

A's News Clips, Thursday, December 29, 2011

Monte Poole: The Oakland A's are a travesty

By Monte Poole Bay Area News Group 12/29/2011

The con is kaput, the game over. A's ownership, having run out of patience, isn't even pretending to care about competing, much less pleasing its fans.

Dedicated first and last to themselves, the owners have upped the ante. In their desire to leave Oakland, they've stopped waiting for or pleading with Major League Baseball commissioner Bud Selig, as well as anyone else who was listening.

They have moved into the next phase, one of such utter defiance it stomps all over the ideals of the game.

By trading the players who have represented Oakland in the last three All-Star games, all in a three-week span, the A's are announcing they're packing it in for 2012 and maybe even 2013.

They're quitting, backing away from the 2012 season so early and so emphatically that even Pete Rose, the disgraced hit king, has to scratch his head and wonder, once again, what is the definition of the phrase "integrity of the game."

It wasn't long ago, after all, that every authority figure in the game was complicit in committing the great baseball crime of using advanced chemistry to inflate statistics. The game went on, shamelessly promoting itself as healthier than ever, avoiding labor strife and racking up record revenue.

And now MLB has an ownership team brazenly deciding to "throw" a season three months before opening day.

The A's have made a series of dramatic moves over the past 20 days, effectively demolishing any pretense of trying to win and simultaneously sending the message that until they get the trade they really want — trading Oakland for San Jose — they'll just keep making a mockery of the game.

The A's are doing this under Selig's nose, practically waving the white flag in his eyes. Any high-minded rhetoric about integrity from the commissioner has to be considered disingenuous at best, downright fraudulent at worst.

How can such a naked exhibition of surrender not hurt the game?

Moreover, how can it not crush to a fine powder a fan base already so battered it collectively flinches every time managing partner Lew Wolff so much as levels his gaze?

Closer Andrew Bailey, 27, was traded Wednesday, as fully expected. The two-time All-Star (2009-10) was sent to Boston for two prospects and a backup outfielder. Five days earlier, left-hander Gio Gonzalez, their lone 2011 All-Star, was dealt to Washington for prospects. Two weeks before that, right-hander Trevor Cahill, a 2010 All-Star, was moved to Arizona for prospects.

These prospects, of course, won't remain in Oakland very long. Their future is limited to two options. One, produce in Oakland and get traded in a couple years. Or, two, produce in Oakland and be a part of the team's fantasy move to San Jose.

That, of course, is something Wolff has pined for ever since he joined the organization nine years ago, hired by then-owners Steve Schott and Ken Hofmann to, um, study all viable geographical options for the team.

Wolff, who along with John Fisher bought the team in 2005, has numerous real estate holdings in San Jose and longs for the support of the corporate base that exists in the South Bay. Even as he talked about a future in Oakland, he already was on record — before being hired by the team — saying he would move the A's to San Jose.

So there never has been any confusion about his desires or intentions. And there isn't any now. Wolff and Fisher even bought off team president Michael Crowley and general manager Billy Beane, giving each a fraction of ownership. All four are rowing one way, beautifully in sync.

The iceberg in the water, however, is the Giants, who own territorial rights to San Jose. This alone makes movement a daunting endeavor, for Selig is big on ownership consensus. And that simply doesn't exist between the Wolff-Fisher A's and platoon of Giants owners represented by CEO Larry Baer.

Consider these moves an A's shortcut, their intent to drive their plan over the few curly hairs remaining atop Baer's head. Few men in baseball can force an issue as vehemently as Beane, and Selig and Baer and all of us can see he's on a mission.

So Bailey had to go, just as Cahill and Gonzalez did. Billy the Part-Owner is better served by moving them, even if we all know Billy the GM likes their talent.

The A's will say they are fiscally barren and competitively invalid, that they were forced into these actions.

But they'll offer no apology about abandoning their loyal but dwindling clientele. They don't want you visiting their shabby little yard, no matter how long you've cared, so they're informing everyone their shop is closed — even though the doors are wide open.

Your move, MLB.

Oakland A's send closer Andrew Bailey, outfielder Ryan Sweeney to Boston

Joe Stiglich, Bay Area News Group

The A's completed a rare trifecta Wednesday, trading away their third All-Star pitcher in a span of 20 days.

Closer Andrew Bailey and outfielder Ryan Sweeney were shipped to the Boston Red Sox for outfielder Josh Reddick and two minor leaguers -- corner infielder Miles Head, 20, and right-hander Raul Alcantara, 19.

The move was no shocker. After Trevor Cahill was traded to Arizona on Dec. 9 and fellow starter Gio Gonzalez was dealt to Washington on Friday, it was common knowledge that Bailey would go next as the A's continue dismantling their roster and stockpiling prospects.

But whereas those around the majors generally applauded the packages the A's got for Cahill and Gonzalez, the initial reviews weren't quite as favorable on this deal.

Jon Heyman of cbsports.com wrote that the deal "looks like a steal" for Boston.

One major league scout, requesting anonymity, told this newspaper that the A's didn't obtain enough for Bailey and Sweeney, given how unproven Head and Alcantara are.

"Whoa," the scout said. "Somebody's gotta have a pretty good crystal ball. Those guys are so far away. What's the certainty of them being what they think they are?"

The A's are intent on upgrading a farm system that they feel lacks impact players.

They've acquired 10 prospects total for Cahill and Gonzalez -- who combined for 61 victories over the past two seasons -- and Bailey, who averaged 25 saves over his first three big league seasons.

Those moves make it clear the A's aren't planning to compete in the American League West in 2012.

So where will next year's team draw its motivation? The remaining players on Oakland's roster aren't blind to their teammates exiting.

"Dropping like flies," left-hander Brett Anderson tweeted Wednesday.

Anderson, who is expected to miss the first half of the season while recovering from elbow surgery, said he looks forward to meshing with all the new players and seeing if the A's can defy expectations. But he added in a phone interview:

"Being with the A's, you realize you're going to rebuild sooner than other teams do. As soon as you get a relationship built (with a teammate), they might get traded. It's a Catch-22. You enjoy people, but they might be gone tomorrow."

Bailey, the 2009 American League Rookie of the Year and an All-Star that season and in 2010, echoed the sentiment of Cahill and Gonzalez upon their trades. He was appreciative of the opportunity the A's gave him but couldn't contain his excitement at going to a team aiming to contend now.

"You're in the big leagues (and) there's a competitive aspect to that," Bailey, 27, said. "It's tough to be a player looking three or four years down the road when you don't know if you're still going to be there."

Bailey now enters the Boston pressure cooker, where he'll replace longtime Red Sox closer Jonathan Papelbon, who signed a four-year, \$50 million contract as a free agent with the Philadelphia Phillies in November.

Assistant general manager David Forst said he likes the return the A's have gotten for their marquee pitchers.

He envisions Reddick, who turns 25 in February, starting somewhere in the A's outfield. Reddick hit .280 with seven homers and 28 RBIs in 87 major league games last season and was ranked as Boston's No. 7 prospect by Baseball America entering the year.

Reddick is under team control through 2016. He played mainly right field last season but has played center extensively in the minors.

"We still have some work to do in putting together our outfield," Forst said.

Sweeney, 26, was slated to play right field for the A's, but the Sox insisted he be included in the Bailey deal. That persuaded the A's to push for Alcantara, a pitcher they wanted in a potential trade that would have sent Rich Harden to Boston last July.

Alcantara went 1-4 with a 2.20 ERA in 13 starts last season split between rookie ball and low Single-A.

Head, a 26th round pick in 2009, hit .299 with 22 homers last season split between low and high Single-A. He was drafted as a third baseman but played mainly first last season, and Forst said the A's are undecided where he'll play.

Source: A's owner 'very confident' deal to move team to San Jose is near

By Joe Stiglich and Tracy Seipel, Oakland Tribune 12/24/2011

With major league baseball owners poised to meet early next month, a source close to A's owner Lew Wolff says he is "very confident" the league is close to clearing the way for his team to move to the South Bay.

The latest wave of enthusiasm came Saturday after yet another unconfirmed report surfaced on Twitter that the league will grant the A's permission to move to San Jose in February.

However, Major League Baseball sources told this newspaper that "nothing has changed. No decision has been made."

Since March 2009, a special MLB committee has been reviewing the A's request to move across the bay into territory long claimed by the San Francisco Giants, who are balking at the move.

But city leaders in San Jose confirmed Saturday that they have been hearing rumblings the league is moving toward a decision.

