

A's News Clips, Monday, December 5, 2011

Winter meetings could kick off Oakland A's latest rebuilding phase

Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

When the A's arrive in Dallas on Monday for the start of Major League Baseball's annual winter meetings, there will be much anticipation surrounding which cornerstone players they might deal.

General manager Billy Beane is beginning another rebuilding phase, and it's been widely reported that he's discussed trades involving two-time All-Star closer Andrew Bailey and left-handed starter Gio Gonzalez, the team's lone All-Star in 2011.

"I think we're definitely going to be open-minded," Beane said. "We're going to be somewhat all ears. I don't think we've made a commitment to (trading veterans), but I think we have to be open-minded on anything."

He wouldn't confirm whether he's willing to part with Gonzalez or Bailey, but his refusal to deny it speaks volumes.

With the A's anticipating word from baseball commissioner Bud Selig on whether they can build a new ballpark in San Jose -- speculation is that a decision could come in January -- Beane's plan is to restock with young players, thinking they would be ready to flourish once a new ballpark is opened, whenever that may be.

"That's the word on the street, that the A's are going to go young and maybe add to the minor league system as well as add at the major league level -- go young and (cost) controllable," said one major league scout who requested anonymity.

A's fans are familiar with this storyline.

Following the 2007 season, Oakland dealt All-Star pitcher Dan Haren and fan-favorite first baseman/outfielder Nick Swisher, netting the A's nine prospects. Trades of veteran pitchers Rich Harden and Joe Blanton followed, bringing more prospects.

Among the players obtained in those trades were Gonzalez, a top-of-the-rotation starter; Ryan Sweeney, a serviceable outfielder; and Fautino De Los Santos, a hard-throwing reliever who projects as a potential closer.

Other prospects obtained have yet to bring a return.

First baseman Chris Carter has a .167 batting average with 41 strikeouts in 39 major league games.

Outfielder Carlos Gonzalez was included in a November 2008 trade with Colorado that brought Matt Holliday to Oakland. Gonzalez has since won a batting title with the Rockies.

The A's dealt Holliday to St. Louis in July 2009 for a package that included first baseman Brett Wallace, who was eventually flipped for outfielder Michael Taylor.

Taylor, like Carter, has yet to become the impact hitter the A's envisioned.

The jury remains out on left-hander Brett Anderson -- received in the Haren trade -- who has made just 62 starts in three seasons because of elbow problems. Anderson is recovering from Tommy John surgery and figures to miss much of 2012.

Pulling the trigger on a deal is one thing. Scoring with the players you get is another.

"When you're trading or drafting for younger players, there's going to be certain attrition," Beane said, "some through injuries, or some guys who don't develop how you hope they would. That's why you see multiple young players come in exchange for one proven player."

Gonzalez, 26, and Bailey, 27, are attractive trade targets and could fetch hefty bounties. They have proven track records and are entering their first year of arbitration eligibility, so they'll be relatively affordable for the next few seasons.

Figure the A's to hang a particularly steep price on Gonzalez because the free agent starting pitching class is considered thin.

The Marlins are reportedly interested in Gonzalez, a Miami-area native who seems a natural fit for them. The Reds, Blue Jays, Rangers, Mariners, Red Sox, Mets and Padres have all been connected to Bailey.

Considering the A's might lose their entire starting outfield to free agency, the team might target major league-ready players as well as prospects.

"You would want to fill holes," said one scout requesting anonymity. "It could be a combination of guys that are ready and (ones that are) close."

But the same scout has reservations about the A's strategy to tear down and go young. Gonzalez and Bailey are still young themselves and could be seen as the type of players that Oakland would want to build around.

"Now you're depleting some of the core of that club," the scout said. "You're going to have to replace it, and sometimes that's not easy to do."

Chin Music: A's holding gift promotion throughout December

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 12/1/2011 11:25am

The A's are doing a "31 Gifts in 31 Days" promotion throughout December that you should check out. Each day on the team's twitter page (@athletics), one fan who responds to an 11 a.m. tweet will win a prize. Here's the calendar of prizes. I just received word on it this morning, and I realize the first prize has already been given away, so let's call it "30 Gifts in 30 Days."

Chin Music: Live chat: Oakland A's at winter meetings, Wednesday at 11:30 a.m.

Bay Area News Group, December 3, 2011 11:17am

Get the latest rumors and news about the A's at the winter meetings from beat writer Joe Stiglich during a live chat on Wednesday, Dec. 7 at 11:30 a.m.

Winter meetings could shape A's, Giants outfields

John Shea, Chronicle Columnist 12/3/2011

The Giants pledged no "big splash," and the A's put free-agent spending on hold because Major League Baseball continues to keep them on hold, 33 months into its supposed ballpark probe.

So how are these teams going to fill their outfields?

The A's have as many as three open spots, the Giants at least one. The winter meetings begin Monday in Dallas, and both teams hope to return home Thursday with better outfield depth or at least a good idea on how to attain it.

As it stands, **Melky Cabrera**, a Giant all of four weeks, is the only guy on either side of the Bay with a set job in 2012, whether it's in center or left. **Nate Schierholtz** is a decent choice for right, and a third outfielder could come through free agency, perhaps **Carlos Beltran**.

The A's have a different strategy: trades. **David DeJesus** is a Cub, and **Josh Willingham**, **Coco Crisp** and **Hideki Matsui** figure to go elsewhere, too. To replace them, the A's are open to moving any pitcher - including starter **Gio Gonzalez** and closer **Andrew Bailey**, both All-Stars - if it means improving the offense.

The A's are seeking young outfielders, preferably nobody close to free agency, as **Carlos Quentin**, **B.J. Upton** and **Nick Swisher** are. Asked if any of his pitchers are untouchable, A's assistant general manager **David Forst** said, "I wouldn't rule anybody out."

Fautino De Los Santos is a possible successor to Bailey, and the A's have several candidates for the rotation: **Trevor Cahill**, **Brett Anderson** (due back at midseason), **Dallas Braden** (due back in April), **Brandon McCarthy**, **Guillermo Moscoso**, **Josh Outman**, **Tyson Ross** and **Graham Godfrey**.

"Not too many teams can list seven or eight starting pitchers they feel confident with," said Forst, adding, "If we didn't have the depth, we wouldn't have this option."

The Giants already acquired an outfielder for a pitcher in the **Jonathan Sanchez**-for-Cabrera trade, and now the mind-set is to add another bat, whether it's an outfielder or a shortstop.

But as assistant GM **Bobby Evans** said, "We're looking for ways to improve our team's offense any way we can, but there might be more options out there among outfielders than infielders."

One could be Crisp, Oakland's center fielder the past two years.

"I think there's genuine interest," said Crisp's agent, **Steve Comte**, who is based in the Bay Area and figures to meet with the Giants among other teams during the meetings. "Covelli wins a lot of games with his defense. He's an outstanding center fielder, he gives you a top-of-the-order guy, hitting not only left-handed but right-handed, a proven speed burner, which (the Giants) haven't had for years, a phenomenal guy in the clubhouse, works extremely hard. I think he's a phenomenal fit."

Willingham would be a nice fit, too, playing left field and batting fifth behind **Pablo Sandoval** and **Buster Posey**, but the Giants might be hesitant knowing his average annual salary (\$12 million) could be similar to Rowand's.

Through it all, the Giants aren't dismissing the possibility of adding no one and simply re-signing **Andres Torres**, who's arbitration-eligible, or free agent **Cody Ross**. They could also stick one of their first basemen, **Brandon Belt** or **Aubrey Huff**, in left.

Other free-agent outfielders include **Michael Cuddyer**, **Jason Kubel**, **Johnny Damon** and **Nate McLouth**.

Lincecum dilemma: Does the Giants' stated plan to stay clear of free-agent heavyweight hitters weigh in **Tim Lincecum's** decision to eventually sign long term?

"I think everything is taken into consideration," said his agent, **Rick Thurman**. "There are a lot of things, and that's one component of it. It's not the end-all."

