

Tuesday, November 29, 2005

### Some pop culture news

The pop culture news from the current (December 5) issue of New York magazine must be commented on.

First, Demetri Martin is now a correspondent on The Daily Show? That's sort of stunning, actually. I saw him live once and I've come across him on TV once or twice. His humor just doesn't seem to fit the spastic Daily Show correspondent style. I mean, Rob Corddry? Ed Helms? Can you really see Martin's heroin-inflected style (to steal a line from Patrice O'Neal) while reporting on ... what exactly? I'm looking forward to it, certainly, but I'm also apprehensive.

Second, Tony Leung has earned himself a retrospective at BAM (Brooklyn Academy of Music). They'll screen twelve of his movies over 18 days in December. The show is titled "Hard Boiled & In the Mood: Tony Leung." Considering that there's significant overlap with exam season at the law school in those dates, I won't be heading out to Brooklyn to actually see anything, but it's awesome that he's being so widely recognized.

(Yes, dear, I'm still straight.)

Third, Trio has been cancelled (click now: it probably won't be there long). I never watched Trio much, but it always seemed like a solid choice when bored: the snarky yet loving nostalgia fits a lot of people in my generation really well, I think, so I'm sort of surprised it didn't get the ratings to make its corporate parents happy.

Fourth and finally, apparently Don Cheadle and Adam Sandler have signed on for Reign O'er Me a post-9/11 movie about finding friendship or some such crap. According to IMDB, there's no writer or director (but according to this site, Mike Binder (The Upside of Anger) is developing it). I'm curious about what the tone of the movie will be. Will Sandler continue his Punch-Drunk Love (not that I saw it) / Spanglish descent (in a good way) into droopiness? Or will it be more manic, in his old style? Either way, I'm not convinced he'll play well with Cheadle.

After a 2004 in which Cheadle appeared in five movies, including his star turn in Hotel Rwanda, it looks like he took a year off, because he's not appeared in a single movie in 2005. Tishomingo Blues, which is supposed to be his directorial debut, is still supposedly showing up in 2005, but considering it's still labeled "pre-production" on IMDB and that it's the end of November, I guess we shouldn't count on it.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Movies at 10:15

Monday, November 28, 2005

### A's get Derek Lowe-alike

The A's signed Esteban Loaiza to a three-year deal today. I've got a much worse feeling about this signing than I did about Arthur Rhodes, and considering how Rhodes panned out, I don't know if that's good news.

Loaiza will turn 34 at the end of the year (really: his birthday is 12/31), so the A's are on the hook for his age-34, -35, and -36 seasons, plus a buyout (you know they're not picking up that club option) for his age-37 season.

Loaiza spent last year with Washington, and had a respectable season: 3.77 ERA, about 7 K/9, and about 3 K/BB. Problem is, last year was the second-best year of his career, trailing only his 2003 season with the White Sox. '03 and '05 were his only seasons with an ERA under four, a K/9 better than seven, and a K/BB better than three.

The other big problem? You shouldn't forget that Washington played as a nice pitcher's park last year. BP's translated numbers give Loaiza a 4.15 ERA. For all of Barry Zito's struggles the last two years, his translated ERA in '05 (in the worst year of his career) was 4.19.

Is there really any reason to prefer Loaiza over Kirk Saarloos?

This really looks for all the world like Paul DePodesta's signing of Derek Lowe, right down to the price: \$7M per year is a lot of money for the A's to spend on a mediocrity like Loaiza.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Baseball, Oakland A's at 17:34

### Pride and Prejudice

It was Thanksgiving weekend, so I had a little more time than I often do. I used this time to see Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire and Pride and Prejudice in the theater.

The former felt rushed and crammed with stuff. I haven't read the books, so I can't speak to the things they dropped out and rushed past. Despite that, it was quite clear how crunched the filmmakers felt. Nary a scene was left to just play out in a normal fashion. Rather, everything was in the manner of, "Here's what you need to get from this scene! Next! Here's what you need from this scene! Next!" I shouldn't say "nary," though, because the graveyard scene, the climax, was quite good. It was the one time where the movie just s l o w e d down for a while. The writers and director are really sort of stuck, though, because the books are only getting longer. Austen tells me there's (finally) a new screenwriter for the fifth movie, which could help things get better. In the end, I liked it, but it doesn't crack the list.

What does crack the list is Pride and Prejudice. Talk about taking your time, not hurrying, just letting things unfold ...

