

Sunday, September 5, 2004

Luck is the Residue of ... blah blah blah

The A's got a little lucky against the Blue Jays last night, scoring two runs on wild pitches late in the game to close a 5-3 gap. Of course, they made up for that luck by pounding the Toronto bullpen into submission in the ninth, scoring four more runs after Nick Swisher trotted home to make the tally five-all, the last three on a bases-loaded double by Eric Byrnes. Of course, the A's got a little help on that ball as well, since it might've been catchable by Reed Johnson, but he actually started toward the infield, rather than away from it, and then saw the ball go over his head. Somebody tell Reed that your first step as an outfielder is always toward the fence.

In fact, if Johnson had caught that ball, the game would have gone to the bottom of the ninth at 6-5, which is the score I called yesterday. Damn him.

What the score reflects, though, is that I had the right instincts about Mark Mulder's performance. He gave up five runs in six innings, though he did strike out five and get nine ground ball outs. Thankfully, the Oakland bullpen has been absolutely untouchable these days, and Ricardo Rincon, Chad Bradford, and Chris Hammond threw three shutout innings following Mulder, with Hammond taking the win.

That bullpen aside, though, Mulder is really starting to worry me. I think we can count a guy with a 3.90 ERA out of the Cy Young race, especially since Curt Schilling has now tied him for the AL lead in wins, with 17. Johan Santana's strong second half also has to be considered, because it'll be fresher in the voters' minds.

That's all pointless, though, because the reason Mark Mulder pitches is for the A's to win ballgames, not for him to win hardware, and, while the A's have still been winning, it's only because they've only scored fewer than five runs in one of his last seven starts (and that was the one game out of those seven that they lost, a 10-3 whomping by Kansas City). It's disheartening to see two of the four aces having to rely on the offense to get them wins, especially after one of them was in Cy Young form early in the year and the other won actually won the award two years ago.

Mulder's really got to get straightened out by the playoffs, because four and five runs in six innings to the Blue Jays and Devil Rays is going to translate to earlier exits and bigger deficits against the Red Sox. I'd hate to see the A's put all their chips on Tim Hudson starting twice and hoping they can steal one of the other three games.

Eric Chavez had a three-walk day, bringing his season total to 80, tying him for the league-lead with Gary Sheffield, despite having about 110 fewer plate appearances than The Sheff has. Those 80 walks give him a .410 OBP, which is third in the league, behind two guys who are batting .345 and .379 respectively: Melvin Mora and Ichiro.

I wonder if Mora is going to get any MVP consideration. His OPS is second in the AL only to Manny Ramirez, and while it's pretty batting average driven, that doesn't matter in value discussions. From a pure VORP perspective, Mora has been the most valuable player in the league this year, with a

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