

A's News Clips, Thursday, January 27, 2011

Herhold: San Jose's ex-mayor goes to bat for A's move

By Scott Herhold, Mercury News Columnist

Ex-San Jose Mayor Tom McEnery grew up as a Giants fan. He can recite the Danny Kaye ditty that the Dodgers threw at the San Francisco team during the playoff of 1962: "Bottom of the ninth, four to nutin', last chance, push the button."

This week, McEnery went public with a plea to his old team. In the name of fairness, he's appealing to the better nature of Giants owner Bill Neukom. McEnery is asking that the Giants not block the A's path to San Jose.

Directed at a man who was once an attorney for Microsoft, a company not known for the milk of human kindness, the ex-mayor's plea arguably surpasses the audacious. But as a San Jose patriot whose property and political legacy are welded to downtown, McEnery deserves our attention.

McEnery's argument turns on the notion that there is something "unseemly" -- he uses the word often -- about the Giants' opposition to an A's stadium in San Jose, within the supposed "territorial rights" of the National League team.

On Ronn Owens' KGO show Tuesday morning, McEnery, 65, put it this way: "What strikes me is the selfish attitude of the Giants toward their fans in San Jose. We've been loyal to them, and it's not like we're going to desert them."

Question of fairness

In other words, McEnery is suggesting that the Giants, with their shiny new World Series championship, ought to avoid pushing their financial advantage to the maximum. "Isn't there a basic element of fairness here?" he asked.

Certainly from San Jose's perspective, the ex-mayor's argument makes sense. A half-billion-dollar stadium, with land from the redevelopment agency, would create thousands of jobs and fortify downtown.

The timing matters, too: McEnery says he believes that MLB Commissioner Bud Selig's decision on allowing an A's stadium near Diridon Station will come soon. And he fears Selig's decision will go against San Jose unless the Giants drop their opposition.

Are the Giants unseemly? Selfish? Certainly talk-show host Owens was willing to contest the ex-mayor. "He (Neukom) is acting for the interest of the Giants. What do you expect him to do?" he asked.

Not all of McEnery's argument is persuasive: To the extent that Giants fans in San Jose would go to A's games, they will probably attend fewer games at AT&T Park. And this is less an issue of insulting San Jose than it is of internal baseball business -- A's owner Lew Wolff vs. Neukom.

Haas family legacy

On the core issue of territorial rights, however, McEnery clearly has a point. The Giants' rights to the South Bay, such as they are, were ceded by the A's under the Haas family, which was happy to see the Giants propose moving south to a San Jose location in 1992.

While the effort to build a Giants stadium here failed, the team's claim to the rights remains. The Haas family, which sold the A's not long afterward, never included a sunset provision.

The Giants' "rights" rest on no real ground of fairness. This issue is made for a settlement, in the same way that the Washington Nationals and Peter Angelos' Baltimore Orioles reached a financial agreement.

For the sake of fans everywhere, Neukom should not be unreasonable. Like the rest of pro baseball, he has a stake in a healthy A's franchise. For San Jose, it's the bottom of the ninth, four to nutin', last chance, push the button.

Competition awaits Blevins, Devine at A's camp

On mend from injuries, relievers look to prove worth in spring

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Jerry Blevins is well aware of the whispers surrounding the 2011 version of the A's.

"I was on the treadmill the other day watching TV," he said this week, "and Larry Bowa picked us to win the West."

Bowa's not the only one. Oakland's elite pitching staff along with its noticeably upgraded lineup have many expecting the A's to stay in contention all year.

And Blevins, who underwent surgery in October to repair a labrum tear in his left hip, very much wants to be included in the party. So does Joey Devine, who succumbed to Tommy John surgery in April 2009 and hasn't pitched in a big league game since 2008.

But both will have to prove more than their health this spring in order to earn a coveted spot on the Opening Day roster. As it stands now, the A's figure to run out a bullpen that includes right-handers Andrew Bailey, Grant Balfour, Michael Wuertz and Brad Ziegler, along with lefties Craig Breslow and Brian Fuentes.

That list, though two months premature, leaves just one remaining relief spot if all of the above remain healthy throughout camp. Other candidates are likely to include Rich Harden and Josh Outman, depending on the fifth-starter decision. Blevins is mindful of the situation, but it's nothing new to him.

"There's obviously designated spots for a couple guys," he said. "I think they're shuffling for positions and roles, but I know I'm in an open competition, and there are a few guys here vying for the last open spots available. I go into every Spring Training like it's a competition. That's just my nature. I think, unless I'm competing, I'm not getting any better. Competition is always good."

Blevins, who is already stationed in Arizona, is coming off a season in which he compiled a 3.70 ERA while recording 46 strikeouts next to 18 walks in a career-high 48 2/3 innings spanning 63 appearances. He was forced to miss the final two weeks of the season due to a left shoulder strain, which ultimately was a result of his hip pain.

Both injuries are almost no more, though, as Blevins noted he's ahead of his rehab schedule and already throwing long toss and looking to pitch off a mound within the next week.

"My hip is better than expected at this point," he said. "It's coming along. It was a little sore the first day out because it hadn't been active, but it already feels better now than it did at the end of last season, so that's a plus."

"It's more about how much pain you can take. I have a pretty high pain tolerance, so it's just one of those things you have to be careful and not push yourself too much. You've got to know your limits to a point where you can be comfortable with what you're doing."

The 27-year-old Blevins will be on a more structured schedule monitored by pitching coach Ron Romanick throughout camp but, like Devine, he's not expecting any setbacks.

The right-handed Devine, who in 2008 posted a 0.59 ERA in 42 appearances with Oakland, believes he's in the clear from the constant hurdles that have delayed his return to the mound.

"Everything couldn't be going better with my rehab program," he said.

Both relievers will look to keep up that trend in preparation for what could be a memorable season in Oakland, where general manager Billy Beane and Co. are infamous for saying a team can never have enough pitching.

"With our new additions and everyone being a little bit more mature this year and getting another year of experience under our belt, I think we could have the most well-rounded staff in the league," Blevins said. "It's something that's exciting. It's fun to know you have a chance to be part of a team that's going to compete. The West is wide open and with our staff, if we can just do what we're capable of doing, it should be pretty exciting."