

Oakland A's Off-Season Q&A: Farhan Zaidi, P.2

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

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In part two of our off-season conversation with Oakland A's Director of Baseball Operations Farhan Zaidi, we get Farhan's take on the Brett Wallace-Michael Taylor trade, including his opinion on Wallace's defense and his "comp" for Taylor. We also discuss the A's third base situation in-depth.

For part one of this interview, please click [here](#).

OaklandClubhouse: I wanted to ask you about the biggest trade the team has made this off-season: the [Michael Taylor](#) for [Brett Wallace](#) swap. How did that trade come together? Was it a deal that you had discussed with Philadelphia before the [Roy Halladay](#) trade was consummated or was it something that only came together once the Halladay trade started to unfold?

Farhan Zaidi: Philadelphia knew about our interest in Taylor. I think he is a guy who pretty much any team in baseball would be interested in. They knew about it but we never really got very far with them. There wasn't a really obvious match there. I think Billy [Beane] through the course of his conversations with Alex [Anthopoulos] after he became the Blue Jays' GM and in hearing how the Halladay talks were coming along, it was really through those channels that the conversations started on Taylor. I would say a good amount of time before that deal actually came to fruition, Alex asked Billy if we were willing to talk about Wallace in a Taylor-for-Wallace swap.

They are both terrific prospects and both have their strengths. I think there are some obvious parallels certainly in their careers. It was a pretty tough decision for us because Wallace is a guy, as we have talked about before, that we have a lot of history with and liked a lot and were really excited to get in the [Matt Holliday](#) deal. I think it ultimately came down to who ultimately fit in our plan going forward a little bit better. Taylor being right-handed and being a corner outfielder, as opposed to Wallace who we ultimately saw as a first-baseman, it was more of a question of fit than anything else. It certainly wasn't a bet against Brett Wallace. We think he is going to be great, which is why we took him as the principle return in the Holliday deal to being with.

That was kind of the process of how the deal came about. It was one that definitely was a subject of a lot of internal debate before we came to the consensus that we would go ahead with it.

OC: You mentioned that the team saw Wallace ultimately as a first-baseman. Was that a conclusion that you came to after evaluating his time in Sacramento, or was that something that you felt was likely even before the trade was made?

FZ: Again, this is a kid with an incredible work ethic. A lot of it was just that, our belief that he is such a good worker, such a hard worker that if he put his mind to it, he could certainly pull it [playing third base] off. That still may be the case. It sounds like Toronto is going to move him back to first base because they have more of a long-term need there. We feel like he is going to be an above-average defender there. As far as third base goes, he is really more of a natural first-baseman. He moved over to third base at ASU to accommodate [Ike Davis](#). Then he was drafted by the Cardinals and it didn't make sense for them to move him back to first base with [Albert Pujols](#) on his deal, so they kept him at third. When we got Brett, it was the same sort of decision where we felt like we were better covered at first base and we had a long-term need there, so we kept him there.

Really, he has been playing at third with his last few teams more out of necessity than anything else. This might be the best thing for him to go to an organization that really needs a first-baseman of the future. He has a chance to be really good over there.

OC: What kind of player is Michael Taylor in your estimation? Do you have any comparables that you use to describe what kind of player you think he will ultimately be in the big leagues?

FZ: This is going to sound a little bit unusual, and I don't think I have heard anyone make this comparison yet, but in terms of the production you'd like to see from him in a perfect world, I could see him being a little bit like a Matt Holliday. I think he is a guy who can hit for average and who can hit his share of homeruns, but who isn't a pure homerun hitter. I think Matt is a guy who is really more of a 25-30 homerun guy. He hit more homers than that in a pretty good hitting environment at Coors, but generally he is a guy who is going to hit better than .300 and give you 25-30 homers and will steal bases. Matt is a guy who doesn't always get the most glowing scouting reports on his play in left field, but actually by all defensive metrics, he is well above-average there. I think that is also the case with Taylor. He grades out as above-average defensively.

That is obviously the perfect world scenario in terms of Taylor's production. They are different physically. Taylor has a little bit of size on Holliday and probably has a little bit more speed at this stage than Matt had when he was coming up. But that, in a perfect world, is the kind of production we would hope for.

