

A's News Clips, Thursday, February 3, 2011

Cameras roll as A's players shoot 2011 commercials

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 2/2/2011 2:53PM

Check out this clip of several A's players and coaches filming commercials for this season. I thought last year's were pretty strong, and it seems like the players get into the spirit of it.

Trevor Cahill doesn't appear in the clip, but he told me a few weeks ago that he'd be shooting a commercial. You'll remember the one he filmed with Dave Stewart last year – the two sat face-to-face and locked eyes as Stewart taught him the proper way to glare at a hitter. Cahill got a kick out of that experience.

"I was sitting in a chair staring at Dave Stewart for three hours," he said. "When they change scenes, they've gotta change the lighting and camera and do 10 takes at each angle. The first five ones, you're staring at each other's eyes. I just couldn't stop laughing."

Inbox: What are A's long-term plans at third?

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

What are the A's long-term plans for third base, and do we have any internal Minor League candidates who could take over the hot corner in the next few years? Is it possible that Adrian Cardenas gets moved to third? The A's have made repeated unsuccessful attempts at moving on from Kevin Kouzmanoff, which clearly shows he is not the answer.

-- Scott P., Springfield, Ore.

The A's are hoping Stephen Parker can ultimately provide some stability at the hot corner. The race for that spot has been wide open since the slow but sure departure of Eric Chavez, but Parker is quietly turning into a legitimate candidate. Taken by Oakland in the fifth round of the 2009 First-Year Player Draft, Parker struggled that year but bounced back with quite the successful 2010 campaign, turning in a .296/.392/.508 line along with 21 home runs and 98 RBIs while with Class A Stockton.

He'll likely start the season with Double-A Midland, where he'll especially look to improve on defense -- a facet of Chavez's game that wasn't always so Gold Glove-worthy in his younger days either, if you recall. Parker's known to have good hands but could stand to improve his range, which he can easily extend with the help of continual long-toss activities. Offensively, I've heard from several in the organization that his swing is rather effortless and compact, giving him the ability to drive the ball in the gaps and possibly duplicate his Minor League home run numbers at the higher levels.

That said, keep a close but patient eye on him as he climbs the ranks. He likely won't be fitted for a big league uniform until the latter part of the 2012 season, when he could very well be joined in the infield by Cardenas, whom the A's would rather see stay at second base. That duo, along with top prospect Grant Green at shortstop, could make for an interesting infield scene in Oakland in the near future.

Mark Ellis is a very fine second baseman who has put up some very fine numbers for that position. Why are the A's not rewarding him with a multiple-year contract and let him retire in an A's uniform?

-- Bill B., Saco, Maine

From a personal standpoint, I'd love to see Ellis retire as an Athletic. His standing in the organization, for which he's been an excellent ambassador, is unmatched, and what's he's represented -- a class act both on and off the field -- for the A's over the last eight years is what's made him a fan favorite.

But Ellis will be 34 in June, and he's struggled to put together a completely healthy season since 2007. The A's, no doubt, recognize this and would likely rather keep the door open for Cardenas or Jemile Weeks. That's not to say, though, that they don't value Ellis. They could have easily declined his 2011 contract option in favor of letting Eric Sogard or Steve Tolleson try to win a job until Cardenas and Weeks are ready, but they see an unparalleled defensive presence in their seasoned second baseman.

Offensively, Ellis finished the 2010 season with a .291 average thanks to a ridiculously good September -- his best mark since 2005 when he hit a career-high .316. The A's are hoping those numbers carry over into this year, which could

potentially be his last in Oakland depending on his production. The club, meanwhile, is expected to focus on locking up its young talent, particularly that found in the pitching department.

From my count, it appears there are several A's players who are here for only one year. So do you expect a majority of them to be traded in the middle of the season for even more prospects?

-- Ryan T., Newark, Calif.

Not necessarily, Ryan. Billy Beane's front office didn't spend endless hours compiling the likes of Hideki Matsui and Josh Willingham and Brian Fuentes this winter -- the busiest, Beane said, since he's been at the helm -- just to pass them off midseason. That sure may have been the case two or three years ago, but this 2011 A's team is intent on contending. And if they're doing just that come July, expect them to play on with what they've got while keeping an eye on the present rather than the future.

