

Sunday, March 23, 2008

Perotto's Sunday roundup, and some musings on Jack Hannahan

John Perotto reports today: "Juan Pierre is looking like the odd man out in the Dodgers' outfield, as he has been outplayed by Andre Ethier and Matt Kemp, who are likely to play on the corners, flanking center fielder Andruw Jones." There is justice in the world!

Also, "The Yankees recently kicked the tires on Oakland pitchers Rich Harden and Joe Blanton, but decided instead that they are satisfied with their starting rotation of Chien-Ming Wang, Andy Pettitte, Philip Hughes, Ian Kennedy, and Mike Mussina to abandon pursuit, while also deciding to leave Joba Chamberlain in the bullpen." There's been quite a bit of talk about how the Yankees have so much pitching depth, etc. etc. etc. Clearly, though, they realize, rightly, that the depth is likely illusory. Pettite and Mussina have had their injury and performance troubles, and Hughes, Kennedy, and Joba could all be pushing up against new highs in innings pitched, so New York would be smart to keep its eyes on who's available in the starting pitching market.

This is wrecking numerous fantasy teams: "The Rays are likely to send top third base prospect Evan Longoria to the minor leagues, in order to keep his arbitration and free agency clocks from starting." It also might well be a terrible decision from the standpoint of keeping your players happy. What's the difference in salary that Longoria is looking at here? \$300,000 at the major league level vs. what if he's in the minors? Not to mention the fact that he'll hit free agency and arbitration later. Obviously, from a pure numbers standpoint, it's a good move for the Rays, but people aren't numbers, as much as we might like to treat baseball players that way. Furthermore, the Rays might actually be competitive this year, and Longoria is probably the best option at third base. (Willy Aybar apparently would get the spot if Longoria is in the minors.)

Finally, it looks like Josh Fields is headed back to AAA as well, which also may annoy some fantasy owners. Joe Crede's PECOTA projection for the year: 249/306/422. Fields? 253/333/468. By WARP, that works out to about a win and a half. Crede's got a rep as a solid major league third baseman, despite that awful projection, so there must be someone out there who'd give up something to get him, right? Wouldn't this be a win-win for the Sox?

In fact, I was just about to suggest that the A's consider Crede, given that Eric Chavez is apparently not going to start the year with the team and Jack Hannahan is ... well, he's Jack Hannahan. Then I looked at Hannahan's PECOTA: 253/351/425. It's not much power, but you have to like that on-base ability, which is precisely what Crede doesn't have. WARP-wise, Hannahan is about even with Fields. Interestingly, past player comments in the BP books indicate that Hannahan has a "Rolenesque" glove, and that his bat is the problem. Given that very adequate hitting projection, I'd be all for sending Eric Chavez on his merry way (the Dodgers need another injured third baseman, don't they?) as soon as they can get something decent for him. I'd miss him, because he's one of my favorite A's, but as far as the talent on the field and the talent in the minor-league system, I can't really say the team needs him.

I was going to make a snide comment about how the A's ripped the Tigers off for Hannahan, but then I looked at Jason Perry's numbers. (Perry's the guy the A's sent to Detroit for Hannahan.) As a 26-year-old outfielder last year, he hit 268/367/521 in Sacramento in 333 plate appearances. He fell apart in Toledo after the trade, but it was only 58 PA's. He's basically a nice extra outfielder to have around, the same way Hannahan is a nice extra infielder. Perry would be an interesting guy to pair with Marcus Thames as an extra outfielder in Detroit, given that Thames is all-power, no-on-base, while Perry is the opposite. Plus Perry has to be better than Jacque Jones, right?

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Baseball, Oakland A's at 13:32

Sunday, March 16, 2008

Japan is silly; four cuts by the A's

Four more cuts by the A's: Jerry Blevins, Kirk Saarloos, Matt LeCroy, and Henry Rodriguez. Rodriguez is the guy with a future, the name everyone's buzzing about, as his fastball apparently touches triple figures at times. But let's not get crazy: the guy is 21, he's got two professional American seasons under his belt, and he walked 58 hitters in basically 100 innings last year. He also hit four and threw 13 wild pitches, so I think it's safe to say he hasn't really harnessed his stuff yet. Of course, maybe we can get a tiny bit crazy about 106 strikeouts in those 100 innings and just two homers allowed. It is the low minors, so guys tend to not have a ton of power yet, but a homer every fifty innings is something either way.