You sort of hear comparisons to [Frank Thomas](#) and [Jermaine Dye](#), but I don't really think that is how Taylor profiles. He certainly has more speed than Frank ever had and isn't really as pure of a power hitter than either of those guys were. I think Taylor has a chance to hit for better average than Jermaine, but, again, these are perfect-world projections. If he becomes comparable to any of those guys, we'd be thrilled.

OC: With Taylor and [Chris Carter](#) as the team's top-two prospects, it sort of reminds me of last year when [Brett Anderson](#) and [Trevor Cahill](#) were the top-two prospects and they arrived in spring training with little or no experience at Triple-A and then wound-up making the team. Do you see any scenario in which Taylor or Carter could open the year on the A's 25-man roster or are you settled enough in the outfield and first base that it isn't going to happen?

FZ: If the question whether it is possible, the answer would be yes. On the position player-side where these players would fit in, we certainly have some veteran players in front of them, but who's to say what our 40-man roster is going to look like on Opening Day and, as a result, what our Opening Day roster is going to look like. I don't think we would count those scenarios out at this point. Certainly as we sit right here, the likely scenario is for both of those guys to start at Triple-A, where neither of them have a ton of experience. But it would be pointless to rule out those scenarios at this point.

OC: Both Taylor and Carter had to leave the Mexican Winter League early with various ailments. Do you have clean bills of health for both of those guys?

FZ: Yeah, there was no long-term health issues related to them leaving Mexico.

OC: The most complicated question for the team right now seemingly is the third base question. Assuming that [Eric Chavez](#) isn't your everyday third-baseman because of health reasons, who do you see as the leading in-house candidates to see the bulk of the time at third?

FZ: That is still a position that we are looking to address. We did have some interest in [Adrian Beltre](#) before he signed with the Red Sox and we have continued to monitor the third base market both in terms of free agents and potential trade targets. We are continuing to evaluate. As we sit here right now, the reports on Chavy's health are encouraging, but we don't want to assume that he will be healthy. If he is healthy, that would be great, but we don't want to count on that given all of the injury obstacles he has to overcome. [Jake Fox](#) is a guy who can play over there and we signed [Dallas McPherson](#) to a minor league contract during the off-season. I think it is fair to say that there is no obvious favorite that I would pencil in right now on Opening Day if Eric isn't healthy. But there is plenty of time left in the off-season and it is a situation that we are continuing to look at.

OC: Would [Eric Patterson](#) see time at third base this spring?

FZ: I think so. We had him get some time there in Sacramento. In fairness to these infielders, especially when you take middle infielders and put them over at third base, there is an assumption that that will be a fairly smooth transition. The ball gets on you a lot quicker at third base than it does when you are playing in the middle infield. The example I think back to now in hindsight is [Marco Scutaro](#), who is a guy who in his last year with us played at third base out of necessity. He made three errors in one game. His defensive metrics and rankings that year [at third] were well below average. Then he wound-up playing a lot there with Toronto the next year and playing much better. Regardless of how old a middle infielder is or how much experience he has, the first time you put him over there at third, it is going to be tough. We saw the same thing with [Adam Kennedy](#) this year. These guys will tell you that they just aren't used to the ball getting on them that quickly.

We put Eric [Patterson] over there in Sacramento last year and it wasn't the smoothest of transitions, but there are a couple of examples right there in Scutaro and Kennedy of middle infielders who have played many years in the big leagues and it took them a little time to make the transition to play third base. We are definitely going to give Eric the chance to play over there. With a guy like him with his speed and the fact that he is a left-handed bat, the more positions that he can play, the more valuable he is, so I think we definitely give him a look over there. It will be a nice additional look for him to have. I'm not sure we view him as a guy who would be an everyday third-baseman. Then again, I don't think the Angels viewed [Chone] Figgins as a guy who would ultimately be an everyday third-baseman when they first started playing him over there.

OC: [Daric Barton](#) saw some time at third base in Sacramento a few years ago. It was sort of a rough experience for him, but has the team given any thought to trying him there again, or has that ship sailed?