The Giants say they're not pursuing **Albert Pujols**, **Prince Fielder** or **Jose Reyes**, in part to preserve money to sign Lincecum and **Matt Cain** to multiyear deals, though Lincecum still prefers one year. Cain will be a free agent after next season and Lincecum after the 2013 season.

"Tim likes to prove himself," said Thurman, who needs to prepare for a February arbitration hearing as he did in 2009 when a two-year, \$23 million deal was finalized moments before the hearing was to begin. "Right now, we plan on a one-year deal for next year, and we really don't have any expectations about a long-term contract."

It's possible the Giants could meet with Thurman in Dallas.

"The immediate timetable requires we get a one-year deal done at least," Evans said, "but we have interest in and will continue to explore multiyear options."

Around the majors: All eyes will be on the Marlins, who are opening a new yard, signed closer **Heath Bell** for three years and \$27 million and are throwing funny money at Pujols and Reyes. ... Comte said it's a "misconception" that Crisp's mind is set on playing only on the West Coast. The Tigers apparently expressed interest. ... The Giants were linked to middle infielders **Clint Barmes** and **Willie Bloomquist** before they signed with the Pirates and Diamondbacks, respectively, and they also have had discussions with agents representing **Alex Gonzalez** and **Jerry Hairston Jr.** Other available shortstops include **Yuniesky Betancourt**, **Rafael Furcal** and **Jack Wilson**, but at some point the Giants must ask if a new guy would be better than **Brandon Crawford**. ... An obscure New York website said the Giants rejected the Yankees' offer for **Matt Cain**, which included catching prospect **Jesus Montero**. If the Giants ever trade Cain, we'll publish the name of the website. ... Oakland's payroll was in the \$66 million range, and Forst said it won't automatically drop: "There's no mandate to cut payroll from ownership. Again, we'll be flexible as opportunities rise."

Shuffling the pieces

The Giants and A's are in flux when it comes to the outfield. Here's a look at who's coming, going or already gone for each team:

Giants

Carlos Beltran: Free agent

Melky Cabrera: Newest Giant

Nate Schierholtz: Best bet for right

Cody Ross: Free agent

Andres Torres: Arbitration-eligible

Pat Burrell: Soon to be retired

Aubrey Huff: A first baseman

Brandon Belt: Has to earn it in left

Darren Ford: Now a Mariner

Gary Brown: Check back in 2013

Aaron Rowand: Gone, on payroll

A's

David DeJesus: Now a Cub

Josh Willingham: Free agent

Coco Crisp: Free agent

Hideki Matsui: Free agent

Ryan Sweeney: Most experience

Michael Taylor: 11 games in bigs

Chris Carter: Not his best spot

Jai Miller: 32 homers in Triple-A

Michael Choice: Tore it up in A-ball

Grant Green: Ex-SS prospect

Jermaine Mitchell: Knee rehab

Drumbeat: No pitcher untradeable for Athletics

By John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle 12/02/2011, 1:07pm

Look for the A's to be a popular team at the winter meetings, which begin Monday in Dallas. They've got pitching depth and need bats and are willing to cut deals if it means strengthening the lineup.

I hooked up today with assistant GM David Forst, and he confirmed the A's are trying to trade for hitters and are open to moving pitchers. I asked if anyone is untradeable. He said no.

"I wouldn't rule anybody out," Forst said.

We've already heard that starter Gio Gonzalez and closer Andrew Bailey could be moved. I asked specifically about Trevor Cahill.

"We're very open," said Forst, adding, "If we didn't have the (pitching) depth, we wouldn't have this option."

While Fautino De Los Santos is possible closing material if Bailey is dealt, any number of pitchers could assume jobs in the rotatio. Plus, Dallas Brade is due back at some point in April but seems to be gunning for the season-opening roster, and Brett Anderson is due back by midseason, if not before.

Other starters include Brandon McCarthy, Guillermo Moscoso, Josh Outman, Tyson Ross and Graham Godfrey.

"Not too many teams can list seven or eight starting pitchers they feel confident with," Forst said.

That's not to suggest the A's will have a quick trigger in Dallas. The return for Gonzalez or Bailey or . . . pick your pitcher figures to be significant. Gonzalez won 31 games the past two years, and Bailey is a two-time All-Star.

The A's need outfielders with David DeJesus signing for two years with the Cubs and Josh Willingham and Coco Crisp expected to go elsewhere. Trades are the preference over free agency for the A's, who are on record saying they won't heavily pursue free agents so long as Major League Baseball is undecided about their ballpark dilemma.

Beane could turn Meetings into trade show

A's GM ready to deal as MLB's executives convene in Dallas

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

DALLAS -- Baseball's annual Winter Meetings officially kick off Monday in the Lone Star State, where general managers, other front-office faces and agents will converge for four days.

A's GM Billy Beane will be around, and he's expected to be pretty popular, given his offseason declaration that essentially all of his roster -- namely his premier pitching staff -- is available.

Whether he chooses to take part in a trade this week remains to be seen, but fans can expect to stay in the know either way.

All MLB.com club reporters will be at the Hilton Anatole in Dallas through Thursday, when the meetings conclude. From now until then, A's readers can expect constant coverage -- think significant rumors, impending signings and any breaking news.

Beane is scheduled to hold court with local reporters in a round of informal sessions in his suite Monday and Tuesday night, and assistant general manager David Forst will take over those duties Wednesday and Thursday, as he's done in years past. Each night, readers will be offered a breakdown of these talks, as well as any other news that may arise.

In addition, manager Bob Melvin -- taking part in his first Winter Meetings as A's skipper -- is scheduled to greet media in a half-hour session on Monday evening, with a compilation of his thoughts on his club also to be available here.

All fans are encouraged to have at it in the comments section. Given the stadium situation, what do you think the A's should do moving forward in the offseason? And, if you were here, what questions and/or issues would you address during Beane's gatherings and Melvin's meetings with the media?

Let us know, and come back to find answers as the meetings unfold.

Finding a new outfield tops A's wish list

GM Beane most likely to part with pitching in any potential deals

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- As the A's prepare for the annual Winter Meetings in Dallas next week, they'll bring with them a wish list that looks distinctly different from those of their 29 counterparts.

At the top of that index is a new stadium, or -- at the very least -- word on whether they'll get one in San Jose, Calif., as desired. The issue affects the team's ability to obtain items on that list, including offensive upgrades, making the creation of the 2012 roster rather difficult.

But the needs and wants still stand. What follows is a glimpse at those as general manager Billy Beane and Co. gear up for what is sure to be a rumor-filled few days in the Lone Star State, where Oakland's front-office staff is expected to do more listening than pursuing.

Club needs:

Outfield: David DeJesus signed a two-year deal with the Cubs on Wednesday, and fellow free agents Josh Willingham and Coco Crisp aren't expected to be back in Oakland, either, seemingly making the outfield the club's biggest area of need. But with the A's lacking the ability to spend aggressively without a stadium decision -- never mind that they struggle to attract free agents -- don't expect Oakland to bring in any big names. The A's are looking to go young, so any additions will likely be of the prospect type via trade.

Corner infielders: Stability is wanted at first and third base, and the A's can't necessarily guarantee that with Scott Sizemore or any one of their current first-base options, which include Brandon Allen and Daric Barton. They've flirted with the notion of Chris Carter starting at first, but his below-average defensive skills and unproven offensive talent at the big league level have the team keeping its options open. Meanwhile, it appears top third-base prospect Stephen Parker is likely a year away from being Major League ready. Any upgrade, though -- like the outfield -- will likely be reeled in from a trade featuring the younger crowd.

Designated hitter: This remains a long-term area of concern for an A's team that again ranked near the bottom in the Majors in homers this year. There was once a strong belief that Hideki Matsui would again fill that role by re-signing with the A's, but that scenario no longer seems probable. Left with a big hole to fill, the club's hope has been that Carter would be ready to grab hold of the job by now, but the A's prospect has endured a disappointing start to his big league career.