LeCroy wasn't going to make the team once it became clear that Mike Sweeney was going to have a hell of a spring. LeCroy brings that nice 3rd catcher vibe, but that's not really necessary, is it? Better to have an actual hitter, and I think Sweeney can more closely approximate one of those than LeCroy at this point.

Saarloos was a long shot to make the team, what with Joe Blanton, Rich Harden, Justin Duchscherer, and Chad Gaudin ahead of him in the rotation. And then there's Dana Eveland and Lenny DiNardo, and even ol' Dallas Braden. I guess his best shot was probably as a long man, but you have to figure that spot belongs to either Eveland or DiNardo, probably the latter. This is not even to mention the fact Saarloos had an ERA over seven last year.

Jerry Blevins I'm a little more surprised about. He had an excellent minor league season last year, making four stops across three levels while racking up these numbers: 77 1/3 innings, three homers, 18 walks, and 102 whiffs. There's a lot to like in that line. That said, he's 24 and he's got a total of 2 2/3 innings in his career at AAA, so I guess it won't really hurt to let him sit down in Sacramento this year and be the A's eighth or ninth bullpen guy, called up if they need him. But I'm not sure I see seven or eight guys ahead of him: Huston Street, Alan Embree, Andrew Brown, Sandy Casilla, and Joey Devine are, I suppose, locks. Keith Foulke? Sure. So that's six, which explains why Blevins is out. I guess I'm just surprised he didn't last 'til the very end, at least to push Foulke. Then again, as I keep forgetting, we're basically at the very end already because of this silly Japan trip. The Red Sox games aren't until the 25th and 26th, but there are a couple of exhibitions lined up for the 22nd, and there are travel days, all of which add up to just three days of regular Arizona spring training left for the A's.

Have I mentioned already how silly this Japan thing is? The A's are going to go over there and play two regular season games, and then come back and have another exhibition series? (The Bay Bridge series that closes the exhibition season every year against the Giants.) And then play two more at home against Boston? For what? To try to drum up interest in baseball in Japan? Hey, Bud Selig! The Japanese already like baseball! And look, this is just me as an A's fan complaining. At least the A's have nothing to really play for this year (or at least that's what everyone says). What if you're the Red Sox? Doesn't this suck, this throwing off of your entire schedule? Aren't you in contention for another championship? Why do you get shafted? I guess it wouldn't have been right to have an A's-Royals series in Japan to start the season, but in some ways, that makes a hell of a lot more sense than sending the champs off on a glorified barnstorming tour. (Which baseball outlawed decades ago!)

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Oakland A's at 16:28

Doug Davis is a geek: excellent!

In John Perotto's most recent Every Given Sunday column at BP, he quotes Doug Davis saying this after facing the A's Dana Eveland in a spring training game: "That doesn't help my WHIP. The walks, I hate them. It's kind of typical Doug Davis, I guess you could say. At the same time, I want to reverse that, especially when my young padawan on the other side is out there throwing strikes."

Yes, that's right, Doug Davis just called Dana Eveland his padawan. Doug Davis is a huge geek. That's awesome.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Baseball at 14:07

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Saturday, March 15, 2008

Chavez, Gonzalez to stay in the U.S.

Excellent news from Susan Slusser: Carlos Gonzalez and Eric Chavez aren't going to Japan. On the former, this is good because I'm worried the A's will blow one of their cheap years of Gonzalez trotting him out to center or right every day while the team struggles to win 75 games. On the latter, I was worried that Chavez was going to forego three days of treatment to DH in Japan when there are better DH options available and the A's are likely better served if he can get back on the field, where his glove can do damage to the other team, at full strength closer to the start of the (American) season.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Oakland A's at 22:52

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Thursday, March 13, 2008

More from Congress

Russ Feingold called recently captured arms dealer Viktor Bout "diabolical" and denounced the "unrestrained capitalism" in post-USSR Russia that allowed Bout to build his empire. Diabolical! He's not Dr. Evil, Russ! (Although I will say he probably is evil, with a lower-case "e"; Feingold mentions that he's been known to sell arms to both sides of conflicts -- I think if I were an arms dealer, I'd be more ideologically based, and just pick a side.) Most interestingly, Bout, according to Feingold, has been linked to Russian intelligence and American government contractors. That's kind of problematic.

