

A's News Clips, Tuesday, January 25, 2011

Oakland A's sign Andy LaRoche, trade Clayton Mortensen to Colorado Rockies

Oakland Tribune staff and wire report

The A's signed infielder Andy LaRoche to a minor league contract on Monday and invited the former Pittsburgh Pirate to spring training.

Oakland also traded right-handed pitcher Clayton Mortensen to the Colorado Rockies for 23-year-old right-hander Ethan Hollingsworth.

LaRoche batted .206 with four home runs and 16 RBIs in 102 games for Pittsburgh last year. He was acquired by Pittsburgh from Los Angeles at the trade deadline in 2008 and joined his brother, first baseman Adam, who was then traded to Boston just under a year later.

The 27-year-old son of former big league pitcher Dave LaRoche has a .224 career average with 22 home runs and 108 RBIs in four seasons with the Dodgers and Pirates. LaRoche, who has been linked to the A's in the past, could provide a challenge to Kevin Kouzmanoff, who is ticketed to be the A's starting third baseman.

Mortensen was designated for assignment last Tuesday when the A's signed right-handed reliever Grant Balfour. He made one start with Oakland in 2010 and had a no decision while posting a 4.50 ERA. Mortensen was 13-6 with a 4.25 ERA in 26 starts last season for Triple-A Sacramento. Mortensen has appeared in eight games, seven as a starter, for the A's over the last two years and is 2-4 with a 7.12 ERA.

Hollingsworth spent most of the season at Single-A Modesto where he was 12-8 with a 3.31 ERA in 25 games, all starts. He tied for the California League lead in wins, ranked second in ERA, third in strikeouts (153) and innings pitched (160.1) and fourth in opponents batting average (.260). He also went 0-0 with a 9.58 ERA in two starts with Double-A Tulsa.

Hollingsworth was originally selected by Colorado in the 4th round of the 2008 draft. He will report to the A's minor league camp this spring.

Chin Music: A's sign Andy LaRoche, trade Mortensen to Rockies

By Jon Becker, Oakland Tribune, 1/24/2011 4:21pm

Joe Stiglich is off this week, so just wanted to pass along the news that the A's have signed free-agent third baseman Andy LaRoche to a minor-league contract on Monday. Also, pitcher Clayton Mortensen was dealt to Colorado for minor league pitcher Ethan Hollingsworth.

From the A's release:

The Oakland A's traded right-handed pitcher Clayton Mortensen to the Colorado Rockies for minor league right-handed pitcher Ethan Hollingsworth, the club announced today. The A's also agreed to terms with third baseman Andy LaRoche on a minor league contract and have invited him to spring training.

Mortensen was designated for assigned last Tuesday when the A's signed right-handed pitcher Grant Balfour. He made one start with Oakland in 2010 and had a no decision while posting a 4.50 ERA. Mortensen spent the balance of the season at Triple-A Sacramento, where he was 13-6 with a 4.25 ERA in 26 starts.

Hollingsworth spent most of the season at Single-A Modesto where he was 12-8 with a 3.31 ERA in 25 games, all starts. He tied for the California League lead in wins, ranked second in ERA, third in strikeouts (153) and innings pitched (160.1) and fourth in opponents batting average (.260). The 23-year old right-hander also went 0-0 with a 9.58 ERA in two starts with Double-A Tulsa. Hollingsworth was originally selected by Colorado in the 4th round of the 2008 draft. He will report to the A's minor league camp this spring.

La Roche batted .206 with four home runs and 16 RBI in 102 games with Pittsburgh last year. He started 52 games at third base, four at second base and two at first base. The 27-year old right-handed hitter made his Major League debut with the Los Angeles Dodgers in 2007 and is a .224 career hitter with 22 home runs and 108 in 363 games over four seasons.

Diamondbacks sign pitcher Armando Galarraga

San Francisco Chronicle, 1/25/2011

The Arizona Diamondbacks have added depth to their pitching staff with a right-hander who was nearly perfect.

Arizona acquired Armando Galarraga in a trade with the Detroit Tigers for minor-league pitchers Kevin Eichhorn and Ryan Robowski on Monday, giving the Diamondbacks another arm in what should be a pretty good rotation competition in spring training.

