

A's News Clips, Wednesday, January 26, 2011

Oakland A's reach agreement with reliever Craig Breslow, the last of five arbitration-eligible players to sign with A's

Associated Press

Craig Breslow and the A's agreed to a \$1.4 million, one-year deal Tuesday.

The left-handed reliever, who got a \$975,000 raise, was the last of the A's five arbitration-eligible players to agree. The others were outfielders Josh Willingham (\$6 million) and Conor Jackson (\$3.2 million), third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff (\$4.75 million) and pitcher Dallas Braden (\$3.35 million).

Breslow, 30, went 4-4 with five saves and a 3.01 ERA in 75 appearances in 2010.

Other pitchers avoiding arbitration were Houston's Wandy Rodriguez (three years, \$34 million) and Minnesota's Kevin Slowey (one year, \$2.7 million).

The Giants agreed to a minor league deal with Marc Kroon, 37, and invited him to spring training. He's been a closer for Japan's Yomiuri Giants the past three seasons and had 25 saves and a 4.26 ERA in 52 appearances in 2010. He's pitched with San Diego, Cincinnati and Colorado but hasn't been in the major leagues since 2004.

Seattle plans to have Milton Bradley compete for a starting job in spring training despite his arrest last week, general manager Jack Zduriencik said. The outfielder has a court date Feb. 8 in Los Angeles for allegedly threatening a woman. ... Seattle signed reliever Chris Ray to a minor league deal with an invitation to spring training. Ray, 29, was 5-0 with a 3.72 ERA in 63 games for Texas and the Giants in 2010.

Todd Wellemeyer, 32, agreed to a minor league deal with the Chicago Cubs with an invitation to spring training. He was 3-5 with a 5.68 ERA with the Giants in 2010 before being designated for assignment Aug. 20.

Texas traded reliever Frank Francisco, 31, and cash to Toronto for catcher-first baseman Mike Napoli. The Blue Jays acquired Napoli, 29, and outfielder Juan Rivera from the Los Angeles Angels on Friday for outfielder Vernon Wells. This deal involves arbitration-eligible players that have not settled their 2011 contracts.

Frank McCourt might have to become business partners with ex-wife Jamie in order to keep the Los Angeles Dodgers in the family, her attorneys said.

A's, Breslow reach deal to avoid arbitration

Lefty reliever gets one-year contract worth \$1.4 million

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The A's and left-handed reliever Craig Breslow avoided arbitration on Tuesday with a one-year deal, the club confirmed through a press release. The contract is worth \$1.4 million, a Major League source confirmed to MLB.com.

Breslow, who made \$425,000 in 2010, can also earn up to \$25,000 in incentives based on the number of games finished.

The 30-year-old originally filed for arbitration at \$1.55 million last week, while the A's countered with \$1.15 million. He represented the last of Oakland's arbitration-eligible players, as the A's continue its long-standing history of avoiding arbitration hearings.

Breslow is coming off the strongest campaign of his career, one which resulted in a team-leading 75 appearances -- a number that ranked second among all American League relievers. In 74 2/3 innings, which ranked fourth in the AL, Breslow registered a 3.01 ERA and set an Oakland record for strikeouts by a left-handed reliever with 71.

His presence was key down the stretch, as the A's battled multiple injury woes in the bullpen, most notably in the form of closer Andrew Bailey (right elbow) and Jerry Blevins (left hip/shoulder) and Michael Wuerz (left thumb).

Breslow is slated to join that trio, along with newcomers Brian Fuentes and Grant Balfour and familiar faces Brad Ziegler and Joey Devine, in forming one of the league's most feared relief corps this year.

Oakland A's Off-Season Q&A: Farhan Zaidi, P1

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Jan 25, 2011

The Oakland A's have been one of the busiest teams in baseball this off-season and the team is confident that they have improved their stock for the 2011 season. On Monday, OaklandClubhouse's Melissa Lockard caught-up with A's Director of Baseball Operations Farhan Zaidi to discuss the A's off-season moves. Part one of this interview focuses on the bullpen and the infield depth chart.