FZ: He is a guy who has already gone through one position change when he went from behind the plate to first base. He's gotten comfortable over there and he's gotten really good over there and he's our starting first-baseman, so I don't think we'd move him over to third and create another hole.

OC: I know this name is sort of thrown around whenever he is available because of his connection to the organization: [Miguel Tejada](#). Would he be a guy the team would consider bringing back, or is that something that isn't really being considered given the recent history the team has had with situations like that, such as with Jason Giambi last year?

FZ: We have a team policy of not commenting on free agents, so I am going to go ahead and invoke that. More generally, like I said in relation to third base, we are looking at all of our options to improve our infield depth. That is an obvious need

for us. As a general comment, we aren't in any position to rule anything out at this point because we are still looking for solutions on the infield. That is kind of why I'm a little bit hesitant to project what the Opening Day line-up is going to look like or what the left-side of the infield is going to look like. It's sort of an on-going process and doing it at this point – it's fun to speculate, but it is still such an on-going process that it wouldn't even mean anything if I told you what I thought our infield was going to look like at this point.

Stay tuned for the final segment of this interview when we discuss the overall health of the A's system, some of the team's top pitching prospects, including Fautino De Los Santos and Michael Ynoa, and more...

McGwire truthful in emotions, not words

[Bruce Jenkins](#), San Francisco Chronicle, 1/13/2010

Mark McGwire spoke through his tears. That's where the message was delivered. It certainly wasn't through his words, at times so contradictory as to be laughable. McGwire's contrition poured forth at the very mention of anyone dear to him - his kids, his parents, Tony La Russa - because deep down, McGwire knows he let them down. It's that larger image, of a sobbing and fallen hero, that will stick with the American public.

McGwire knows that as his kids grow up, they will realize their dad is portrayed as a cheater. He knows damn well that he cheated the game, and the notion of a level playing field, and he knows that La Russa's reputation will suffer greatly as those great A's teams become increasingly identified with steroids.

McGwire took severe and well-deserved heat for some of his comments to Bob Costas on Monday night, but you'll never see him more in character. The man has an enormous heart, well concealed behind a gruff exterior, a skeptical view of strangers and a reluctance to be truly honest or forthcoming at any time. From the media standpoint, he's a terrible interview; always was. He hated the process and almost went out of his way to be misleading. But this was one interview he couldn't avoid - not if he wanted to accept La Russa's invitation to return to baseball as hitting coach of the St. Louis Cardinals.

So he was Mark McGwire in essence. He spoke evasively, and when the subject matter drew close to his core, he broke down and cried.

We could spend hours picking apart McGwire's comments, including the positively absurd answer as to when La Russa first learned McGwire was a steroid user: "He found out this morning." Take that one comment, or McGwire's many attempts to write off steroids as a genuine enhancer, and the interview becomes worthless - on paper.

Allow for the visuals, however, and McGwire wins. He gets a pass from the public. If you don't agree, you've forgotten how Alex Rodriguez, Jason Giambi and Manny Ramirez moved on with their careers, to great adulation, despite making ludicrously vague, contradictory or just plain erroneous remarks about their own experiences with performance-enhancing drugs. After a while, the specific words don't much matter. Just perform that act of contrition. There certainly was nothing phony about McGwire's emotion, so if you wanted him to pay a dear price for his transgressions, rest assured that he has - and that the healing process is far from over.

Other thoughts on the subject:

-- Commissioner Bud Selig, right in character, made a fool of himself in declaring that the so-called Steroid Era is essentially over. Somebody tell Selig that his sport doesn't test for human growth hormone, or that Major League Baseball's drug tests are so easily beaten, players try to contain their laughter. On the wane, perhaps, but over? Not a chance. Not ever.

-- There was a lot of truth to what McGwire said. A lot of players, perhaps even a majority, started using steroids to hasten the recovery process from injuries. He *was* "given a gift" of hand-eye coordination, he *was* a legendary power hitter in his teens, he possessed titanic mental strength, and he was going to be a storied ballplayer under any circumstances. As Jose Canseco said Monday, "Mark was naturally talented - a right-handed-hitting power machine." But to flatly refute the additional strength, the heightened sense of empowerment and other benefits provided by steroid use ... come on, man, you've got to finish the story.

