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Kendall trade

It appears that the Jason Kendall trade to the Athletics is basically complete, contingent only on Arthur Rhodes and Mark Redman passing their physicals. It's appropriate, then, to start looking at how the trade works out for both sides.

Kendall's contract gives him \$10, \$11, and \$13 million in 2005, 2006, and 2007, while, according to Dugout Dollars, Mark Redman will get \$4.25 and \$4.95 million over two years, while the status of Rhodes's contract is uncertain. Figure an even split at \$3.1 million each of the next two years. The A's, then, are taking on \$2.65 million in payroll for 2005, \$2.95 million for 2006, and the whole \$13 million for 2007.

The ESPN article here claims that the A's will be making a "small" payment in each of the first two years, while the Pirates will make a payment in 2007 to offset the big Kendall contract in that year. If we assume that "small" payment is something on the order of a million bucks or so, then the A's monetary commitments increase to \$3.65 and \$3.95 million, respectively. If the Pirates send, say, \$3 million the A's way in 2007, then Oakland's burden is reduced to \$10 million for that year. Let's just work with those assumptions and we'll adjust them as necessary.

Kendall would have been a great guy to have in his 23-26 seasons, before he got hurt, when he regularly put up about 8 WARP per season. Unfortunately, that's not the Kendall the A's are getting. Instead, Oakland has acquired a 31 year-old catcher with a history of health issues who has had trouble cracking slugging percentages of .400 the past two years.

But that's the downside. The upside is that despite that complete lack of power, he's still managed to average about 7 WARP a year, though I have to worry about how batting average-driven his offensive value is: he's hit .325 and .319 the last two years after seasons of .283 and .266 the years before that. Kendall doesn't walk as much as he'd need to in order to survive another down year with the batting average (once every 11.6 plate appearances in his career). However, walks aren't the only way to get on base. Kendall has an amazing proclivity for being hit by pitches, getting hit once every 30 times to the plate in his career. When we add in the HBP's, he's getting first for free once every 8.4 trips, which compares favorably to the A's paragon of plate virtue, Scott Hatteberg, who has been walked or hit about once every 8.1 trips in his career.

Pittsburgh apparently played as a slight pitcher's park the past two years, so Kendall's numbers are a tiny bit (we're talking one point of OBP here) understated. Oakland, according to Baseball Prospectus depressed run scoring at about the same level, so we won't expect the movement from park to park to change Kendall's numbers. Why don't we go ahead and put him down for, overall, about a six WARP season, as we'll assume that he'll hit about his career average (.306) with his usual ISO's (75-80 OBP, 75-90 SLG).

The A's signed Arthur Rhodes on the basis of two good seasons out of the last three, with the bad season being the most recent one. Unfortunately, it appears that a major decline in Rhodes's strikeout rate in 2003 (8 k/9, compared to 10.7 in 2001-2002) augured a decline in all areas; Rhodes's walks, homers, and hits allowed all rose to combine for an ugly 5.12 ERA. According the BP's reliever evaluation tools, he cost the team about three quarters of a win over his 38.7 innings. With the A's plethora of cheap arms (Justin Duchscherer, Kirk Saarloos, Mario Ramos, John Rheinecker, Joe Blanton, Huston Street, Jairo Garcia), I'm pretty sure they can overcome the loss of one old, expensive, crappy lefty, even after accounting for Jim Mecir also playing somewhere else next year. Dumping Rhodes is, even if he has a nice comeback season, addition by subtraction.

Then there's Mark Redman, who's becoming the definition of the journeyman pitcher: he'll be pitching for his fifth team in seven years when 2005 rolls around. Redman had a tough year with the A's, particularly in the Coliseum, where he allowed a .981 OPS overall, essentially turning every hitter into Melvin Mora. It's hard to pin down why this may have happened, and it's likely that it's just that old baseball bugaboo, random variation and chance, or "luck" if you want to call it that.

The A's may have exploited that road ERA in raising Redman's trade value, essentially saying, "Look, you're getting a guy who had a 2.90 ERA away from home, and he's not going to have to pitch in Oakland next year, so that's pretty much what you'll be getting." Which is, of course, a load of crap. I would be seriously shocked if Mark Redman suddenly turned into Oliver Perez, mostly because he's never had an ERA below 3.59 in his career. Redman's not a bad pitcher, and if that random variation evened out in 2005, he might have made a fine back-end starter for the A's, but

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with so many cheaper options out there and a potentially damaging offensive hole at catcher (though I'd still like to see Adam Melhuse get a more serious shot), it's a good idea to trade him.

From the Pirates's perspective, they get a guy who, as I mentioned, should be a decent starter, though his 2 for 75 career batting line implies that he's a true American League pitcher. He'll also be relatively cheap, especially if the A's are picking up part of the tab on his salary.

Assuming Rhodes is traded for something else the Pirates need or shunted to a corner of the 'pen where he's not used much, the trade looks pretty fair from both sides, with the A's getting the better player, but paying the money to make it so. It is funny, though, to see the A's being the team with the payroll flexibility to pull a deal like this with some other poor team begging for them to take a contract off their hands.

Posted by jason in Baseball, Oakland A's at 11:14