

**Plenty of interest in Oakland A's left-hander Gio Gonzalez, but no deal yet**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

DALLAS -- The A's continued spinning in the winter meetings rumor mill Wednesday, with starting pitcher Gio Gonzalez replacing closer Andrew Bailey as the most discussed Athletic to potentially be traded.

Despite the speculation, the A's are unlikely to complete a deal as the four-day meetings wrap at the Hilton Anatole hotel.

This despite reports that as many as 12 teams have inquired about Gonzalez, a lefty who has won 31 games over the past two seasons. He's just 26, possesses some of the game's best natural stuff and won't be eligible for free agency until 2016, making him affordable and attractive.

"The presence of interest doesn't mean somebody is going to step up and make a deal," A's assistant general manager David Forst said. "We have a lot of options. Obviously we haven't made a trade yet. If something was what we're looking for, we would have done that by now."

The A's steep demands for Gonzalez and Bailey are making teams reluctant to pull the trigger. For a deal to happen, either Oakland will have to lower its asking price or another team will have to cough up the top-shelf prospects the A's seek.

Forst said the A's would gladly retain Gonzalez and Bailey for next season -- both would be entering just their second year of arbitration and still have some allure on next winter's trade market.

But consider it a surprise if Oakland begins spring training with both pitchers still on the roster, given their desire to replenish their farm system with prospects.

Forst, running the A's operation after G.M. Billy Beane left the meetings Tuesday night, estimates he and Beane shared a dozen phone conversations Wednesday and each talked trade with a handful of teams.

"I've read all the names that have been thrown out there, all the scenarios," Forst said of the media speculation. "Ninety-five percent of that stuff is absolutely not true when talking about specific players."

A source with knowledge of the situation said Oakland's talks with the New York Yankees regarding Gonzalez were short-lived. Same with the A's and Phillies, who discussed a deal involving Philadelphia outfielder Domonic Brown, ranked the majors' top overall prospect by Baseball America in 2010.

Brown, 24, has yet to impress at the big league level, and the A's don't appear enamored.

Detroit inquired on Gonzalez but probably doesn't have the prospects to pry him away.

The A's like Arizona's farm system, and the Diamondbacks reportedly have interest in Gonzalez and right-hander Trevor Cahill, who took a step backward last season from his All-Star campaign of 2010.

Arizona could try enticing the A's with pitchers Tyler Skaggs and Jarrod Parker, their third- and fourth-ranked prospects according to Baseball America.

"It has nothing to do with position players vs. pitchers," Forst said. "We want the best players -- we're looking for young guys who are (cost) controllable."

The Texas Rangers reportedly are another team eyeing Gonzalez, but the A's covet some of Texas' premier minor leaguers, and the Rangers aren't budging.

As expected, free agent left fielder Josh Willingham declined the A's offer of arbitration, meaning the A's will receive two draft picks as compensation if Willingham signs with another team, which is expected.

## **Mark Purdy: More signs point to San Jose for the Oakland A's**

By Mark Purdy Mercury News Columnist

The saga continues. The A's ultimate ballpark destination remains up in the air, a high and deep fly ball, with the entire Bay Area waiting to see in which glove it lands.

And despite what you hear, nothing is certain. Major League Baseball's so-called "blue-ribbon panel" still has not made public its report. Commissioner Bud Selig has not ruled on whether the Giants' territorial rights claim to San Jose should be overturned. Or whether A's owner Lew Wolff can pursue a San Jose stadium project.

However, the fly ball seems to be descending rapidly. Two recent developments -- a pointed comment by a powerful baseball owner and a lawsuit filed by a front group for the San Francisco Giants' interests -- seem to indicate that Selig and MLB are leaning toward a San Jose solution to the A's problem.

That should come as no shock. If the idea is for MLB to have two healthy Bay Area franchises, common sense says they should be located in the region's two largest cities, more than 40 miles apart, with both teams residing in modern new ballparks. That's instead of the current situation, with the Giants and A's just a short drive across the Bay Bridge from each other and the A's playing in a substandard, outdated and bleak hunk of concrete.

That common sense, however, acquired a strong voice this week at baseball's winter meetings in Dallas. Chicago White Sox owner Jerry Reinsdorf told the San Francisco Chronicle that he was "totally supportive" of Wolff being able to pursue a ballpark project in San Jose.

"He needs to be there," Reinsdorf said. "It has to come to a head soon."

