

Sunday, August 29, 2004

The Duke Spears some Fish

Oakland won two more games the last two days, though they're not the kind of wins you'd like to see over the Devil Rays. I predicted an easy 6-2 win for Friday; instead, the A's found themselves down 5-1 early, but came back and won 8-7, with a big boost coming from a four-run fifth inning that included Erubiel Durazo's 21st homer of the year.

Mark Hendrickson got smacked around, as predicted, giving up seven runs on ten hits in just 4.2 innings, but Mark Redman got it worse, putting the A's in the aforementioned hole by giving up six runs on nine hits in just two innings. Fortunately for the A's, they've got one of the best long men in the game waiting in the wings, and Justin Duchscherer came on and pitched five scoreless innings, scattering four singles and a hit batter, to allow the A's to get back into the game. Arthur Rhodes and Octavio Dotel covered the last two innings, with Rhodes allowing an unearned run after Jermaine Dye dropped a ball in right field.

Speaking of Dye, I think it's about time to drop him out of the fourth spot in the lineup. Yes, putting Scott Hatteberg or Erubiel Durazo there would create a three-lefty heart of the order (with Chavez hitting third), but Dye is a crappy hitter, with just a .324 OBP and .451 SLG. He's basically Bobby Crosby with three more homers (and, for those keeping count at home of Crosby's alarming strikeout rate, Dye has actually whiffed nine more times as well).

As usual, lineup effects don't matter all that much in the long run, etc., etc. But I'd rather see Hatteberg, Durazo, and Chavez deal with a lefty reliever in a tough playoff situation than have Dye at the plate against any pitcher.

Yesterday, Oakland overcame three errors and a four-run Tampa Bay fifth inning to win 5-4, largely on the strength of a pair of two run homers by Eric's Chavez and Byrnes.

Tim Hudson pitched another vintage game, throwing seven innings while allowing just two earned runs (four total) on four hits and a walk. He struck out four Devil Fish and got thirteen ground ball outs, compared to just four in the air. If this is the Tim Hudson we're going to see for the rest of the year and, potentially, in the playoffs, rather than the Hudson-in-pain we've seen the last two years, I think the A's might have their best chance yet at leaving the first round of the playoffs.

Eric Chavez, meanwhile, is tearing it up. He's up to 27 homers now, which is 9th in the AL, his 71 walks rank him 6th, and his OBP and SLG put him seventh and 10th, respectively. Take an OBP fifty points higher than his previous best despite a batting average that's just five points higher than his career average and mix in what is probably still Gold Glove defense and you get what's been hoped for him all these years: an MVP-like season. He won't win it this year, as there are plenty of better candidates, especially because of his injury, but he should get some down-ballot votes.

The Competition

Texas beat Baltimore twice and Boston beat Detroit twice, as you might expect, but Anaheim finally took one on the chin, losing once to the Twins. Johan Santana continues to be unstoppable, and he'll get my Cy Young vote unless something extreme happens, while Bartolo Colon continues to be the worst ace in the league. This combination of events finally puts the A's in position where a bad day (a loss plus a win by their competitors) won't take them out of the first place: Anaheim is two games back, Texas remains at 2.5, and Boston is a half game behind.

Today

Newly arrived from the minor leagues, with one five-inning, no run start against the Mariners under his belt, Scott Kazmir starts against the A's, who toss Mark Mulder out there to teach the rookie a thing or two about pitching. I don't mean to sound overconfident, but even in pitching well against a bad team, Kazmir threw 101 pitches in just five innings, and Tampa Bay's bullpen isn't all that good. Now, obviously, he's highly rated for a reason. The question is whether, at 20, he's going to fulfill that promise against a decent, patient offense while pitching against a guy who many (too many) believe is the Cy Young front runner in the AL. I think the A's will hand him his first major league loss, but praise him afterward and predict good things for him: 5-2.

Detroit has one more drubbing coming against Boston, as Wil Ledezma starts against Tim Wakefield. Ugh. 9-4.

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Minnesota and Anaheim's rubber match pits Carlos Silva against Kelvim Escobar. Escobar hasn't had the super-ace year that the Angels hoped for, but he's been a pretty good pitcher, which is not something Silva can really say. The Angels bullpen holds up in a 6-4 win.

Finally, Baltimore tries to avoid their 13th straight loss by sending Sidney Ponson, who's very big (listed at 266 pounds) and very disappointing (5.62 ERA) against Chris Young, who's also very big (remember, 6'10", 250), but had a semi-decent major league debut against the Twins earlier this week. Texas's offense takes this one, 8-5.

Posted by jason in Baseball, Oakland A's at 13:18