

Thursday, September 2, 2004

### **Mommy, what's that L mean?**

The A's finally lost a game, and in crummy fashion: after leading all day, Barry Zito, Chad Bradford, and Jim Mecir conspired to allow a three-run seventh inning that tied the game for the White Sox (all the runs were charged to Zito, but Mecir received a blown save). Justin Duchscherer then gave up a run in the bottom of the ninth to lose it.

Jason Grilli did a better job than I thought he would, allowing four runs in six innings, though he put fourteen men on base via ten hits, three walks, and a hit batter. Despite only eight ground ball outs all day, though, the A's hit into three double plays, which really just sounds like bad luck.

Barry Zito continued to be plagued by big inning syndrome. Often, that big inning has come early, contributing to his early exits, but this time out, he shut down the White Sox for six innings before getting knocked around a little bit. His peripheral numbers look good, though: just one extra base hit allowed to go with one walk and six strikeouts. In fact, the first run the White Sox scored came on a fielder's choice grounder when, apparently, Aaron Rowand beat the throw to first for the double play that would have nullified the plating of Jamie Burke.

On the other hand, the A's fourth run came when Eric Chavez hit into a first-and-third-no-out double play that scored Mark Kotsay, and their first run came on Eric Byrnes's bases-loaded beaning.

The worst thing about that big seventh inning for the Sox is that the scoring all came with two outs. The first two batters reached base, but then Zito got two outs before allowing a base hit. That hit brought on Chad Bradford, who gave up a hit allowing an inherited run to score, so Jim Mecir came in and gave up another single allowing another inherited runner to come home before Carlos Lee finally made the last out. Clearly, Zito could have had a little more help from his bullpen in this game, though it was trouble of his own making, certainly.

### The Competition

As mentioned above, the A's main competition, Texas and Anaheim, both lost yesterday as well, so Oakland doesn't lose any of their West lead.

I had the spirit of things right when I guessed 9-6 Red Sox, but the final score actually ended up 12-7. Aaron Sele and Bronson Arroyo pitched predictably and neither lasted four innings. Sele pitched worse, but, more importantly, he also had worse bullpen support, as Scot Shields followed him and gave up five runs over two innings, while, of the five Boston pitchers who came after Arroyo, only Mike Timlin gave up anything to the Angels.

As fast as Chone Figgins is, and he's stolen 27 bases this year, why on earth has he been caught stealing 12 times, including once in this game? He's 26, so if he hasn't learned to steal yet, he's probably never going to. It's probably time for Mike Scioscia to stop being enamored of his speed and realize that he's not stealing intelligently. No more green lights for Chone.

I should have stuck with my original Minnesota-Texas prediction of 5-2, Twins, but I was seduced by the idea of dead guys pitching against each other. The zombies pitched well, though, each allowing two runs on eight hits and turning the game over to the bullpen. Thankfully for the A's, when the team you're rooting for has Jesse Crain and Joe Nathan going, you've got a good shot of going home happy. Crain and Nathan stopped the Rangers attack, allowing just one base runner, a walk by Nathan, while Francisco Cordero allowed the tie-breaking runs to come home for the Twins, earning his first loss this year.

The only change with regard to the A's is that Boston now has the second-best record in the American League, giving them an edge on the A's should Oakland fall out of first place in the West down the stretch. Just because it hasn't happened before doesn't mean it can't in the future.

### Today

The A's and White Sox finish their series today in the ESPN day game, so I'll be all over that. Mark Redman goes for the A's against Jose Contreras. The Cuban has had a good run for the White Sox since being traded by the Yankees, having just one bad game when he allowed five runs in five innings with the help of seven walks. He's been getting

strikeouts and ground balls, though, so he's been effective.

Mark Redman is coming off one of his periodic disastrous outings, allowing six runs in just two innings to the Devil Rays. This is a worrisome matchup in my mind. Redman could be brilliant, but he's more likely to be mediocre, and he's allowed right-handed batters to slug nearly .500 against him this year, so Chicago's lineup scares me a little. Contreras, meanwhile, neutralizes lefties, who he's actually faced more of this year, to the tune of .231/.311/.379. And that's after spending most of the year with the Yankee outfield behind him.

And it's not like right-handers crush him, either. They've hit for good power, posting a .234 ISO, but neither split paints the ugly picture that Redman's do.

For the first time all year (of course, I've only been doing this for about ten days), I'm going to predict an A's loss, 7-4.

Bartolo Colon pitches against Derek Lowe in a matchup of "guys who are supposed to be better than this." Colon seems to be pitching a little better in the last month or two, but he's still all over the place. Lowe, on the other hand, has allowed more than four runs just once in his last ten starts. Of course, he's also allowed fewer than four just twice. He's being consistent, though, which the Red Sox can handle, even if it is consistent mediocrity, because their offense can make up for mediocrity, which they've shown by winning seven of those last ten games (including the one game in which Lowe gave up five runs).

So long as Lowe continues to get those ground balls (he's had double digit ground balls in eight of his last ten starts), he should be ok against the Angels. 8-3, Red Sox, for a sweep.

Texas and Minnesota finish up with Kenny Rogers pitching against Brad Radke. It seems like both guys have been around forever and, really, they have: Rogers is in his 17th season and Radke is in his 11th. The Twin is having the better year, despite Rogers's fifteen wins and Radke's nine-run blowup in his last start. That said, Rogers has been pretty decent this year, and you can never underestimate the power of a Gold Glove pitcher on the hill. Or something. I'll take Texas to narrowly avoid a sweep, winning 5-4.

Posted by jason in Baseball, Oakland A's at 10:45