

A's News Clips, Monday, October 3, 2011

Newhouse: Can A's find the way to San Jose?

By Dave Newhouse, Oakland Tribune columnist

The future home of the Oakland A's will be decided this baseball offseason. It's Oakland or San Jose, and we already know the preference of A's ownership.

Lew Wolff is urging his Wisconsin fraternity buddy, Major League Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig, to move the A's to San Jose, regardless of territorial rights restrictions.

Selig, for purposes of public posture, has deferred this decision to a blue-ribbon committee. But don't be fooled. Selig and Wolff are in cahoots, both of them siding against Oakland. Did someone say "collusion?"

The San Francisco Giants feel they have a stranglehold on San Jose, where they have a minor league team that they've invested in heavily, including the upgrading of its home facility, Municipal Stadium.

But even with the Giants' changing front-office situation -- sure couldn't handle success, could they? -- a court of law remains Wolff's only realistic opportunity to break the Giants' territorial rights claim to San Jose.

Meanwhile, the A's future has been debated endlessly for 2½ years by the blue-ribbon boys, but a decision surely is forthcoming after the World Series.

It all comes down to who is more believable, Wolff or Oakland.

Wolff has painted a vile picture of Oakland, and how unresponsive the city has been to his needs for a new ballpark. A big lie.

Oakland was unresponsive to the A's previous owner, Steve Schott, when then-Mayor Jerry Brown killed a downtown ballpark project in favor of building housing units.

But Wolff has been offered other sites in Oakland that he has refused to look at because, flatly, he only wants San Jose, where he has established business ties.

A history lesson is needed here. When Charles O. Finley moved his A's from Kansas City to Oakland in 1968, Missouri Sen. Stuart Symington called Oakland "the luckiest city since Hiroshima."

Whew!

Finley was that difficult to deal with, but Oakland politicians contend Wolff is just as disingenuous. One difference: "Charleyball" won three consecutive World Series, while Wolff's ownership has produced six straight losing seasons.

And here is "Moneyball" creator Billy Beane -- the real Billy Beane, not the Brad Pitt portrayal -- contending that he won't have the revenue to produce a winning team unless the A's get a new stadium.

Hey, Billy, look out your office window. Between the Coliseum complex and Hegenberger Road is enough land to build a new ballpark, extra parking and that "baseball village" Wolff keeps envisioning.

The highway is there, BART also is in place and the Coliseum complex is dead center in the middle of five Bay Area counties. What's not to like?

Well, there's always those empty Coliseum seats, if you listen to Wolff. But, remember, both Wolff and Schott are San Jose-oriented. Thus A's fans have been dealing with carpetbagger owners ever since Schott and Ken Hofmann bought out the revered Haas family in 1995.

The Haases didn't complain about Oakland; they embraced Oakland. And they drew 2.9 million one season (1990). Meanwhile, Wolff and Beane carp about the A's having baseball's worst attendance. But why buy tickets to help an owner who's trying to move your team?

As reader Jim Zelinski continually tells me, "The A's should be happy their attendance is that high."

Beware of a Wolff in wolf's clothing. Oil Slick Lew contends he has spent millions of dollars on potential sites here, such as the 66th Avenue location across from the Coliseum. But small businesses there refused to leave.

It was all a sham. Multimillionaires such as Wolff can waste millions -- because they have millions to waste. Wolff has been contemplating his exit from Oakland from the very day he arrived in 2005.

But if truth and justice prevail, the A's will remain in Oakland.

Oh, by the way, wasn't that Selig and Wolff practicing fraternity handshakes at Rosebud, a Chicago restaurant, this summer?

Washington says he could have lifted A's

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

The Rangers are making another World Series bid, and A's fans might wonder what might have happened had **Ron Washington** managed in Oakland.

Washington has an idea.

"If I took this team over when I went to Texas, I believe the same thing we did in Texas, we'd be doing here," said Washington, referring to Oakland. "**Billy (Beane)** had that chance. I'm not saying he didn't want me, but he went in another direction, and another team wanted me."

