

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

after being unable to come to terms with local leaders in Oakland on a new lease at the coliseum to take them through the years before the Las Vegas stadium would open. Given the circumstances, one sports business expert said, the first season in West Sacramento went about as well as it could've.

"Sutter Health Park was modified to try to address player needs, but it's still very much a minor league park," said Maury Brown, who lives in Portland and is a senior contributor to Forbes SportsMoney, in an email. "Having to move the schedule around to place as many home games as possible in the evening to avoid the heat was simply part of that."

He said similarly, the A's had the lowest attendance in the league, but that can be attributed to Sutter Health Park's capacity of about 14,000.

If the attendance was disappointing, though, the impact on business away from the park was considerable. Denice Domke, president of the West Sacramento Chamber of Commerce, said restaurants and bars around the ballpark in the city's Bridge District reported an increase in sales attributed to the team's presence.

"In the second year, I'd expect some improvement," she said, adding she believes freeway construction on Interstate 80 and U.S. 50 probably affected the draw negatively as well. "We'll continue to grow that market."

Domke pointed to the openings during 2025 of Birdies Social Club and The BLVD near Sutter Health Park as signs of optimism. "We need to introduce customers to these businesses," she said.

**Wait 'til next year**

For 2026, Dean said other changes will include a "Home Run Happy Hour" event on Fridays and more family friendly events on Sundays. Community heroes, nonprofits and local leaders will be spotlighted on Wednesdays.

Brown, of Forbes SportsMoney, said he wouldn't expect much in the way of major changes beyond what's already been announced. Some changes in ticket packages to boost sales on certain days are a possibil-



GETTY IMAGES

Right: Fans wait to enter Sutter Health Park for the Athletics game against the Chicago Cubs on March 31



GETTY IMAGES

**9,487**

Average attendance in 81 home games at Sutter Health Park in 2025

**30th**

Rank in MLB attendance among 30 teams

**11,528**

Average attendance in A's final season in Oakland in 2024

SOURCE: ESPN.COM

ity, he said.

With the A's posting on social media pictures of construction progress of their Las Vegas stadium, the next two years may also largely serve as a test case for how well Sacramento might support a future MLB franchise, whether through expansion or relocation.

Domke acknowledged that having a permanent team here is a local dream, but she also noted that the A's are already planning to play a handful of regular-season games at the AAA Las Vegas Ballpark next year.

Not identifying with Sacramento, as the A's largely did in 2025, affects those local dreams, but she pointed out the team doesn't even play in the city or county of Sacramento as it is.

In the long term, Brown said, he's

not sure the A's experience here will matter much for getting another team in town. Data being gathered now will help make that case someday, he said.

"As to whether Sacramento would be dismissed as a possible MLB market, the league will always be interested in what a market can bring to the table in terms of developing a multi-billion-dollar ballpark," he said. "If Washington, D.C. were able to get what is now the Nationals in close proximity to the Orioles in Baltimore, then the league would not dismiss any market out of hand."

**Focus on MLB, not Athletics**

Though the A's next two seasons are the only Major League Baseball planned in the Sacramento region for now, they will play a role in whether it returns.

In a state of the city address on Oct. 20, Sacramento Mayor Kevin McCarty linked the success of the A's current stay to a campaign he announced to bring an MLB team here permanently.

"If you went to one game, go to two next year," he said. "If you went to two, go to 10."

McCarty said Sacramento would join West Sacramento's leadership in the effort, with local support, sponsorships and a stadium plan as necessary components.

"The city of West Sacramento is conducting preliminary studies to evaluate the long-term feasibility of permanently bringing Major League Baseball to West Sacramento, including the financing and infrastructure investments required to build a new stadium," West Sacramento Mayor Martha Guerrero said in response to McCarty's state of the city remarks. "While this work is still in its early stages, we are confident that West Sacramento offers one of the most attractive and strategically positioned locations for Major League Baseball expansion in the western United States."

MLB has hinted in recent years at announcing a new round of expansion in the next decade, aimed at adding at least two teams, one each in the western and eastern U.S.

Greater Sacramento Economic Council CEO Barry Broome said that for Sacramento to be considered,

**IN THIS STORY**



West Sacramento Mayor Martha Guerrero



Sacramento Mayor Kevin McCarty

it will be judged based on a local checklist, with some points easy to accomplish, and some less so.

"We're the best market, and that's not blowing smoke," Broome said. "We should expect to be the best market and proceed accordingly."

He said the easier parts include finding potential owners or members of an ownership group. The U.S. has 25 to 50 billionaires who'd like to own an MLB team, he said, but only about five expansion cities where they could do it.

The most likely landing spots for new MLB franchises would be Charlotte, Nashville, Portland, Sacramento and Salt Lake City, according to Broome. If Sacramento looks at the two western U.S. cities as its competition, the next step is putting together a compelling economic package, and a stadium deal.

Because of available land, efficiency of government and proximity to Sacramento's urban core, Broome said the stadium's likely home would be in West Sacramento, whether on or next to the footprint of Sutter Health Park.

An economic incentive package would need to be worth at least \$500 million, and possibly as high as \$600 million. That would include components such as corporate sponsorships and stadium naming rights, the latter worth \$20 million to \$25 million alone, Broome said.

Both Salt Lake City and Portland, among other competing cities, would have economic packages of around \$800 million, he said. Sacramento's advantage is its proximity to the Bay Area where it could capture lapsed A's fans, as well as the 2.5 million people in the Sacramento region itself. But the economic package has to be comparable if not the same, he added.

He said the discussion includes some unknowns: What's the timing for MLB to select a team, what the expansion fee will be, and whether the uncertain status of a new stadium for the Tampa Bay Rays means they could still relocate.

There's a possible scenario in which the Rays moves to one of the eastern U.S. cities, Broome said, and MLB tabs both Salt Lake City and Sacramento for new franchises.

"I think it's a possibility," he said. ▮

**"If Washington, D.C. were able to get what is now the Nationals in close proximity to the Orioles in Baltimore, then the league would not dismiss any market out of hand."**

Maury Brown, senior contributor to Forbes SportsMoney