

Interview - Billy Beane - VP & General Manager - Athletics

Written by Bill Jordan
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If there is a Rock Star status for General Managers in Major League Baseball, **Billy Beane** would surely own the title. He's not often — if ever — referred to as “William” or “Mr. Beane”, but rather gets that single-name moniker that makes you nod your head... “Billy”.

It certainly didn't hurt to have Michael Lewis write one of the best baseball books — arguably of all time — about his focus on objective analysis in *Moneyball*.

Sandy Alderson may be the [Godfather of Moneyball](#) , but Beane has been the one to run with it.

Times are changing for the Athletics as of late. Since **Lewis Wolff** (see [The Biz of Baseball interview with Wolff here](#)

) and

John Fisher

purchased the club, the financial outlook for “that other club” in the Bay Area has looked much brighter.

Beane is still procuring talent via “Moneyball”, but he's been given a higher player payroll to work with than in the Schott/Hoffman era; a byproduct of the A's front office to build teams that have performed well in the standings year after year. Add in work towards a new state-of-the-art stadium in Fremont (see [renderings of the proposed design of Cisco Field here](#)), and the A's — and Beane — should be feeling rosy about the future.

Wisely, the first order of business for Wolff and Fisher after the purchase of the A's was to offer ownership equity to Beane and **Mike Crowley**, making them both Vice-Presidents in the process.

And the fruits of Beane's work since then were rewarded this past week: [He was given a](#)

[contract extension \(along with Crowley\)](#)

that will keep him with the A's till 2014.

Bill Jordan, an excelling student in the Baseball General Manager's course at [Sports Management Worldwide](#)

was fortunate enough to catch up last week with Beane for this outstanding interview just after the First-Year draft, get insight into one of the brightest minds in baseball, and how he approaches general management for the Oakland A's.

Topics for the interview include the First-Year draft; how he measures character; who influenced him; how *Moneyball* changed his life; what he feels a new stadium in Fremont will do to change the fan base, and the ability to retain player talent; whether he's interested in working with a big-market club; what a normal day is like for a GM in MLB, and much, much more. - *Maury Brown*

(Select [Read More](#) to see the interview with Billy Beane)

Bill Jordan for The Biz of Baseball: How do you as a general manager handle the First-Year draft? How much do you rely on your scouts to do, and throughout the year, how much communication goes on between you and the scouts?

Billy Beane: Well, we have a lot of different scouts covering different areas. Most of my communication is *vis-a-vis* the scouting director and my player personnel director, who usually try to see the top 100 to 150 players in the country. Usually I will go and talk to the area scouts before the draft when it comes to certain players or certain high profile individuals. We bring all of our scouts in for the draft, and once they come in for the draft there is a lot of interaction on certain parts, but my involvement is mainly on the higher round guys. Usually through the first three or four rounds, and once we get deeper into the draft, that's when you are really relying heavily on your area scouts, and the scouting director will coordinate that a lot as the draft goes along.

BizBall: When you are looking at acquiring a player, how much does character come into play, and how much does it matter whether it is an on, or off-field incident?

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Beane: Character certainly comes into play and is something that's discussed on every one of the players that you draft. It's a very subjective process where you're judging character as well, too, and you're also limited to the

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amount of information. Really, how well do you know these kids? It's a very difficult thing to nail down. And as far as on the field/off the field, I guess it's just a matter of if there are incidents or there are things that have happened concerning a player's past. I think we sort of judge on a case-by-case basis whether it is on or off the field. But once again you are also subject to information you know you're gathering second hand, so you have to be careful because in most cases, any issues that you have with a player, many times come from hearing it from other people, or getting it second hand. So, it's probably the most difficult thing to determine when drafting a player. You've also got to be careful that you are doing the homework in the beginning. Not just information, but getting good information and making sure it's accurate.

BizBall: When you were moving up the ranks from being a scout to becoming a General Manager, was there any one person who helped you immensely along the way? Also, what advice would you give someone who was trying to go the same path that you have gone?



Beane: Well, I certainly had a number of people surrounding me. It was more so just being around them. Obviously Sandy Alderson was the general manager here while I was here, and he had a huge impact on my career. He actually hired me as an advance scout when I stopped playing. I took advantage of working next to him for a long time, so he certainly had a big influence and was very helpful.

There's other guys that were also helping me at the time in different roles. I think one of the former player developer directors here had a big influence on my career. Tony LaRussa, the manager, and Dave Thompson, with the coaching staff, and some of those guys — guys that I

had played with, actually played for also were very, very helpful, all for different reasons.

As far as any advice, probably the best advice I would give anybody is that it is very difficult to get into pro-ball or A-ball, even at the entry level, but once you get in, I think too many people set a timetable on themselves. They are more in a hurry to get to the next job, and sometimes they aren't concentrating on the current job that they have.

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If you are good at what you're doing and you show a lot of passion, ultimately, you will rise, probably quicker than you even think. But, when people look beyond a job they currently have, it's probably a mistake. I think any job, whether it is working in baseball, or you are someone who is an architect or an engineer or something, if you have a passion and really love what you're doing and it's really what your hobby is, there is a disappointment there if you aren't able to be successful at it.

