

Monday, August 30, 2004

### Texas on the Verge

The A's didn't have nearly the easy time with the Devil Rays they were supposed to have yesterday, and that was, in fact, the story of the series. Come-from-behind wins, close games, walk-off homers: these aren't supposed to be the tools you need to break out when Tampa Bay comes to town. Nonetheless, a sweep is a sweep, and one can't get upset about that.

The A's drubbed Scott Kazmir a little more than I figured they would, blasting off for six runs on nine hits in just three innings. I couldn't find any quotes where the A's praised Kazmir, but that's understandable after you smack a guy around. It's also understandable in the wake of Billy McMillon's game-winning three-run homer after Octavio Dotel blew another game, giving up consecutive home runs to tie it in the top of the ninth.

Of course, Dotel never would have been in that position if Mark Mulder hadn't continued his long slide to mediocrity. He threw six innings, and labored, throwing 104 pitches while walking six batters and giving up seven hits. That this led to just four runs is largely because he tossed four double play balls, out of five twin killings the A's turned in the game. If Mulder's walk-tastic ways don't stop soon, though, the A's could find themselves in the delicate situation of having to push aside the potential Cy Young winner to make room for Rich Harden in the #2 starter spot if the team makes the playoffs.

On the other hand, the way the A's bullpen has been pitching, four runs in six innings is still going to win a lot of games, so 60% of an effective Mulder could still be useful down the stretch.

### The Competition

Anaheim got its own game-winning homer, as Adam Kennedy did his best Marco Scutaro imitation, hitting his ninth homer of the year to break a 2-2 tie in the bottom of the ninth for the Angels. Juan Rincon gave up the shot despite striking out four batters in 1.1 innings. At least my prediction held pretty true: Kelvim Escobar went seven innings and allowed just two runs on four hits while striking out nine and walking none, while Carlos Silva lasted just five innings despite giving up just one run. The bullpens decided the game, though, as Joe Roa blew the Twins's lead in the sixth, while Frankie Rodriguez held the Minnesotas down for the final two innings, allowing just a harmless single.

Boston won by five, as I figured, but Tim Wakefield was better than expected, so the final tally was 6-1 rather than 9-4. Wakefield gave up just three hits and a walk in eight innings, with the one run coming on a Craig Monroe homer. Wil Ledezma, meanwhile, gave up four runs and was knocked out with two out in the fifth, and Craig Dingman gave up a two-run homer to Mark Bellhorn to seal things up in the seventh.

Baltimore pulled out a close win over Texas, 7-6, in a game where both teams scored at least once in each of the sixth, seventh, and eighth innings. The starting pitchers turned in their expected performances, with Ponson giving up five runs in seven innings and Chris Young allowing four in just 4.1 frames. All that late scoring by Texas came for nothing, though, especially as Young is concerned, because the three pitchers following him each gave up a run as well: it's like Zeno's Paradox or something, where the Rangers keep cutting down the deficit, but can't ever seem to catch up to the Orioles.

That loss pushes Texas 3.5 games behind the A's, which is dangerously close to falling out of the race. I'd say if they get to four back, they're done.

### Tuesday

All four teams are off today, though, so Texas won't be eliminated until at least Tuesday.

The Rangers head to Minnesota, sending Ryan Drese up against Kyle Lohse, and you have to like Texas in that one, say 6-3.

Anaheim and Boston square off in one of those series where everything's all good for the A's, though one team winning (Boston) would certainly make Oakland happier. In the opener, Curt Schilling goes for the Sox, while John Lackey takes the mound for the Halos. My upset-o-meter is on high alert, but I'll take the Sox anyway, 7-2.

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Finally, Oakland goes to Chicago and sends Rich Harden against former Marlin Jason Grilli, who's making his second start of the year. Grilli gave up six runs in five innings to the Indians in his first start, and I wouldn't expect too much more from him here. A's win, 7-5.

Posted by jason in Baseball, Oakland A's at 12:08