OaklandClubhouse: You guys have been busy since the start of the off-season, but let's start with the acquisitions last week of [Grant Balfour](#) and [Brian Fuentes](#). How do you envision the bullpen lining up now and what was the thought behind targeting relievers even though you had a strong bullpen last season?

Farhan Zaidi: First of all, they are a couple of guys who we have always liked. Balfour has had three pretty good years with Tampa and Fuentes is a guy that we saw a decent amount of the past couple of years with the Angels. Even earlier in the off-season, they were guys who we were aware of and wanted to keep track of. Earlier in the off-season, it was very much that a three-year deal was a starting point for any of those high-caliber relievers and that wasn't something that we were willing to do.

The reality of the off-season is that you can't expect just to have one plan and expect to be able to execute it. That's not realistic for any team and I think it is even less realistic for us because between free agents that we go after that we might get out-bid for or that might not be interested in playing for us and trade targets that come available that you thought weren't going to be available and sometimes guys that you thought were going to be available in a trade ultimately aren't. It's impossible to have one set of players you are going to go after without having a plan B or C or working your way through a set of alternatives.

We started this off-season with some targets in mind and we had to adjust as players came off the board. We had some financial flexibility and we think that we are going to be good this year. We won 81 games last year and our run differential was better than that. I think the consensus is that we are going to be a better team in 2011 than we were last year. Whether that is three games or five games or 10 games better, that will have to bare itself out. Getting back to those two guys, when it became apparent that we were going to be able to make a play on them with two-year deals at numbers that we were comfortable with and that they had interest in playing for us and that we had some financial flexibility left, it made some sense.

As far as where they fit, I think this notion of having a five-man rotation and a seven-man bullpen is a little bit antiquated. We used 23 pitchers last year. I think if you have seven or eight starters that you feel good about and eight or nine or 10 relievers that you feel good about, and that group of guys can soak up a pretty high percentage of the innings that your team is going to throw, then you are in pretty good shape. It's hard to line-up those guys. We have a group of guys that we feel good about and obviously from a depth perspective, having additional depth, just with the attrition of the year with injuries, is a big deal. We feel like we were able to sign them to deals that we were comfortable with and we feel like they definitely made us better.

OC: There are a few of the relievers in camp who have options, but some, such as [Joey Devine](#), who don't. How do you approach depth discussions when you have guys who are out-of-options who may not clear through waivers?

FZ: Quite a few of those pitchers have options remaining. Without getting into specifics, more pitchers than people realize. That only becomes relevant if you are sitting there on Opening Day and have to make a decision of choosing seven bullpen guys from a group of nine or 10 healthy players at the time. You are rarely in a situation where you have so many [healthy] players that you wind-up losing a guy that you really like on Opening Day because everybody is healthy and everybody is ready to go and you only have so many slots. I think you see that throughout the league. You don't know necessarily which guys are going to get hurt, but the unfortunate reality is that you always have a couple of unhealthy players at the start of the season.

It will sort itself out. In some sense, you are limited obviously by the 40-man roster. You can't have 50 guys on that roster going into the season, so there only so many guys you can have on the 40-man and some of those guys are already slated for the minors or may not be healthy. It's a bit of a clichéd answer, but we think it will work itself out.

OC: There were two guys who were DFA'd off the 40-man roster last week, [Clayton Mortensen](#) and [Steven Tolleson](#), to make room for the two new relievers. From an outsiders' perspective, those guys seemed like they would have pretty large roles in the depth discussions for the starting rotation and the infield, respectively. Is there a sense that they will both clear, or do you feel like you have addressed their roles on the depth chart with other players [note: Mortensen was traded to Colorado for [Ethan Hollingsworth](#) hours after this interview]?

FZ: We like both of those guys. If there was a 42-man roster, we would happily keep them both and they both do have options for next year, which make them attractive for teams considering them as potential depth options. There is nothing that we didn't particularly like about either guy. It was just the reality of the numbers game. We still have a couple of days here to work out deals for those players and I think we have a good chance to work out deals at least for one of them, if not both of them.