Washington, whose confident demeanor dates at least to his A's coaching days and is an asset for motivating and relating to players, qualified his remark by saying he realized injuries took a toll on the A's in recent years.

Still ... "One thing we always had was pitching and defense, and when you have pitching and defense, you have a chance," Washington said. "Besides talking about it, I'd make sure we'd get it done."

After **Ken Macha** was fired following the 2006 ALCS, Beane interviewed Washington — the top choice among many players — but hired **Bob Geren**, who posted one .500 record and four losing records, including 27-36 at the time of his June firing.

Under Geren, who was knocked by players for communication issues, the A's as a whole lacked drive and spirit.

Players said the atmosphere and attitude improved once Geren was replaced by **Bob Melvin**.

In Geren's four full seasons, the A's ranked sixth, fifth, third and first in league ERA but didn't contend. In Texas, Washington helped turn an all-hit, no-pitch also-ran into a well-rounded pennant winner that fell to the Giants in the World Series.

One of the reasons he said he would have succeeded in Oakland: "I've just got that influence on people."

No doubt he's working out in Texas, and it doesn't hurt to have one of the majors' deepest lineups — **Nelson Cruz** is the seven hitter, for goodness sakes. But the difference the past two seasons is an improved pitching staff, and Washington notes this year's is deeper than last year's, which featured **Cliff Lee**.

The staff posted a 3.79 ERA (its lowest since 1983) and a league-high 19 shutouts. Behind **C.J. Wilson** and **Colby Lewis** in the rotation, **Matt Harrison**, **Derek Holland** and **Alexi Ogando** were mainstays after combining for 16 starts last year, and the July additions of relievers **Mike Adams** and **Koji Uehara** strengthened the **Neftali Feliz** led bullpen.

"We're certainly deeper in a lot of areas, but a better team?" asked Washington.

"The only way I could judge this team being better is if we got back to the World Series."

Huff criticism: Brian Sabean and Bruce Bochy held nothing back in critiquing

Aubrey Huff, who had a huge 2010, signed a \$22 million contract and suddenly stopped conditioning properly. Sabean said it was about “not doing enough in the offseason,” and Bochy spoke of how Huff “dropped the ball last year and didn’t work out enough last winter.”

Now we wonder about Huff’s motivation. Remember, he repeatedly said he was willing to retire after 2009 if no team called, turned off by constantly playing for losers.

The Giants called, and everything changed. All he wanted was one ring, and he obviously was focused to win one.

Well, he got it. Then he rested and lost his edge.

In spring training, he appeared softer around the middle. When asked about it, he joked it off. At the time, it wasn’t a big deal because he had the best spring of any Giant. During the season, he clearly wasn’t the same player — not as quick or agile, especially in the outfield, and his timing at the plate was way off.

Broadcaster **Mike Krukow**, on his KNBR morning show, said Huff “didn’t do his homework. He partied a little too hard. He took a little bit too much time off.”

Krukow, though rooting for a Huff comeback, also said the first baseman lost credibility in the clubhouse.

“Halfway through this year, he lost a lot of it when he kind of went with the que sera comment about, ‘Well, some years are good, some years are bad,’ ” Krukow said. “Guys in the clubhouse kind of raised an eye about that because you know what? You cannot BS a teammate. They know what homework you did in the offseason. They know how hard you worked.”

Bochy said Huff fessed up and will train harder this winter. It might help that Huff could be playing for another contract. He’ll be a free agent next winter.

Life after Neukom: Could the Giants’ territorial rights to San Jose be softening with kingpin/lawyer **Bill Neukom’s** exit from the ownership group and Beane’s talk that the A’s soon will receive word from Commissioner **Bud Selig’s** committee on the A’s stadium front?

The Giants insist their territorial commitment is unchanged.

“The board is totally locked in to our previous and current positions on that,” incoming CEO **Larry Baer** said. “Our position is as solid as it’s ever been.”