Galarraga, 29, had an average 2010 season but gained fame by missing a perfect game when umpire Jim Joyce acknowledged blowing a call with two outs in the ninth inning against Cleveland.

He's expected to compete for a spot in Arizona's rotation on a staff that includes Joe Saunders, Ian Kennedy, Dan Hudson, Barry Enright, Zach Duke and Aaron Heilman.

Galarraga went 4-9 with a 4.49 ERA in 24 starts and one relief appearance last season with the Tigers, gaining national attention when Joyce blew the call at first base against Cleveland and later made a tearful apology.

-- The A's traded right-hander Clayton Mortensen to the Colorado Rockies for minor-league righty Ethan Hollingsworth. Oakland also announced it has agreed to terms with third baseman Andy LaRoche on a minor-league contract and invited him to spring training.

Mortensen was designated for assignment last Tuesday when the A's signed right-handed reliever Grant Balfour. Mortensen made one start with Oakland in 2010 and had a no decision while posting a 4.50 ERA. Mortensen was 13-6 with a 4.25 ERA in 26 starts last season for Triple-A Sacramento. Hollingsworth was a 12-game winner for Class-A Modesto.

LaRoche batted .206 with four home runs and 16 RBIs in 102 games for Pittsburgh last year.

A's sign LaRoche, get Hollingsworth from Rox

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The A's made a pair of moves on Monday, signing third baseman Andy LaRoche to a Minor League contract and acquiring right-hander Ethan Hollingsworth from the Rockies in exchange for hurler Clayton Mortensen.

LaRoche, the 27-year-old brother of Nationals first baseman Adam LaRoche, received an invitation to Spring Training and immediately represents an extra infield option for the A's, who are not guaranteed a healthy Adam Rosales (right foot) by season's start.

Though Rosales recently told MLB.com that he'd like to be 100 percent by March 15, the A's -- who are also watching shortstop Cliff Pennington as he comes back from shoulder surgery -- are playing the safe route.

LaRoche hit .206 with four home runs and 16 RBIs in 102 games with Pittsburgh last year. Fifty-two of his 58 starts were at third base; he also made appearances at second base and first base.

Fellow newcomer Hollingsworth, meanwhile, has pitched just two games above Class A. Just 23, he was selected by the Rockies in the fourth round of the 2008 First-Year Player Draft. The right-hander notched a 12-8 record and 3.31 ERA for

Class A Modesto, striking out 153 against just 34 walks. He made a brief debut at Double-A Tulsa late last season, and for his career, he boasts a 24-24 record and 4.33 ERA.

Mortensen, a former supplemental-round draftee, has pitched in the Major Leagues in each of the last two seasons but made just one start with Oakland last year. He made 26 starts for Triple-A Sacramento, notching a 13-6 record and 4.25 ERA and striking out a career-high 112 batters.

San Jose City Council to get first look at plans for Diridon Station area

By Tracy Seipel, San Jose Mercury News, 1/25/2011

After 18 months of study and debate, the grand plan for the area surrounding San Jose's Diridon Station will be unveiled Tuesday night before the City Council.

Divided into three sections, the plan features an area devoted to business and research and development just north of the station. Entertainment, retail and office space would be nearest the station, and mixed-use residential development to the south.

All told, the city proposes a scenario in the years to come of almost 5 million square feet of office/commercial space, along with 420,000 square feet of retail/restaurant space, 2,588 residential units and 900 hotel rooms.

Whether it will happen sooner or later hangs on a critical decision by Major League Baseball officials, who have yet to rule whether the Oakland A's can relocate to San Jose.

"A baseball stadium is certainly a catalyst for development," said City Councilman Pierluigi Oliverio, whose district includes the ballpark site and train station. Short of that, he cautioned, "what we plan today and what actually turns out 25 to 30 years later doesn't always match."

The potential baseball stadium helped kick-start the planning process between city leaders and neighborhood groups, but it was far from the only issue on the table.

Hans Larsen, head of San Jose's Department of Transportation, said driving the issue is Diridon Station's future as a transportation hub with high-speed rail, BART, Amtrak, light rail and bus systems that many hope will make it a local and regional destination.

"We want to ensure that all the transit systems come together in an effective and efficient way," Larsen said.

