

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

Tuesday, March 15, 2005

Chipper a hack?

Unrelated to the A's, here's a piece at Braves Journal criticizing Baseball Prospectus for, among other things, being inconsistent in its criticisms of Chipper Jones's defense at third base. I won't address the other criticisms (for example, about whether BP's defensive stats are accurate) because I'm completely incapable. But do the writers ignore their own stats when they call Jones a butcher at third?

The argument posited is that Jones, while certainly below average, has "usually" put up above replacement-level numbers. That's true: he's been at or above replacement at third base five times and below thrice. On the other hand, five out of eight doesn't sound like a great performance record. Let's compare that to the other regular third basemen in the league last year. I'll decide on "regular" by using these pages at ESPN to see who played at third most often for each team.

Player Team Above rep. Below rep. % above Chipper Jones ATL 5 3 63% Melvin Mora BAL 0 1 0% Bill Mueller BOS 9 0 100% Aramis Ramirez CHC 5 2 71% Joe Crede CHW 3 0 100% Juan Castro CIN 2 0 100% Casey Blake CLE 2 0 100% Vinny Castilla COL 10 0 100% Eric Munson DET 1 1 50% Mike Lowell FLA 6 0 100% Morgan Ensberg HOU 2 1 67% Joe Randa KCR 8 1 89% Chone Figgins ANA 1 0 100% Adrian Beltre LAD 7 0 100% Wes Helms MIL 0 2 0% Corey Koskie MIN 6 0 100% Ty Wigginton NYM/PIT 2 0 100% Alex Rodriguez NYY 1 0 100% Eric Chavez OAK 6 0 100% David Bell PHI 4 1 80% Chris Stynes PIT 4 1 80% Sean Burroughs SDP 2 0 100% Edgardo Alfonzo SFG 6 0 100% Scott Spiezio SEA 1 1 50% Scott Rolen STL 8 0 100% Aubrey Huff TBD 2 0 100% Hank Blalock TEX 2 1 67% Eric Hinske TOR 2 1 67% Tony Batista MON 5 0 100% Total (w/o Chipper) --- 107 13 89%

So no other member of the 2004 Third-Basemen's Social Club has had more than two seasons below replacement, but Chipper has had three. Among the guys with enough data under their belts to really count on (not to mention most of the guys with just a season or two), Chipper has the worst percentage of "decent" seasons with the glove, by BP's measure, and he's well below the league average.

Do remember that I'm not arguing whether Jones is actually a bad defender or not, since I can't defend the BP defensive system on its merits (nor attack it). However, I can challenge the notion that the writers aren't following their own (perhaps flawed) statistics when writing their articles. In other words, when BP writers call Jones "iron-gloved," they are accurately reading their statistical reports. "More seasons above replacement than below" isn't so hot when the majority of your colleagues have never put up a below-replacement season.

Posted by jason in Baseball at 11:40

Jay, I'm not sure if you were involved in the discussion at Braves Journal, but someone there mentioned something that I agree with: it's much easier to find someone who can defend a position well than it is to find someone who can hit major league pitching. It seems that most rookies who make a jump from the minors, even low levels, don't have to do much to get adjusted to playing defense at the major league level. In fact, it might even be easier, due to things like the quality of the fields.

Mac, based on the other numbers cited over at your site, as well as the perceptions of you and fans like you who watch many Braves games, I'd be inclined to agree that the BP stats might be missing something with regard to Chipper.

Anonymous on Mar 16 2005, 15:44

doesn't that kind of imply that their "replacement player" numbers are skewed too low if the majority of third baseman are above it?

Anonymous on Mar 15 2005, 22:55

Fair enough. "More often than not" better than RL (and six runs over for his career) is probably fairer. I seriously doubt that Chipper's giving back a game a year on defense, but like you said that's not what you're arguing.

Anonymous on Mar 15 2005, 13:56