

Saturday, July 26. 2008

The NBA gets uppity

Just a quick bit from the Sonics mess: The NBA claimed in its motion to intervene that the transfer of the franchise to a court-appointed receiver and a subsequent transfer back to Schultz would both be prohibited by the league's constitution.

The league also claimed in the motion that if a court-appointed receiver were to be appointed, the NBA's constitution allows for the league's owners to put that team "under the management and control" of Stern." (The following could be entirely wrong, but at first blush, this is what crosses my mind.)

Guess what, league's constitution? You can suck it. Does the NBA honestly think the court cares that an order to Bennett to transfer the team back to Schultz, or an order to put the team in receivership, perhaps eventually to be transferred back to Schultz (or to Bennett), would "be prohibited"? If the court finds that some contract was violated by Bennett and that the proper remedy is that Schultz should get the team (i.e. the corporate entity comprising the Sonics and the WNBA team and god knows what else) back, then what does it matter that the constitution says this shouldn't happen? You know what the league's constitution is? It's a contract. You know who's not a party to that contract? The court. The court can't violate the NBA constitution by ordering a transfer of assets because the court isn't a party to the contract. It isn't bound thereby.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Basketball at 23:55

Friday, July 25, 2008

Finally, The Machine has come back to Los Angeles

That's right, Sasha Vujacic is back. This is good news, even if you can't really be happy with the Lakers having to pay \$5 million a year for Vujacic's services. The Press-Enterprise says that the deal is a compromise between a 3-year, \$12 million offer from the Lakers and a 4-year \$24 million request from the Lakers.

Reed at Forum Blue and Gold posted on Sasha earlier today, before this news came out, and he made some interesting points. First, guys like Daniel Gibson, Jason Kapono, and Mickael Pietrus have been getting 4- and 5-year deals despite lower PER's than Sasha's. Second, and this may be a bit of a surprise, the single most efficient offensive unit in basketball last year was Farmar + Sasha + Kobe + Lamar + Pau. Not only did that unit score 1.37 points per possession, but it only allowed .99. That means that every five Laker possessions with that squad on the floor was resulting in a four-point lead. That's preposterous. So you can see why it was important for the Lakers to resign Vujacic.

On the flip side, as Reed also points out, Jerry Buss has a limited budget. Basically, the signing of Vujacic means the end of spending for the Lakers. With eleven guys under contract, and Coby Karl presumably being #12, the Lakers still have one or two (probably two) spots to fill. L.A. is probably still short a big man, given that Chris Mihm, while professing his health, has too long an injury history to be fully trusted. But that big man and the 14th spot will have to be filled by spending the veteran's minimum, most likely, which probably means DJ Mbenga or maybe someone like Randolph Morris, but probably not Carl Landry, Adonal Foyle, or Francisco Elson. Maybe this bodes well for Joe Crawford, though, who might now make the team while spending the year in the D-League and inactive on the L.A. roster.

And what about Sun Yue? If Mitch Kupchak wants to bring him over, will Buss let him given the state of the payroll? Presumably Yue isn't coming for Karl-type money, especially when it's Karl-type money to play in the D-League.

So I've updated the free agent watch list below, but I've added a new marker -- I've put italics around any players I think are probably out of L.A.'s reach, price-wise. I guess we should also recognize that the 14th spot is likely to be filled with a guy not on this list, someone we've never heard of, perhaps one of the bigs who played either the Lakers' Vegas League team or someone else's team. Ronny Turiaf -- four years, \$17 million, Golden State James Posey -- Hornets, four years, \$25 million DJ Mbenga -- waiting for the phone to ring, I'm sure Corey Maggette -- five years, \$50 million, Golden State Sun Yue -- Kupchak wants to bring him over, but no word yet on a deal Kurt Thomas -- San Antonio Brent Barry -- two years, \$3.9 million, Houston Craig Smith -- two-year deal to return to Minnesota Carl Landry -- qualifying offer extended by Houston Walter Herrmann -- big European money on the table? back to Detroit? Randolph Morris -- Atlanta? Kwame Brown -- Bucks, Heat, Hawks apparently interested Eduardo Najera -- undisclosed deal with the Nets Juwan Howard -- ? Robert Horry -- not retiring; Spurs or Rockets? Francisco Elson -- Denver, New Jersey, Seattle, Charlotte, Lakers; Miami? Theo Ratliff -- back to Detroit? Adonal Foyle -- back to Orlando? Quinton Ross -- with Brand gone, maybe the Clippers bring him back, but everyone is interested, including Phoenix, Orlando, New Jersey? Bostjan Nachbar -- Russia, three years, nine million Euros Dorell Wright -- qualifying offer from Miami Sasha Vujacic -- resigned for \$15 million over three years Patrick O'Bryant -- two years, \$3 million, Celtics David Harrison -- Denver? Chris Andersen -- Denver, one year, \$1 million Primož Brezec -- Virtus Roma, Euroleague Jorge Garbajosa -- two-year deal in Russia

