

A's News Clips, Tuesday, February 8, 2011

Redevelopment agencies in San Jose, Oakland, rushing to assemble ballpark plans

By Tracy Seipel, San Jose Mercury News, 2/7/2011

Undaunted by new obstacles to her city's plan to keep the A's from bolting to the other side of the bay, Mayor Jean Quan insists Oakland is still on course to build the team a new stadium -- despite a growing chorus of skepticism.

"The question of who is ahead I would say is a matter of where you stand," said Oakland's new mayor, who insists her city -- not San Jose -- is in the best position to build a ballpark.

But experts say Gov. Jerry Brown's proposal to disband all of the state's redevelopment agencies and divert their assets to local services creates a bigger problem for Oakland than San Jose.

While both cities are relying on their redevelopment agencies to buy land for a ballpark -- and both cities are facing major budget deficits -- San Jose has assembled more than half of the land needed for a downtown ballpark and has concluded a time-consuming environmental impact report on the area. Oakland, by comparison, has completed neither.

Not to mention that A's owner Lew Wolff insists he's finished negotiating with Oakland and focused on the South Bay.

Yet, as Quan points out, almost two years after Major League Baseball started studying whether the A's could move to Santa Clara County -- broaching the San Francisco Giants' territorial claim to the affluent fan base -- the team and both cities still are waiting for an answer.

"The reality is that even though you have land," Quan said of San Jose, "you still have not gotten permission" from Major League Baseball to relocate the A's to San Jose. "My timeline is less urgent than your timeline," said Quan. "You are trying to woo them away, but the reality is the team is here."

In December, the Oakland City Council voted to spend as much as \$750,000 on an environmental study for a new ballpark south of Jack London Square. The study will examine physical and environmental impacts of building a 39,000-seat, baseball-only stadium at the so-called Victory Court site southeast of Jack London Square. In order to build the park on the site, several businesses would have to move. But Oakland officials say its redevelopment agency has \$80 million in bonding capacity to buy the land and pay for those company relocations, while San Jose's struggling agency has no such bonding capacity.

Quan said the environmental study is being fast-tracked in less than 12 months.

San Jose's agency, however, is doing its best to stay one step ahead. Last week, its agency identified top bidders for six parcels of downtown land it owns and wants to sell for about \$20 million. The proceeds could then be used to buy the last two pieces of privately owned land needed for a 32,000-seat ballpark paid for by the A's.

"There are problems we face because of that issue, but there are two or three ways of putting together the land transaction," said San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed. "I'm trying to put together a package and explain that to Major League Baseball and tell them we can deliver the site."

Reed resolutely added another well-known advantage for San Jose: Wolff, who has studied options in both Oakland and Fremont, does not want to stay in Oakland. "He's not interested," said Reed. "And that's a problem with their plan" in Oakland.

For Paul Staudohar, professor emeritus of business at California State University East Bay, San Jose is leading the race, for other reasons.

"One is they have a great population -- the sheer number of people living in Santa Clara County exceeds that which Oakland seems to be drawing from," he said. And Oakland, he added, "has not been drawing as much in the way of fan interest," said Staudohar, noting that the team was the second to last in attendance in the MLB last year. The A's drew 1,418,391 fans in 2010, ahead of Cleveland at 1,391,644.

Moreover, Oakland "doesn't even have a shovel in the ground yet" while San Jose may soon have all the land required to build a ballpark, he said. "So unless Oakland pulls a rabbit out of a hat very soon, it appears they will lose the A's by default."

Still, Quan's point cannot be ignored: absent a decision from MLB for some time, Oakland -- like the fabled tortoise and the hare -- can continue to move its plans along while San Jose remains stalled on the sidelines, anticipating MLB's nod.

March 30 will mark the two-year anniversary since MLB Commissioner Bud Selig appointed a three-member committee to study the A's options for relocation. Committee spokesman Corey Busch continues to decline comment on the committee's progress. For Wolff, the wait has been tedious. "There is no deadline," he acknowledged. "Bud wants to satisfy himself that he has looked at every possible angle that relates to this decision."