The "soon" probably translates to sometime in the next few months, most likely at an owners meeting in Arizona scheduled for next month. And for those who believe Oakland might still be in the picture, Reinsdorf threw in jabs at both the Oakland Coliseum and Oakland, saying the stadium was "past its time" and so was the city.

"Oakland's had plenty of opportunity to build a stadium and hasn't gotten it done," Reinsdorf said.

Those words could not have been spoken casually and cannot be overestimated. Reinsdorf has owned the White Sox since 1981. He is not only one of MLB's longest-tenured proprietors but also one of the most powerful, known to have Selig's ear. Reinsdorf also led the relocation committee that oversaw the Montreal Expos' move to Washington, D.C., and conversion into the Nationals.

Reinsdorf's statement about Oakland, meanwhile, outlines a chapter of the A's stadium pursuit that many East Bay citizens either forget or refuse to acknowledge. The chapter dates to 1994, not long after the Haas family sold the team to Steve Schott and Ken Hofmann. The two men had big plans for remodeling the Coliseum into a fine baseball-only structure. They requested a meeting with the Coliseum commission.

"Here's what we'd like to do," Schott told the commission, outlining his remodeling ideas.

"That's all very nice," the commission replied, more or less. "But we have some news. The Raiders want to come back to Oakland, and we've got a financing plan to make it happen that will include building a new center field addition. You can't fight this, because the important people in Oakland want it to happen and they'll make it difficult on you if you try to get in the way."

Schott and Hofmann acquiesced. From that moment forward, the A's long-term future in Oakland was probably doomed. Years later, after Wolff and partner John Fisher bought the team, Wolff did assemble a new ballpark proposal near the Coliseum site. His plan involved mixed-use redevelopment and required Oakland's assistance to acquire the necessary land. The project went nowhere when the city did not or could not cooperate. Wolff then looked south to Fremont and spent years on another failed plan before finally settling on San Jose as his last, not first, resort.

All of that information is contained in the "blue-ribbon" report. The hunch here is that Reinsdorf has already seen it, which explains his assessment about Oakland.

It is possible, in fact, that the Giants also have seen the report, which might be why they backed a lawsuit filed last week by a group called "Stand For San Jose," which curiously is represented by a lawyer and public relations firm from San Francisco.

The lawsuit cites flaws in the environmental impact report for the proposed downtown San Jose ballpark and charges that the city's decision to give Wolff an option on the proposed ballpark property is illegal because the public didn't vote on it -- even though no ballpark could be built there without a public vote. Attorneys will hash out the whole thing. But we all know what this is about: The Giants want to delay and/or subvert any San Jose deal.

Clearly, the Giants are afraid that Selig will soon decide against them. Otherwise, why file the lawsuit at all? Why not let the other MLB owners decide the right thing to do? Perhaps because, as Reinsdorf's comments demonstrate, the Giants already know what that decision will be.

And that fly ball may plop into San Jose's mitt before pitchers and catchers report to spring training

### **Blue Jays enter the Gio Gonzalez sweepstakes**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

**Dallas --**

Toronto became the latest team to join the Gio Gonzalez fray at baseball's winter meetings, and the Blue Jays just might be a fine match for the A's All-Star left-hander.

The Blue Jays and A's are frequent trade partners, and Toronto's minor-league system is among the best and deepest in the game after several recent trades, including the Roy Halladay deal two years ago.

Oakland is looking for at least two high-value prospects and a few mid-range prospects in any trade involving Gonzalez, and the Blue Jays have potential impact players at all levels of the minors.

It's unclear if Toronto will want to part with more than one of its most valued prospects, though; the landscape has changed since the A's got six players, including Arizona's No. 1 and No. 3 prospects, for Dan Haren and Connor Robertson four years ago. More teams now try to hang onto top prospects in order to achieve better cost control.

There were indications that the Jays and A's, clubs that relish multi-team deals, might add a third team to the mix to try to find the right match. In addition, Oakland could sweeten any deal with a second player. There is interest in left-handed reliever Craig Breslow, as well as much of the rest of the A's bullpen.

Because the A's are looking for such a significant return, some teams that have asked about Gonzalez now believe they might have a better shot at another All-Star, right-hander Trevor Cahill. There won't be a big drop-off in asking price; Cahill is signed through 2015, with two team option years after that. Gonzalez is under team control for four more years, but he is not signed to a deal and he is arbitration-eligible for the first time.