Perhaps the best feature of the movie was that it just moved in a straightforward way, letting the story and the characters carry the day. There was no need for fancy cinematography, quirky editing tricks, or bizarre structural innovations here. Austen tells me that Jane Austen has translated quite well to the screen (I haven't seen the other movies that have come from her books).

I'm reminded of Matt and Ben, a little play that Austen's mom sent us to about the writing of Good Will Hunting. The point of the play, which is quite funny and features women playing the titular characters, is that the duo never wrote the script: it fell from the sky. The scene I remember, though, involves the attempt by the pair to adapt Catcher in the Rye for the screen. It basically involved Ben at the computer, typing the dialogue that Matt reads straight from the novel.

My point? Maybe this works if you're adapting Jane Austen.

So, on to the amended Top Ten, with the newly added Pride and Prejudice.

The Constant Gardener  
Proof  
Kung Fu Hustle  
War of the Worlds

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

Pride and Prejudice  
Grizzly Man  
Capote  
Rize  
Bee Season  
Mad Hot Ballroom

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Movies at 13:45

Sunday, November 20, 2005

**Mommy's one of the chosen people, and daddy thinks ...**

I saw Sarah Silverman: Jesus is Magic last night with a teacher friend and her boyfriend. A lot of people didn't find it as funny as I did: a number of different groups walked out at various points. I'm not sure what they were thinking. It is, after all, a Sarah Silverman concert film. You've got to know what you're getting yourself into, right? She's rude, she's crude, she's edgy, she's regularly accused of racism; what did you expect?

Probably the best joke, certainly one of those that makes you a little nervous, goes something like this: "My niece goes to Hebrew school. She called me the other day and was talking to me and said, 'Aunt Sarah, did you know that Adolf Hitler killed 60 million Jews?' And I told her, 'Honey, I think it's actually six million.' And she said, 'Yeah, you're right. But really, what's the difference?' What's the difference? There's a huge difference! I mean, really! Sixty million would be unforgiveable!"

It doesn't make my Top Ten for the year. It's funny, but I think in order for an uninventive (not in terms of the comedy, but in terms of the filmmaking) concert movie to make the Top Ten, it's got to be better than, say, The Original Kings of Comedy or Richard Pryor Live on the Sunset Strip, and this wasn't.

Better than the Blue Collar Comedy Tour, though? I'll be charitable and not answer that.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Movies at 20:15

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

Friday, November 18, 2005

### National League deals

The Cubs are terrible. They're going to pay Scott Eyre \$11 million over three years to ... do what exactly? Throw 60 innings of mediocre baseball? Eyre's not a bad guy to have around, but he's the definition of fungible reliever. He's got a 4.52 career ERA, a K:BB ratio of 1.5, a K/9 ratio a little below seven, and a career OBP allowed of .350. For that, you pay almost \$4M per year? I feel bad for Mark Prior.

The Padres, though, made themselves a nice little deal for Mike Cameron. Their outfield in Petco is huge, so they want a good, fast center fielder to run around out there, and Cameron certainly provides more pop than Dave Roberts did. He's got a .340 career OBP and a .442 career SLG despite playing in some ugly parks for hitters: Safeco and Shea (and Petco ain't gonna help matters).

And all they had to give up was Xavier Nady? I've got a soft spot for Nady, because he's a local (California, that is) boy and I remember the newspapers at home being really excited when he was drafted years ago. That said, his line last year was .261/.321/.439, and I don't think his defense is all that highly regarded. Yes, he's significantly cheaper than Cameron, but if you're the Mets, isn't a \$7M extra center fielder a luxury you can afford?

I guess there's also the fact that Nady is in the midst of his prime seasons (he's 27) while Cameron is heading toward the downward slope (he's 32), which is not an unimportant fact. Omar Minaya might have followed the old "trade him a year too early" rule here.

In the abstract, trading Cameron is not so terrible, but I think you have to get something better than a random fourth outfielder in return, even if it means defraying Cameron's salary with his new team a little bit. Again, if you're in New York, are salary dumps really all that necessary?

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Baseball at 10:26

Tuesday, November 15, 2005

### Top Ten movies of 2005, revised

Having seen Bee Season this weekend, and being completely disappointed with the reviews it's getting, here's my newest edition of my Top Ten. The bottom of the list contains the only change. It's not consistent from last time because Austen ridiculed me for my #9 choice.

The Constant Gardener  
Proof  
Kung Fu Hustle  
War of the Worlds  
Grizzly Man  
Capote  
Rize  
Bee Season  
Mad Hot Ballroom  
Good Night, and Good Luck

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Movies at 21:52

### The Baseball News

From smallest to largest.