Who they can or need to trade:

Pitching. Stockpiling pitching hasn't been a problem for the A's in recent years, so they may very well choose to take advantage of their plethora of hurlers by dealing one or two away to grab hold of prospects that would fit a three-year rebuild mode. Count on such a scenario if the A's get the OK for a new stadium. Two-time All-Star and former American League Rookie of the Year Andrew Bailey appears destined to be dealt, while fellow All-Star pitcher Gio Gonzalez will also draw heavy interest. It's also possible the A's could consider trading relievers Grant Balfour and Brian Fuentes to free some payroll, or even righty Brandon McCarthy.

Top prospects: Outfielders Carter, Michael Choice, Grant Green and Michael Taylor; infielders Parker and Yordy Cabrera; right-hander Sonny Gray

The A's are not in a position to start dealing away top prospects. These are the guys, rather, they will be counting on in the next couple of years to fill their starting lineup if given the green light for a new stadium. This list will not dwindle but, more likely than not, expand.

Big contracts they might unload: Trading Fuentes (\$5 million) or Balfour (\$4 million) is a possibility, but there truthfully aren't any "big" contracts of which to dispose. The only other A's player set to be making as much as \$5 million next year is Kurt Suzuki, who currently teams with Fuentes as the club's highest-paid players.

Arbitration-eligible: Bailey, Gonzalez, McCarthy, Dallas Braden, Craig Breslow, Ryan Sweeney, Barton, Joey Devine, Adam Rosales, Landon Powell

Non-tender candidates: Rosales, Powell

Payroll summation: The exact figure is far from determined, given the team's limbo status with the stadium situation. The A's carried around a \$67 million payroll in 2011, marking a \$15 million increase from the year before. But just five players are under contract for 2012, their total salaries accounting for less than \$22 million. And the club's 10 arbitration-eligible players likely won't combine for much more.

A's, Oakland Zoo team up for holiday party

Weeks, Ross assist in giving students unique experience

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Having traveled nearly 3,000 miles from his Orlando, Fla., home to Oakland this week, A's rookie sensation Jemile Weeks has handed out just as many smiles.

Just a day after making an appearance at the Alameda County Community Food Bank with right-hander Tyson Ross, Weeks again joined the A's pitcher to aide in the production of the ninth annual A's Community Fund holiday party at the Oakland Zoo on Thursday.

The organization hosted children in preschool through fifth grade from Burckhalter Elementary School in Oakland, lending them a break from class in the form of a zoo trip that featured player autographs and pictures, along with a wrapped gift courtesy of the Good Tidings Foundation.

In addition, the children were treated to an animal presentation in the Wildlife Theater, along with lunch provided by Round Table Pizza, visits by Santa and A's mascot Stomper, and face-painting and arts-and-crafts opportunities.

For Burckhalter principal Carin Geathers, the day served as an abundant treat for her kids, who earned the special field trip by way of good attendance, academics and citizenship. Nearly 185 were on hand, nearly representing the entire school.

"We were trying to clear out the whole school," Geathers said, laughing. "I don't know if the A's know the impact this has for some of our kids. A lot of the kids live in Oakland, and they've never had this kind of interaction with the A's.

"Especially in this economic downturn, a lot of these kids and their families haven't been afforded the chance to go to A's games or the zoo, so this is an opportunity to give them a little taste of both."

For Weeks, it was merely a simple gesture.

"It's great to see the kids happy, especially around this time of year," he said. "Helping out in the community, this is really important. We can make a strong impact on these kids, and especially the ones that are coming from inner cities, you want to make them remember happy environments like these so they'll want to come back to them."

Weeks, just 24, is still adjusting to his newly gained status as a big leaguer. Moments like Thursday, he said, make it all the more real -- more so, even, than the first-class charter flights and five-star hotels.

"This is when it really sinks in," he said. "You really begin realizing the impact you're having on people."

Likewise for Ross, an Oakland native who has taken part in the holiday party for three straight years.

"It's just a great day for the kids to get out of school and be treated to all this," the pitcher said. "It's a great opportunity for us to brighten their day."

Said Geathers: "Those commercials where they say it's priceless, this is priceless."

Big deals could go down at winter meetings this week

By Bob Nightengale, USA TODAY

DALLAS — They strolled into the Hilton Anatole Hotel Sunday with stacks of scouting reports, analytical studies, marketing portfolios and, of course, checkbooks. The annual winter meetings start Monday, and while there have been no major trades or marquee signings since the St. Louis Cardinals won the World Series, the fate of 30 teams can swiftly change when hundreds of baseball executives are under one roof this week. Here are the five things to keep an eye on this week:

Miami Marlins: They agreed to a six-year, \$106 million contract with Jose Reyes on Sunday night, according to two people familiar with the negotiations, and may not stop there. They are also looking for a starting pitcher as they gear up for the opening of a new stadium.

Albert Pujols and Prince Fielder: They are the two prodigious power hitters on the market. Everyone can use them but precious few can afford them, or have a vacancy to plug in a \$200 million first baseman. Fielder is younger at 27, but Pujols, 31, is considered better with his three MVP awards and two World Series titles.

The St. Louis Cardinals badly want to re-sign Pujols but haven't negotiated since their nine-year offer for about \$195 million in February. The Florida Marlins also have made a nine-year offer, and the Chicago Cubs say they'll weigh in with an offer.

The Milwaukee Brewers want to re-sign Fielder, but they may not be able to offer as much as teams such as Washington, Seattle or Toronto.

Chicago White Sox GM Kenny Williams: No one loves to wheel and deal more than Williams, and he has some interesting pieces to move.

Front-line starter John Danks and power-hitting left fielder Carlos Quentin are drawing plenty of interest, enough to compel Williams to move them.

The Nationals, who could be ready for a wild-card bid, are interested. The Texas Rangers, trying to win their third consecutive American League pennant, are listening. The Marlins are ready for a splash.

C.J. Wilson and Mark Buehrle: They are the premier free-agent starters, while Chicago Cubs ace Matt Garza could be available in a trade.

Wilson wants to cash in with a big deal, perhaps for as much as \$100 million, and Buehrle is seeking a three-year deal. Both will probably not get it from their 2011 team, the Rangers and White Sox.

Buehrle has at least 10 teams interested, and he may wind up trying to decide between Florida and Washington.

Wilson would love to pitch for the Yankees, but the Los Angeles Angels are showing heavy interest.

Oakland A's GM Billy Beane: The man is frustrated after an 88-loss season and unclear future.

"In my younger age," Beane says, "I would have maybe overturned a desk."

The A's have been in limbo for nearly three years, awaiting Major League Baseball to hammer out a deal with the San Francisco Giants over territorial rights that would enable Beane's team to build a new stadium in San Jose. In the meantime, the GM is open to any and all deals, even for his young talented pitchers.

Closer Andrew Bailey is drawing tremendous interest, with the Rangers, Mariners Boston Red Sox and San Diego Padres in the mix. Beane has also let teams know that 16-game winner Gio Gonzalez is available.

Could A's talks be 'Mesaball'?

By **Mark Scarp**, East Valley Tribune, 12/4/2011

Now, I haven't asked him, partly because Billy Beane isn't likely to be one to publicly reveal his tactics anyway. But the general manager of the Oakland Athletics may well be applying some "Moneyball" strategy as the A's mull moving spring training baseball operations from Phoenix Municipal Stadium to Mesa's Hohokam Stadium.

For those of you who neither saw the movie - few men, and I'm certainly not one of them, can say that Brad Pitt portrayed them - nor read the Michael Lewis book on which it is based, Beane is known for defying conventional wisdom and coming up a winner.

You and I may look at Hohokam as not exactly a better trade for Phoenix Muni. Yes, Hohokam is bigger and newer (it was completely razed and rebuilt in 1996-97). But it's also surrounded by residential neighborhoods.

This means that before and after the game, fans are spending their money in places that are not in Mesa and are not giving the team a cut.

But hidden value is, of course, the theme of the movie: Beane, who loses his roster's stars to free agency, starts picking up players for reasons their teams' managements don't see. I won't give away any more other than to say these players each have hidden talents that can be aggregated in just the right way.

According to his biography on Major League Baseball's website, "Beane remains in great demand on the national speaking circuit, where he regularly addresses top companies on his management approach of identifying and using undervalued assets to create and sustain a competitive edge."

Which brings us to Phoenix versus Mesa.