If the A's weren't able to find the right offer for their most popular players - Gonzalez, Cahill and Andrew Bailey - assistant general manager David Forst said that the team has no qualms about keeping them and moving them next summer or in a year.

"There is no mandate to trade guys," Forst said.

The current number of teams thought to be interested in Gonzalez stands at 12, according to one source with a club that has inquired about him. The teams known to be after him or reportedly interested include the Blue Jays and Tigers, both first reported by The Chronicle, and the Yankees - who have long coveted Gonzalez and have some outstanding young prospects - Phillies, Reds, Nationals, Rangers, Diamondbacks and Marlins. Miami still plans to acquire players even after signing Jose Reyes, Mark Buehrle and Heath Bell in the past week.

The winter meetings conclude today with the Rule-5 draft. With one open roster spot and at least two outfield positions up for grabs, it would not be surprising if the A's selected an outfielder.

Josh Willingham, one of three outfielders expected to leave as a free agent, officially declined arbitration from Oakland on Wednesday.

### **Drumbeat: Toronto jumps into Gio Gonzalez talks with A's**

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Dallas, 12/7/2011, 3:32pm

I've heard from two sources that the Blue Jays are after A's All-Star Gio Gonzalez, and that is an interesting development: Toronto frequently deals with the A's, and the Blue Jays are stocked in the minors, especially after the Roy Halladay deal.

I ran a list of the Blue Jays' top-rated prospects by one source - Oakland wants at least two of a team's top four prospects for Gonzalez, plus some middle-level minor-leaguers - and I was told that Toronto has even better players in the lower minors that might be Oakland targets. The A's aren't looking for immediate help in any deal this winter, they're looking for top talent that would be ready for a potential new stadium in three years. That could include players who are in the lower levels of the minors, now.

I think the other 11 teams I'm told are in the Gonzalez hunt will be nervous about Toronto's interest. The Blue Jays have the wherewithal to make something happen because of their minor-league depth.

The Dallas Morning News just reported that the Rangers want Gonzalez, and the Phillies and Nationals were added to the group earlier in the day. I had heard the Phillies mentioned yesterday and was under the impression they'd asked about Gonzalez early in the process and didn't think they'd be inclined to pony up the large asking price for Gonzalez, but they're at the very least still keeping tabs on Gonzalez. Because, you know, the Phillies just don't have enough starting pitching. The other known or reported teams: The Tigers, as I reported today; and also the Yankees, the Nationals, the Diamondbacks, the Reds and Miami.

The Marlins signed Mark Buehrle today, so you'd think they'd now be out on Gonzalez, but the word is that Miami is still being aggressive on all their original wish list of players. Gonzalez told me yesterday that he'd like to go home to South Florida if he's dealt, and the prospect is now dimmer - but with the Marlins' crazed offseason of acquisitions, don't rule anything out.

It's a slow Andrew Bailey news day. Several teams are starting to plug their holes at closer (San Diego traded for Huston Street today) and while Boston remains a possibility, I'm not sure the Red Sox have a package to the A's liking. It's entirely possible that if Oakland doesn't move Bailey or Gonzalez this winter - remember, they're not shopping them, they'd only move them for top value - the A's might want to explore deals at the trade deadline or next winter. They are taking the long view on this.

I still think Bailey goes this winter, but if the offers are too meager, the A's won't mind hanging onto him until they get something they really want. He's a two-time All-Star. He's not some guy they're trying to unload.

As I tweeted earlier today (@susanslusser), there's some buzz among teams about reliever Craig Breslow, and some clubs believe he might be a second player added into a Gonzalez or Bailey deal.

## **Forst maintaining Beane's mantra at Meetings**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

DALLAS -- At this time last year, A's assistant general manager David Forst was fairly new to the concept of Twitter -- or, rather, "The Tweeter," as he called it at the time.

Forst has since become a fervent user of the social networking service, not to relay his own thoughts and comments but to see those made by others, notably local and national media covering the A's.

So when Forst, who is representing the A's through the end of the Winter Meetings on Thursday following general manager Billy Beane's Tuesday night departure, greeted just a small handful of reporters in his suite on Wednesday, he broke into a smile.

"The difference between me and Billy is that you know I have read every single thing all of you have written in the last 24 hours," he said.

