

## A's News Clips, Monday, January 10, 2011

### Winter transactions improve A's roster, but will it be enough in 2011?

Sam McPherson, examiner.com, 1/9/2011

Whether those moves will be enough to close the gap on the American League champion Texas Rangers is another question, of course.

While the team has made a flurry of moves, there are five significant acquisitions worth examining (in chronological order):

1. In an attempt to improve their outfield, the organization acquired Kansas City outfielder David DeJesus. The 31-year old veteran has spent his entire career with the Royals. He's not a great player, but he's a good, solid player who will improve the A's lineup. But by how much? He's a career .289 hitter, with minimal speed and average power. His career OPS (.787) isn't great, either, but he'll be an improvement over [Ryan Sweeney in right field](#), for sure. With some young OF talent coming up from the minors in the future, DeJesus is probably a short-term solution, however.
2. The team sent Vin Mazzaro and his mediocrity to the Royals in exchange for DeJesus, so they signed free agent starting pitcher Brandon McCarthy. The 27-year old righty has never delivered on his promise, pitching only 372+ innings since his 2005 debut for the Chicago White Sox. With a career record of 20-24 and a 4.56 ERA in 110 appearances (including 56 starts), McCarthy is a small gamble for the A's as they try to fill [the fifth spot in their rotation](#). If he pans out, great. If he doesn't, oh well.
3. Prior to the 2010 season, the A's really didn't want Jack Cust as their designated hitter. After he played the final half of the season as their primary DH, the team let him walk via free agency. To fill the spot, Oakland signed 2009 World Series MVP Hideki Matsui to a deal. This will be Godzilla's ninth major-league season, and he was still productive last year as a DH for the Los Angeles Angels. Against right-handed pitchers last year, Matsui hit .289 with an .868 OPS, but he really can't hit lefties anymore. So making this move was probably not a great one for the A's, as it will just stunt the development and growth of Chris Carter (who be the Oakland DH against lefties in 2011). Matsui is a part-time player at this point -- a platoon DH, no less -- but he might give a boost to attendance and other revenue streams as his Japanese following is tremendously huge still.
4. One of A's biggest problems in 2010 was [the left-field hole](#) when Coco Crisp was not in centerfield; after trading Rajai Davis to the Toronto Blue Jays, Oakland filled the left-field hole by trading for Florida Marlins outfielder Josh Willingham. He'll be 32 when the season starts, and he hasn't played 140+ games in a season since 2007 -- but when Willingham is healthy, he's a solid run producer. Only a .265 hitter, he walks plenty and delivers power to the tune of a career .842 OPS. The key, of course, will be keeping him healthy.
5. In a fun twist, Oakland also went out and signed former A's fan favorite Rich Harden to compete for the fifth spot in the rotation. Only 29 years old now, Harden's best years came in an Oakland uniform (3.42 ERA in parts of six seasons). However, Harden's season-high of 31 starts was in 2004, and he's always been an injury risk. He struggled in Texas last year with a 5.58 ERA, but maybe a return to the green-and-gold can resuscitate his career. He'll be competing with McCarthy and others for that fifth rotation slot.

So with these five moves, the A's attempted to shore up their weaknesses. They addressed the outfield problems in terms of improving run scoring, and they replaced an outgoing DH with an incoming one -- although they probably overpaid for Matsui (\$6M). They still have the same [issues at third base](#), however.

In truth, the A's attempted to fix that problem by claiming Toronto's Edwin Encarnacion off waivers in November, but the 28-year old elected to file for free agency rather than sign with Oakland. Encarnacion hit 21 home runs in only 96 games for the Blue Jays last year, and he would have been a distinct improvement over incumbent hot-corner man Kevin Kouzmanoff. Oakland also made a generous offer to free agent All-Star third baseman Adrian Beltre, but he spurned the A's to sign with Texas instead.

There's not much left on the market for third basemen, however, so Oakland may be stuck with Kouzmanoff for 2011 -- hoping he'll improve on his dismal 2010 performance and return to his 2007-09 level of production.

## **San Jose's redevelopment agency selling land to buy property needed for proposed MLB ballpark**

By Tracy Seipel, San Jose Mercury News, 1/8/2011

San Jose moved a step closer toward a proposed downtown ballpark Friday, when officials announced they will sell five city-owned parcels, using the proceeds to pay for land needed to complete the stadium plan.

"This is a move forward to assure residents that the city is on track with baseball," said Harry Mavrogenes, chief of the San Jose Redevelopment Agency.