The No. 1 priority heading into this offseason was to improve the offense in an effort to truly aid an exceptional pitching staff. They've seemingly done just that with the resources available, focusing on spending as opposed to rebuilding.

Who are the projected leaders in the A's clubhouse for 2011? Does this leadership play a role in contract negotiations and ultimate salary determinations?

-- Larry S., Georgetwon, S.C.

Players don't get paid for weekly pep talks or one-on-one sit-downs with the rookies, but leadership mentality definitely doesn't go unnoticed, even if it's not expressed in the most vocal way. Veterans like Ellis and Matsui are the lead-by-example types, and Dallas Braden -- though still youthful himself -- will likely again be a sounding board for the club's young pitching staff. I'd also suspect Willingham to boast a leading presence in the outfield, and same for guys like Fuentes and Grant Balfour in the bullpen. None of those names is Ben Sheets, whose Southern drawl was playful and loud in the clubhouse last year, but they've rightfully earned just as much respect around the league.

Are the A's going to bring back FanFest this year?

-- Michael B., Sunnyvale, Calif.

No Fanfest, but they will host a Fan Appreciation Tailgate event again prior to their final home exhibition game against the Giants on March 29 at the Coliseum. Yes, that is a weekday because the baseball schedule begins early this year, but it's worth an early departure from work if you enjoy autograph sessions, question-and-answer forums with players and photo opportunities with the A's four World Series trophies. Free parking will be offered and discounted tickets to the game will be available for \$5. Check back at www.oaklandathletics.com for more information as the event nears.

Urban: MLB offseason's winners and losers

Mychael Urban, CSNBayArea.com 2/2/2011

Any sort of rankings or lists associated with baseball's offseason are bound to be highly subjective, loaded with selections and labels open to argument and spirited debate.

Isn't that the beauty of it, though? Isn't that why baseball is the best "talking sport" of all? To be sure, one man's brilliant signing is another man's disaster.

Jayson Werth's stunning contract -- \$126 million, seven years -- with the Washington Nationals is a perfect example; to some it's a clear message from team to fan base that they're in it to win it, while to others it's a clear indication that the past few years of what appeared to be financial restraint and fiscal responsibility on the part of baseball's fattest cats were an aberration at best and an example of collusion at worst.

Who's right? Nobody will know Werth's true worth for a year, two years, five years down the road. If he spurs a renaissance in the nation's capitol, teaming with phenom-du-jour Bryce Harper to back a pitching staff led by Stephen Strasburg on the road to respectability, it's all good. If he's a grossly overpaid, underperforming flop by year three of the deal, he's just another name on the long list of cautionary tales.

So take in the following with one thing in mind: You simply have no idea how any of this is going to work out. All you know is what the teams and players involved have done in the recent past, and that's not always -- if ever -- an accurate indicator of what they'll do in the future.

Presenting the biggest winners and losers of the big leagues' biggest, richest offseason in years, with a few special categories thrown in as extra fodder for the next time you gather around the Hot Stove with fellow fans to discuss the season that's set to formally open less than two weeks from now under the spring training sun in Arizona and Florida.

Biggest winners (teams): RED SOX, PHILLIES, ATHLETICS

The Red Sox do stealth as well as any team in the game, and they did it again this winter. Few had them pegged as major players in the trade market for Padres superstar Adrian Gonzalez, whom they acquired in a trade that sent shivers down the spines of the rest of the American League East, and they seemed to swoop in at the last minute to lock down the best position player on the free-agent market, Carl Crawford.

With Crawford patrolling the outfield at Fenway and wreaking havoc atop the Boston lineup, and first baseman Gonzalez playing opposite-field pepper with the Green Monster when he isn't dumping balls into the right-field bleachers just inside Pesky's Pole, the Red Sox, who have a rock-solid rotation, will be the team to beat not just in their division but in the AL.

The Phillies lost Werth, but they have a capable replacement in top prospect Domonic Brown, who'll be twice the player that is Werth inside of three years. What made them winners, of course, was the return of Cliff Lee, who gives them a starting rotation that everyone outside of San Francisco is calling the best in the business.

If the offensive stars -- Jimmy Rollins, Chase Utley and Ryan Howard -- can stay healthy, expect Philly to return to the National League Championship Series for the fourth year running.