"All I know is that Lew is optimistic," said Mayor Chuck Reed, who spoke to Wolff last week.

Another source close to Wolff said Saturday that Wolff "is very confident that the A's (deal) was going to happen." The source said that confidence is based on "communication between Wolff and (MLB commissioner Bud) Selig, which is very frequent."

Wolff could not be reached for comment, and A's spokesman Bob Rose said the team continues to wait for Major League Baseball's report on the A's stadium situation and would have no further comment until then.

Team owners are expected to discuss the A's move at a meeting Jan. 11 to 12 in Scottsdale, Ariz. A move to San Jose would have to be approved by three-quarters of the owners. But sources say they may not end up voting until a settlement with the Giants can be negotiated.

The A's want to build a new stadium on land the team would buy from the city of San Jose next to the downtown Diridon Station.

A's general manager Billy Beane declined to comment on the Twitter report that the A's will receive permission by February to move to San Jose.

USA Today's Bob Nightengale tweeted Saturday morning: "All signs and top MLB sources say that the Athletics will be granted permission by Feb to move to San Jose."

Beane said he was unaware of any such news when reached by phone Saturday and didn't want to comment further.

Selig appointed a committee to research the A's stadium options almost three years ago, but there has been no public revelation of those findings. But Beane has expressed optimism this winter that a decision will come soon.

Beane's reasoning for his optimism has remained vague, but he did say on a media teleconference Friday night: "We just keep hearing (a decision will come) soon. Any other information I have I'd probably rather keep to myself."

Oakland officials discounted the latest Twitter report as "just rumors," said Susan Piper, a spokeswoman for the city's mayor. Earlier this month, Mayor Jean Quan held a news conference to make one more pitch for Oakland's stadium plan to keep the A's in town.

The city is touting a pair of sites to build a ballpark for the A's on city-owned land -- one at Victory Court along the waterfront, and the other as part of a proposed Coliseum City that would include stadiums for the A's, football Raiders and basketball Warriors, along with a retail and entertainment development, and a convention center.

"We have two very strong options," Piper said.

A's trade Andrew Bailey, Ryan Sweeney to Red Sox

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Andrew Bailey knew he'd be traded this winter, he just didn't know the destination.

On Wednesday, that mystery was solved: The A's traded their two-time All-Star closer to the Red Sox, a team that had pursued Bailey much of the offseason.

Bailey and outfielder Ryan Sweeney went in a package for outfielder Josh Reddick, who played in 87 games with Boston last year, and Class A players Miles Head and Raul Alcantara.

"I'd be lying if I didn't say it's exciting," Bailey said by phone. "Everyone knows what direction the A's are taking, and like I told Billy Beane today, I'll always appreciate them giving me that opportunity out of spring training, but they're trying to get younger, they're rebuilding. I'm going to a proven winner. I'm excited to pitch in meaningful games in September and the playoffs, hopefully the World Series.

"As a player, you want to win, first and foremost, and the A's are rebuilding for down the road. I'm grateful that I have enough value to maybe help them do that."

Bailey's friends are already teasing him that he'll be "a rock star" in Boston, but Bailey said with a laugh that he will be his usual self. "Different colors on my back, but nothing else will change," he said.

Head, 20, will move from first base to third in the Oakland organization, according to general manager Beane. Alcantara, 19, is a right-hander the A's tried to acquire in the proposed Rich Harden deal with Boston in July.

Sweeney said Boston manager Bobby Valentine and GM Ben Cherington told him they think his line-drive stroke is well-suited for Fenway. "I'm looking forward to playing for a winning team," Sweeney said. "And hopefully winning a championship."

One major-league scout said that he believes the Red Sox got the better end of the deal and that the A's traded Bailey and Sweeney for a player much like Sweeney. Reddick, 24, hit .280 with seven homers and 28 RBIs for the Red Sox.

Reddick said Beane and manager Bob Melvin told him to be ready to play every day. He's most comfortable in center, he said, but he played mostly right field in Boston. Beane said that the A's like the fact that Reddick has experience at all three outfield spots, and the team will decide where he fits best during the spring.

While Bailey and Sweeney go to a contender, Reddick is in the opposite situation.

"Playing in Boston was a pleasure," he said. "Fenway has so much history, the fans are so supportive and they get into the game. It's tough to leave something like that, especially when it's your first team. But whoever you're with at the time, you've got to focus."

Brian Fuentes and Grant Balfour are the top possibilities to close next season, though there is trade interest in Balfour. Joey Devine also will be considered.

A's trade

In less than three weeks, the A's have traded three All-Stars - Trevor Cahill, Gio Gonzalez and, on Wednesday, Andrew Bailey. Who's coming and going in the latest trade:

Coming to Oakland, age 2011 level, stats

OF Josh Reddick, 24 MLB - 254 ABs, .280, 7 HRs, 28 RBIs
 Triple-A - 191 ABs, .230, 14 HRs, 36 RBIs

IF Miles Head, 20 Class A - 495 ABs, .299, 22 HRs, 82 RBIs

RHP Raul Alcantara, 19 Class A - 65 1/3 IP, 1-4, 2.20 ERA, 50 Ks

Going to Boston, age 2011 level, stats

RHP Andrew Bailey, 27 MLB - 41 2/3 IP, 24 saves, 3.24 ERA, 41 Ks

OF Ryan Sweeney, 26 MLB - 264 ABs, .265, 1 HR, 25 RBIs

Drumbeat: A's send Andrew Bailey, Ryan Sweeney to Red Sox

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser 12/28/2011, 4:14pm

The only surprise about the A's trade of Andrew Bailey was that it didn't happen sooner: Bailey, the two-time All-Star closer, was expected to be dealt away much earlier this winter because so many teams needed closers.

As those clubs filled those spots, however, the market for Bailey receded a bit, and the A's might not have gotten maximum value for him, sending Bailey and outfielder Ryan Sweeney to the Red Sox for outfielder Josh Reddick and Class-A players Miles Head and Raul Alcantara. Head is a first baseman that the A's plan to have play third, and Alcantara is a right-handed starter who the A's tried to acquire in the proposed, then nixed, Rich Harden deal with Boston in July.

One major-league scout I spoke to said the A's were "abused" in this deal, saying they essentially traded Bailey and Sweeney for a player much like Sweeney. A major-league executive with another club told me he was surprised Oakland didn't just wait to deal Bailey at the All-Star break, when his value might be higher.

Reddick is two years younger than Sweeney and he has just over a full season of big-league service time, whereas Sweeney is heading toward arbitration for the second time. Reddick also has a lot more power potential than Sweeney. Head is 20 years old, Alcantara is 19. By now, you've all heard the mantra: the A's are compiling young players to be ready to be part of a good core group for a potential new stadium in three years.

Bailey has been braced for a move all winter, and he told me by phone, "I'd be lying if I didn't say it's exciting. ... Everyone knows what direction the A's are taking, and like I told Billy Beane today, I'll always appreciate them giving me that opportunity out of spring training, but they're trying to get younger, they're rebuilding. I'm going to a proven winner, I'm excited to pitch in meaningful games in September and the playoffs, hopefully the World Series.

"You can't be too upset. As a player, you want to win, first and foremost, and the A's are rebuilding for down the road. I'm grateful that I have enough value to maybe help them do that."

Bailey has become friendly with Red Sox manager Bobby Valentine through charity work; Valentine has MC'd Bailey and Craig Breslow's Strike 3 Foundation events, and Bailey is eager to work with Valentine on the field.

Bailey's friends are already teasing him that he'll be like "a rock star" in Boston, but Bailey said with a laugh that he will be his usual, easy-going self. "Different colors on my back, but nothing else will change," he said.

Sweeney knows this drill already; the A's acquired him from the White Sox in the Nick Swisher deal. He said he got deja vu today because, like that time, he found out this time via voice-mail message. He laughingly told me he thought it was weird he'd have a message from Beane on his phone.

Like Bailey, Sweeney is excited about the move. He knows he's going from a place where he might have had everyday playing time (the A's outfield is beyond unsettled) to a spot where he's likely to be a role player, but Sweeney said that Valentine and Boston GM Ben Cherington told him they think he can play Fenway Park's big right field well and that his line-drive stroke is well-suited for Fenway.

"I'm looking forward to playing for a winning team," Sweeney said. "And hopefully winning a championship."