Plenty of input has come from members of a 31-member Good Neighbor Committee, appointed in May 2009 by Mayor Chuck Reed to provide a forum for residents, business owners and other interested groups. After 22 meetings over 14 months, the committee was especially concerned about parking and traffic in the area.

In its final report of recommendations, the group emphasized a plan that encourages alternative transportation, not a sea of parking lots. The members are urging that pedestrian, bike and creek trails and other transit options should be completed between the station, surrounding neighborhoods and Mineta San Jose International Airport.

"This is a prime piece of real estate next to a high-speed rail station," said Eloy Wouters, a member of the committee and resident of the St. Leo's neighborhood. "Building parking lots was not seen as a good way of using that land or making it an attractive place to go."

Although they agree with the plan in large part, Reed, Oliverio and Councilman Sam Liccardo late last week

issued a memo asking city staff to work with the San Jose Sharks on parking issues that could affect events at HP Pavilion.

The trio also asked that staff allow the flexibility of mixed-use development in the central and northern areas around Diridon Station, rather than a more rigid segregation of zoning. And they want city staffers to account for both underground and aboveground alignment of high speed rail tracks near the station, even though state leaders have said tunneling would be prohibitively expensive.

No place like home for Merced native and A's pitcher Brian Fuentes

By Sean Lynch, Merced Sun Star 1/25/2011

They aren't your grandfather's "Boys of Summer" — not today's Major League Baseball players.

Players spend 81 games out of a 162-game grind out on the road, and when they are home, there's seldom time for family and friends with only two days off a month.

In addition to the physical and mental rigors of the regular season, players leave their homes and report for spring training in the middle of February.

And for those lucky few fortunate enough to make the playoffs and World Series, the season now extends into early November.

It's a 10-month undertaking.

So, when recently signed Oakland A's relief pitcher Brian Fuentes has the opportunity to spend the afternoon with family or the community he grew up in, he jumps at it.

The former Merced High and Merced College standout did a little of both on Monday afternoon, speaking at the Kiwanis Club of Greater Merced meeting.

About 50 club members and guests turned out for lunch, listening to the four-time All-Star speak about his travels and stints, overtures from the Toronto Blue Jays this winter and realizing how few closer jobs were available.

Fuentes will act as the setup man for A's closer Andrew Bailey.

Most of all, though, he shared his joy of being back in Northern California with the A's, close to home, close to family and friends.

"For those that don't know me, I was born and raised in Merced," Fuentes said. "I've been fortunate enough to be a pitcher in the major league's for the last 10 years.

"With the ability to live almost anywhere, most people want to know why I still live in Merced.

"Why Merced? Why? Why?"

"It's probably the question I get asked the most, especially from the kids around here.

"It's home for me. This is where my family is. This is where I'm from. I'm proud to be from Merced.

"It's a great town if you take advantage of it."

Fuentes attempts to give back to the town and people who have supported him on his way to the big leagues whenever he can.

The southpaw can often be found working out with the Merced College baseball team before the start of spring training, and he said he usually does two to three appearances at places like the Kiwanis Club during the offseason.

"It's tough because my time with my family is so precious, but if a good organization like Kiwanis approaches me I'm happy to do it," said Fuentes, whose father Dave is a member. "It's obviously tougher during the season. A two-hour drive is tough when you're playing every day, but it's nice being so close to home.

"Especially if we have a day game, I imagine I'll be a little more transparent in the community."

With his parents and wife, Barbara, sitting to his right, Fuentes recounted his recent free agent experience and how he likes the makeup of his new team.

"I'm excited," Fuentes said. "They had the No. 2 ERA in all of baseball last year, so you know pitching is already a focus.

"I was pretty familiar with the bullpen from pitching against them while in Anaheim, and I think I'm really going to fit in.

"I'm excited to join a group that already has a lot of talented arms. I'm probably a little biased, but I really believe if the starters get past the fifth inning and hand it off, it's going to be lights out."

With not many closing options available, Fuentes was resigned to taking a middle relief role. He said he was close to signing with Toronto, when the A's came in and made him an offer he couldn't refuse.

Fuentes was also appreciative of the way the A's have tried to bolster their lineup during the offseason with the additions of David DeJesus, Josh Willingham and Hideki Matsui.

He fielded questions from the crowd for about a half hour, and finished up by posing for pictures and signing autographs.