First, Albert Pujols won the NL MVP. That's not crazy, like the Cy Young awards, for example. If it's between Derrek Lee and Albert Pujols, I don't really have a strong feeling. Thank goodness Andruw Jones didn't win.

Second, Ned Colletti, long-time assistant GM with the Giants, will take over the for the Dodgers. Colletti's apparently been in front offices since 1982, when he started with the Cubs. The story at ESPN said he's fifty, which means he started in Chicago when he was 27, so he's essentially a lifer at this point. I'll wish him luck without holding out much hope that the Dodgers will be all that great in three years.

Finally, baseball instituted a 50-100-forever steroid policy. It's just getting more and more ridiculous. Who was the player in Seattle who tested positive despite apparently not using for, what, a year? Two? Is the so-called image problem really worth a step like this? What happens when someone finally gets the money and motivation to do a detailed, long-range study that shows that the various drugs guys are using aren't helping them perform?

Of course, we can't be expecting baseball or Congress to come through and actually, oh, I don't know, use gather and use data when they make decisions. Aren't many of the people in Congress former business-people? Aren't the team owners all business-people? What kind of business environments did these people come up in that decisions are just made willy-nilly, with no evidence that things will or won't work?

Now, I say this because I'm skeptical that, were a study to be done, it would come out with the result that the drugs really help the players. Were it to be shown that players really benefit from the drugs, then fine, I'm all for these suspensions. But if it came out and were publicized that the drugs don't do anything, then that'd be its own deterrent, wouldn't it? What player would sacrifice his future (Lyle Alzado) or his current health (Jason Giambi) if he wasn't actually going to hit or pitch better? The penalties would be entirely unnecessary. But instead, rash decisions were made for public-relations reasons, and, for those same reasons, those decisions can never be taken back, no matter what science ends up saying.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Baseball at 20:43

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

Wednesday, November 9, 2005

### **Jayson Stark, stathead?**

A quick link this morning to Jayson Stark, who complains that Johan Santana was the best pitcher in the AL this year but got beat by Bartolo Colon because Colon had a gaudy win total. We're getting there statheads, little by little.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Baseball at 06:25

Sunday, November 6, 2005

### Gilberts, rugby, and Uruguayan rookies

The "game of the night" last night didn't turn out so well, as Dallas blew out San Antonio. I must've been on to something, though, because Andrew Bogut and the Bucks beat the Shaq-less Heatians. Finally, the Hawks-Blazers game finished as close to a tie as possible: Portland took the contest by a single point. I'm sure it was less exciting than it sounds.

Orlando hasn't won in three tries and Washington hasn't loss in the same number after last night's matchup. Orlando stayed close for a while, winning the first half by two, but the Magic scored just 37 points after the break. The Wizards got their usual performance: 53 points from Gilbert Arenas (the coolest man to ever hold the name "Gilbert") and Antawn Jamison and just 34 from everyone else. Keeping the Magic to just 31% shooting, though, enabled them to please the home crowd.

Detroit killed Toronto. What else is new? The Pistons were up by 16 after the first quarter and the Raptors never scored more than 22 points in a period. Seven Pistons scored in double digits, with Tayshaun Prince dropping a game-high 27. Darko even got 16 minutes of run, which is the surest sign (though lessening) of a blowout. The Nets nudged the Bulls by a point in what was apparently a closely whistled game. Tyson Chandler and Mike Sweetney each fouled out for the Bulls and Jason Collins and Nenad Krstic had to take early seats for New Jersey. Krstic, by the way, looks like he's developing into the kind of solid player that wouldn't drag down a championship team if he were the starting center. That's not to say that the Nets have a championship team, but they might be better than I've been giving them credit for inside my head.

Last night was emblematic of what they can get offensively when they're on: seventeen from Krstic; Jefferson putting up 28-13-7; Carter going for 28-12 (though it took him 27 shots to get there); and Jason Kidd tossing in a 10-11-11 tripdub with three steals for good measure.

Neither Carter nor Kidd shot well, though, which probably explains why such superficially impressive numbers resulted in just a one point win.

Charlotte and Boston played the least impressive overtime ever, with the Bobcats coming out on top by winning the final period by a count of 4-2. Ouch. Six combined points in five minutes? One offensive goaltending, one offensive foul, two missed free throws, two jump balls, and about 32 missed three-pointers resulted in that ugly result. Must've been fun for the fans in attendance, though. Who knew they were getting a rugby match?

