

A's News Clips, Wednesday, November 16, 2011

Whodathunkit? Baseball a paragon of labor stability

John Shea, Chronicle Columnist

The NFL lockout lasted 136 days. The NBA lockout is in its 139th day. By contrast, baseball's collective bargaining agreement expires Dec. 11, but a new settlement through 2017 is expected soon.

That means MLB, which had eight strikes/lockouts from 1972 to 1995, now is envisioning 22 years of labor peace.

I asked Bill Gould, emeritus professor at Stanford Law School who was instrumental in ending baseball's 1994-95 strike, why basketball can't figure out, like baseball, how to peacefully divide the wealth.

Few know sports labor like Gould, whose new book, "Bargaining With Baseball: Labor Relations in an Age of Prosperous Turmoil" illustrates law's impact on baseball history.

He pointed to three differences between the sports.

1. The baseball union has maintained more aggressive stances than the basketball union. "The lack of which in basketball led (Commissioner David) Stern, who's a lawyer, to believe he could push the union around, and he's been right, until now at least," Gould said. "Baseball owners learned they can't push these (players) around."
2. The NBA has more "marginal franchises with economically perilous circumstances" than MLB - including Sacramento, Toronto and Memphis. "I don't think baseball has any teams like that," Gould said. I mentioned the A's, and he called them "an aberration. They seem to be calculating that they can go elsewhere."
3. Race. "Look at who comes to NBA games and who has the money," said Gould, who's African American. "Basketball has always had a problem because they're trying to appeal to a white fan base. The basketball union doesn't have as much leverage with fans as in baseball, but players generally don't have leverage with fans anyway."

As chairman of the National Labor Relations Board, appointed by President Clinton, Gould cast the deciding vote to obtain an injunction that ended the strike that wiped out the 1995 World Series. To this day, some owners, who were intent on having a salary cap, hold it against him.

Oakland stuck as sellers

Buster Olney, espn.com, 11/16/2011

The Oakland Athletics finished 24th in homers last season and could use some punch in their lineup, and with Brett Anderson set to miss most or all of the 2012 season, they could use a starting pitcher.

But player acquisitions will be secondary for Oakland this winter and maybe in every winter until the Athletics can secure a new ballpark. They will continue to field a team and go about the business of trying to win as many games as possible, but the Athletics are dead men walking until they get their new ballpark; they are biding time until the shovels go into the ground, whether that's in one year or two years or three, and so their player decisions will be all about the future.

Look for them to trade Andrew Bailey then, because his value in the market will never again be as high as it is now, when he's just 27 years old, has 75 career saves and is just starting to climb the arbitration ladder. If somebody calls and offers them a big-time haul of prospects for Gio Gonzalez -- who is 26 years old and coming off the best season of his career,

having improved his strikeout-walk ratio to 2.17 -- then it probably makes sense for them to make that deal. Gonzalez probably won't be around when the Athletics are in position to make a serious run at the AL West, and if they can make a great trade for him now, they should do it.

Twenty years ago, Oakland actually had the highest payroll in the majors, but last season, the Athletics' payroll of \$67 million was among the lowest. Meanwhile, the Texas Rangers have built a powerful organization and have a treasure trove of TV money guaranteed to them, and the Los Angeles Angels already are a power.

The Athletics are where the Florida Marlins were five years ago, and now the Marlins have a new park and at least the *hope* that their future is evolving. Oakland is not there yet; the Athletics will be hope/ess until they get their ballpark -- and maybe now that Major League Baseball is moving closer to restoring the Los Angeles Dodgers and settling on a labor agreement, that can happen. Maybe the Athletics' situation will soon be at the top of MLB's docket.

Until then, sure, they'll consider trading anybody. They've got young players, but they're not really building anything yet. Do you want to make a deal for Trevor Cahill? Call them. Want Bailey, or Gio? Make an offer. Want Kurt Suzuki? Call them. They'll listen to anything while they wait for somebody to tell them when and where they can build a new ballpark.

