

Oakland A's GM Billy Beane to get contract extension through 2019

Oakland Tribune, 2/8/2012

A's general manager Billy Beane and president Mike Crowley are expected to sign contract extensions that will keep them with the team through 2019, A's spokesman Bob Rose confirmed Tuesday.

The deals should be finalized over the next month.

"I view them as partners as well as executives," A's co-owner Lew Wolff told Bloomberg Television. "So if they are here another 30 years, that is fine with me." Beane, who took over general manager duties from Sandy Alderson following the 1997 season, is the second-longest tenured GM in the majors behind the Giants' Brian Sabean. Beane has achieved fame unusual for someone in his post, thanks in large part to "Moneyball," the 2003 book written about his outside-the-box methods for building a team, which was adapted into a movie last year.

"Moneyball" is nominated for Best Picture at this year's Academy Awards, and Brad Pitt earned a Best Actor nod for his portrayal of Beane.

The story on the field hasn't been as pretty for the A's in recent years. They are 1206-1060 (.532 winning percentage) with five postseason appearances in Beane's 14 seasons as GM. But that includes a mark of 381-428 (.471) with no winning records over the last five seasons.

Still, his name comes up when other GM openings arise. He was linked to the Chicago Cubs' job when Jim Hendry was fired at the end of last season.

Beane signed an extension in 2007 with the A's that was to run through 2014. He holds a small ownership stake in the team, as does Crowley.

The A's remain optimistic they will gain approval from Major League Baseball to build a new ballpark in San Jose, which Wolff says would allow the team to boost its payroll and be more competitive in signing top free agents.

Deals to keep A's execs Beane, Crowley through '19

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

A's general manager Billy Beane and team president Michael Crowley are poised to sign extensions that will keep them in place through 2019.

Owner Lew Wolff confirmed in an e-mail that the five-year deals are "in process" and he called the development "good news."

The length of the deals is widely considered yet another sign of optimism from the A's upper ranks that their desire for a new stadium in San Jose might become a reality. Commissioner Bud Selig said last month that the stadium issue is now "on the front burner," although the Giants still own territorial rights to San Jose and object strongly to the A's proposed move.

The Chronicle has learned, however, that both Beane, 49, and Crowley, 48, will have option years - potentially multiple option years - as part of their extensions, which could be interpreted as possible wiggle room should the San Jose stadium plans fall through.

Beane became the A's general manager after the 1997 season. Only Brian Sabean of the Giants, in place before the 1997 season, has longer tenure among major-league GMs. Crowley became team president following the 1998 season. Both Beane and Crowley hold small ownership stakes in the team, with reportedly 4 percent apiece.

The extensions are expected to be formalized in the next 30 days.

Drumbeat: Billy Beane extension – another sign A's will get a stadium?

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle, 2/7/2012 2:14pm

It sounds as if the framework is in place for general manager Billy Beane and team president Michael Crowley to remain with the A's through 2019. Owner Lew Wolff told Bloomberg TV that the five-year deals should be completed within 30 days, and Wolff told me in an email that the discussions are "in process." He also called it "good news."

Such lengthy extensions point to further optimism in the A's upper ranks about the team's chances of getting approval for a new stadium in San Jose. Considering how publicly frustrated Beane has been about the limitations of the Coliseum, both in terms of attracting free agents and in terms of income generated, I cannot imagine him staying with the club that long without a good idea that a new stadium is on the horizon.

Of course, there could be plenty of language in any contract that might nullify everything in the event the team does not get approval to move. Still, the fact that Wolff is eager to tie up his top baseball decision maker and his top financial decision maker is a strong indication that he believes there's long-term reason to do so. And the fact that Beane, already antsy about the Coliseum, is on board, makes for an even more compelling case.

Beane became general manager in 1998, so if he were to honor the length of this extension, he'd be the A's GM for more than 20 years, tough to do in this day and age. I do wonder about highly capable assistant GM David Forst, however: Will he elect to pursue a top spot with another team? Or might Beane have a provision to step into another role with the club at some point – something like GM emeritus and vice president of something or other – and allow Forst to take over the day-to-day operations in full?

That wouldn't surprise me at all. Beane thinks extremely highly of Forst, and Forst has declined to interview for some attractive GM jobs in order to stay with Oakland. That makes me think that there are at least vague plans for a succession at some point down the road – perhaps a year or two after any new stadium opens. If not, this extension might gently push Forst elsewhere should a good opportunity arise.

Wolff: Beane, Crowley to sign extensions

GM, team president to sign deals through 2019

By Zack Meisel / MLB.com

The Oakland Athletics will extend the contract of general manager Billy Beane through the 2019 season, club owner Lew Wolff said Tuesday in an interview with Bloomberg Television.

Wolff said he expects Beane and team president Michael Crowley to sign contract extensions within 30 days that would keep both front-office members with the club for the next eight seasons.