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in L.A. Lakers at 19:45

Thursday, July 24, 2008

The Birdman flies to the Nuggets

I never really though The Birdman would fly to L.A., but it was kinda fun to dream, wasn't it? It looks like he'll sign a one-year deal with the Nuggets, though, returning to place where he made his name. Updated free agent watch list after the jump. Ronny Turiaf -- four years, \$17 million, Golden State James Posey -- Hornets, four years, \$25 million DJ Mbenga -- waiting for the phone to ring, I'm sure Corey Maggette -- five years, \$50 million, Golden State Sun Yue -- Kupchak wants to bring him over, but no word yet on a deal Kurt Thomas -- San Antonio Brent Barry -- two years, \$3.9 million, Houston Craig Smith -- two-year deal to return to Minnesota Carl Landry -- qualifying offer extended by Houston Walter Herrmann -- big European money on the table? back to Detroit? Randolph Morris -- Atlanta? Kwame Brown -- Bucks, Heat, Hawks apparently interested Eduardo Najera -- undisclosed deal with the Nets Juwan Howard -- ? Robert Horry -- not retiring; Spurs or Rockets? Francisco Elson -- Denver, New Jersey, Seattle, Charlotte, Lakers; Miami? Theo Ratliff -- back to Detroit? Adonal Foyle -- back to Orlando? Quinton Ross -- with Brand gone, maybe the Clippers bring him back, but everyone is interested, including Phoenix, Orlando, New Jersey? Bostjan Nachbar -- Russia, three years, nine million Euros Dorell Wright -- qualifying offer from Miami Sasha Vujacic -- qualifying offer from the Lakers Patrick O'Bryant -- two years, \$3 million, Celtics David Harrison -- Denver? Chris Andersen -- Denver, one year, \$1 million Primož Brezec -- Virtus Roma, Euroleague Jorge Garbajosa -- back to Europe?

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Basketball at 14:11

Wednesday, July 23, 2008

Luol Deng in a sign-and-trade?

Laker Nation links to Hoopsworld, which has the news that the Lakers, Pistons, Heat and Jazz have all talked to the Bulls about a sign-and-trade involving Luol Deng. This becomes an issue because apparently Deng and the Bulls aren't exactly seeing eye-to-eye in contract negotiations.

Figuring out sign-and-trade deals is particularly hard because you don't know what kind of salary the signee is going to have, and you have to kind of eyeball the whole thing because the Trade Machine can't deal with sign-and-trades. A deal with the Lakers likely wouldn't be the blockbuster Odom-for-piles-of-awesomeness I've dreamed up on this blog before, but let's see if we can figure out some things that'd work given some possible Deng salaries. First, a note: per Larry Coon's remarkable Salary Cap FAQ, we know that Deng is likely to get the 20% raise necessary to trigger the Base Year Compensation rule, which means that his salary for trade purposes is going to be considered is his previous salary or 50% of his new salary, whichever is greater. Deng pulled down \$3.3 million last year, so it'll either be that number or 50% of his new salary if he makes more than \$6.6 million in the first year of his new deal.

So let's say Deng gets \$7 million in the first year of the new deal. His cap number in a trade is then \$3.5 million, which means the Lakers could send back Trevor Ariza and be within the 125% rule. If you increase Deng's salary a little bit, you could make Luke Walton the guy you send back, but do you think the Bulls are interested in a player with guaranteed money for the next five years who's coming off ankle surgery and whose bloodlines don't exactly suggest great health in his future?