Reddick told me that GM Beane and manager Bob Melvin have told him to be ready to play every day. He's most comfortable in center field, he said, but he played mostly right field in his 87 games with Boston last year. Beane told me that the A's like the fact that Reddick has experience at all three outfield spots, and the team will decide where he fits best during the spring.

Reddick is doing the reverse commute from Bailey and Sweeney, going from a contender to a team with many question marks that will be fighting to stay out of the bottom of the league.

"Playing in Boston was a pleasure," he told me. "Fenway has so much history, the fans are so supportive and they get into the game. It's tough to leave something like that, especially when it's your first team. But whoever you're with at the time, you've got to focus."

With Bailey's departure, Grant Balfour is likely to be Oakland's closer. If he's traded, Brian Fuentes would be the probable closer. If he's traded, it probably would be Joey Devine. In fact, with a good spring, Devine just might win his on- projected job back, anyway, because Balfour and Fuentes are best in set-up roles. Fautino De Los Santos remains the closer of the future, but if the team doesn't have to rush him, they won't.

"Joey certainly could be a consideration," Beane said.

The Red Sox appeared to have interest in Bailey right from the get-go, with the departure of their own closer, Jonathan Papelbon. Beane confirmed that was the case, and at points last week, the A's were talking to Boston about a deal that also would have sent Gio Gonzalez to the Red Sox. Once Gonzalez went to Washington, much of the framework was already in place to complete the Bailey trade.

A source tells me Sweeney was added in to ensure that the A's got Alcantara in the deal; Boston had hoped to substitute another player. Alcantara was the player to be named the Red Sox removed from the Harden deal after seeing Harden's medical records, and when he was pulled from the deal, the A's called it off.

Giants fight A's move to San Jose

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer 12/28/201

For months, a strong sense of optimism has ruled the A's pursuit of a new stadium in San Jose.

Not so fast, say the Giants. They own the territorial rights to Santa Clara County and won't relinquish them without a fight.

The feeling in the Giants' camp is that the A's think if they just keep saying they're optimistic about a new stadium, it will happen.

"I think it's wishful thinking," said Peter Magowan, the Giants' former managing general partner. "I don't think they'll get anywhere with it. I'd be surprised if a different result were to come about."

Major League Baseball is apparently in no hurry to alter the Bay Area's baseball landscape, either. According to multiple sources, including A's owner Lew Wolff, the A's stadium issue is not on the agenda for the owners meetings in Scottsdale, Ariz., in two weeks.

"That's my understanding," Wolff said.

Officials from both the A's and Giants are prohibited by MLB Commissioner Bud Selig from discussing the A's stadium situation, but Magowan, who still owns a small stake in the Giants, said that he is entirely up to date on the issue and that he does not believe that the A's will be allowed to move to San Jose.

Faith in Selig

"I'd be amazed that, with all the public reassurances we've received from Bud Selig over the years, he would change his mind on this matter," Magowan said. "He's a man of his word, a man of integrity, and he has been clear and direct in the past about reaffirming our territorial rights. It's hard to see how he would not be bound by what he's said, as many times as he has been on the record in support of those rights."

Magowan, however, knows that pledges can disappear. He said that he met with Wolff when the A's current ownership group, which includes John Fisher of the Gap, purchased the club in 2005. Well aware of Wolff's background as a San Jose developer, Magowan said he asked Wolff about the group's potential interest in Santa Clara County.

"We had a drink at the Fairmont hotel, and Lew assured me ... that he was never going to San Jose," Magowan said. "I kept notes of the conversation and made a memo for my files while it was fresh in my mind: He said they had interest in Las Vegas but they had no interest in San Jose. Bud knows all of this."

Wolff said that he doesn't remember such a conversation, but, he said, "At that time, we did not consider San Jose. This verifies that we weren't thinking that because we thought we'd get a new stadium in Oakland."

Wolff contends that the A's have explored every possibility within the team's territory, including numerous options in Oakland and one extended look at a site in Fremont. None has panned out to the A's satisfaction, and club officials no longer believe that Oakland is a viable market. Wolff said Las Vegas is "not an option."

San Jose option

There was widespread belief that the A's stadium would be discussed at the owners meetings, in part because the team entered into a land-purchase agreement last month with the city of San Jose; the A's have an option to buy 5 acres downtown, near HP Pavilion, at a reduced rate: \$7 million for land that the city had acquired for \$25 million and is currently appraised at \$14 million.

January also was thought to be a sensible time frame for the owners to look at the A's stadium matter because the team has waited so long. Selig formed a panel to investigate a new ballpark nearly three years ago, and, to date, no report has been issued, although the A's have been told that the panel's work is completed. The A's assumption has been that if the territorial rights were a deal breaker, the panel would not have been formed.

In addition, MLB focused on the Dodgers' bankruptcy and the Astros' sale at the last owners meetings, in November, so it seemed as if the docket might be freed up to finally address Oakland's request to move into the Giants' territory. Any change to territorial rights would take a three-quarters vote of baseball's owners, but votes are not always tied to meetings. They also may be conducted by phone.

No other two-team market has territorial rights assigned. The A's gave the Giants the rights to Santa Clara County in 1993, when the Giants had their own stadium vote on the ballot in San Jose. The Giants insist that when they financed AT&T Park, all agreements with lenders were based on the team's current territorial rights, including corporate-rich Silicon Valley.

"Those long-term commitments wouldn't be there without that," Magowan said. "Investors would not have taken the risk if there was belief that our chief competitor could create a shiny new stadium right in the heart of our fan base."

A's struggles

There is thought that, despite the Giants' obligations on their debt service, a majority of big-league owners might be tired of paying the A's hefty revenue-sharing checks - more than \$30 million last season. A new stadium in the 10th-largest city in the country probably would put money into the revenue-sharing pot. The Giants argue that they might then be taking out of the kitty rather than contributing. San Francisco must draw 3.3 million to operate at its current level, according to club officials. The Giants sold out every game last season and drew 3.387 million.

Despite the commissioner's decree not to discuss the topic publicly, the A's have begun to press the issue, making it a central conversation point for all personnel matters. General manager Billy Beane has taken a more prominent role in the efforts to get a stadium decision, and he traveled to Scottsdale with other A's officials to meet with Selig in early November.

Though Foxsports.com reported that Selig also planned to meet with Giants officials, that has not happened, according to Magowan.

The A's have traded two prominent pitchers this month, All-Stars Trevor Cahill and Gio Gonzalez, and both times, Beane emphasized that the moves were tied to the team's need for a new stadium and increased revenues.

Oakland Mayor Jean Quan said this month that if the A's move into San Francisco's territory, litigation could last 10 years. Two years ago, San Francisco City Attorney Dennis Herrera sent Major League Baseball a letter warning against tampering with the territorial rights, citing long-term, binding legal agreements between the city and the team.

Many obstacles

Should the A's get the OK for San Jose, there would be more hurdles to climb. The team has yet to detail plans to privately finance a stadium that would cost an estimated \$400 million. The land-purchase agreement must go to a public vote, and Better Sense San Jose, a grassroots taxpayer organization opposed to a new stadium downtown, argues that there could be \$70 million in additional expenditures for the city. That could hurt the A's chances in a public vote, given the current economic climate and San Jose's other fiscal issues.

"Basically, it boils down to the fact that San Jose is in a financial mess, just short of crisis, and a new stadium is a bad idea," said Marc Morris, a spokesman for Better Sense San Jose.

Wolff said he has not sent out any signals about the A's expectations for a stadium decision, and he said he has no idea where a recent report indicating that he's "confident" the team will get the OK originated.

"I haven't heard anything," Wolff said. "It's all up to the commissioner. We'll follow whatever he says."

Bleak year of abuse, deaths and lockouts in sports

Gwen Knapp, Chronicle Columnist
Wednesday, December 28, 2011

The local top 10 stories of 2011 were covered in Tuesday's paper. The leaders from the rest of the sports world leave behind an unusually bleak landscape:

1. Penn State child sex-abuse scandal: The indictment of former defensive coordinator Jerry Sandusky has led to further revelations from other corners of the sports world. In the end, increased scrutiny may bring some relief to victims and prevent future abuses. But how much have these predators undermined the next generation of people who are truly devoted to helping children, not to mention the kids who need the help?

2. Hockey deaths and head injuries: The hockey world heard the alarms that started to wake up the NFL in 2010, instituting tougher penalties for dangerous play. Three current or former NHL enforcers died young in 2011, one from excess alcohol and painkiller consumption, two of apparent suicides. Superstar Sidney Crosby has been shelved for most of this year because of repeated collisions and post-concussion symptoms.

