

A's News Clips, Wednesday, November 30, 2011

Outside the Bay Area, the GM merry-go-round spins

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

While Giants general manager Brian Sabean gained security with Tuesday's extension and Billy Beane remains a fixture with the A's, much of the rest of baseball is experiencing front-office turnover that will alter how trade and free-agent activity is conducted in the immediate future.

Or at least force Sabean and Beane to update their phone lists.

The lowly Astros figured it wasn't enough to simply change leagues, which they'll do in 2013. By firing GM Ed Wade, they're changing their decision-making process, too, becoming the seventh team in the offseason to hunt for a GM.

That means 23 percent of all GM jobs are changing. Or nearly one-third (32 percent) when counting the teams that missed the playoffs. That's a lot of ownership groups that rightly or wrongly think their place in the standings ought to be far better.

Let's go down the list, if you dare.

Theo Epstein left Boston (and was replaced by Ben Cherrington) to assume presidency of the Cubs and hired Jed Hoyer away from the Padres to be his GM, replacing Jim Hendry.

In turn, the Padres hired Josh Byrnes, who was fired as Diamondbacks GM in 2010 and replaced on an interim basis by Jerry DiPoto. The same Jerry DiPoto hired by the Angels after they fired Tony Reagins.

The Twins re-hired Terry Ryan (their GM through 2007) after firing Bill Smith, not to be confused with Astros President Tal Smith, who was fired along with Wade. The Orioles hired Dan Duquette - not to be confused with Jim Duquette, the former Mets' GM - to replace Andy MacPhail, not to be confused with noted execs Lee or Larry MacPhail, his dad and granddad.

Now the Astros are searching for a successor to Wade, and let's not forget about three hires last winter - Kevin Towers to the Diamondbacks, Chris Antonetti to the Indians, Sandy Alderson to the Mets - making it 10 GM changes over 14 months.

A lot to keep up with for ball fans, let alone old hands Sabean and Beane.

Beane heads to Winter Meetings ready to listen

Interest in Gio, Bailey and others will keep ballclub busy

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- In less than a week, baseball's Hot Stove scene is set to take over the Hilton Anatole in Dallas, home of this year's Winter Meetings.

From Dec. 5-8, notable front-office faces are expected to pull the trigger on a handful of moves, while some simply lay the groundwork for future ones.

A's general manager Billy Beane and Co. generally choose to take the latter route, electing to use the time to observe and listen rather than actively pursue.

"The Winter Meetings are a great thing," Beane has said in the past. "The focus on baseball during that week is fun for the fans. But from a club's perspective, it can be a little bit distracting because, when you go down there, you end up finding yourself being tugged in so many ways from a media standpoint. That being said, I understand their value, but the work environment is not necessarily ideal."

And while that same mindset is likely to hold true again for Beane this year, the A's GM could easily come out a frontrunner in the popularity contest, his hotel suite likely to receive plenty of calls and knocks given other teams' interest in a few of Oakland's biggest names.

All-Star pitchers Gio Gonzalez and Andrew Bailey have been the subject of widespread trade rumors in recent weeks, and the gossip is expected to heat up in Dallas. Both are arbitration-eligible and neither is signed long term, with potential return value for the A's being substantial.

Gonzalez, who is under club control for four more years, has already been linked to the Yankees, Marlins and Red Sox as a possible No. 2 or 3 starter, while Bailey has reportedly garnered interest from the Reds and Mariners.

The A's, though, will listen to offers on essentially any member of their roster -- Jemile Weeks not included -- and they could presumably draw other interest in pitchers Brandon McCarthy, Grant Balfour and Brian Fuentes, as they look to rebuild.

It's quite the different situation when examining the club's doings at this time last year, when they had already brought aboard new acquisitions David DeJesus, Edwin Encarnacion and Minor League hurlers Trystan Magnuson and Danny Farquhar. They were also in the middle of contract negotiations with Japanese right-hander Hisashi Iwakuma, and in the coming months reached agreement with Hideki Matsui, Josh Willingham, Rich Harden, McCarthy, Balfour and Fuentes.

But when the calendar flips to December on Thursday, it's probable that Oakland's biggest storyline this offseason will highlight not what they have done -- newcomers have come in the form of Minor Leaguers and staff members -- but what they haven't done.

Simply put, the A's are not buyers this winter but sellers, largely because their stadium situation remains unsettled. The team is in danger of watching a third straight offseason pass without an answer to their request to move to San Jose, though Beane believes he will have one soon.