I'm sure the Lakers wouldn't mind passing off Chris Mihm to the Bulls, but his salary is so low (\$2.7 million) that another player would have to be included, and the Lakers don't really have any other players at the right salary level to throw in except Jordan Farmar and Coby Karl (and Karl's contract for this season is non-guaranteed; I don't know how that works with the traded player rules). Obviously, anyone would give up Mihm to get Deng. And I think you'd probably give up Ariza as well, even if you might miss Ariza's defense, because Deng's offensive talent and his ability to background his game for the greater good are something you can't really pass up if they're available for such a low cost. And I guess, though I hate to say it, you'd say the same thing about Jordan Farmar. Point guards aren't hard to find in this league, but as long as Phil Jackson's around, they're not that important in the offense, either, and Farmar's not exactly known as a stellar defensive guard. On the other hand, what does Chicago want with another guard? No, I think if a Deng-to-the-Lakers deal happened, it'd be for Ariza.

Of course, there are multiple questions here. What kind of money does Deng want? Does he want to play in L.A. over Detroit, Miami, or Utah? Would Chicago encourage Deng to agree to go to one of those other teams because they had better trade packages in place? Let's look at that last question.

Utah has a variety of small salaries, including Ronnie Price, Ronnie Brewer, Jason Collins, and Jason Hart. (I'm sorry, did I say "variety"? I meant "salaries attached to guys named Ronnie and Jason". That's odd.) All of these guys are in the \$1.2 to \$2.5 million range, so you could put together two or three of them to get Deng. That said, I'm not sure any one of them is as attractive as Trevor Ariza or Jordan Farmar except for Brewer. And does Utah give up Brewer for Deng? The Jazz already have Kirilenko and Harpring at the small forward spot, and maybe Kyle Korver if you want to count him there, but they don't really have a shooting guard outside of Brewer (again, depending on how you classify Korver). Are the Jazz comfortable giving up Brewer, sliding Korver in the starting SG spot, and running with both either Deng or Kirilenko off the bench?

Ok, how about Miami? They pretty much have Marcus Banks at the right salary level, and if, as I figure, the Bulls have no interest in Jordan Farmar, what would they want with Banks?

Finally, Detroit. Joe Dumars has Amir Johnson (\$3.6 million), Jason Maxiell (\$1.9), Rodney Stuckey (\$1.7), and Arron Afflalo (\$1.0) to work with. I'm not sure Dumars would be prepared to trade Maxiell or Stuckey for a guy who'd back up Tayshaun Prince when he's apparently also spent the entire summer trying to move Rasheed Wallace (Maxiell would step in there) and Chauncey Billups (Stuckey would step in). If a deal he can't beat pops up for one of those guys, he'd hate to be stuck saying no because he suddenly doesn't have a point guard on the roster, having traded him for a shiny new small forward. But Amir Johnson, despite twice the salary of Maxiell, doesn't seem to have quite the hype. If he sticks around with Detroit, it looks like he's destined to be Maxiell's backup. That makes him an eminently tradeable guy. For a Chicago team whose bigs consist of an expiring Drew Gooden (likely to be a big trade asset at this year's

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deadline), Joakim Noah, Ty Thomas, and Aaron Gray, getting a guy like Johnson would have to be considered a coup.

This is obviously all at the rumor stage, but let me tell you, it's a vastly more exciting rumor than Odom-for-Artest, even if it would make the Lakers a major luxury tax payer for years to come, what with Kobe, Pau, Bynum, maybe Odom, and Deng on the team. But goodness, what a team that'd be, right?

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski at 03:42

Tuesday, July 22. 2008

Ron Artest not happening?

Chris Broussard has this: The Ron Artest to the Lakers talk is more media- and fan-driven than it is Lakers-driven. A source close to the situation told me, "L.A. hasn't decided that it needs to go out and get Ron. It's not really committed to making a Ron Artest trade. It would take Kobe really pushing for this deal to give it a really good chance of happening." Kobe and Artest are friends, and Kobe wants Artest in L.A., but after last summer's PR disaster, his front office forays are over. Chances are Artest will start the season in Sacramento, and if the Kings struggle, he could be moved before the February trade deadline. Can I just say "thank goodness"?