(We interrupt this Congressional commentary to bring you this: I just received a call from "Angela at New York Sports Club". She asked me if I was enjoying my time at NYSC. I said yes. She said, "Great, thanks." That was the end of the call. Literally like 10 seconds. That's the weirdest phone survey I've ever been part of.)

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Politics at 16:41

Washington and Lee's new 3L year

The hot news in the legal blogosphere is that Washington and Lee is overhauling its third year: instead of academic courses, the entire thing will be experiential learning. This will, according to the WSJ Law Blog, include practicing keeping track of billing hours.

Let me first say congratulations to W&L for taking a big experimental step with their educational program -- it takes guts to implement something like this, and hopefully they display the same guts over the years to keep with it and really try to make it work.

That said, while the heart is in the right place on this, I'm not sure that it is going to work out for them. It strikes me that experiential learning should be incorporate all the way through. Two years of classroom instruction and then a year of, what, basically apprenticeship? All this really does is push what used to be the first year in private practice back into the law schools. That's fine, I guess, if you're trying to make the law firms happy, but in the end, you're still just throwing the students into the "actual practice" portion of things with no real preparation beforehand.

The approach I'd want to take would be more integrated. In the first year, you take Legal Research and Writing, where you're really learning the nuts and bolts of, well, legal research and writing. But that first year is also filled with the usual doctrinal classes, partially to learn doctrine, but more importantly, to learn the way lawyers talk and think about things, so that you can actually fill those lovely briefs you're learning about in LR&W with substantive, correct-sounding material. None of this is radical. In fact, none of this is a change at all from what's already done.

The key, I think, is in the later years, when there ought to be requirements that some not insubstantial portion of your credits should be of the clinical/internship/externship/etc., i.e. experiential, variety. Furthermore, upper-level classes should include semi-experiential components. That is, don't just teach for 40 hours and then make the students write an exam; instead have them file short memos on various topics throughout the semester. Don't just do your silly, unexamined version of Socratic teaching. Set up sessions where students make meaningful contributions, like through oral arguments or perhaps presentations of material.

This kind of system requires a couple of things: a willingness on the part of the professor to really engage in teaching (but see Jeff Harrison's blog on the unlikelihood that this will happen); and small classes. There were 121 people in my Evidence class. That doesn't excuse the multiple-choice exam at the end of the semester, but it does excuse not having 3-5 writing assignments throughout the semester. Regardless of your dedication to teaching, grading 600 assignments, even if you limit those to one page apiece, is a ton of work.

The fact that this model law school will require smaller classes will balance, from the law teacher's perspective, the fact that fewer doctrinal classes will be taught (because of the clinics/internships requirement). Thus the faculty size will likely need to remain about the same. What will not remain the same, however, is cost. Building clinical programs, i.e. offering free legal services, isn't cheap. It's a lot cheaper to lecture 120 students about Evidence than it is to pay court costs and things like that for indigent clients in all these new clinics that will be starting. Another issue is the big gap between (relatively) rural and urban law schools. Carbondale just doesn't have the number of people who need legal service as New York City. Of course, given the number of schools in New York, that doesn't address the right question

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-- the question is whether there are enough people in Carbondale who need Southern Illinois' legal services to justify opening three or four new clinics and expanding the already existing ones to accommodate the fact that now, every student will have to do n credits of that kind of work.

To reiterate, however: all of these difficulties will always exist for any law school that wants to update its curriculum to be more useful, to give students the kind of experiential learning opportunities that forward-thinking educators realize are necessary. Thus it is a real credit to W&L's faculty and administration that they are willing to step up and try to make something new work.

