

A's News Clips, Wednesday, February 2, 2011

San Francisco Giants mark their territorial rights with a trophy run

By Bruce Newman, San Jose Mercury News, 2/2/2011

The thing was just sitting there, looking sparkly in the afternoon sunlight, when it suddenly occurred to Karen Sheehy that the San Francisco Giants' world championship trophy was, in a sense, hers.

As a long-suffering fan of the team, she had endured decades of grinding disappointment. So why not leave her mark on the 24-karat gold globe that Tiffany & Co. had designed to look like a baseball. As Sheehy moved her hand toward the glittering hardware, a team official cried out, "Don't make me tackle you."

It was a good-natured warning, but Sheehy quickly withdrew her five-fingered smudge-maker. Instead, she and her husband, Gary, proudly had their picture taken with the trophy.

On Tuesday, the Giants brought their precious metal mantelpiece to San Jose to mark their territorial rights in the most public way possible. Standing 24 inches high and 11 inches in diameter, the trophy looked like what you might get if you asked Tiffany to design a gaudy fire hydrant.

For three hours, the Giants' local fan base filed by the glittering cylinder at home plate of Municipal Stadium, where the San Jose Giants -- the big club's Class-A farm team -- plays. The San Francisco ballclub has been embroiled in a two-year turf war with the Oakland Athletics over who should control territorial rights to San Jose, where A's owner Lew Wolff has said he wants to move his team. But after 2,375 locals lined up for hours just to touch the hem -- metaphorically, of course -- of the Giants' championship robes, there was little doubt who owns this town. "Don't talk to me about that other team," sniffed Sheehy.

The Giants' website asserted that the team had "partnered with the civic leaders and local governments" to allow every hamlet in the Bay Area to clutch the gilded globe to its municipal bosom (still metaphorically!). But civic leaders were in short supply in San Jose, where local officials have lined up in lock-step behind Wolff.

No matter, the trophy tour has been so popular that Giants officials decided not to ask ballplayers to come in early to help move some season tickets. Everywhere the big prize has gone, ticket sales have shot up. "This trophy has been a rock star," said Giants vice president of communications Staci Slaughter.

"I would never be an A's fan," insisted Joe Bojo of Redwood City, who knocked off work at 10 a.m. to be first in line, standing shoulder to shoulder with the glittering hardware and the San Francisco Giants when the gates finally opened at 3 p.m. Then, referring to the team's near miss in the World Series a half-century earlier, he added, "I remember '62. I've had a lot of disappointments with this team. At least now I know what it feels like to win it one time."

When it was Cole Weyermann's chance to pose with the trophy, the 5-year-old son of the farm team's president, Jim Weyermann, reached out and clenched the trophy with both fists. "There were a lot of etiquette discussions," the elder Weyermann explained. "But that youthful exuberance is something you just can't control with a memo."

If there was any doubt that the Giants will dig in their heels to protect their territory, managing partner Bill Neukom made the trip down to the South Bay to put it to rest. "This county is the heart of our marketplace," Neukom said. Then he got on the public address system and told the fans the trophy was really theirs.

Piniella to play support role for Giants

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle, 2/2/2011

A few items while waiting for pitchers and catchers to descend on the desert:

À» Brian Sabean has plenty of respect for old pal Lou Piniella from their days in the Yankees' organization in the '80s.

Sabean interviewed Piniella to manage the Giants before the 2007 season, but Piniella removed himself from the running because San Francisco was so far from his home in Florida. He was hired by the Cubs, and the Giants got Bruce Bochy, both of whom had their lives altered in 2010 with Bochy winning a World Series and Piniella retiring after 48 years in the game.

But on further review, he'll be sticking around.

Piniella, 67, will be joining the Giants as a special assistant, The Chronicle has learned, bringing his baseball acumen, fiery

passion and colorful personality to the World Series champs, presumably performing a role similar to Felipe Alou's — based in Florida and available for scouting in and out of the system and advice on player personnel.

