

A's News Clips, Friday, December 30, 2011

Mark Purdy: The most powerful person in Bay Area sports

By Mark Purdy, Mercury News Columnist

Charles Johnson is the most powerful person in Bay Area sports. He is also someone that most local fans wouldn't recognize if he was sitting next to them at a sports bar, eating chicken wings and quaffing beer.

He could, however, definitely pick up the tab for the wings and the brew.

Johnson, according to Forbes magazine, is among the world's 250 richest people. The co-chairman and co-founder of the Franklin Resources financial mega-firm is worth an estimated \$4.4 billion.

And as the new largest stakeholder in the Giants, Johnson will have much to say about the team's future -- as well as the entire Northern California sports landscape -- if he chooses.

But will he? We'll be finding out over the next several months.

The year 2011 was a significant and compelling one in Bay Area sports. And that was just on the field. The 49ers and Raiders became playoff contenders. The Sharks again reached the NHL's Final Four. Stanford's quarterback, Andrew Luck, almost won the Heisman Trophy.

Yet without question, the most momentous developments occurred off the field. Raiders owner Al Davis died. There was a major shakeup in the Giants' ownership structure when former CEO Bill Neukom was ousted by the team's executive board. And the 49ers' stadium plans took a leap forward.

All of this, combined with other comings and goings, resulted in weighty changes among this newspaper's annual rankings of the Bay Area's powerful sports figures. Most radically, there are 10 new names on the list. Others moved up or slipped down.

Yet no one came more out of nowhere than Johnson. Last year at this time, he was an anonymous member of the Giants ownership group's executive board. Last summer, however, the board became unenamored with Neukom, their fellow owner and chief executive officer. According to various sources, Neukom proposed too much self-compensation and had different ideas about how to spend team revenue.

Johnson was part of the board faction that decided Neukom had to leave. He did, by awkwardly "resigning" at season's end. Johnson then purchased additional shares in the team, giving him more than 25 percent ownership of the Giants, by far the largest chunk. He has become de facto chairman of the nine-person board -- although under the team's new ownership structure there is officially no chairman. Larry Baer, the Giants' president, is also now the team's chief executive officer.

Baer, however, must still report to the board. Which means that Johnson will now be the loudest voice in Baer's ear.

What will that voice say? Hard to know. Johnson seeks a low profile. He declined an interview request for this story through Giants spokesperson Staci Slaughter. But we know a few facts about Johnson. He is 78 years old. He is chairman and co-founder of Franklin Resources, the investment and mutual fund giant. Johnson and his wife, Ann, have been longtime Bay Area philanthropists. They live on the peninsula.

That's about it in terms of biographical information. But from this point forward, Johnson's actions will speak for him -- both in terms of the team's payroll budget and the Giants' upcoming response to Major League Baseball's decision regarding the A's.

This explains why two of the top three spots on this year's 25-person list are being held down by Giants' executives -- Johnson and Baer. But they hold the fate of many Bay Area teams in their hands.

Despite recent reports that Major League Baseball has assured the A's they will be granted permission to pursue a San Jose ballpark project, the decision is no sure thing. Bud Selig, the baseball commissioner, must first work out a settlement with the Giants to abandon their claim of territorial rights in Santa Clara County. So far, they have been massively stubborn.

But if that happens and if the A's do indeed move to San Jose, other dominoes could fall. The Raiders might stay in Oakland because they would have O.co Coliseum to themselves. The Giants could use their territorial rights windfall to help construct an arena for the Warriors on the parking lot across McCovey Cove from AT&T Park. It's all tied together.

Johnson may not enjoy being in the public eye. But he can no longer avoid it. Baer can't act without Johnson's approval and his approval could affect all of those teams. Know what they call someone in that situation?

Most powerful.

Baseball remembers those it lost in 2011

By Tom Singer / MLB.com

It was a year of many indelible memories, countless remarkable personal and club feats and far, far too many moments of silence.

The baseball universe had to bid farewell to men who had graced its fields, its front offices, its broadcast booths and its grandstands. Men who shall never be forgotten, and to whom we now raise our flutes for the most heartfelt of Auld Lang Synes.

Matty Alou, 72: The smallest (5-foot-9) of the Alou Brothers swung the biggest bat, both literally (a 36-ounce model that seemed to outweigh him) and statistically (he won the National League batting title in 1966 by hitting .342 and retired as a career .307 hitter). Nov. 3, Miami, diabetes.