"We're very fortunate to have Brian come and speak with us," Kiwanis president Ellen Taylor said. "I brought my old softball glove and bat. I don't play anymore, but I thought it would be nice for Brian to sign them."

Fuentes happily met any request and shared a few laughs with the line of well wishers.

"This is what is so nice about signing with Oakland," Fuentes said. "If I'm on a road trip for two, three weeks, my family can just come home to Merced and be around people that care about them."

Oakland Has Legal Bullet to Use Against A's

San Francisco sued Giants twice to keep them from leaving, and it worked

By [Zusha Elinson](#), Bay Citizen, 1/24/2011

When the San Francisco Giants threatened to move to Florida in 1992, City Attorney Louise Renne quickly – and without breathing a word to anyone -- sent her lawyers down to the courthouse to file a lawsuit.

"We very quietly prepared to get a restraining order to stop the Giants from leaving town," said Renne, who is now in private practice. "I didn't tell any other city official; it was a stealth attack, I suppose."

By several accounts, the stealth legal attack cast uncertainty on the deal and delayed it just long enough to prevent the Giants from being sold to a group of investors from Florida. Instead, a group of local investors headed by Peter Magowan stepped in and bought the team from Bob Lurie, who'd become frustrated trying to build his team a new stadium.

If the scenario sounds similar to what could soon be transpiring with the A's in Oakland, it's because it is. The team's owner, Lew Wolff, wants a new stadium and has his sites set on San Jose, even going as far as hiring an architect and cutting questionable deals with the city to acquire the needed land.

Legal experts say that Oakland has the same ammunition to prevent the A's from moving to San Jose. A part of the A's lease essentially prohibits the team from taking actions that could result in the team leaving town.

"I wouldn't have any question that they have a complaint drafted and sitting on a desk somewhere drawing on all the other disputes, including ours," said Jim Hunt, a lawyer who represented the Giants in their fight with Renne and San Francisco.

Oakland City Attorney John Russo said that he has gone over the A's lease with a "fine-toothed comb," and if the A's violate the agreement, "my office will consult with the decision makers and take whatever action is necessary." But he said that because Oakland is working with Major League Baseball on the whole issue, "it's premature for us to look at things like legal action against the A's."

When asked if he had a complaint drafted and sitting on a desk somewhere, Russo's tone became more ominous: "The A's pattern of behavior has been apparent for many years now, and were we forced to act, we are ready to act very quickly."

Bob Rose, the A's spokesman, declined to comment for the story, saying only that the team is waiting for the blue-ribbon committee that is studying – with all the speed of a Galápagos giant tortoise – whether the A's should be allowed to move into the Giants' territory in San Jose.

When San Francisco sued the Giants in 1992, it wasn't the first time. Back in 1976, the cash-strapped team was on its way to being sold to a group in Toronto when the city stepped in and filed a lawsuit.

Giants' lawyer Hunt said the city didn't have much of a case to stop the team from moving since bankruptcy was the other alternative to being sold to investors from Toronto. But when then-Mayor George Moscone showed up in court to say they'd found a local buyer in Bob Lurie, the case swung in favor of the city.

Nearly two decades later, Hunt was once again defending the Giants as they tried to leave town. Renne's suit threw a number of allegations at the team, including their failure to give 30 days notice about their plans to leave for Florida. The suit also invoked a clause similar to the one in the A's lease, Hunt said.

Hunt said the city's case against his client was weak, but Renne says it put a roadblock in what seemed like an imminent move to the sunny climes of Tampa Bay. "If you ask most people, they'll say that litigation turned the tide," Renne said last week.

The secrecy around the lawsuit, she said, was to make sure that the team didn't sue first in Florida. After filing, she told then-Mayor Frank Jordan. The suit cast a shadow on the deal. Meetings with league officials followed – and eventually Magowan bought the team.

The A's are currently pursuing their stadium dreams in San Jose while Oakland also readies a site near Jack London Square. The lease runs through 2011 and the team has options to renew through 2013.

Whether the legal bullet will be fired likely depends on the league committee that is studying the A's potential move. And the A's themselves would likely have their own claims. One thing is clear, legal experts say: The bullet exists.

And just in case anyone wants to read the actual language, here it is:

"Licensee [A's] shall not permit or cause to occur any event that may result in the transfer of its Franchise or any of its Home Games to any other city or location or do or fail to do anything which will cause its right to play major league professional baseball in the Stadium to be lost, impaired or transferred to any other city or location."