Andrew Zimbalist, a professor of economics and baseball expert at Smith College, said he has no inside knowledge of the MLB committee's process, though he guesses it has come to an end and "that the matter is pointing toward San Jose."

"It's pretty clear that Oakland is not going to work out for the A's," he said, because so much time and energy has been spent studying options there. But political and legal wrangling -- particularly over agreements related to building AT&T Park that the Giants say allowed them to continue to own the territorial rights to the South Bay -- is something he believes may be holding up a decision. And both sides, he said, would likely want to avoid litigation.

Spring Is Hardly Just Around the Corner, but Baseball Is

By BEN SHPIGEL, New York Times, 2/7/2011

Around much of this winter-battered country, grass is only a rumor. Winter is but halfway over, and already enough snow has fallen in Boston to blanket its star second baseman, Dustin Pedroia, who stands 69 inches tall. Undoubtedly, another storm — or three — are coming.

But for fans residing in the East and Midwest, and in Texas, some of the worst is over. And spring training, an annual antidote, is almost here. For those keeping score, pitchers and catchers officially begin reporting on Sunday in Florida and Arizona, with some holding official workouts the next day, and fans can begin feeling optimistic about teams that will inevitably leave them frustrated and fuming.

Meanwhile, the intimidating winter of 2010-11 continues. Joe Bastardi, the chief long-range meteorologist for AccuWeather, was relatively optimistic, contending in a telephone interview that "the worst of the winter is over south of a line from New York to Philadelphia to Dodge City, Kan."

North of that line, he said, there could be more major storms, more snow days for kids, more trains that are not running.. But at least those who are afflicted can read baseball stories with datelines from Clearwater and Scottsdale.

Already, there are dozens of players working out at various spring training sites. Yankees starter Phil Hughes threw at the team's complex in Tampa, and Derek Jeter, with much to prove after hitting .270 last season, took batting practice and fielded ground balls at shortstop.

"I've always been pretty good in my career in terms of forgetting about previous seasons, whether it was a good season or a bad season," Jeter told The Associated Press.

Across the state in Port St. Lucie, the Mets' David Wright was working out, too, even as the team's owners continued to deal with a perilous lawsuit filed against them by the trustee representing the victims of Bernard L. Madoff's Ponzi scheme.

Wright told reporters he had even reached out to Jeff Wilpon, the team's chief operating officer, to express his support. But the trustee is seeking a billion dollars from the owners and Wright cannot do much about that.

In all, pitchers and catchers from 11 of the 30 teams — though not the Yankees (Feb. 15) or the Mets (Feb. 17) — will hold their first official workouts Monday. And almost faster than you can shovel out a driveway, the exhibition season will be under way, with a game between the Philadelphia Phillies and Florida State on Feb. 24.

The defending champion San Francisco Giants then open the Cactus League schedule the next afternoon against the Arizona Diamondbacks.

If it seems as if teams are assembling earlier than usual, it is because they are. To keep the World Series from again being played in November, spring training was moved up a few days.

And in order not to give those days right back, baseball, a sport that holds fast to its traditions, will begin in a most nontraditional fashion by having opening day on a Thursday, March 31.

Aside from season openers played outside the United States, opening day has fallen on a Sunday or a Monday every year since 1998. Only 10 times prior, and not since 1976, has the first pitch been thrown on a Thursday.

Six months later, the season will end Sept. 28, a Wednesday, the earliest conclusion since 2003, and the first time it will be scheduled to conclude on a day other than Sunday since 1990.

In between, intriguing highlights abound. On May 20, presuming it will have been dug out by then, Fenway Park will welcome the Chicago Cubs for the first time ever in a regular-season series. A month later, from June 24 to 26, the Florida Marlins will play a home game 3,300 miles from home — at Safeco Field in Seattle, against the Mariners, because of a conflict at Sun Life Stadium with a U2 concert.

