

Saturday, December 15, 2007

Goodbye, Dan Haren; hello Carlos Gonzalez? Really?

Sigh. That's really all I could do when I saw that Danny Haren had been traded. Maybe Billy Beane figured Barry Bonds wasn't coming to town, now that there's not only the perjury trial but an independent mention of PED use in the Mitchell Report. Maybe he didn't like the health reports he was getting and figures that, despite the Angels' failure to improve this off-season, Oakland won't be competitive this year. Maybe he personally dislikes Danny Haren. Regardless of the reasons, Joe Blanton should be the next domino, perhaps to whatever team loses out on the Johan Santana sweepstakes. And the A's blow it up again.

Let's take a look at the haul.

Oakland gave up Haren and Connor Robertson in the deal. Haren, we know. Robertson, a right-handed pitcher, will be 26 during this season. He made his major league debut with Oakland this year after being a 31st round pick in the 2004 draft. His two major-league innings, while terrible, are meaningless. He's been a reliever all the way up the system, never starting a game, but also rarely being the closer (he's finished 43 of the 167 games he's played in, saving 23). His strikeout rate has consistently been above one per inning, and he's allowed incredibly few home runs, just five in his 228 1/3 minor league innings. His walk rate has been a little high. For his career, he's around 3.6, but if you take out his uncharacteristic 2006 season (from which he regressed in 2007), he's at 4.3. That said, he looks pretty much as good as a relief prospect can look, as a high walk rate can be offset by a good strikeout rate and an excellent home-run rate. Even his hit rate hasn't been very high. In other words, Arizona may have picked up a nice little steal as a throw-in.

The A's got back Brett Anderson, Dana Eveland, Greg Smith, Chris Carter, Aaron Cunningham, and Carlos Gonzalez. Arizona is generally regarded as having a very good minor league system, and four of these six players are on Baseball America's list of the top ten prospects in that system. Gonzalez, furthermore, is rated as the best prospect in the system, and Brett Anderson is the top left-handed pitcher. On quantity alone, that's quite a haul, because you have to figure that at least one, and probably more, of these players will turn out to be quite good. But let's take a look at some stats. We all love those.

Brett Anderson: He'll be just 20 this season, and has only reached High-A ball. He had a rough nine outings at Visalia last year, with a 4.85 ERA, but that followed 81 1/3 innings in South Bend where he posted a 2.21 mark. His walk rate was 1.5 per nine innings, an excellent mark, and Baseball America had him as the best control prospect in the system. (He also rated the best slider.) He struck out over a man per inning, even while struggling in Visalia. He gave up six homers in his 39 innings in High-A, but had granted just three round-trippers in South Bend. In his draft class, Baseball America said he had the best command among all high school pitchers, and was also the closest to the majors of that group. He's basically Haren-sized, standing 6'4" and weighing in at 215 pounds. His dad is the coach at Oklahoma State. Get excited about Anderson.

Dana Eveland: He'll be 24, but already has parts of three major league seasons under his belt after making his debut at 21 for the Brewers. He's another lefty, stands 6'1", and has a career major league ERA of 7.55. His minor league ERA, by contrast, is 2.61. He's never had a season (or even a part of a season at a particular stop in the minors) in which his ERA was over three. He was part of the Doug Davis/Johnny Estrada trade a few years ago. His home run rate is ridiculous, averaging better than one per 25 innings in the seasons for which data is available. The strikeout rate has been good but not overwhelming before taking a nosedive (15 in 27 2/3 innings) at Tucson last year. His walk rate has been fine, not overwhelming, at around 2.7 or 2.8. Outside of his age-19 season in rookie ball, he's been a starter in the minors and started his only major league appearance last year with the Diamondbacks. Given that he only threw 32 2/3 minor league innings to go with that one start, he was presumably hurt. He's a hefty guy. I've seen his weight listed as high as 258. He'll push Lenny DiNardo this year in the back of the rotation (or does this mean that DiNardo is now a lock?), but long-term, that's probably the best he'll do.

Greg Smith: Yet another lefty, also 24 this year, no major league appearances. Started all but two of his games in the minor leagues. 3.27 ERA, 3.78 at Tucson this year. Ok strikeout rate (7.8), having struck out more batters than innings pitched only as a 21-year-old in rookie ball. Walk rate around 2.65, but he cut it from 3.3 in 2006 to just 2.4 in 2007, which bodes very well. Gives up a homer every 13.5 innings. Hit rate doesn't seem crazy. Scout.com had him at fifth-best Arizona prospect entering 2007. Probably somewhere in between Anderson and Eveland, but has the most boring name of any of them. #3 starter at best?

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Chris Carter: First baseman, eighth on Arizona's BA list. Just 21 this year, but he's not past A-ball yet. Just acquired from the White Sox this offseason. 284/373/514 career line, pretty much generic for a right-handed first baseman, right? That said, that's really good power for such a young guy. The power's not all doubles: ripped 25 homers last year. Good walk rate, fairly high strikeout rate. Probably a good prospect, but could he be any more generic as a first baseman? If all goes well, he'll make his way up the system, only to find Daric Barton blocking the way with a .900+ OPS.

Aaron Cunningham: Outfielder, has played at all three positions, righty, just 22, but reached AA last year. Seventh on the BA list. Average is his skill: .304 career, just .074 ISO-OBP, ~.180 ISO-SLG. Has stolen bases, but only at a 65% clip. Gets hit by plenty of pitches, uses his apparent speed to stay out of double plays. Not projected to be a starting outfielder for Arizona ahead of Carlos Gonzalez, Chris Young, or Justin Upton. He's young, but how good is he? Fourth outfielder?

Carlos Gonzalez: Saved the best for last. #1 on the BA list. Best power and best outfield arm in the Arizona system. Lefty, he'll be 22, but he's already played at AAA. As usual for many young players, power has been in the form of doubles so far. Piles up the strikeouts, doesn't walk very much. Based on the stats, it's not clear why he's the #1 prospect in the system. Venezuelan. "Star potential." Billy Beane doesn't usually go in for that sort of thing. Let's hope he pans out, because otherwise, this deal doesn't make me happy nearly the way the Mark Mulder deal did.

Which I think really sums it up. That Mulder deal is now the gold standard by which A's fans will measure trades. Did we get a Daric Barton, Danny Haren, and Kiko Calero here? Certainly not, not least because the major-league ready pitchers are mediocre (unlike Haren), there's no Calero-type reliever in the deal, and the headlining minor-league hitter isn't a Daric Barton, "best hitter in the minor leagues" type guy.

On the other hand, is it fair to measure this deal against the Mulder deal, which worked out so magically?

On the third hand, it might be argued that it is fair. Haren is proven to be much more durable than Mulder, and his best year (2007) stacks up well with Mulder's 2003. Furthermore, Haren is coming off his best year and is locked up cheaply for three more seasons, while Mulder was coming off his worst season, one in which he was basically league-average and was locked up for only two more seasons at cheap rates.

Throw in the fact that I can't shake the fact that the Diamondbacks wound up with both the best and the third-best pitchers in this deal (Haren and Robertson) and you've got yourself a dissatisfied A's fan. Particularly since this deal isn't like to bear real fruit in 2008 (again, unlike the Mulder and Hudson deals).

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Oakland A's at 00:53