Al Jefferson, who Bostonians are apparently supposed to be really excited about, did score 12 points off the bench, but he also committed five fouls in just 19 minutes, so he might have some things to work on.

Philadelphia tipped Indiana by two despite losing the fourth quarter by ten points. That's the definition of a comeback falling just short, isn't it? Every Philly starter scored at least 13 points, though that's partially an effect of the bench playing a combined 37 minutes. Consider that a team has 240 player-minutes to divvy up amongst is 12 players and realize that seven of them (58% of the roster) accounted for just 15% of the minutes. Now, obviously the minutes distribution does not result in each player getting 20 minutes of game time (the flat distribution), but that low percentage seems pretty remarkable.

Part of the problem is that Samuel Dalembert is still hurt but on the active roster. The other part is that the bench sucks. Cleveland's not going to be called a title contender if it loses regularly to mediocre teams like Memphis. I wouldn't expect a repeat of this, though, because even bad defensive teams can't be expected to have the other team shoot 57.6% from the floor and 11-18 from three-point range. LeBron scored 36, but Pau Gasol's efficiency (29 points on just 15 shots) takes star-of-the-game honors.

The Mavs, as I mentioned, blew out the Spurs, and they did it with defense. San Antonio scored just 84 points, shot 41%, and committed 18 turnovers. Dirk Nowitzki scored 34, but I'm most impressed with Devin Harris's 8-8 shooting off the bench.

New Orleans managed to beat Houston, which you just don't see happening if Tracy McGrady is around. Yao made just eight of his 22 shots, though he added fourteen boards and seven (!) blocks. Some people will probably say that Yao should be blocking seven shots every night, given his height, but those are the same people who won't be happy until Yao is averaging 35-18-7-7 for the next six years. It's not going to happen. He can, however, be the second-best player on a championship team, and those guys, especially centers, are hard to find.

I should give a little love to the Hornets. After all, they won the game. But c'mon, who's there to talk about? PJ Brown

grabbed thirteen rebounds. What's new? The hype about how many people bought season tickets in Oklahoma City is incredible. I hope they don't get disappointed when they actually watch this team, though.

Miami played a seven-man rotation, which is sensible when you consider that, aside from James Posey, who's hurt, the Miami benchies who couldn't get into the game are Earl "Warren" Barron, Wayne "State" Simien, Matt Walsh, and Dorell "Toothpaste" Wright. That's a championship-caliber team? If Miami has one more injury, they might have to sign Jeb Bush to run a wing position.

Andrei Kirilenko didn't disappoint me in the non-scoring categories, blocking four shots, grabbing fourteen rebounds, and passing out six assists, but Shawn Marion and others held him to just 4-15 shooting. Jerry Sloan has to take a moral victory out of this, though, because it's an accomplishment to hold the Suns under 100 points, even in their re-constituted form.

Atlanta's loss to Portland has to be laid at the feet of starting power forward Esteban Batista, a 6'10" rookie from Uruguay. Batista shot 0-1 in fifteen minutes, and if he'd only made that shot, the Hawks would have won by a point instead of losing by that margin.

The Clippers are the best team in LA! How did this happen? They're 3-0 after beating Minnesota in overtime. Elton Brand and Cat Mobley scored 27 apiece, helping to overcome Sam Cassell's poor shooting, not to mention KG's 25 and 15 night.

KG is automatic for those numbers just about every night. Problem is, the rest of this team is also automatic to back him up with 1-6 shooting nights (Eddie Griffin and Wally Szczerbiak last night), no help on the boards (the Clips out-boarded the Wolves by nine), and empty minutes (Mark Madsen getting 14 ticks and putting up these numbers: 1-1 shooting, 0-2 free throws, one steal, two fouls. Yes, that's it).

Just three games tonight, probably because it's still football season. The Warriors have already beaten the Knicks by two. The other games are a Nugs-Lakers rematch in LA and a Kings-Suns matchup in Phoenix. I'll take the Nuggets in the former game, though it'll be close, and the Suns in the latter. It might be close if it were in Sac-town, but ... well, it's not.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Basketball at 18:59

### **A quick note on Baron Davis**

Walt "Clyde" Frazier just mentioned before the Knicks-Warriors telecast (ok, not "just" because I'm watching it delayed, but whatever) that Baron Davis is 6'3". Please! I know he's officially listed at that height, but if Teen Wolf has two inches on Derek Fisher and an inch on Stephon Marbury, then I'm listing myself at 5'11" from now on.