» Gerald Perry, the A's hitting coach in 2006 who's returning in the same role this year, sees a 10-game improvement over last year's 81-81 team.

"I like the whole team. It's a deeper lineup," Perry said.

"With all the additional relievers and hitters, I think we could win 10 more. That would be 91 games, and maybe better than that."

What would 91 wins mean?

Texas won the division last year with 90.

» The A's PR department released a "statistical adjustment" of the 2010 season, minus numbers of departed players plus numbers of newcomers. It shows a bullpen ERA dropping from 3.75 to 2.84 (would have been first in the league instead of sixth) and an on-base percentage zooming from .324 to .339 (third instead of ninth).

On one hand, silly. On the other, promising.

» Should be a lively Giants FanFest on Saturday. Most of the World Series roster will attend, including one guy making news because of his body and another because of his wardrobe, Pablo Sandoval and Brian Wilson.

Naval officer returns to active duty on diamond

After serving country, catcher will resume dream at A's camp

By Rhett Bollinger / MLB.com

PALM SPRINGS, Calif. -- Baseball's long had history with the United States military.

After all, Hall of Famers who served their country include Ted Williams, Stan Musial, Willie Mays, Joe DiMaggio, Bob Feller, Hoyt Wilhelm and Jackie Robinson. And that's just to name a few Major Leaguers with ties to the armed forces.

Yet in the 156-year history of the U.S. Naval Academy, it's never graduated a position player who made the Major Leagues.

Lt. Jonathan Johnston, however, is trying to break that mold, even if he knows it won't be easy.

After all, Johnston, 26, is just getting back into the game after spending the past four years on active duty with the Navy and being deployed three times.

He could have been spending that time in the A's organization -- he was drafted as a catcher by the club in the 42nd round of the 2007 First-Year Player Draft -- but instead he was putting his leadership skills to a different use, earning a slew of honors, such as the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal, along the way.

And even though his dream continued to be playing in the big leagues, Johnston said he has no regrets about attending the Naval Academy and serving his country in the years following graduation.

"The word regret doesn't even enter my mind," Johnston said. "I had great coaches at the Naval Academy and I got better there. It got me to where I am and made me a better person and a better leader."

Now, Johnston finally has his chance to reach his goal of getting to the Majors with the A's, as he's playing in the independent California Winter League in Palm Springs to get ready to attend Minor League Spring Training at the A's complex in Phoenix.

It's been a relearning process for Johnston after so much time away from the game, but he said he couldn't be any happier being back on a baseball field.

"It's just great being out here playing the game," Johnston said. "It's been a few years, but getting out here has been fun. It's the best way I can describe it. Just going back to into the routine is the hardest part. Playing baseball is fun no matter how hard it gets. I don't look at it as difficult -- I just look at it as fun."

It's easy for Johnston to think of baseball as a place of respite considering his journey after starring at the Naval Academy, where he batted .317 with 35 stolen bases as a senior in '06.

He was undrafted after that season but later worked out for A's scout Craig Weissman, who recommended his club to draft Johnston the following year. Johnston then had a chance to partake in Spring Training in 2008 after serving two years of active duty and achieved his dream of playing professional baseball when he was assigned to Class A Kane County (Ill.) of the Midwest League.

But after batting .228 with a .350 on-base percentage and 11 stolen bases in just 36 games, Johnston received a call that he had to leave early to report to San Diego for duty aboard the U.S.S. Peleliu.

His temporary status, which allowed him to play baseball after two years of active duty, was revoked after Secretary of the Navy Donald Winter issued a policy that required all Naval Academy midshipmen to fulfill their five-year active commitment.

Johnston tried the available avenues laid out by the Department of Defense to get back to his baseball career but was rejected four times. He took it in stride and graciously served his four years before leaving active duty a year early because he met the criteria and qualified based on service time.

He's now a member of the Individual Ready Reserve and is highly unlikely to see active duty while he serves out the rest of his mandatory eight years in the military upon graduation from the Naval Academy.