It's been speculated that time could come as soon as January's Owners Meetings. But until a decision has been made, Beane's front-office army is stuck in limbo, and the unknown is continually equating to big ramifications for the 2012 roster, as any pursuit and subsequent spending on free agents is on hold until a resolution on the stadium issue has been reached.

The A's payroll increased a significant amount this year, climbing from \$52 million to \$67 million, but it's not known how much or in which direction that figure will move until a stadium decision comes through. Just five players are already under contract for 2012, their total salaries accounting for less than \$22 million. And that same number, perhaps of even lesser value, is likely to account for players eligible for arbitration, seemingly giving the club wiggle room if allowed to spend.

But even more payroll could be shed in the event Beane finds a trade he likes -- a scenario most everyone will be keeping a close eye on come Monday.

A's negotiating to move spring facilities to Mesa

Current agreement with Phoenix expires in 2014

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- While the A's continue to wait on approval of a new ballpark in San Jose, they're moving forward with a potential plan to relocate the club's Spring Training home.

On Monday, they entered exclusive negotiations with the city of Mesa, Ariz., that could result in a move from Phoenix, where they've been stationed since 1982.

The A's plan to discuss moving their Spring Training operations to HoHoKam Park, where the Cubs will continue playing through 2012 before moving into the Cactus League's fourth new ballpark since 2009. The club's year-round Minor League operations would transfer from Phoenix's Papago Sports Complex to Mesa's Fitch Park.

During this exclusive period, which lasts through May 15, 2012, unless extended by mutual agreement and the approval of the Mesa City Council, the A's and Mesa will negotiate without any other third party contract.

The A's current agreement with the city of Phoenix expires after the 2014 season. Before taking up residence at Phoenix Municipal Stadium, they were previously tenants of Mesa (1969-1978) and Scottsdale (1979-1981) following their move from Florida.

Despite public announcements in April that a deal between the A's and Phoenix to extend their contract agreement was imminent, no such agreement was made. Phoenix Muni, which opened in 1964 and is the Cactus League's oldest ballpark, underwent an \$8 million remodel in 2004 but is already due nearly \$4 million in renovations -- money that isn't expected unless a long-term agreement has been reached with a team.

A's officials have talked about the need to improve the facility, which holds just 8,775 fans -- the second-smallest in the Cactus League -- compared to HoHoKam Park's capacity of 12,500. But they have stated they will not comment on the matter until an agreement has been reached or negotiations with Mesa have ended.

Baseball's New Schedule Should Be All About Rivalries

By [STUART MILLER](#), New York Times

Baseball, that most traditional of sports, is once again making a radical shift. For the third time in two decades, it is realigning. The latest move will transfer the Houston Astros from the National League Central to the American League West, giving each division 5 teams and each league 15 teams, creating the need to schedule at least one interleague series at all times.

The logical route, the one that sticks closest to recent practices and minimizes disruption, would be one laid out in an article by [Tyler Kepner on Nov. 17](#), with teams facing divisional foes 18 times (72 games), other league opponents six times (60 games) and teams from one division from the other league six times (30 games).

Since wild-card rivals will never play the same interleague schedule, the schedule is always going to be unfair for certain teams in certain years. But if baseball is transforming its own landscape, then it might as well overhaul it in a way that creates the most excitement for fans: enhance rivalries. There are two types of rivalries, the most obvious is divisional and the second is geographic, so there are two steps baseball should take in its new schedule to generate fan interest.

First, teams should play in their division more often. If your team is competitive, there is nothing better than going head to head against your rivals. Local fans — and, equally important for baseball, local and national television networks — would rather have more games between the Yankees and the Boston Red Sox and the Tampa Bay Rays than between any of those teams and the Cincinnati Reds or the Milwaukee Brewers. And even if your team is mediocre or awful, fans care more about games against longstanding rivals — if San Francisco and Arizona are battling for the divisional title, Los Angeles Dodger fans would be thrilled to see their team try to play spoiler against the Giants, preferring that to meaningless games even against a better team from the American League like the Detroit Tigers.

So, the new formula should include 20 games against divisional rivals, four three-game series and two four-game series. That is eight more games for each team against an opponent that matters in the traditional pennant race — and if baseball is smart about the way it handles the proposed second wild-card team, then pennant races will matter more than they have since the initial introduction of the wild card in 1995. (Smart in this case means the two wild-card teams play a one-game showdown and the winner moves on to a best-of-seven series against the team with the best record in the league, while the other two division winners also have a best-of-seven series. Thus, more teams will be in the hunt to make the playoffs, but the division winners will have a deservedly greater advantage than they have had in the wild-card era to date.)

