

Billy Beane to attend Oscars to back 'Moneyball'

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Brad Pitt was nominated for an Academy Award as best actor for playing A's general manager Billy Beane in "Moneyball."

And Beane will be there in person to cheer Pitt on, he said. Beane and his wife, Tara, plan to attend the Oscars on Feb. 26 at the Kodak Theatre in Hollywood.

"I'm going," Beane said by phone. "It will be fun. I'm excited for Brad, and I know how much time and effort he put into it.

"Of course, absolutely I'm rooting for him. Not me. It's got nothing to do with me. It's all about Brad. He's a great guy, and I do want him to win for his sake, not for me. He's the one who put himself on the line. He's one of the producers, and he was the driving force behind getting the movie made. Anything he gets, he deserves."

Beane said his wife is also excited, although nervous about the preparations, and Beane is hoping his daughter, Casey, who attends college in Ohio, can attend; she is portrayed in the movie and is a significant figure in the plot.

Although he helped with some "Moneyball" publicity before the premiere in September, Beane has tried to stay in the background as much as possible. The Oscars, though, are special, and the fact that "Moneyball" also was nominated for best picture is a reward for everyone who worked on the film, Beane said. He wants to help support that.

"I've tried to keep some of this at arm's length, but I told myself to take a breath and enjoy it," he said. "I *am* going to enjoy it. This is a once-in-a-lifetime thing, and everyone with the production was so respectful and so helpful throughout the whole process, they all deserve all the accolades they're getting."

Beane, known for wearing shorts and sandals around the office and on the field, purchased a tuxedo last week, "but I avoided ruffles and power blue," he said with a laugh.

Beane was in Los Angeles last week for some pre-Oscars interviews the studio arranged, and he got a small taste of what Pitt's life is like: He was greeted at the airport by TMZ, and paparazzi followed him to several stops.

"Moneyball," based on Michael Lewis' best-seller about the A's 2002 season, garnered six Oscar nominations. The others: Jonah Hill, best supporting actor; Steven Zaillian, Stan Chervin and Aaron Sorkin, adapted screenplay; and film editing and sound mixing.

Drumbeat: Manny Ramirez remains strong A's possibility, Matsui longshot

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser 2/9/2012, 5:09pm

I'm hearing that the A's are continuing to pursue Manny Ramirez, and that they're much more interested in Ramirez than Magglio Ordonez at this point; Ordonez's health is more of a concern.

Signing Ramirez would be the last thing the A's do before camp opens, I'm told, maybe even after pitchers and catchers report.

If the A's do sign Ramirez, it is likely that Kila Ka'aihue would get the first crack at DHing until Ramirez is done serving his 50-game PEDs suspension. People I've spoken to in the A's organization are intrigued by Ka'aihue's power potential.

The A's have some interest in last year's DH, Hideki Matsui, who remains unsigned, but that remains a real long-shot, though they've been in touch with Matsui's agent, Arn Tellem. They've also had some talks about Johnny Damon, but Damon is probably looking for more money than Oakland is looking to spend.

In addition, the A's are considering trading for Texas reliever Koji Uehara, according to team sources, confirming a tweet by Ken Rosenthal of FoxSports.com.

Drumbeat: Oakland A's: more on Rich Harden's surgery

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser 2.9.2012, 12:58pm

I spoke to Rich Harden at length yesterday about his recent shoulder-capsule surgery, and I think it's important to emphasize something that was cut out of the story for space reasons:

Like many pitchers, Harden tried hard to avoid shoulder surgery; shoulder-capsule surgery is relatively new and the results mixed, so it is common for orthopedists to recommend strengthening the area around the shoulder instead.

I know there is a major split in the sports medical community about capsular surgery. A pro sports injury expert recently told me that he is watching Dallas Braden's return from such surgery with interest, saying, "most surgeons will not perform this procedure because of the uncertainty. Everyone is waiting to see the results first."

Only a handful of pitchers – Johan Santana, Braden, Chris Young, Chien-Ming Wang – have had the surgery. So to those who are pointing at Harden for not having had the surgery earlier, I am very sorry that paragraph was cut from the original story. Most people aren't familiar with this kind of injury, but my impression, from talking to team medical people, is that plenty of pitchers are dealing with this kind of injury and just trying to strengthen the shoulder to avoid surgery. When most orthopedists won't do it, the procedure is relatively new and the results uncertain, it's unfair to blame Harden. He was repeatedly advised not to undergo surgery. You might recall that Braden had to visit several orthopedists last summer before finding one who would do surgery.

This is *not* a case of a player hiding an injury – all of Harden's teams have known about the shoulder capsule – nor is it a case of a player stubbornly trying to pitch through something when surgery was the better option. Harden was trying his best to follow all the medical advice he got, and he was trying to pitch without a stable shoulder – and he managed to do so very well for a year. He, and medical professionals, thought and hoped he could continue to do so, but he could not.