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski at 22:39

What's this thing the A's did?

"Win"? Is that what you call it? My goodness, now I remember. It's been so long!

Anyway, it's funny how things work out. Brooks Conrad did indeed make his debut tonight (going 0-4), but it was at second base, as Mark Ellis was a late scratch with shoulder soreness. So Jack Hannahan was in the lineup after all, playing third, and he belted a three-run homer in the fourth that put the A's up 3-1, a lead that held up as Dallas Braden, Jerry Blevins, Brad Ziegler, and Huston Street combined to throw six scoreless innings thereafter.

Ziegler, by the way, is now up to 23 2/3 innings of scoreless baseball to start his career, which is a new American League record.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski at 22:32

Marcus Williams traded to the Warriors

ESPN. The Nets got a conditional first round pick from the Warriors for Williams, which doesn't sound like a whole hell of a lot. I guess the question is "how conditional"? Top-three protected? Lottery protected? And also, when? This coming year, when the Warriors might again be on the outside looking in for the playoffs? The year after that?

It almost doesn't matter, though, because the Warriors aren't going to be terrible anytime soon, so this pick won't be very high, and Williams is a guy I still think can be a good point guard in the league. Are the Nets really so loaded at the one that they can just give a guy like him away? I guess with Devin Harris and Keyon Dooling on the squad, Williams wasn't going to get much playing time. But doesn't that just beg the question of why the Nets bothered to acquire Dooling in the first place?

The other part of this is that with Williams, the Nets roster stood at 17 guys. It looks like Nenad Krstic won't be back, which trims them down to 15 and allows Chris Douglas-Roberts to make the team. Somebody on the squad had to be traded or released or something, in other words, and I guess Williams was probably the best answer, unless you're going to retroactively question things like signing Eduardo Najera or acquiring Dooling.

But I guess getting worked up over backup point guards on Eastern lottery teams isn't really worth it. From the Warriors' perspective, though, this looks like a pretty savvy pickup, getting a guy who can be at least a quality backup for not much at all, as they recognized New Jersey's lack of leverage and took advantage of it to fill a hole. And hey, if Monta Ellis really can't handle the rock 38 minutes a night, it's nice to have someone you can trust a little bit to play a real point game in the Nellieball offense.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski at 20:50

There goes Kurt Thomas

Unfortunately, Kurt Thomas decided to resign with the Spurs. Not only is he not in L.A. replacing Ronny Turiaf, but he's also back in San Antonio, where he can do more of that rebounding and defense he's so well known for to help keep the Spurs a good team in the West.

The updated free agent target list, after the jump. (Yes, I'm officially using that part of the blog editor now. Don't ask why. It's an experiment.)
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DJ Mbenga -- waiting for the phone to ring, I'm sure
Corey Maggette -- five years, \$50 million, Golden State
Sun Yue -- Kupchak wants to bring him over, but no word yet on a deal
Kurt Thomas -- San Antonio
Brent Barry -- two years, \$3.9 million, Houston
Craig Smith -- two-year deal to return to Minnesota
Carl Landry -- qualifying offer extended by Houston
Walter Herrmann -- big European money on the table? back to Detroit?
Randolph Morris -- Atlanta?
Kwame Brown -- Bucks, Heat, Hawks apparently interested
Eduardo Najera -- undisclosed deal with the Nets
Juwan Howard -- ?
Robert Horry -- not retiring; Spurs or Rockets?
Francisco Elson -- Denver, New Jersey, Seattle, Charlotte, Lakers; Miami?
Theo Ratliff -- back to Detroit?
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Jorge Garbajosa -- back to Europe?

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski at 16:43

Another Euro back to Europe, pt. 2

Bostjan Nachbar is the latest guy to decide to head back overseas: he's going to Russia, where he'll make nine million Euros (ESPN calls this \$14.3 million, which is probably about right) over three years and have the opportunity for buyouts after each year in case American money comes calling again. Nachbar apparently has his eyes on the 2010 summer, when there will be tons of money floating around and a lot of disappointed suitors of guys like LeBron James and Chris Bosh.

