

Monday, August 2, 2004

Oakland playoff chances

It was, of course, Deal Weekend, but the A's were apparently not involved. That's sort of odd, because it seems like Billy Beane usually has his fingers in every pie around the league. Of course, when your team doesn't have any areas in obvious need of upgrade, or where there isn't an upgrade really available (second base), it's understandable that you might stand pat. The A's made their big move awhile back, when Carlos Beltran became available, and, since he wasn't traded again, it looks like Beane's abilities as a deal facilitator weren't needed.

Of course, we have to not only look at whether the A's got stronger, but also at whether their competitors did. We'll work from the bottom up in the standings in the AL, beginning with the White Sox (who could compete with the A's for a wild card spot if it came to that). Chicago traded away Esteban Loaiza and got back Jose Contreras. This looks like a money deal, as any trade with the Yankees will, and, on the talent side, it'll be at best a wash for Chicago. No help.

The Angels couldn't pull off the big trade to get Randy Johnson, which is almost too bad for the long-term chances of the A's, because they'd likely have to have given up a couple of their Dallas McPherson / Casey Kotchman prospects, and not having those guys to slot in for their older players in a year or two could hurt them. In terms of short-term impact, of course, no help.

The Red Sox made a splashy deal as well as a minor one, ending up with Orlando Cabrera, Doug Mientkiewicz, and Dave Roberts, giving up (of the players who matter now) Nomar Garciaparra. There's a lot being made of Nomar's "fragile psyche," the fact that he had a day off during that wild and crazy Sox-Yankees game of about a month ago, and so on. The thing is, pop psychology has no place in baseball analysis. If you want to talk to a real psychiatrist and ask him/her what (s)he thinks of Nomar, based on a very limited observation, perhaps they can venture a guess about what's going on in his head. More likely, they'll scoff and tell you to leave them alone. What we do know is that from Nomar's offensive value to Cabrera's, there's a step down, even if we take into account that Cabrera's likely better than the .223 EqA he's posting this year. Defensively, who knows? Cabrera had a huge year with the glove a few years back, but is he still that good? Even if he is, the Sox still have capable defensive caddies around if they're really that concerned.

Buster Olney thinks that Minky is a good guy to add because he improves the team's defense. I wonder when on earth the guy is going to get to play. I guess with Trot Nixon down again, Kevin Millar becomes the every-day right fielder, so perhaps Mientkiewicz becomes the every-day first baseman, with David Ortiz DHing? Perhaps this is a defensible part of the deal, but overall, you have to think the Red Sox are a weaker team than they were on Saturday, giving the A's a leg up, plus a 2.5 game lead, in case Texas overtakes Oakland again.

And how about Texas? They picked up Scott Erickson from the Mets. Brilliant! This seals the West for the A's.

Then there are two teams that aren't likely to come into direct competition with the A's in the regular season, but you never know. Minnesota sent away their first baseman, clearing room for a real hitter to play there (finally!). The minor league pitcher they got doesn't matter this year, so we won't concern ourselves with him. This is addition by subtraction and, coupled with the White Sox's five game deficit as of today, call the Central for the Twins, meaning that they're not going to be competing with the A's for the wild card (again, if it comes to that).

Finally, the Yankees: Esteban Loaiza for Contreras is, as I mentioned for the Sox, likely a push. The Yankees would rather have a guy who'll consistently throw 7 innings and give up four runs than a guy who'll sometimes go nine innings, one run, and other times go four innings, six runs. Since New York's already got a playoff spot locked up, this doesn't really help or hurt them in the regular season, and I'm frankly not sure whether two starts of Loaiza or two starts of Contreras is more favorable for the A's in a seven-game series (I'm assuming a seven-gamer because, as of right now, the A's would play the Twins in the first round, not potentially meeting the Yankees until the second).

All in all, then, there's really no change. The A's got better a month ago and nobody else really helped themselves, so Oakland's got to be considered a strong bet to win the West yet again.

Posted by jason in Baseball, Oakland A's at 10:57