The plan comes even as doubts about the agency's future continue to mount, following revelations last fall that plunging property tax assessments decimated the agency's budget. And last week, reports surfaced that Gov. Jerry Brown might eliminate all redevelopment agencies statewide to free up money for schools and other programs.

Said Mayor Chuck Reed: "A lot of people have been wondering how we're going to put together the transaction to do the land for a baseball stadium. I think this is an answer. And it's a message for Major League Baseball -- just in case they had any questions."

In an interview with the Mercury News, Mavrogenes acknowledged that the governor's proposal to eliminate redevelopment agencies could throw a wrench in the city's plan to acquire the land for the ballpark.

He and the mayor said Friday that the agency's land-sale plan has been in the works for at least a month. Reed added that the memo about the plan was prepared in advance of a discussion he has been trying to have with MLB Commissioner Bud Selig about "how we can finish the land deal."

In his two-page memo Friday, Mavrogenes said the agency owns real estate assets worth an estimated \$220 million to \$240 million, and that it has "received strong interest" from a number of developers for those assets.

But, he said, "rather than taking any offers from one person, we're organizing a process for several entities, because multiple interest will maximize the revenues from these transactions."

The assets being considered are all downtown and include the Fairmont Hotel Annex retail area (McCormick & Schmick's seafood restaurant, Bijan Bakery and a vacant space to First Street); the Central Place parking lot (between South Second and South Third streets and East San Fernando Street and Central Place); the Fairmont parking garage (under the Fairmont Hotel); the Fountain Alley parking lot (South Second Street between East Santa Clara and East San Fernando streets); and the East Santa Clara Development Site, across from City Hall.

Mavrogenes said these five assets represent about 11 percent of the agency's total assets, or about \$25 million. He said he believes that most sales will occur by June 30, and that all of the parcels will be closed on by year's end.

The memo also says that should the proposed MLB stadium not come to fruition for any reason, any sale of the site for other development would require approval by the City Council, which acts as the agency's board of directors.

Mavrogenes is referring to a committee -- appointed almost two years ago by Selig -- that is studying whether the Oakland A's can relocate to San Jose. The hurdle lies with the World Series champion San Francisco Giants, who hold baseball's territorial rights to the South Bay and have argued that the A's move would destroy their sponsorship and ticket revenues.

The \$461 million stadium project would be privately financed by the A's with help from investors and sponsors.

The Redevelopment Agency already has spent about \$24.4 million for little more than half the 14 acres earmarked for the project. Mavrogenes in October estimated the price tag for the last two privately owned parcels -- one of which is owned by AT&T, which sponsors the Giants -- would total around \$20 million. On Friday, Mavrogenes said that price tag has dropped somewhat after recent appraisals on the land have come in lower than they were last year.

However, even if Selig were to give the A's the nod today, it would also take three-quarters of MLB owners to agree on the matter. And before any public money can be spent on the project, San Jose voters would have to approve it.

On Friday, A's owner Lew Wolff said the agency's land sale is "good news for us."

"It's just another indication that the city of San Jose has continued to put all their ducks in a row to acquire the land if we are allowed to come there," Wolff said. "They are light-years ahead of any other place that might want to acquire land for this purpose."

Added Michael Mulcahy, co-chairman of Baseball San Jose, a booster group that has pledged to help fund any ballpark ballot initiative: "This is welcome news. ... San Jose is acting like the private sector and becoming very creative in how they operate."

## **2010 Oakland A's Position Analysis: Manager**

Sam McPherson, examiner.com, 1/8/2011

Technically, the manager of a major-league baseball team isn't a real member of the squad -- but the manager is still a very important part of a team's success, or lack thereof.

That being said, the Oakland Athletics could probably use an upgrade in the managerial position, as Bob Geren has demonstrated over four seasons an inability to maximize the talents on his roster.

Blaming the [injury bug](#) can only go so far, especially considering a number of factors specific to the A's 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010 seasons.

Geren just isn't a good manager.

Based on the Pythagorean theorem of baseball, the Oakland A's should have won 86 games last season -- but they only won 81.

This is a consistent trend with Geren as the manager, as in both 2007 and 2009, the team underperformed on the same scale: in Geren's first season, the A's were three games under their projection, and in his third season, Oakland was six games under their expected win total.

The only year Geren has met expectations was in 2008, when the A's were 75-86. Otherwise, the team has underperformed by an average of almost five games a year under Geren's managerial game guidance.