Around the majors: If the Red Sox want a contrast with manager **Terry Francona**, who lost the clubhouse and his job, they’d get someone fiery to force **David Ortiz**, **Adrian Gonzalez** and **Carl Crawford** to run harder to first base.

Hello, **Tony La Russa? Bobby Valentine?** With either big personality on board, general manager **Theo Epstein** would need to take a step back. ... Another intriguing name: **Ryne Sandberg**, who has earned a big-league shot. ... Would the Red Sox go back in their past and consider one of their successful minor-league managers: Macha? ... The White Sox don’t have Francona on their short list, instead considering Triple-A manager **Joe McEwing**, Rays coach **Dave Martinez** and Indians coach **Sandy Alomar Jr.** ... White Sox owner **Jerry Reinsdorf** favors cheaper managers, and Francona made \$4 million to **Ozzie Guillen’s** \$2 million. ... The feeling on Chicago’s North Side is that the longer the Cubs wait to hire a GM, the better the chance for **Mike Quade** to return as manager. ... Red Sox analyst **Dennis Eckersley** (one of the best in baseball) nailed it by saying, before the season ended, that Francona wasn’t the right guy for the job anymore. ... We’ve heard the reports, not denied by Francona, of Red Sox starting pitchers downing beers in games they weren’t scheduled to pitch. Maybe it’s time for Epstein to ban booze in the clubhouse, as the A’s do.

KNUCKLEHEAD OF THE WEEK

Lew Wolff

Bud Selig has sucked the life out of the A's franchise by delaying for almost three years a decision on where the team should be located.

Wolff's reaction is to smile and shrug, because Docile Lew and Glacier Bud are college frat brothers.

Any other owner would be banging on the commissioner's door with a bat, demanding action.

Lew, go down swingin', bro. At least pretend you care.

Deep thoughts, cheap shots & bon mots ...

Scott Ostler, San Francisco Chronicle

No championship team simply fades away, any more than a car sailing off a cliff simply settles peacefully to the bottom of the canyon. Now we learn that **Aubrey Huff** reported to spring training way out of shape and never really got himself together emotionally.

And yet **Bruce Bochy** and **Brian Sabean** continued to run Huff out there every game. As **Dick Enberg** would say, "Oh, my!"

And **Brian Wilson**, last season's poet laureate, the Giant who best conveyed the soul of the team to the outside world, slunk off the stage this time, a grumpy **Garbo**. "I'm not going to talk about myself."

If they beat the Eagles today, do the 49ers really have a choice? They must return to Youngstown and make that lovely city their headquarters until they lose a game. You don't change underwear in the middle of a winning streak.

Jemile Weeks sat out the A's final game and finished his rookie season with a scintillating .303 batting average. An 0-for-5 final day would have dropped Weeks to .299, but don't call him a wimp. He told me a week ago he absolutely would not sit out the final game to protect .300. Had to be a manager's decision.

Weird Stat Dept.: Guess which player has more net yards gained through three games — **Alex Smith** or **Darren McFadden**? McFadden has 393 yards rushing and 84 in pass receptions, for 477 yards.

Smith has 504 passing, 43 rushing and minus-72 in sacks, for a net 475 yards.

Oakland is the organization Dodger fans look at and say, "At least we're not as screwed up as the A's." The A's face three dismal options: One, get the OK from **Bud Selig** to move to San Jose, thus becoming a rebuilding (and losing) lame duck for at least three years, if they find someone to finance a new stadium. Two, get a no-go from Selig, in which case the A's are stuck in the muck, fans and players left praying for a new owner who isn't into tarp.

Three, get no word from Glacier Bud and just continue spinning their wheels indefinitely.

Seems odd that Sabean didn't bump **Gary Brown** up a notch, instead leaving him in Class A all season (.336 batting average and .407 on-base percentage).

A conspiracy theorist might wonder if Sabean feared that Brown would rip it up in DoubleA, too, causing a clamor for him to open next season with the big club. Now the Giants can say, "That's too big a jump." Brown might not be ready for center field with the Giants, but who is?

