

A's News Clips, Monday, November 8, 2010

Oakland A's win bidding for Japanese pitcher Iwakuma

Oakland Tribune staff and wire report 11/8/2010

The Oakland Athletics have won the bidding for free-agent Japanese pitcher Hisashi Iwakuma, a 29-year-old who won 44 games the past three seasons in Japan's Pacific League.

Teams had to submit bids by Saturday for the right to negotiate with Iwakuma's team, the Rakuten Golden Eagles. The Golden Eagles, who announced the A's as the winning bidder, had hoped to get at least \$16 million in the bidding process. The A's bid has not been revealed.

The A's, who entered into a working agreement with Rakuten last January, topped the bids of both Texas and Seattle and now have 30 days to work out a deal with the right-handed Iwakuma, who went 10-9 with a 2.82 ERA last season.

Oakland's rotation seemed set with Trevor Cahill, Brett Anderson, Gio Gonzalez, Dallas Braden and Vin Mazzaro returning to a staff that had the league's lowest ERA. Also, left-hander Josh Outman is ready to resume pitching after missing the 2010 season. Adding Iwakuma suggests the A's will likely move at least one starter in hopes of improving their offense.

Iwakuma, who is 101-62 with a 3.32 ERA in his 10-year career, is seen by some as a No. 2 or No. 3 starter. He features a forkball that helped him limit opponents to just 11 home runs in 201 innings last seasons.

Iwakuma was the Pacific League's MVP in 2008 after going 21-4 with a 1.87 ERA and permitting just three home runs in 201 innings. He outpitched his higher-profile Japanese counterparts Daisuke Matsuzaka and Yu Darvish during the 2009 World Baseball Classic with a WBC-low 1.35 ERA.

A's win bidding for Japan's Iwakuma

Oakland has 30 days to negotiate a pact with 29-year-old

By Jane Lee / MLB.com 11/8/2010

OAKLAND -- An already wealthy A's pitching staff may be getting even richer.

The club won negotiating rights to right-handed Japanese pitcher Hisashi Iwakuma on Monday and now has 30 days to come to terms with him on a contract.

The A's were said to be one of three teams, alongside American League West rivals Texas and Seattle, who submitted bids for Iwakuma to the Tohoku Rakuten Golden Eagles of Japan's Pacific League last week. The Golden Eagles were expected to make more than \$16 million on the posting, though Oakland's exact bid was unknown.

If signed to a contract, the 29-year-old Iwakuma would join an A's pitching staff that already boasts Trevor Cahill, Brett Anderson, Gio Gonzalez and Dallas Braden -- a group deemed by some to be among the best young rotations in the American League.

The thinking in Oakland is that, with an added bat or two this winter, the A's could be serious contenders in 2011. By landing Iwakuma, Oakland would essentially receive extra trade bait, as the Japanese pitcher -- along with righty Vin Mazzaro -- could be used to get that needed lineup power.

Iwakuma posted a 10-9 record and 2.82 ERA and averaged 6.9 strikeouts and 1.6 walks per nine innings this season. He has compiled an ERA of 3.40 or lower in each of the past four seasons.

He had 21 wins and a 1.87 ERA in 28 starts in 2008. A 10-year veteran, he pitched for Japan in the World Baseball Classic in 2009, earning a spot on the All-Tournament Team while helping his homeland to the title. He was the starting pitcher for Japan in the Classic's decisive victory over Korea.

Major League: A's win negotiating rights to Iwakuma

Jane Lee, mlb.com 11/8/2010 8:24AM

The A's have officially won the bidding for right-handed Japanese phenom Hisashi Iwakuma. The club now has 30 days to come to terms with Iwakuma on a contract. Texas and Seattle also submitted bids for the 29-year-old hurler.

The thinking behind this move is that the A's will have a surplus of pitching that will allow them flexibility when trading for a big bat this winter. Trade bait would likely include, but not limited to, Vin Mazzaro and even Iwakuma.

More on this to come at the **A's site**.

A's win bidding for Japan's Iwakuma

By Jon Heyman, SI.com 11/8/2010

The Oakland A's have taken another step in filling out one of the game's most intriguing starting rotations in winning the bidding for Japanese pitcher Hisashi Iwakuma, SI.com has confirmed.

Agent Don Nonura tweeted Monday that the A's had won the services of the 29-year-old righthander, who has won 44 games over the past three seasons in Japan's Pacific League.

Major League teams had until Saturday to enter the bidding process for the 10-year veteran. With a winning bidder selected, the A's now have 30 days to negotiate a contract with Iwakuma.