Gino Cimoli, 81: The NL All-Star outfielder with the 1957 Brooklyn Dodgers batted .265 across a 10-year career with seven different clubs. Feb. 12, Roseville, Calif., kidney and heart failure.

Wes Covington, 79: With 54 home runs, he was a junior member -- the seniors being Hank Aaron and Eddie Mathews -- of the Milwaukee Braves' back-to-back World Series teams of 1957-58. July 4, Edmonton, cancer.

Ryne Duren, 81: His thick glasses intimidated hitters and his blazing fastball put them away. The inspiration for cinema's Rick "Wild Thing" Vaughn topped the Majors with an inconceivable 20 saves in 1958, when he fanned 87 in 75 2/3 innings for the Yankees -- the first of six consecutive seasons in which his strikeouts exceeded his innings. Jan. 6, Lake Wales, Fla.

Mike Flanagan, 59: He helped pitch the Orioles into two World Series (1979 and '83), winning the AL Cy Young Award on the way in '79, but wasn't able to achieve as much success as the team's general manager. Aug. 24, Monkton, Md., suicide.

Bob Forsch, 61: His ceremonial opening toss prior to World Series Game 7 was merely the last of thousands of clutch pitches by the only pitcher to throw multiple no-hitters (1978 and '83) for the storied Cardinals franchise. Ken Forsch's "little brother" also helped pitch St. Louis into the World Series in 1982, '85 and '87. Nov. 3, Weeki Wachee, Fla., thoracic aortic aneurysm.

Joe Frazier, 88: Baseball, too, lost a Smokin' Joe, the one-time infielder whose 207-game run as Mets manager ended two months into the 1977 season, with his replacement being Joe Torre. Feb. 15, Broken Arrow, Okla., heart attack.

Woodie Fryman, 70: The ole Tobacco Farmer from Kentucky didn't break into the Majors until he was 26, and the lefty won 141 games in an 18-year career through 1983. Feb. 4, Lexington, Ky., heart ailment.

Lou Gorman, 84: The 2002 inductee into the Red Sox Hall of Fame spent more than three decades in baseball operations, a career highlighted by stints as general manager in Seattle and Boston. April 1, Weston, Mass., natural causes.

Greg Halman, 24: He smiled, he joked, he excited with anticipation all of his native Netherlands. He was fresh off his most significant stretch of Major League action and was set to invite Seattle's love in 2012. He was abruptly, inexplicably taken from us. Nov. 21, Rotterdam, knife stabbing.

Roy Hartsfield, 85: He was the charter manager of Toronto, guiding the Blue Jays through their first three seasons (1977-79), a just reward for a long stint as a successful Minor League skipper. Jan. 15, Atlanta, liver cancer.

Hideki Irabu, 42: The right-hander helped blaze Japanese players' trail to the Majors, going 29-20 with the 1997-99 Yankees before his career wound down in disappointment. July 27, Los Angeles, suicide.

Eddie Joost, 94: The smooth-fielding infielder was one of the last remaining links to the fabled Philadelphia A's, with whom he became a two-time (1949, '52) All-Star, then the team's last manager before its move to Kansas City. April 12, Fair Oaks, Calif.

Harmon Killebrew, 74: The Hammer struck for 573 homers across a 22-season Hall of Fame career, playing all but 106 of his 2,435 games as the revered and beloved face of the Washington-Minnesota franchise. May 17, Scottsdale, Ariz., esophageal cancer.

Charlie Lea, 54: The France-born righty went 43-31 for the Expos from 1982-84, but he left his most permanent mark with his May 10, 1981 no-hitter against San Francisco. He was a long-time member of the broadcast crew for the Memphis Redbirds. Nov. 11, Collierville, Tenn., heart attack.

Marty Marion, 94: He fielded shortstop as no one with two arms had any business, thus was known as The Octopus as the centerpiece of the Cardinals' World Series championship teams of 1942, '44 and '46. March 16, Ladue, Mo., natural causes.

Charlie Metro, 92: He dabbled both in outfield play and managing before becoming one of the true scouting legends of the game, primarily for the Dodgers. March 18, Buckingham, Va., lung cancer.

