

Tuesday, August 24, 2004

The New Barry Bonds

Since Oakland was only half a game ahead of the two second place teams in the AL West and half a game behind the Red Sox (in case they fall out of the first place and have to try to get in the playoffs via the wild card), every day seems like a must win. The A's finally got some good news with their win last night, as Boston and Texas both lost (though Anaheim beat the Royals), which pushes Oakland a half game ahead of Boston and 1.5 in front of the Rangers.

One would like to see the A's beating the Orioles by more than one run, but Rodrigo Lopez, the Baltimore starter last night, has been good this year. He began the game with a 3.73 ERA and has 29 VORP on the year, behind only stellar reliever BJ Ryan on his team. For context, the players immediately around him on the big pitcher VORP list are Rich Harden (just ahead) and Joe Nathan (just behind).

In other words, it's excusable to only score four runs, especially because Tim Hudson was in the process of only allowing three (with just one "earned," since the other two came after a second-inning error by Eric Chavez). Hudson, in fact, had a very nice game. He gave up eight hits in 7.1 innings, six singles and two doubles, had one runner caught stealing, walked two, and struck out five while getting eleven ground ball outs to just five in the air. It wasn't one of the gems that he sometimes spins, but it's pretty much vintage Tim Hudson anyway.

Mark Kotsay was out of the game with the flu, which may have pushed Jermaine Dye back in the lineup a little earlier than anticipated after sitting out three games with a sore thumb. Or maybe he was planning on coming back today anyway. Oakland does have Billy McMillon on the bench, so it's not like they were short an outfielder.

Adam Melhuse has been hitting well recently, and he added two singles and a walk in four trips to the plate last night. He's hitting .259/.318/.457, so he's getting on base less than Damian Miller, due mostly to Miller's career-best .290 batting average, but he's hitting for better power (.198 ISO vs. Miller's .153), which is entirely expected.

Despite batting from both sides of the plate, Melhuse has been used almost exclusively against right-handed pitchers this year, although Miller's right/left splits aren't anything to write home about.

A look to tonight

The A's throw Mark Mulder against Sidney Ponson tonight, which is a matchup the A's have to like.

Meanwhile, Carlos Silva goes for Minnesota against Texas, who have 6'10", 250 pound rookie Chris Young making his first major league start. Baseball America had Young as the #19 prospect in the Expos's system, from whence he came in the Einar Diaz trade early this year, and John Sickels gave him a B-. He doesn't throw as hard as his body might suggest, but both sources seem to believe that he should end up as a decent pitcher with average stuff. You can read between the lines of BA's paragraph and figure he should top out as a useful bullpen arm, while Sickels just comes out and says so. Anyway, that game should be a tossup, due to the "never seen him before" factor.

Anaheim sends John Lackey against Jimmy Serrano of the Royals, who's making his fourth major-league start. Serrano was left out of the BA book, but John Sickels included him and gave him a C. Serrano's a short (5'10") right-hander with a decent minor league track record that suggests to Sickels that he could be a useful middle-reliever, but his size has prejudiced front offices against giving him a real shot. In the shot the Royals have given him, Serrano's not pitched all that well: 17.2 innings in three starts, three homers, eleven strikeouts and eight walks, but just one decision (a loss) to show for all that.

Since John Lackey hasn't lived up to his very good 2002 callup season, you can't immediately call this one for the Angels, especially since the Royals have added a Barry Bonds-like presence to their lineup. Since Cal Pickering was called up on the 22nd of this month, he's played two games in which he's collected three hits in seven at-bats. All three of those hits were homers.

If Pickering had been called up, say, at the midway point of the season, which would have been reasonable considering how he was tearing up AAA, he'd be on pace for about 118 homers (which is, of course, not so reasonable, but whatever). It seems like Pickering's been around forever, but he's still only 27, which means he's probably got 3-5 good years left in him, assuming he can actually build on this year and that it doesn't represent the most extreme age-27 peak

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I've ever seen.

Posted by jason in Baseball, Oakland A's at 10:46