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Thursday, February 24, 2005

News and notes

Today's notebook at the Press Democrat is just chock full of little tidbits, some of them a little worrisome.

First, there's the idea that Ken Macha is experimenting with his lineup as he's worried about Eric Chavez's lack of protection. If such a thing actually exists, the best guy to put behind him is Erubiel Durazo, but the first lineup card of the spring will have Durazo in front of Chavez, with the third-sacker hitting cleanup. Frankly, I don't see the need to move guys around to try to get Chavez more hittable pitches to swing at. Sure, he has monster power and it'd be nice to let him use that, but at the same time, this isn't Barry Bonds we're talking about here, in the sense that it isn't even debatable whether walking him a lot is a good or bad strategy. Every time Chavez gets on base (and those 95 walks certainly put him on base a lot), the A's are helped. Durazo slugged well over .500 hitting behind Chavez last year. What more do the A's want?

The next section in the article discusses Macha's devotion of a full practice field to bunting and situational hitting. His reason? Ramon Hernandez laid down that beautiful bunt two years ago to win a playoff game for the A's, so you never know when it might be a good thing to do.

So long as it really is a "get ready for a weird special situation" kind of thing, this is fine. If it forebodes Macha getting all National League on us and having Bobby Crosby sacrifice Mark Kotsay from first to second with one out, then I'll get worried. That actively hurts the team and it's something I thought the A's avoided with Billy Beane running the show from upstairs.

Finally, "Left-hander John Rheinecker will not be able to pitch for about a week because he hurt his hamstring when he slipped on the wet grass." This is the kind of thing that can be perceived to kill any tiny chance Rheinecker had of making the big club as the last bullpen guy or something. What's unfortunate is that, whether it actually kills his chances or not, he'll probably feel that way and try to get back from the injury as quickly as possible. Playing and working out on a bad anything, much less a hamstring, isn't a good idea, and, while Rheinecker is as unlikely as anybody to have an effect on the big club this year, you hate to see any chance of players hurting themselves further because they push a little too hard.

This is where the education, communication, and respect aspects of a team's health and fitness program come in. If a team (and I don't know whether the A's do this well or not) communicates to its athletes that injuries are to be reported and dealt with completely and properly before they get back to work, then everybody benefits. The athlete gets to play fully healthy and doesn't have his ability impaired by an owie and the coaching staff doesn't have to worry about the root cause of a guy playing poorly. There's always media speculation that a guy is injured when they can't figure out why he all of a sudden can't hit, but if the team can rule that out because they know the player would come to them with any injury, they can go to work on mechanical factors, psychological issues, or whatever else might be bothering a player.

Posted by jason in Baseball, Oakland A's at 10:50

That's a good point about Macha's real job, and I agree completely.

I think it's awesome, frankly, being able to say that the A's bullpen is about the equal of the Angels, considering that it's been a huge source of strength for that team for a few years now, and, even with the loss of Percival, shouldn't get too much weaker this year.
Anonymous on Feb 26 2005, 11:13

Macha's real test will be in running a bullpen where on most nights he'll have the luxury/choice of removing a starter in the 6th.

I agree that Chavez should bat 3rd.

Rheinecker won't make the team and, at this point in his career, is a throw-in in a larger deal.

I disliked Chavez' comments re the Angels because they're unnecessary and likely untrue. Both clubs rearranged some pretty significant pieces in the off-season. As you're probably aware there are some sims out there which show the A's winning the West. The A's have a stronger infield with the Angels' outfield coming out ahead. The bullpens are equal; the difference maker will be the SPs with the Angels having known quantities. The A's do have some options (Etherton, Yabu, Harikkala) if things go sour whereas the Angels don't have much depth beyond a good but not great starting five.
Anonymous on Feb 25 2005, 21:05