

A's News Clips, Friday, January 14, 2011

Source: A's to sign free-agent reliever Grant Balfour

By Joe Stiglich_Oakland Tribune

The A's and free agent reliever Grant Balfour have agreed to a two-year, \$8.1 million contract, a source with knowledge of the situation confirmed Friday.

Balfour, 33, went 2-1 with a 2.28 ERA in 57 appearances with the Tampa Bay Rays last season. He's a Type A free agent, which normally costs the signing team a first-round draft pick. Since the A's top pick is protected for the 2011 draft, they'll surrender their second-round pick to the Rays.

Having added some offensive pieces as well as depth for the starting rotation, Oakland was known to be scanning the market for relievers. Balfour, a native of Sydney, Australia, will join Michael Wuertz, Joey Devine (if healthy) and Brad Ziegler as right-handed set-up options to get the ball to closer Andrew Bailey.

The A's bullpen had an up-and-down 2010 season, finishing sixth in the American League with a 3.75 ERA. Injuries also took their toll. Bailey missed several weeks with a rib cage strain and was shut down in September to have "clean-up" surgery on his right elbow. Wuertz was slowed by a shoulder injury early in the year and never regained his dominant 2009 form.

Left-handed setup man Jerry Blevins also required surgery this offseason to repair a torn labrum in his left hip.

The Associated Press reported Balfour will earn \$3.75 million in the upcoming season and \$4 million in 2012. The deal includes a \$4.5 million club option for 2013 with a \$350,000 buyout.

It's likely Balfour will have to undergo a physical before the deal is announced. A's officials have a policy not to discuss free agents until they're officially under contract.

A's sign reliever Balfour, announcement next week

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle, 1/14/2011 10:01AM

I'm still supposed to be on vacation, but this is such a nice signing for Oakland, I decided to go ahead and do some work this morning, and I have had it confirmed that the A's have signed reliever Grant Balfour to a two-year deal, and I also learned that the deal includes an option year. ESPN's Buster Olney has reported the guaranteed portion of the deal is \$8.1 million.

I was told that Balfour's physical is not until Monday in Florida, so that will be the earliest possible day for an announcement. Balfour had been connected with the Yankees this winter, but New York agreed to terms with Rafael Soriano this week.

Balfour is a Type-A free agent but the A's won't lose a first-round pick because they didn't finish in the top half of baseball. They surrender a second-rounder to Tampa Bay.

And another little tidbit: I've just learned the A's won't offer Balfour arbitration at the conclusion of the deal if he is a Type-A free agent. That means that a team that signs Balfour in two or three years will not have to give up a first- or second-round pick. So the A's won't give up a first-rounder, nor will they eventually get one. Their take on such agreements with free-agents: If he's a Type-A free agent, that means he's performed well for Oakland, so that's great.

With Balfour, 33, the A's already-strong bullpen gets all the better. He had a 2.28 ERA last year, and in 2008, when the Rays went to the World Series, he was among the best in the game, with a 1.54 ERA. Opponents hit .216 off the Australian last year - .143 in 2008.

The A's bullpen now has Andrew Bailey closing; he's expected to be ready for spring training after a minor elbow cleanup. Set-up men are presumably Balfour, Michael Wuertz and lefty Craig Breslow. Wuertz had some nagging injuries last year and was less effective than he was in 2009. He and Balfour both seem to have every-other-year track records, and they're on opposite years, so maybe they'll mesh well.

Sidearmer Brad Ziegler is also back and lefty Jerry Blevins is coming off hip surgery. The interesting wild card is Rich Harden, who will be stretched out to start but who could be a tempting option in the bullpen if Brandon McCarthy or Josh Outman gets the fifth-starter spot.

I'd say the A's now have a bullpen to match the starting pitching, and some depth. Very strong pickup. Also, knowing they had a protected first-rounder, it seemed as if the A's really wanted to sign a Type-A free agent while they could, and here he is. Not Adrian Beltre, sure, but every team wants a full, and reliable, bullpen.

The A's will have to make a 40-man roster move to add Balfour once the deal is announced.

Scout.com pal Melissa Lockard tweets: "Should the A's really be the B's? Breslow, Bailey, Braden, Barton, Blevins, Bateman and now Balfour." I'd throw in Billy Beane, too, which explains all the B's - B bias, clearly.

Meanwhile, I am wondering about the possibility of having both Out-man and Ball-four on the same pitching staff. Contradictory?