Maybe **Coco Crisp**? He could be the answer to the Giants' leadoff/center field problems, except ... he missed 46 games in 2011 and an average of 82 games the past three seasons. And why would the wispy Crisp sign with a team that doesn't steal bases?

No way the A's go to Japan for the 2012 opener without **Hideki Matsui**. That would be like not bringing **Springsteen** to a Springsteen concert. If I'm **Billy Beane** (or **Brad Pitt**), I tell Selig, "We won't pay \$2 million to sign a guy who hits only six weeks out of the season. If you want us to bring Godzilla to Japan, you pay his salary."

A public service message from **Tom Brady** to Raiders' fans: "Start drinking early so you can get lubed up. I'm talking about water, of course. Stay un-thirsty, my friends."

Oakland A's: Hitting, pitching and bench coaches will not return to Bob Melvin's staff

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's announced sweeping changes on their coaching staff Friday, as pitching coach Ron Romanick, hitting coach Gerald Perry and bench coach Joel Skinner were all let go.

It's a significant, though not unexpected, step as manager Bob Melvin prepares for his first full season on the job in 2012. Melvin inherited former manager Bob Geren's staff when he replaced Geren on June 9, and Melvin said Thursday he would make changes that would come quickly.

Third base coach Mike Gallego (who also coaches infielders) and first base coach Tye Waller will be retained, according to a team release, and bullpen coach Rick Rodriguez is a candidate to return in the same position.

An A's spokesman said neither Melvin nor anyone in the front office would comment on the changes until Melvin's staff was complete.

But Melvin telegraphed his intentions at Thursday's season's-end news conference.

"A lot of the coaches who are here right now have been in this organization, and when you move up, you move up based on your performance," he said. "Once you get to the big league level, a lot of it has to do with the manager, unfortunately. These guys are very loyal to Bob Geren, who was a good man and a good manager."

"I really appreciate the job they did for me. Having said that, as a manager, you do want some of the guys you feel close to around you that get your message across and know really what you're all about."

Cutting ties with Romanick is the most significant move, given Romanick had spent 13 years with the organization and worked with many of the A's pitchers since their minor league days.

This was Romanick's first season replacing Curt Young as pitching coach, and the results were mixed.

The A's posted a 3.13 ERA in the first half but slipped to 4.48 in the second half. Gio Gonzalez was an All-Star and won 16 games, but Trevor Cahill, another key young starter, took a step backward, going 12-14 with a 4.16 ERA.

Still, the A's 3.71 overall ERA ranked third in the American League.

"(Melvin) wanted his guy in there," Romanick said. "I don't necessarily know who that is. (But) he wants to surround himself with guys he knows, and I totally understand that."

One possibility as Romanick's replacement is Reds pitching coach Bryan Price, who worked under Melvin when he managed the Seattle Mariners and Arizona Diamondbacks. Price has one year left on his contract with Cincinnati, but he left Seattle's staff in 2006 to join Melvin in Arizona.

Price later resigned in protest as Diamondbacks pitching coach after Melvin was fired as manager during the 2009 season.

Perry spent just one season as the A's hitting coach, as he did in his first stint with the team in 2006. Though the A's showed improvement offensively in the second half, they finished 2011 tied for 12th in the A.L. in batting average (.244), 12th in homers (114) and 12th in runs (645).

Skinner was in his first season as bench coach after coming over from Cleveland.

"When a (managerial) change is made in the middle of the season, these types of things happen as part of it," Skinner said. "I think coming in, (Melvin) had people in mind already."

Former Brewers and Tigers manager Phil Garner, currently an A's special adviser, is a logical fit to slide into the bench coach role.

□ The A's also announced they obtained outfielder Eliezer Mesa from Colorado as the player to be named later in the Mark Ellis trade.

Pitching, hitting coaches gone

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

The A's let go of half of their coaching staff Friday, including Ron Romanick, who had fared well in his first season as the team's pitching coach.