Looking like Oakland, not Seattle, will win Iwakuma bidding

Larry Stone, Seattle Times, 11/8/2010

At various points in recent days, first the Mariners and then the Rangers were cited as favorites to land negotiating rights to Japanese right-handed pitcher **Hasashi Iwakuma**.

But all indications now are that another AL West team -- the Oakland A's -- put in the high bid.

First, **Ken Rosenthal** of FOX strongly indicated on Saturday that, according to his sources, the A's were making a strong bid for Iwakuma and could surpass the number submitted by Seattle, reported by the Japanese media to be \$13 million.

Then, earlier today, as **Jeff Sullivan** noted on Lookout Landing, Iwakuma's agent, **Don Nomura**, tweeted earlier today the words, "Oakland Athletics" followed by four exclamation points. I'd say that's a pretty good indication that the A's put in the high bid, which would likely be accepted by Iwakuma's Japanese team, the Rakuten Golden Eagles. Three exclamation points and I might have my doubts, but there's a level of certainty that radiates from four. I feel strongly about that!!!!

It's an odd move, on the surface, because the A's already have five starters intact -- **Brett Anderson, Trevor Cahill, Dallas Braden, Gio Gonzalez** and **Vin Mazarro**. But as Rosenthal points out, the A's can now use their starting pitching excess as trade bait to land needed offensive help. He threw out the name **Casey McGehee** of Milwaukee as a possible target. The A's could even trade Iwakuma, he points out, but I doubt that Oakland would do that unless the acquiring team offset much of the posting fee.

Rakuten has until Thursday to accept or reject the high bid, but I'd suspect we'll hear something sooner than that.

Dave Newhouse: Oakland has ballpark space, Mr. Wolff

By Dave Newhouse, Oakland Tribune columnist 11/7/2010

Looking out my Tribune window Friday, below a blue, cotton-candy sky, I see nothing but open space -- lots of room for the ballpark village Lew Wolff keeps envisioning, through his myopic eyes.

He contends there's no land available for an Oakland ballpark. Yet from my ninth-floor perspective, directly across the freeway from the Coliseum-Arena complex, I see nothing but space -- space for two ballparks.

Wolff, the storytelling Oakland A's co-owner, has concocted baseball's Big Lie, that the A's are doomed in Oakland.

Doomsday baseball talk is nothing new in Oakland. Charles O. (for Obstreperous) Finley preached the same gospel 30 years ago, when he nearly sold his A's to Marvin Davis, who desired a team in Denver.

True visionary ownership then arrived in Oakland in the friendlier, more decent, form of the Haas family, which adopted, rather than abandoned, this town. That union led to something beautiful -- three straight World Series, 2.9 million attendees one season and a community bonding second to none in baseball.

It isn't Oakland's fault that the Haases were succeeded by two carpetbagging owners, Steve Schott and Wolff, who've spent the better part of the past 14 years seeking to move the well-traveled A's.

Both men have South Bay ties, so San Jose became the apple of their evil eyes. Meanwhile, attendance naturally plummeted in Oakland, just as it had with Finley, because fans can't be loyal to disloyal owners.

And with the A's general manager, Billy Beane, flipping his roster too often for fans to truly embrace the players, this only adds to customer dissatisfaction.

Adding to this adversity, baseball Commissioner Bud Selig said the A's last move from Kansas City to Oakland in 1968 was a major mistake.

Nevertheless, the greedy Wolff expects A's fans to continue dumping greenback dollar bills into his multimillionaire coffers in order to help finance his relocation out of town. The height of insincerity.

Crying Wolff? You bet, with crocodile tears.

What has to happen now in order to save the A's for Oakland is to get all the facts on the table before Major League Baseball decides what to do with the franchise, which has to happen sometime after several delays, and could happen any day.

But, MLB, remember this: Wolff's initial lie was that the A's must be near BART and the freeway whenever a new ballpark is built. Fremont fulfilled one-half of that requirement -- BART was 2 miles away -- and San Jose also fulfills one-half, but it doesn't have BART.

So, MLB, it isn't Oakland that lied -- it still has BART and the freeway abutting the Coliseum-Arena complex. I can see both from my window.

And that isn't the only available ballpark space in Oakland. There are two spots in Jack London Square, though it would take two businesses, Peerless Coffee and East Bay Restaurant Supply, to shift a bit to make it happen.