3. NFL and NBA lockouts: The NFL was too profitable for its labor dispute to abbreviate the 2011 season, but the NBA faced a very real threat and lost 16 games per team off its regular season. The NFL players held together remarkably well, and the product on the field has not suffered in the slightest for the loss of minicamps and other offseason practices. The NBA's compressed schedule, featuring stretches of three games in three nights, represents a real threat to the quality of the sport and to the long-term health of players.

4. Women's World Cup: The thrilling quarterfinal between Team USA and Brazil created a buzz that pushed the tournament into a new realm. When the Japanese team beat the Americans in the final, it established the sport's increased competitiveness, emotionally boosted a country still reeling from a horrifying tsunami and reconfirmed the growing power of Asian female athletes.

5. Al Davis' death: Yes, this is a repeat from the local list, but Davis occupied an outsize role in pro sports. An innovator, a gadfly, an uncompromising rebel, he led the Raiders in a way that did more to shape the NFL than any other franchise could.

Seismic shifts in Bay Area sports

2011 will go down in local history as a year of momentous events

Gwen Knapp, San Francisco Chronicle

As 2011 enters the last lap, here's a look at the top 10 Bay Area stories of the year.

1. Al Davis dies at 82: The Raiders' long-term prospects became murky with the loss of the man who defined the franchise for 49 years. But their immediate future could fall in line with Davis' legacy of rebellion and creative chaos.

In a classically erratic season, his Raiders are threatening to take down both the NFL's single-season penalty record and make the playoffs anyway - perhaps at the expense of the league's newest icon.

If Tim Tebow and the Broncos miss the playoffs, network executives will be devastated. Yielding a spot to the Raiders would be a double blow to suits everywhere, vindicating Carson Palmer, the quarterback who stood up to his Bengals boss and forced a trade.

Davis died Oct. 8 without a hint that Palmer would become the quarterback of his team 3 1/2 weeks later. But he always did love the outlaws. One of his last acts was acquiring Terrelle Pryor, an NCAA miscreant, through the supplemental draft.

And for all his business savvy, Davis never, ever identified with the suits. He fought his fellow owners on issues large and small, once going to court to challenge the Panthers for encroaching on the Raiders' team colors and Tampa Bay for borrowing too much of his beloved pirate logo.

Other teams can claim three Super Bowl wins. None has a legacy that resembles what Davis left to the Raiders.

2. Jim Harbaugh revives 49ers' franchise: Simply winning the Harbaugh hiring sweepstakes in January would have pushed this story into the top five. As other teams lined up to court the Stanford coach, threatening to derail the 49ers' pursuit, the franchise found its first winning formula in eight years.

An indulgent honeymoon period seemed to be in order, given the hindrances of the NFL lockout. Instead, Harbaugh quickly flipped the 49ers' culture.

His early efforts seemed a bit gimmicky - alternating the stalls of defensive and offensive players instead of allowing groupings by position, and handing out blue auto-mechanics shirts to signify working-class sensibilities.

But the 49ers are 12-3, defying serious second-guessing. Harbaugh has coached the skittishness out of Alex Smith's game and, best of all, taken 49ers such as Frank Gore and Patrick Willis to the place where they always belonged.

3. Buster Posey's season ends in May 25 collision: Posey's dismantled ankle would have been big news under any circumstances. The absence of the 2010 Rookie of the Year kept the defending world champs out of the playoffs.

But the Giants' attempts to redefine how players can legally approach home plate elevated their catcher's injury to a cause. So far, their efforts have failed, but they inserted themselves into what is becoming the runaway sports story of the decade.

As head-injury research rewrites the conventions of the NFL and NHL, all safety practices are up for debate. Giants manager Bruce Bochy made his best case when he said he could envision a crash at home that caused brain damage.

4. Andrew Luck passes on NFL draft, stays at Stanford: Luck should be leaving college with the Heisman Trophy. He will have to settle for a valuable degree and the knowledge that he helped entrench his school among the college football elite.

5. Bryan Stow attacked in L.A.; two people injured in Candlestick shootings: The Santa Cruz paramedic and Giants fan continues to convalesce nine months after thuggery leveled him in the Dodger Stadium parking lot. The Raiders and 49ers suspended their preseason tradition of playing each other after the mayhem that accompanied their August meeting.

The blurring of civility boundaries became apparent in a subtler way when MLB had to suspend Atlanta pitching coach Roger McDowell for verbally abusing fans at the Giants' park.

6. Cal baseball rises from deathbed to College World Series: As a budget crisis restricted funds for athletics, the school tried to cut varsity teams. While Bears baseball players wondered where or whether they'd be playing the following year, they put together one of their most successful seasons.

As they headed to the World Series, the school announced it had received enough donations to maintain the sport. The team bowed out in three games, but its supporters raised almost all of the \$10 million needed for the next seven to 10 years.

7. Tara VanDerveer and Chris Mullin enter Basketball Hall of Fame: VanDerveer had already established herself as a great coach in the mid-1990s when she took a sabbatical from Stanford to lead the U.S. Olympic team. Her induction came at a time when the Cardinal had reinstated itself as a powerhouse and ended UConn's record-setting winning streak last December.

Mullin never brought much attention to himself as a player, so it made sense that he would end up sharing his induction in a way that enhanced the Bay Area's basketball image.

8. Jury convicts Barry Bonds of single felony: The jury deadlocked on three perjury counts, one of them by a vote of 11-1. But the obstruction-of-justice verdict gave the government an unexpected victory April 13 against the home-run king, who had more protection from his legal lineup than he got in the days he worked with Jeff Kent and Bobby Bonilla.

9. "Moneyball" makes A's relevant on big screen, while on the diamond ... the club lost its edge years ago, and it has seen other teams with stringent payroll limitations, some worse than theirs, reach the playoffs.

The film made the 2002 season unrecognizable, with Scott Hatteberg somehow looming as a larger figure on that team than AL MVP Miguel Tejada.

10. Warriors hire Mark Jackson: The team's new owners wanted to make a statement with their new head coach, and they did - choosing in June a former player turned vibrant TV commentator. Because of his history as a preacher, Jackson was originally compared to ex-49ers coach Mike Singletary. But Jackson is already on his own, singular path. When describing his players' roles, Singletary never referenced Gladys Knight and the Pips.

Billy Beane: Prospects improving for A's stadium

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer 12/24/2011

After trading two All-Star starters in a two-week period - Gio Gonzalez to Washington in a deal completed Friday, Trevor Cahill to Arizona earlier in the month - A's general manager Billy Beane said the team is trying to parlay established stars into a core of good young players for a potential new stadium.

The A's have yet to gain approval for any new venue, but Beane reiterated Friday that he believes that a decision will come soon. Until then, Beane said, Oakland cannot realize sustained success in the AL West.

"There wasn't going to be a move we could make to compete with Texas and Anaheim," Beane said, noting that both will have payrolls in the \$175 million range. "Just to come up to Seattle, we'd have to spend an extra \$40-50 million."

The A's 2011 payroll was \$70 million, and Beane told The Chronicle last month that the team lost money, largely because the payroll had gone up from \$52 million in 2010. Two major-league sources confirmed that Oakland did lose \$1 million to \$2 million, despite getting revenue-sharing checks of \$30 million-plus.

Why does the A's farm system need replenishing, though? Beane says the team has not spent enough in recent drafts, because resources were going to the big-league level. Oakland spent about \$3 million on the draft last year; Beane anticipates spending \$10 million or more this season.

Draft experts point to some unimpressive draft results, to boot, but a bigger issue might be Oakland's failure to fully commit to its last rebuild after the 2007 season. The December 2008 trade for Matt Holliday, in particular, highlighted that inconsistent approach. Even last winter, the A's attempted to add bats with an eye toward competing. Adrian Beltre and Lance Berkman turned down overtures; the A's acquired Josh Willingham, David DeJesus and Hideki Matsui.

So now what does Beane tell the fan base, especially with another All-Star, Andrew Bailey, likely to follow Gonzalez and Cahill out of town in the next month?

"I'd rather run a club that has a 3- or 4-year plan and implements it and see it getting better over time, than going on the patchwork basis of year-to-year," Beane said. "We haven't been as successful when we go year-to-year."

Beane understands the frustrations.

"We've been through this cycle a number of times," he said. "And it gets shorter and shorter because the gap between us and everyone else grows."