A's agree to deal with Balfour to bolster bullpen

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- A Major League source confirmed Friday that the A's and right-handed reliever Grant Balfour have agreed on a two-year deal with a club option for 2013, pending a physical.

The A's have not announced the deal and won't do so until the physical is complete, though the Associated Press reported that Balfour is set to earn \$3.75 million in 2011 and \$4 million in 2012. His club option for 2013 is worth \$4.5 million and includes a \$350,000 buyout.

Balfour, 33, is a seven-year veteran who most recently posted a 2.28 ERA and 1.08 WHIP while averaging 9.1 strikeouts and 2.8 walks per nine innings spanning 55 1/3 frames for the Rays last year. He has tallied 207 strikeouts in 181 innings over the past three seasons, numbers that represent the third-best strikeout ratio of any American League reliever over that time period.

The Australian native is classified as a Type A free agent, so Oakland -- whose first-round pick is protected -- will have to hand over a second-round choice to Tampa Bay once the deal is finalized. The club will also have to trim its 40-man roster by one to make room for Balfour.

The righty's presence bolsters an already formidable A's bullpen, which includes the likes of two-time All-Star Andrew Bailey, Michael Wuertz, Craig Breslow, Brad Ziegler and Jerry Blevins. Healthy versions of Joey Devine, Rich Harden and Brandon McCarthy also figure to be possible additions.

The A's, looking to build on a 2010 campaign that resulted in a 81-81 record and second-place AL West standing, have proved to be the busiest club in their division this offseason. That much is evident not only by the signings of hurlers Balfour, Harden and McCarthy, but in the offensive additions of Hideki Matsui, Josh Willingham and David DeJesus.

Sources: Grant Balfour gets 2-year deal

By Jayson Stark, ESPN.com

The Oakland Athletics have agreed on a two-year, \$8.1 million deal with reliever Grant Balfour, sources familiar with the negotiations told ESPN.com.

The contract also includes a club option for 2013.

Balfour, a 33-year-old right-hander, had a 2.28 ERA for Tampa Bay last season, but has had trouble finding the right fit this winter because he was a Type A free agent. Several interested teams backed off because signing him would have required them to give up their first-round draft pick this spring.

The A's, however, are not one of those teams. Because they ranked in the bottom half of all teams based on their won-lost record last season, they will lose only a second-round pick. They also agreed not to offer arbitration to Balfour at the end of his contract, meaning a club signing Balfour would not have to surrender a compensation pick in his next deal.

In the past three seasons, Balfour has struck out 207 hitters in 181 innings, the third-best strikeout rate (10.29 per nine innings) of any American League reliever.

He also allowed just 130 hits in those 181 innings -- the second-best rate among AL right-handed relievers who pitched as many innings as he did, behind only Mariano Rivera of the Yankees.

The signing of Balfour adds to Oakland's impressive bullpen depth, gives the A's protection in the event that closer Andrew Bailey and set-up man Joey Devine are slow to bounce back from injuries, and stands as yet another significant move in an aggressive offseason.

The A's have now added Balfour, Rich Harden and Brandon McCarthy to what was already one of the best pitching staffs in the American League. And they've upgraded their lineup with the signing of DH Hideki Matsui and trades for outfielders Josh Willingham and David DeJesus.

Balfour, meanwhile, becomes the fifth key member of Tampa Bay's 2010 bullpen to sign elsewhere this winter. But because of those departures, plus those of free agents Carl Crawford and Carlos Pena, the Rays now have amassed 10 draft picks before the second round this spring.

GREENS COMFORTED BY BASEBALL FAMILY

JON PAUL MOROSI, MSN.FOXSPORTS.COM, 1/14/2011

TUCSON, ARIZ.

John Green is a scout for the **Los Angeles Dodgers**. He's also the father of Christina Taylor Green, the smiling little girl who many Americans can't and won't forget.

Green loves his job. He is terrific at what he does. He earns a living for his family by doing it.

Yet there is heartache attached to it, too. Green spent around 200 nights on the road last year. He cherishes the other days, when he can enjoy the simple pleasures of being a father. But a nation is mourning now, because the nights at home won't be as rich as they should have been.

Christina is gone, one of six victims in a shooting last Saturday that has left the country anguished and heartbroken.

She was buried on a sun-splashed Thursday, beneath a bright blue desert sky. Thousands gathered in and around the Catholic church on a dusty road, assembling in the morning and lingering until mid-afternoon, just as children in the neighborhood started walking home from school.