This may be doable for one business, not both. But Oakland City Councilmember Ignacio De La Fuente assured me that the most aesthetically pleasing spot -- the Oak to 9th Project by the Estuary -- remains available. It's closer to the freeway than BART, but that site is every bit as attractive as the AT&T Park locale.

My gut feeling is that Wolff has no place to go but Oakland. The world champion San Francisco Giants have strengthened their South Bay "territorial rights" by investing more heavily in their San Jose minor league team and by planning to renovate its home field, Municipal Stadium.

If Wolff's disingenuous college fraternity buddy, Selig, will keep his nose out of it, and if the special MLB committee set up to resolve the Oakland situation will act responsibly, it will sift through Wolff's mendacities and do the right thing.

The A's don't need a new home; they need a new owner.

Byron Williams: The Glenn Burke story is a tragedy with a local flavor

By Byron Williams, Contributing columnist San Jose Mercury News, 11/7/2010

I FIRST became aware of Glenn Burke during the Tournament of Champions (TOC) high school basketball tournament. The TOC was Northern California's debutant ball for many great high school players, including former NBA players such as Paul Silas, Phil Chenier and Bill Cartwright.

In 1970, playing for Berkeley High School, Burke helped lead the Yellow Jackets to an undefeated season, a TOC championship, while garnering all-tournament honors.

Though my introduction to Burke was through basketball, he was a great all-around athlete. He reportedly ran the 100-yard dash in 9.7 seconds and was an outstanding baseball player.

It was his baseball skills that caught the eye of the Los Angeles Dodgers. One coach labeled Burke as "the next Willie Mays." But in addition to being a great baseball prospect, Burke also was gay -- something not amenable to professional sports, especially in the 1970s.

Burke made his debut with the Dodgers in 1976. Early in his career, Burke felt he had to hide his sexuality from his teammates. When he began to reveal glimpses into his sexuality, it naturally drew the ire of baseball establishment.

Ironically, the team that courageously challenged baseball's status quo of racism in 1947 as it stood behind Jackie Robinson, did not possess similar impulses when it came to Burke's orientation.

In an attempt to cover up his homosexuality, the Dodgers' management offered Burke \$75,000 if he agreed to get married, to which Burke slyly responded, "You mean to a woman?"

Not only did Burke refuse to participate in the proposed charade, he also became friends with the Dodgers Manager Tommy Lasorda's estranged gay son.

Shortly after these episodes, along with his inability to meet the baseball scouts lofty expectations, Burke was traded to the Oakland A's before the 1979 season. Though back at home, things in Oakland didn't improve much for Burke as he felt he could no longer exist in bifurcated worlds.

By the end of the 1979 season, Burke was no longer in baseball.

"Out. The Glenn Burke Story," is a very moving one-hour documentary produced by Comcast SportsNet Bay Area, it tells the tragic story of Burke's legacy as the first openly gay Major League Baseball player.

Many of Burke's teammates were aware of his homosexuality during his playing career, as were members of management. And many of those teammates believe that his sexuality -- and the reaction it provoked -- led to the premature derailment of his baseball career.

Former Dodgers players Dusty Baker, Davey Lopes and Reggie Smith candidly discuss what Burke the teammate was like, as did former members of the A's.

But baseball only scratches the surface of Burke's story.

What happens when an individual's beliefs run ahead of societal norms? There's no way Burke's story, circa 1979, could end any way other than it did -- a promising career ending before it truly began.

It wasn't enough for Burke to be a Major League Baseball player, if it meant compromising who he was. With the Dodgers, Burke possessed a very nontraditional attitude while playing for one of the most corporate sports franchises at the time.

But it wasn't just the Dodgers; homophobia was the norm in Major League Baseball. As filmmaker Ken Burns illustrated in his first baseball documentary, societal attitudes were consistent, and in some cases intensified, in locker room.

Burke's desire to be a professional athlete and a gay man became an irreconcilable paradox -- conflicting emotions too large, even for someone with Burke's enormous personality and athletic prowess.

After his premature retirement from baseball, Burke found solace and acceptance in San Francisco's Castro district. In the Castro, Burke was a celebrity acknowledged for his athletic ability and orientation, which temporarily seemed to be the antidote that Burke sought.

But as Burke's money ran out, his demons took over, leading to drug abuse, crime and AIDS.

The tragedy of Burke is the tragedy in many of us to varying degrees -- unfulfilled dreams. It may be exaggerated for Burke because his dreams were in sight.

Burke was not the first gay athlete in baseball nor, for that matter, any other professional sport. But he was the first who was unwilling to compromise. It remains an open question whether Burke gave much thought to the heavy toll his decisions would demand on his life.