Fans, though, are losing patience. "When do you stop rebuilding?" said John Coyle of Los Angeles, 73, a fan since the club was in Philadelphia. "Do Billy and the owners want a major-league team or don't they? I know it's not an easy situation without a new stadium, but in the meantime, there's no one out there to watch."

The A's received right-handers A.J. Cole and Brad Peacock, left-hander Tommy Milone and catcher Derek Norris for Gonzalez and minor-league starter Rob Gilliam. Beane said that Cole, 19, might have the most upside and that Milone is probably the closest to being a full-time big-leaguer.

To create roster space, catcher Landon Powell was designated for assignment. "Not fun to find out two days before Christmas," Powell said. Powell, the favorite catcher of several A's pitchers, said he hopes he is traded or claimed by another team.

Outfielder Jai Miller also was designated; Beane said the A's would like to retain both players.

Drumbeat: A's interest in Iwakuma is 'lukewarm'

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser 12/26/2011, 3:41pm

I checked in with some sources about the A's interest in Hisashi Iwakuma, which was reported by the Contra Costa Times the other day, and while I had it confirmed that Oakland is one of the four teams to have inquired about the Japanese pitcher, the A's are "lukewarm" about Iwakuma.

I'm told that there are two teams with "viable" interest in Iwakuma, and the A's aren't one of them.

It would have been a neat full circle, though, if Oakland were to have landed the right-hander. The A's won the bidding for Iwakuma's posting fee last winter but were unable to come to terms with Iwakuma and his then-agent, Don Nomura, after negotiations that were at times testy. Iwakuma missed time last season with a shoulder injury, and he is now a free agent, with no posting fee required.

I had a chance to speak to new A's acquisition Tommy Milone last week but couldn't wedge in a mention into the newspaper; Milone, 24, has a good shot at making the Oakland rotation in the spring because of his more extensive pro experience, plus his sensational command.

"That's kind of how I have to throw to be successful," Milone told me. "You can't let guys on with a free pass. I take pride in staying around the strike zone, throwing the ball to the right spot."

Milone said it was "bittersweet" to leave the Nationals in the Gio Gonzalez deal because Washington gave him his first opportunity, but he likes the fact that the A's have such a good reputation for developing young pitchers.

Milone will be joining the A's growing USC crew. Former A's top draft pick Grant Green and reliever Ryan Cook, picked up in the Trevor Cahill deal with Arizona, were Milone's college teammates.

I've had some e-mails and tweets asking me what I thought of Bob Nightengale's tweet Saturday that the A's are expecting to get a favorable decision soon on their request to move to San Jose. That sounds like pretty much what team and San Jose city sources have been saying since the end of the season; the new part was that Nightengale gave a time frame of "by February."

As many of us who have covered this issue have been writing, the next owners' meetings are in January, and many believe that the A's stadium will be discussed there. But even if the team were to get the OK to move to San Jose – which is in the Giants' territory – the land-sale agreement for Oakland's proposed downtown stadium still would have to go to a vote of San Jose citizens, and I believe the earliest that might happen would be April.

A's sources I've spoken to continue to be optimistic they'll get the OK for San Jose. Sources with Major League Baseball continue to insist that no decision has been made. It does seem at some point, though, that the A's will have to get some sort of clarity on this – they've been waiting for three years for the commissioner's stadium panel to issue a report. January, February, April – they need an answer sometime.

News report say approval for A's move is likely

Staff and News Services, 12/25/2011

The A's, on their way to San Jose?

At least one national baseball writer says it's likely.

In a Christmas Eve twitter post, Bob Nightengale of USA Today reported that Major League Baseball will soon make an announcement.

"All signs and top MLB sources say that the Athletics will be granted permission by February to move to San Jose," Nightengale tweeted.

There has been no official word from the league on the A's request since November, when Commissioner Bud Selig released a statement saying he would soon be meeting with Giants officials to discuss the possibility and ramifications of an A's move to the South Bay.

The Giants have long claimed the South Bay as their market, and maintained that their territorial rights are nonnegotiable.

Elsewhere

Atalanta captain bet on fixed games

Former Atalanta captain Cristiano Doni reportedly said he bet on fixed soccer games in Italy's Serie B involving his club. He stressed that he agreed to go along with the scam because his team was not supposed to lose.

Doni was among 16 people arrested across Italy on Monday in an investigation into match-fixing and illegal betting on games.

"I said yes to the fixes because Atalanta benefited," Doni told the Gazzetta. "I would have never listened to anyone who offered me money to make my squad lose."

In June, 16 people were arrested as part of the first wave of the inquiry. Details have not yet emerged as to what Doni did in the fixed games.

College basketball: Virginia men's head basketball coach Tony Bennett says redshirt freshman forward James Johnson is planning to transfer. He is the fourth member of Bennett's first recruiting class to leave the program in the past year, joining Billy Baron, Will Regan and KT Harrell. The departures come with the Cavaliers (10-1) off to their best start since the 2000-01 season.

Sailing: Australian skipper Chris Nicholson helped his Camper team take the lead from Spanish rival Telefonica during the second leg of the Volvo Ocean Race at Alicante, Spain. The eight-month Volvo Ocean Race covers about 45,000 miles and will finish in Galway, Ireland, in July.

A's ship Bailey to Boston for Reddick, two more

Oakland stays busy, adds pair of prospects in five-player swap

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Less than a week after trading one of their All-Star pitchers, the A's dealt another to Boston on Wednesday, shipping right-handed closer Andrew Bailey to the Red Sox.

The deal, which comes on the heels of Gio Gonzalez's departure to Washington, also sent outfielder Ryan Sweeney to Boston. In exchange, Oakland received outfielder Josh Reddick and a pair of Minor Leaguers: third baseman Miles Head and right-hander Raul Alcantara.

"It was a combination of getting back a Major League-ready position player -- we think Josh is an everyday outfielder who we've liked for quite some time -- and prospects who we really like that made this a good option for us," A's assistant general manager David Forst said.

It marks the third substantial trade of the offseason for the A's, who have suddenly moved quickly in their rebuild quest -- they also traded pitchers Trevor Cahill and Craig Breslow to Arizona earlier in the month -- as they wait on a decision from Major League Baseball regarding a potential new stadium in San Jose.

A's managing partner Lew Wolff told MLB.com on Tuesday that there has been no traction in the stadium talks despite recent reports suggesting otherwise. But A's general manager Billy Beane, trying to implement a long-term plan he hopes will equate to a contending team in as few as three years, maintains he has no choice but to act like the club will have a new home soon.

To that end, Beane will continue stockpiling prospects and adding to a depleted farm system, even if it means letting go of a player of Bailey's caliber. In three big league seasons with the A's, the 2009 American League Rookie of the Year and two-time All-Star compiled 75 saves to go along with a 2.07 ERA and 0.95 WHIP, despite two disabled-list stints. He also tallied 174 strikeouts in as many innings.

His success followed one too many struggles as a starter at the Minor League level, and on Wednesday Bailey relayed his sense of gratitude to the organization that allowed him such a career-changing opportunity in 2009, when he went from Double-A obscurity to prime-time closer.

"I can't say enough about the A's organization because, looking back, not many guys would be given the opportunity I was given back in 2009, coming off a terrible year in Double-A to making the big league team and, a couple months later, being closer," Bailey said. "So hats off to them and the opportunity they gave me.

"I had a good conversation with Billy. I understand. They're moving in a different direction and want to get younger and are hopefully looking forward to a new stadium in San Jose."

With Bailey out of the mix, the A's have several in-house closing options, including right-handers Fautino De Los Santos, Joey Devine and Grant Balfour and lefty Brian Fuentes.

Reddick, meanwhile, gives them a durable everyday option in all three outfield spots, notably in center field -- his home in the Minors -- and right field, where he played most in Boston. Where he fits in Oakland's picture remains to be seen.

"I think that will play out over the next few months," Forst said. "We don't quite have a full outfield yet, so it's nice for us to know he can play all three spots.

"[Hitting coach] Chili Davis saw him a lot in center field and really liked him there when he was with the Red Sox system, and he was very good defensively in the big leagues. So we have both options, but we probably won't be able to tell until we get a better sense of what our Major League outfield's going to look like as a whole."

The 24-year-old Reddick played in 143 games in parts of three seasons with the Red Sox. He began the 2011 campaign at Triple-A Pawtucket but was promoted to Boston in late May and hit .280 with seven home runs and 28 RBIs in 87 games over two stints.

