

Blog Export: Beaneball, <http://beaneball.org/>

Monday, January 17, 2005

Guess who's back, Durazo's back

Athletics Nation claims to have info that Erubiel Durazo has been signed to a one-year deal. Obviously, we can't really say more about this until we know the terms, but the immediate good and bad are pretty clear.

EDIT: Durazo appears to have actually signed for \$4.7 million for this year, according to ... well, just about everyone. I'm leaving the above link in for archival purposes. This means that if he does this year what he did last, the A's will be getting about one win per million bucks for him, which isn't terrible. It's not likely to approach the value they'll get from Dan Haren or anything, but that's not a fair comparison. Look at the guys on either side of him on the VORP list from last year: Hideki Matsui and Javy Lopez, both of whom are making far more than four and a half million bucks next year.

Anyway, on both a rate and overall value basis, Durazo was the best hitter on the team last year. When defense is taken into account, Mark Kotsay and Eric Chavez were both more valuable, but in terms of who the A's want at the plate in a critical situation and who the A's most want in the batting order every day, Durazo is the guy.

A second point is that Durazo's mainstream stats were not that impressive: he hit just 22 homers, drove in 88 runs, scored 80, and struck out over 100 times. The only thing he'd have going for him if we were still living with the analysis of the '50's is his .321 batting average. The hidden part of his value comes from his 74 times on base that didn't require a hit and his .202 Isolated Power, a result of 35 doubles. The point of all this is that he might be making less money than he actually deserves because the demands he could make in arbitration may not be as great as comparable players with better counting numbers.

On the downside, this means Dan Johnson is stuck again. Durazo and Scott Hatteberg both play most of the team's games, despite Durazo's prior injury history, so there's not a lot of room for someone else to horn in on their playing time when they need to nurse some owies. Graham Koonce has already left for greener pastures, probably because he realized that he was never going to get any significant playing time in Oakland.

It also means the A's don't really have a backup first baseman. When Hatteberg does need to rest, the A's options at first appear to be Durazo and, based on his college position, Nick Swisher. He did make some appearances at first last year, so the A's aren't locked into the idea of him as an outfielder, which is nice, but, seeing as how he's supposed to be the everyday right fielder, you don't necessarily want to be jerking him around when you need to rest Hatteberg. This leaves Durazo to play first, which is a really ugly and costly site. His rate stats at first last year suggest that he'd cost the team 47 runs below the average first baseman over 100 games. Small sample size warnings apply, of course, because this was only four games. His previous four years, though, in which he played 60, 38, 56, and 33 games, yielded rates of 89, 97, 91, and 81. Those are ugly. You don't want those numbers in the field for your team, but if Hatteberg goes down and you want to do something other than shift Keith Ginter around, Durazo's going to be out there, butchering ground balls and throws from the infield alike. First-base-side fans, take heed.

Of course, the A's could just count on Hatteberg playing every day and, in the case of injury, calling up Johnson to play every day, leaving Durazo safely at the DH. I guess this isn't a bad option, because Hatteberg has been durable, appearing in 152 games last year. That plus the fact that the A's are already going younger and, temporarily, worse, means they probably don't want to swap out Durazo for Johnson just yet. Wait 'til 2006.

Posted by jason in Baseball, Oakland A's at 10:48