All those times people ripped Harden for those many smaller injuries he had, they were very likely the result of compensating for that unstable shoulder. People thought he was trying to get out of pitching – instead, he was trying so hard to pitch that he was causing himself other problems. He chose not to reveal the torn shoulder capsule – medical privacy laws allow that – because he didn't want to make excuses.

I spoke to former A's pitching coach Ron Romanick today about Harden and he said he was amazed with what Harden had to do just to get ready for games. "He'd do anything to get on the field," Romanick said. "He just wants to pitch, and he put up with a lot to do it."

Harden credits Romanick for revamping his mechanics after the injury to help him have a strong 2008 season, and Romanick said that if Harden can come back healthy (always iffy with this kind of surgery), "He can be a dominant guy again. He has all kinds of swing-and-miss stuff. What a talent."

Excitement was Henderson's 'greatest' tool

Steals just part of Hall of Famer's flashy style of play

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Less than a month had passed since Jemile Weeks' promotion to the big leagues last June when Rickey Henderson walked into the A's clubhouse, all smiles and all ready to spill -- per usual.

"My goodness," he began. "See that kid. Usually you get a guy like that just coming up to the big leagues, he's got a little fire in him. He's a little hyper out there. It seems like the team picks something up."

Rewind to another June, this one in 1979. Henderson, himself, is the newbie. At age 20, he's making his Major League debut with the A's. And he's a little hyper.

During that game against the Rangers, Henderson managed a single and a double for a 2-for-4 day at the plate. Perhaps of greater significance, however, was another number he tallied: his first career stolen base.

Not even 5,000 fans were there at the Oakland Coliseum to witness the historic steal, but nearly 37,000 showed up on May 1, 1991 -- Henderson, by then, was enjoying his second tour of duty with the A's following a five-year stint with the Yankees -- to watch him grab another bag.

It was No. 939 for Henderson, who on that day broke Lou Brock's record for stolen bases in a career and proclaimed, "I'm the greatest of all time." His speech oozed of confidence and flare, much like his everyday personality that was hated by some but loved by many more.

Meanwhile, his teammates and opponents knew him as the consummate competitor, arguably the greatest leadoff hitter in the history of the game. He accumulated a staggering string of numbers that not only included 1,406 stolen bases -- almost 500 more than the next closest player -- but 297 home runs, 1,295 runs, 3,055 hits and a .401 on-base percentage.

Not surprisingly, then, Henderson was elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame on the first ballot in 2009 with 94.8 percent of the votes cast by the Baseball Writers' Association of America.

"My impact on the game was going out there and making things happen," Henderson, now 53, said at the time. "To me, the most important thing was stirring things up and scoring some runs so we could win a ballgame."

Said Sandy Alderson, current Mets general manager and former A's vice president: "Rickey was the greatest, most complete player I ever saw play. He was always on base, had power, played excellent defense and, of course, could run like no one else. He could sear any game into permanent memory. Perhaps most importantly, he was always fun to watch."

He still is, and he's been no stranger in Oakland, having acted as a special instructor to the A's during Spring Training in recent years, passing along basestealing hints to the likes of Weeks and Coco Crisp.

"He's one of baseball's greatest figures," Weeks said. "What he did for the game, I'm not sure it can be done again. And I'm pretty sure he could still play and beat all of us around the bases."

Former manager Garner staying on with A's as special adviser, will work at spring training

By Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Phil Garner says he has agreed to stay on with the Oakland Athletics in a part-time special adviser role.

Garner, who had contemplated retirement, will be with the team throughout spring training in Phoenix. His role will then be further determined.

Garner managed the Brewers, Detroit and Houston. A's manager Bob Melvin coached in Milwaukee under Garner, who was first hired as an A's adviser in August. They also worked together with the Tigers.

Garner said after last season that he would run any potential job offer by his wife, Carol, considering he already had committed twice to retiring.

The A's were Garner's first major league club and he had the 10,000th hit in Oakland history against the Angels in 1975. Garner owns a 985-1,054 career managerial record over 15 seasons.

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Mariners, Athletics get jump on hard climb ahead in AL West

Joe Lemire, SI.com, 2/10/2012

For a week, the pop of ball-in-mitt in the bullpens alongside the ball fields of the Mariners' spring training facility in Peoria, Ariz., will be the only sounds of organized uniformed activity in the baseball world.

Seattle's pitchers and catchers will hold their first workout on Feb. 12 and the full squad joins them on Feb. 18; even that latter date is a day before any other major league club's pitchers and catchers begin their official preparations for the season.

The Mariners were granted the opportunity to start early -- as were the Athletics, though they declined to do so -- because the two overlooked members of the American League West open the regular season a week before the rest of the majors with their two-game series in Japan on March 28 and 29.

With the trip overseas (a first for the franchise) and the accompanying travel demands (days off for travel and jet lag that complicate the spring schedule), the Mariners decided to move their Spring Training start date up a week to ensure proper preparation for the season.