"Out. The Glenn Burke Story" will premiere Wednesday at the Castro Theatre in San Francisco. It will also air on Comcast SportsNet the same night at 8 p.m.

Sources: A's target Japanese pitcher

Ken Rosenthal, foxsports.com, 11/8/2010

The A's have won the bidding for Japanese right-hander Hisashi Iwakuma.

Iwakuma's Japanese team, the Rakuten Golden Eagles, must decide by Thursday whether to accept the winning bid, according to the Seattle Times.

If the Golden Eagles accept the bid, the A's then would need to negotiate a contract with Iwakuma, who is considered the second-best pitcher in Japan behind Yu Darvish.

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The posting process Iwakuma closed Friday, and the A's, **Rangers** and **Mariners** were among the clubs to submit bids, according to major-league sources.

The A's made a strong push with the idea of creating a surplus of starting pitching that would help them trade for a hitter.

The A's entered a partnership with Rakuten in Jan. 2009, agreeing to share information on player development and data analysis and exchange baseball operations staff, including coaches, strength and conditioning specialists and medical personnel.

At first glance, the A's would seem an unlikely suitor for Iwakuma; the team led the American League in rotation ERA by a wide margin last season, and none of their returning five starting pitchers is older than 27.

However, the A's have struggled to attract free-agent hitters to Oakland in recent years. The addition of Iwakuma would enable them to trade a starter such as righty Vin Mazzaro — or perhaps even Iwakuma himself — for a bat.

Third base is one area of need for the A's. The **Brewers**, one of several teams looking for starting pitching, could be a match if they were willing to part with **Casey McGehee**.

Iwakuma, 29, is 101-62 with a 3.32 ERA in 10 seasons in Japan, including 10-9 with a 2.82 ERA last season.

He will return to Rakuten if the Golden Eagles do not accept the A's bid or if he is unable to successfully negotiate a contract with Oakland.

Eyre, Blackley ink Minors deals with A's

By Jane Lee / MLB.com 11/5/2010

OAKLAND -- The A's on Friday locked up two pitchers via Minor League contracts, agreeing to terms with right-hander Willie Eyre and re-signing lefty Travis Blackley.

Both are slated to join the A's in Major League camp next year as non-roster invitees.

The 32-year-old Eyre, brother of Major League hurler Scott Eyre, was 5-4 with a 3.50 ERA and two saves in 49 relief appearances for Triple-A Oklahoma City, where he spent all of 2010 in the Texas organization. He was last seen on a Major League mound in 2009, when he compiled a 4.50 ERA in 17 relief appearances for Texas. Eyre also pitched for the Twins -- gathering 92 appearances -- in three seasons prior.

Blackley, meanwhile, enjoyed a successful second half with the A's organization this year following a slow start -- 8.53 ERA in four appearances -- with the Mets' Triple-A club. The Mets released him on May 1, but he was signed by the A's 13 days later and proceeded to go 2-1 with a 2.52 ERA in 15 games, including four starts, with Triple-A Sacramento following two starts at Class A Stockton.

Blackley, 28, is currently 4-1 with a 2.16 ERA in five starts for Hermosillo in the Mexican Winter League. He initially made his Major League debut with Seattle in 2004 and also has big league experience with San Francisco. Overall, the Australian native is 1-3 with a 9.35 ERA in eight career appearances -- all starts -- in the Majors.

A member of the A's brass said Friday that Blackley will continue to see work as both a starter and reliever while with the organization.

A's Buck, Ziegler earn Super Two status

Pair among 20 in MLB who qualify for salary arbitration

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Oakland's Travis Buck and Brad Ziegler are among 20 players who have been deemed eligible of Super Two status, which immediately qualifies them for salary arbitration this offseason.

The often confusing Super Two tag means that Buck and Ziegler ranked among the highest 17 percent of players who have tallied between two and three years of service time. That threshold is always changing, with the cutoff this year coming at two years, 122 days.

Sitting right at the edge was Ziegler, who finished the 2010 season with two years and 122 days. Buck, meanwhile, has racked up two years, 123 days of service time. Prior to this year, no player was awarded Super Two status with less than two years and 130 days of time.

By qualifying for arbitration a year early, Buck and Ziegler -- who both made \$410,000 this year -- will be rewarded with a larger salary jump than most players with less than three years of service time. Buck, though, could be subject to a non-tendered contract following another year limited by injury.