-- I can't help recalling the sight of both McGwire and Canseco when they broke in with the A's. I spent a lot of time in the clubhouse back then, and these were two specimens for the ages. They were *exactly* what skinny or underperforming young players envisioned as they pondered the plunge into steroids. Apparently, for them, God's generous gifts weren't quite enough.

-- As the TV shots alternated between the present and McGwire's infamous Congressional testimony, you couldn't help but notice that McGwire has considerably more hair than he did in 2005.

-- Everything looks rosy in the Cardinals' land of giants: McGwire, Albert Pujols and Matt Holliday in a Bunyanesque assault on the pennant race, before a forgiving and adoring St. Louis public. McGwire couldn't have hand-picked a better situation, but what if it all goes wrong? Big Mac does *not* want that kind of spotlight.

-- America's forgiveness aside, this won't bolster his Hall of Fame candidacy at all. McGwire's detractors either reject all steroid users, out of hand, or dismiss him as a one-dimensional talent. Now they're hearing him say the steroids didn't help him hit home runs. He might get even fewer votes the next time.

SPORTS AND DRUGS

Anti-doping chiefs slam Selig

Associated Press 1/13/2010

The president of the World Anti-Doping Agency says Mark McGwire's admission of steroid use should spur baseball to get tougher on drug cheats.

WADA President John Fahey said Tuesday that despite "incremental progress," baseball's drug program still falls short of the "universally accepted standards" of the international code on doping.

McGwire tearfully apologized Monday, acknowledging he used steroids and human growth hormone on and off for a decade. He said his use started before the 1990 season and included 1998, when he hit 70 home runs to break Roger Maris' single-season record.

MLB Commissioner Bud Selig responded by saying the "so-called steroid era ... is clearly a thing of the past, and Mark's admission is another step in the right direction." Former WADA President Dick Pound criticized Selig and said he's skeptical of claims baseball is becoming cleaner.

"I think the jury is still out on that issue and the self-serving statements by Bud Selig do nothing to increase confidence," Pound said in an e-mail. "What has emerged in the whole baseball mess is that drug use is widespread and even the best players are involved - and still MLB is whistling past the graveyard."

U.S. Anti-Doping Agency executive director Travis Tygart dismissed McGwire's claim that steroids only allowed him to regain health and didn't help him become a better player.

"It's just crazy - I don't buy that for a second," Tygart said. "It's sort of disappointing you don't just come clean and take full responsibility."

Goose on Mac: Hall of Fame reliever Goose Gossage watched McGwire's confession and was happy his former A's teammate came clean. That's where the praise ended - Gossage said there should be no place in Cooperstown for McGwire or any player who used performance-enhancing drugs.

"I definitely think they cheated," Gossage said. "And what does the Hall of Fame consist of? Integrity. Cheating is not part of integrity."

McGwire apology creates rift between Bash Brothers

By Monte Poole, Oakland Tribune columnist 1/13/2010

TWO DECADES after what should have been the most fulfilling winter of their careers, the former Bash Brothers of Oakland are bashing each other.

Mark McGwire is saying Jose Canseco is lying when he says the two of them were steroid buddies.

Canseco is saying it's McGwire who lies.

As debate rages in the court of public opinion, I'm siding with Canseco.

Granted, it has been more than a decade since I've spent extended time with either man. During the early 1990s, though, both were accessible and cordial A's teammates. Canseco was a bad comedian devoted to himself, McGwire an earnest worker bee who was much more comfortable talking about his teammates.

In March 1995, while striking major leaguers were locked out of spring-training facilities in Arizona, I arranged to meet McGwire at a Phoenix-area community college for an interview. We spent more than an hour talking about baseball, about the A's, about home runs.

We also talked about the choices ballplayers make while active and in retirement. Mac, then 31, envisioned himself owning a sports-themed restaurant and bar or, perhaps, working in law enforcement.

