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Back to the basics

A quote from Joe Roderick's story today: "Last season's statistics did not paint a pretty picture for the A's, who nonetheless won 91 games. They ranked 11th in the American League in sacrifice bunts (25), last in stolen bases (47) and had the third-most grounded into double plays (142)."

Roderick goes one for three with this sentence. Yes, third-most DP's is bad. They're rally-killers. On the other hand, a whopping sixteen of those (Jermaine Dye) are gone to Chicago, replaced with a speedier sometime-lefty, Nick Swisher. Damian Miller took his twenty (!) twin-killings to Milwaukee, to be replaced by the speedy Jason Kendall. Now, Kendall does ground into a number of DP's, himself, largely because he's a ground-ball oriented (1.49 G/F career) right-handed contact-hitter, but I'd expect him to cut about 6-8 DP's off the catcher total this year. Finally, Eric Chavez grounded into 21 DP's last year, which is a preposterous sum. His ground/fly ratio was about at his career average, but he managed to hit into the double play about 16% of the time he had the chance (according to BP's numbers). 16%! Compare that to 7%, 5%, and 14% the previous three years and you've got one of two things: a worrisome trend or a bit of a fluke. I'd guess a combination of the two, meaning that he should cut out some DP's this year.

Back to that sentence, though, let's look at those sacrifices. The only way in which it could be construed as a negative that the A's only gave away 25 outs last year is if we said, "Well, they should have finished last, not third from last."

I guess the A's lack of steals isn't a good thing, in the way that their lack of sacrifices is, but this should also be looked at this way: the A's gave away the fewest outs in baseball on caught stealings last year, with 22, one fewer than the Giants and Mets. And that's only a negative when we realize that the A's were only successful on 68% of their steal attempts. I'd use that number to justify calling for fewer steals and hit-and-runs, not more.

(Side note: The Mets were actually good at something last year! They led everybody in stolen base percentage, racking up extra bags at an 82% clip, beating out second-place [perpetually in everything?] Philadelphia by three percentage points.)

Posted by jason in Baseball, Oakland A's at 16:02