The Toronto Blue Jays have also checked on the availability of Huston Street, writes Bob Elliott, and I wrote a couple of weeks ago that the Blue Jays have also talked to the Athletics about Bailey. Presumably, Street wouldn't cost as much as Bailey would in a trade, because he is owed a lot of money. The New York Yankees are bound to add a pitcher, writes Joel Sherman; remember, Oakland has starting pitching under contract.

The Cy season

Justin Verlander's 2011 season by the numbers (from ESPN Stats & Info).

Stat	Verlander	AL Rank
Wins	24	1st
ERA	2.40	1st
K's	250	1st
WHIP	0.920	1st
H/9 IP	6.2	1st
IP	251.0	1st

• Justin Verlander won the Cy Young Award unanimously, and even more awards are likely for him, writes Michael Rosenberg.

Verlander is the first pitcher to win the AL Cy Young by a unanimous vote since Johan Santana in 2006. Verlander is also the first pitcher to win at least 24 games and throw a no-hitter in the same season since Sandy Koufax did it with the Dodgers in 1965.

James Shields was happy finishing third in the Cy Young Award voting.

• The Marlins are at center stage this offseason, writes Andrew Keh. It's a different time for the team, says Larry Beinfest.

A lot of folks in the industry are waiting to see the substance of the offers the Marlins have made. It's one thing to say you've made an offer to Albert Pujols, and it's something else entirely to tender a proposal in the range of what the St. Louis Cardinals offered in the past -- something in the \$200 million ballpark.

• The cartoon bird is back.

Moves, deals and decisions

1. The Cardinals have had a couple of talks about bringing back Octavio Dotel.

2. Heard this: Grady Sizemore is not close to picking a new team. For him, it'll come down to the right team, the right lineup, the right ballpark, on a one-year deal.

3. When other teams have poked around to see if the Philadelphia Phillies will look to trade Cole Hamels -- as they did two years ago, in dumping Cliff Lee -- the indication from Philadelphia has been that it would cost three small nations and two oceans to convince them to trade the lefty. Ruben Amaro says the Hamels situation is not yet pressing for the Phillies.

4. Chris Volstad was not invited to the unveiling of the Marlins' new uniforms, which has left him wondering about his future.
5. The Arizona Diamondbacks' talks with Miguel Montero are at a standstill, writes Nick Piccoro.
6. The Colorado Rockies are pursuing two starters, writes Troy Renck. They need Jhoulys Chacin to have consistent mechanics.
7. The Baltimore Orioles have made offers.
8. T.J. Simers questions Frank McCourt's motives in making the Matt Kemp deal.
9. The Dodgers won't be spending on a big bat.
10. A number of teams are interested in Heath Bell, writes Bill Center.
11. Howard Cole isn't a fan of the Dodgers' signing of Matt Treanor.
12. C.J. Wilson's agent says the Yankees have been aggressive in their pursuit of the lefty.
13. Jim Crane is getting a \$70 million discount for his move to the AL, writes Richard Justice. Some ex-Astros aren't thrilled by what's happening, writes Steve Campbell.
14. Dale Sveum could be offered the Red Sox managerial job today, writes Peter Abraham. The Chicago Cubs may also be vying for his services, writes Scott Lauber.
15. Theo Epstein says he's just not worth that much in compensation.
16. Don't expect any big moves from the Red Sox, writes Michael Silverman.
17. Brett Gardner could be a trade chip this winter.
18. The Minnesota Twins continue to look for players in Japan.
19. Mat Gamel could be the guy who replaces Prince Fielder at first base, says Doug Melvin, who also indicated that he will not re-sign Craig Counsell.
20. Jed Hoyer talked and said little, writes Paul Sullivan.
21. Ken Williams is in listening mode, writes Mark Gonzales.
22. The Kansas City Royals had a meeting with Roy Oswalt.
23. The Cardinals are not interested in Fielder if Pujols leaves. Which makes sense, because they've already got Lance Berkman lined up and ready to play if Pujols departs. Let's see how much the Cardinals want Pujols, writes Bryan Burwell.

