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Sunday, April 24, 2005

Three games, two wins

Today's a three-in-one, since I haven't posted since Thursday.

On Thursday, Rich Harden went off and banged out seven innings worth of zeroes against the Mariners, powered by eight strikeouts. The bullpen was then good enough to overcome an error and make the three runs Oakland had scored early in the game stand up. The only black mark on Harden's day is that he had to be removed after the seventh, having thrown 119 pitches already. That's 17 pitches per inning and one would like to see him be a bit more efficient so that he can complete a game like he had on Thursday. The model should be Mark Mulder's 10-inning shutout of the Astros on Saturday when he used just 101 pitches. With that count, he probably could have gone one more inning had he needed to. That efficiency is why Mulder is one of my favorite pitchers (and was my favorite of the Big Three): there's something almost perverse about only throwing ten pitches per inning, and he seems to do just that with regularity.

On Friday, Kirk Saarloos threw another mediocre game, giving up three runs in five and a third innings, but the A's bullpen, showing its muscle, held the Angels off long enough for Oakland to score twice in the top of the ninth against Francisco Rodriguez (no mean feat), giving the A's the lead that Octavio Dotel held on to in the bottom half. The A's banged out ten hits, earned five walks, had one batter hit with a pitch, and got helped out by two Anaheim errors, but still managed to push across just four runs. That's ugly, but a win is a win.

And it's a good thing Oakland came back to win on Friday, because Saturday just turned ugly. Dan Haren had his first bad game as an Athletic, giving up eight runs in just four and two thirds innings. The most worrisome trouble the A's had in this game were the five stolen bases Anaheim had off of the Haren/Jason Kendall combination. In 2004, Haren allowed three stolen bases and had no one caught stealing, but there's not enough of a sample to make any statements about that. I've mentioned significant worries about Kendall's ability to stop the running game before, but I honestly didn't think it would get this bad. Sure, running is down everywhere, but if it gets around that people can run on Kendall, they will, and those few runs those teams pick up over the course of the season could spell the difference between first and second place between Oakland and Anaheim.

Contracts

Bobby Crosby signed up to be with the A's up to his free-agent year, inking a five-year, ~\$12 million contract. I don't think there's much debate about whether this is good or bad so much as confirmation from the team that, despite playing just one year (and not playing, offensively at least, particularly well in the big picture), the A's are ready to commit to Crosby at short. The A's, assuming no trades, will actually end up having had a longer Crosby-Chavez left side of the infield than the beloved Tejada-Chavez tandem.

ARC

MVOP for 4/21: Mark Kotsay, riding the strength of his two-run homer in the third inning.

MVOP for 4/22: Scott Hatteberg for an all-around good day capped by the game-winning two-run single in the ninth against one of the best relief pitchers around.

MVOP for 4/23: Bobby Kielty, who hit a big three-run homer (his first bomb of the year) that the A's pitching staff couldn't make stand up.

LVOP for 4/21: Nick Swisher, who left Mark Ellis on third base and Eric Chavez on second in separate situations.

LVOP for 4/22: Mark Ellis, predictably, since he went 0-5 with six men left on base.

LVOP for 4/23: Mark Kotsay, whose 0-5 at the top of the order really sunk the A's offense outside of the fifth inning.

MVP for 4/21: Rich Harden, of course, for seven innings of shutout ball.

MVP for 4/22: Keiichi Yabu, for two innings of scoreless relief late in the game.

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MVP for 4/23: Huston Street and Juan Cruz for a scoreless inning each.

LVP for 4/21: None.

LVP for 4/22: Kirk Saarloos, whose start actually looks better in play-by-play than it does in the box score, but whose sixth inning, where he allowed a runner in and left a man on for Rincon to strand, killed his numbers.

LVP for 4/23: Dan Haren. Duh. (Though he wasn't helped at all by all those stolen bases, which I charge solely to the defense, mostly because I don't know a good way to split the cost and I want to keep things simple.)

Posted by jason in Baseball, Oakland A's at 12:37