As guys that we saw a little bit at the big league level and who performed well at Triple-A and have options left, those guys are useful players. And I think that those guys have a little upside, so it's unfortunate. But to get two guys [Balfour and Fuentes] who are going to be two of our most important relief pitchers in our bullpen this year and hopefully next year, we thought that was a trade-off worth making.

OC: Does Tolleson's removal from the roster indicate that you are confident that [Cliff Pennington](#) will be 100 percent at the start of spring training [note: Pennington had off-season shoulder surgery] and that you aren't concerned about the depth at shortstop for the start of the season?

FZ: Yeah, we are optimistic about Cliff starting the season. You never know and guys can be very much on-pace to start the season and then have an unexpected set-back, but right now we feel good about Cliff's readiness for the start of the season. And [Adam] Rosales is maybe a little bit behind him, but we don't think that if he's not ready it will be for an extended period of time. We hope to have those guys on Opening Day or shortly thereafter.

OC: Do you expect to see [Eric Sogard](#) at shortstop more in spring training? He spent some time there during the second half of last season with Sacramento.

FZ: Yeah, I think so. He's not a prototypical shortstop, but the reality is that most utility guys aren't. The ability to play over there is obviously pretty valuable. With Cliff last season, especially after Rosales went down, we were in a position where it was pretty hard to give him days off. Having a good option there [at back-up shortstop] would help. With Sogard, he's not going to have Cliff's range or arm, but if he reaches a level of comfort there and makes the Opening Day roster as the utility infielder and we feel comfortable putting him over there once or twice a week, that would be a great asset. And spring training is the perfect time to do that.

OC: Is it reading too much into the decision to DFA Tolleson and Mortensen that the rehab for [Sean Doolittle](#)'s knee is progressing in a positive direction?

FZ: Guys who are added can't be removed from the roster for a certain period of time, but I'm not saying that we would have chosen Doolittle otherwise. When you select guys for the roster in that situation [to protect them from the Rule 5 draft], it is with the understanding that they are going to be on it. But to answer your question more specifically, our training staff is very happy with where Sean is.

I know it was a surprise to some people that know our system and know what he has gone through over the past few years to see him added to our roster, but there are front offices that we are close to that we asked about Doolittle and they said that if he wasn't protected, they would at least consider [taking him in the Rule 5 draft]. The Rule 5 process is such that it is not so much that you are concerned the player is going to get taken and you are never going to see them again, it's just not good for a player's development to be selected and be in another organization and then be placed on the DL or waste away on a major league bench.

If you have a player who you think might be selected, for no other reason than if you want to be in control of that player's development, putting him on the roster makes the most sense.

OC: Is [James Simmons](#) progressing with his rehab? Could he fill the spot that Mortensen would have filled on the depth chart?

FZ: Yeah. We feel good about our Triple-A pitching depth both in the rotation and the bullpen. Even after injuries, we have seven, eight, nine guys who are in the mix for the big league rotation. Some of those guys obviously have spots locked down, but there are a group of four or five guys for that fifth starter spot and the guys who don't make it on Opening Day will be in the Triple-A rotation. Mortensen was certainly in that mix, but we don't necessarily feel like we have to replace him right away. We have other guys who we feel good about backing up the big league rotation.

OC: Is [Tyson Ross](#) slated to start spring training on time? Has he worked through the shoulder injury he had last season in Triple-A?

FZ: Yeah. Right now he is on schedule.

Stay tuned throughout the week for the rest of this interview. We review the A's off-season additions on offense, the status of top prospects [Chris Carter](#) and [Michael Taylor](#) on the depth chart, the A's third base situation, how the team stacks up against the rest of the AL West, [Rich Harden](#) and Brandon McCarthy's roles this year, the transition from Curt Young to Ron Romanick as the team's pitching coach, and more...

Oakland A's Off-Season Q&A: Farhan Zaidi, P2

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Jan 26, 2011

Our off-season conversation with Oakland A's Director of Baseball Operations Farhan Zaidi continues with a discussion about the A's revamped outfield/DH situation and its implication on young players such as Chris Carter and Ryan Sweeney.