Last year, the A's saw Rajai Davis and Joey Devine reach Super Two status. They made \$410,000 in 2009 and, by being eligible for arbitration, both received hefty raises, especially the former. Davis took home \$1.35 million this year, while Devine earned a paycheck worth \$557,500.

Ziegler could potentially double his 2010 salary after compiling a 3.26 ERA and 1.35 WHIP in 60 2/3 innings this season. During his three years in Oakland, the right-handed submariner has put together a career 8-11 record and 2.51 ERA.

Super Twos get to go to arbitration four times instead of the usual three, but don't become free agents earlier than other players, as six years of service time are still required.

Buck and Ziegler join teammates Davis, Devine, Craig Breslow, Dallas Braden, Ryan Sweeney, Kevin Kouzmanoff, Conor Jackson and Jack Cust as arbitration-eligible players.

Baseball just heating up in Arizona

Harrell Miller, Napa Valley Register 11/6/2010

PHOENIX — Finally, Bay Area baseball is big news in the fall. It's been a while, but, the drought is over and the boys from AT&T Park made headlines every day.

What fun!

However, the baseball world apart from all the hoopla of playoffs and championships quietly continues under the Arizona sun.

For the 19th time since 1992, the top prospects from all 30 major league teams have gathered to play ball — while the bosses watch to see just what they've got when they're playing with the best of the best.

Every year, each major league franchise sends seven of its best minor league players to the Arizona Fall League. Here they are mixed and matched and melded into six teams that play six days a week for six weeks in six of Spring Training's slick little ballparks.

This is not just another obligatory situation for young players trying to make the grade. Being picked to play in the AFL is a big deal. In the 19-year history of the league, the proof is in the playing.

Across the board, six out of every 10 players who come to Arizona in October and November wind up on a major league roster before their baseball careers are finished.

For example, of the 13 Giants who played in Texas in the third game of the World Series, nine are AFL alumni. Freddy Sanchez, Aubrey Huff, Buster Posey, Pat Burrell, Cody Ross, Juan Uribe, Guillermo Mota, Jeremy Affeldt and Ramon Ramirez all did their turn in the Valley of the Sun.

Obviously, things changed as the year progressed, but, of the players on the Oakland Athletics' 2010 Opening Day roster, 20 had played in the Arizona Fall League. Fifteen Opening Day Giants had at least one round of fall ball on their resume.

It really is a big deal.

So, far away from the October headlines, what's cooking in Arizona for the boys from around the Bay?

Here's a quick rundown for the green and gold. This year's Phoenix Desert Dogs include seven players from Oakland — four pitchers, two infielders and an outfielder. In addition to the seven A's, the Dogs have equal numbers from the Braves, the Marlins, the Yankees and the Dodgers.

Actually, the A's infielders played together this year at Single-A Stockton.

Grant Green and Stephen Parker both were excellent college players before signing professional contracts, Green at USC and Parker at BYU. In 131 games in Stockton this year, Grant collected 174 hits and Stephen, who played nine more games, rapped out 155.

Outfielder Michael Taylor was a regular at Triple-A Sacramento this year, batting .272 in 127 games. At the beginning of the 2010 season he was listed as the 29th Top Prospect in Major League Baseball by Baseball America.

The four pitchers include Justin James, who serious Oakland fans might remember as being up with the A's for five games with no decisions this year.

Travis Banwart has been moving up the Oakland ladder since he was signed in 2007. This year he appeared in 15 games for the River Cats and finished the season with a 4-2 record. As of this writing, he was the winningest pitcher in the 2010 AFL, with four of the six wins managed by the Desert Dogs.

Mike Benacka was another Sacramento regular this year, putting together a 6-2 record with five saves in 40 appearances.

Finally, Carlos Hernandez spent the year with the A's Double-A Midland, Texas, Rock Hounds, where he went 9-3. He pitched 129 innings in 26 games.

Halfway through this year's AFL season, the team on which these aspiring Athletics are playing is having its troubles.

The Phoenix Desert Dogs have been in the championship game for the last six years — but not this time. Their 6-11 record is probably not going to get them close to the big game on Nov. 20.

Actually, it's San Francisco's team, the Scottsdale Scorpions, that is making things happen this fall. The Giants, along with the Diamondbacks, the Nationals, the Orioles and the Rockies were cruising at a .625 clip with 15 games to play.

I haven't made it to Scottsdale yet, so all I know about the young Giants is what I read in the Press Guide. Hope to fix that this week.

No matter, could there be more Giants news than there is right now?

By next week, the big lights will have dimmed and the news out of Arizona might be a bit more relevant. Stay tuned.