When he said he didn't think he would stay in baseball, as a coach or in any other capacity, it seemed genuine. He seemed to enjoy the game but was not immersed in it and certainly did not wish to be defined by it.

Baseball, McGwire implied, was not essential to his happiness; he neither needed nor wanted to be a celebrity. This seemed to make sense. It fit the "aah-shucks" image that was so appealing to so many fans.

Canseco, to the contrary, reveled in his celebrity, wearing colorful clothes, buying flashy cars and scorching local freeways. He toted pistols, had a tryst with Madonna. He would boast about his ability and flex his biceps in a display of self-admiration.

Though Canseco, then 30, also did not wish to be defined by baseball, he had no idea as to his future. He was too busy being Jose Superstar, charismatic slugger and matinee idol.

He inwardly yearned to be respected as much for his mind as for his physique, but it was difficult to take him seriously.

In this context, it might seem foolish to place more trust in Canseco, a cartoon, fabricated to entertain, than McGwire, who lacked the basic ingredients of fiction.

Over the years, that changed. McGwire went to St. Louis, slugged his way into baseball's record books and eventually joined Canseco as a cartoon — except Mac isn't cut out for the role. He was, after all, supposed to be more genuine than that.

Yet there he was two days ago during an interview with Bob Costas on MLB Network, trying and failing spectacularly to be earnest and honest about his career.

He said he told no one — no family or friends or attorneys — about his steroid use until Monday, when he acknowledged it to the Associated Press. He wants us to believe he and Tony La Russa, a father figure who happens to be his new boss, did not discuss this before or after Oct. 26, when he was hired as hitting coach for the Cardinals.

La Russa played along, telling reporters he had no idea of Mac's steroid usage until Monday morning. Tony is smarter than that. That he was compelled to compromise his own integrity sheds more unflattering light on McGwire.

The most disappointing aspect of the interview with Costas, though, was McGwire's unwillingness to accept his performance was enhanced by performance-enhancing drugs. No matter how much the big man sniffled, no matter how much moisture welled around his eyes, this punctured his credibility.

And that makes it hard for me to side with Mac over Jose. Simply put, I'm siding with the man who, according to the evidence, likely is more honest with himself.

Yes, Canseco is an opportunist. He needs money and craves attention. He has mocked his career and himself. But as baseball's steroid era reveals itself, his truths tend to ring truer than those of many others, including his former teammate.

Canseco and McGwire 20 years ago were two months into their winter as members of the 1989 World Champion A's. They were marquee stars on a marquee team.

Look at them now, two unsympathetic figures, one wanting forgiveness and the other seeking vindication, bickering like old thieves who got caught and, turning on each other, differ on the recollection of details.

McGwire stepped up with a chance to come clean about cheating. He made a valiant effort. But even at the risk of insulting our intelligence, he still tried to cheat.

A's ballpark opponents reorganizing for stadium battle

Nonbinding vote on new Fremont ballpark plan recommended for November ballot

By Matthew Artz, Oakland Tribune 1/13/2010

In the words of baseball great Yogi Berra, it's déjà vu all over again.

Nearly one year after A's co-owner Lew Wolff broke off talks with Fremont, the city once again is making a pitch for the team, and opponents are criticizing both the city's plan and the process, which has proceeded behind closed doors leading up to this evening's City Council meeting.

However, one thing has changed: The city now wants to take the stadium plan to voters in November.

Mayor Bob Wasserman, who opposed a stadium referendum two years ago, said a nonbinding vote this time around could show the A's that residents want them.

Hundreds of residents rallied against a previous stadium plan last year, with some saying they would welcome a vote and a chance to unseat council members who support the stadium.

"We're better armed this time," said Kathy McDonald, president of the Fremont Citizens Network, which worked to kill a previous stadium proposal.

"If this ridiculous thing actually goes to a vote in November, I guarantee that our campaign will not only be about defeating this proposal, but replacing a few heads."

On Friday, the city unveiled a plan for a ballpark on 120 acres owned by the NUMMI auto plant between Interstates 680 and 880, and a short walk from a new BART station.