After more than 30 years at Hohokam the Cubs certainly have every right to be counting the days until their 2014 move to a new west Mesa ballpark, training grounds and surrounding mixed-use facilities known as Wrigleyville West.

After being told by city officials that this would put the words "Mesa" and "destination" in the same sentence for tens of thousands of visitors, local voters approved the public financing package.

It's the way of all sports today. That is, the sport itself is merely first among equals. Those equals are sport, retail, restaurants, entertainment-that-is-not-sport ... and a hotel. Add in varying degrees of public dollars, and voila! (Home park name here) ville West.

The likely progenitor of this theory is the Walt Disney theme park. Walt waved a wand at Anaheim, and suddenly there appeared all the stuff in the previous paragraph. And if the Angels weren't already in a baseball stadium that in Los Angeles terms is right around the corner, there'd be a stadium bordering the same parking lot as Main Street USA.

To the Cubs' management - and I'm sure they saw "Moneyball" and likely read the book as well - Hohokam, and the practice fields at nearby Fitch Park, likely do not constitute this style of venue. Which is why they pine for the new Wrigleyville West.

But not everyone wants to turn a baseball park into, well, Disneyland.

As the Tribune's Garin Groff reported: Talks between the A's and Phoenix over improvements to Muni have stalled and Mesa officials - caught off guard as they were expecting a team now training in Florida - are looking to put a permanent tenant at Hohokam.

You don't have to be a baseball genius to recognize a squeeze play. Phoenix and the A's aren't playing ball and Mesa is a convenient possible alternative for the team to flirt with. And Phoenix's new mayor, Greg Stanton, might prefer that his first year in office not be marked by his city's longest-serving spring baseball tenant leaving town.

To be sure, neither Muni nor Hohokam will ever have the high-end retail or restaurants within walking distance that has made Scottsdale Stadium the tourists' park of choice. Then again, that's why Scottsdale remains home to the San Francisco Giants.

It's just as well. Scottsdale appeals to the eclectic San Francisco crowd (around whom one must never utter the words, "Rice-A-Roni"). North-of-downtown Mesa is more of an Oakland kind of place just like it has been a North Side of Chicago kind: Middle class, hard-working, hard-nosed, no frills. Think Raiders fans.

In the film, Beane is shown longing to compete on the same level as the more well off franchises toward ultimately winning the World Series. It's not clear whether moving spring training to Mesa or keeping it in Phoenix will help him accomplish those goals. But it might get him more seats and better spring training facilities wherever the A's end up.

Then, all Beane needs to do is sign up some more of those players with hidden talents.

Suit seeks to block A's San Jose ballpark land deal

Cromwell Schubarth, Silicon Valley / San Jose Business Journal

A lawsuit was filed on Friday that seeks to block the sale of land by San Jose to the **Oakland Athletics** for a **Major League Baseball** park.

The suit targets a City Council vote to sell five acres of land near the Diridon train station. The Nov. 8 vote approved a two-year, \$50,000 option for the A's to buy the land near HP Pavilion for \$6.98 million.

A group that calls itself "Stand for San Jose" and a woman named Eileen Hannan filed the suit in Santa Clara County Superior Court. Among the members of the group in the **San Francisco Giants** minor league team in San Jose.

The Giants have long opposed the A's move to San Jose, saying that it violates an agreement the team has with Major League Baseball. A study group appointed by the commissioner of baseball has been exploring the matter for more than two years without a resolution.

The lawsuit charges that the City Council violated state and San Jose law in a way that would cost taxpayers millions of dollars. The group claims the true value of the land is about \$14 million.

A's could help Mesa fill park

The Arizona Republic 12/4/2011

Were it possible, Mesa would rather snag a Major League Baseball team that trains in Florida rather than another Cactus League team to fill Hohokam Stadium.

Doing so would bring Arizona's spring-training line-up to 16 teams, funneling even more tourism revenue to the state. The even number of teams would make it easier to schedule spring-training games, because one team wouldn't always have to sit out.

And, most importantly, it wouldn't leave a glaring hole at another Cactus League stadium that may or may not be filled.

But that's not in the cards, at least not for now. Mesa is now exclusively negotiating with the Oakland Athletics, which have practiced in Phoenix for 30 years, to use Hohokam Stadium and Fitch Park.

The Chicago Cubs' larger stadium in Mesa should be finished in time for the 2014 spring-training season. But the five teams most likely to move from Florida -- the Houston Astros, Minnesota Twins, Washington Nationals, Toronto Blue Jays and St. Louis Cardinals -- are stuck in leases for the next four to eight seasons.

Breaking those agreements early hasn't historically been done and could be prohibitively costly for teams. So though Mesa has received interest from Florida teams, Hohokam would likely collect dust for years until a deal could be completed.

Meanwhile, the A's are eager to negotiate now. The team's lease at Phoenix Municipal Stadium is up in 2014, and though the team has said it wants to stay in the Valley, neither Phoenix nor the Cactus League have enough money to fulfill its wish list.

It remains to be seen whether snagging the A's is in Mesa's best interest. Unlike the Cubs, the team is not a tourism powerhouse. Last year, its attendance was the fifth-worst in the Cactus League.

It's doubtful that Florida's Grapefruit League would pony up big bucks to woo the team if a deal with Mesa fell through.

It's important to note that the A's approached Mesa, not the other way around, and that before the city agreed to meet with the team, it insisted on talking to Phoenix first.

Mayor Scott Smith knows how important it is to avoid the appearance that his city is stealing the team from Phoenix. After all, he has spent his tenure as mayor arguing the opposite -- that outdoing our neighbors for something of mutual benefit is costly and counterproductive.

Smith told *The Republic* in October that he hoped Phoenix would find a way to take care of its two teams, the A's and Milwaukee Brewers. But, he said, officials there may be more interested in spending limited funds on boosting the downtown conference center and related tourism.

If Phoenix is keen on letting the A's go, and Mesa can fill what otherwise would be a mothballed stadium without any appreciable cost to taxpayers, that's a win-win. It may be cheaper than renovating Phoenix Muni or building a new facility elsewhere, which would help the cash-strapped Cactus League.

But if not, it's no big loss. Mesa can simply resume discussions with Florida teams in May.

Big deals at winter meetings in Big D?

By Jayson Stark, ESPN.com

DALLAS -- It's never just another week on the baseball calendar when the winter meetings pass through Dallas. And y'all can look that up.

It was here, in 2000, that Alex Rodriguez became the first \$252 million man in history. It was here, that very same week, that the Red Sox began their beautiful relationship with the Artist Formerly Known as Manny Ramirez.

It was on a visit to Dallas that the Rockies thought that showering Mike Hampton with \$121 million would be an excellent idea. And wouldn't you know that five years later, it was right back in exactly this same spot that the Blue Jays had the same thought about bestowing \$55 million on A.J. Burnett AND \$47 million on B.J. Ryan.

So who knows what's coming this week, deep in the heart of the sprawling, ornate Hilton Anatole hotel? Can Albert Pujols and Prince Fielder possibly out-earn A-Rod and Manny? Will C.J. Wilson or Mark Buehrle be this year's Mike Hampton or A.J. Burnett?

Can Jose Reyes sprint from Queens to Miami, via the Metroplex, this week without popping a hamstring? Is a six-team deal involving Matt Garza, Gio Gonzalez, Wandy Rodriguez, John Danks, Jair Jurrjens and James Shields out of the question?

Hey, you never know. But you can bet some sort of craziness is in store. So let's take a look ahead at what we might see at the latest, greatest Dallas edition of the winter meetings:

Will the big boys sign?

We're a month into free agency, but you'd never know it. Not one of Keith Law's top 17 free agents has signed on anyone's dotted line. But clearly, that's about to change -- possibly any minute. So we now present the results of our annual What Day Will They Sign survey of 14 prominent executives and agents:

SIGNING DAY?