In another rarity, the first scheduled doubleheader in about 10 years is slated for July 16, when the host Oakland Athletics will play two games on a Saturday against the Los Angeles Angels.

Meanwhile, bigger changes loom for the sport. In all likelihood, this will be the final postseason under the old system, which rewarded the three division winners and a wild-card team. Momentum is gathering for the additions of two wild-card teams, one in each league. The new format is yet to be determined, but it is likely to be in place for 2012. Expansion of instant replay may not be far behind.

As for whether there will still be snow on the ground in the Northeast on opening day, Bastardi naturally could not say. But he did suggest that after a winter that could wind up as the coldest nationwide in more than 20 years, the beginning of the baseball season in places like Philadelphia, New York and Boston might not be as peaceful as it was a year ago.

Still, he added with a laugh: "There's hope. The seasons will change eventually." And baseball is already here.

Sean McAdam: Previewing the A.L. West

By [Sean McAdam](#), CSNNE.com 2/5/2011

Each day from now until next Wednesday, Sean McAdam will be previewing the upcoming baseball season. Today's preview: The A.L. West.

For most of the last decade, the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim ruled the West, winning the World Series in 2002, the division title six times and going to the ALCS as recently as 2009.

But no more. Texas beat out the Angels last year and after a winter in which the Angels struggled to find someone -- anyone! -- to take their money, the case could be made that they're now the third-best team in the division.

Under new ownership, the Rangers have demonstrated a willingness to spend like the big-market team they are. Meanwhile, if the A's ever get a new ballpark, they, too, could become more of a force. As it is, their pitching staff should keep them in contention.

(IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER):

Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim

ONE THING THAT MUST HAPPEN: The offense must get better - and quickly. The Angels scored 202 fewer runs last year than they did before. Overpriced though he may be, Vernon Wells will help, and so, too, will the return of first baseman

Kendry Morales, who missed the last four months with a broken leg.

ONE THING THAT CAN'T HAPPEN: The two high-priced trade acquisitions in the last two years -- Scott Kazmir and Dan Haren -- can't underperform. The Angels have too much money (almost \$25 million this year alone) to have that happen again.

BIGGEST ADDITION: OF Vernon Wells

BIGGEST SUBTRACTION: C Mike Napoli

ROOKIE TO WATCH: C Hank Conger

Oakland A's

ONE THING THAT MUST HAPPEN: The additions made in the off-season (David DeJesus, Josh Willingham and Hideki Matsui) must support the pitching staff better. The A's were second-to-last in homers in the A.L. and hit just .241 with runners in scoring position.

ONE THING THAT CAN'T HAPPEN: The young starters can't regress. The A's rotation is talented but still relatively inexperienced. Only Dallas Braden will begin the season older than 25.

BIGGEST ADDITION: OF David DeJesus

BIGGEST SUBTRACTION: DH Jack Cust

ROOKIE TO WATCH: OF Michael Taylor

Seattle Mariners

ONE THING THAT MUST HAPPEN: New manager Eric Wedge must gain control of the club. The team was full of turmoil last year, with naps in the clubhouse and fistfights in the dugout. That can't continue if the Mariners are to improve.

ONE THING THAT CAN'T HAPPEN: Felix Hernandez can't struggle for runs the way he did a season ago when his teammates scored seven runs in his 12 losses. Another frustrating year like that could do damage to Hernandez's psyche.

BIGGEST ADDITION: C Miquel Olivo

BIGGEST SUBTRACTION: INF Jose Lopez

ROOKIE TO WATCH: 2B Dustin Ackley.

Texas Rangers

ONE THING THAT MUST HAPPEN: Someone must step up and help fill the void left by the departure of Cliff Lee. Maybe Tommy Hunter will mature, or Neftali Feliz will transition from the bullpen or maybe the Rangers will get a comeback season from Brandon Webb.