Jim Northrup, 71: As the starting right fielder on the 1968 Tigers that united Detroit at a time of deep social divide, the lefty hitter belted 21 homers and drove in 90 runs, the high note of a 12-year career. June 8, Grand Blanc, Mich., seizure.

Jose Pagan, 76: Versatile and affable, the Puerto Rican crowned a 15-year career by playing a vital role on the 1971 World Series champion Pirates, for whom he started at four different positions. June 7, Sebring, Fla., Alzheimer's disease.

Mitchell Page, 59: A third-round Draft pick in 1973 by the Pirates dealt to Oakland as part of a nine-player blockbuster in March of '77, he broke in with the '77 A's as the AL Rookie of the Year runner-up -- to Hall of Famer Eddie Murray -- hitting .307 with 21 homers and 75 RBIs. March 12, Glendale, Ariz., in his sleep.

Duane Pillette, 88: The big right-hander earned two unique spots in baseball lore, starting the St. Louis Browns' final game and earning the Orioles' first victory after the franchise's 1954 shift to Baltimore. May 8, San Jose, Calif., heart failure.

Mel Queen, 69: As a left-handed hitter and right-handed thrower, he had a brief but unique career with the Reds as an outfielder/pitcher prior to a conversion to full-time pitching in 1967. Then as a pitching coach/advisor, he tutored three Toronto pitchers to Cy Young Awards -- Pat Hentgen, Roger Clemens (twice) and Roy Halladay. May 13, Morro Bay, Calif., cancer.

Bob Rush, 85: Mr. Cub of the mound during the outset of Ernie Banks' wider reign, the big right-hander was an eight-time double-figures winner for the perennial cellar-dwellers of the '50s, including a 17-13 mark with a 2.70 ERA in 1952. March 19, Mesa, Ariz.

Larry Shepard, 92: He never got to do it in the Majors, but he sure knew a lot about pitching, winning 179 games during a 13-season Minor League career then steering the Big Red Machine pitchers as Cincinnati's pitching coach. He also served as Pirates manager for two seasons between Danny Murtaugh stints. April 6, Lincoln, Neb., natural causes.

Dave Sisler, 79: The bespectacled pitching branch of the famed Sisler clan (Hall of Fame father George was a career .340 hitter and brother Dick a two-time All-Star) posted 38 wins from 1956-62 in his career as a reliever and spot-starter. Jan. 9, St. Louis, prostate cancer.

Roy Smalley, 85: A cornerstone of one of baseball's leading families -- brother-in-law of Gene Mauch and father of Roy Smalley III -- he was the Cubs shortstop replaced by Ernie Banks, making him Wally Pipp to Mr. Cub's Lou

Gehrig. Oct. 12, Sahuarita, Ariz.

Duke Snider, 84: The Duke of Flatbush -- and of Chavez Ravine -- hit nearly .300 and struck 407 homers, mostly for the Dodgers during a Hall of Fame career that spanned 18 seasons and both coasts. Feb. 27, Escondido, Calif., diabetes.

Paul Splittorff, 64: A 1987 inductee into the Royals Hall of Fame, the left-hander had 129 wins from 1974-80 for Kansas City's AL West dynasty, and he remained vital on the scene as the team's TV analyst. May 25, Blue Springs, Md., oral cancer.

Shannon Stone, 39: Many years ago, Al Stone caught a ball tossed into the Arlington Stadium stands by Buddy Bell and presented it to his joyful son, Shannon. Spurred by the warmth of that memory and his own fatherly love, the 18-year veteran of the Brownwood (Texas) Fire Department suffered a fatal fall at Rangers Ballpark while reaching for a souvenir ball tossed for his 6-year-old son, Cooper, by Josh Hamilton. July 7.

Chuck Tanner, 82: The onetime nondescript utility outfielder enjoyed an uninterrupted 19-season run as a manager with four teams, most gloriously the "We Are Family" Pirates, whom he guided to the 1979 World Series championship. Feb. 11, New Castle, Pa., following a long illness.

Dick Williams, 82: He was hard-nosed as a vagabond utility player during a 13-season playing career, even harder-nosed as a Hall of Fame manager who won pennants with three different teams (Boston, Oakland, San Diego) and two World Series with the A's. July 7, Las Vegas, brain aneurysm.

