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Well, ok, so maybe they're not so bad

With two comfortable victories over Texas, the A's moved back to just 2.5 games behind the Rangers as the AL West matchups continue. Oakland plays at home against Seattle tonight, and the A's have been nearly unstoppable in the Coliseum, where they're 33-15, second only to the Yankees in all of baseball. The Achilles heel of the team has been road trips: they're just 20-29 away from home, a road record too similar to that of teams like Colorado, Cincinnati, the Mets, Cleveland, and Tampa Bay to be of any comfort to A's fans.

The A's won the last two games of the series exactly the way they're supposed to against the Rangers: the A's strength (pitching and defense) held Texas to four runs total, while the Rangers weakness (pitching and defense) allowed the A's to score fifteen.

On Saturday, Kirk Saarloos had another "who needs brilliance, just keep us in the game" start, pitching five innings and, despite giving up just three hits, allowing two runs. Saarloos walked five batters, but none of them ended up hurting him. The two runs scored on a Mark Teixeira homer and an Alfonso Soriano sac-fly, driving in David Dellucci, who had doubled, then moved to third on a groundout.

Following Saarloos was another good long outing by Justin Duchscherer, who went 2 2/3 innings, allowing three baserunners, no runs, and striking out three. Jim Mecir and Octavio Dotel finished things from there, with Dotel striking out all three men he faced.

Mark Kotsay is heating up, and Eric Chavez appears to be getting his power stroke back. Chavez hit his fifteenth homer in this game, and would hit his sixteenth on Sunday. Kotsay bashed two bombs, and added another on Sunday, padding his season total to eight, and helping his July batting line rise to .388/.454/.635. He's not walking as much as I thought he would, with just a .060 ISO-OBP, but I think I've been deluding myself in thinking that he was going to be a walks monster. His best ISO-OBP of his career was last year's .077 mark. The important question, then, is "Will Kotsay finish the year with his current .324 batting average? And what about his career-best .461 slugging percentage?"

Kotsay's clearly playing over his head, as his July line shows, and I think he'll come back to earth. His batting average is better than his previous career best by .026. And his slugging percentage is entirely batting-average driven: his .137 ISO-SLG is essentially the same as his career mark, .136. He's playing in a park that's not very nice to left-handed hitters, so you have to respect his work so far, but that doesn't mean you have to expect it to continue. My prediction? He'll hit over .300 for this first time in his career, and his ISO's will stay the same, resulting in a .301/.361/.438 line. (Note the .799 OPS: I'm cruel. Couldn't I have just given him an .800? No!) There are about eleven center fielders hitting better than that right now. One of those is Jeromy Burnitz, who's (a) Coors-aided and (2) probably not the defensive center-fielder that Kotsay is. Actually, a cringe-worthy note for A's fans. The player whose line looks the most similar to this projection right now? Randy Winn.

Anyway, Sunday's game was much the same. A young A's starting pitcher last just five innings, giving up two runs on a low number of hits (two), while walking five and giving up a homer. The bullpen was even better this time around, allowing just one baserunner (a Justin Lehr walk) over the final four innings, including six straight ground balls induced by Chad Bradford.

Meanwhile, Eric Byrnes and Erubiel Durazo added homers to the Chavez and Kotsay jobs I already mentioned. All four A's homers came off of former Athletic John Wasdin. The last time Wasdin was with the A's was 1996, when he was 23 years old. Were any of the current A's members of that team? Why don't I just say, not even close. This was not the kind of young team that would still have players with the team eight years later. The list of guys on that team who've appeared in the bigs this year is small: Jason Giambi, Tony Batista, Matt Stairs, Scott Spiezio, John Wasdin, Buddy Groom, Todd Van Poppel, and Jay Witasick. That's eight out of 43 who appeared at least once for the team.

I wonder if that's normal? Well, let's pick five teams and see how many of their players played in the majors eight years later (and, as a side note, how many played for the same team). I could do this historically, but I think I'd rather see if this is normal hold-over for this particular era.

The random number generator spits out 3, 9, 23, 7, and 12. Those correspond to Florida, the Cubs, Minnesota, Houston, and Los Angeles. The number to beat is 18.6% of year's roster still playing. Additionally, I'll add this: the

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position players accounted for 16.7% of the team's at-bats, and the pitchers accounted for (about - I'm just going to round off fractions of innings) 19.5% of the team's innings pitched.

