's health certainly will play a factor. He has been plagued by injuries for much of his eight-year big league career.

Oakland had penciled in Hisashi Iwakuma as a possible fifth starter but earlier this month failed to reach agreement with the Japanese right-hander during the allotted 30-day negotiating period, sending him back to his Japanese club.

The No. 5 spot could go to several candidates, including Bobby Cramer, Tyson Ross or left-hander Josh Outman, who missed last year recovering from Tommy John surgery but made a strong impression in the instructional league this fall.

The 29-year-old Harden spent two stints on the disabled list in 2010, first from June 12-July 30 with a left gluteal muscle strain and later with right shoulder tendinitis.

Oakland saw him miss his share of time, too.

Harden went 1-2 with a 2.45 ERA in only 25 2-3 innings in 2007 because of an inflamed right shoulder, and didn't pitch after July 7 that year. He threw two simulated games late in the season with the hopes of making two final starts, but ultimately decided it wasn't worth risking further injury.

He was 4-0 in nine games in 2006, spending time on the disabled list with a strained back and then a strained elbow ligament.

2010 Oakland A's Position Analysis: First Base

By [Sam McPherson](#), Oakland A's Examiner

Note: This is the fifth article in a multi-part series assessing the Oakland A's 2010 season. Read the [fourth](#) installment here.

Six years ago, the Oakland Athletics traded away starting pitcher Mark Mulder to the St. Louis Cardinals. In return, they primarily received Dan Haren and Daric Barton.

Haren had a few years of success before the A's flipped him to the Arizona Diamondbacks. And in 2010, Daric Barton finally entrenched himself as Oakland's starting first baseman.

The results, after many years of anticipation and hype, were mixed.

Barton easily had his best season as a major-league hitter, posting a .798 OPS and leading the American League in walks with 110 free passes. He also hit a career-high .273 while registering new personal highs in every offensive category.

The 25-year old's first full season in 2008 had been a disaster; after missing a lot of time in 2009, he bounced back in a big way to establish himself as the A's first baseman of the present and the near future (at least through 2013).

But there's still a lot left to be desired out of a major-league first baseman, and Barton comes up short in a lot of areas -- despite his drastic improvement in 2010.

His OPS mark ranked only 12th overall in MLB for his position, as his slugging percentage (.405) ranked 20th out of 22 for regular hitters playing first base. He tied for last in home runs (10) and was 21st in RBI (57); he tied for 15th in doubles with 33 two-base hits.

The walks are his offense right now, basically. But since he's only 25, there is every reason to believe he will get better from here on out. Yet there's no guarantee of that, either.

On the glove side, Barton was 14th amongst first basemen in fielding percentage (.993), although he posted the second-highest range factor (10.00) at his position. This means he is getting to a lot more balls than his peers, which also means he's more likely to make some extra errors.

So overall, the A's are probably content with this fielding, especially considering he had the most chances in the AL in 2010.

Barton is obviously going to be playing first base for Oakland for the next three seasons, and his upside is still impressive considering his age. But 2011 will have to show another significant leap forward in terms of power and run producing for the A's to make a run at the postseason.

With the young Barton starting 154 games at first base, there wasn't a lot of mop-up duty at the position in 2010, either. Adding some depth for 2011 would be a nice thought for the A's in case something goes wrong.