BizBall: How much did your life and career change after *Moneyball* was published?

Beane: Well, surely it was a lot of publicity and it brought a lot of opportunity, not just in the game, but outside of the game. I've met a lot of people that I probably wouldn't have normally met if I hadn't been exposed and Michael [Lewis] hadn't written the book, so the opportunities beyond baseball; I'm very thankful for. It brought the organization and myself some publicity that we wouldn't have expected, but I think the good certainly outweighs the bad. I think we are privileged that an author of Michael's caliber would have any interest and people outside the game of baseball would have any interest in reading about what we tried to do here.

BizBall: How did the prospective move to Fremont come about and how do you think it will affect the central fan base of the Athletics? Do you think that there will be a honeymoon effect on the team and the fan base?

Beane: I think the biggest evidence is that we desperately needed a new venue, and I think it will allow people to have a longer term attachment to the organization. We have such large turnover here that we are kind of reinventing ourselves, and fans themselves are having to get used to a whole new group of players every year. I think having our own stadium will really allow us to draft, develop, and ultimately hold onto players. That will hopefully lead to longer term success and a little more stability, not just from a personnel standpoint, but from a fan standpoint, too.

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I mean people like to know that when you bring a kid up he could finish not only the year but his whole career in that city, and in Oakland, we just haven't been able to do that. We missed out on some of the best playing years of players who, when they hit their prime, seem to become free agents; so we are very excited about the possibility of once again having a player through the bulk of their career. I think ultimately when you look at the organizations that have had success for a long, long time – you know, not just the Red Sox and Yankees – but you look at a team like the Cardinals who were able to hold onto players like Albert Pujols. It's a huge advantage, not just from a playing standpoint, but also from a fan identification stand point.

BizBall: If funding for the new stadium transpires ([see high resolution renderings of Cisco Field here](#)), and after the new stadium is built, do you think that the Athletics will have more money to spend on free agents? Along with that, with

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the trading deadline about a month away, and free agency impending in the off season, are there any specific players that you are looking to acquire through either of these methods?

Beane: I wouldn't be in a position to be able to discuss any future acquisitions in the free agent market or the trade market. The revenue certainly gives you the ability to offer free agents how much they want, but I don't think that's the most attractive thing for us. The most attractive thing for us is keeping the players that we want to keep. We want to receive the long-term benefits of drafting and developing players.

As far as trades are concerned, each year what you think you need in June may be completely different in July. As far as the trade deadline goes, it would be hard to answer that right now. I think the biggest thing that we want to do in 2007 is to just get healthy. We've got ten players on the disabled list and just returning those guys will be like making a trade for us.

BizBall: When you are negotiating a player's contract, are you the head of that, or do you have someone who is perhaps more financial but less baseball who handles those aspects of the negotiations?

Beane: Actually my assistant GMs and I have always handled all of the contracts here. That was one of the things that Sandy taught me. I don't think there is any advantage; in fact I think it is a disadvantage to hire outside

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people. I've been negotiating contracts for fourteen years, and there's probably a disadvantage to hiring someone outside of the business who doesn't have the knowledge base to handle baseball contracts. Not only that, but to handle the personality that you are dealing with on the other end.

One thing Sandy taught me was to not only handle the baseball side of it but also the financial part of it. It is very important in a small market not only understanding bringing in young players, but also understanding the economics of having a small market team. and the idea of

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separating the two I think would be a disadvantage.

BizBall: If you had the chance to move into a bigger market with more money to spend, would you be interested in that opportunity?

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Beane: I am perfectly happy in Oakland. With our new stadium, our market shares should change in time anyway. I think there will be an advantage here. I have no desire to ever leave Oakland and I don't ever see that happening at any point in my career. I consider myself a life long "A", and as long as they want me here, I'm going to stay here.

BizBall: At time of this interview, your pitching is ranked first in the American League in ERA and your hitting is third from the bottom according to batting average. Is this how you saw things working out at the beginning of the season, and do you think that either of these statistics will change by the end of the year?

Beane: I think we felt like we really had good pitching. We've struggled a little bit in the last couple of years offensively. Struggled a little bit this year with the injuries that we've had. But really at the end of the day, the most important thing is making sure you give up less than the other team. Whether it's scoring seven and giving up six, or scoring two runs and giving up one.

At the end of the day, it's really what is the balance between the offense, the pitching, and the defense. As far as pitching, that's a commodity that everyone wants all of the time. We've been fortunate in the last four, five, six years or even longer to have good pitching and we obviously haven't had a dynamic offensive team for a number of years, but it's been at least efficient enough to put us in a position to win every year.

"It's very difficult in this day and age with the high on-base, power hitter; a very expensive commodity now on the market. It's very difficult for us to acquire those guys."

"I think there's nothing better than working and starting a career once you finish college. I think that they would probably appreciate a Master's program after you have worked for a couple of years as opposed to just extending that time period."

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