Player	Earliest date	Latest date	Avg. date
Albert Pujols	Dec. 15	Jan. 15	Dec. 27
Prince Fielder	Dec. 7	Feb. 5*	Dec. 31
Jose Reyes	Dec. 6	Jan. 10	Dec. 18
C.J. Wilson	Dec. 5	Jan. 5	Dec. 14
Mark Buehrle	Dec. 7	Dec. 23	Dec. 15

First off, what's that asterisk doing there next to that Prince Fielder prediction? Glad you asked. One GM forecast, mostly (but not completely) tongue-in-cheek, that Prince would sign "on Super Bowl Sunday -- probably at halftime." So there's an asterisk there because that date alone doesn't tell the whole story. And we're all about the big picture here.

That date also doesn't tell us WHERE Fielder is going to sign, just that many people think he and Scott Boras are going to have a lonnnngggg wait ahead of them if they're intent on nailing that eight-year, \$200 million bonanza they've been looking for.

"I think Scott might be in trouble on this one," said one GM. "I know he always pulls a rabbit out of his hat, but I don't see a great fit at that money."

We heard predictions about Fielder ending up in Seattle, Washington and the North Side of Chicago. But if the sticker price drops enough, it's no longer insane to think there's a chance Fielder lands back in Milwaukee. And who thought that was remotely possible a month ago?

Pujols, on the other hand, seems more likely than ever to head back to St. Louis. Not one person we surveyed predicted otherwise, although an official of one club did say: "Sometimes, I get the feeling the Cardinals are hoping that some team out of their division will make an offer big enough that they will be able to justify not bringing him back."

Could be. But who is that team? That's the question. The Marlins may have offered Pujols nine years, but not at enough dollars to inspire Pujols to say yes or the Cardinals to cut the cord. And that Marlins offer could also disappear in the snap of Jeffrey Loria's fingers if the Fish can get Reyes signed.

After all, no matter how intrigued the Marlins may be by Pujols, it's clear they've had their checkbooks trained on Reyes from literally the minute the free-agent negotiating period began Nov. 3. And their hope, said one source who has spoken with them throughout the process, was to "get it done quick."

So after waiting three weeks for a response to their original offer, the Marlins appeared to be making a major push in recent days either to finish this deal or move on -- possibly to Aramis Ramirez, maybe to Pujols, potentially to Cuban phenom Yoenis Cespedes, or to some combination thereof.

Reyes does have other options, starting with the Brewers if they don't sign Fielder and the Cardinals if they don't sign Pujols. And the Mets have never completely signed off, as long as Reyes is willing to take a shorter deal. But EVERYONE in baseball who picked a team for Reyes predicted he'd be a Marlin. So that should tell you something.

We also had a flurry of prognostications that Wilson will wind up an Angel. ("He's an unbelievable fit for them," said one GM.) But Buehrle is on so many teams' radar screens, projections for him were all over the map. One team to watch, though, is the Nationals, who have made him their No. 1 rotation target, sources say.

So you'll be hearing those five names pretty much nonstop over the next few days. But who's the best bet among that group to hold a news conference at these meetings? The folks we surveyed think that's Wilson. Which probably means he won't sign until Groundhog Day.

Most likely to get traded this week

Adrian Gonzalez got traded at last year's winter meetings. So did Shaun Marcum, J.J. Hardy, Mark Reynolds and Jason Bartlett (although technicalities held up the announcement of that deal for more than a week). Well, it wouldn't shock anyone if we see at least as much action this week. And that would be fine for all of us professional rumor-chasers.

But when we asked the folks in our poll to name the player they thought was most likely to get traded at these winter meetings, we got 10 different names, from Martin Prado and Carlos Quentin to Maicer Izturis and Ben Francisco. The name we heard most, however, was an A's pitcher who isn't named Gio Gonzalez or Trevor Cahill.

That would be Oakland's soon-to-be-former closer, Andrew Bailey, a guy this team wouldn't be unloading if these were normal times in the life of this franchise.

But since the A's have no idea whether their future playing field will be located in Oakland, San Jose, Billy Beane's backyard or Amsterdam, they're retooling. Yeah, again. It's what they do best -- or frequently, at any rate.

Beane is also dangling Gonzalez, Cahill and virtually every other name on his roster. But indications are that Bailey has the best chance of calling a moving van this week.

He's young (27). He's a low-budget alternative to Ryan Madson, Francisco Cordero, Francisco Rodriguez and the free-agent closer brigade. And despite some forearm issues and slight regression in his performance, Bailey is still an effective, strike-throwing, swing-and-miss bullpen force with a better career strikeout-walk ratio (3.55) than Madson, Heath Bell or Joe Nathan.

Among the teams interested: the Blue Jays, Red Sox, Rangers, Padres, Mets and Reds. We'd bet he'll be working for one of them by the end of the month, if not the end of the week.

The Human Trade Rumor Award

This is another one of the fun categories in our annual survey. And just so you understand the distinction between a Human Trade Rumor and the winner of our Most Likely to Get Traded competition, there IS an important difference.

Some guys show up in Rumor Central because they're really about to get dealt. But others make the old rumor circuit because their team is dangling them, or at least listening. So we spend winter meetings week talking about them nonstop, especially if they're world famous enough, even though most of them never go anywhere.

Normally, there's some sort of consensus on the most likely Human Trade Rumor. But this year, five players got significant support. Here they come:

- **Matt Garza:** Theo Epstein and Jed Hoyer view the Cubs as a long-term urban-renewal project. So they'll be listening on just about everybody. But Garza's name is out there heavily. There's no doubt about that. The doubt centers around whether he winds up moving, considering the hefty price tag. "I'll be shocked if Theo trades him," said one exec. "Let's just say he wants a lot for him. So because of that, because of what he's asking, I don't think he really wants to trade him."
- **Gio Gonzalez:** There's that name again. We've already covered why the A's would even think of dealing a 26-year-old, 200-inning strikeout machine. But Gonzalez is another guy whose early asking price is so steep, it's hard to envision any team meeting it. We've heard rumblings the A's asked the Marlins for Mike Stanton, for instance. Another club's exec said the price was two young players it viewed as future stars, plus a third young player. Yet another exec said it would take "a haul" to pull this off. Gonzalez is arbitration-eligible, but he's also four years from free agency. "So they can just sit back and be patient," said one exec. "They don't have to move him."
- **John Danks:** It's even tough for Kenny Williams' fellow GMs to get a good feel for what he's really up to. But one of them says the White Sox are sending out the vibe they're "looking to dump guys making \$6-9 million." So that means Gavin Floyd and Carlos Quentin are also in this mix, both because they fit inside those price points and because, like Danks, they're a year away from free agency. But Williams has been especially active in trying to shop Danks, whose numbers slipped across the board this season. So far, though, the asking price has been "ridiculous," said an official of one club that checked in. The Yankees, for example, have told other clubs they were asked for both Jesus Montero and their top pitching prospect, Manny Banuelos. And that price will need to drop if the White Sox sincerely want to move this fellow.
- **James Shields:** Just about everyone we surveyed was skeptical that Tampa Bay really intends to trade this guy after a breakthrough year -- especially at a time when the Rays clearly believe they're positioned to make it back to the postseason. So if they trade any starting pitcher, it's more likely to be Jeff Niemann, Wade Davis or Alex Cobb. But for what it's worth, the Rays have never stopped telling teams they'll listen on Shields. So as one GM put it, "I think there will be a lot of James Shields talk out there this week."
- **Joey Votto:** We're not sure how many times the Reds can say they're not interested in dealing their best player before other teams will stop talking about it. But apparently, we're not there yet. So we guess Votto qualifies as a Human Trade Rumor, even though there's still no sign the Reds want to trade him -- not this week, not any week in the near future. But that won't keep other clubs from seeing a team that probably can't sign Votto long term in two years and has an in-house replacement in Yonder Alonso who is ready to play (or at least hit) in the big leagues right now. So if they insist on dialing Walt Jocketty's cell phone, we'll have no choice but to keep firing Votto's name out there.

Others who got votes: Jurrjens, Prado, Quentin, B.J. Upton.