This flaw was evident in many spots last season -- most often with the bullpen, where Geren would misuse Andrew Bailey or rely on other relievers to deliver in key spots when they clearly were not throwing well at the time.

Can any team in the position of the A's really be able to absorb five losses a year that could be wins? Heck, that kind of result would get most managers fired (Steinbrenner, anyone?), but Oakland continues to stick with their underwhelming field boss nonetheless.

No one is penalizing Geren for not having the best roster to work with -- but he doesn't manage the assets he does have very well, and that continues to be a trend for his managerial tenure in Oakland as evidenced above.

The A's finished nine games out of first place in 2010, even though they posted their best season record since 2006. If they want to be a serious threat in 2011, they need to reverse the trend Geren has established in terms of underperforming.

It's the manager's job to put his players in positions to surpass expectations -- not fail to meet them, time and time again.

## **A's bring over Moscoso in trade with Texas**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The A's on Saturday swapped right-handers with Texas, acquiring hurler Guillermo Moscoso from the Rangers in exchange for Minor Leaguer Ryan Kelly.

Righty Philip Humber, whom the A's claimed off waivers from the Royals on Dec. 17, was designated for assignment to make room for Moscoso on the 40-man roster.

The 27-year-old Moscoso most recently pitched for Caracas in the Venezuelan Winter League, compiling a 3-0 record and 2.66 ERA in 10 games, eight of which were starts. That stint followed a 2010 campaign in which Moscoso went 7-7 with a 5.18 ERA in 23 games -- 22 starts -- for Triple-A Oklahoma City. He struck out 107 and walked 49 in 123 1/3 innings.

Moscoso boasts 11 career Major League appearances -- only one of which came last year, following a 2009 season that resulted in a 3.21 ERA in 10 games with the Rangers. That lone '10 appearance lasted just two-thirds of an inning against Baltimore on May 20, when he allowed two runs on two hits and two walks for a 27.00 ERA.

Kelly was recently acquired by the A's from Pittsburgh in a Minor League deal that sent speedy infield prospect Corey Wimberly to the Pirates less than a month ago. He was 2-3 with four saves and a 4.20 ERA in 38 games -- all but one in relief -- with Class A West Virginia in 2010.

## **Oakland A's, Texas Rangers pull of minor trade for right-handed pitchers**

Associated Press 1/8/2010

The A's acquired right-hander Guillermo Moscoso from Texas for right-hander Ryan Kelly.

The deal announced Saturday came a day after the Rangers designated Moscoso for assignment to clear room on their 40-man roster for newly signed third baseman Adrian Beltre. Moscoso appeared in one game for Texas last year, allowing two runs while getting two outs against Baltimore. He was 7-7 with a 5.18 ERA at Triple-A Oklahoma City.

Kelly was 2-3 with a 4.20 ERA for Single-A West Virginia in 2010. The A's acquired Kelly from Pittsburgh last month for infield prospect Corey Wimberly.

The Chicago Cubs acquired right-hander Matt Garza from Tampa Bay. Garza, 27, went 15-10 with a 3.91 ERA while making \$3.35 million in 2010. He's arbitration-eligible this offseason. Garza joins the Cubs along with minor league outfielder Fernando Perez and left-hander Zachary Rosscup. The Rays get three of the Cubs' top prospects: right-hander Chris Archer, 22; shortstop Hak-Ju Lee, 20; and outfielder Brandon Guyer, 24. Also going to Tampa Bay are catcher Robinson Chirinos and former Stanford outfielder Sam Fuld.

David Aardsma's hip surgery was more extensive than first expected and Seattle's closer might not be ready for opening day, the Seattle Times reported. ... The Mariners announced a \$2.75 million, two-year deal with infielder Brendan Ryan, avoiding arbitration.

Houston infielder Jeff Keppinger will have surgery on his left foot Jan. 14 and will miss the start of the season.

Brian Bannister, 29, signed a one-year, \$1.8 million deal with Yomiuri of Japan's Central League. He went 7-12 with a 6.34 ERA for Kansas City in 2010.

## **2010 Oakland A's Position Analysis: Relief Pitchers**

Sam McPherson, examiner.com 1/7/2011

By now, every Oakland Athletics fan knows the team led the American League in overall staff ERA in 2010, and they the starting pitchers led the major leagues in starters' ERA, as well.

So how did the bullpen fare last season?

Not as well as the starters, that's for sure.

The A's bullpen finished sixth in the AL with a 3.83 ERA, trailing all four AL playoff teams and the Chicago White Sox. Overall, the Oakland relief corps finished 12th in the majors.