ONE THING THAT CAN'T HAPPEN: The Rangers can't battle injuries like they did a year ago. Ian Kinsler and MVP Josh Hamilton must stay on the field and in the lineup if the Rangers are going to repeat as division champs.

BIGGEST ADDITION: 3B Adrian Beltre

BIGGEST SUBTRACTION: LHP Cliff Lee

ROOKIE TO WATCH: RHP Tanner Scheppers

Oakland A's Top-50 Prospects: 25-21

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Feb 7, 2011

It's that time of the year when we take stock of the Oakland A's organization and analyze the top prospects. For the next few weeks, we will profile our top-50 prospect list in groups of five. Today, we continue the series with a review of prospects 25-21.

25. Tyler Vail

It is easy to measure how much the A's philosophy on drafting high school pitchers has changed since the publication of the book *Moneyball* by the fact that it wasn't that notable that Oakland selected Vail in the fifth round this past season. The

right-hander from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, is the latest in a recent collection of high school pitchers the team has targeted in the early rounds of the draft. Less than a year removed from being drafted, Vail is already drawing comparisons to two pitchers selected by the A's out of high school: Trevor Cahill and Vince Mazzaro.

Vail was the fourth high school player taken by the A's in rounds two through five in 2010 and the first to sign. He reported to the A's Rookie League team in Arizona and made 13 appearances. Although 10 were starts, the majority of Vail's appearances were limited to three innings, as the A's wanted to ease him into professional baseball. Vail acquitted himself well in his first pro season, posting a 3.13 ERA and allowing only a .218 BAA in 31.2 innings. He struck-out 29, walked eight and allowed only one homerun. Vail also induced 1.30 groundouts for every flyout.

Coming out of a relatively low-profile high school baseball program in the Northeast, Vail didn't have a lot of the pre-draft hype that was attached to many of the other high school pitchers taken in the top-five rounds of the draft. The A's were well-versed in Vail's game, however, as team scout Jeff Bittiger has known Vail for a number of years. Bittiger has made a good career finding top pitching talent in the Northeast for the A's, including Mazzaro and Andrew Bailey.

Two of the biggest concerns surrounding Vail coming out of high school were his size (he is only 6'1", 190) and that he hadn't played against what many consider top-flight high school baseball competition. A's Scouting Director Eric Kubota feels that Vail's size won't be a detriment to his ability to be a starter and Vail answered some of the questions about his ability to play against top competition by pitching well in the Arizona Rookie League.

A's Minor League Pitching Coordinator Gil Patterson is impressed with Vail's polish and his ability to apply instruction quickly.

"Tyler is a great kid. A sponge," Patterson said. "He has a good fastball with life and command and a good change as well. His breaking ball needs the most work."

Because of the sinking action and movement on his fastball, Vail has drawn comparisons to Mazzaro and Cahill. Vail's velocity sits in the low-90s and can hit 95. He has a high-effort delivery that is reminiscent of Mazzaro's in the way that he employs a lower release point and hides the ball well. Vail made the transition from position player to pitcher late in his high school career, much like Cahill did. Also like Cahill, Vail is an excellent athlete and he can field his position.

Both Cahill and Mazzaro spent their entire first full professional seasons in the Midwest League and Vail is likely to follow a similar path. Look for the A's to limit his innings to roughly 100, likely by starting Vail at extended spring training and having him join the Bees when the weather warms.

24. Matt Thomson

taken during the 2010 draft raised his profile more within the A's organization than Thomson did last year. The 6'4" right-hander from the University of San Diego went from being a relatively non-descript senior selection in round 12 to a rising prospect in the span of one short-season. Buoyed by a jump in velocity and pinpoint command, Thomson set the standard for performance in his draft class, posting a 1.94 ERA and a 71:10 K:BB ratio in 51 innings for short-season Vancouver and High-A Stockton.