It's likely Oakland will ask for permission to speak to Reds pitching coach Bryan Price, who worked with A's manager Bob Melvin in Arizona and Seattle and is a Bay Area native (attended Tamalpais High and Cal) - or that the A's will turn to their former pitching coach, Curt Young, who was on Terry Francona's staff in Boston this year. With the Red Sox cutting ties with Francona on Friday, it's expected that Young might not be retained, though he has a year left on his deal.

The A's also will not renew the contracts of hitting coach Gerald Perry and bench coach Joel Skinner.

Romanick's departure is the most unexpected, after the young pitching staff led the league in ERA much of the season. Romanick has worked with many of Oakland's pitchers throughout their careers.

"He did a lot for me and my career," A's closer Andrew Bailey said. "I've had him since Day 1, and he's a good friend. He's a great pitching coach, and I'm sure he'll find another job easily."

Despite losing starters Brett Anderson and Dallas Braden to season-ending injuries, and not having Bailey for two months, the A's finished with the third-best ERA in the league, 3.71, and set an Oakland record for strikeouts, 1,160.

"I wish I could continue to be a part of this," Romanick said. "I feel like we were just getting started."

When Phil Garner was hired as a special adviser during the season, there was immediate speculation that he might serve as bench coach next year, and while that has not yet been determined, Skinner knew that all managers want their own bench coach.

"There's nothing shocking about it at all," he said. "I enjoyed being there, every bit of it, and I have nothing but good thoughts about that group of players."

Perry has served as the A's hitting coach twice, and he said, "I appreciate the opportunity Billy Beane gave me, in bringing me back a second time. ... I wish we'd gotten off to a better start, but I think we started to put it together in the second half, just a little too late."

The A's will have had 10 bench coaches in the past 11 seasons, with only Tye Waller serving consecutive seasons there. Waller, now the first-base coach, will return next year, as will third-base coach Mike Gallego. Bullpen coach Rick Rodriguez will be a candidate for that job again.

Briefly: The A's acquired outfielder Eliezer Mesa, 22, as the player to be named in the Mark Ellis deal with Colorado. ... A's assistant general manager David Forst is expected to be among the candidates for the newly open Angels GM job.

Waller, Gallego to return as A's adjust staff

By Cash Kruth / MLB.com

Three coaches who spent this past season with the A's will not return in 2012, the club announced on Friday.

Bench coach Joel Skinner, pitching coach Ron Romanick and hitting coach Gerald Perry will not have their contracts renewed, while bullpen coach Rick Rodriguez will be considered a candidate for his same position next year.

First-base coach Tye Waller and third-base coach Mike Gallego will return in 2012, the first full season under manager Bob Melvin.

The club also received outfielder Eliezer Mesa, 22, as the player to be named in the Mark Ellis trade with Colorado on June 30. The 5-foot-11, 180-pound Mesa hit .256 with seven doubles, one triple, 13 RBIs and 11 stolen bases in 53 games for Class A Modesto this past season.

Leading Off: A's press Selig on proposed San Jose move

Aileen Voisin, Sacramento Bee 10/1/2011

A's to Selig: Show us the way to San Jose

The film "Moneyball" not only elevated the A's sagging profile, at least in the more immediate news cycles, it also provides Lew Wolff and Billy Beane a national platform to push for that new ballpark in San Jose.

Major League Baseball officials have been "studying" the A's proposed move for 2 1/2 years, seemingly reluctant to act on the messy situation because the Giants hold territorial rights in the Bay Area.

But the pressure's on. With the film's release, coupled with the Chicago Cubs' pursuit of Beane for their general manager vacancy, the topic is receiving considerable attention.

In an end-of-season meeting with reporters Thursday, Beane applied some less-than-subtle pressure on Commissioner Bud Selig, saying he expects to hear "very soon" whether the A's can proceed with the proposed ballpark approximately 40 miles south of O.co Coliseum.

"We've been told a number of times a decision was near," Beane said. "This time I'm going to believe it. That certainly would be helpful from my standpoint and everybody else's to determine which direction we are going."