Beane has been Oakland's GM since the end of the 1997 season. Priding himself on the "Moneyball" tactics that fueled the inspiration behind both a book and film of the same name, Beane has focused on acquiring players with high on-base percentages.

The Athletics, who have not made the playoffs since 2006, finished the 2011 campaign at 74-88, third in the American League West.

A's agree to extend GM Billy Beane through 2019

By Janie Mccauley, Associated Press

Oakland Athletics owner Lew Wolff said Tuesday that the team has agreed to extend the contracts of the general manager as well as team President Michael Crowley through the 2019 season. Wolff, confirming comments first made on Bloomberg Television, wrote in an email to The Associated Press that the deals are in the process of being finalized.

Wolff is counting on Beane's leadership and innovation to lead the club in a new stadium in the San Jose area.

The franchise needs approval from Major League Baseball to move to the south bay, where the San Francisco Giants hold territorial rights to the technology-rich region filled with fans and corporate dollars. The A's are hoping for a resolution to the long-standing dispute soon.

Beane and Crowley hold small ownership stakes in the team. Crowley took over as team president at the end of the 1998 season.

Beane has been Oakland's general manager since 1997. He is the subject of Michael Lewis' 2003 book on baseball statistics and economics titled "Moneyball," which was made into a film starring Brad Pitt as Beane last year.

Beane bucked the baseball trend of relying on the common trio of statistics — batting average, home runs and RBIs for hitters; wins, losses and ERA for pitchers — and instead turned to hard numbers over subjective scouting to fuel his team's successful runs in the early 2000s. His staff helped usher in what became known as the stats revolution, a complete overhaul from the early days of the basic boxscore, the premise behind the best-selling book that immortalized Beane beyond the Bay Area.

The movie focuses on the 2002 edition of the self-described blue-collar Athletics and a thrilling 20-game winning streak. Ultimately, Oakland lost in the first round of the playoffs.

That 2002 run was the third of four straight playoff appearances for the A's, but little has stayed the same since. Oakland finished 74-88 last year, the fifth losing season in a row.

Without a deal to move out of the outdated Oakland Coliseum, the A's have said they can't compete with large-market clubs. Oakland shed several of its best players this winter — including top starters Trevor Cahill, Gio Gonzalez and closer Andrew Bailey— in the latest payroll purge.

The 49-year-old Beane is still considered among baseball's best general managers — but far from the genius he once was considered to be — and there was even chatter last summer that he might head to the Cubs to replace Jim Hendry. Instead, former Red Sox general manager Theo Epstein took over on Chicago's north side.

Billy Beane to be Oakland A's general manager through 2019, says owner Lew Wolff

By Jon Erlichman and Rob Gloster, Bloomberg News

General manager Billy Beane and president Michael Crowley will remain with the Oakland Athletics through the 2019 season, club owner Lew Wolff said Tuesday in an interview with Bloomberg Television's "Bloomberg West."

Wolff said in San Francisco that the two executives have reached agreements to stay with the team and that he expects them to sign contract extensions within 30 days.

Beane, 49, has been the team's general manager since the end of the 1997 season. He is the subject of Michael Lewis's 2003 book on baseball economics, "Moneyball," which was made into a film starring Brad Pitt as Beane.

Crowley took over as team president at the end of the 1998 season.

The Athletics were 74-88 last season and haven't made the playoffs since 2006.

Billy Beane Signing Good For Owner But Bad For Fans

Mike Ozanian, Forbes Staff

Oakland Athletics owner Lew Wolff has told Bloomberg that he expects to sign general manager Billy Beane to an extension through the 2019 season.

Wolff should celebrate. Beane is perfect for the penny-pinching owner who Bleacher Report ranks among the five worst owners in baseball. Since Forbes has been tracking the wins-per-player costs of Major League Baseball teams the Athletics, under Beane, have excelled. During the 10-year stretch through the 2010 season Oakland averaged a wins-per-player-costs index of 134, meaning that Beane has delivered 34% more wins per dollar of payroll than the typical baseball team. Moreover, during that decade the A's never scored below 100 (league average).

Problem is, the team hasn't been any good, as Wolff pockets money he gets from baseball's richer teams rather than spend it on players. Oakland was 74-88 last season and hasn't made the playoffs since 2006, the last time they finished with a winning record. This has made it harder for him to get the A's a new stadium.

The bad news for fans is that Wolff doesn't care so much about winning as he does about his GM finding relatively cheap players that might somehow win more games than they lose should Beane pull another rabbit out of his hat.

Wolff bought the A's for \$180M in April, 2005 and the team is now worth \$307 million, thanks to baseball's rising tide of media revenue. The A's also posted an operating profit of \$23 million in 2010. Which is why Wolff is happy to re-sign Beane but the team's supporters shouldn't be.