UPDATE: Here's the post about the topic at PrawfsBlawg.

UPDATE 2: Here's Law School Innovation's post.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Education, Law, Law School at 12:36

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Wednesday, March 12, 2008

Recent Congressional action, with obnoxious commentary

So GovTrack.us is an amazing site -- you can set up "alerts" for various things happening in Congress: particular congresspeople speaking or voting or introducing bills; action on particular types of bills; committee actions; and so forth. You can use their website to track these alerts, or you can set up RSS feeds. Also, they use OpenID. Anyway, I now Track our Gov. Here's some interesting stuff from the last two days, which will go partly to show just how much random, time-wasting stuff our legislature gets up to.

John Shadegg, R-AZ, introduced "Jenny's Law", which would disallow "Tier III sex offenders" from being buried in the National Cemetery or getting burial honors and whatnot. "Tier III sex offender" comes from the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act, at P.L. 109-248. III is the highest tier, and refers to sex offenders who commit offenses punishable by more than a year in prison and is "comparable to" aggravated sexual abuse or abusive sexual contact (both of which are defined federal crimes). I don't see any conceivable purpose for this bill. Then again, I'm not a believer in retributivism in criminal punishment, so I guess your view of the propriety of this kind of law depends on how you feel about the purpose of punishment.

John Salazar, D-CO, introduced this: "The Secretary of Defense may not transport hydrolysate from the Pueblo Chemical Depot, Colorado, or the Blue Grass Army Depot, Kentucky, to an off-site location for treatment, storage, or disposal." The bill is cosponsored by a Kentuckian and a fellow Coloradan. Wikipedia tells me this about hydrolysate: "Hydrolyzed collagen, HCP, also known as purified gelatin and collagen hydrolysate, is collagen that has been enzymatically or chemically processed to make it more digestible and more easily absorbed by the body. HCP is often used by body builders because it is a relatively inexpensive protein source. It is also used to treat skin disorders, treat or prevent malnutrition and for those who cannot tolerate large amounts of bulk food, such as patients of weight loss surgery." It seems that the bill may refer to VX hydrolysate, which is a neutralized form of a chemical weapon. Apparently shipping this stuff can, if it's not properly neutralized, cause a health hazard. Thus perhaps it's sensible for the Coloradans and Kentuckians to be a little worried about truckloads of VX hydrolysate making its way down their highways to be incinerated.

Tim Murphy, R-PA, wants a Resolution honoring the recently deceased Steelers announcer Myron Cope. I'm sure Myron would have appreciated that while he was alive, Mr. Murphy. (That said, maybe Congressional recognition that Myron Cope invented the Terrible Towel is entirely appropriate.)

Steve Kagan, D-WI, offers a Resolution honoring Brett Favre. Don't do it! He'll cry! And then right-wing radio hosts will make vicious jokes! But, you know, of course, the House has to "understand[]" that retirement means reoccupation, knowing that Brett Favre will now be busier than ever before as he helps to build a better future for all of us." If not for Brett Favre, who'll do it? (Oh, wait, you mean that's supposed to be Congress's job?)

The late E. Arthur Gray, former mayor Port Jervis, New York (no, it's not a port; yes, it is basically in Pennsylvania), may get a Post Office in his town named for him. The bill has passed the House.

Not to be outdone, Steve W. Allee is getting a Carrier Annex in Lebanon, Missouri named for him. If you just do a quick Google, Allee just looks like a guy who died in a car accident when he tried to drive across a flooded roadway. Turns out, though, that it was a flash flood and he was on duty at the time, delivering the mail. (Google does add something that Congress didn't, though: Allee wasn't wearing his seat belt.)

The House has passed a Resolution adopting an Office of Congressional Ethics. This passed essentially on party lines, 195 Dems and 33 Reps for, 23 and 159 against. Crossover Democrats include John Murtha, Heath Shuler, and Maxine Waters. Crossover Republicans include the aforementioned Tim Murphy and Chris Shays.

A unanimous resolution in the House congratulated Kansas for winning the Orange Bowl. Dude, you're like two months late, Congress.