Other stuff

- The Marlins are selling a lot of T-shirts.
- Giving Carlos Zambrano another chance is a bad idea, writes Rick Telander.
- The success of Jeremy Hellickson is a tribute to a scout's tenacity, writes John Romano.
- The Atlanta Braves will play a group of their own prospects.
- Vanderbilt got back to winning.

And today will be better than yesterday.

Hot Stone League: Move of Astros to AL West appears imminent

by [Larry Stone](#), Seattle Times

The expansion of the AL West, which has been much discussed in the past year, is expected to be finalized this week. By all accounts, the Houston Astros will switch from the National League Central to join the Mariners' division in 2013.

As I [discussed last month](#), the Mariners will be losing a huge advantage that they rarely took advantage of -- being a member of the only four-team division in baseball. If the switch goes through as expected when the owners meet this week in Milwaukee in conjunction with the General Managers Meeting, the Mariners, Rangers, Angels and A's will, in 2012, be enjoying their final season of having to beat out just three teams for the division title.

All other divisions in MLB have five teams, except for the NL Central, which has six. When this move is completed, each of six divisions will have five teams, leading to a much more equitable schedule. The departure of Astros to the American League will leave each league with 15 teams. One of the side effects of having an odd number of teams in each league, unavoidably, will be an interleague game virtually every night of the season. Obviously, that will have [significant ramifications](#) on the schedule.

Here's how the events are expected to unfold this week, [as reported](#) by Bob Nightengale of USA Today: Owners will begin their quarterly meetings Wednesday in Milwaukee, with the sale of the Astros from **Drayton McLane** to **Jim Crane** one of the items on the agenda. Commissioner **Bud Selig** is expected to recommend approval of the sale -- but under the condition that Crane agree to switch leagues. Crane has balked because of fear of losing television revenue from having divisional road games start so late in Houston. SI.com's Jon Heyman is reporting that MLB has agreed to assuage Crane by giving him an \$80-million discount off the \$680-million sale price.

This is all tied into the expected expansion of the postseason that figures to be a part of a new collective bargaining agreement. A new CBA is also [said to be imminent](#), and it has been widely reported that it will include a second wild card team in each league, and an extra round of playoffs.

Gomes leads Dogs in offensive explosion

Blue Jays prospect homers, doubles, drives in three runs

By David Heck / Special to MLB.com

Yan Gomes has been hot of late. So it's no surprise that on Tuesday, he turned in his best game of the Arizona Fall League.

The Blue Jays prospect homered, doubled, drove in three runs and scored twice as the Phoenix Desert Dogs defeated the Surprise Saguaros, 12-8.

Drafted in the 10th round in 2009, Gomes hit .250 with 13 homers and 51 RBIs in 71 games for Double-A New Hampshire. He also played four games for Triple-A Las Vegas, batting just .214 with one extra-base hit.

The 24-year-old catcher has gotten on base in his past seven AFL contests, hitting .333 while scoring six times and driving in five runs. Of his eight hits, four have gone for extra bases.

The Desert Dogs got off to a fast start against the Saguaros, plating 10 runs in the first two innings. Grant Green (Athletics), Brodie Green (Reds) and Dusty Coleman (Athletics) each went deep, knocking in a combined seven runs. Gomes doubled in Phoenix's seven-run second to drive in Rob Segedin (Yankees), then came home after two wild pitches by Brendan Lafferty (Royals).

The only time the Desert Dogs scored after that was when Gomes hit a two-run shot off the Rays' Kirby Yates in the sixth. His average currently stands at .255, much improved from the .194 mark he owned before his on-base streak began.