Those games should not come at the expense of the other teams in the same league — the Mets, for instance, should play a home-and-home, three-game set against every N.L. Central and N.L. West team each season.

Instead, the additional divisional games should mean a reduction in interleague games. With 140 games already accounted for, there are only 22 games left. One of the most fascinating things about interleague play has been the annual matchups of local rivals: Mets-Yankees, Cubs-White Sox, Giants-A's, Dodgers-Angels, Reds-Indians, Rays-Marlins, Nationals-Orioles, Cardinals-Royals. The players, especially in New York, complain that too much weight is attached to these games, but the

fans love them, and it's one of the recent innovations that should not be dispatched simply for mathematical expediency. These rivals should play each other in a unique four-game series, two in each team's ballpark.

Even the 14 teams that do not have natural rivalries are close enough geographically that they can play those four games without needing a travel day: Boston-Philadelphia, Minnesota-Milwaukee, San Diego-Seattle, Detroit-Pittsburgh, Houston-Arizona, Texas-Colorado and Atlanta-Toronto. (This could be rearranged, instead pitting Detroit against Milwaukee, Pittsburgh against Toronto and Atlanta against Minnesota.) The benefit of an annual matchup isn't as obvious for those teams, but given time, genuine rivalries would develop there as well.

That leaves 18 games unaccounted for. Each National League team would have three other American League opponents (and vice versa), facing off against them in home-and-home, three-game series. The opponents would rotate each year.

If it's easier for the schedulermakers, this can be changed so teams play their geographic interleague rival six times (three home, three away); this leaves 16 games and each N.L. team could then play two four-game series against just two American League opponents.

This schedule would please both the fans watching the on-field action and the owners watching the bottom line. It is a rare situation in which all involved would be happy.

An Expert's Take On The A's System

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Nov 30, 2011

The baseball Winter Meetings are next week and with several of their young players reportedly being dangled on the trade market, the Oakland A's figure to be the center of several rumors. Before the trades begin, we thought that it would be good to take a pulse on the state of the A's minor league system. We spoke with Scout's National Baseball Expert Frankie Piliere about several A's prospects.

For more from Frankie Piliere, visit ScoutingBaseball.com.

OaklandClubhouse: [Michael Choice](#)'s swing-and-miss tendencies have been discussed a lot, but he seemed to improve his contact rate considerably as the 2011 season went on and during the AFL. Do you think that his K-rate is going to be a long-term concern for him?

Frankie Piliere: If he continues to look the type of prolific run producer I think he'll be, it doesn't worry me a whole lot. He did make a lot of progress in the AFL, but for the long term I think he's just going to be a guy who swings and misses. But his pitch recognition and selection has improved quite a bit.

OC: Do you see Choice as a centerfielder long term or a corner outfielder?

FP: I think he's a case of a player that's capable of playing the position, but on a deep roster there would probably be a better option to play center field. And, given what he's capable of [offensively], I can see the team making a decision to slide him to a corner spot. But he is capable of playing the position.

OC: How much did Grant Green's stock fall from a prospect-ranking perspective when he had to move positions?

FP: It hurts a little but not a whole lot. As much as I like his bat, I wouldn't be too concerned with where he plays because he profiles well anywhere. Sure, not playing shortstop hurts a little but this has always been a guy driven by his strong bat.

OC: What can you tell us about [B.A. Vollmuth](#) as a hitter? We only got to see a glimpse of him in the NY-Penn League, but he looked legit.

FP: I saw Vollmuth struggle mightily in the Cape two summers ago. But I still came away grading out his hit tool very highly. I think struggling up there probably helped prepare him for the pros too. He's a guy I think could advance quickly on

the strength of his bat.

OC: Would Mark Kotsay be a good comp for Bobby Crocker?

FP: There are two types of comparisons in my mind. One type has to do with a player's profile and the type of career he'll have. The other is more in regards to a resemblance or style of play. When it comes to profile, I think Crocker and Kotsay is an excellent comparison. Crocker is probably not a star, but could be a very good regular that can do a lot of things well on both sides of the ball to help a team.

OC: If Sonny Gray's change-up comes around early next year, do you see him being ready to start in the big leagues in 2012?