Other storylines to watch this week

- **Other free agents:** We also asked our panelists which free agent they thought was most likely to sign this week. Wilson won that poll going away. But all these men also received votes: Michael Cuddyer, Matt Capps, Coco Crisp, Jimmy Rollins and Jerry Hairston Jr.
- **Team to watch:** The Marlins were easy choices in this category, with folks forecasting they'll make two significant moves this week -- assuming Heath Bell still qualifies as one of them. (His signing isn't official yet, so why not?) The only other club that got multiple votes: The Nationals, who are aggressively chasing starting pitching (Buehrle?) and a center fielder (Cespedes?), and keep getting linked to Fielder despite denials from Nationals execs that they're actively involved.
- **Yoenis-mania:** Speaking of Cespedes, clubs monitoring the status of this dazzling 26-year-old Cuban mega-talent believe there's a realistic chance he could be declared a free agent (by establishing official residence in the Dominican Republic) before the end of the meetings. Then the bidding could get wild and crazy for a guy widely agreed to be the most tool-laden young Cuban position player ever to defect. The Yankees, Red Sox, Phillies, Cubs, Tigers, Nationals and Marlins head the list of clubs showing legit interest.
- **Help wanted:** Finally, nobody we've asked can remember a team that arrived at the winter meetings looking for a general manager. But the Astros are making all sorts of strange history these days. So they'll spend the week interviewing candidates AND listening to offers on guys such as Wandy Rodriguez, Carlos Lee and Brett Myers. Which creates the surreal prospect of Rockies assistant GM Bill Geivett stopping by the Astros' suite one day to work on trading FOR Rodriguez, then showing up again the next day to interview for a job that would empower him to trade AWAY Rodriguez. Are these bizarre times in Houston, or what?

Parade of possibilities at the winter meetings

Nick Cafardo, Boston Globe 12/4/2011

You can shop for the groceries anytime, anywhere, really, but there is no place like the winter meetings, which begin tomorrow in Dallas with plenty of shopping options under one roof.

Some winter meetings are more productive than others, and while there has been movement on the free agent front already - the big deal for **Jonathan Papelbon** in Philadelphia heads the list - the futures of **Prince Fielder**, **Albert Pujols**, **Jose Reyes**, and **C.J. Wilson** have not been decided.

By the end of business Thursday, we may have a clearer picture as to where the big names wind up.

Here's a team-by-team look at what could happen:

AL East

NEW YORK - The Yankees have secured **Freddy Garcia** as a fourth or fifth starter and may pursue Wilson or **Mark Buehrle**. They also could be intrigued by the White Sox duo of **Gavin Floyd** and **John Danks**. They will seek a lefthander reliever.

TAMPA BAY - **B.J. Upton** rumors are sure to crop up, but for the most part, the Rays will be seeking offense, and they could give up their surplus pitching, preferably **Wade Davis** or **Jeff Niemann**. Don't look for them to deal **James Shields**, but if there's a major bat coming back, who knows? The Rays solved part of their catching problem by inking **Jose Molina**. They will be looking for low-cost relievers and will need to make a decision on **Johnny Damon** returning as DH.

BOSTON - With **Heath Bell** and **Jonathan Broxton** off the market, will the Sox consider **Ryan Madson** to be their closer? Lots of talk about Oakland closer **Andrew Bailey** to the Red Sox. Will general manager **Ben Cherington** go with **Daniel Bard** in the rotation or make him the closer? **Michael Cuddyer** and **Carlos Beltran** remain good right-field options, with **Andre Ethier**, in a trade with the Dodgers, the long shot. They could use **Jed Lowrie** and **Josh Reddick** as trade bait. In a bigger deal, would the Sox part with **Kevin Youkilis**?

TORONTO - The up-and-coming Blue Jays are still looking for a closer after falling short on Bell. Madson could be a possibility. They have money to spend. While they have committed to **Edwin Encarnacion** for now, the DH spot remains fluid. They could use power at first base. Could they emerge as players for Fielder? Like about 80 percent of teams, they need starting pitching. Don't be shocked if they field offers for **Kyle Drabek**.

BALTIMORE - **Dan Duquette** has already acquired catcher **Taylor Teagarden** to back up **Matt Wieters**. He is in need of a DH, and the flirtation with **David Ortiz** could be something to watch. Duquette has a good center-right combo in **Adam Jones** and **Nick Markakis**, but he may add a power bat in left field. Second base is always an issue with **Brian Roberts's** health in question, so look for an infield acquisition. Payroll needs to be in the mid 90 millions, but owner **Peter Angelos** could always sign off on Fielder. Veteran righthander **Jeremy Guthrie** seems perpetual trade bait. They could also make lefthander **Brian Matusz** available. Duquette needs to fix the 4.89 team ERA, worst in the AL.

AL Central

DETROIT - A very good team that probably needs one more impact starting pitcher (Buehrle would be perfect) and perhaps an upgrade at third base, where **Aramis Ramirez** might fit. It all depends on how much owner **Mike Ilitch** can extend his payroll, and he usually can. The Tigers could also use back-end rotation and bullpen help.

CLEVELAND - The Tribe already has struck by acquiring veteran righty **Derek Lowe**, who can only help **Justin Masterson**, and re-signing **Grady Sizemore**. It doesn't appear the Indians will do much positionally, but they could add another veteran starting pitcher.

CHICAGO - GM **Kenny Williams** is willing to deal, and he has attractive players to offer. Danks and Floyd head the list, which also includes right fielder **Carlos Quentin** and lefty reliever **Matt Thornton**. Williams is willing to rebuild his farm system and has the chips. The Yankees, Red Sox, Blue Jays, and Orioles, among others, could have interest in his pitching.

KANSAS CITY - The Royals traded outfielder **Melky Cabrera** to the Giants for lefty starter **Jonathan Sanchez** and signed Broxton to a one-year deal. They will use rookie **Lorenzo Cain** (.312 in Triple A) in center to replace Cabrera, and would like to enhance the rotation further, even with the acquisition of Sanchez and the re-signing of lefty **Bruce Chen**. With Broxton on board, they could deal closer **Joakim Soria**, especially with his \$8 million option for next season. The Red Sox would have to be interested.

MINNESOTA - The Twins are motivated to reward their fan base (they drew 3.2 million last season) after a 99-loss campaign. They could be interesting trade partners. They need to replace closer **Joe Nathan**, who fled to Texas, and make decisions on free agents Cuddyer and **Jason Kubel**, both of whom they'd like back. **Carl Pavano** is their only workhorse, so they need another dependable guy to pitch every fifth day. Lefty **Francisco Liriano** could probably be had in the right package. They signed catcher **Ryan Doumit** as a backup plan for **Joe Mauer** and a jack-of-all-trades. Outfielder **Denard Span** could be trade bait if he brings back pitching. The bullpen also needs bodies.

AL West

TEXAS - GM **Jon Daniels**, like Arizona's **Kevin Towers**, is a bullpen builder. He bought Nathan and will convert closer **Neftali Feliz** to a starter to make up for the loss of Wilson. Nathan's velocity was lower when he returned from Tommy John surgery, but the expectation is that it will return. Don't ever count the Rangers out of anything, because they have a lot of chips in their farm system to deal and the resources to make a free agent splash with someone like Fielder.

LOS ANGELES - New GM **Jerry Dipoto** likes to deal. He has already acquired Rockies catcher **Chris Iannetta** for pitcher **Tyler Chatwood**. Yesterday he sent **Jeff Mathis**, a superb defensive catcher, to Toronto for lefty **Brad Mills**.

OAKLAND - Like Williams in Chicago, **Billy Beane** is open for business. The Athletics could deal anyone from Bailey to starting pitchers **Trevor Cahill** and **Gio Gonzalez**, for a hefty return.

SEATTLE - The Mariners would love to dump **Chone Figgins**, who has been a flop, and could be in the market for a big hitter like Fielder, who was drafted by the Brewers when GM **Jack Zduriencik** was an executive in Milwaukee.

NL East

PHILADELPHIA - The Phillies have already done damage with the signing of Papelbon and the trade for **Ty Wigginton**. Now they need to figure out shortstop. They want **Jimmy Rollins** back, but at their price. If not, they'll kick the tires on a lesser player or stay within.

ATLANTA - They traded Lowe, and now **Jair Jurrjens** is being dangled. Big-time offense/prospects would have to come back. The Braves want an RBI guy at one of the corner outfield spots, preferably left field.