Then the cars rolled away, crunching gravel beneath their tires. The sewn-back-together American flag recovered at Ground Zero on Sept. 11, 2001 — the day Christina was born — will return to New York.

But the vigil isn't over. Not for the scouts.

They compete against one another all year, trying to outwork and outwit the next guy in order to sign the best ballplayers. They are big boys in a big-money game. They want to win. But when they learned last weekend that the little girl from Tucson was *John Green's* little girl, well, the scouts did what scouts do: They booked flights.

Logan White, Green's boss and close friend, counted more than 50 scouts among the congregation Thursday. And that number included only those he saw. White was seated up front, near the family. Again, that tells you something.

Those scouts understand the full scope of this tragedy in a way that the rest of us can't, because John Green's sacrifices are their own. They know the time he spent on the road — and the time he will never get back.

That is why, when Christina's funeral was over, so many of them drove back to Green's house for a reception.

"We want to work in a kids' game," White said over the telephone, as the guests arrived. "It's a game we love, and that's wonderful. But there are so many sacrifices.

"You can't join the Lions Club. You can't join the Kiwanis. We're 24/7 baseball. It's almost like working in a game within a game. It gets a grip on you. Finding players isn't the difficult part. It's the hours on planes, driving, traveling. Everybody understands that. It's an unspoken thing. We know what we're going through."

So they traveled here this week, instinctively fulfilling President Obama's call for national empathy even before he made it. And they came from all corners of the country — including the Northeast, despite the severe winter storms there. The show of support wasn't surprising — and that made it even more impressive.

TRAGIC SPORTS DEATHS

Sports has lost many athletes way too soon. **We list a few.**

Darnell McDonald, an active player with the **Boston Red Sox**, surprised Green by attending Christina's wake on Wednesday evening. Green, while scouting for the **Baltimore Orioles**, signed McDonald to his first professional contract 14 years ago.

When a visitor stopped at a Tucson coffee shop on his way to the funeral on Thursday morning, only two patrons were seated inside. One was Billy Owens, a high-level scouting and player personnel executive with the **Oakland Athletics**.

Owens has known John Green since the early 1990s. Both men played baseball at the University of Arizona.

"That's the brotherhood of the scouting community," Owens explained. "If you had an opportunity to be here, you needed to be here."

Green's official title is "national crosschecker," a job many Americans — even many American *sports fans* — know very little about. Its essence is this: Every year, roughly 1,500 baseball players are selected in an amateur draft that covers the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico. The 30 major-league teams try to observe, evaluate and interview as many prospects as they can.

Green has scouted for the better part of two decades. Now he has a job that is hard to get and even harder to perform. Based on initial reports from area scouts, he identifies intriguing players and travels to see them. He talks with those who have insight into their character — parents, siblings, coaches, teachers. *Anyone*. Then he recommends which teenagers might deserve million-dollar signing bonuses.

In fact, John Green is known for doing so without equivocation.

"He's a bulldog," White said. "If he likes a player, he goes to bat for him. When you hear John Green say, 'I like this player,' it's really hard not to listen. He's not a fence-sitter. He will tell you if a kid can play or not."

Green is able to show such conviction because of the legwork he does. He saw a lot of players last year. Often, he saw them more than once. That is the essence of good, thorough scouting. That is also why the scouting life is so hard on families.

Even under ideal circumstances, it is difficult to be a great scout and a great father at the same time. But John Green, by all accounts, has been that for Christina and her brother, Dallas. White remembers Green altering his schedule last year so he could be certain to attend Christina's dance recital.

"John does as great of a job of balancing as anyone I know," White said. "He's a quality-time guy. He would always throw batting practice to the kids, push them in the swing or take them to the pool. He mixes the two really well. And he's got a phenomenal wife (Roxanna).

"Christina really was a special kid. She was the best of both of them: Roxanna is beautiful, graceful, polished in a lot of things; John is tenacious, tough, doesn't back down from anything. She would have been a phenomenal leader in anything she did."

Baseball was a common interest for John and Christina, who famously declared her intent to be the first woman to play in the major leagues. After all, it is the family business. John's father, Dallas Green, pitched in the majors before managing the **Philadelphia Phillies** to a world title in 1980.