Gus Zernial, 87: Oh, how Ozark Ike could swing the big lumber, especially from 1950-53, a four-season span during which he totaled 133 homers and 430 RBIs for two teams (White Sox and Philadelphia A's). Jan. 20, Fresno, Calif., heart disease.

A's look ahead after busy winter of retooling

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Though the A's may finally appear ready to say goodbye to 2011, which resulted in their fifth straight non-winning season, they're not exactly prepared to welcome the 2012 campaign.

At least not yet.

Plenty of questions still face the A's as they flip the calendar, and what follows is MLB.com's attempt to address some of them.

1. What have the A's done this offseason, and what still lingers on their to-do list?

The A's have used this offseason to plant the seeds for a rebuild, evidenced by their decision to trade All-Stars Gio Gonzalez, Andrew Bailey and 2011 Opening Day starter Trevor Cahill, along with lefty Craig Breslow. Their unwavering stance as a team on a spending hold with no qualms on dealing other names while they await a stadium decision has held true.

In the meantime, they'd like to fill the outfield, which lost Josh Willingham, Coco Crisp and David DeJesus, and continue stockpiling talent that could potentially equate to a contending team as early as 2014, when a new stadium - if approved -- is expected.

2. So what's the deal with the stadium issue then?

The A's have been awaiting a decision on their future home since March 2009, when Major League Baseball appointed a three-person panel to assess the team's relocation options inside and outside the Bay Area. It's been well-documented that the A's would like to build a stadium in San Jose, but the Giants own territorial rights to the city and have made it clear that they will not negotiate to relinquish them.

However, Commissioner Bud Selig has reportedly met with A's officials this winter and was also scheduled to meet with the Giants brass to discuss the issue. In the meantime, Selig has continually declined to answer specific questions about the progress made on the situation, though many speculate a decision could come by February.

3. Cahill, Gonzalez and Bailey are gone. Who could be next on the move?

While the A's appear done making headlines among trade rumors, it's possible they find a deal they like that could send relievers Grant Balfour or Brian Fuentes elsewhere -- and maybe even catcher Kurt Suzuki, who is under contract through 2013, with a club option for 2014. Everyone not named Jemile Weeks, they say, is available.

4. Who will join Weeks in the infield next year?

Weeks, again, will have shortstop Cliff Pennington as his double-play partner, with Scott Sizemore set to be the everyday guy at third base. The A's expect Sizemore to continue making strides there, while third-base prospect Stephen Parker undergoes his own grooming process at the Minor League level. First base, then, represents the club's biggest infield concern, though the front-office folks appear rather content with the current choices in Daric Barton, Brandon Allen and Kila Ka'aihue. However, it would behoove them to reel in another strong option via trade.

5. Will there be any familiar faces in the outfield?

Not so much. Ryan Sweeney was dealt in the Bailey trade, and Jai Miller was designated for assignment shortly before. The newly acquired Josh Reddick and Collin Cowgill are in the mix for a starting job in center field, with Reddick representing an option in left and right, as well. As for Michael Taylor, he's far from a lock to be a mainstay in Oakland and won't be, general manager Billy Beane says, until he displays more consistency at the Triple-A level. So expect the A's to look for upgrades at all spots in the coming weeks, whether by trade or low-cost free-agent signings.

6. Any chance that whoever they pluck from the free-agent crowd has some power?

Power comes with a price, and the A's can't afford much of it right now. Even if they could, there are few offerings on the open market that can give the A's the power they need. That missing supply will have to come via trade through prospects that may not even be close to Major League-ready. And in the meantime, the A's will hope that now is the time for coming-out parties from the likes of Carter and Allen.

7. Who, then, will be the club's designated hitter?

With Hideki Matsui seemingly out of the mix, the A's will look to stay young and try to pick from within. That means Carter is a possibility -- he would probably be the Opening Day DH as the roster stands now -- along with each of the club's first-base options. Should Barton steal the show in spring, manager Bob Melvin could choose to employ Allen or Ka'aihue in the DH spot.

8. Who will be the closer now that Bailey is gone?

Hard-throwing righty Fautino De Los Santos is a definite option, as are veterans Balfour and Fuentes. Either way, the potential loss of Bailey won't leave the A's hunting for a replacement outside of the organization. Don't count out Joey Devine, either. He'll enter camp completely healthy with plenty of gusto after a roller-coaster 2011 season -- his first since undergoing Tommy John surgery.