....

Of course, that's not funny if you've never met me. My license lists me at 5'8", and I think I probably carry myself a little shorter than that.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Basketball at 18:53

Saturday, November 5, 2005

### Friday's NBA - Miller = Korver

Friday night's NBA action had twenty teams going at it. I watched a few of the games (Jersey beating Toronto; San Antonio blowing out Cleveland; and the overtime game between Seattle and Minnesota), but only intermittently. I don't really have any observations from my eyes, though some things might come up as I peruse the box scores.

Orlando fell to 0-2 as Memphis took them out. Eddie Jones jacked up ten threes and knocked down five of them, leading to a game-high 25 points. Mike Miller strikes me as worthless. He's a guy who's not valuable if he's not scoring, and it never seems like he's scoring. He did grab eight boards in this game, but that's not going to happen every night.

On the other side, Dwight Howard's five boards, and five fouls are disappointing, but, despite the apparently foul trouble, he played 34 minutes and scored 16 points on just ten shots. I'm curious how tall he'll end up being: he's listed at 6-11 now, but it's not unheard of for high school draftees to add an inch or two their first or second year in the league. Philadelphia dropped to 0-3, and what I've seen of them hasn't been pretty. Charlotte smoked them by 17 in Philly. The teams were remarkably consistent from quarter to quarter: the scores were 26-22, 26-22, 27-22, and 31-27, and the last quarter was probably pumped up a bit by the usual defense-less garbage-time play.

Kyle Korver, as much as I love watching him play, is the new Mike Miller. He has to score to be effective and in this game he played 26 minutes and shot 0-5, missing his only free throw attempt. Richard Jefferson had one of those nights you sometimes think he should put up every night: 35 points (on just 17 shots!), eleven boards, five assists, and a steal. He did commit five turnovers, but the total package is quite nice. Out of respect for the delicate sensibilities of my readership, I won't talk about the Raptors. Detroit beat Boston by one with, from what I saw on the replays, an incredible finish with Rip Hamilton hitting a jumper as time expired. You wouldn't be accused of unreasonableness if you asked why the game came down to this, given that the Celtics are by no stretch on the level of the Pistons. Part of it is that Chauncey Billups and Rasheed Wallace shot just 3-15 and 4-13, respectively, and part is that Rip turned the ball over eight times.

The teams shot exactly the same percentage (39.5%), the Celtics had one fewer turnover, one fewer foul, two more rebounds, and made two more free throws. That's what you call evenly matched, and the Celtics have to feel bad about losing because they were up by one with less than a second left and won (slightly) a bunch of statistical categories. The quarter-scores in the Washington-New York game are a little bizarre: the Wiz doubled up the Knicks in the first twelve minutes, 32-16; the teams combined for just 30 points in the second, as the Knicks won it 19-11; the Knicks continued their strong play in the third, winning it 26-18, sending the game to the final period all knotted up; but the Knicks managed just 14 points in the fourth, so they lost by eleven.

No Knick broke 20 points, with only Marbury (19) coming close. Also, it appears that Caron Butler is hurt (I didn't know that) because he's not in the Wizard box score. As I said above, San Antonio blew out Cleveland. The Cavs scored 17, 17, and 14 points in the final three quarters after winning the first period 28-25. The third period was particularly egregious, as the Spurs scored 32 in that frame. LeBron James, despite playing 37 minutes, scored just 20 points with six rebounds and four assists. That's suprisingly mediocre, even accounting for the fact that Bruce Bowen was draped all over him all game.

San Antonio reaped the benefits of blowing the opposition out, as no player was on the floor for more than 30 minutes. The scoring was accordingly well-distributed, with Tim Duncan taking the team-high with 21 points and every player on the active roster knocking in at least one shot. That's right, even Nazr Mohammed and Beno Udrih added some points to their resumes.

Denver smoked Portland by 39 as the Nugs finally took home a victory. This may've been a little bit of a statement game, trying to alleviate some of the concerns their first two contests gave rise to. On the other hand, maybe it's just because George Karl came back and threatened to cut off their balls if they didn't go out and take care of business.

Marcus Camby was the star of the game, shooting a ridiculous 11-14, adding 17 rebounds and six blocks, all while turning the ball over just once and committing only a single foul. With the four other starters the Nugs have, any offense they get from Camby is essentially gravy. When they get a game-leading performance from him, that's way more than gravy, that's an apple and asparagus reduction.