Nachbar's a guy I thought could help the Lakers as a bench shooter if Sasha Vujacic walked, but he's off the table now.

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Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Basketball at 13:05

Monday, July 21, 2008

Welcome to the majors, Brooks Conrad

I'm excited that the A's have decided to call up Brooks Conrad to see if he can add some life to the offense from time to time. He'll apparently play third base against lefties instead of Jack Hannahan, who's, to be charitable, not really doing so well with the bat. Conrad, who's 28 this year and has yet to play a day in the majors, isn't a high-average hitter (just .242), but he does have some pop in his bat: exactly half of his hits have gone for extra bases, and his SLG is double his batting average.

Donnie Murphy was DFA'd to make room him. Murphy's young enough, versatile enough, and has hit well enough in the minors that he might not make it through waivers. He's only hit .192 in 362 career major league plate appearances, but his career minor league line of 281/346/436 might intrigue someone, especially since he's still just 25.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Oakland A's at 18:55

A letter to Larry Bird

So: this. Shawne Williams is rolling with this friend and gets pulled over. The cop writes up Williams for window tint and seatbelt violations. Shawne's friend, in the passenger seat, is found with a small amount of marijuana and is arrested. It's a small enough amount that the only charge is a misdemeanor. Larry Bird's response to this? "While Shawne Williams was not involved in any arrest or any criminal wrongdoing, we are extremely upset and hugely disappointed he once again has put himself in a position that jeopardizes Shawne's future as a member of the Indiana Pacers."

Thus:

Dear Larry Bird,

Don't be a huge dick.

Your player, the only guy in this whole incident (if it even rises to the level of the word "incident") who you can concern yourself with, did nothing wrong besides jeopardize his own safety by not having his seat belt on. The seat belt thing is worth talking to him about because you've made an investment in his career and you don't want him going all Jay Williams on you. I guess even the window tint might be worth talking to him about because you don't want him pissing off the cops. (And when the cops in Indianapolis see a black dude in an expensive car with too much tint, you can bet your ass they're pulling him over.)

But you know what? I get the feeling that this "jeopardizes [his] future" business isn't referring to window tint or a seat belt. No, I think you're concerned about Shawne's friend with the joint. Which, I have to tell you, Larry, strikes me as a tad silly. We're not talking Brad Miller or Jeremy Giambi or Damon Stoudamire here. We're talking about a guy whose friend had some weed. A guy whose friend had little enough weed that a middle-of-the-country red state could only charge him with a misdemeanor. I mean, my god, what would have happened to you, Larry Bird, if you'd had a friend who smoked weed? You probably would have ... um ... well, you probably would have been a Hall of Fame basketball player for the Celtics, famous for hustle, sweet shooting, a perm and some tight-ass shorts. Which you'll notice is exactly what you did become. You see what I did there, Larry? I used a cheap device to make the argument that if you'd had a friend with weed, it wouldn't have affected you in the slightest. And my argument extends by analogy to your buddy Shawne Williams.

Look, if you want to set the kid straight, you should teach him how to rebound. But this weed thing? Just leave it alone. Really.

Yours,

Jason Wojciechowski

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Basketball at 02:40

Sunday, July 20, 2008

Google News is a bit erratic

I don't understand how Google decides what sites are worthy of inclusion in Google News and what are not. I found, for instance, this post on Google News today, advocating a trade of Lamar Odom for Tayshaun Prince. The claim is that it would be ideal because the Lakers get the SF defender they want while the Pistons get a scorer/creator. Now, I've always loved Prince, but you know why I love him? Because he's an awesome player, a guy who can shoot the three, rebound, pass the ball, play both tough, smart defense and make hustle plays, a guy who doesn't demand the ball but could do a lot of things if he were the primary playmaker. And he hasn't missed a game in five years! He makes \$9.5, \$10, and \$11 million the next three years. This isn't a trade asset, this is a guy you build your team around (and based on the fact that his name never seems to come up in credible trade rumors, Joe Dumars knows this).