Billy Beane's murky future in Oakland

The Oakland Athletics are close to tying up general manager Billy Beane and team president Michael Crowley through 2019, as Susan Slusser writes. But these contracts are probably somewhat like those \$100 million deals that NFL quarterbacks get: Nobody is sure, at the moment they are signed, whether the terms of the deal will actually be executed.

Oakland owner Lew Wolff has stated flatly that if Beane decides to pursue a job elsewhere, he's free to go. Beane could've gone after the Chicago Cubs job, and the Baltimore Orioles GM job was probably something he could've landed if he had gone all-out to get it.

There will be more opportunities to come. The incoming Los Angeles Dodgers ownership will decide whether to keep Ned Colletti, who has ably navigated the team and kept it competitive despite steep cuts in the payroll. If a change is made, Beane could be a president of baseball operations for the Dodgers and bring in somebody to be his general manager, like the Tampa Bay Rays' Andrew Friedman, in the same way that Theo Epstein hired Jed Hoyer. The future of the New York Mets is uncertain, although it's hard to imagine Beane diving into the challenge of remaking a New York franchise, given the fact that he steered around the Cubs' opening.

But so long as the future of the Oakland Athletics is murky -- and we are swiftly coming up on the three-year anniversary since Major League Baseball announced the formation of a committee to study the team's ballpark and territorial issues -- nothing can be ruled out.

Club officials have waited and waited and waited for some direction from baseball about their future. More specifically, what the Athletics want and need is for commissioner Bud Selig to stick out sharp elbows and push the question of whether the San Francisco Giants will surrender the territorial rights to San Jose, either through negotiation or executive fiat, to a critical mass.

Then the Athletics will know, one way or the other, what their future can be. Wolff can decide whether he wants to retain ownership, perhaps with a new ballpark in 2015 in San Jose, or whether he wants to sell to somebody willing to take the baton of a franchise with an incredibly rich history and uncertain fate.

And Beane can decide whether he wants to stay with the Athletics, either building toward something good in a new ballpark somewhere, or consigned to an ugly future saturated with third- and fourth-place finishes. The Texas Rangers are a superpower, the Los Angeles Angels have a chance to be that, and meanwhile, Oakland's payroll will be at about one-third the level of those division rivals.

At the end of the movie "Moneyball," Brad Pitt, playing Beane, decides to stay in Oakland rather than go to Boston, essentially because there are rewards beyond money.

But the losing does get tiresome. The hopelessness gets old. Some general managers who have worked on long-term deals for losing franchises will tell you privately that after a while, they pine for a chance to contend rather than watching their best players walk away.

Beane is signed for seven more years. But that doesn't guarantee he'll be with the Athletics for that long.

Notables

- The Miami Marlins are meeting with Yoenis Cespedes today and could make him an offer; he arrived in Miami on Tuesday. From Juan Rodriguez's story:

Based on his performance in limited at-bats last month in the Dominican winter league, it seems a given Cespedes would require a stint in the minors.

He hadn't appeared in a game since last March and went 5-for-35 with a homer and 10 strikeouts. Tuesday, he said the Dominican circuit was challenging, but he gained good experience.

Asked if he required minor league time, the confident but soft-spoken Cespedes said: "No. I'm ready."

Meanwhile, the Orioles are assessing their level of interest in Cespedes, as Roch Kubatko writes.

- Some writers address the question of whether the St. Louis Cardinals really need Roy Oswalt. The Cardinals are just sitting back and waiting to see if Oswalt comes to them completely on their terms, at their price.

- One of the more intriguing players in spring training will be the Cardinals' Tyler Greene, who is getting a strong opportunity from St. Louis to be the team's every-day second baseman. "He's a five-tool player," Cardinals GM John

Mozeliak said on the phone the other day. "It's a matter of having success at the big league level. He has everything -- speed, power, range."

And it will be interesting to see if he gets a little more time, under new manager Mike Matheny, to establish himself. The 28-year-old Greene has 316 at-bats in the big leagues -- but in 150 games, which means that many of his appearances have been truncated. If you examine the game log from his first three seasons in the big leagues, the most consecutive starts he's ever had is six.

His average in his brief time in the majors is .212, but he also has shown the ability to take a walk, which is why he managed a .322 on-base percentage last year despite a .212 average. He had a .422 on-base percentage in Triple-A last season, with an OPS of 1.001, and in his minor league career he's stolen 144 bases in 166 attempts. It makes sense that the Cardinals will want to give him a longer look.