John Green, who has an engineering degree, could have picked a career that didn't involve the long, unpredictable hours. He could have chosen a line of work where he would be free from the inevitable comparisons to his father's many accomplishments. But none of that seemed to interest him.

In the 20 years the two have known each other, not once has White heard his friend mention anything about working in an industry other than baseball.

"I don't think he's even thought of it," White said.

John Green loves baseball. That is obvious. But on Thursday, by counting the dozens of men who joined their traveling family in a time of tragedy, we learned something far more profound.

When a mourning father needed it most, baseball actually loved him back.

Balfour reaches deal with A's

Jon Paul Morosi, FOXSPORTS.COM, 1/14/2011

Free-agent reliever **Grant Balfour** has reached a multiyear contract with the **Oakland Athletics**, a major-league source told FOXSports.com. Balfour still needs to pass a physical.

The deal will include two guaranteed years plus club options and guarantee the reliever \$8.1 million.

Even before adding Balfour, the A's had perhaps the best overall pitching staff in the American League.

Balfour becomes the latest prominent player to depart the **Tampa Bay Rays**, who won the American League East last year but now have little in the way of big-dollar talent.

A's co-owner Lew Wolff denies interest in buying Dodgers

By Joe Stiglich_Oakland Tribune

A's co-owner Lew Wolff denied all speculation Wednesday that he has any interest in buying the Los Angeles Dodgers.

The idea was floated Tuesday by ESPN national baseball writer Buster Olney. With Dodgers owner Frank McCourt on shaky financial ground as his very public divorce unfolds, and with Wolff's bid to build the A's a new stadium in perpetual limbo, Olney wondered if Major League Baseball might help facilitate Wolff's purchasing the Dodgers.

It was pure speculation, as Olney noted, but by Wednesday the topic was creating buzz. That the A's felt compelled to issue a release denying the notion added fuel to the connect-the-dot fire.

Wolff, attending the owners' meetings in Arizona, said he wanted to head off any thoughts that he was eyeing another franchise.

"It actually came as a one thousand percent surprise to me. I don't even quite get it," Wolff told Bay Area News Group by phone. "I normally don't spend my time denying things, otherwise I'd be doing it constantly. But I wanted to make sure I didn't have any possible interference with what's going on with the Dodgers and (Major League Baseball). The other reason is so everyone knew my target is getting the new venue for the A's."

The idea isn't entirely far-fetched. Wolff lives in Southern California, and his business offices are based there. And Wolff hasn't hidden his frustration as his attempts to move the A's to San Jose have bogged down.

A committee appointed by MLB commissioner Bud Selig nearly two years ago to explore the issue still hasn't released its findings.

Asked if he and the rest of the ownership group would consider selling the A's if a new stadium doesn't come to fruition, Wolff said: "There's no thought of that and no plans of that."

If McCourt does sell the Dodgers, there's no shortage of prospective buyers. Former Dodgers first baseman Steve Garvey reportedly is interested.

Another candidate mentioned is former sports agent Dennis Gilbert, who is a special assistant to Chicago White Sox chairman Jerry Reinsdorf but lives in Southern California. Gilbert and Wolff often socialize when the A's play the Los Angeles Angels in Anaheim.

A's Rosales to miss part of spring after surgery

Infielder underwent procedure on troublesome foot on Dec. 8

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Adam Rosales is one of a handful of A's players already stationed in the confines of Oakland's Spring Training home in Phoenix, a nod to his overzealous work ethic and contagious love for the game.

But the A's infielder will simply be an observer until further notice, as he informed MLB.com on Thursday that he's recovering from surgery on his hampered right foot, which initially forced an early end to Rosales' 2010 season in August after a long bout with ankle soreness.

Rosales, 27, underwent the procedure on Dec. 8, when debris around the navicular bone was cleaned and two screws were inserted to aid in the healing process, which is expected to last three to four months.

It's no surprise, though, that the always-amped Rosales -- who is sporting a boot and crutches -- is hoping for three months. More specifically, March 15 -- just past the midway point of Spring Training.

"I'm hoping I'll be 100 percent, like it never happened, by that day," Rosales said by phone. "I think it's reasonable, and hopefully I'll be back before that. I'm going to do the best I can to stay in shape so that I'm ready to go then -- working out my upper body, stretching, making sure my hips and everything else are good."

Rosales' expectant optimism, he said, has outbalanced the frustration that's come along with the four-month process. Still, "it's a bummer," he noted, especially given he was one of many who wanted to leave behind a 2010 season that saw the A's use the disabled list 23 times.