Thomson was the first of two senior pitchers taken by the A's out of USD with back-to-back picks in the 2010 draft. San Diego had one of the deepest pitching staffs of any collegiate team and that was reflected in the way that Thomson was used at USD, as he was primarily a reliever for the Toreros in 2010 after serving mostly as a starter in 2009. Thomson actually pitched better in a relief role for San Diego, but the A's weren't hesitant about moving him into the rotation.

After three somewhat shaky relief appearances for Vancouver, Thomson joined the Canadians' rotation and quickly got into a groove. In nine starts for the C's, he allowed only five runs (three earned) in 42 innings (0.64 ERA). He gave-up only 25 hits and six walks and he struck-out 53. Thomson was named the Northwest League's Pitcher of the Week three times. On top of that, he was asked to make a spot start for High-A Stockton when Justin Marks landed on the DL. Thomson pitched up to the level of competition, scattering only two hits and two walks and striking out 10 in five innings for the Ports.

In college, the book on Thomson was that he was a command pitcher with a high-80s fastball and a good slider. Since turning pro, however, Thomson's velocity has jumped into the low-90s and his slider went from being merely good to being an out-pitch. He was able to make those improvements without losing any of his command, as well. Thomson also features a decent curveball and change-up. At 6'4", 200 pounds, Thomson has a traditional starter's build. He has always done a nice job missing bats, something that carried over from college into the pros. Thomson is a flyball pitcher, but he didn't allow a homer in his first pro season and gave-up only nine in three years in college.

"We really like him. I think he is somebody who has improved a lot from what we thought we had coming out of the draft. He was a definite performer. He made a big impression on the entire system," A's Director of Player Development Keith

Lieppman said.

Because he was a senior when the A's selected him, Thomson will be 23 at the start of the 2011 season. However, he has the stuff and pedigree coming from a top collegiate program to be promoted aggressively. The A's will likely start Thomson in Stockton and he could reach Double-A by the end of the year.

23. Steven Tolleson

The breakout season came one year later than expected for Tolleson. Added to the Twins' 40-man roster before the 2009 campaign, Tolleson was projected to play in Triple-A for Minnesota and then push for a back-up infielder job with the Twins in either late 2009 or 2010. Instead, Tolleson struggled to the tune of a 720 OPS in 130 games between Double-A and Triple-A and was designated for assignment. The A's claimed Tolleson before the start of spring training and the change of scenery did wonders for the infielder.

Assigned to Triple-A Sacramento at the start of the season, Tolleson got off to a hot start in April and never looked back. He hit no lower than .296 and posted an OPS of 879 or higher in every month of the season with Sacramento. That performance translated into Tolleson seeing a decent amount of playing time with the A's in two different stints and he hit .286 with a 748 OPS in 49 at-bats spread over 25 games. In 80 games for the River Cats, Tolleson hit .332/.412/.503.

Despite those good numbers, Tolleson was designated for assignment again this off-season, but the A's were able to retain his services when he cleared waivers. He was invited to big leagues spring training as a non-roster invitee and will be competing with Adam Rosales, Eric Sogard, Andy LaRoche and Wes Timmons for the A's back-up infielder job.

Tolleson is a natural second baseman, but he played a lot of shortstop and third base with Sacramento in 2010. His glove isn't strong enough at any of those positions to be an everyday player in the major leagues currently, but he is competent enough at all three to be a major league bench player. At the plate, Tolleson has an excellent command of the strike-zone and average power for a middle infielder. He has average speed and isn't a big threat on the basepaths.

Tolleson's ceiling is that of a back-up infielder at the major league level. Given his ability to get on-base, hit for average and play multiple positions, Tolleson can bring value to a team's bench. He will be 27 throughout the 2011 season.

22. Aaron Shipman

In an extremely talented 2010 class of high school players coming out of Georgia, Shipman was, at times, lost in the pre-draft hype shuffle. However, the A's believe that the centerfielder has the talent and baseball acumen to make a name for himself in 2011 and beyond.