- Carlos Zambrano was clocked in the mid-90s when he threw this winter. If he maintains that kind of velocity, then Big Z is back. In recent seasons, he's been throwing in the 88-89 mph range.
- The Detroit Tigers keep talking up Miguel Cabrera as their third baseman, writes Drew Sharp.
- The Orioles revamped their scouting operations earlier this offseason, shifting a lot of resources to their amateur side. As a result, their base coverage of spring training will be on the shoulders of one scout in the Grapefruit League and one scout in the Cactus League.
- Texas hired an accountability partner for Josh Hamilton, writes Jeff Wilson, although the team is not calling him that. From the story:

[GM Jon] Daniels said the Rangers aren't calling Kelley an "accountability partner."

"Josh is accountable for himself," Daniels said. "We want to do whatever we can to support him and put him in the best position to succeed as possible."

The Rangers aren't likely to discipline Hamilton, said Daniels, for drinking alcohol in a Dallas-area bar Jan. 30. The club will abide by whatever actions or recommendations MLB has for Hamilton, who also had a relapse with alcohol in January 2009.

It came to light eight months later as pictures were leaked to a website. Daniels said that the Rangers have heard the rumors that pictures and videos of Hamilton from last week exist, but said there's nothing the club can do to prevent anything from being leaked to the media.

- The Dodgers agreed to terms with Clayton Kershaw on a two-year deal. The first order of business for the team's new owners will be to work out a longer deal with Kershaw -- an agreement that locks up the left-hander beyond his arbitration years.
- A really wealthy guy is being courted by other really wealthy people, as the bidding on the Dodgers continues, writes Bill Shaikin.

Moves, deals and decisions

1. The Boston Red Sox probably won't be in position to make significant changes with their roster until 2014, at the earliest, writes John Tomase.
2. Bill Hall agreed to a minor league deal with the New York Yankees. He'll be battling for a spot on the roster.
3. The Yankees want to sign Eric Chavez and one of the left-handed hitting DH types, writes Joel Sherman.
4. The Orioles' challenge will be weeding through their pitchers, writes Peter Schmuck.
5. Tom Ricketts visited the site of the Cubs' new facility in the Dominican Republic.
6. Walt Jocketty is sick of the Oswalt rumors, he tells John Fay.
7. Cleveland Indians GM Chris Antonetti believes Casey Kotchman fits in well, writes Sheldon Ocker.
8. The Tigers will consider Drew Smyly as a candidate for their No. 5 spot, writes Anthony Fenech.
9. Alex Gordon and the Kansas City Royals are closing in on a one-year deal, writes Bob Dutton.

10. The Atlanta Braves might move one of their minor league teams, writes David O'Brien.

11. The Rangers have bought out Elvis Andrus' arbitration years.

Other stuff

- There is sad news about former major league outfielder Danny Clyburn.
- The Braves are in position to challenge the Philadelphia Phillies, writes Matt Gelb.
- Kyle McClellan is ready to put all the trade talk behind him.
- Russell Martin is fired up that the Yankees have landed Hiroki Kuroda, writes Anthony McCarron.
- A new Seattle Mariners pitcher feels some pressure, writes Brad Lefton.
- George Brett's company has been sued, writes Mark Morris.
- Rusty Staub deserves his place in the Canadian Hall of Fame.
- Doug Melvin got a really cool honor and credited Pat Gillick.
- The Minnesota Twins are auctioning their Kim Kardashian baseball.
- Ozzie Guillen had an encounter with a basketball, as Joe Capozzi writes.
- Yu Darvish merchandise is available.
- What's next for Hanley Ramirez?
- Vanderbilt has a big game against LSU today.
- On "Baseball Tonight" at 3:30 p.m. ET, we'll be talking under-the-radar moves of the offseason and ranking our top five rotations.

And today will be better than yesterday.

Oakland A's Spring Training Battles: Catchers

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Feb 7, 2012

The answer to the question of who will be the Oakland A's starting catcher in 2012 is obvious, but the race for the job of backing up Kurt Suzuki is wide-open. We take a look at the A's spring training battle for that back-up catcher spot inside.

A Look Back At 2011

For more than 10 years, the Oakland A's have counted on one primary catcher to take the vast majority of their reps behind the plate. That trend continued in 2011, as veteran Kurt Suzuki logged 129 games played behind the plate. It was the fourth straight year that Suzuki appeared in more than 120 games as the A's catcher.

Suzuki's durability was arguably his biggest asset in 2011. He suffered through one of the most difficult seasons of his three-and-a-half year major league career, both at the plate and behind it. As a hitter, Suzuki hit only .237 with a 686 OPS. His OPS was actually slightly higher than it was in 2010, thanks to a slight resurgence during the second half of the year during which he had a 763 OPS. Much of those improved second-half numbers were thanks to a strong August (892 OPS), by far his best month of the season. He struggled in September (672 OPS).

It was defensively where Suzuki experienced his biggest challenges. His catcher's ERA rose from 3.29 in 2010 to 3.78 in 2011. He had trouble throwing out runners attempting to steal, allowing a career-high 98 stolen bases. His throwing did improve as the season went on, but he finished with a 27.9% caught-stealing rate.

