

Padres looking to play two-game series in Hawaii

■ **MLB:** Team president says the proposed move is related to negotiations with Japanese baseball leagues

By **Bernie Wilson**
The Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — Talk about away games.

Less than a year after moving a three-game series from San Diego to Mexico, the Padres are considering moving a two-game series against the Houston Astros from Jack Murphy Stadium to Honolulu's 50,000-seat Aloha Stadium on April 22-23.

If finalized, they would be the first regular-season major league games in Hawaii, where the Padres once had a Class AAA affiliate.

It would also come at a time when capacity at Jack Murphy Stadium will be reduced to about 40,000 because of demolition work as part of a \$78 million remodeling and expansion project to accommodate the NFL's Chargers and the 1998 Super Bowl.

Playing in Hawaii "is related to what we did this past week in Tokyo, an effort to reach out and redefine our market and globalize," team president Larry Lucchino said. "It's got some strategic benefit. We'd plant the Padres' flag in another location."

The Padres announced Sunday night that they've entered into a working agreement with the Chiba Lotte Marines of the Japanese Pacific League. Under that agreement, the Padres obtained what they say are exclusive negotiating rights with star right-hander Hideki Irabu.

However, the Padres might not have a lock on Irabu's exclusive negotiating rights. It remains to be seen if other clubs object, and that could depend on how much noise Irabu and his agent make. Baseball's ruling executive council didn't make a decision when it met Tuesday night, instead appointing a four-man committee to make a recommendation.

Irabu's agent, Don Nomura, made it clear to the Padres that his preference was that his client be-

come a free agent, Lucchino said during a news conference at the owners' meetings in Scottsdale, Ariz.

Nomura, who also is Hideo Nomo's agent, didn't immediately return a call placed to his Los Angeles office.

"There needs to be a little acceptance time," said Lucchino, who met with Nomura and Irabu in Tokyo on Saturday.

Lucchino said the Japanese commissioner's office sent a letter to the major league commissioner's office "stating that they did not feel it was appropriate that any others be negotiating with Irabu except for the Padres," Lucchino said. "We've capitalized on an opportunity that was available to all clubs."

Lucchino also said the major league commissioner's office told the Padres it had no objection to the arrangement. However, the owners' Player Relations Committee has not yet been asked to decide the matter, a management source said speaking on the condition he not be identified.

Some lawyers in baseball fear that if the Padres are given exclusive rights, it would open the possibility of Irabu filing an antitrust lawsuit against baseball.

The committee established Tuesday will recommend how relations with Japanese players should be handled. Its members are NL president Len Coleman, AL president Gene Budig, PRC head Randy Levine and Bill Murray, the executive director of baseball operations for the commissioner's office.

Irabu apparently is signed by Chiba Lotte for 1997-98 and could not be a free agent under Japanese rules.

Irabu's rights are assignable, according to Lucchino, meaning the Padres could trade him if they don't sign him. His salary last year was 160 million yen (approximately \$1.7 million).

About a year ago, Irabu said he would play in the major leagues "for a penny," according to Lucchino.

"We took that more as metaphorical," Lucchino said

Wednesday.

As for Hawaii, Lucchino said that while the Padres have a logistical plan, they haven't finalized any contracts.

Moving the series would need the approval of the NL, the players' association, and the Padres and Astros players.

Lucchino said a decision would have to be made 45 to 60 days in advance to allow for ticket sales.

He also said the Padres could substitute a series. The next closest series is a three-game set against the St. Louis Cardinals on April 18-20.

Lucchino said the Padres will definitely play opening day in San Diego on April 1 against the New York Mets. Their first nine games are scheduled for Jack Murphy Stadium.

The city has promised that there will be no construction work during games, and that areas under construction will be camouflaged.

L.A. City Council asks for public ownership of Dodgers

■ **SALE:** The Green Bay Packers are held up as a model for the public ownership arrangement

By **Michelle DeArmond**
The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — In an effort to keep the Los Angeles Dodgers under local ownership, the City Council decided Wednesday to recommend owner Peter O'Malley consider taking the team public.

The unanimous vote came nine days after O'Malley's surprising announcement that he had put the team his family has controlled since 1950 up for sale. Suitors of all types have been lining up for the team that is expected to fetch upwards of \$300 million.

The resolution by councilwoman Laura Chick urges O'Malley to explore public ownership of the club, which includes the stadium and property in Florida and the Dominican Republic. Public ownership is unprecedented in major league baseball.

"I think when we talk about wanting to keep the Dodgers in Los Angeles, it's not only about wanting to keep the team that

has done well by us and that we care about, but to keep it in the same way," she said.

Chick held up the NFL's Green Bay Packers as a model of such an arrangement.

More than 4,600 shares of Packers stock are owned by 1,898 people, with no more than 200 shares owned individually. When shares are sold, which seldom happens, no profits are allowed. The team turned a \$5.4 million profit last year.

"There's a lot of people out there that I know feel the way I do — as we're watching professional sports turn into big business, mega corporations, and the almighty dollar over and over," she said.

The three-part resolution also lauds the O'Malley family and the team for "being really an exemplary team in terms of professionalism and community involvement."

A formal letter by the council outlining its resolution will be sent to O'Malley.

O'Malley, who has not commented since making his announcement Jan. 6, did not immediately return a phone call Wednesday.

The Dodgers have been one of baseball's most successful teams, finishing first or second 19 times in the last 27 seasons — since

"I think it's about time the taxpayers own something around here. Here they are going to spend \$90 million over here on some doggone arena and the billionaire's still going to own it."

— **Nate Holden**
Los Angeles City Council Member

O'Malley succeeded his father, Walter, as president.

The O'Malley family is second in seniority among baseball ownership groups, trailing only the Tom Yawkey trust that owns the Boston Red Sox.

Prospective bidders reportedly have included everyone from media mogul Rupert Murdoch to former O.J. Simpson attorney Robert Shapiro.

Other council members spoke at the meeting in support of Chick's proposal, including Nate Holden, who is against a separate and controversial proposal to build a sports arena for basketball and hockey

downtown.

"I think it's about time the taxpayers own something around here," Holden said. "Here they are going to spend \$90 million over here on some doggone arena and the billionaire's still going to own it."

The downtown proposal would cost taxpayers an additional \$70 million to \$100 million than renovations of the current facility in Inglewood.

Chick conceded there may obstacles to public ownership of the Dodgers — such as National League rules — but urged people to be positive.

"It's not about public and taxpayer dollars, not about the city owning the Dodgers, but about the fans being able to hang a blue certificate on their wall and say they own a piece of this great team," she said.

Richard Levin, spokesman for the baseball commissioner's office, said baseball guidelines prohibit public ownership, but noted each sale is addressed independently and voted on by the full ownership committee.

"We have a guideline against public ownership, but obviously anything is possible," he said.

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