"It just wouldn't heal," he said. "That bone, it's a tough bone to heal. I didn't realize the degree of severity, so it was a surprise to me that I needed the surgery. I think any bone in the foot takes a long time to heal because there's no blood flow in that area of the body. We're on our feet so much, and you have to make sure it heals all the way. I have to be really cautious. I've learned a lot of lessons from it because it's been a long process. It takes a lot of patience.

"This started back in August, so I thought I'd be 100 percent by now. I was hoping, but every time I went back to the doctor, it just wasn't healed."

Early in the offseason, Rosales was braced in a walking boot and took advantage of a pain-free feeling by taking part in stationary bike activities. Once told that the stress fracture was still there, he was directed to stay off the foot for four weeks. Still, though, nothing changed.

"We thought that would completely heal it, just being off of it for that long," he said. "We tried to do everything we could to make it heal on its own because it's best if it heals on its own. Knowing I had to have the surgery was pretty devastating, but, like I said, I'm learning a lot."

Before the onset of his injury in August, Rosales was batting .271 with seven home runs and 31 RBIs in 80 games and was the first A's player since 1995 to start at least one game at six positions. That super utility role proved a perfect fit for both the club and Rosales, who feels rather confident about his Opening Day status but at the same time is remaining realistic and putting no timestamp on baseball activities.

"It depends on what the team thinks," he said. "Spring Training is all about getting in reps, getting swings, taking ground balls. I think I'll be ready, but the team has to confirm that, and they have to believe I'm ready to contribute to the team and be an asset to the team. I guess it's not my decision, even though I want to say yes.

"They're kind of keeping me on a day-by-day basis. They don't want me to get too excited. I'm just kind of doing what they say."

Steve Tolleson and Eric Sogard both represent possible candidates to fill the utility role should Rosales not be ready by season's start. Both figure to see plenty of work during spring, anyway, as shortstop Cliff Pennington is also recovering from surgery -- an October operation on his left shoulder to repair a labrum tear -- and isn't expected to take to the field until mid-March at the earliest.

In the meantime, Rosales will stay the safe route with help from assistant trainer Walt Horn, who is also already in Arizona. New head trainer Nick Paparesta will be in tow shortly, as well. Rosales' navicular bone has to heal around the screws, so he'll be constantly placing the foot in a whirlpool to make sure his range of motion is still intact. The next step, then, will be lightly walking on it again.

"As frustrating as it's been, it's a lot more comforting knowing it's healing the right way now," Rosales said. "I know for sure now what it's going to take to get back. Before, I kept fooling myself. I thought it was four to six weeks to start off with, and then I found out it was a couple more weeks, and then a couple more."

The A's infielder, as he's done in years past, was hoping to play winter ball in Mexico for at least a month in an effort to tally at-bats. The crutches, which made several appearances with Rosales at the Oakland Coliseum late last season, were supposed to be forgotten by now.

"It's hard right now being here with all the guys," he said. "There are guys here hitting and running, and here I am watching, so now I'm thinking maybe I should have just stayed at home. It's good to be down here, of course, but it's frustrating to show up here and know that everyone was expecting me to be off crutches. Through adversity, you just gotta stay positive. Hopefully it's just a bump in the road and I can carry on."

Wolff and McCourt shoot down rumor of Dodger sale

Nick Cafardo, Boston Globe, 1/13/2011

Neither Dodgers' owner Frank McCourt or A's owner Lew Wolff know how it got started, but both owners indicated there was nothing to an ESPN report that Wolff, currently the Oakland A's owner, was interested in purchasing the Dodgers.

McCourt, a Boston native, who has gone through a very public and painful divorce with his former wife Jamie, said the rumors took him by surprise.

"Lew was in touch with me as soon as he became aware of the rumor that started to circulate a few days ago to make sure that I knew there was nothing to it," McCourt wrote in a text.

McCourt saw Wolff at the owners' meetings in Phoenix and they discussed it again.

"I have no idea where this one originated," said Wolff from his cell phone at the owners' meetings. "It's completely untrue. We're right in the middle of trying to get the go-ahead from Commissioner Selig about moving our franchise to San Jose. That's all I'm thinking about. The Dodgers have an owner."

There has been much speculation that McCourt may have to sell the Dodgers because of the split in the divorce settlement, but that speculation is far from McCourt's thinking at present.