The left-handed batter is reminiscent of Sweeney, who departs the A's after four seasons in Oakland, where he hit .286 with 13 home runs and 159 RBIs in 439 games. Relegated to a bench role this past season after an injury-plagued 2010 season, Sweeney compiled career lows in batting average (.265) and RBIs (25) and hit just one home run.

Head, 20, batted .299 with 22 home runs and 82 RBIs in 129 games at the Class A level this year and, according to Forst, represents "the type of offensive player we wanted to add to the system" alongside fellow third-base prospect Stephen Parker.

Alcantara, whom Forst confirmed was a talked-about name in the potential Rich Harden deal in July, combined for a 1-4 record and 2.20 ERA in 13 starts between Class A Lowell and the Red Sox affiliate in the Gulf Coast League.

The 19-year-old, originally signed by Boston as a non-drafted free agent out of the Dominican Republic in 2009, struck out 50 and walked just 12 while holding opponents to a .208 batting average and did not allow a home run in 65 1/3 innings.

Oakland's offseason maneuverings have netted them 10 players via trade. Forst did not rule out another and said "there are still some players of interest."

The roster makeover, then, continues.

"I'm just glad I was able to hopefully help them get better for the future," Bailey said.

Red Sox acquire closer Bailey from A's

Outfielder Sweeney also headed to Boston in five-player swap

By Cash Kruth / MLB.com

The Red Sox found their new closer Wednesday afternoon, acquiring right-hander Andrew Bailey from the A's for three players.

The trade was first reported by ESPN's Buster Olney.

Along with Bailey, the Red Sox also acquired outfielder Ryan Sweeney, who has spent the majority of the past four seasons in the Majors with the A's.

"I love the Bay Area, but if you're going to get traded, I can't think of a better situation for myself and my family to be in," said Bailey, who lives in Connecticut in the offseason. "It's a big market, big team, and I'm excited about the opportunity to win over there, especially knowing Bobby [Valentine]."

Oakland acquired three players for Sweeney and Bailey, a two-time All-Star who recorded 24 saves this past season: 20-year-old third baseman Miles Head, 19-year-old right-hander Raul Alcantara and 24-year-old outfielder Josh Reddick.

Head hit .299 with 22 homers and 82 RBIs while splitting time in Class A and advanced Class A this past season.

Alcantara went 1-4 with a 2.20 ERA in 13 starts between Rookie ball and Class A in 2011, while Reddick has spent parts of the last three seasons in the Majors. He hit .280 with seven homers and 28 RBIs in 87 games for the Red Sox this past season.

Bailey was the American League Rookie of the Year in 2009, when he collected 26 saves to go with a 1.84 ERA in 68 appearances. He has 75 saves in three seasons with the A's.

The deal comes five days after Oakland dealt starter Gio Gonzalez to the Nationals for four prospects.

"I had a good conversation with Billy [Beane, A's GM]," Bailey said. "I understand. They're moving in a different direction and want to get younger and are hopefully looking forward to a new stadium in San Jose.

"I can't say enough about the A's organization because, looking back, not many guys would be given the opportunity I was given back in 2009, coming off a terrible, terrible year in Double-A to making the big league team and, a couple months later, being closer. So hats off to them and the opportunity they gave to me. I'm just glad I was able to help them get better for the future."

No movement on Athletics' potential move

By Jane Lee and Barry M. Bloom / MLB.com

There has been no change in the status of a possible A's move from Oakland to San Jose, the club's managing partner told MLB.com on Tuesday.

"Not to my knowledge," Lew Wolff said. "Everything is in the same position as it was a month ago. We're still looking for a 'yes' or 'no' answer. So this is news to me. I'm not sure where some of this stuff is coming from. Until now, nobody [from the media] has talked to me."

Wolff's comments come three days after USA Today's Bob Nightengale tweeted, "All signs and top MLB sources say that the Athletics will be granted permission by [February] to move to San Jose."

"With the committee still working, we don't comment," an MLB spokesman said when reached in New York on Tuesday.

Wolff said there has been ongoing contact with officials from Major League Baseball about the issue but that there's no timeline for a decision. He also confirmed that the issue is not on the agenda for the upcoming Owners Meetings, being held from Jan. 11-12 in Paradise Valley, Ariz.

"I hope [a decision] would come in February. I'd like it to come in December," he said. "But there's no timetable. It's a decision that has to be made by the Commissioner."

A month ago, Wolff said he was awaiting some movement from MLB on the issue.

"We need an answer, whether it's yes or no," he said at the time. "I need an answer pretty soon. Last year it didn't affect our planning. This year it is."

Wolff asked MLB in 2008 for permission to move 35 miles south from Oakland, to San Jose, and Commissioner Bud Selig put together a three-person committee to review the relocation options inside and outside the Bay Area. The San Francisco Giants have blocked a possible move to San Jose, claiming that Santa Clara County is part of their territory.

The San Jose market once belonged to the A's, who ceded it to the Giants in the 1980s while they were trying to build a ballpark in Santa Clara County, where the team lost two separate popular votes. The Giants have since self-funded their own successful ballpark on the waterfront in San Francisco, a stadium that opened in 2000, but are still claiming San Jose as their territory.

In the meantime, A's general manager Billy Beane has jump-started a rebuilding of the team, collecting seven combined prospects over two deals that sent All-Star Gio Gonzalez to the Nationals and fellow front-line starter Trevor Cahill to the D-backs -- moves he hopes equates to a contending team in a new stadium as early as 2014.

As does Wolff, though, Beane maintains that he hasn't been given a decision by MLB regarding the stadium, though he expects one soon. He simply has no choice, he said, but to act as if approval will come in the near future.

When reached regarding Nightengale's post on Twitter, Beane had no comment.

Revamped lineup not enough for A's in 2011

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- For the A's, 2011 marked a year defined not by an expected contending formula, but rather by an array of underachieving performances that ultimately scripted a fifth consecutive non-winning season.

Never mind the fact the A's welcomed in offensive upgrades via Josh Willingham, David DeJesus and famed Japanese slugger Hideki Matsui, nor that they entered the year boasting baseball's best young pitching staff. Both sets struggled with consistency and also faced injury, leading to a 74-88 record and third-place finish in the American League West.

Through it all, the A's also endured a change in leadership -- Bob Melvin became manager June 9 and the A's went 47-52 under him after posting a 27-36 mark with the dismissed Bob Geren at the helm -- and underwent plenty of transition on the field.

By June, shortstop Cliff Pennington represented the lone Opening Day starter in the infield. And by the start of the offseason, the A's were essentially left staring down three holes in the outfield. They're expected to be filled by a younger crowd in 2012, when a rebuilding A's team is likely to experience plenty more growing pains than wins.

Patience, again, will need to be had by the Oakland faithful, which endured a handful of highs and lows in 2011. What follows is a snapshot of those, highlighted by the top five story lines of the calendar year.

5. Injuries, and more injuries

Despite a makeover to the team's training staff following an injury-plagued 2010 season, the 2011 A's again endured their fair share of bumps and bruises -- and costly ones, too. Injuries to starters Dallas Braden and Brett Anderson early in the year ultimately resulted in season-ending surgeries and also forced key pieces like Andrew Bailey (53 games), Rich Harden (82 games), Brandon McCarthy (41) and Michael Wuertz (53) to miss considerable time. Their absence -- combined with inconsistency faced by front-line starters Trevor Cahill and 2011 All-Star Gio Gonzalez -- proved damaging, as a pitching staff that led the AL in ERA (3.13) before the All-Star break watched that number slide to 4.48 in the months that followed.

4. "Moneyball" brings A's national attention

Though in the midst of a forgettable season, the A's found themselves as the center of national attention in September, when the 2002 version of the club hit the big screen by way of the long-anticipated film "Moneyball." A's general manager Billy Beane -- played by Brad Pitt, who meticulously mastered Beane's mannerisms in the movie -- and his story of fielding a winning baseball team that won 20 straight games on a small budget, lent a good dose of positive vibes to the city of Oakland. Pitt, along with co-stars Jonah Hill and Chris Pratt and director Bennett Miller, were among several Hollywood names to grace the red carpet -- naturally, it was actually green -- for the premier in Oakland. Beane, Melvin and most of the A's roster joined in on the activities.