9. What will the rotation look like?

It's anyone's guess at this point. Plenty names abound, including Brandon McCarthy, Dallas Braden, Josh Outman and Tyson Ross. But that same quartet boasts a long injury history. Count Guillermo Moscoso in the mix, as well as Graham Godfrey. The A's also have their fair share of new faces to pluck from thanks to the Gonzalez and Cahill trades: Jarrod Parker, Brad Peacock and Tom Milone.

Left-hander Brett Anderson, who underwent Tommy John surgery in July, is expected to return in the second half.

10. Can the A's stay in contention?

Probably not, given their current roster makeup doesn't quite match up with the likes of Albert Pujols' Angels and the powerhouse Rangers. But that doesn't mean they'll enter each day expecting to lose -- not under the watch of Melvin, anyway. Melvin is prepared to field the best team possible and, while he realizes that a true contending team may not be in the works for another few years, he's a competitor at heart and will ensure his players boast that same winning desire.

Dallas Braden dropping puck at Stockton Thunder game

By Lodi News-Sentinel Staff

Oakland Athletics pitcher and Stockton native Dallas Braden will appear at Stockton Arena this Friday for "Dallas Braden 209 Night With the Stockton Thunder," when the Thunder hosts the Ontario Reign at 7:30 p.m.

Braden, who threw the second perfect game in A's history (19th all time in Major League Baseball) on May 9, 2010 against the Tampa Bay Rays, will meet Thunder fans for autographs and photos during the game and participate in the pre-game ceremonial face-off.

Ticket packages are available for \$15 and each ticket will include a limited edition, autographed photo from his perfect game to the first 209 tickets sold in section 209. For more ticket information, call 209- 373-1521.

Half of all proceeds from the tickets sold will go to the United Way of San Joaquin County.

"It is really exciting to branch out and cross the baseball barrier to help the community," said Braden. "It is about doing whatever it takes to help provide life and to help the community. That includes stepping off the pitching mound and dropping a puck on a frozen pond with the Thunder."

Braden, 28, has pitched in five Major League seasons (2007-11) for the Athletics and continues to make his home in Stockton where he grew up and Stagg High.

On Saturday, the Thunder will host a special New Year's Eve Extravaganza in a game against the Ontario Reign at 7:30 p.m.

Tickets are on sale for as low as \$7 per seat.

Immediately following the game, fans are invited to enjoy a spectacular fireworks display inside Stockton Arena.

Bailey Not A Slam Dunk For Boston

Frankie Piliere, ScoutingBaseball.com

Dec 28, 2011

Clearly, the Red Sox set out to revamp their bullpen this off-season. With Daniel Bard likely headed for the rotation and Jonathan Papelbon now in Philadelphia, they had their work cut out for them. But, they are taking somewhat of a gamble finishing their games with young pitchers with limited experience pitching in harsh environments, like Mark Melancon and newly acquired closer, Andrew Bailey.

First, this trade has to be evaluated from a Red Sox perspective. Obviously, their talent evaluators believe Bailey can step in and be a top tier type closer right away. With that being said, they have to be pleased with his relatively low price tag. They viewed a player like Josh Reddick as expendable and none of the prospects they surrendered are among their elite.

There has to be some doubt, however, as to just how well Bailey will adapt to the bright lights of Fenway Park. He's not a Jonathan Papelbon type personality and he's spent his entire career pitching in essentially meaningless baseball games. There's no doubting his pure ability, but it isn't always just about ability when it comes to pitching in the AL East. Also, something worth keeping an eye on is Bailey's velocity. He dipped nearly a full MPH on his average fastball in 2011 and did have some injury trouble.

As for the prospects Oakland acquired, this is not a loaded package like the one they received for Gio Gonzalez. Josh Reddick gives them immediate help at the big league level, but the prospects are likely many years away. 19-year old righty, Raul Alcantara is very crude at this stage but does have a fastball that reaches 96 mph. Miles Head is a righty swinging infielder with a solid hit tool, but his upside is highly dependent on that tool.

This deal adds some depth to the lower levels for Oakland, but Boston's end of the deal obviously creates the headline. But, once again, this is not necessarily the slam dunk win for the Sox that it appears to be at first glance. Andrew Bailey does come with some risk.