

MLB Winter Meetings

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Athletics

Manager Mark Kotsay

Press Conference

Q. You guys made some news early in this off-season with the Severino signing. What kind of is the feeling this off-season as opposed to the last few off-seasons where you were waiting around until late in the off-season to make moves? Now a team that you feel is close to competing, adding some pieces can help you?

MARK KOTSAY: I think the way we finished the second half, we built a lot of momentum, and the young position player group kind of carried that momentum. We've still got a ways to go. And I think the signing of Severino shows the desire to accelerate that process and add to this group and show that they can compete in the second half.

The veteran starter that has a track record of success in pitching in the postseason was kind of a target for us, and to be able to land Sevy and bring him in, not just from a performance standpoint, but from a leadership standpoint, to have him surround himself with guys like J.T. Ginn and Joey Estes as well as Osvaldo Bido and Mitch Spence, I think is really going to add to their development and their growth.

Q. What do you think about with the Soto thing, it really kind of really highlighted the haves and have-nots in the schism of Major League Baseball. You guys are obviously in the have-nots and you're trying to build back up. What do you think has to be done here to basically make it a more fair playing field?

MARK KOTSAY: I think 28 years of being in this game and being a player and now being in management, as players, we never feel like there's a playing field that we should be on that we can't compete in and win at. I try to keep that mindset as a manager.

I feel like my team that I've been able to lead for the last few years is getting to that point where we can go out on the field with anyone and win. I think there is obviously in the big market arena, you have an opportunity to possibly grab one of the best players in modern baseball, because



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of that fact, that they create revenue in ways that maybe a small market team can't.

For me, I think we look at it twofold. We've got an opportunity to get these young players to that point in their careers where they get an opportunity to be paid for what they've done and accomplished. And that's equally as exciting as it is to acquire someone that is at that level already.

Q. Especially given your second half last year, adding Severino, potentially adding Burke. How do you rate your ability to compete in your division this year?

MARK KOTSAY: It's a different level of expectation going into Spring Training. With the group that we have, I know there's going to be bumps because they still are young. Maturity happens generally into those arbitration years.

I think we could look at a player like Brent Rucker that it took time for him to become the player that we're looking at in front of us now, a middle of the order bat that has put two seasons together back to back.

We're looking for players like Zack Gelof to have those two seasons back to back. We're also looking for JJ Bleday and Shea Langeliers and those guys that are leading into their arb years to really come about and solidify the type of player they can be consistently because we've seen that in spurts.

We saw Lawrence Butler at his best for two months at the top of his game. We also saw him in April kind of have to go back to Triple-A and reset. The goal is to get these guys as consistent as possible as quickly as possible. If that happens, I think we have a definite opportunity to make some noise in the division and compete with teams like Houston and Seattle.

Q. Could you see guys adding more? Do you feel like maybe that's the plan? I know that's more David's area.

MARK KOTSAY: It is David's area, but I feel like I've been involved more in the process in the off-season in a larger capacity, which I was really happy about. I think the vision

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for David, myself, and Dan and Rob, was to add to the areas we felt would have the most impact.

Obviously starting pitching, even though we have starting pitching with the guys I mentioned, they're young, they're inexperienced. And that was kind of an area we felt we could help, especially with the confidence that the young position player group builds and showed throughout the course of the last 64 games.

I do feel like we still have things, goals to accomplish in this off-season. Whether we get there, we'll see. Third base obviously is an area where we haven't had a player kind of come in and solidify themselves. We've given some opportunities to some young players, Brett Harris being one of them, Darell Hernaiz being another. I think Max Schuemann who played shortstop will get an opportunity there.

Definitely hopeful we can continue to add a few more pieces that can impact the club.

Q. (No microphone.)

MARK KOTSAY: It's great because he's the centerpiece of the offense right now, he's a quiet leader of the group. And obviously he's a player I'm somewhat attached to because of our story, our history, and how he made the team in '23 and what he's done for the club over the last few seasons.

It's great we have this opportunity to present a contract in front of him, allow him to make a decision if he wants to be here long term. That's something the A's really haven't had a chance to do over the last 25 years, very few long-term contracts. So I think that shows itself that, if there's a change in kind of direction for this organization.

Q. As you've met with prospective free agents this off-season, what have been maybe some of the challenges of convincing them to side with your team given just the circumstances of what these next three years are going to look like?

MARK KOTSAY: I want to say first like the article that came out with Walker, that wasn't necessarily true. Walker never said he didn't want to play in Sacramento.

The challenges, like you said, are when you're a Major League player and you've played in a Major League stadium that has a third level, an upper deck, and a capacity of 35,000, 40,000, there's an excitement and energy about that. That's different in Sacramento. There's going to be 14,000-plus. It's going to be loud. It's going to be exciting. We just haven't experienced that yesterday.