FP: Absolutely. From his days in college I viewed him as a guy who would move up the ladder very quickly. And, the progress he's made with a changeup only makes his odds better. I can definitely see him pitching and succeeding in the big leagues in 2012.

OC: His 2011 season was obviously forgettable, but what are your projections for Ian Krol?

FP: Obviously he's still very young and did have his issues in 2011, but I still have high hopes for him. The stuff is quality across the board and I've always been a fan of his command and aggressiveness in the strike zone. His ceiling is not sky high but I think he could be a very quality third or fourth starter in the big leagues.

OC: Did you see much of Sean Doolittle as a pitcher in college? What were your thoughts on him back then on the mound?

FP: I think it's a great move sending him back to the mound. I saw a lot of him in college and liked him a lot. He's different from a typical power arm that teams try to make it work with on the mound. He won't be overpowering but has quality stuff and good pitchability. Think of him as sort of a Danny Hultzen lite, and coincidentally they went to the same school. He's not Danny Hultzen, but he's cut from that cloth when it comes to approach.

OC: Does Stephen Parker have the power to be a third baseman in the big leagues?

FP: I did expect to see bigger power numbers out of Parker in 2011, but I still buy into his power for the long haul. I'm interested to see how he fares in 2012 but I do think he has the power to profile there.

OC: Who is more likely to stick in the big leagues: Max Stassi or Ryan Ortiz?

FP: I'll take Stassi. There are things I like about both players but I think Stassi has more time and ability to make adjustments over the long haul.

OC: If you were running a team, would you stick Tyson Ross in the bullpen or continue to develop him as a starter?

FP: I have a strong belief that players should be developed as starters until they prove that they shouldn't be starters. With that said, I don't think Ross has proven he can't be a starter so for now I'd keep him in that role.

OC: The A's will have a pretty high pick in the 2012 first round again. What is your early assessment of the 2012 draft class? Are there early strengths and weaknesses?

FP: The 2011 class was a well-rounded class. It had a little bit of everything. 2012 is not going to be like that. The high school class is a distinct strength and the college side is going to be very weak. There will be college players like Mark Appel, who are true blue chippers in any year but after that it really drops off. But there are high school hitters and pitchers galore.

OC: How concerned are you about the impact of the new CBA on teams signing HS draft picks? Do you anticipate the international talent pool will shrink?

FP: I'm curious more than anything else about how it's going to impact everything. I think it will definitely make the draft more college oriented for the long haul and that may not be such a bad thing. As far as the international side, we might see more quantity but less in terms of big bonuses. But I think we have to wait and see just how much of an impact it has.

OC: Are you hearing if the A's are connected to any big name international free agents right now, either professional or amateur?

FP: At the moment I don't see them being big players on either market, but that can always change on the international

side. The free agent class obviously isn't great this year and honestly if I'm the A's I don't see a big money free agent that could come in and make a big difference for them.

OC: If you were the Yankees, Marlins or Rangers, would Gio Gonzalez be a trade target? If so, what kind of packages would you be willing to give up?

FP: He would definitely be a target, but I'm sure they are considering the price tag. If I'm the A's the conversation with those teams has to begin with names like Manny Banuelos or Martin Perez. That's the type of centerpiece they should be getting back. However, that doesn't mean those teams will think that way. That's why it's difficult to trade talented, affordable young pitchers. It's difficult to get on the same page.

Five Reasons It's Good to Be an Oakland A's Fan Right Now

By Doug Brockwell, Yahoo! Contributor Network

Well, the Oakland Athletics finished up another ho hum campaign during the 2011 season, ending with a record of 74-88, 22 games behind the AL West pennant champs, the Texas Rangers. Dumpy season aside, there are still plenty of things to be thankful for when it comes to our beloved Oakland A's. Before you turn all doom and gloom about those paupers from the east bay, consider the following:

1. Jemile Weeks - Batting .300 with 22 stolen bases in just 400 at bats? That's the kind of production that the typically offensively inept A's should swoon over. Weeks is a bona fide table setter. He's just 24, and had not been called up prior to the 2011 season. He's still a work in progress, striking out about three times as often as he walks. But Weeks is the kind of offensive talent that A's fans have been hungry for. Now if they could only put some serious power behind him in the batting order, maybe we won't have to suffer quite so many 2-1 games.

2. Gio Gonzalez - Trevor Cahill(notes) stole the spotlight in 2010, but 2011 belonged to Gonzalez. Gio is a 20 win pitcher if you put him on a team like the Yankees or Texas, and other GMs around the league know that. His name has been tossed around heavily during the winter meetings, and rumor has it that they'll trade him if they can't get a stadium deal done soon. But even if Gonzalez is traded (and I'm hoping he isn't), he'll return top flight prospects in any deal.