If Major League Baseball thinks the plan is viable, it could ask A's owner Lew Wolff to negotiate with Fremont rather than pursuing a stadium in San Jose, which baseball considers to be San Francisco Giants territory.

The committee is expected to take its findings to Commissioner Bud Selig later this month, city officials said.

The new site, at the corner of Fremont and South Grimmer boulevards, has several advantages over the two previous proposed locations.

It is adjacent to the future Warm Springs BART station but a mile from a residential neighborhood, whose residents led the anti-stadium charge last year against plan to put a stadium closer to their homes.

However, the new plan also includes more public money than the previous plan — including \$62 million in infrastructure improvements and an undisclosed sum to purchase the land.

"I do not think a ballpark is a good economic generator," former council candidate Vinnie Bacon said. "It's an irresponsible use of money."

Former Mayor Gus Morrison, another stadium opponent, criticized the city for keeping the new approach under wraps.

"This effort should have been developed in public, after a council vote authorizing it, not sprung on the citizens 72 hours before a final decision with a report that has been festering for months," he wrote.

Fremont has spent nearly \$100,000 developing its new plan for the A's, City Manager Fred Diaz said. The city started working on the concept in August when NUMMI announced it was ceasing operations but only determined that it was feasible in December after the council had gone on recess.

Diaz said the \$62 million in infrastructure improvements likely would be necessary no matter what is developed on the site and that a ballpark could kick start development.

Councilmember Anu Natarajan said she was surprised that the plan was so detailed and had concerns about how much money the city would invest.

"If this is just a starting point for dialogue, I'm not upset," she said. "If this the final deal, yes, I'm absolutely upset."

A's Chavez at Peace

Mychael Urban, CSN Bay Area, 1/11/2010

This is the time of year when A's fans are used to hearing a glowing medical update on Eric Chavez.

This isn't that update.

This is about a still-young athlete growing peacefully and thankfully — and, somewhat incongruously, defiantly — into athletic middle age.

Chavez feels just fine, of course. He's been throwing and hitting and taking ground balls without pain for a while now.

The surgically repaired right shoulder, about which he was more than a little worried a few months ago, is doing swell. Has been for a month or so.

The surgically repaired (twice) back? It's a little stiff in the mornings, but it loosens right up.

There's an occasional "jolt" of pain when he bends over to scoop up one of his children, and that probably doesn't inspire much confidence among A's fans because bending over to pick up stuff is kind of important for a big-league infielder.

But whereas a year ago such jolts would have left Chavez to recover in bed for five days, now they go away nearly as suddenly as they come.

"It just goes away instantly," Chavez says. "I'm not walking around with a pain-free back, but there's no down-time when I tweak something. ... There's been probably three times when I'd feel something and I've looked at my wife and I'm like, 'Oh my gosh!' But it subsides within five or 10 minutes.

"I'm thinking to myself, 'I definitely would have missed three or four days of working out if that happened last year.'"

That's about as glowing as Chavez gets with his updates these days.

Go hard or go home

He's no dummy; having played in only 121 games over the past three seasons while rehabbing this or that, Chavez is acutely aware that any sort of declarative statement — *I'm going to play 130-140 games this year* — will be met with some serious eye-rolling.

He doesn't even *do* declarations anymore. Call it wisdom, experience, frustration. The harsh reality tells Eric Chavez that the every-kid's-dream phase of his life could very well be over.

And if that's the case, he'd like to find out sooner rather than later.

So while he's certain that the A's will want to bring their franchise player — their \$66-million man — along at a snail's pace this spring, he's pushing for clearance to do a 180 on that approach.

In short, Chavez wants to go hard or go home.

"What I've expressed to them is that this potentially could be the last year I ever play baseball, and I don't want to tippy-toe it," he says. "I want to go out there full-bore, enjoy the game and give it the best effort I can. Obviously I'm going to be smart, and if it works out, great. If it doesn't and something happens, it's apparent my career's not going to go any further.

"So let's just get it on. My body is either going to hold up at this point or it's not. I've had enough time to heal."

Chavez, a six-time Gold Glove winner who averaged more than 30 homers and 100 RBIs from 2001-2005, plans to go full-bore on his own within a week or so. No limitations, no restraint, within reason.