For part one of this interview, please click [here](#).

OaklandClubhouse: Shifting to the offense, there has been a significant change in the make-up of the middle of the A's line-up with the new additions. Let's start with the DH spot. What is it about [Hideki Matsui](#) that you think will make the team better than it was with [Jack Cust](#) in that same spot?

Farhan Zaidi: It's a fair question. The bottom line is that Jack was productive for us for the past three seasons. We are a team that puts a premium on a guy's ability to get on-base and he was as good as anybody at doing that. His stats also have to be viewed through the lens of having played half of his games in our home park, which isn't necessarily always kind to hitters. We have an appreciation for what he did. I think at some level, it was time to create a different dynamic in our line-up with a guy who will put the ball in play a little bit more. That's definitely something that Hideki brings to the table.

I think power-wise, they are pretty similar. Jack was a little bit down the past couple of years, but they bring similar power to the table. Without putting too much of a premium on it, we did appreciate that Matsui is a guy who has played on some really good teams and is an experienced hitter who has played really well on big stages. He is actually very well respected by other players in the league. I think that was something that we were aware of that we put value on. If you talk to his former teammates on the Yankees and even the Angels, the other players on that team had great respect for him, both as a teammate and as a player and hitter. I think that is a pretty significant part of the equation and I know the other guys on our team are pretty excited to have him in the middle of the line-up next year.

OC: Do you anticipate that he will 100 percent DH or will he appear in the outfield at all?

FZ: I think the plan is for him to DH and we will try to get him some days off against lefties. He hasn't hit lefties as well the past couple of years, but if you look at his entire career, he has hit lefties fine. I don't think that is necessarily an erosion of skill as much as it is having an off-year. That is something that you see with left-handed hitters. I think the plan is for him to DH and in an emergency play in the outfield. I think it is going to be key for us to keep him fresh. He doesn't have any serious injuries but a player at that age, if you can keep him off the field occasionally to keep him fresh, that is a good thing.

We were actually really encouraged by the way that Matsui finished last season. I think his OPS was over 900 after the All-Star break. You always have concern with a player in his mid- or late-30s, but he finished last year really strong, so we feel good about his chances.

OC: What do you think [Josh Willingham](#) and [David DeJesus](#) will bring to the line-up?

FZ: When we started the off-season, our plan was to get one of those guys because we felt we needed to upgrade the outfield. They were both guys who were projected – and in DeJesus' case contracted – for \$6 million and in Willingham's case we projected in arbitration to be worth roughly the same amount. So they were affordable guys and guys whose skill-sets we really liked. Willingham is a power hitter who draws a lot of walks, as well, and DeJesus is just a good all-around hitter. He'll hit .300 and hit 10-15 homers and play terrific defense and run the bases well.

We were hopeful of getting one of those guys. We were able to get the DeJesus deal done early in the off-season. Actually right around the time of the winter meetings, we were looking around thinking that we wanted to add a fourth-outfielder, right-handed bat type. We started thinking 'we have a little flexibility, we may as well see if we can get Willingham.' Instead of having a fourth-outfielder as a right-handed bat, why not get that right-handed bat in the line-up every day and get a better player?

We re-engaged with the Nationals, who we had talked to earlier in the off-season, and we were able to work something out. Having both of those guys in the outfield, we are pretty excited about that. If Coco [Crisp] can stay healthy, I think we have a very good all-around outfield. I think between Willingham's hitting and right-handed power and DeJesus' all-around game,

they are going to be major improvements for us in those spots.

OC: You talked about the fluidity of the off-season. Was Willingham a guy who wasn't available or wasn't as available earlier in the off-season before the Nationals surprised everyone and signed [Jayson Werth](#)?

FZ: Yeah, I think that it is an example. The Nationals were a team we were talking to earlier in the off-season around the time that we were speaking with the Royals. We just weren't that optimistic that we were going to be able to work out a deal there. I think a lot of the Nationals willingness to move him a little later in the off-season was a result of signing Werth and maybe wanting to reallocate Willingham's salary towards pitching or some of their other needs.

