

**Poole: Lew Wolff and John Fisher never wanted to commit to keeping the A's in the East Bay**

By Monte Poole, Bay Area News Group

That the A's would benefit from a new stadium is indisputable. O.co Coliseum is downright dowdy and, well past its 40th birthday, ancient by modern baseball standards.

As a baseball yard, O.co is a lot like Candlestick Park was at a similar stage -- well past its prime and ripe for replacement.

So my issue is not with the basic desire of co-owners John Fisher and Lew Wolff but with their consistently disingenuous, thus condescending, tactics.

When these men bought the A's in 2005, O.co was the ballpark they inherited. What they did with it was, to a point, up to them. And they demonstrated zero desire to commit to the area, much less make a genuine effort to engage the community.

The calculated way with which Wolff and Fisher have operated is an insult to the fan base that during the three seasons before their ownership cared enough about the A's to buy more than 6.5 million tickets.

Shortly after he and Fisher bought the team from Steve Schott and Ken Hofmann, Wolff was savvy enough to shake hands and slap backs among East Bay politicians. Oakland City Councilman Ignacio De La Fuente raved about the positive vibe emanating from the new managing partner, so much more inviting than Schott had been.

Others also bought the Uncle Lew facade. Having met the man, I can say he has an easy way of exuding kind and gentle.

Fans, however, were skeptical from the start. They quickly realized their beloved team was in the clutches of owners who, along with baseball commissioner Bud Selig, had an agenda. Step 1? Trash the ballpark.

Wolff and Fisher were too dedicated to negativity to ponder what they might do to improve the place. Their attention was elsewhere, focused on moving to a more, um, "desirable" destination. Why waste time making friends in their new neighborhood?

Months after taking co-ownership, Wolff proposed a "ballpark village" on land north of the current site. That's rich. He realized such a project would require relocating 60 to 80 businesses. And, by the way, Wolff added that this village would require the creation of a new BART station, this one between the Coliseum and Fruitvale stations.

That was their pitch to Oakland. Judge for yourself the goodness of the faith within.

Meanwhile, Wolff made no such sweeping proposal about the land to the south, from the stadium perimeter through the parking lot and out to Hegenberger Road. There's a Denny's, not much else, other than plenty of space, mostly paved.

That site was being considered by the group that tried to buy the A's four years before Wolff first joined the organization in 2003 as an executive hired to find a suitable yard. The group was headed by supermarket magnate Bob Piccinini and longtime sports executive Andy Dolich, with such additional initial investors as Men's Wearhouse founder George Zimmer and Hall of Fame players Reggie Jackson and Joe Morgan.

If you ask Dolich today, 12 years after the group was rejected by Major League Baseball without logical explanation, he would say that site still has potential.

Wolff never mentions it. Why would he? He doesn't want it.

He never mentions Camp Parks in Dublin, another East Bay site that would seem worthy of consideration -- if they were serious about staying north of Fremont. All this site offers is two major highways, I-580 and I-680, nearby, BART being a 10-minute walk from the entrance and a favorable land deal.

The Raiders scouted Camp Parks during an open house a few years back but were rejected. When then-mayor Janet Lockhart visualized negotiations with Al Davis and imagined stereotypical Raiders fans in her city, she shook her head and closed the door.

The A's, had they tried, would have gotten a warmer reception. Still would. Last time I checked with Dublin Mayor Tim Sbranti, he said no one from the A's had inquired.

Because it's not the South Bay, where Wolff said -- in 1998 -- the team ought to be.

The tactics of Wolff and Fisher are in stark contrast to those of the folks who, in 1993, bought the San Francisco Giants. Led by Peter Magowan, the new group inherited Candlestick but knew it needed a new yard.

Magowan and Co. set out to win friends, hoping it would beget influence. They signed big-ticket free agent Barry Bonds. They promoted a popular coach, Dusty Baker, to manager. They painted the dump they had, scrubbing the bathrooms, installing new bleachers behind the fence in left field and putting smiles on the faces of the ushers.

It was a calculated plan to gain the support of the community. And it paid off. Citizens previously resistant to a new stadium were gently persuaded. A jewel was built.

Then again, the goal of this group was to seduce the community it inherited.

That never was the goal of Wolff and Fisher in Oakland, or else they would not have been insisting they wanted to make this relationship work while simultaneously winking and blowing kisses in another direction.