The A's needed offense, and while David DeJesus, Hideki Matsui and Josh Willingham aren't needle-movers on their own, collectively they represent a significant upgrade that should be enough to complement Oakland's gifted young starting rotation, which might feature returning free agent Rich Harden as the No. 5 man, and a deep and versatile bullpen recently fortified by the additions of Brian Fuentes and Grant Balfour.

Honorable mention goes to the Brewers, who have a fantastic offense but were hamstrung by horrible pitching in 2010. Adding Zack Grienke won't be enough to make them favorites in the NL Central, but it'll help quite a bit.

Biggest losers (teams): ANGELS, YANKEES, PADRES

The Angels needed to bolster their offense, and owner Arte Moreno was expected to spend whatever it took. Crawford was a virtual lock to join his good friend Torii Hunter in the Halos' outfield, and third baseman Adrian Beltre was a safe bet to land in Orange County as well.

None of it happened, though, and now Moreno is drawing criticism for backing off the master plan once it was clear that landing top talent this winter was going to be ridiculously expensive.

Quick, how do you win championships in baseball? Pitching, right? So how to explain the Yankees, who have won more championships than any organization in the history of the game, failing to address the painfully clear lack of strength and depth in their starting rotation?

When your prospects for the coming season hinge in part on the plans of Andy Pettitte, a one-time ace who is now a good-but-not-great starter with a ton of mileage on his arm, things are bleak in the Bronx. And don't even mention the Derek Jeter fiasco. If The Boss could fire people from the great beyond, he'd be doing plenty of it right about now.

San Diego was the forehead-slap team of 2010, winning 90 games when most "experts" had them pegged for about 90 losses. They were contenders down to the wire on the strength of their pitching, but they couldn't have done it without Gonzalez and the in-season addition of Miguel Tejada, who provided energy, enthusiasm and surprising offensive production after being acquired in a stretch-drive deal with the Orioles.

Over the winter, San Diego lost starter Jon Garland, Gonzalez and Tejada, and while the club's standout bullpen returns intact and some glass-half-full folk like the low-key additions of Orlando Hudson, Jason Bartlett and Brad Hawpe, another year of contention would be more than a forehead slap. It'd be a borderline miracle.

Honorable mention goes to the Rangers, who added Beltre but lost Lee. What's been the Rangers' biggest issue over the years? Offense? Uh, no. Pitching. Yes. Enough said.

Biggest winner (player): WERTH

Hey, the skinny Grizzly Adams look is a winner in a weird way, and there's no doubt that the man is a solid all-around player. But seven years and \$126 million? Wow. At least Washington GM Mike Rizzo admitted that he overpaid.

Honorable mentions to Carlos Pena, who signed a one-year, \$10 million deal with the Cubs after batting under .200 for Tampa; the Giants' Aubrey Huff, who got a two-year, \$22 million deal about a year after getting exactly one offer -- from the Giants, for \$3 million -- in free agency and pondering retirement; and Beltre, who got six years and \$96 million from Texas. That deal is going to look absolutely awful in three years.

And kudos to Lee for going where he wanted to go. Let's not lionize the guy for leaving whatever millions he might have left on the table to do so. Clipping coupons, he's not. But it was nice to see someone make a decision based on something other than the almighty dollar.

Biggest loser (player): MANNY RAMIREZ

The Rays lost their best player (Crawford), best slugger (Pena) and one of their best starting pitchers (Matt Garza, traded to the Cubs). They play in an absolute dump, and in front of crowds often smaller than what Klymaxx and Color Me Badd draws at Midwestern county fairs these days. Yet that was the best option for one of the greatest right-handed hitters of our generation, and he's making a fraction of what Johnny "Will Play Anywhere For Attention" Damon will make from the same team. Anyone feel sorry for the guy? Didn't think so.

[RELATED: Ramirez, Damon join Rays]

Honorable mention to Edgar Renteria, who sullied what should have been a lifetime of love in San Francisco by calling a \$1 million offer a slap in the face before signing with the Reds. Sure, he got an extra \$1.5 million from Cincy, but he's have gotten that in comps as a World Series hero in the Bay Area if he's have kept his yap shut about \$1 million not being enough to lure him away from his family.