The Jazz and Warriors are both minor rooting interests of mine, mostly because of a single player on each team: Troy Murphy single-handedly carried my awesome fantasy team a couple years ago; and my love for Andrei Kirilenko is

well-documented. Utah came out ahead in this one, winning by six.

Kirilenko didn't have a great numbers game (eleven points, six rebounds, four turnovers), but Troy Murphy and Mike Dunleavy, who I assume he had some hand in guarding, shot a combined 6-22. Murphy tried to carry the Warriors at the foul stripe, getting their fourteen times. He also fouled out. That's a funny combination: bad shooting, lots of free throws, lots of fouls.

Dunleavy, by the way, jacked up eight threes. I don't think he can be successful doing that. He's a skinny little man, sure, so he may not be able to hack it inside, but he's got to use his versatility and height inside to a greater extent than this shot-record (and his lack of rebounds) shows.

The least televisable game of the night involved the Clippers and the Hawks. I'll give you two guesses to figure out who won.

James Singleton, a 24-year old rookie for the Clips (yes, I had to look him up because I didn't know his first name or anything else about him) had the game of the night, scoring thirteen and adding thirteen rebounds (seven offensive!) in 29 minutes off the bench.

Seattle has to be happy that they escaped with an overtime win against the T'Wolves because Ray Allen missed ten threes. The key may have been keeping Kevin Garnett off the boards: he only grabbed seven rebounds. Hell, Danny Fortson out-rebounded him despite playing 22 fewer minutes.

Tonight's top game is San Antonio at Dallas. In other games, Andrew Bogut has to be thrilled that Shaq hurt his ankle as Miami goes to Milwaukee without their big man available. Phoenix at Utah is a mismatch, but the Kirilenko-Marion matchup, assuming they guard each other, could be fascinating.

Worst game of the night is Atlanta at Portland. David Stern might show up and declare a tie just to spare those nice Oregonians of what's about to ensue.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Basketball at 21:08

### More Dodger front office news

Jon Weisman at Dodger Thoughts points to an article in the Dallas Morning News that says that Orel Hershiser will be headed to Los Angeles for a front office job. The speculation in the comments is that Kim Ng will be promoted to GM with Hershiser as the Asst. This would be odd, to say the least, because Ng isn't like John Hart was in Texas, warming the seat for the younger up-and-comer: Ng is, I believe, younger than Hershiser, and has never been a GM (though she's a long-time assistant with a number of teams), so the idea of her mentoring the older neophyte is odd.

Also, I'd like to see Ng just get a clean shot at a job, because from the interviews and profiles I've read with and about her, she seems smart and capable. Which is not to say that Hershiser isn't smart and capable, but for a lot of reasons, including glass ceiling ones, I'm more interested in seeing Ng in the top spot.

One of the other reasons I don't want to see Hershiser moving up to the front office is because the general opinion is that he's done a good job as the pitching coach in Texas. I could do something fun and empirical here, and show you a table, but I don't think I will. I can say that from a quick browse through the stats, I think Hershiser isn't another Mazzone.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Baseball at 09:29

Friday, November 4, 2005

### **Aw, does your ankle hurt?**

There were just two games played in the NBA last night. There was big news out of one of them, and a little disappointment in the other.

Shaq came out of the game after 29 minutes played with an ankle injury. ESPN is now saying that he'll be out 2-4 weeks. I'm not big on feeling happy about guys getting hurt, but I don't know how sorry I feel for Shaq "I'm Unfamiliar With That Name" O'Neal. Anyway, Miami will of course need Dwyane Wade and Antoine Walker to step up. Wade's probably a given to drop 30 a night until Shaq comes back, but I wonder whether Walker can help carry the team. He's only 29, but he looks like an old man out there sometimes. Even if Walker steps up, it'll be interesting to see how he handles stepping back down again when Shaq comes back.

Meanwhile, Miami out-scored Indiana by eight in the fourth quarter, but still came up short, losing by three. Jason Williams's 1-8 effort, with just two assists, didn't help matters for the Heatians. The disappointment came as the Suns beat the Lakers by ten. As Phil Jackson said, the Suns are a better team than the Lakers right now, but regardless of expectation, a loss is always disappointing. Anyway, Mamba (see Bill Simmons for the story) Bryant scored 39, Smush Parker added 21, and Lamar Odom had a great game, with 23 and 16 rebounds. Three good offensive games, but the team couldn't stop anybody. The Suns had six guys in double figures, including the immortal Eddie House. When you let Eddie House score 10 points in nine minutes, you're probably not going to win.