Plenty was written, particularly about All-Star pitcher Gio Gonzalez, who has been linked to the Blue Jays, D-backs, Phillies, Tigers, Reds, Marlins and, most recently, the Nationals. It's likely more are in on the coveted southpaw, who is just 26 and under club control for four more years.

But the A's are using the 2007 Dan Haren haul -- Oakland landed Brett Anderson, Carlos Gonzalez, Chris Carter, Aaron Cunningham, Dana Eveland and Greg Smith from the D-backs for Haren and Connor Robertson -- as parameters for a potential deal involving Gonzalez, and Forst noted Wednesday that "if something were what we were looking for, we could have done it by now."

Still, Forst assured the club has "a lot of options" when asked if he's been pleased with the offers that have been put forward for Oakland's top players. But he didn't expect a deal to be completed Wednesday night.

"I can confirm significant interest," he said. "I'm not going to go through team by team. I've read all the names that have been thrown out there, all the scenarios. I wish I could respond to each rumor one by one, but 95 percent of that stuff is absolutely not true, when you're talking about specific players. There's a reason we try to keep that between us and the other team.

"Despite the fact Billy isn't here, we've talked maybe a dozen times today. Separately, he and I have spoken to a handful of clubs. There's no shortage of work being done, despite the fact he's not physically here."

Not surprisingly, there have been teams showing interest in more than one of Oakland's players. The A's are listening on all of them, excluding Jemile Weeks, and it's safe thinking they've not only garnered interest in Gonzalez and All-Star closer Andrew Bailey -- linked already with the Red Sox, Rangers, Reds and Angels -- but also righty Trevor Cahill and possibly a few of the club's relievers.

When seeking return goods, Forst reiterated the team is looking to reel in "young guys who are controllable." That includes players at all positions, at all levels -- whether they're just getting their feet wet at Class A or knocking on the door to The Show. Simply put, think best prospects available.

But in the midst of the dozen rumors surrounding the A's, there's perhaps been a misunderstanding about their desire to move guys like Gonzalez and Bailey. In reality, there's no need or want to. They'd gladly keep both around, but at the same time, they recognize their situation -- the green light on a new stadium could come as soon as January, and a bunch of top-notch prospects could be ready for the bigs by the time that stadium is built -- allows them to keep their options open.

"There's no mandate to trade guys," Forst said. "We happen to have guys who are valuable, who have the potential to bring back players. But if you don't trade them now, and you sit here 12 months from now, they're still under control."

The A's, then, could very well find themselves with Gonzalez and/or Bailey still in tow come April, and they could explore dealing again around the Trade Deadline or at season's end. But the possibility of any one of their players moving shortly after the Winter Meetings is still very real.

"It's hard to say whether all of this leads to a completion of a deal," Forst said of the Winter Meetings. "But we certainly have a better view of the landscape than we did on Sunday. Billy always talks about how being here sort of

generates conversation. Some of that is rumor, and some of that is actual work. The nice thing about being here -- Billy complains a lot about the environment -- is when opportunities or options come in, our entire staff is here and we have the proximity to have that conversation."

But the A's mindset about it all has remained unchanged. They're staying course with the patient route.

"There's no reason to jump in and do something," Forst said.

Not until they're overwhelmed with an offer.

### **Suitors for potential Gio trade increasing**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

DALLAS -- While Albert Pujols stole all the overnight buzz at the Winter Meetings, talks of a trade involving A's hurler Gio Gonzalez were picking up steam by the time the sun came up in Dallas on Wednesday morning.

The 26-year-old Gonzalez, already known to have drawn interest from teams including the Marlins and Yankees, reportedly added the Tigers and Phillies to his list of suitors. Next to free-agents C.J. Wilson and Mark Buehrle, the A's southpaw appears to be the most sought-after pitcher this week.

Miami's interest in local product Gonzalez has been well documented, and on Tuesday Bob Klapisch of the Bergen Record noted that the A's asked the Yankees for power bat Jesus Montero, along with either Dellin Betances or Manny Banuelos in exchange for their All-Star pitcher.

But Detroit and Philadelphia's inquiries on the hurler are apparently new. The San Francisco Chronicle's Susan Slusser reported that the Tigers are making a "strong push" for Gonzalez and would be willing to part with top prospect Jacob Turner, a 6-foot-5 right-hander. Ken Rosenthal of FoxSports.com, meanwhile, first relayed news of Philadelphia's entrance into the discussion.

