

Thursday, July 22, 2004

Good Zito, Bad Zito

The bad Barry Zito is back. Good Zito had been the one who was showing up recently, but after allowing five runs in five innings to a lineup that included Raul Ibanez, Jolbert Cabrera, Justin Leone, and Willie Bloomquist, I think it's safe to say that we saw Bad Zito again last night.

After all, when Ricardo Rincon can come in and throw a scoreless complete inning against a lineup, it's probably not the next murderer's row we're talking about.

It's too bad that Bucky Jacobsen's home-run in the tenth won the game for Seattle, because the A's had a decent little offensive night, with ten hits, four of which went for homers, and a nifty comeback capped by Scott Hatteberg's game-tying, pinch-hit, two-run homer in the top of the eighth.

I'm starting to worry that Texas is getting out of reach. They're three and a half up now, and have four fewer losses than Oakland. With Boston's loss last night, the A's remained tied for the wild card spot, but you don't want to go toe-to-toe with a team with that much talent down the stretch, especially when that team will be playing Baltimore, Tampa Bay, and Toronto, instead of Anaheim and Texas (though the A's do get Seattle and the Red Sox get the Yanks).

Where have the A's been after 93 games the last few years? Last year, they were four games behind Seattle and a game out of the wild card, but ended up winning the division. In 2002, they were also four games behind Seattle, but a game and a half up for the wild card, and again they ended up taking the division. In 2001, the Mariners ran away and the A's had only just begun to play. Oakland was a whopping eighteen games behind Seattle, and five games out of the wild card hunt, behind both Boston and Cleveland. The A's more than made up those five games in their ensuing tear, though, taking the wild card at the end. In 2000, the A's were (again) behind Seattle, this time by three games, but they led the wild card by a game and a half, tied in the wins column with Toronto, but with three fewer losses. Oakland won the division.

The last time the A's weren't in the playoffs was 1999. Here's a bad omen, though: Oakland trailed Texas by five games at this point, though they were also three and a half back of the wild card.

If you believe in history, you notice the A's are in better shape than they were in 1999, and essentially the same position that they've been in at this point of their whole playoff run. If you believe in luck and omens, you notice that a Texas team out-performing its Pythagorean projection won the division in 1999 (Pythagorean record: 88-74), and a Texas team out-performing its Pythagorean projection is leading the division this year.

To be fair, the Rangers are only a game and a half ahead of their Pythagorean projection. That's the more accurate measure, though. Using the 1.83 exponent that's used in the calculation of the 1999 Pythagorean projection, though, we see that the Rangers are a little more than two games ahead of their expected record.

Posted by jason in Baseball, Oakland A's at 21:29