Despite his struggles, Suzuki was still the most productive of the three catchers the A's used in 2011. For a third

consecutive season, Landon Powell was Suzuki's primary back-up. He appeared in 33 games as a catcher but struggled with his inconsistent playing time. In 106 at-bats, he hit only .170/.241/.226 with 30 strike-outs and only one homerun. Defensively, Powell played well. He had a career-best 2.70 catcher's ERA and threw out 36% of all base-stealers.

It was a strange year for Powell, however. Despite serving as the A's back-up catcher for much of the past three seasons, he was sent down to Triple-A in late August to make room for Anthony Recker. Powell would remain on the River Cats' roster from August 22 until the Sacramento season ended on September 10. He would appear in four more games in the big leagues after being recalled.

Recker got the call in late August and made his major league debut on August 25th versus the New York Yankees. Unfortunately for Recker, it was the game that the A's took an early 7-1 lead, only to lose 22-9. Recker would appear in only four more games with the A's despite remaining on the A's roster the rest of the season. In total, A's catchers hit .222/.289/.351 with 15 homers.

Good-Bye And Hello

The A's have had a lot of roster turnover this off-season, but very little of that turnover has impacted their catchers. Landon Powell was removed from the A's 40-man roster in December, but he cleared waivers and is still part of the organization as a non-roster player. The A's did add one catcher: prospect Derek Norris, who was one of the players acquired by Oakland in the Gio Gonzalez trade with Washington. With four catchers on their 40-man roster and Powell still in the fold as a non-roster player, the A's did not sign any free agent minor league veteran catchers to Triple-A contracts this off-season.

Catchers Invited To Camp

Josh Donaldson*
Derek Norris*
Ryan Ortiz
Landon Powell
Anthony Recker*
Max Stassi
Kurt Suzuki*

**Denotes player on 40-man roster*

Number Of Catchers Likely On Roster – 2

Lock To Make The Team

Kurt Suzuki: In 2009, Suzuki was considered one of the rising young stars at his position. He hit .274 with 15 homers and 88 RBIs that season and was thought to be one of the better defensive catchers in the American League. Since then, however, Suzuki's star has dimmed somewhat. He has posted consecutive seasons with OPSs below .700 and his struggles to throw out base-runners have been well-documented. That all being said, the A's love his leadership of the pitching staff and, as long as he is a member of the organization, he is a lock to be the team's starting catcher this year.

Receiving more frequent time-off could aid Suzuki. The 2011 season was the first time in his major league career that he hit better after the All-Star break than he did before it. It was also the first time that the A's tried to give him some scheduled days off early in the season. It would behoove the A's to continue this practice in 2012. Suzuki, 28, is still young despite his three-plus years in the big leagues, but he isn't a big man and catching so many games early in his career could be taking a toll on him physically. The 2012 season will be a big one for Suzuki, who needs to recapture his offensive prowess from the 2009 season and show that he has improved his ability to control the running game. If he gets off to a strong start and the A's fade out of the playoff picture early in the season, Suzuki could be a trade candidate around the July deadline.

Favorites For The Final Spots

Josh Donaldson: Of the four catchers who spent time on the A's 40-man roster last season, Donaldson was the only one

who didn't see any major league time. Despite that fact, he still has a strong chance of making the A's Opening Day roster out of spring training. Donaldson battled a number of minor injuries during the final six weeks of the 2011 regular season, which likely contributed to the A's decision not to bring him up in September. Donaldson had a solid season with the River Cats, batting .261/.344/.439 in 115 games. He played the majority of his games at catcher but also saw time at third base and, as was discussed in our corner infield preview yesterday, could be viewed as a viable option as a back-up third baseman by the A's this season. Donaldson has some power, but he has vacillated throughout his career between being a patient hitter and an aggressive one. The past two seasons he has been wearing his aggressive hitting shoes, with mixed results. The power numbers have increased, but the strike-outs have also increased and the walks have decreased dramatically. Finding more of a balanced approach at the plate would serve Donaldson well this spring. Defensively, Donaldson has improved his game-calling behind the plate considerably over the past two seasons and he has a strong arm. He is still arguably the weakest defensive player of the three candidates to back-up Suzuki, but he offers the most offensive upside, positional flexibility and he is the youngest of the trio.