MIAMI - The Marlins have a brand new stadium, a brand new manager in **Ozzie Guillen**, and an aggressive attitude. They secured a three-year deal on Bell and are in competition with the Mets for Reyes. They have also made offers to Buehrle and Pujols. They could deal first baseman **Gaby Sanchez** and pitcher **Ricky Nolasco** as they also pursue a center fielder.

NEW YORK - Re-signing Reyes would be good PR. They need lots of pitching, particularly in the bullpen, where they will be active for set-up/closer types such as **Octavio Dotel** and **Brad Lidge**. It's doubtful they would do anything big like dealing third baseman **David Wright**, but there would be interest if they did. They'll likely look for non-tenders. **Joe Saunders** could be a possibility.

WASHINGTON - The Nationals are still searching for a center fielder. They may go for someone such as free agent **Coco Crisp**, though Upton remains a possibility. They will try to find a back-of-the-rotation veteran starter. There are always Fielder rumors associated with the Nats.

NL Central

ST. LOUIS - Pujols is priority No. 1. If there is any money left, the Cardinals have a great chance to acquire Buehrle, who would love to pitch in St. Louis. That would be a fairly unbeatable rotation if **Adam Wainwright** returns in top form. The Cards also need middle-infield help.

MILWAUKEE - A replacement for Fielder, a shortstop, and bullpen help are atop the list. The Brewers could dabble in Reyes or Rollins if they lose Fielder. They could solve first base from within with **Mat Gamel**.

CINCINNATI - The Reds are concentrating on back-end rotation help but would be open to dealing **Edinson Volquez** and shortstop **Paul Janish**.

CHICAGO - As usual, **Theo Epstein** and **Jed Hoyer** have explored every free agent out there, but will they hold back, try to rebuild the farm system, and strike two or three years from now? **Carlos Pena** could be back at first base, but Ramirez is gone from third. Epstein could be enticed to deal righty **Matt Garza** for a huge package of younger players; we'd see if the Red Sox would bite. Their biggest accomplishment would be to dump **Alfonso Soriano** and **Carlos Zambrano**. They may take offers on closer **Carlos Marmol**, who blew 10 saves last season.

PITTSBURGH - They signed catcher **Rod Barajas** and **Clint Barmes** got a two-year deal to play shortstop, which should improve their defense. The Pirates will strive to add a veteran starter.

HOUSTON - With new ownership and a new GM on the way, the Astros want to wipe the slate clean, and their goal is to get a bounty for lefty **Wandy Rodriguez** while dumping the contracts of righty **Brett Myers** and first baseman/outfielder **Carlos Lee**. Lee, a DH type, makes \$18.5 million, so the Astros would have to eat a lot of it.

NL West

ARIZONA - Don't look for much wheeling and dealing by Towers. One player he could deal is Saunders, whom he may not tender with a bounty of pitching prospects coming up. He'd like to re-sign **Lyle Overbay**.

SAN FRANCISCO - The Giants made their offensive move by acquiring Cabrera. The focus is shortstop, where it could be anything from Reyes to **Alex Gonzalez**. **Brian Sabean** could also add a low-cost veteran starter.

LOS ANGELES - With the ownership situation up in the air, it's hard to tell exactly what the Dodgers can do. Ethier or **James Loney** could be dealt for pitching. They signed low-cost lefty **Chris Capuano**, and need bullpen help.

COLORADO - The Rockies have a very good bullpen, but they need help in the rotation, at second base, at third base, and in the outfield.

SAN DIEGO - Shortstop **Jason Bartlett** might be available. Indications are that former Sox prospect **Anthony Rizzo** will get every opportunity to win the first base job. They would love a more powerful bat at third base. With Bell and **Mike Adams** gone, GM **Josh Byrnes** will try to rebuild the pen.

ETC.

Apropos of nothing

1. Follow this: **Chili Davis** replaced **Gerald Perry** as Pawtucket hitting coach after Perry went to Oakland last season. Perry got fired and was replaced by Davis, who was replaced at Pawtucket by Perry; 2. The Angels made a mistake in letting **Mike Napoli** go. Did they make the same mistake in letting defensive whiz **Jeff Mathis** go?; 3. **Dave Magadan** was never allowed to seek another job, which tells you the Sox were going to retain him as hitting coach all along; 4. The Red Sox are one of the teams that will attend fireballer **Joel Zumaya's** workout after the winter meetings. 5. OK, **Stan Kasten**, now you can tell me what you're doing, right? Trying to buy the Dodgers.

Updates on nine

1. **Bill Buckner**, former Red Sox first baseman - He would be an excellent choice for a coach on **Bobby Valentine's** staff, not to mention what a great story it would be. A new manager has to have a coach he can trust with his most personal thoughts. Buckner, Valentine's longtime friend, would be that guy.
2. **Allard Baird**, vice president of player personnel, Red Sox - His name is likely to come up in connection with the Houston GM job. There will be people in the Astros organization pushing for him with new owner **Jim Crane**.
3. **Lee Thomas**, special assistant to **Dan Duquette**, Orioles - Great baseball guy who had been out of the game. As Duquette's right-hand man in Boston, he had a huge part in **Manny Ramirez** and **Johnny Damon** coming to the Red Sox.
4. **Kevin Youkilis**, 3B, Red Sox - After having abdominal surgery, he is expected to be close to 100 percent by spring training, according to his agent, **Joe Bick**. Youkilis was depicted as a "cancer" in an ESPNBoston story, but a few people associated with the team have disputed that characterization.
5. **Larry Lucchino**, CEO/president, Red Sox - Whether it's a sign of backing off or having full confidence in his new management team of **Ben Cherington** and Valentine, Lucchino said he would not attend the winter meetings.
6. **Luis Tiant**, former Red Sox pitcher - Sox historian **Dick Bresciani** has put together a nice statistical package to support Tiant's bid for the Hall of Fame in advance of today's Veterans Committee vote. Interesting numbers: 229-172 record, 3.30 ERA, four 20-win seasons. He was 57-25 in September and October. He has more wins and a higher winning percentage than 26 Hall of Famers. He has more shutouts (49) than 46 Hall of Famers. The only other pitcher with two streaks of 40-plus consecutive scoreless innings was **Walter Johnson**. In 1968, Tiant went 21-9 with a 1.60 ERA, 9 shutouts, a 5.295 H/9 IP (second-best in history to **Nolan Ryan's** 5.261 in '72), and a .168 batting average against. He won two AL ERA titles: in '68 (1.60, best in AL since 1919) and '72 (1.91).
7. **Brett Myers**, RHP, Astros - The Astros are trying to make the pitch that Myers has thrown more than 200 innings the last two seasons and would be a dependable starter. Problem: He makes \$11 million this year with a vesting option for \$10 million in 2013.

8. **Frank White**, former Royals second baseman - He was fired as an analyst on the team's game broadcasts on Fox Kansas City this week; his candid style apparently didn't go over well with the higher-ups. White, a former Red Sox coach, should be attractive to a network that appreciates candor. White, who should be revered in Kansas City, was quite shaken by the firing.

9. **Gene Lamont**, third base coach, Tigers - In the Red Sox' defense, many employers, when conducting interviews, do not notify runners-up until the deal is sealed with the person they're hiring. And that's exactly what Cherington did, in working out a contract with Valentine and then notifying Lamont that he did not get the job.

Short hops

From the **Bill Chuck** files: "Over the last three seasons, 90 relievers appeared in at least 150 games. Who do you think had the best WHIP? If you guessed **Mariano Rivera**, you're wrong! Mo's 0.879 WHIP was second to **Mike Adams's** 0.852." And, "A's closer **Andrew Bailey** has given up 34 hits and 3 homers each of the last two seasons; however, he faced 19 fewer batters in 2011." . . . Tigers slugger **Miguel Cabrera** is the 2011 winner of the Ted Williams Award as the best hitter in baseball. Cabrera, selected by a vote of the Boston Chapter of the Baseball Writers Association of America, will be honored at the chapter's 73d annual dinner on Thursday, Jan. 19 at the Westin Copley Hotel. Tickets are \$175 each and are available by sending a check made out care of **Rusty Sullivan**, The Sports Museum, 100 Legends Way, Boston 02114. Or e-mail rsullivan@dnc.com . . . Happy birthday to **Matt Fox** (29) and **Lee Smith** (54).