Down through seven, 12-4, the Saguaros made it interesting by scoring four in the eighth. After Anthony Capra (Athletics) walked the first three batters of the frame, Rangers prospect Ryan Strausborger was hit by a pitch, and fellow Texas farmhand Leury Garcia lofted a sacrifice fly. Following a pitching change, Christian Colon (Royals) smacked an RBI single off Andrew Carignan (Athletics) and Mike Olt (Rangers) drew a bases-loaded walk. Carignan then got Joe Terdoslavich (Braves) to pop out to end the frame.

Blue Jays prospects Anthony Gose and Kevin Ahrens both finished with two hits for the Desert Dogs, scoring three runs between them. All nine players in the Phoenix lineup got on base at least once, with all of them crossing home plate as well.

Rays first-rounder Mikie Mahtook led the Surprise offense, going 2-for-4 with a homer and two runs scored as he raised his average to .354. Garcia tripled and drove in three out of the No. 9 spot.

Starter Murphy Smith (Athletics) earned the win for the Desert Dogs, yielding three runs on four hits over four innings while striking out seven. Ryan Kelly (Rangers) did not make it out of the second for the Saguaros, falling to 0-2 after surrendering six runs on five hits in just 1 1/3 frames.

2011 Year In Review: Midland Pitchers

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Nov 15, 2011

Our "2011 Year In Review" series continues with a look at the pitchers for the Oakland A's Double-A affiliate.

Midland Rockhounds Pitching At A Glance

Team ERA: 4.92 (sixth out of eight teams)

Strike-outs/Walks: 989/480 (fifth-most out of eight teams/fourth-most of eight teams)

Team WHIP: 1.51 (second-worst in the league)

Note: this article covers all pitchers who threw at least 35 innings for the Midland Rockhounds in 2011.

It was a down year for the Oakland A's Double-A affiliate. The Rockhounds never really got on-track in 2011 and despite having a talented roster, finished with the third-worst record in the league at 14 games under .500. The pitching staff struggled for much of the year, especially the team's starting rotation. A number of the Rockhounds' starters were pitching full seasons in Double-A for the first time and a number of them struggled with what many believe is the most difficult transition in minor league baseball (from Single-A to Double-A).

One of the pitchers who struggled with the transition to Double-A was right-hander [Shawn Haviland](#). Haviland had a solid 2010 season with High-A Stockton during which he led all A's minor leaguers in strike-outs and posted a 3.65 ERA in 150.1 innings. Haviland was a workhorse again in 2011, leading the team with 143.2 innings, but he struggled to duplicate his California League success. In 27 starts, he posted a 7.08 ERA. Haviland walked only 42, but he was too frequently in the middle of the strike-zone and he allowed 205 hits and 24 homeruns. His strike-out totals dipped, as well, dropping to 110. The A's believe Haviland will have a better showing during a second tour of the Texas League in 2012. His last two starts of the season were solid, so perhaps he is already starting to make that adjustment to the league.

The pitcher with the second-most innings on the staff was right-hander [Gary Daley](#), who managed to throw 106 innings for the Rockhounds despite spending time with High-A Stockton and Triple-A Sacramento during the year. Daley had an inconsistent season with the Rockhounds. In June, he was outstanding, posting a 1.86 ERA in 38.2 innings with a 32:14 K:BB ratio. He fell off in July, however, posting an 8.31 ERA in 26 innings with a 27:14 K:BB ratio. In August, he had a 4.50 ERA, but he walked 13 while striking out only 13 in 28 innings. Overall, his ERA was 5.18 for Midland. Daley, a former third-round pick of St. Louis in 2006, has been a project for A's minor league pitching coordinator Gil Patterson. Daley has good stuff, but his command has been awful for much of his professional career. He saw some improvements in that area in 2011 and he will continue to work with Patterson in 2012, as the A's re-signed the potential minor league free agent.