This one's a little better. UCLA won the championship in women's water polo, which obviously deserves a House Resolution. (More importantly, the Resolution notes that this is UCLA's 100th NCAA championship, the most ever. Awesome. Go Bruins.)

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

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Politics at 22:06

Tuesday, March 11. 2008

Spring training pitch counts

Barry M. Bloom, for MLB.com, wrote this about Greg Smith's outing today: "Smith may be setting the pace. It was his third appearance on Tuesday and just his second start. He threw 44 pitches and was so eager when he was removed from the game that he went down to the bullpen and tossed another 16 pitches." Isn't that last sentence wrong? In modern spring trainings, guys are set to throw x pitches in a particular outing in order to keep on track to be ready for the season. If they get through a bunch of innings in fewer than that number of pitches, but the team needs to pull them in order to get other guys work as well, they head down to the bullpen and finish out their pitch allotment down there. That's what happened here, I'd assume. After all, if he was "so eager", then why 16 pitches? That's a strange number, isn't it? Well, it's not strange if you consider that his total pitch count for the day would thus be 60.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Oakland A's at 22:38

Sunday, March 9, 2008

Trade Dan Johnson!

John Perrotto reports at Baseball Prospectus that "San Francisco has interest in Oakland first baseman Dan Johnson." My god Billy, what are you waiting for? Look, if Daric Barton isn't healthy, so what? Mike Sweeney will out-hit Johnson this year, and he's right-handed. Jack Cust can DH, with an outfield of Chris Denorfia, Travis Buck, and Todd Linden. And if Barton is healthy, then great, Sweeney can start twice a week, once at DH and once at 1B, and PH once or twice more per week (for Bobby Crosby or Jack Hannahan, or Cust in a platoon situation). Oh, and if you trade Johnson, maybe Linden will stop whining about how he may not make the team. (On the other hand, do you really want to keep a guy who's whining in the middle of the spring about how he might not make the team?)

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Oakland A's at 19:08

Trey Hillman is the man

The A's almost hired this guy, but instead went with Coach Taylor Bob Geren: "I've spoken to all of our players about eliminating batting average and going to OBP," Trey Hillman said. "OBP really is the statistic that tells you what your chances are of scoring runs."

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Baseball at 19:04

Thursday, March 6, 2008

Houston still on a roll; Dirk's flagrant

Houston really picked up the Heavyweight Championship at the right time -- since winning it last Tuesday, they've still yet to lose, pounding Memphis, Denver, and Indiana in succession. They're at Dallas tonight, which might be a game, or it might be a double-digit win against a team that's lost three of its last four, the only win being over Sacramento.

Plus, Dirk Diggler won't be playing because he was suspended for body-slammng Andrei Kirilenko. To tell you the truth, after watching that video, I'm not sure it's a suspendable offense. He didn't come up around Kirilenko's head, he just caught him by the shoulder. I guess the flagrant part is that he pulled down on AK, but it's hard to tell if he was really throwing him to the ground, or if it was kind of an inevitable response to the fact that Dirk himself was off-balance and heading toward the floor himself.

The Lakers, by the way, have mostly continued winning, falling once to Portland, but beating Dallas in overtime (the game before Dirk picked up his flagrant) and then the Kings in Sacramento, when Kobe had one of those Kobe-quarters in the fourth that generated MVP chants. In ARCO Arena. Yes. L.A. remains percentage points behind San Antonio in the West (the Spurs have played two fewer games), which means that if the playoffs started today, the Lakers would have the struggling Mavs in the first round, and then, if they beat the Mavs as they should, New Orleans in the second round after the Hornets trounce the mightily slipping Suns.

2007-08 Title Bout Records:

Boston122
Houston82
Cleveland52
Milwaukee52
San Antonio73
Phoenix32
Utah32
Chicago11
L.A. Clippers11
Philadelphia11
Miami23
Washington24
Charlotte12
Chicago12
Denver12
Sacramento14
Memphis15
Dallas01
Detroit01
Orlando01
Portland01
Seattle01
Atlanta02
New York02
Indiana03
L.A. Lakers03

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Basketball at 10:42