"A lot of guys have already rolled in here," GM Jack Zduriencik said by telephone from Peoria. "Some guys are here working out on their own. You know how players are, they're anxious and ready to get going this time of the year. I think everybody understands that, and we'll monitor it. Eric [Wedge] does a real nice job with Spring Training to give the players the consideration and make sure they're ready for Opening Day and throughout the season."

With such a young club -- 18 rookies saw major league playing time last year -- and with several non-roster camp invitees, the Mariners' development staff and major league coaches are likely salivating over an extra week of work with the would-be roster.

"We have a big camp this year," Zduriencik said. "We're going to give a lot of guys opportunities, and we're going to bring in a lot of our own players. We're bringing in 10 of our own non-roster guys just to give them the experience of immersion in camp. We think it's going to benefit them in the long run."

Oakland, however, elected not to add an extra week of practice sessions. The franchise participated in the season-opening series in Japan in 2008 as well and didn't move up Spring Training then either. What the A's have done is identify their first two starting pitchers -- Brandon McCarthy and Bartolo Colon -- and make sure those righthanders get in extra throwing before the start of camp. Otherwise, it'll be business as usual at their complex in Phoenix.

"Ultimately, I don't think it's to the benefit of the players to be out there a week early and to be on the field more days without playing games," A's assistant general manager David Forst said by phone from his office in Oakland. "These guys, in our experience, tend to go a little stir crazy the more that they're out there without actually playing Spring Training games." The Cactus League exhibition games do not start appreciably earlier for Oakland and Seattle, who open the Arizona spring circuit on March 2, one day before everyone else.

"The way [manager Bob Melvin] put it, just because we play two [early regular-season] games, we're still getting these guys ready for 162 total, not just for those two," Forst said. "These days, so many guys are down in Phoenix early and out on the field -- it wasn't something we thought was necessary, and it worked fine for us four years ago."

Though the organizations differ on the best way to approach the season, their goal is the same: unseat the Rangers and Angels atop the AL West, where one or the other has won the last five division titles and eight of the last 10. That streak appears as if it may continue after a winter that saw the Angels add Albert Pujols and C.J. Willson in free agency and the Rangers add pitchers Yu Darvish and Joe Nathan.

Not surprisingly, Oakland is taking more serious aim a few years from now, when a new ballpark in San Jose -- it's not a done deal though recent A's transactions suggest there's optimism -- will create new revenue streams in hopes of helping the club.

In the meantime the A's traded young but established starters Gio Gonzalez and Trevor Cahill and closer Andrew Bailey to replenish a depleted farm system. (ESPN's Keith Law recently ranked Oakland's system No. 9 in baseball while noting that it might have been bottom-five before the trades.)

"Certainly what the Rangers and Angels have done this offseason is particularly responsible for why we took the tack that we did in trading some players away and getting younger -- resetting the clock, if you will, on our major league club," Forst said. "It's an uphill battle without a doubt, and that's been at the center of our quest for a new stadium."

"... For the health of this franchise a new stadium is probably necessary to allow us to compete in this division. That said, we've made some moves that we think will allow us to compete better in the long term. We're battling uphill in 2012 for sure, but we do think with some of the young pitching we've created, with the extra draft picks we have this year and hopefully some of the quality that comes with the new CBA, we're set up for the long haul."

The collective bargaining agreement's new caps on spending in the amateur draft should, the A's hope, redistribute talent more evenly with fewer players able to force their way to particular teams that are willing to pay over-slot bonus money, making the draft more about selecting players "based on talent rather than dollars," Forst said.

The Mariners, on the other hand, might be a little closer to contention even if a serious run this year seems premature. They still have ace Felix Hernandez atop the rotation, and there's a wave of young pitching depth on the horizon in the form of prospects Danny Hultzen, Taijuan Walker, James Paxton and Erasmo Ramirez, though not all of them will reach the majors this year.

Seattle didn't keep all of its young talent, dealing starter Michael Pineda to the Yankees for catcher Jesus Montero in what Zduriencik deemed a "good old-fashioned baseball trade of talent for talent." (Seattle also acquired pitcher Hector Noesi; New York also received minor league pitcher Jose Campos.)

Zduriencik felt he could afford to trade Pineda for the offense his club so desperately needed -- the Mariners ranked last in the majors in runs each of the past two seasons -- because of that pitching depth. Montero will join other promising young hitters such as Dustin Ackley, Justin Smoak, Mike Carp and Kyle Seager, among others, though Zduriencik cautioned against presumptions that Montero, who turned 22 in November, will immediately be the Mariners' middle-of-the-order savior in '12. "We have to be careful with that," the GM said. "We think eventually he'll do that, but you have to realize that as young as we were last year -- and we were a very young ballclub -- that this kid would have been the youngest player on our club." Such decisions will sort themselves out with time, and for the young player on the young club with so much uncertainty, this year the dawning of the new season comes a little sooner.