I did like the starting lineup for the Lakers, though. With Shawn Marion playing the power forward for the Suns, there's a greater need for the opposing team to play a lineup with speed and length than one with big bodies. Thus, Devean George started at small forward, pushing Lamar Odom to the power forward spot; compare to the night before, when Chris Mihm started at the four and Odom was the three.

The Lakers don't have the talent to force the other team to react to them. It's easy to start Karl Malone at the power forward and say, "You adjust to us" but when you're talking about Chris Mihm, you've got to be a little more creative. It's good to see that necessary mixing-and-matching early.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Basketball, L.A. Lakers at 14:31

Thursday, November 3, 2005

### Tampa Bay's front office

I'm extremely intrigued by the Tampa Bay front-office situation. They've decided to promote from within, naming Andrew Friedman, who's just 28, to the top spot while hiring Gerry Hunsicker to serve as his number two. Hunsicker certainly showed himself capable as a GM of the Astros for many years, he seems to be happy with a subsidiary role, and the Rays' new principal owner apparently thinks highly of Friedman, so it could be an interesting tag-team.

Friedman's a finance guy who spent five years working in that industry after graduating from Tulane, where had a baseball scholarship before injuries cut him down. That's an interesting background, because a lot of the focus on the up-and-coming young GMs is on the guys with the Ivy League credentials, the MBAs and JDs, so it's interesting to see a guy who didn't go to what I like to call Entitlement U get a shot.

Matthew Silverman, the team's president, was apparently instrumental in bringing this about. Silverman is just 29, has an economics degree from Harvard, has worked for Goldman Sachs, and was apparently heavily involved in the purchase of the team by Stuart Sternberg.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Baseball at 16:56

### Notes from the NBA boxscores

Basketball season is underway, and baseball is in hibernation as the winter hasn't really started yet (at least for the guys on the field; the manager / GM action is going hot and heavy).

I haven't watched last night's games yet: they're on the DVR at home, but I can take a quick run through the box scores. I'm a stats guy anyway.

LeBron James had himself an interesting night: he was very efficient, scoring 31 points on just sixteen shots, which is incredible, but he managed just three rebounds and four assists. He did get two steals, though. Still, isn't Bron-Bron supposed to average a triple-double at some point? The Cavs beat the Hornets by 22, so you can't complain too much, though.

Welcome back, Ron Artest. Problem is, he forgot how to shoot: just 4-14 last night. Also, just three rebounds in 40 minutes. The Pacers won 90-78 over the Magic, though, and no one for either team managed to reach twenty points, ten rebounds, or eight assists.

Washington won in Toronto by three, which is a disappointingly small margin, given the Raptors' atrociousness. Caron Butler had the kind of game that makes people wonder whether he's stagnated at the same time as showing his "all-around player" potential: 29 minutes off the bench, 3-10 shooting, though with seven rebounds and five assists. Boston beat New York in overtime ... by fourteen. How do you lose by fourteen in overtime? It's a miracle the Knicks even got to overtime, though, with Jamal Crawford shooting 3-11 off the bench while Stephon Marbury and Eddy Curry combined to miss fourteen free throws. The Celtics played a short rotation, with Al Jefferson's 13 minutes off the bench registering as the team high. Also, the way to stop Paul Pierce is not to send him to the line 24 times.

The Bucks are 2-0 after they beat New Jersey by fourteen. Andrew Bogut grabbed 17 rebounds, eight offensive (but shot just 4-13), Michael Redd dropped 41, and Maurice Williams scored 23 in just 28 minutes off the bench. The Nets countered with all five starters in double digits but a total of just 15 points off the bench.

Detroit beat Philly, so the Sixers are 0-2. I'm sure Allen Iverson's displeasure with the dress code has everything to do with it. The fact that Chris Webber got to the line just three times shows his devolution into an outside player. He's not worth the money or players the team paid for him if he's a jump shooter. It was more of the same for the Pistons, though: Ben Wallace rebounds the ball (10), Chauncey Billups runs the show (10 assists), Rip Hamilton works that mid-range game (37 points, no threes attempted), and Darko rots on the bench (nine minutes played despite a 20-point victory).

Boy, that Sebastian Telfair really fills up the stat sheet, doesn't he? Thirty-four minutes, five points, two rebounds, three assists, three turnovers? That's remarkable. You can't put up a line like that by accident. Meanwhile, in the same game, what's happened to Troy Hudson? He's getting DNP-Coach's Decision now? He was overrated based on lighting up the Lakers a few years ago, but is Richie Frahm really playing over him? Who the hell's Richie Frahm? Whoever he is, he was tied with Kevin Garnett as the Wolves' leading scorer last night.