3. A change in guard at second base

Perhaps no other day proved more bittersweet for A's fans this year than June 30, when the club traded away longtime fan favorite and class act Mark Ellis to the Rockies -- a move that signaled rookie sensation Jemile Weeks' permanent takeover at second base. Ellis departed as Oakland's career leader in games played by a second baseman with 1,021, and his loyalty to the A's was reciprocated by Beane, who wasn't so much interested in a great return package -- he landed right-handed reliever Bruce Billings and also gave Colorado cash to help offset Ellis' remaining salary -- but in giving Ellis an opportunity to resume everyday duties elsewhere. Weeks, meanwhile, quickly helped ease the pain of the news, emerging as one of the league's rising young stars and providing A's fans a bright spot in what appears to be a foggy future.

2. Geren dismissed; Melvin hired

The A's underwent their first in-season managerial change in 25 years, when Geren -- under pointed criticism after public comments made by current and former players regarding his managing style -- was dismissed June 9 in the midst of a nine-game losing streak. The move spoke volumes, relaying a message that complacency wasn't to be had by a team built to contend, that change was necessary even if it came at the cost of Geren, a longtime friend of Beane. Melvin was named interim manager and quickly injected a newfound energy and confidence into a reeling club, which improved in the second half. Those efforts were rewarded on Sept. 21, when Melvin landed a three-year contract that will keep him at the helm through 2014.

1. A's enter rebuilding mode

Before the A's even closed the book on their disappointing 2011 campaign, whispers of a rebuild percolated around Oakland and have since been indirectly confirmed by several decisions made by the club this winter. Oakland chose not to chase any of its own free agents, including the Minnesota-bound Willingham, while citing an unclear financial situation -- the result of an unresolved stadium situation that has the A's on a spending hold. Beane, though, is expecting a stadium decision soon and, subsequently, has rebooted a youth movement reminiscent of the one created after the 2007 season. Shortly after the Winter Meetings, the A's GM pulled the trigger on a pair of big names, shipping Gonzalez and Cahill in separate deals. The former went to Washington for four prospects, while the latter was sent along with lefty Craig Breslow to Arizona for three players, bringing Oakland's total haul to seven well-regarded prospects.

Major Lee-ague: Bailey reacts to trade

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 12/28/2011, 2:34pm

Just got off the phone with Andrew Bailey, who sounded both genuinely excited about his new opportunity in Boston but — as expected given the consummate professional and class act that he is — also very grateful for the years he spent in Oakland. Here's some of what he had to say:

"I love the Bay Area, but if you're going to get traded, I can't think of a better situation for myself and my family to be in. It's a big market, big team, and I'm excited about the opportunity to win over there, especially knowing Bobby V."

On his chat with Red Sox GM Ben Cherington:

"He wanted to just welcome me to the team. They said I've been of interest to them for most of the offseason and they were close a number of times and they couldn't think of a better time to get a deal done. He said they're looking forward to having me in Boston, and I'm looking forward to getting started in Spring Training."

On his time in Oakland:

"I had a good conversation with Billy. I understand. They're moving in a different direction and want to get younger and are hopefully looking forward to a new stadium in San Jose. I can't say enough about the A's organization because, looking back, not many guys would be given the opportunity I was given back in 2009, coming off a terrible, terrible year in Double-A to making the big league team and, a couple months later, being closer. So hats off to them and the opportunity they gave to me. I'm just glad I was able to help them get better for the future."

Major Lee-ague: Bailey, Sweeney dealt to Red Sox

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 12/28/2011 2:03pm

Confirmed: The A's have traded Andrew Bailey and Ryan Sweeney to Boston for outfielder Josh Reddick, third baseman Miles Head and right-hander Raul Alcantara.

Major Lee-ague: Beane addresses Gio trade

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 12/23/2011 8:02pm

Quick hits from A's general manager Billy Beane's conference call with reporters this evening:

On why he pulled the trigger on the Nationals' offer:

"We were pretty clear from the start that we were going to leverage one team against the other. We were transparent about that. First of all, I think the caliber of the prospects, they're guys we think very, very highly of, and in a couple of cases guys we think are very, very close. Milone and Peacock were in the big leagues at the end of the year and showed themselves pretty well. The other thing, we're giving up a pitcher, and the ability to acquire three — what we think are three very good Major League prospects was what won it for us. There were a couple of teams involved, and it was a very difficult decision because there was another club that put together a deal that was different in terms of prospects, but we just slightly leaned this way."

On not taking a more offensive-conscious approach when assessing return packages:

"I think we focused on getting the best players we could get, whether they be pitchers or position players. I think we've got a long way to go and we just wanted to basically take the best deals and not be overly specific with it. We thought that was the best long-term approach."

On the effect the Angels and Rangers have had on his planning:

"I think we've been pretty public about the position we're in, the expectation that we need a new venue to compete and that we expect that decision pretty soon. So this would have been the same approach we would have taken two months ago, but as it applies to their moves, it would be disingenuous to say, particularly in Anaheim's case, that it certainly was a little bit of a nudge in this direction, that's for sure."

On his response to fans who are saying goodbye to some of the team's best players:

"We've been through this cycle numerous times, and it gets shorter and shorter because the gap between us and everybody else grows. Ultimately, the fact of the matter is, and we've been a little more vocal about it lately, for us to compete we're going to have to have a new stadium, and I don't think there was a move we could have made that would put us in a position to compete with a club like the Angels or Texas given what they have and where they're headed and some of those signings. You're talking about two clubs in the division that are probably in the \$150-\$170 million range, and we're not a business that can put that payroll on the field. Just for us to catch up to Seattle, we'd have to spend an extra \$40 or \$50 million to catch the person above us. From our standpoint, I don't know there's a move out there that could have put us in a position to compete with them next year.

"I'd rather run a club that has a plan, a three- or four-year plan, and see that plan implemented, and see the team get better over time, as opposed to putting together a patchwork on a year-to-year basis which has a very limited future. Whenever we've been successful is when we've had a plan and stuck to it, and when we haven't been successful is when we try to act on a year-by-year basis."

On teams' remaining interest in his other players:

"Yes, as we expected. We're still going to be very open-minded. Whether it happens or not, we're putting together a team with the idea that we're going to have a new stadium because I don't think we have any other choice, to be honest."

On the stadium decision:

"We've just been hearing soon. Any other information, I would probably keep to myself. We have no choice but to operate this way. The fact of the matter is, if you have a new stadium, there's been one model, and it's what the Cleveland Indians did. They did it first, and they did it best. Nobody's done it the same way since. We're going to take the same approach, and if there's a little bit of pain inbetween, so be it. If we get the opportunity to open a new stadium, we're going to take advantage of it. It may sound a bit Pollyanish, but I don't think we have too many other options.

"The plan I'd like to have is like Cleveland, where the core of your team enters a stadium and they're already productive Major League players, based on giving them the opportunity before you go in there, and that one sustains itself for a long, long time. The Indians were arguably one of the most dominant teams of the 90's, and to me that's the blueprint and the template of the way to do it. They went through some pain over there, but they had the guts to do it right, and they did it best."

On potential outfield additions:

"There are certainly a couple we're speaking to now. And we've had trade conversations that would involve that position, too."

A's designate Powell, Miller for assignment

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- In an effort to make room on their 40-man roster for players acquired in the Gio Gonzalez trade, the A's designated catcher Landon Powell and outfielder Jai Miller for assignment on Friday evening.

The A's, already owners of four catchers on their roster at the time of the trade, added another in prospect Derek Norris. Depth at the position allowed them to make a move with the 29-year-old Powell.

"Landon's a guy that's been with us; we're certainly comfortable with him as a backup," A's general manager Billy Beane said of Powell, who has an excellent rapport with the pitching staff. "The hope is that he remains with us and is competing for the backup job again next year as he's done. Obviously, we'd like to hold on to him, but we'll see what happens."

Powell has appeared in 123 games over the past three years with Oakland and most recently played in just 36 contests as Kurt Suzuki's backup this season, batting .171 with one homer and four RBIs.

Miller, meanwhile, spent the majority of 2011 with Triple-A Sacramento, hitting .276 with 32 home runs and 88 RBIs in 110 games. As a September callup in Oakland, the outfielder went 3-for-12 with one homer and two RBIs in seven games and, by season's end, was expected to compete for a starting-outfield job come spring.

"He had a real good year for us at Triple-A," Beane said. "The hope is we can retain him in some way, shape or form once this process is over. He came on pretty good last year, and I'm sure others took notice as well."