### **Mark Purdy: In battle for the A's, San Jose capitalizes on Oakland's mistakes**

By Mark Purdy, Mercury News Columnist

When asked to help the A's build a new ballpark, Oakland dithered and whined. San Jose organized and acted. Simply put, that is why the team should ultimately end up in San Jose, whenever Major League Baseball finally gives the proper nod.

If anyone believes any other version of the story, that person has either not studied history or chooses to ignore it.

I understand the desire for Oakland politicians and loyalists to concoct other conspiracy theories. They want us to think A's owner Lew Wolff (and his financial partner, John Fisher) have been James Bond villains, meeting secretly and implementing a subversive master plan to dump on the entire East Bay.

That's not true. But it's always easier to accept a blithe conspiracy theory than to carefully revisit the facts as they've spun out over the years.

Look, this has nothing to do with the city or the people of Oakland. It has problems, but what city doesn't? The people of Oakland are by and large wonderful people. One of them is my daughter, who lives there and teaches there. I enjoy visiting her, walking the neighborhoods, dining in the new wave of downtown restaurants. I just can't figure out why all these wonderful people put up with their dim-bulb city leaders and keep electing them.

Because those leaders blew it with the A's. Going all the way back to 1995, they blew it. When the power elite of Oakland had a chance to help the A's stay, those politicians (A) rejected the idea the team would ever move and did nothing or (B) decided to pay more attention and financially satisfy the Raiders or the Warriors.

The conspiracy theorists never bring up that part of the equation. They point to a quote of Wolff from 1998, when he was not the A's owner but a real estate developer doing consulting work for the team. In a newspaper interview, Wolff opined that if he had to pick a place to build a new ballpark for the A's, his first choice would be San Jose.

Well, duh. In other words, at that period in Bay Area history, Wolff made a statement that any other intelligent observer of sports would make. San Jose has more than twice the population of Oakland, with five times as many Fortune 500 companies. If no major league teams currently existed in the Bay Area and you were asked to locate two of them wherever you wished in terms of being both profitable and geographically sensible, where would you choose? San Francisco and San Jose.

However, that is not the case. The two teams are already here. The Giants came to San Francisco in 1958. Oakland became the A's home in 1968 when its population was roughly equal to San Jose's. Oakland had possession of the A's. Oakland could have kept the team forever if the city had shown the proper respect for the franchise.

But let's examine what occurred instead.

In 1995, after previous A's owners Steve Schott and Ken Hofmann studied newer MLB ballparks and proposed remodeling the Coliseum into a gorgeous baseball-only facility, they met with the Joint Powers Authority (with both Oakland and Alameda County representatives) to discuss the plan. Schott and Hofmann were told to forget it because the Raiders were moving from Los Angeles back to Oakland and \$190 million in bonds were being issued to remodel the Coliseum for the NFL team. Those bonds still cost taxpayers \$20 million a year. Oakland also paid for the Raiders' move and their new training facility. The A's were saddled with an ugly baseball venue, a cramped locker room and a gouged-up outfield during football season.

If you were the A's, how would you feel about that?

In 1996, with Schott examining alternate Oakland ballpark scenarios and failing to gain the city's attention, the Warriors squawked about their outdated arena and the Coliseum authority immediately dropped more than \$100 million worth of bonds into the NBA team's lap to help renovate the building, now known as the Oracle Arena.

If you were the A's, how would you feel about that?

In 2005 after Wolff and Fisher bought the team, Wolff proposed building a new ballpark north of the Coliseum that included a residential and retail development but required the city and county's help in acquiring property and moving a BART station. The city and county tell Wolff that his plan is unworkable. He outlined another ballpark idea for property south of the Coliseum and requested that the A's and the public entities split the cost of a \$500,000 feasibility study for that project. His request for the \$250,000 was turned down.

If you were the A's, how would you feel about that?

In 2006 after Oakland has thwarted Wolff's plans, he strikes a deal with Fremont to construct a "ballpark village" in the East Bay city. However, after Wolff has purchased property adjoining a proposed ballpark parcel owned by Cisco Systems, citizens and politicians there rise up against the proposal and tell the A's to get lost.

If you were the A's, how would you feel about that?

Cities make choices. Oakland, for reasons I still don't understand, chose to put the Raiders and Warriors ahead of the A's.

If Oakland and Fremont made those choices, why wouldn't the A's choose to search for a more cooperative business partner?

