

Thursday, May 22, 2008

Matthew Cerrone on Omar Minaya and the grand scheme of baseball

MetsBlog.com Â» Opinion: Minaya, from Howe to Here

The Yemen Deli sent me this, and this is my email in response.

1. The old market was changing ten years ago, from one that focused on athletes and tools to one that focused on performance. Beane was part of that, getting cheap guys who could hit but didn't sell jeans. Then the market changed again, as everyone went "holy shit, OBP". Beane realized that hitting started becoming overvalued relative to pitching, and had his three-aces years (top draft picks from terrible teams didn't hurt as to Mulder and Zito; Hudson was just a hell of a find). Beane then realized that everyone knew they needed young pitching, and would overpay for it, so he dealt his young pitching and built a team based on defense: Eric Chavez, Bobby Crosby, and Mark Ellis is the best defensive infield in baseball if Chavez ever comes back, though Daric Barton at first drags them down a bit. Mark Kotsay the last few years was tremendous. None of these guys has hit a lick in years, yet the A's were competitive. Finally, despite the spread of information about hitting and whatnot, Jack Cust and Frank Thomas still cost the A's almost zero.
2. Players hitting the open market aren't the way that Minaya and Beane have thrived. The Mets have precisely one major free agent on their team (Beltran), and the A's have none. More importantly, the "locking them up" phenomenon doesn't reduce "players hitting the open market" because most players are being locked up only through their arbitration years, and occasionally (Evan Longoria) for one or two years beyond that. Those guys will become free agents exactly when they used to. They stop being the property of the team that drafted them exactly when they used to.
3. Cleveland, a small market team, inaugurated the idea of buying out the arbitration years of its young players back in the mid-90's. This isn't anything new.
4. Maybe he's not talking about the arb-buyout contracts at all, but small-market teams actually locking up guys who are heading into free agency? If that's the case, I can't think of a single example. One reason for this is because there will never be any examples -- guys are, by definition, not young when they are heading into free agency. Most are past their peak, only hitting free agency for the first time at around 30. Only a guy like A-Rod hits free agency as he's entering his peak.
5. The idea that older players are breaking down more now is probably not supported by the evidence. I'm not going to make a list, but I just don't see any difference now as compared to previous years.
6. The idea that this supposed extra breaking down is because of a lack of PEDs is preposterous. Most of these old guys have never been linked to a thing in their lives, and most of them never will be. Remember, something like 93% of players tested negative that year they did the anonymous sampling to see if there should be real drug testing in baseball. Is it really the case that Carlos Delgado sucks because he's not shooting up anymore? I highly doubt it. Hell, Canseco was loaded with that stuff, and he still sucked at the end of his career.
7. Relying on older talent has never been a good strategy. It works as a supplement, but you always have to have talent coming from elsewhere. The Mets weren't going to be good because of Delgado and Pedro, they were going to be good because of Wright and Reyes. And Johan, who's still young because he was rushed to the majors after being a Rule 5 pick.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Baseball at 20:46