

Friday, December 21, 2007

Clemens's Lawyer

Roger Clemens's lawyer says, "Roger Clemens did not take steroids, and anybody who says he did had better start looking for a hell of a good lawyer." I'd advise Roger Clemens himself to also look for a good lawyer, considering that this one likely hasn't read the "public figure" portion of his defamation law casebook in a while. It's one thing to accuse reporters of getting the story wrong. It's a whole other thing to accuse them of having actual malice toward Clemens in reporting the stories.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Baseball at 06:39

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?

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

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

Friday, December 14, 2007

Nontenders update

Well, forget most of what I said yesterday. Kiko Calero is back, having signed a one-year deal with the A's.

I don't have much to say, so here's some former-A's news: Chris Snelling will make \$450k this year with the Phillies. At that price, I wish the A's had managed to keep him, because it almost doesn't matter if he gets hurt.

In non-former-A's-but-related-to-former-A's news, Adam Everett, nontendered yesterday by the Astros, has signed with the Twins. Minnesota really loves these crappy infielders, don't they? Years of Cristian Guzman and Luis Rivas, and they still haven't had enough. Anyway, since Everett isn't back with the Astros, does this mean Miguel Tejada really will be playing shortstop?

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Oakland A's at 09:41

Thursday, December 13, 2007

Maybe Mr. T is pretty handy with computers!

Has that occurred to you, Mr. Condescending Director?

I love this World of Warcraft ad.

Click.

Shut up, fool!

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Television at 22:19

Cust and PEDs

I am utterly heartbroken to discover that Jack Cust's name is in the just-released Mitchell Report.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Oakland A's at 15:19

Nontenders galore, including Kiko Calero

As anticipated, the A's have nontendered Kiko Calero. This isn't as meaningful as it once was, with the abolishing of the "no resigning until May 1" rule, but after last year's terrible season and Calero's age (33 this year), I wouldn't be surprised to find him in another uniform next year. Even without Calero and with Justin Duchscherer moving to the rotation, the A's will have a number of guys vying for bullpen spots this year: Dallas Braden, Alan Embree, Huston Street, Jay Marshall, Santiago Casilla, Andrew Brown, Dan Meyer, and Jerry Blevins all come to mind, and that's without whatever minor league signings Beane makes in the next few months, or trades, or what have you. The A's also still have six starters (Harden, Haren, Blanton, Gaudin, DiNardo, Duchscherer), so it's likely one of them (DiNardo's my bet) will be in the 'pen for the two weeks or whatever that Rich Harden is healthy this year.

With the exception of Harden and Duchscherer, though, that's a pretty durable collection of starters (Blanton, Haren, and Gaudin all made 34 starts last year), so while Meyer and Braden could ostensibly see some time in the rotation, it hopefully won't be all that necessary.

Here are some other big names on the nontender list: Mark Prior (is a Frank Thomas-style deal in the offing? (not necessarily with the A's)); Johnny Estrada (odd, because the Mets just traded for him, but maybe not completely odd, because they also acquired Brian Schneider); Aki Otsuka (really good the last three years, but he's 36 already); Josh Towers (31 and has suffered through two terrible years after a wonderful 2005); Brendan Donnelly (still chugging along as a better-than-league-average reliever, but he's also 36); Dallas McPherson (never really got an opportunity to play, but also never cracked a .300 OBP); Mark Hendrickson (he's tall); Miguel Olivo (the outcry on some A's message boards when he was traded was amazing -- people had fallen in love with his 100 mph arm and forgotten that he can't hit a lick); Adam Everett (clearing the way for Miguel Tejada to play short?); and Nook Logan (one of the best names in baseball).

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Oakland A's at 09:35

Wednesday, December 12, 2007

Tejada finally traded

Lee Sinins just sent an email alert that Miguel Tejada has been traded to the Astros for Luke Scott plus four dudes I haven't heard of (which doesn't mean they're not good, just that I haven't heard of them). Five players seems like quite a haul for a guy who (a) couldn't crack a .450 slugging last year; (b) will have to play third base; (c) has been linked to PED's (and the trade comes on the eve of the Mitchell Report's release!).

Tejada's numbers took a nosedive last year, and he also was hurt for the first time in his career. That said, his OPS+ was still 109, and I think there's a good chance he'll bounce back this year, even at 32. I doubt he'll ever crack a neutral .500 SLG again, even in the Juicebox, but he remains a high-contact hitter and a workout freak. But is he a clear upgrade over Mike Lamb? Lamb's averaged basically 295/363/460 the last two years. Isn't that basically what you're going to get out of Tejada? And the Astros gave up a right-fielder with an 850 OPS to get this?

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Baseball at 14:21

Monday, December 10, 2007

Trans-Siberian Christmas House

If you watch sports on TV as much as I do, you've seen the Miller Lite ad starring the Trans-Siberian Orchestra already. To my delight, I discovered that the tremendous song is featured in a full-length video in which it is synchronized to the Christmas lights of a house.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Music at 19:47

Yet another A's minor leaguer suspended for PED

See here.

Also, yet another player for whom the drugs didn't work: 223/269/409 as a 23-year-old in A-ball. (I guess that isolated power is pretty good.)

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Baseball at 19:34

The Mike Vick Redemption Story (in two years)

Keyshawn Johnson just beat me to it, but is there any reason why, if Mike Vick comes back, he shouldn't come back as a running back, wide receiver, cornerback, or even linebacker? (He'd obviously have to bulk up in prison to do the latter.) Defense might be wasting his ridiculous moves, and to a certain extent the same could be said about wide receiver. But running back? Particularly as a running back who could throw the ball at any moment? Why not?

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Football at 19:09

Crack sentencing

On the SCOTUSblog this morning came the news that the Supreme Court isn't 100% evil after all (as John McEnroe might say). Instead, they've decided that judges are permitted to give below-Guidelines sentences to those sentenced for crack-related crimes, and are permitted to take into account the large disparity between crack sentences and powder cocaine sentences when deciding the sentence. The Fourth Circuit had held that "a sentence 'outside the guidelines range is per se unreasonable when it is based on a disagreement with the sentencing disparity for crack and powder cocaine offenses.'"

At the same time that I'm glad, substantively, about this decision, I can't help but agree with Justice Thomas that this whole sentencing thing, post-Booker, is turning into a quagmire to rival some of the Brennan-Court criminal procedure issues a generation ago.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Law at 14:16

Saturday, December 8, 2007

The Rock

EPIC ROCK. It is on.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Music at 18:29