3. There's movement on the relocation front - Of course, if you're an Oakland resident this is kind of bittersweet news. Personally I'd rather see a competitive San Jose Athletics than a bankrupt Oakland squad, or worse yet, see the franchise flee to some place outside norcal altogether. A few weeks ago, the San Jose City Council approved a land option for the A's to purchase some real estate down in San Jose that they could use for a new stadium. Sure, it's minimal progress, and a lot depends on whether the MLB wants to get behind the deal, but at least it represents some forward movement.

4. There's a new labor agreement - It's hard to cheer for the A's if there's another work stoppage. Hey, that's something isn't it? More specifically, the new labor deal allows the A's to receive revenue sharing through 2016 if the stadium deal remains in limbo. That will help stabilize things if it takes an economic rebound to get a new stadium approved, be it in Oakland, Fremont, or San Jose.

5. The Giants imploded - When life's got you down, there's always schadenfreude. The epic collapse of our bay bridge rival was perhaps the sweetest highlight of the 2011 season. And to the Diamondbacks, of all teams? Call me petty and spiteful, but I had enough of the manufactured personalities on the Giants some time in mid 2010. Shave the beard, drop the act, and play baseball.

Oakland A's negotiating to move their spring training home to Mesa

San Jose Mercury News staff and wire report

Even if they're not on their way to San Jose in 2015, it appears the A's will still be moving into a new home by then.

The A's, who have made Phoenix their spring training home since 1982, have entered into exclusive negotiations to move their spring training and year-round minor league operations to Mesa, Ariz. The exclusivity of negotiations between the A's and Mesa lasts through May 15, 2012.

Mesa's Hohokam Park and Fitch Park are currently home to the Chicago Cubs, but the Cubs will move to a new complex in Mesa's Riverview area in 2014.

The A's contractual agreement with Phoenix ends after the 2014 season.

A move to Mesa would be a homecoming for the A's, whose spring training home was at Hohokam Park from 1969-1978. The A's moved to Scottsdale in 1979 and stayed three years before moving to Phoenix.

During this exclusive period for the A's and Mesa, both parties will negotiate only with each other without any other third party contact. The negotiating window can be extended by mutual agreement and the approval of the Mesa City Council.

Chin Music: A's negotiating to move spring training home from Phoenix to Mesa

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 11/28/2011

There is talk of an A's move ... and it has nothing to do with Oakland or San Jose.

The team announced Monday morning that it will begin an exclusive negotiating agreement with the city of Mesa, AZ, to possibly move its spring training home there from Phoenix. The negotiating period runs through May 15, 2012 but can be extended through mutual agreement and approval by the Mesa City Council. The A's current contract with Phoenix ends after the 2014 season. It's unclear if they could wiggle out of that contract early, or if they would even want to. The team plans to make no further comment beyond Monday's press release.

The A's would play their games at Hohokam Park and train at Fitch Park — currently used by the Chicago Cubs — were they to move to Mesa. There's been talk in the past about the Cubs moving their spring training home to Florida, but as of now, there's no indication of how a potential A's move to Mesa would affect the Cubs.

A's officials have talked about the need to improve the facilities both at Phoenix Municipal Stadium — where they play their spring games — and at Papago Park, where they hold some workouts and house their minor league operations. Phoenix Muni holds just 8,775 fans, the second-smallest in the Cactus League, and is the oldest Cactus League ballpark still used. It was built in 1964. Hohokam Park has a capacity of 12,500.

In all honesty, Phoenix Muni is beginning to look antique compared to the new stadiums that have sprouted up around the Cactus League. But I'd hate to see the A's leave that park. It's very small and offers one of the best fan experiences as far as being close to the action and seeing players up close. Plus, there's a terrific view of the Papago Park mountain range over the left field fence. No stadium has more of a "desert feel" to it than Phoenix Muni.

**Second baseman Jemile Weeks and pitcher Tyson Ross will make an appearance at the Alameda County Food Bank on Wednesday at 2 p.m. as part of a food and fund drive. The first 150 people to bring a minimum of 10 non-perishable food items or donate \$20 cash will receive an autographed photo.

That's all for now ...

A's negotiating to move spring facilities to Mesa

Current agreement with Phoenix expires in 2014

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

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