Another pitcher whose command has been a project for the A's coaching staff is left-hander [Anthony Capra](#). Capra's command issues with Midland were so bad at one point during the season that the A's sent their 2008 fourth-round pick back to Arizona for a few weeks to work with minor league rehab pitching coordinator Garvin Alston. Alston's work seemed to help Capra, although he still hasn't gotten back to being the pitcher he was in 2008 when he was among the top five pitchers in minor league baseball in strike-outs. He is currently pitching in the Arizona Fall League, where he has continued to have command issues. Capra has been a starter since turning pro, but he has been in the bullpen in Arizona and that may be where the southpaw finds his permanent home. He could be in-line for a third season with Midland.

Right-hander [Ethan Hollingsworth](#) was arguably the team's best starter in 2011. Acquired before the season from Colorado for [Clayton Mortensen](#), Hollingsworth was the only Midland starter to post an ERA under 4.00. In 94.2 innings, he had a 3.61 ERA and a 66:23 K:BB ratio. Hollingsworth was promoted to Triple-A for the final week of the season and looked poised to lead the River Cats' staff in 2012 before the A's traded him to Kansas City for [Kila Ka'aihue](#). Hollingsworth, who has had impeccable command throughout his professional career, could factor into the Royals' plans by the end of the 2012 season.

Left-hander [Carlos Hernandez](#) began the season in the Midland rotation, but was promoted to Triple-A after eight starts and never returned to the Rockhounds. Hernandez had a 5.27 ERA with the Rockhounds, but his 37:10 K:BB ratio was solid. He was hittable with Midland, however, allowing 47 hits in 42.2 innings. He would go on to post similar numbers with the River Cats. Hernandez is currently pitching well in the Mexican Winter League. He should start next year in Triple-A. The biggest

question will be whether the A's decide to leave him in the starting rotation – where he has spent most of his career – or move him to the bullpen – where many scouts believe he will find the most success in the big leagues.

Veteran Jason Bergmann was signed by the A's as a minor league free agent during the season. The former Washington National struggled despite his experience. In 78 innings, he had a 5.65 ERA for Midland. Bergmann did improve as the season progressed, however, posting an ERA of 4.88 in July and 3.60 in August. He is currently a minor league free agent.

Left-hander Polin Trinidad was also brought in mid-season on a minor league free agent deal. Trinidad, a longtime Astros' farmhand, had been pitching in the Cubs' organization before being released and later signed by Oakland. He split his time with Midland between the rotation and the bullpen. In 56 innings, he posted a 6.91 ERA with a 32:19 K:BB ratio. He also allowed 70 hits. Trinidad is currently a minor league free agent and is pitching for the Estrellas in the Dominican Winter League.

Reliever Jared Lansford is also on the free agent market. The A's 2005 second-round pick is a free agent for the first time in his career. The right-hander was once one of the A's top relief prospects, but a lack of strike-out stuff has stalled his career. Lansford tossed 79.1 innings for the Rockhounds in 2011, posting a 4.54 ERA with a 48:27 K:BB ratio. He has pitched in parts of four seasons for Midland and the 2011 campaign was his worst statistically for the Rockhounds in terms of ERA and homeruns allowed. He did cut down on his walks per innings pitched, however. Lansford has always been an extreme groundball pitcher and his sinker can be a special pitch at times. At 25-years-old, he should receive plenty of interest on the open market.

Lansford led the Rockhounds' relief corps in innings pitched, but Paul Smyth (65 IP), Jonathan Ortiz (65 IP) and Trey Barham (61 IP) weren't far behind. For the first time in his professional career, Smyth struggled. He posted a 4.85 ERA with Midland after posting an ERA of 0.00 in 2009 for Vancouver and Kane County and an ERA of 3.01 in 2010 with Stockton. The biggest drop-off in Smyth's numbers with the Rockhounds was with his strikeout total. He K'd only 59 with Midland after striking out 94 in 77.2 innings with Stockton the year before. Smyth also allowed double the number of homeruns and more hits per innings pitched. Smyth really struggled after the All-Star break and may have been suffering from fatigue. The A's still like the sidearm specialist. He will likely start the 2012 season back in Midland but could jump to Triple-A with a strong start to his season.