Certainly, it wasn't a weakness on the 2010 team, but with a better bullpen, the A's can certainly challenge for a playoff spot in the AL this upcoming season. Perhaps the biggest issues were managerial mismanagement and injuries, in truth.

And for the most bullpen stability, a team needs an anchor in the closer role -- and Oakland has that in Andrew Bailey. In his second major-league season, Bailey posted a 1.47 ERA with 25 saves. But he only pitched in 47 games, missing time with injuries -- and that threw the whole bullpen out of whack at times.

Lefty Craig Breslow turned in an admirable season in the bullpen, posting five saves in Bailey's absence. He also notched 16 holds with a 3.01 ERA on the year -- while striking out 71 batters in 74 2/3 innings, too.

Brad Ziegler finished the year with a 3.26 ERA, but that number doesn't tell an honest truth. Ziegler struggled, taking a bullpen-high seven losses on the year, and his strikeout-to-walk ratio was downright mediocre: he struck out only 41 batters in 60 2/3 innings, while walking 28 batters. Putting that many batters on base with a free pass is a big problem for a reliever.

Jerry Blevins was even worse than Ziegler in that department: the lefty struck out his fair share of batters, but he gave up more hits than innings pitched. His 3.70 ERA still looks respectable, but Blevins was one of those players that every fan feared when he entered a tight spot.

After a stellar 2009 season, Michael Wuertz began the year injured and rarely flashed his previous form. Finishing the year with a 4.31 ERA, Wuertz was often very inconsistent -- resulting in a lot of anxious moments. Wuertz still had the ability to strikeout hitters regularly, but his walks were way up.

Overall, these five players combined for 62% of the relief innings in 2010, but the damage done by other pitchers getting significant action was hard to overcome. Henry Rodriguez (4.55 ERA in 27 2/3 innings), Boof Bonser (5.09, 23), Tyson Ross (5.12, 31.2) and Chad Gaudin (8.83, 17.1) accounted for 23% of the relief innings last season, and when almost a quarter of your bullpen innings are that bad, it makes it hard for a team to stay in games when the offense isn't playing well.

So with some better health and improved fringe relievers, the A's could have won some games last year that they lost. And when the chance to get to the playoffs falls short by a few games, it's the bullpen meltdowns which often get remembered most.

## **2010 Oakland A's Position Analysis: Starting Pitchers**

Sam McPherson, [examiner.com](http://examiner.com), 1/6/2011

There's little to explore about the Oakland Athletics starting pitching in 2010 that hasn't been noted already.

They led the major leagues in starters' ERA (3.47) and paced the A's to the best staff ERA in the American League. Other highlights include posting the most quality starts of any staff in the majors (103), while also throwing more complete games than the San Francisco Giants vaunted starters.

If it wasn't for the lack of offensive support, the A's might have won more than 81 games with this kind of starting pitching. And to think, as well, there is plenty of room for improvement from this starting staff is an encouraging thought for 2011.

Trevor Cahill probably can't replicate his stellar season (18-8, 2.97 ERA), as he still walks too many batters (63 in 196 2/3 innings) and doesn't strike out enough hitters (only 118). But his improvement from 2009 was astounding in terms of hits allowed -- some of that may have been luck, however. Only time will tell.

Gio Gonzalez made progress, too, and chances are he'll keep improving. With a 15-9 record to go with a 3.23 ERA, the lefty finally turned the corner -- and the sky is the limit. His walks are still too plentiful as well, however: walking 92 batters in 200 2/3 innings is way too many. Gonzalez also needs to focus on avoiding those big innings where the opposing batters light him up.

Brett Anderson probably is the best of these three young hurlers, but injuries derailed his 2010 season. Still, he posted a 7-6 record and a 2.80 ERA in only 19 starts. Fighting through the rust frequently, his location wasn't very good at times, so he'll have to cut down on his hits-per-nine mark to keep moving forward.

With this core in place, the A's starting staff should be very good for the next few years, perhaps almost as good as the Big Three from ten years ago turned out to be. These new three were pretty good in 2010, and they're only going to get better as they mature.

Beyond this trio, however, 2010 was an interesting proposition for Oakland's starting pitching. It says a lot about the young arms that they were able to provide the basis for the strong overall staff performance.

Perhaps the biggest story of the year for the A's starters was Dallas Braden and his perfect game on Mother's Day. It certainly dominated the headlines for awhile, and it gave Oakland some much-needed and -deserved attention for its accomplishments. Braden had an up-and-down season, for sure, but he was a solid contributor to the league-leading numbers above.