It doesn't hurt that acclaimed "Moneyball" author Michael Lewis has been part of the publicity tour and forcefully backs the club's need for a state-of-the-art facility.

What Beane isn't saying about stadium

Mychael Urban, CSN.com

So Billy Beane knows something that we don't.

Nothing new there. General managers never completely open their vaults of knowledge to the masses, and Beane, the longtime architect of the Oakland A's, takes particular delight in withholding certain key bits of information.

Nothing wrong with that. His business is his, and his alone.

But the business of A's baseball is, in fact, the business of A's fans, and Thursday's press conference at Whatever They Call It These Days Coliseum had to leave those fans befuddled.

Beane said he expects word on the stadium issue soon.

How soon? He wasn't saying.

Where'd he get the information? He wasn't saying that, either.

The second question doesn't really matter. The first one does in a big way, because Beane suggested that it'll determine his course of action for the next several years.

What Beane did say represented something of a Catch-22 for fans.

If the stadium news is good -- assuming you think approval for territorial rights and a new stadium in San Jose is good -- the news as it applies to fans hoping to have a winner sooner rather than later is bad.

A new stadium would mean the A's will start another rebuilding phase of sorts, emphasizing youth in an effort to have a contending team by the time the new yard is ready. That approach rarely produces a winning team in the short-term.

And the opening of a new stadium wouldn't happen for three years, at the earliest.

Sweet, must think the typical A's fan. Three more years of no-names in a three-quarters empty park.

There's a school of thought that bad news on the stadium would preclude a sale, and its reasonable to think that adopting a win-now philosophy that might bring out more fans by putting in front of them more recognizable players would make the team more attractive to buyers.

Wouldn't that kind of be good news for fans?

Strange, isn't it?

A's wrap-up

by Lowell Cohn, Santa Rosa Press Democrat, 9/30/2011

On Thursday, the A's held their season recap just as the Giants did across the Bay. I just finished reading the coverage of the A's post mortem in the papers and I was struck by a major difference. The Giants articles stressed what happened and what will happen with the team. The A's articles led off with Billy Beane news.

You know the deal. He will return to the A's and he won't go to the Cubs, etc.

So, twice in one week Beane has overshadowed the team, first with Moneyball and now this.

The team should come first. The general manager should be a background figure.

I am not blaming Beane but I am saying things are out of whack at the A's. When the team becomes more newsworthy than the GM you'll know the A's finally are on the right track.

September 28th, 2011 09:15pm

Billy Beane vs. Art Howe

by Lowell Cohn, Santa Rosa Press Democrat 9/29/2011

Stan has asked why I haven't written about Moneyball the movie or addressed Art Howe's complaint that he was misrepresented in the movie.

I have not seen the movie and do not intend to — although I read the book. I don't think I can comment on a movie I haven't watched. I don't want to see the film because, from what I've read, it partly fictionalizes the events of that season and the people involved — a season and people I covered. When it comes to my job I am interested in reality and not fiction.

I can say this. I really like Art Howe. He is an exemplary human being and whenever I see him it brings gladness to my heart.

When he managed the A's — he was a hell of a manager — he sometimes felt angry with Beane. So did Ken Macha. All this is known. Beane admits he was hard on Howe. He told me he was a young man when Howe was his manager and he (Beane) needed to learn how to behave better. Beane also told me he later on offered Howe a job as his advisor — wanted him to return to the A's. Howe went to Texas instead to be Ron Washington's bench coach.

So they had gone some distance in working out their differences.

Howe feels he was portrayed negatively and incorrectly in the movie. I can't comment on that. He also maintains Beane had a hand in the misrepresentation if there was one.

I am closer with Howe than Beane, although I like Beane. But I do not think Beane went behind Howe's back in the movie or book. Beane did not write the book or direct the movie. Other people did. I just don't think Beane would have had that much power in the movie to create Howe's characterization and I don't think Beane would have wanted to do that.

He still should phone Art Howe and reassure him and make sure things are OK between them.