Ortiz joined the A's as a minor league free agent from the Yankees' organization before the 2011 season and he had a solid first year in the A's chain. The Dominican native, pitching at the Double-A level for the first time, posted a 4.02 ERA with a 60:24 K:BB ratio. The A's liked what they saw from Ortiz and re-signed him for the 2012 season. He is currently pitching for Licey in the Dominican Winter League.

Barham, in his first year in Double-A, posted the best ERA of any reliever with more than 30 innings on the Rockhounds' staff at 2.95. The left-hander's K/IP ratio dropped from his ratio with High-A Stockton in 2010, but he allowed fewer hits per inning. He also did an excellent job of keeping the ball on the ground. Despite not having overpowering stuff, Barham has continued to get outs at every level he has pitched at. He has a shot at beginning next season in Triple-A.

Neil Wagner was on pace to throw 60+ innings for Midland before he was promoted to Triple-A Sacramento in late June. Wagner, who was the Rockhounds' hardest throwing reliever, posted a 3.38 ERA with four saves in 37.1 innings. He didn't allow a homer and he struck-out 53 while walking only 13. Wagner, who can touch triple digits with his fastball, also pitched well for Sacramento and went on to make his major league debut with the A's in September.

Mickey Storey was also a workhorse for the Rockhounds before a mid-season transaction removed him from the roster. Storey was traded by the A's to the Houston Astros' organization in July. The right-hander got an opportunity at the Triple-A level with the Astros and pitched well for Oklahoma City. For Midland, he had a 4.03 ERA in 38 innings with a 31:13 K:BB ratio and he posted similar numbers for the Triple-A RedHawks. It wouldn't be surprising to see Storey surface at the major league level with the Astros in the next year.

Although he didn't make the innings cut-off for this article, A's 2011 first-round pick Sonny Gray had a large impact on the Rockhounds late in the season. He made five starts for Midland in August and September and didn't allow a run until his final outing. He finished with one run allowed in 20 innings of work and an 18:6 K:BB ratio. He also held opposing batters to a .214 average. Gray worked extensively on his change-up during the A's Instructional League season and many believe that as soon as he masters that pitch, he will be ready for the big leagues. It is up in the air whether the A's send Gray back to Midland to start the 2012 season or keep him close to their front office with Triple-A Sacramento.

Overstock retreats from O.co name change

by [Steven Musil](#), cnet.com, 11/14/2011

Overstock.com spent millions of dollars for the naming rights of the Oakland Alameda County Coliseum--now known as the O.co Coliseum.

Just months after rolling out a media blitz to promote its new branding, Internet retailer Overstock.com is backpedaling on its O.co moniker.

The company ran TV ads declaring that "Overstock.com is now O.co," revamped its Web site's signage to O.co, and spent millions of dollars on the naming rights to the stadium in the San Francisco Bay Area where the Oakland Raiders and Oakland Athletics play.

But now the company concedes that it was too aggressive with the rebranding strategy and is stepping back from the effort "for now," Overstock.com President Jonathon Johnson told [AdAge](#).

"We were going too fast and people were confused, which told us we didn't do a good job," Johnson told AdAge. "We're still focused on getting to O.co, just at a slower pace...We're not flipping back, we're just refocusing."

Apparently a "good portion" of people attempting to visit the site were instead going to O.com, a single-letter domain still reserved by ICANN.

The company plans to return to its former Overstock.com branding on its Web site and in TV and online ads for the holiday shopping season. But the company will stick with the O.co for international and mobile efforts, and the O.co sign will remain on the Oakland Alameda County Coliseum throughout its six-year naming contract.

The retreat may remind some of [Netflix's famous flub](#) when it announced and then canceled plans recently to spin off the company's DVD-by-mail operations to a service called Qwikster. But Overstock assures us that switching to the O.co brand is still its goal.