Until you go through it, you really can't talk about the differences. For me, the challenges of being in Sacramento are all unknown because it's something we haven't walked through. When they ask about facilities, we're doing everything in our capability to provide Major League services and amenities. And we're going to have a brand-new building, one that for us we can call home for three years.

They've done everything they can to put the amenities in that are, one, required, but more that will add to their experiences in the clubhouse, which I'm glad and thankful for.

I think at the end of the day, we want players that want to be a part of our group. And Severino said he wanted to be a part of our group. To me, there is no challenges that I face going forward with free agents. It's about the group and the players and the team that we have.

Q. You said that it's uncertain, what's next, what it's going to look like in Sacramento is uncertain. What strategies have you guys developed to just like be transparent with these prospective players, maybe ease their minds about what it's going to look like?

MARK KOTSAY: We have the diagrams. We have the layout. We have the field dimensions. We know what the bullpens are going to look like.

The only thing that's going to be different from a Major League stadium is that the clubhouse isn't going to be attached to the dugout. So the freedom for them to -- you're going to see players actively walk out the dugout, down the left field line, go out the door, go into the clubhouse.

That will be new for a fan experience, but it won't be new for players because we've consistently done that throughout baseball. Guys go in the clubhouse, spend an inning, spend two innings, you don't see them, and they pop back up on the bench if they're not in the game. That will be the only challenge or only difference.

As far as the game, the field, everything's -- it's the same game, same field, same dimensions. Visiting teams are going to have to play there, and we're going to get to play there 81 times.

Q. You said the Walker thing wasn't necessarily true. I was wondering generally speaking what has been your feedback from these players?

MARK KOTSAY: Their curiosity, their feedback has been -- they can't really give you feedback until they go

experience it. I can't give you feedback on what it's going to feel like or how it's going to be. It's in the process of being developed.

But I can assure you that it's going to be Major League standard and it's going to be Major League quality, and I can assure you that the hot tubs are going to be in ground and not a metal hot tub like we had in Oakland. There's going to be some positives as well definitely.

Q. Jacob Wilson caused a lot of excitement last year, the top prospect came up. He's battled some injuries. As it gets to be a full season for you guys, do you send him into the off-season with plans to address his injury concerns?

MARK KOTSAY: I spoke about Jacob on MLB this morning in terms of just the physicality that's needed to play at this level on an everyday basis. That's been a big emphasis for Jacob to get in the weight room, to really focus on the strength side of things as well as their flexibility.

Jacob's hamstrings have been tight. There's some areas to address, and we feel like we can help him in that area. He's working with our strength coach Josh Cuffe in Arizona. I think he's training out of the Spring Training facility, which is great, so we can continue to work with him and monitor his progress.

It will be interesting because Jacob hasn't played the 162-game schedule. In the Minor Leagues now with the adjustments they made with giving a day off every Monday, you don't get the rigor of a 13-day stretch where you don't get a break. So that's going to be different for Jacob, and we're going to have to kind of monitor his workload and see how we can keep him healthy and on the field for as many games as possible.

Q. (No microphone.) What does he bring to the table?

MARK KOTSAY: Well, the strengths of the relationship for Bob, if you're talking about what he's going to do for the Giants, I think Pike has grown a lot in Oakland. I can remember being the infield coach in '21 and kind of mentoring him on our side, our perspective, as opposed to the data side and the analytics side, positioning and player speed, player agility.

Pike has done an amazing job transitioning and continuing to grow in his role. For Pike it was more of a family decision for him and what was best for him and Morgan, which is always first and foremost for us. David and I take a lot of value and pride in the family side and what's most important for the person as opposed to the organization.

Is it going to be a loss? Yes. But we have a great team together in baseball ops that will fill those roles and continue to do great things. Obviously for Pike, we're excited for his opportunity with the Giants, and I know that he'll have an impact there.

Q. Tell us something about Pike really for someone who didn't know him. For Giants fans and Giants people, how would you describe him?

MARK KOTSAY: That's a great question. I think Pike is shy but yet confident. Obviously he's thoughtful in how he approaches the game and the decisions that are made in the game. I think his growth over the last three years has been really good, coming from a pure data analytics side of how you see the game to growing and combining that vision.

But you won't notice Pike, which is another positive about Pike.

Q. You're entering the last year of your contract. Is an extension something you've talked about with David or something that you'd like to discuss here at some point?

MARK KOTSAY: David and I haven't talked about the future in terms of our future together. I know David is also in the last year of his contract. I can only speak for myself in saying that I've always said this, I said it last season, last off-season. I want to see this through. I want to win with this group.

So in terms of going forward, it's not necessarily my decision but one that I would definitely be open to for the future. Again, right now the focus is on going from 69 wins to a total that gets us competing through the last game of the season and our chance to go to the postseason.

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