Anthony Recker: At this time last year, it was expected that Recker would be playing his final season in the A's organization. A 2005 18th-round pick of the A's, Recker had consistently put up good numbers at the plate while improving behind the plate, but he was also often on the short-end of personnel decisions, seemingly stuck behind Donaldson, Suzuki and Powell indefinitely. Recker changed all of that thinking with the best season of his career in 2011. He posted an 889 OPS for the River Cats and forced his way into being an everyday player for Sacramento. Recker was a surprise call-up in late-August and he has remained on the A's 40-man roster throughout the off-season, a testament to what the A's think of Recker's future as a back-up catcher in the big leagues. Recker has always been one of the better right-handed power hitters in the A's chain, but he really made his numbers stand-out last season by improving his plate discipline. He posted a career-best .388 OBP, drawing 56 walks in 99 games. Recker also cut-down on his strike-outs. Defensively, he improved his footwork behind the plate and continued to garner praise from the River Cats' pitching staff. He also played a position other than catcher for the first time in his minor league career, logging some time at first base. While his time at first was limited, the fact that Recker now has experience playing at least one other position should help him in the battle to make the A's 25-man roster.

Battling For A Spot

Landon Powell: Powell will be entering camp in an unusual position. He is by far the most experienced catcher not named Suzuki in A's camp in terms of major league service time, but he isn't on the 40-man roster. Not being on the 40-man roster shouldn't be a huge impediment for Powell in his quest to make the A's roster, but it is an indication that he is slightly behind Donaldson and Recker in terms of pecking order at the start of camp. Powell is arguably the best defensive catcher in the A's camp, Suzuki included. The A's top pick in 2004 hasn't been given a chance at regular playing time during his three major league seasons. He received the most playing time of his career as a rookie in 2009. Probably not coincidentally, that was Powell's best season, as he posted a 726 OPS and homered seven times in 140 at-bats. The switch-hitting Powell has an excellent batting eye and power from both sides of the plate, but his swing is long, something that is likely exasperated by long stretches of inactivity. Powell also has durability concerns that have made the A's wary about using him in an everyday capacity. He does have some experience playing first base, but those durability issues have kept the A's from using him "out of position" that often. Powell has a good rapport with the A's pitching staff and had a team-best 2.70 catcher's ERA in the big leagues last season. It wouldn't be shocking to see Powell overtake Recker and Donaldson and claim the back-up catcher slot this spring.

Looking To Make An Impression

Derek Norris: There will be several new faces in Oakland A's camp this spring, and Norris will be one of the most high-profile of those newcomers. The former Washington Nationals' prospect could very well be the heir-apparent to Suzuki as the A's everyday catcher. Norris, who will turn 23 next week, has been one of baseball's top catching prospects for the past four years. His batting average has dipped the past two seasons, but he has shown above-average plate patience and good power for a catcher. Defensively, Norris has improved his glove work significantly, although he still has a ways to go before he is a major-league ready backstop. Norris' defense should get special attention from A's manager and former big league catcher Bob Melvin. Norris has very little chance of making the A's Opening Day roster, but he could position himself as a possibility to take over for Suzuki mid-season should the A's decide to deal their incumbent backstop.

Here For The Future

Ryan Ortiz: Ortiz has been quietly rising through the A's organization since being drafted in the sixth round in 2009 out of Oregon State. That progress has only been slowed by a right shoulder injury that cost him the final few months of the 2010 season and the first six weeks of the 2011 campaign. The shoulder injury impacted his throwing in 2011 but his bat didn't

suffer. He had a 970 OPS in 28 games with the High-A Stockton Ports before being promoted to Double-A Midland. Ortiz started out swinging the bat well with the Rockhounds, but he slumped during the final month of the season and finished with a 660 OPS for Midland. He redeemed himself this fall by posting a 948 OPS in a 15-game stint with in the Arizona Fall League. Ortiz's bat is currently ahead of his glove, thanks in part to the shoulder problems. The A's believe that when healthy Ortiz can stick as a catcher. Ortiz will be attending his first big league camp and will be looking to soak up as much knowledge from the A's veteran catching corps as possible.

Max Stassi: Stassi is another promising A's catching prospect who has been hampered by a shoulder problem the past two seasons. He underwent surgery on his right shoulder in May of last season and missed the rest of the year. Stassi has been on a throwing program all winter and should be close to 100 percent by spring training. Although only he is only 20 (Stassi turns 21 in May), he will be attending his third big league spring training. Stassi was thought to be a bat-first prospect when he was drafted in 2009, but his glove has moved past his bat for the moment. He is still a few years away from being big-league ready, but Stassi's time in big league camp will continue to aid his development.

If and when the A's move to San Jose, they'll need a makeover

By Sam McPherson, Oakland A's Examiner

Imagine, for a moment, if you can, a world where the Athletics baseball organization doesn't reside in Oakland.

Put aside the infamous green and gold and try to picture what the following looks like: the San Jose Athletics.

After the team's FanFest in late January, no one really knows when that will happen.

But when it does? The team needs a firm makeover and a new identity for its new destination and residence.

Consider the Philadelphia A's, with their blue script "A" on a white background. For awhile in Kansas City, the Athletics had a red, white and blue scheme for the team's colors.

Eventually, Charlie O. Finley brought in the green-and-gold imagery so well-known to A's fans today in Oakland, although the official shade of green has changed over the years from a kelly green to the darker hues used today.