Sleuthing the Bay Area's sports mysteries

Scott Ostler, San Francisco Chronicle, 1/24/2011

If you love a good unsolved sports mystery, and who doesn't, the Bay Area is your one-stop shopping center.

Whether you prefer to ponder, muse upon or phone a sports-radio show and babble incoherently, you've got a solid list of murky mysteries from which to work.

A partial list: **Panda-pounda-monium**: Pablo Sandoval has lost some weight, or so it is rumored.

This is the 21st century, we can find lost golf balls with satellite technology, but Sandoval has flat-out disappeared.

Giants fans need to know Sandoval's weight, yet the closest anyone has gotten to actual information is Sporting Green baseball ace Henry Schulman's report of an eyewitness sighting of the Kung Fu Panda by a former Giants player in a mall in Phoenix.

The Giants seem to be fueling speculation by giving no hard-facts updates on Sandoval's winter weight-loss campaign. I don't want to say the Giants are milking the mystery, but I will be suspicious if Sandoval reports to spring training and works out for the first two weeks wearing a cardboard refrigerator box with holes cut for arms, legs and neck.

A few photos hit the Internet of Sandoval taking batting practice, but they were grainy and inconclusive, even to the Warren Commission.

Once he was the lovable Panda. Now he's the Bay Area's Bigfoot.

The Lost Brigade:

Nineteen months ago, baseball Commissioner Bud Selig commissioned a three-person committee to study the A's ballpark situation and make recommendations. It was a yes-or-no question: Should the A's stay or should they go?

What happened to this so-called blue-ribbon committee? Did the members go bodysurfing at Ocean Beach, get pulled by a riptide and become stranded on Seal Rock?

Who's leading this committee? Moses?

Where's Andris? Two years ago at this time, we were talking about Andris Biedrins, then 22, as a potential participant in the All-Star Game.

Now some of us are wondering why Biedrins is still in the Warriors' starting lineup.

Back then, he averaged 11.2 rebounds and 11.9 points. He had so much potential, so few negatives, that even Doghouse Don Nelson couldn't find much fault.

Now, he is averaging 8.6 rebounds and 6.2 points. Other than tip-ins and the occasional handout from a driving guard, he contributes no offense. Even with an improved free-throw stroke, the man who shot 62 percent at age 21 now shoots 27 percent.

Biedrins needs help: mechanical, psychological, or both.

What's this America's Cup thing? San Francisco devoted much official money and energy to luring this event to San Francisco in 2013, but what is it?

We know it's stupendously rich fellows racing sailboats, but we can see that every day by looking out any window.

The organizers say they hope to turn an elitist event into a popular spectator sport in San Francisco. And if they pull it off, who knows, the Bay Area could land franchises in professional polo and fox hunting. Tally ho, bro!

Football stadiums?

Hello? The two Bay Area pro football stadiums get crummier and more unsuitable by the day, and nothing happens.

Well, some stuff happens, by the 49ers (the Raiders don't even bother). Pretty scale-model stadiums get built (they should make them out of cake material so they can be eaten), talk gets talked, vows are made and broken. The NFL commissioner explains that the only solution is a joint stadium, and the two team owners plug fingers in ears and say, "LA-LA-LA- LA-LA!"

Who was Al's secret

GM? Sixteen months ago, Al Davis said he was considering seeking a general manager (though he didn't use that exact title) to help him run the Raiders. At one point, fans chipped in to put up a billboard begging Davis to hire a GM.

Nothing happened. Or so we thought. At Davis' news conference last week, I asked him about it.

"To be real honest with you," Davis said, "we've had two people in here.

One worked here about eight months and you people (the media) didn't even know he was working here. He was a name, a very prominent name in professional football.

He worked with our ... pro personnel department."

Now that's an impressive level of sneakiness, even for the Raiders.

It's a puzzler. What famous person could have slipped in and out of Raiderland for eight months, right under our noses, without being noticed? The only name I can come up with is Santa Claus.

Former major leaguer Gus Zernial dies

By Marek Warszawski / The Fresno Bee 1/21/2011

Gus Zernial, the former major league slugger who settled in Clovis after his 11-year career ended and became a sports broadcaster and one of the Fresno Grizzlies' biggest advocates, died Thursday after a long illness.