So, yeah. That is a perfect of example of that. For us, it was a good thing that we still had the financial flexibility to make that kind of move.

OC: In regards to the third base situation, earlier in the off-season you brought in [Edwin Encarnacion](#) briefly before letting him go and the team also attempted to sign [Adrian Beltre](#). Are you comfortable with [Kevin Kouzmanoff](#) as the A's third baseman?

FZ: Yes, absolutely. Adrian Beltre is one of the best five third baseman in baseball. Pursuit of truly, truly elite players is not something that we are going to do that often and ultimately it is our job to upgrade the team in any way possible. Sometimes that means at least considering upgrading a good player with a very good or even great player. And that's just the reality of going season-to-season with your team and having to consider every option and possibility to make that team better.

That said, we recognize what Kevin Kouzmanoff brings to the table. If we did not think he had value as the everyday third baseman, we would have just non-tendered him and figured something else out at the position. But he's a guy who can hit 15-20 homers and he plays terrific defense. At a position that is pretty hard to fill, that is valuable. So, yeah, we do feel comfortable going into next season with him as our third baseman.

OC: [Ryan Sweeney](#) has seemingly lost his defined role as the everyday right-fielder with the new additions to the team. I know he is coming off of knee problems and I don't know if those have been resolved, but do you envision him as a fourth-outfielder, 50-75 games a year guy, or as someone who will play more frequently than that?

FZ: I kind of look at our outfield and as excited as I am about it and as good as I think those guys are, none of them played anything remotely close to full seasons in 2010. If you look at how many different guys played in the outfield last year and how many different guys we thought were fourth or fifth or sixth outfielders who ended up getting significant playing time, I think Ryan is going to play a lot. We do think very highly of him and he is still in our long-term plans and even in where he is projected to be on this team – which is as a fourth outfielder who can spell players at all three spots – I expect him to get a lot of time, just between injuries and trying to keep those other guys healthy.

Even if those three outfielders stay healthy, in a season after playing 80 or 100 games, you don't want to throw them out there for 150 games. Almost like with a pitcher who misses a season, you don't want to get him all the way back up to 200 innings right away. I think Ryan will be in there a good amount. It might be a good chance to keep him healthy and save a little wear and tear on his knees. He's still very much in the long-term plans for this team. Willingham and DeJesus are only contracted with the team through 2011 and we like those players and they may be here for longer than that, but if they are not, we feel very good about Ryan as an everyday outfielder.

OC: With the new additions and Sweeney still on-board, [Chris Carter](#) is obviously not someone who will be relied on to be on the Opening Day roster unless there are a number of injuries. Were these acquisitions made in part to keep the pressure off of young players like Carter?

FZ: Again, it's the situation where we think we are going to be competitive this coming year and the chance to have really established, good big league players at those positions was something that we put a value on. Chris is still probably the top prospect in our organization and one of the top power-hitting prospects in baseball, but, you know, he hit .258 in Triple-A last year. That is not something that punches an everyday job in the big league necessarily.

That said, in his defense, he is the kind of guy who jumps up a level and gradually gets better. He worked his average up to .258 after a slow start. Even in the big leagues he started slowly but did very well the last week or two of the season. But we didn't think that the strong last week or two of the season necessarily meant that we should pencil him in for an everyday job in the big leagues in 2011. Now, just to clarify, this is a guy we think very, very highly of. We've talked many times about how much of a premium we are putting on developing our own power hitters because that has been a weakness of this team the past few years.

Going out and getting David DeJesus and Josh Willingham is not an indictment of what we think of Chris Carter. He's a guy who is still very much a part of our long-term plans and a guy we are still very much excited about. We just think that he

could use a little more seasoning after hitting .258 in Triple-A and if he pounds down the door and does great in Triple-A, he's going to be a big part of this team next year. I don't think that anybody is necessarily trying to hold him down, but I think after his performance last year, I think we didn't necessarily want to have to rely on him to be a very productive big leaguer from Day One of the 2011 season.