Baseball's hot stove off to a cool start, Jose Reyes has offer from Marlins but market is slow for Pujols and Fielder

Yankees and Mets may be quiet, but other teams in AL and NL East should make moves

Bill Madden, NEW YORK DAILY NEWS 12/3/2011

DALLAS – Time will tell if something will rouse Brian Cashman and Sandy Alderson from the relative solitude of their war rooms at the Hilton Anatole these next few days, but while both the local GMs are expected to shun any and all big-money players offered their way, their respective eastern division rivals will be quite busy at baseball's annual winter meetings swap-and-shop fest.

In particular, the new-look Miami Marlins, fresh off shoring up their closer situation with the signing of Heath Bell for three years, \$27 million, are now going for bigger fish. Presently, they appear to be the only bidders for Jose Reyes with a five-year offer out to the Mets' estranged shortstop said to be somewhat less than the widely reported \$90 million.

They may have to go to a sixth year to ensure that the Mets will be unable to match and to discourage any johnny-come-lately Reyes bidders. Actually, the Marlins' primary need is starting pitching, and if they can strike a quick deal with Reyes at the meetings, they may just make a play for C.J. Wilson. Otherwise, they're prepared to trade for a top-of-the-rotation starter and sign a free agent back-end starter.

It is now beginning to look as if White Sox GM Kenny Williams is prepared to deal his lefty ace, John Danks. If so, that'll be the "something" to peak Cashman's interest. But in up-and-coming slugging outfielder Logan Morrison, the Marlins have a prime chip (and one the White Sox have long coveted) in any deal for a starting pitcher.

Besides the Marlins, the Phillies and Braves are also poised to put even more distance between themselves and the

Mets in the NL East. The Braves are looking for a power bat and possibly a one-year shortstop “bridge” to top prospect Tyler Pastornicky and have let it be known they’ll entertain offers for handyman Martin Prado and righty ace Jair Jurrjens, while the Phillies, having filled their closer need with Jonathan Papelbon, are looking to upgrade their offense with another power-hitting corner outfielder.

Back in the AL East, now that rookie Red Sox GM Ben Cherington finally has his manager in place in Bobby Valentine, there is much work to be done in turning the Sox back into postseason contenders. He needs a closer to replace Papelbon (which likely will come from among those still out in the free agent market, Frankie Rodriguez, Francisco Cordero or Ryan Madson), another starting pitcher, a righthanded-hitting outfielder (Michael Cuddyer?) and a DH, which is still most likely to be David Ortiz. In and around interviewing for the vacant Houston Astros’ GM job, Tampa Bay Rays GM Andrew Friedman is once again figuring out how to squeeze the most out of a \$50 million payroll. The Rays desperately need at least one and probably two power bats – at first base and DH. They’re looking at Hideki Matsui for the latter and anyone’s guess for the former. They would also like to upgrade their bullpen.

The Rays, too, have starting pitching to spare in a big trade, but while they like the Marlins’ Morrison, they will have to be overwhelmed to move their righty ace, James Shields. But the AL East team that bears the most watching is the Toronto Blue Jays, who after all those third-place finishes, can sniff that extra wild card. The Jays are looking for starting pitching and have plenty of attractive prospects, beginning with shortstop Adeiny Hechavarria and catcher Travis d’Arnaud, to deal for it.

TIP OF THE CAP

The players last week ratified the new five-year basic agreement, but do you think they realize that, in addition to agreeing to HGH blood testing, they also agreed to what amounts to a soft salary cap? That’s right – those dreaded two words, salary cap, that led to so much anguish and acrimony in the past and prompted the shutdown of the game in 1994.

There’s no mention of any salary cap in the new deal, but it’s there all right, in the complicated new revenue-sharing formula that no doubt the players glossed over as they tried to understand it. Under the new deal, big spending teams like the Yankees, Red Sox and Phillies are given a significant disincentive not to be big spending teams. Here’s how it works: Beginning in 2013, the top 15 market teams – Yankees, Mets, Red Sox, White Sox, Cubs, Dodgers, Angels, Rangers, Astros, Blue Jays, Braves, Phillies, Nationals, Giants and A’s – will be disqualified on a gradual basis from getting any revenue sharing from a total pool that, in the past, has been about \$75-80 million. (The A’s are exempt from this until they get a new stadium.)

Instead, this money will be used as rebate money to the revenue-sharing payers, with the biggest payers like the Yankees getting the largest rebates – as long as they are under the payroll luxury tax threshold, which will jump from \$178 million in the second year of the contract to \$189 million for the last three years of it. In addition, if the Yankees get under the revenue sharing threshold for just one year, their tax rate drops from 50% to 17% the next time they go over it. So, in effect, what you have here is baseball rewarding teams like the Yankees threefold for not going over the luxury tax threshold: (1) They significantly lower their revenue sharing bill; (2) they avoid paying luxury tax, and (3) their tax rate if they exceed it again drops from 50% to 17%. In any given year, that could amount to as much as \$20-30 million in the Yankee coffers for not signing that one extra player that puts them over the \$189 million payroll luxury tax threshold.

It may not seem like a big deal now, but by the end of the contract, that \$189 million threshold, with all its revenue ramifications, will, in fact, be a sufficient “cap” for keeping the Yankees and other big spending teams out of the bidding for big-ticket free agents any given year.

Anti-A's ballpark group "Stand for San Jose" sues city

By Janie Mccauley Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO -- The coalition group "Stand for San Jose," which is opposed to the Oakland Athletics moving to the South Bay and is supported by the Giants, filed a lawsuit Friday against the city of San Jose claiming the failure to perform a proper environmental review of land committed to the A's.

The 28-page suit, filed in Santa Clara County Superior Court, also claims the city violated citizens' rights by not putting to a public vote the contractual agreement it made with the A's to sell the discounted downtown property where owner Lew Wolff hopes to build a new ballpark. He is still waiting to hear from Commissioner Bud Selig about whether the club can relocate into San Francisco's territory.

Last month, the San Jose City Council agreed to sell nearly five acres at a huge discount to the A's as long as it is used to build a ballpark.

There was a 30-day window from Nov. 8, when the sides reached agreement on a two-year land-purchase option that costs the A's \$50,000, for potential lawsuits to be filed.

"In the midst of its 11th consecutive budget deficit, San Jose politicians rushed to sell prime downtown land for only \$6.9 million, even though it was acquired for \$25 million and is currently appraised at approximately \$14 million," Stand for San Jose said in a statement. "This huge discount for wealthy developers who want to build a baseball stadium comes at a time of fiscal challenges so severe that the Mayor recently admitted: 'We're not as bad as Greece, I don't think.'"

A phone message and email to San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed weren't immediately returned. A message also was left for Wolff.

The lawsuit claims that though several environmental reports have been done, the studies on issues such as traffic and air quality are insufficient relating to the California Environmental Quality Act and additional studies are needed.

Also, Stand for San Jose challenges that a public vote should have happened before the city decided to enter into a binding agreement with Wolff and the A's for land committed to be used for a ballpark or stadium.

It reads that the city and its agencies "abused their powers and ran roughshod over their legal duties, including their duties to protect the public's right to vote and to comply with laws designed to protect the environment, prior to committing to sell public lands for a ballpark project."

Selig in March 2009 appointed a committee to evaluate the issue facing the Bay Area teams, yet he has provided no timetable for when he might announce a decision. Wolff has said he hopes to hear a resolution one way or the other soon. Moving to San Jose, he has said, would help the low-budget A's generate revenue and become a bigger spender.

The Giants have a significant fan base in technology-rich Silicon Valley in Santa Clara County, and they don't want to give that up.

Wolff, a friend of Selig's dating to their days as fraternity brothers at Wisconsin, is ready to break ground on an intimate ballpark projected to cost between \$400 million and \$450 million -- if and when he gets the OK to relocate some 40 miles south.