It was admittedly a struggle for Johnston, but he said he knew what he was getting into when he chose a free education at the Naval Academy after attending high school at Peddie School in Hightstown, N.J.

"The whole time I knew I had a commitment and was willing to fulfill it," Johnston said. "I signed my name to a piece of paper and I'm all about commitment. So when the Navy said I couldn't play, I couldn't play, and I served."

Now, Johnston can play and he's doing everything he can to try to make his mark with the A's organization despite turning 27 this month. His age means he'll have to advance quickly in the Minors, as the A's will want to test Johnston by starting him out in high Class A or Double-A, depending on how he does in Spring Training.

But the organization clearly hasn't given up on him, judging by his invitation to Spring Training and the fact that the scout who signed him, Weissman, arranged for Johnston to play in the California Winter League, which features more than 100 players and a dozen coaches.

The league is the perfect steppingstone for Johnston and many others to get ready for Spring Training, and so far, Johnston has been a hit in more ways than one. His leadership skills have shined through, and he also batted .385 with a triple through his first seven games.

"Anyone who's ever met [Johnston] just wants to root for him," league founder Andrew Starke said. "He's a quality guy. He's really excited to be out here from everything I've seen. I can't even imagine the kinds of things he's seen, but here he knows what he'll get every day. He'll get to play every day in sunshine and get to do what he really loves. So it has to be really satisfying for him, and for us it's great to watch."

Johnston's tools, which include a strong arm, speed and athleticism, have certainly impressed the coaching staff at the Winter League. And of course, he's not lacking in leadership, either.

"He's done well," said league instructor Dana Williams, who played in eight games with the Red Sox in 1989. "The catching and throwing came first. But he can run and he has some pop in his bat. The only thing is that he's 27, so he'll have to play in Double-A, but I think he can do it. To have a leader like him behind the plate is huge for a team. I know he'll be prepared."

Johnston's next step will be admittedly tougher against better competition in Spring Training and will only get more difficult from there, but for now, he is relishing his chance to finally live his dream.

"I can't wait," Johnston said. "It's going to be a challenge and it's going to be fun. Playing baseball every day -- you can't beat it. You just can't."

Oakland struggles to hold onto redevelopment money

Alan Wang, kgo, 2/2/2010

OAKLAND, Calif. (KGO) -- Gov. Jerry Brown is looking at a variety of ways to help balance the budget, including reclaiming redevelopment funds from cities across the state that haven't yet put the money to use. In Oakland there is a lot on the line including the city's effort to keep the A's baseball team in town.

The race is on to spend millions of dollars in redevelopment money before Brown can take it away.

"We've spoken to all the major cities as to what various arrangements, or gimmicks or other things they've been trying to figure out, and we're absolutely looking a teach one of those," says Oakland City Manager Dan Lindheim.

The governor wants to withhold \$1.7 billion redevelopment dollars to balance the state budget. For Oakland, that's a loss of \$52 million -- money that's used to leverage bonds for other projects.

"What you really lose is the ability to turn the economy around in different parts of the hardest hit cities," says Oakland Mayor Jean Quan.

If anyone understands the value of redevelopment money, it's Brown himself. As mayor of Oakland, he used \$51 million in redevelopment money to bring the Fox Theater back to life.

"Everything around the Fox is just blooming, some of the hottest restaurants in the country are moving in that area," said Quan. "And so those tax revenues that are coming back to pay off the original \$14 million are coming back at a very high rate."

The Oakland A's also generate millions for the city and the plan to build a new stadium, to keep them from moving to San Jose, is hinged on redevelopment dollars.

When asked if this was the nail in the coffin for the Oakland A's, Doug Boxer -- Co-found of Let's Go Oakland -- says, "I don't like to think of it like that. It's very difficult to move a franchise. The Giants were on their way out, quite frankly, including Canada."

And the other city courting the team could have a development dilemma. San Jose stands to lose \$20 million needed for its proposed A's stadium.

Brown says money obligated before a March 1 deadline will not be taken away. Now cities are racing to use it before they lose it.