He was 87.

Mr. Zernial died at a Fresno hospice care center from the effects of congestive heart failure, said his daughter, Lisa Pearlstein.

"When my dad passed away he had his entire family around him," Pearlstein said. "For the past year he'd been in and out of the hospital quite a bit. But he fought the whole way."

Nicknamed "Ozark Ike" during his playing days after a popular comic strip character and "Big Gus" around the central San Joaquin Valley for his burly 6-foot-2 frame, Mr. Zernial swatted 237 home runs and drove in 776 runs while playing outfield for the Chicago White Sox, Philadelphia/Kansas City Athletics and Detroit Tigers from 1949-59.

A one-time All-Star, Mr. Zernial led the American League in home runs (33) and RBIs (129) in 1951 despite being traded from the White Sox to the A's just four games into the season. He hit a career-high 42 homers for the A's in 1953.

From 1950-57, no AL player, not even Hall of Famers Mickey Mantle, Yogi Berra or Ted Williams, slugged more home runs than Mr. Zernial's 220.

"Gus played against some big-time hitters but never got as much hoopla as those guys, mostly because his career only lasted 11 years and he never played in a big market," said longtime friend Tom Sommers, a former minor league director for the California Angels. "But he was a terrific hitter."

Mr. Zernial moved to Fresno in 1960 after retiring from baseball and in 1967 became sports director at KFRE. He broadcast Fresno State football, basketball and baseball games on TV and radio.

In the early 1990s, while working for the Fresno Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Zernial learned of an effort by the Fresno Diamond Group, headed by John and Diane Carbray, to build a downtown stadium and bring a Triple-A baseball team to Fresno. He quickly jumped aboard.

"He just walked in the office one day and said, 'Where's my desk? I'm going to work for you,' " John Carbray recalled. "I told him to pick out a table.

"He opened more doors in Fresno for me than I could imagine. He knew everyone and everybody liked Big Gus."

Added Diane Carbray, "We wouldn't have gotten that stadium built without him."

When the Grizzlies arrived in 1998, Mr. Zernial served as the team's director of community relations and color commentator on radio broadcasts. He was a constant presence around Grizzlies Stadium, as the ballpark was then named, signing autographs and regaling anyone within earshot with stories from his playing days.

Mr. Zernial resigned from his position in 2004 after a team ownership change but returned three years later with the title of team ambassador. His responsibilities included speaking engagements and engaging with fans.

"Gus has been a part of the Grizzlies' family dating back to its very beginning," Grizzlies president Chris Cummings said in a statement. "His spirit and energy helped bring baseball back to Fresno, and we are eternally grateful for everything he has meant to this community. His positive impact cannot be understated.

"We will truly miss his vitality and his humor, both of which made this world a better place. The thoughts and prayers of everyone in the Grizzlies family go out to Gus' family, friends and colleagues."

Born June 27, 1923, in Beaumont, Texas, Mr. Zernial was the youngest of 10 children. In his 2007 autobiography "Ozark Ike," he described playing sandlot baseball from morning till nightfall, using a broomstick when no bat was available.

Mr. Zernial was a three-sport star for Beaumont High and signed his first pro contract in 1941 at age 17 with the St. Louis Cardinals. During World War II, he served 25 months in the Navy as a radio operator aboard five battleships stationed in the Pacific, according to The Baseball Biography Project website.

Mr. Zernial's baseball career might have been even more prolific if not for two broken collarbones. Before the second injury, in 1954, he hit the last grand slam in Philadelphia A's history.

In 1984, Mr. Zernial was inducted into the Fresno Athletic Hall of Fame. He was inducted into the Philadelphia Wall of Fame in 2001 and named to the Philadelphia A's All-Century team in 2002.

"It's ironic that the heart problems finally took him because he had a heart as big as he was, if not bigger," said longtime friend Rick Finley, who worked with Mr. Zernial with the Grizzlies. "I can't fully describe him. He was an incredible friend."

Mr. Zernial is survived by his wife of nearly 50 years, Marla; two sons, Gus Zernial Jr. and Jim Zernial; two daughters, Susan Zernial and Lisa Pearlstein; five grandchildren; and one great-granddaughter.

Funeral services are pending.