The A's won't address specific inquires, but, as general manager Billy Beane noted the previous two days, assistant general manager David Forst reiterated on Wednesday morning that "there is no shortage of interest in our pitchers."

The Phillies, according to Jim Bowden of MLB Network, have discussed with the A's a package deal involving Gonzalez and outfielder Domonic Brown, who is considered to be Philadelphia's best offensive prospect since Ryan Howard.

The 24-year-old outfielder, who's played mostly right field but has experience in left, has been shuttled up and down between Philadelphia the Minors during each of the past two seasons. And with Hunter Pence and John Mayberry likely to hold down the Phillies corner-outfield spots next season, Brown is likely expendable.

This past season may have been Brown's most trying yet. The difficulties started with his breaking his right hand in May, and he struggled at the plate once he returned. But in six career Minor League seasons, Brown sports a .294 average with a .834 OPS. He's hit 53 home runs with 251 RBIs and 101 stolen bases over 470 games.

Those numbers sound more like the ones Beane wants to see from prospects Michael Taylor and Chris Carter before awarding them a prolonged opportunity at the big league level. Oakland is essentially looking to restock its entire outfield this winter and, though a low-cost free-agent signing is possible later this offseason, Beane is hoping to do so via trade.

From the Phillies' standpoint, they're surely familiar with Gonzalez's All-Star arm. He pitched for their Double-A affiliate in 2006 after being acquired from the White Sox in the Jim Thome deal. But Chicago reacquired Gonzalez, whom they drafted in '04, at the end of the year for pitcher Freddy Garcia. They again said goodbye via a trade with the A's that sent Nick Swisher to the Windy City.

Oakland doesn't need to trade Gonzalez this winter and won't if not offered a sizable return, but the club -- in a state of limbo because of an unclear stadium situation -- is making all of its players not named Jemile Weeks available. The A's are open to offers that would net them a handful of prospects who could christen a potential new stadium in a few years.

Along with Gonzalez, Andrew Bailey has garnered plenty of interest and could draw even more in the coming days, considering the closer market is thinning. On Tuesday, the Blue Jays picked up Sergio Santos in a deal with the White

Sox, and the Padres were wasting no time replacing departed closer Heath Bell, closing in on a trade with the Rockies for former A's pitcher Huston Street.

Both Gonzalez and Bailey, eligible for arbitration for the first time this winter, are under club control for several more years. Bailey is not set to become a free agent until after the 2014 season, with Gonzalez eligible for such status the following year.

Beane left Dallas on Tuesday night, but before his departure noted no deal involving any of his players was imminent. The A's have been known to stay rather quiet through the Winter Meetings and seemingly prefer to strike a deal shortly after instead.

### **Willingham declines A's arbitration offer**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

DALLAS -- As expected, outfielder Josh Willingham officially declined arbitration from the A's, a decision confirmed by his agent on Wednesday evening before the 9 p.m. PT deadline.

Willingham, classified as a "modified" Type A free agent in a one-year arrangement under the new Collective Bargaining Agreement, will not force the team that ultimately signs him to forfeit a Draft pick.

Instead, the A's will receive compensation in the form of the pick before the signing team's scheduled first-round pick, as well as a supplemental-round selection. The change to the status of those modified free agents is for this offseason only, as a new set of rules will be implemented next year.

Several teams have reportedly inquired on the 32-year-old Willingham, including the Rays, Twins, Red Sox, Indians and Reds. He's coming off a highly productive offensive season, finishing with career highs in home runs (29) and RBIs (98).

### **Major Lee-ague: Day 3: A recap**

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 12/7/2011, 6:14pm

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### **Tigers inquire on Gio Gonzalez**

From fellow MLB.com writer Jason Beck: 12/7/2011, 2:29pm

The Tigers are among the teams interested in A's left-hander Gio Gonzalez should Oakland GM Billy Beane decide to deal him, but any chance of a big push appears to be dim at this point.

The Tigers inquired on Gonzalez here at the Winter Meetings as an idea to see if they could do something bigger than expected for a good price. The asking price in return, however, apparently cooled that interest. While top pitching prospect Jacob Turner could be expendable in a package for Gonzalez, who has four years left before free agency, other potential pieces in a package beyond that appear to be a problem.

The Tigers are open to improving, but they're not going to do it while taking away from the core of the team that won the AL Central and made it to within two games of the World Series. Unless the asking price comes down, it doesn't appear to be a good fit, and with so many additional teams reported to be interested, a discount doesn't look likely.