Although he posted a 3.50 ERA overall, Braden suffered from a lot of offensive absenteeism, going only 11-14 in the win-loss column. In fact, for several starts after the perfect game, his teammates just couldn't score runs for him -- notching just a few runs over Braden's next 30+ innings on the mound. It was almost two months before he won another game after the perfect.

With the young guns firing and Braden's veteran influence stabilizing, there wasn't much left to choose from for the Oakland organization in 2010. Injuries and ineffectiveness took their toll in the remaining 50 games started by pitchers other than Cahill, Gonzalez, Anderson and Braden.

To wit, former two-time All-Star Justin Duchscherer managed only five starts before being shut down for the year. After missing all of 2009, he pitched well enough in those few starts (2-1, 2.89) -- but he was done by the end of April. Ben Sheets also missed all of 2009 with injuries, and he grinded out 20 starts of his own before being shut down. His 4-9 record (with a 4.53 ERA) was damaged by a few horrible starts, yet he never really seemed to get in a groove while working his way back into form.

The two injured veterans combined for 25 starts and almost \$12M in salary -- a lot of dough for so little production, although they weren't horrible pitchers when they were healthy enough to play.

The bulk of the remaining 25 starts for the team were taken by the now-departed Vin Mazzaro, who started 18 games with mixed success. Sometimes, Mazzaro looked very lucky with his junkballing -- and other times, he looked very bad. That inconsistency resulted in a 6-8 record with a 4.27 ERA -- solid numbers, but not enough for the team to keep him around for 2011.

So any outside observer can see that even the A's "bad" starters were still somewhat average at worst -- and that's why they led the majors in starters' ERA, posting better numbers than the more-famous staffs in cities like New York, Philadelphia and San Francisco.

One major flaw for the A's starters, overall, is the lack of strikeouts. The staff as a whole finished 21st in the majors in strikeouts, which means they rely a lot on control and placement. And when the control isn't there (see Cahill and Gonzalez above), it creates problems.

While the World Series champs across the Bay led the majors with 1331 strikeouts overall, Oakland's entire staff registered only 1070 strikeouts. Putting those extra balls in play creates more chances for opposing offenses, even if the A's fielded a solid defense for most of the season.

The numbers are worse when just the starters' strikeouts are isolated: 24th in the majors for the A's starting staff, meaning that majors-best ERA could be an illusion if Oakland's starters can't learn to miss the bats the old-fashioned way more often.

## **2010 Oakland A's Position Analysis: Designated Hitter**

Sam McPherson, [examiner.com](http://examiner.com), 1/5/2011

Some may argue that the designated hitter isn't a position in baseball, but after almost 40 years of the DH, time has passed to get over that issue: it matters, as the 2010 Oakland Athletics prove.

Seventeen different players took an at-bat at DH last year for the A's; this isn't normal, but most astute managers do use the slot in the lineup to rest regular players while still gaining the advantage of their potent bats. But 17 players means more than just the regulars got their shot at hitting well for Oakland.

In fact, so many players got a chance, because very few of them were actually any good swinging the bat in 2010.

Veteran Eric Chavez got the initial nod at DH on Opening Day, and he lasted 31 games before being shelved (again) with injuries. And he was terrible: the former All-Star third baseman, robbed of his talent by many years of pain, hit a mere .239 with one home run and nine RBI in about a month of play.

Jack Cust, after being designated for assignment coming out of spring training, re-joined the team to replace Chavez, and he had a moderately productive half-season for the A's. Cust had been in decline for three years, but he rebounded solidly in 2010: 13 HRs, 49 RBI and a .842 OPS at DH helped the veteran slugger return to prominence.

Beyond Chavez' poor month and Cust's solid three months, Oakland got the equivalent of two terrible months at DH from 15 other players -- none of them very good at the job.

Jake Fox received 40 ABs at the position, and he hit only .175 with a .558 OPS; he didn't finish the season with the A's. Meanwhile, position regulars Kurt Suzuki (27 ABs, .259, .619) and Mark Ellis (26 ABs, .231, .528) underperformed in the role, as well, compared to their regular numbers playing in the field.

Cust has never played the field well or regularly in his major-league career, so he was just able to focus on hitting. The same can't be said for everyone else to get a shot for the A's at DH in 2010. It's an underrated ability to just be a hitter in the DH slot -- and it proves every team needs a dedicated player at the position.