But that iconic color scheme should remain in Oakland when the A's leave town, and the Athletics organization should give itself a makeover in terms of a new image and color scheme for a new city (San Jose, perhaps).

If the announcement comes down soon -- maybe this month? -- that the A's are moving down Interstate 880 to the Promised Land, they'll have a few years to plan ahead and establish a new identity in Silicon Valley.

The Athletics name itself will remain, as it should, as the franchise has history and tradition behind that name.

But two major changes should occur in regards to the uniforms and team colors:

1. San Jose is a different city than Oakland -- trendier, for example -- and the team's current colors just don't "feel" right for the South Bay. Also, throw in the fact the San Francisco Giants have orange in their color scheme, and the A's should avoid green, yellow/gold and orange in their new scheme. What colors does that leave? The Athletics should revisit some of their storied past with new color schemes, so blue should definitely be part of the equation. And the script "A" itself needs to remain. The boldly-patriotic red, white and blue used by the A's in the past -- with the obligatory black thrown in -- should really drive the A's new image when the time comes, as nothing is more American than Silicon Valley's entrepreneurial spirit. If the Athletics are really going to be the South Bay's team, they should reflect the diversity there as well by flying the colors of Old Glory;

2. Put classic pinstripes on the home uniforms. Nothing screams "class" in baseball more than pinstripes, and it's not just about the New York Yankees. Look at the Arizona Diamondbacks, for example: an expansion team can still rock the classiness of pinstripes on their way to a championship. The Chicago White Sox have added pinstripes in recent years, and they won a World Series, too. The A's need to represent like the tradition-rich organization they are, and adding pinstripes to a red, white, black and blue color scheme would solidify that strong bond to baseball's past -- and its future.

If change is imminent, roll with it. The Athletics organization needs to evolve as it prepares for a new future beyond Oakland, and one sure way to establish a new identity is to make some changes to the topical color scheme -- without losing the iconic "A" logo.

So when the time comes, look for the new A's to be even newer than you ever imagined.

Teen's research brings Negro Leagues to life

Boston-area 17-year-old becomes valued friend to former players

By Anthony Castrovince / MLB.com

The first check arrived in the mailbox at Paul Jones' Hamilton, Ohio, address in June of 2010.

There it was, in permanent ink: "\$833.33."

Proof, finally, of a Negro League past of which few were aware. It was pension money long-deserved and newly claimed, decades after Jones suited up for the Cleveland Buckeyes, Homestead Grays and Memphis Red Sox.

"To get something like that, something that belongs to you," Jones says of that monthly pension, "it makes a big difference in your life."

And for that, the 84-year-old Jones has an accomplice to thank. For he would not have had evidence of the extent of his Negro League service time and his pension eligibility if the Center for Negro League Baseball Research's best gumshoe hadn't been assigned to the case.

That researcher was Cam Perron, an Internet-savvy sleuth who has tracked down dozens of Negro League players whose stories had never been told. Perron scoured newspaper archives to find proof of Jones' playing days, and that information was passed on to Major League Baseball to process the payments. Within a week of Perron's discovery, the first check arrived at Jones' home.

Jones now considers Perron one of his closest friends.

A close friend who happens to be a white teenager from suburban Boston.

"Boy, I tell you," Jones says, "that kid is *magnificent*."

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That Perron, a 17-year-old high school senior from Arlington, Mass., spent a large chunk of his childhood collecting baseball cards and trying to accumulate autographs doesn't distinguish him from the average young fan.

But his particular interest in the Negro Leagues -- the oft-overlooked chapter of the game's history -- certainly does.

Perron began writing to former big league ballplayers requesting autographs when he was in the seventh grade. He didn't target the superstars but rather the bit players who would show a genuine appreciation for the attention. And in 2007, when Topps released a set of cards that featured players from the alternative leagues where black players were relegated before Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in 1947, Perron started writing to those guys, too.

Responses began to arrive. Some of them even included phone numbers. The players wanted to talk to the youngster, to see if he had any information about their old teammates.

"I wasn't able to offer them any information at all," Perron says. "I was like 13."

Perron came to realize something about the players they were asking about. Not only did they not have baseball cards of their own, but, in many cases, no almanac had ever chronicled their playing time and no researcher had ever unearthed their existence.

So Perron made a call to Dr. Layton Revel, the executive director of the Center for Negro League Baseball Research. In the 16 years since Revel founded the all-volunteer non-profit organization, it has located hundreds of players whose whereabouts were either unknown or undocumented. Perron wanted to assist in the search.

Revel gets calls all the time from people intrigued about the Negro Leagues, and many of them are kids writing a school paper. Perron's call, then, didn't strike him as strange. Revel informed him of some resources for locating ballplayers, and that was that.