Suzuki passing on holiday traditions to daughter

A's catcher creating memories in first Christmas as father

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- A's catcher Kurt Suzuki has been busy prepping for the 2012 season but is also using the offseason to take in moments with his wife, Renee, and baby daughter, Malia, who is enjoying her first holiday season.

Suzuki recently took some time to talk to MLB.com about the memories he's creating as a father, as well as ones he relishes from the past.

MLB.com: Where do you usually spend the holidays?

Suzuki: We usually spend it in our house here in Southern California. We used to alternate back and forth between Hawaii, but the last couple of years we've spent it here. This year, since Malia is still so young, my parents are actually flying out here, and my wife's family will be here, along with my sister and her husband.

MLB.com: What are your best memories of the holidays when you were growing up?

Suzuki: Getting the gifts, of course! The fun part I used to like is when I checked my stocking. That was my favorite - waking up and going to see what was in my stocking. That was probably the highlight of my morning.

MLB.com: What was the best thing you ever found in your stocking?

Suzuki: Well, it wasn't in my stocking, but once I had a set of golf clubs right next to it. I was pretty excited about it. That was probably the best gift I ever got as a kid. Another good one was a boogie board, which I had wanted for a while.

MLB.com: Was there a present you always wanted but never received?

Suzuki: Well I don't want to sound like a spoiled brat. I was always a pretty simple kind of kid. There was nothing really that I wanted and never got. Growing up in Hawaii, most kids just want stuff to go to the beach with, and I was that way. Anything to do with water sports I loved -- boogie boards, surfboards, fishing poles.

MLB.com: What's the worst present you ever received?

Suzuki: The worst was clothes. Any clothes, shirts or sweatshirts. You get a sweatshirt and you would think, 'I live in Hawaii. Why do I need a sweater?' So I never got too excited when I got one. I would always act excited because I wanted to be nice, but you're always looking for that toy or that boogie board.

MLB.com: How about the best present you ever gave someone?

Suzuki: I got Renee a Louis Vuitton purse, and she had no idea I was getting it for her. We had kind of agreed upon not getting each other any really nice gifts that year, so I kind of surprised her and she was pretty excited about it. I remember her saying she really didn't need it, but she wasn't returning it.

MLB.com: What has this holiday season been like for you as a first-time dad?

Suzuki: It's been so much fun. We've been doing a lot of Christmasy stuff with her. We went and walked around a district by our house called the Christmas Light District, where all the houses have lights galore all over the place. We took Malia out for a walk in that neighborhood to look at the lights, and we got our Christmas tree with her and decorated it with her and we all put the angel on the tree kind of together. That was pretty neat. We've been creating memories, and even though she's so young and probably won't remember, it's fun doing stuff as parents that you remember doing as a kid. We also bought a bunch of Christmas books we read to her before bed.

MLB.com: How would you describe yourself as a shopper?

Suzuki: When I'm buying something for me, I'm always putting stuff back and picking it up again. I'm pretty indecisive. But it's for somebody else, I know what I want and I go in and get it.

MLB.com: Are you making any New Year's resolutions?

Suzuki: When you become a father, you want to be the best father you can be, and you want to be as helpful as you can. I want to help Renee with everything because it can get a little overwhelming at times. I just want to try to be as happy as I can, try to enjoy life a little more and not worry about the small stuff.

A's trade closer Bailey, OF Sweeney to Red Sox

By HOWARD ULMAN, AP, 12/29/2011

BOSTON For Andrew Bailey, coming in from the bullpen at Fenway Park is a special feeling.

He'll experience that a lot more next season.

New manager Bobby Valentine found his new man for the back end of the Boston bullpen on Wednesday when the Red Sox obtained the All-Star closer and outfielder Ryan Sweeney from the Oakland Athletics for outfielder Josh Reddick, infield prospect Miles Head and minor league pitcher Raul Alcantara.

In the deal, first reported by ESPN, Bailey gives the Red Sox a reliable ninth-inning guy to replace the departed Jonathan Papelbon, who signed a \$50 million, four-year contract as a free agent with the Philadelphia Phillies in November.

The 27-year-old Bailey has three saves in four appearances at Fenway Park in his three major-league seasons.

"The one that sticks out the most was my first save opportunity this year was against the Red Sox," Bailey said in a conference call. "I actually blew that save. From what I remember, there's nothing like the atmosphere of running into the game from the bullpen at Fenway Park."

A New Jersey native and offseason resident of Connecticut, Bailey is excited about coming back east.

He already knows Valentine, who lives in Stamford, Conn., and hosted several events for the pediatric cancer foundation of Bailey and former teammate Craig Breslow.

"Bobby and I are good friends," Bailey said. "It just kind of helps knowing someone going in."

Bailey - the 2009 AL Rookie of the Year, who made the All-Star team that season and again in 2010 - had been the subject of trade talk this offseason.

The right-hander went 0-4 with a 3.24 ERA and 24 saves in 41 2-3 innings and 42 appearances this year. He spent time on the disabled list for the second straight season, pitching for the first time in 2011 on May 29 after being sidelined with a strained right forearm.

"I'm feeling good," he said. "This is my first healthy offseason I've had since I've been in the big leagues."

In his career, he is 7-10 with a 2.07 ERA and 75 saves in 84 opportunities. In 2010, Oakland led the AL in ERA (3.56) and shutouts (17) while holding opponents to a .245 batting average.

Bailey becomes the fourth key pitcher traded this month for the rebuilding A's, who dealt starter Trevor Cahill and reliever Breslow to the Arizona Diamondbacks on Dec. 9 and then sent left-handed starter Gio Gonzalez to Washington last week.

Still left in Oakland's depleted rotation are Dallas Braden, Brett Anderson and Brandon McCarthy.

Braden, who pitched a perfect game on May 9, 2010, received a \$3.35 million, one-year contract Dec. 13. But he made only three starts last season before being sidelined by a shoulder injury that required surgery.

"That organization is heading down a different road where they're trying to get younger and build for a future in San Jose," Bailey said.

Oakland general manager Billy Beane is retooling his roster for the future in hopes of the franchise getting the go ahead to build a new ballpark some 40 miles south in San Jose despite the San Francisco Giants owning the territorial rights to technology-rich Santa Clara County.

Beane and owner Lew Wolff have said they expect to hear soon from Commissioner Bud Selig, and Beane said the unsettled stadium situation would affect him being able to sign his own and other free agents this winter. He has gone the trade route yet again, a common practice for the low-budget franchise that has watched its superstars leave for big money elsewhere over the past decade.

The A's (74-88) haven't posted a winning record or earned a playoff berth since being swept in the 2006 AL championship series by Detroit.

The Red Sox missed the playoffs the past two years, but won the World Series in 2004 and 2007.

"I think every kid playing T-ball out there strives to pitch in the postseason and meaningful games in September and, ultimately, the World Series," Bailey said. "So I'm going to welcome that with open arms."

On Dec. 14, Boston traded for Houston closer Mark Melancon, who had 20 saves last year in 71 relief outings but may be a setup man for Bailey.

"We believe both are fully capable of (closing)," Red Sox general manager Ben Cherington said. "Bailey's been doing it for a little bit longer so perhaps he goes in with the leg up."

Sweeney is in the mix for Boston's right field job now that J.D. Drew is a free agent. He's an outstanding fielder who can play all three spots. In six seasons, he has a .283 batting average after hitting .265 with one homer and 25 RBIs in 264 at bats last season.

Reddick, who began last season at Triple-A Pawtucket before being promoted in late May, will look to fill a big void in Oakland's open outfield.

The 24-year-old Reddick batted .280 with seven homers and 28 RBIs in 87 games for Boston in 2011. He can play any outfield spot and likely will get immediate action for the A's, who already lost outfielders David DeJesus and Josh Willingham in free agency. Center fielder Coco Crisp isn't expected to return either.

At last summer's trade deadline, the A's and Red Sox were near completion on a deal that would have sent Oakland right-hander Rich Harden to Boston for Triple-A first baseman Lars Anderson, but it fell through late because of Harden's lengthy list of injury issues.

Former Red Sox pitching coach Curt Young returned to the A's this offseason to work under manager Bob Melvin.

Head, a first baseman, batted .299 with 22 home runs and 82 RBIs in 129 games with the Red Sox two Single-A affiliates, at Greenville and Salem.

The right-handed Alcantara, 19, combined for a 1-4 record and a 2.20 ERA in 13 starts with Single-A Lowell and the Red Sox affiliate in the Gulf Coast League. He struck out 50 and walked just 12 while holding opponents to a .208 batting average.