

## **OPINION: Oakland fan: Nevada-Fisher partnership doesn't make sense, would end disastrously**

By Matt Ortega

Nevada Independent

May 27, 2023

The Oakland A's frantic last-minute dash for stadium cash is approaching a climax. The A's and Nevada lawmakers [reached an agreement](#) to funnel \$380 million to the heir of the Gap fortune and team owner, John Fisher, to build the smallest ballpark in baseball for a team [he's driven into the ground](#).

This is a deal that makes sense for nobody and will end disastrously for everybody. Take it from a lifelong Oakland A's fan, this is not a team owner Las Vegas should trust, let alone offer residency on the Strip. If the fact that Fisher will not own the stadium nor own the land is not a dead giveaway that he is hesitant to invest in this team, [his stewardship of the franchise](#) should quell any doubts.

For years, observers [blamed relocation rumors on Oakland fans](#). Accepted is the [flawed argument](#) that the A's are a "small market team" without the resources to re-sign its star players or lure marquee free agents. Under the leadership of the Haas family, the A's fielded competitive teams, including three straight World Series appearances and the 1989 title, placing [third in league attendance that year](#).

When Fisher, with managing partner Lew Wolff, [purchased the team](#) for \$180 million in 2005, they constituted the [third richest ownership group](#) in all of baseball. Yet despite that tremendous wealth, the A's never re-signed a player to a long-term contract in the past 18 years. Not one. In fact, the A's remain [one of only three franchises](#) to have never signed a player to a \$100 million contract. Ever. Instead, fan favorite star players in Oakland would be regularly shipped out for cheaper prospects or allowed to walk in free agency.

Payroll under Fisher, with a couple of exceptions, regularly sits [between 26th and 30th](#) in the league. This season, the A's are more than [\\$100 million below the league average](#). That's not a team owner who is trying to win. Former A's stars [Matt Chapman](#) and [Chris Bassitt](#) both agree. Team ownership didn't share the same goal as them. They wanted to win. Fisher did not.

A's team president Dave Kaval tried to [sell Oakland on claims](#) that a new ballpark would facilitate a better on-field product and greater attendance. [This is simply not true](#) and we know it is not true because there's another sports franchise owned by Fisher and fronted by Kaval that made the [same bogus claims eight years ago](#).

An [expansion team](#) created in the city's own image and backed by a local ownership group with Las Vegas' financial and marketing chops would be a fantastic success for the city and the league. [The Golden Knights](#) offer a proof of concept. Consider the alternative: the interloper Raiders. Attend any Raiders home game and you would be forgiven if you forgot you were in Las Vegas. The overwhelming force of fans for the opposing team has been [a point of friction](#) since the lifting of COVID measures. It's such a problem that even team owner Mark Davis is "[embarrassed](#)" by the situation. At least the Raiders' California fans travel.

For Major League Baseball, they will cannibalize a promising expansion market with a third-rate operation and [surrender a \\$500 million relocation fee](#) for the privilege. MLB could make a glamorous arrival on the Strip with an expansion franchise and a stadium crafted to Las Vegas standards. Instead, Fisher will slink into town with discount lodging crammed into the [southeast corner of the Tropicana lot](#) and [reportedly face the airport](#) like a seedy motel.

For the A's, as they leave the [sixth largest media market](#), they will exchange their position as the only game in town to one of just a myriad of entertainment options. If the A's supposedly struggled to compete against the Giants across the Bay, good luck on the Strip. And when the novelty of a new ballpark wears off, they will struggle to fill the smallest ballpark in the [42nd largest media market](#) and will own nothing but last place.

For Nevada, the biggest risks rest with the taxpayers. The A's abandoned their promise of a "[privately financed ballpark](#)" and now seek a publicly owned facility with \$380 million in public financing. When the A's fail to meet their ridiculous attendance projections and the math on the bonds no longer pencils out, it will be Nevada's taxpayers left covering Fisher's losses. Responsibility for the inevitable repairs to this government-owned facility is unclear. MLB's [stern warning to Milwaukee](#) over \$448 million in repairs to their government-owned ballpark suggests the League's preference. But rest assured, Fisher [reportedly](#) will collect most of the ballpark revenues. Isn't that nice?

With each passing day, everything makes less sense than it did the day before. Rob Manfred [once said](#) that leaving Oakland would be looked upon years later as a "mistake." By fleeing out the door like this, Major League Baseball is going to find out just how much he was right.

*Matt Ortega is the Bay Area-based web developer behind [NoNevadaMoney.com](#) aimed at organizing Nevadans opposed to public financing of an A's ballpark to contact their lawmakers.*