In Florida, we've got Charles Johnson, Greg Colbrunn, Edgar Renteria, Jeff Conine (same team!), Gary Sheffield, Luis Castillo (same team!), Billy McMillon, Gregg Zaun, Al Leiter, Kevin Brown, Jay Powell, Chris Hammond, Dave Weathers, Matt Mantei, Felix Heredia, Miguel Batista, and Livan Hernandez. That's 17 out of 46, or 37%, and $2/46 = 4.3\%$ of the team's roster stayed the same (compared to 0% of the A's). The players accounted for 52.3% of the team's at-bats and 49.9% of the team's innings. Also, it should be noted that Robb Nen, who's still officially active despite not having pitched, was on that team, and Rick Helling, who finished up with the Marlins last year, is trying to make it up from the minors in Texas. I'm sticking with my rules, though.

On to the Cubs! Rey Sanchez, Luis Gonzalez, Sammy Sosa (same team!), Jose Hernandez, Doug Glanville, Brooks Kieschnick, Frank Castillo, Steve Trachsel, Amaury Telemaco, Terry Adams, Rodney Myers, and Tanyon Sturtze. That's $12/41 = 29.2\%$ of the team, and 2.4% still with the team. They accounted for 33.9% of the at-bats and 45.5% of the innings.

The Twins! Greg Myers, Matt Lawton, Denny Hocking, Todd Walker, Brad Radke (same team!), Eddie Guardado, Jose Parra, and LaTroy Hawkins. That's $8/38 = 21.1\%$, with 2.6% still with the team. They accounted for 13.9% of the at-bats and 27.9% of the innings.

The Astros! Jeff Bagwell (same team!), Craig Biggio (same team!), Ricky Gutierrez, Bobby Abreu, Shane Reynolds, Mike Hampton, Todd Jones, and Billy Wagner. That's $8/43 = 18.6\%$, with 4.7% still on the team. They accounted for 27.9% of the at-bats and 35.1% of the innings. It should be noted that it seems likely that Darryl Kile, who was a member of that team, would still be in the big leagues were he still alive. Kile threw 219 innings for that team and batted 73 times.

The Dodgers! Mike Piazza, Eric Karros, Todd Hollandsworth, Roger Cedeno, Raul Mondesi, Juan Castro, Dave Hansen, Wilton Guerrero, Karim Garcia, Hideo Nomo (same team!), Ismael Valdes/Valdez, Antonio Osuna, Chan Ho Park, and Darren Dreifort. That's $14/40 = 35\%$, with 2.5% still on the team. They accounted for 52.1% of the at-bats and 45.7% of the innings. Additionally, Joey Eischen is still hanging around on the Expos DL.

Let's put that in a table!

Team	%Playing	%Same	Team	%AB's	%IP	Oakland	18.6	0	16.7	19.5	Florida	37	4.3	52.3	49.9	Chicago	29.2	2.4	33.9	45.5
Minn	21.1	2.6	13.9	27.9	Houston	18.6	4.7	27.9	35.1	LA	35	2.5	52.1	45.7						

I'm guessing that this represents a pretty good cross-section of your average team. The A's and Houston would probably be on the low end of the first column if we did this for every team, and the Dodgers and Marlins would probably be on the high end. There are extremes, certainly, that we're probably missing. For example, how many current Yankees do you think will still be around in 2012? Alex Rodriguez and Derek Jeter are the only two players who come to mind.

The "same team" column isn't totally forthcoming, because Hideo Nomo left LA and came back, and the same for Jeff Conine in Florida. When we're talking about only a pool of seven players, those two change things quite a bit.

The percentage of at-bats is interesting. LA and Florida had lots of good young players who they let play. This was still a time of a ripe farm system for the Dodgers, and they let the fruits of their labors help them to within one game of a division championship, while the Marlins were playing the core of their 1997 championship team. Note that four of the six teams have %AB higher than %Playing. The two exceptions are Oakland and Minnesota, and the A's are at least in the ballpark. What's wrong with Minnesota, then? Perhaps it's the age-old Minnesota problem of having good young hitting talent and not letting it play.

Posted by jason in Baseball, Oakland A's at 20:28