"[H]e was a guy who was rated very highly that we liked and we maybe rated higher internally than perhaps the public perception of him, which by itself was quite high," A's Director of Baseball Operations Farhan Zaidi said after the draft.

"He's just a really good athlete. A well above-average runner. A guy who can fill out and maybe come into some power. A true centerfielder."

The A's also liked Shipman's baseball bloodlines, as his father Robert was a former minor league baseball player and is currently a high school baseball coach. Oakland was impressed with Shipman's swing and ability to square up the ball on the barrel of the bat and they liked what they saw from him defensively in centerfield, as well.

None of those perceptions changed once Shipman signed with Oakland. He inked his deal with the A's on the final day of the signing period, so Shipman appeared in only four games with the A's Rookie League team. However, the team got a long look at him during the A's Instructional League camp this fall.

"[Shipman] handled the Instructional League with no problems," A's Director of Player Development Keith Lieppman said.

"He makes adjustments quickly and really improved his routes and positioning in centerfield. He will start as a top-of-the-lineup type player and we'll see how it evolves from there."

Shipman is an excellent athlete who ran the 60-yard dash in 6.4 seconds at pre-draft prospect showcases. He has an above-average throwing arm and was also a pitcher in high school, where his fastball was clocked in the 90s. Shipman is a lean 6'0", 180, but there is room for him to add muscle as he gets older, which should translate to more power, although speed

and on-base/hit abilities are likely to be his best offensive attributes.

Shipman recently turned 19. Based on his strong showing at Instructs and his baseball pedigree, Shipman may skip short-season A and spend the 2011 campaign with Low-A Burlington.

21. Yordy Cabrera

Going into the 2010 draft, Cabrera was one of the most discussed names on the board. There was considerable controversy over where Cabrera should slot in the draft. Many scouts considered him to be a top-half of the first round talent, but his draft stock was hurt considerably by the fact that he was already 19, would be turning 20 by the end of 2010 and he was only in high school. Primarily due to those age concerns, Cabrera slid out of the first round and the A's happily picked him up with their second round pick.

Cabrera is the son of a longtime minor league coach and former top prospect, Basilio Cabrera. The younger Cabrera was raised in the Dominican Republic until he was 14, when he moved to Florida with his family. Yordy didn't speak English at the time of the move, so he was kept back in school to allow for his English skills to develop. He is now a fluent English speaker and was one of the top high school players in Florida over the past several years, both in the infield and on the mound, where his fastball was clocked in the mid-90s. His father has managed the Gulf Coast Rookie League Tigers for the past few seasons and Yordy spent a significant amount of time hanging around the club.

Cabrera already has a major league frame at 6'4", 200 pounds, and the A's believe his body will continue to grow and develop. The A's are also impressed with Cabrera's agility and athleticism. He is currently a shortstop, although many scouts believe Cabrera will eventually have to move to third base as his body matures. The team is confident that he has the arm and the hands for both positions.

"Cabrera is a physical presence at SS," A's Director of Player Development Keith Lieppman said. "He has probably has the best infield arm in the system. [During Instructs,] he made major improvements on jumps, range and learning to play the [shortstop] position."

The A's are also not concerned about the age issue as it relates to Cabrera, primarily because of his baseball bloodlines and his exposure to the professional game at a young age.

"He comes from good baseball family and has been around numerous major league players so he is confident and capable of handling the stresses involved with the game," Lieppman said.

"He loves to play the game."

Cabrera is currently a gap-to-gap hitter, but the A's believe he will develop plus-power for an infielder. He has good speed and athleticism for a player his size. His arm is a plus tool. Given his exposure to professional baseball and his age, Cabrera will most likely start the 2011 season with Low-A Burlington and he could be a candidate for a cup-of-coffee at the High-A level by season's end if he performs well with the Bees.