Shaq only had to play 28 minutes against the Grizzlies, partly because Dwyane Wade and Antoine Walker combined for 48 points and 26 rebounds. Pau Gasol, who I love, scored 26 points and grabbed 12 rebounds, but got no support. It's

not entirely clear to me who he should have expected support to come from, either. Is Shane Battier supposed to score eighteen a night? I like Battier, but that's not his game.

The Bobcats took the Bulls to overtime but were sunk by Chicago's team-wide effort. The Bulls had seven players in double digits. It took Ben Gordon 18 shots to get his 14 points, but Chris Duhon filled the gap: 18 points on nine shots, ten rebounds, and twelve assists. Duhon's on pace for 82 triple-doubles this year.

Sacramento is 0-2 after Yao Ming dropped 22/10 in just 25 minutes (foul trouble, it seems: he finished with five) and Jon Barry scored 24 off the bench. Peja and Bibby sunk the Kings, shooting a combined 5-24.

Utah beat Dallas by ten, which is a little bit stunning. My absolute favorite non-Laker in the league, Andrei Kirilenko, did his usual damage, grabbing ten rebounds, dishing five assists, and blocking six shots. He only scored seven points, because he shot 2-10, but can we recognize how ridiculous it is for a 6-9 small forward to regularly put up four-, five-, and eight-block games? I like Mehmet Okur a lot. He's my kind of player. The Jazz shouldn't count on him to keep scoring 27 per game, though.

The Clips knocked out Seattle by scoring 37 in the fourth quarter to the Sonics' 18. Sam Cassell went for 35 and still managed to dish out 11 assists.

Golden State went nuts on the Hawks, 122-97. I'm not sure what to make of this. The Hawks are bad. They're awful. But doesn't winning by 25 still mean something? The Warriors shot 58%, helped out by Troy Murphy's 8-8 and Mickael Pietrus's 6-9 showings.

Finally, the Lakers beat the Nugs in overtime. I may have more to say after I watch it, but from the box score, Lamar Odom was awful, shooting 2-13; no team should ever be putting Chris Mihm on the free-throw line ten times; and how in the hell did Andrew Bynum get six minutes of run while Slava Medvedenko got squat? Slava can't really guard real centers, but who were the Nugs throwing out there as big men? Marcus Camby, Eduardo Najera, Francisco Elson. Slava can't guard these guys? Bynum did block two shots, though. Final note: if you let Smush Parker score 20 points despite not focusing on Kobe enough to keep him under 30, you're going to lose.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Basketball at 16:08

Wednesday, November 2, 2005

### **Witasick, Hatteberg, and a hitting coach**

The Oakland news of the day is that Jay Witasick will be back for two years, apparently at just \$2.75M total. That strikes me as a really nice deal. Witasick's been a very nice reliever since about 2001, he'll be 33 and 34 in this contract and he'll likely continue to be very tradeable in case some cheaper youngsters need a space on the team or something. If he were traded, by the way, it'd be for the seventh time in his career. He's been traded for Todd Stottlemyre, Brian Meadows, D'Angelo Jimenez, and John Vander Wal in the past.

(Ken Arneson isn't so happy with the deal. This post by Ken elaborates on the deal and expresses displeasure with the fact that it's too guaranteed years.)

In other news, to no one's surprise, Scott Hatteberg's option was declined. I'd like the A's to convince him to hang it up now and join the front office because there's just no room for a first baseman who can't crack a .400 slugging percentage. He had a better year than anyone could ever have hoped for in 2002, and he's become something of an A's institution, but he's exhausted his utility to the team on the field.

(Ken, same article as the second one above, feels the same way.)

Finally, Gerald Perry has been named the A's hitting coach. Perry spent 13 seasons in the majors with Atlanta, Kansas City, and St. Louis as a first baseman and occasional outfielder. He hit .265 for his career with a mediocre walk rate and very little power, though he was an All Star in 1988. Perry was apparently the Pittsburgh hitting coach last season, so the Pennsylvania connections continue with the team (maybe Macha really pushed for him?).

(Ken, once more, elaborates on Perry, noting that he was the Mariners hitting coach a few years ago, and also got into a fight with Dave Duncan once.)

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Baseball, Oakland A's at 21:08