When the A's showed interest, here is what San Jose did: The city bought up parcels for a ballpark, completed an environmental impact report (EIR), addressed a state redevelopment money takeway with an alternate strategy that allowed Wolff to buy the property (at a discount) and pay for the ballpark, too. Mayor Chuck Reed is prepared to campaign for a ballot proposal to approve the plan.

And what of Oakland? In the past few years, the city has outlined various ballpark ideas but has not completed any EIR, has never purchased property for a proposed downtown site and has never explained in detail how a new proposal at the Coliseum site would be financed.

San Jose never sought to "steal" the A's from Oakland. San Jose saw a jilted lover walking down the Nimitz Freeway and tried to find the jilted lover a new home. If you were the A's, how would you feel about that? What's your dream date? Someone who dithers and whines? Or someone who organizes and acts? Is it even a serious question?

### **Drumbeat: Billy Beane feature highlights 'Moneyball' DVD release**

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser 1/9/2012, 6:01pm

"Moneyball" comes out on DVD tomorrow, Jan. 10, and the extras are worth a look, especially a feature entitled, "Billy Beane: Re-Inventing the Game," which includes the A's GM discussing his career and that 2002 "Moneyball" season.

Among other things, the feature addresses a few (though not nearly all) of the facts that the movie overlooked, including Sandy Alderson's importance in kick-starting the whole "Moneyball" notion (using advanced metrics along with more traditional scouting reports), and Beane also notes that as much as anything, the concept of "Moneyball" – as presented in Michael Lewis' best-selling book – is a product, really, of....Lewis. "A lot of the uniqueness comes in how Michael sees things," Beane said.

That's what I enjoyed about the book – Lewis' ability to take small details and use them to examine a much larger topic, much as he has done in his other bestsellers. In the process, some of the more obvious factors that helped the team win,

particularly the Big Three and 2002 MVP Miguel Tejada, were virtually ignored, but the fact that the book was such a hit, made Beane a cult hero in the business world and spawned a Hollywood movie says something about Lewis' sharp eye for compelling stories.

It's nice to see the real Beane on the DVD, period, because it might give viewers a better appreciation for the acting performance Brad Pitt turns in. Beane isn't well known enough for this to be one of those bio-pics where just about everyone is familiar with the main character and can judge how well the actor captures that person, but I've covered Beane for 14 years and I think Pitt got every little nuance, every mannerism, exactly right. Even though this is Beane in an interview setting, not in his usual casual wear on a baseball field, you can still get something of a sense of his personality. The movie has found surprisingly strong support from non-sports fans, or occasional sports fans, and many of them had little idea who Beane was before the movie's release. I hope Oscar voters who don't know Beane take the time to watch this feature.

Academy Award nominations are announced on Jan. 24. Pitt and the movie itself are likely to be nominated, while the screenplay, by Steven Zaillian and Aaron Sorkin, is a shoo-in. The ever-fascinating Sorkin pops up on the DVD feature, as do Lewis and director Bennett Miller.

Another feature will particularly appeal to those local fans who were extras at the Coliseum during filming. "Moneyball: Playing the Game" focuses on the making of the film, and shows lots of scenes of the Coliseum during the production – and the costume department raves about those who turned up to fill the Coliseum seats, saying that there was so much variation, the extras nailed a "real" crowd perfectly, something that the production crew could not have replicated easily. Production designer Jess Gonchor, a wealth of information, provides many details about the sets, and he said that shooting at the Coliseum itself was invaluable. "It really put a valid stamp on the whole thing," he says. Other locations used, you might be surprised to learn: Dodger Stadium and Blair Field in Long Beach.

The one blooper is Pitt laughing hysterically while trying to shoot one scene. The deleted scenes contain one that had been rumored but never made it in: Beane eating dinner with his wife, Tara, played by "Cold Case" actress Kathryn Morris, who got left out altogether.

The Blu-ray – which I have not seen – includes other features, including "Drafting the Team" and "Adapting Moneyball." I'd like to see that one; I spent more than a year trying to get Sorkin on the phone to talk about the challenges of turning a business book about stats into a dramatic feature compounded by the difficulties of making a sports movie about a baseball team that didn't win the pennant. I remain amazed that he and Zaillian did so, and if they win the Oscar, they'll deserve it.

Maybe Sorkin will talk to me for the 10-year anniversary release.