"But he called back again," Revel says, "and the more we talked, the more we found this young man is interested not only in the history of Negro League baseball but the ballplayers themselves. What started as a typical conversation we have with the school students interested in writing a paper became watching someone grow and develop over the years into a top-line researcher."

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Perron began to search for rosters and archived newspaper articles about Negro League teams from the 1940s, '50s and '60s. When he'd come across a name he didn't recognize, he'd try to hunt down contact information.

"I paid \$30 a year for this private website where I could get unlisted numbers and addresses," he says. "What I would do is call a guy up and just say, 'My name's Cam. I was wondering if you played in the Negro Leagues with this team back in the day.'"

Wrong numbers were par for the course. So, too, were family members informing Perron that the person he was trying to reach had passed away.

Among the living players Perron managed to get in touch with, several were stricken by strokes that rendered them unable to talk. Still others were simply reluctant to chat about their long-ago playing days.

"I did this for a year and a half," Perron says. "From eighth grade to 10th grade. Maybe I'd get through to one out of 10 guys. Some guys I'd find on the first call. Others, it took a few months."

Perron, though, was persistent. He's proud to point out that he made all these calls and sent out all these mailings on his own dime. And he estimates that he found about one or two players a week.

One player he managed to get in touch with was Charlie Dees, a Negro Leaguer who wound up playing parts of three seasons with the Angels in the 1960s and was notorious in the collecting community for being difficult to pin down.

When Perron called him, Dees was initially gruff, demanding \$30 for an autograph. But as Perron began asking him questions about his life and career, Dees realized that he wanted more than just a signature.

"He's a wonderful guy," Dees says. "So intelligent. I couldn't believe it. He knew everything about baseball and a lot about me. We just got along like family."

With his growing list of contacts, Perron was often able to put players back in touch with old teammates. He even started to use Adobe Illustrator to make homemade baseball cards for guys to sign.

"Eventually, people were calling the house like every day," Perron says. "They would call and my mom would be like, 'He's in school now.' A lot of them didn't even realize I was this kid."

This kid was doing important work. He was reconnecting people with their past, proving to them that their small part in the game's long history has meaning. Any white player who has played so much as a single inning in a single game in the lowest of the low Minors can find documentation of that appearance. For the veterans of the Negro Leagues and their family members, however, such documentation has long been difficult, if not impossible, to come by.

"Over 95 percent of the history of Negro League baseball had been unrecorded and undocumented," Revel says. "One of the biggest problems in black baseball is that the games were not reported nearly as well as in white baseball."

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Revel realized how invested Perron was in improving that percentage. And so he involved him in the planning of a Negro League reunion held in Birmingham, Ala., in June of 2010. He also gave him an assignment.

For a former Negro League player to qualify for an MLB pension, he must have proof of four years of service time. Revel had been working on Jones' case for about a year, but he could only find evidence of three. A deceased former player with the same name had actually collected what should have been Jones' pension money.

"I started looking up this stuff," Perron says. "I used Google news and this other newspaper archive website that I paid \$15 a month for. I called Paul to narrow down when he played, but nothing matched up. His career was all jumbled up. So I started typing in the names of the teams he played for, trying to narrow down two or three years that he could have played. And I found a box score from a 1948 Homestead Grays game. It had him listed as a pitcher."

Perron printed it up and brought it with him to the Birmingham reunion. It was there where he met Jones, who was both thrilled and thankful for a gift that essentially amounts to \$10,000 a year in pension money.

And Jones wasn't the only player impressed by Perron.

"That white kid had all these black ballplayers gathered around him," Jones recalls. "When he gets to talking, everybody gets around him. He sits down and relates to them."

Revel estimates that Perron has discovered more than 80 players who had league experience that MLB would accept as criteria for a pension. For his research, Perron has been given awards, been written up in the Boston Globe, asked to speak before the Boston chapter of the Society for American Baseball Research and invited on the field at Fenway Park.

"Cam is the top researcher we have in the country at this point in time," Revel says. "He's a valued colleague."

And whether it's helping them obtain pension qualification, making them aware of autograph shows where they can make a few bucks or simply chatting with them about their playing days, Perron has become a valued friend to many former players. When Perron's family went to Myrtle Beach for vacation, two former Negro Leaguers he had tracked down -- James "Cowboy" Atterbury and Russell "Crazy Legs" Patterson -- drove in excess of three hours to meet up with him, just to say thanks in person.

These Negro League veterans are all elderly, which means that Perron's work has an expiration date.

But as he awaits responses to his college applications and plots out what he hopes will be a career in the business world, he knows that this experience has been as invaluable for him as for those he's helped.

"Back in the day, these guys were disrespected," he says. "But each person has their own story. The fact that this little white kid who has nothing to do with their past is reaching out to them, I think that, in itself, is important."

For more information on the Center for Negro League Baseball Research, visit <http://www.cnlbr.org>.