"I'm not prevented from doing anything," he says. "I'll be in full-blown workouts, on the field and off."

If he makes it though that, it'll be on to spring training.

"I'm going to have a pretty good idea in the spring what my future is," Chavez says. "Last year at spring training my shoulder blew apart within the first two weeks, so I kinda knew I was treading some dangerous waters there."

Dial it down

Only if his oft-in-port-for-repairs vessel makes it to Opening Day will Chavez, who turned 32 in December, dial it down some.

"Playing five or six days a week, that might be a thing in the past for me," he says. "I'd love to say I can get there, but I don't know how realistic that is. A good measure for me would be three or four days a week. It's so hard to predict. The only thing I know how to do is get in the best shape I can."

Actually, that's not all he knows. There's also this: "I'm not going to be playing six games in a row. That's just not going to happen for me anymore."

But three or four games in a row would be nice. Then a day or two off, another three or four games, and so on.

Ideally, much of the action he sees will be on the hot corner, where the A's have no equally able heir. A's general manager Billy Beane and Chavez also have discussed part-time work as a designated hitter, but Oakland's other DH, recently re-signed Jack Cust, is another left-handed-hitting slugger.

This is where the themes of gratitude and loyalty join the conversation.

"Whatever's gonna happen is completely up to what the A's want to do," Chavez says. "It's pretty apparent that everybody wants me to be a third baseman and be in the lineup four or five times a week. Billy's best-case scenario, I think is (me playing) third base three or four days and being the DH one or two days."

Chavez speaks of Beane — a fellow San Diego native who gave him the club-record contract that some Oakland fans lament should have been bestowed upon Miguel Tejada — in a tone of reverence.

He emotes similarly when speaking of A's owner Lew Wolff, keenly cognizant that the men who pay him — and the fans who pay to see him — have gotten very little in return on their considerable investment over the past three years.

"They've been so good to me, the A's and the fans," he says. "Lew, he's made some phone calls to me, encouraging me and supporting me and seeing how I'm doing. And that's been huge, because the underlying point in this whole thing is that they've known how bad I've wanted to play."

This is where foolish pride tries to hop onto the back of defiance and sneak in, primed to point out how many games Chavez endured searing shoulder pain or back stiffness -- when reaching anything but a fastball down Main Street was a ridiculously impossible notion.

Chavez doesn't slam the door completely, but he closes it to within an inch of a crack.

"There have been things I've been through that people don't know about," he says. "So Billy and the guys (in the clubhouse), they know how bad I want to play, and they know that the fact that I haven't been able to live up to my part of the bargain is probably eating at me more than anyone could imagine."

Grace knocks. Chavez swings the door back open.

"I owe the A's gratitude forever," he says. "It's not always how people are when things are great that you find out about them, if you know what I'm saying."

Anything they want

Now Chavez is saying he'd even play a utility role if need be. That's how thankful he is, how hell-bent he is on proving the character that Beane said was such a key part of the massive-contract equation.

"I don't know exactly what they have in mind; I've heard people talk about first base, too," Chavez says. "I'm just going to go out and try to play third base. They paid me to be a productive third baseman. I'm going to try to fulfill that. But if they told me today, 'Look, you're going to play left field or first or split time at DH with Cust,' I'd be like, 'OK.'"

"I'd be willing to do anything they want me to do. Whatever they want me to do, I'll do it with a smile on my face. The last thing I'd ever do is give them any type of disagreement."

He would, however, give them what few athletes have ever given the team that drafted, developed and star-made them: a discount.

Chavez will make \$12 million this year — if he doesn't get hurt again and retire — and has a \$12.5 million club option with a \$3 million buyout for 2011.

What would you do, he's asked, if you did stay healthy and had a big year? What if the A's wanted you back but not at \$12.5 million? Would you let them buy you out and re-sign on the cheap?

"Yeah. Of course. Absolutely," he says without skipping a beat. "The goal is three more years, and I want to end my career with the A's if they feel my game is up to par."

"Either way, I'm prepared. And happy. If my body just doesn't let it happen, I'm ready to move on with my life."