But my favorite part of the post is the complete whiff on the salary-matching. The poster recognizes that another salary would have to come with Prince for Odom to make the deal work under the cap rules, so he suggests the Pistons sign-and-trade Kwame Brown. Uh, last I checked, that wasn't allowed. As Larry Coon says, "Under no circumstances can a team sign and then trade another team's free agent." That is, the Lakers could sign-and-trade DJ Mbenga, but they could not pull a sign-and-trade involving Robert Horry.

I really shouldn't bash, I know. It's just a blogger. But it was on Google News! It would come up if you searched for "Lakers Tayshaun Artest dynamic".

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in L.A. Lakers at 16:26

Another Euro back to Europe

What'd I say about those European dollars? Primoz Brezec is headed to Rome to play in Euroleague with Virtus Roma after playing for seven years in the NBA. Brezec wasn't, to my knowledge, ever talked about as a Laker target, but I'd put him on this list because I thought he could be a solid backup big for the team if he could come cheaply enough. The story linked above doesn't mention money, so it's hard to tell what kind of offers he might have turned down in the U.S. from the teams I'd seen him linked to: Seattle, Chicago, and Miami.

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Bostjan Nachbar -- Detroit? With the Nets adding Najera and Jarvis Hayes, does that mean no room for Nachbar?
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Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Basketball at 16:03

Liveblogging an awful loss to the Yankees

Can someone tell me what Huston Street's deal is? The A's tie the game against Jose Veras and manage to score a run on Mariano Rivera, which is still nearly impossible to do, only to see Street blow the lead. We're now a Brett Gardner base hit away from losing this game. And this could be worse if not for the fact that the Yankee pinch-runner got caught stealing. Maybe the game would already be over if that hadn't happened.

Thankfully, Street gets the last out on a popup, lowering his ERA back "down" to 4.19. But we're still going into extras

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because he can't hold a lead these days. He's pitching about as well as his good buddy Joe Blanton. In the story about the Blanton trade on the official website, Street sounded pretty forlorn. He can't really blame his performance on that, though, because he's been pitching like this basically all year. The A's aren't likely to make a push for the postseason, not with this offense, but what Street's really doing is hurting his trade value. Don't the Dodgers need a closer? Could we get a third baseman from them? And maybe Andre Ethier back? Or Matt Kemp?

Ok, we're in extras. (I'm "liveblogging" this in the sense that I'm watching it on MLB Gamecast as I type.)

Edwar "No D" Ramirez is in for the Yankees. I think the A's are probably going with Andrew Brown next inning. Jose Molina is also in for New York, which should cut down on their running game a bit (Rajai Davis and Ryan Sweeney both stole second against Mariano/Posada in the 9th). Crosby flies out. Ellis is terrible at the plate, so I'm betting on Donnie Murphy with nobody on and two out. If this were Marco Scutaro, that might be a great situation for the A's, but Murphy doesn't seem to have Scoot's clutchitude.

But hey! Ellis gets on base by accident as Ramirez hits him with a changeup. Way to take a soft one for the team, Mark! The pitch didn't look very far inside on Gamecast, so he may have done a sort of turn-the-elbow-in-toward-it kind of move. So now Murphy with one out and Ellis on first (twelve steals this year, caught just twice) and Wes Bankston, Oakland's third-best hitter, up next. Murphy's batting .186, which is bad, even for the A's. Ramirez's changeup, which Murphy just fouled off, looks, in Gamecast at least, like it has some ridiculous break on it. How did people even know about baseball before the internet? Now the count is full. I think I send Ellis here, and damn the consequences. Ramirez will probably come back with his fastball after throwing three straight changes, the last two in the dirt. And he does come back with the fastball, but it's low and Murphy is on first with a walk. I don't know if Ellis was running on the pitch or not.

So Wes Bankston, with two singles and two whiffs on the game. His second single set up the A's 7th inning run against Veras. Wow, Ramirez gets a called strike on the first pitch that from here looks to be about six inches off the plate. The immortal Rajai Davis is on deck. It's 0-2 after two foul balls. Bankston's in trouble. And down he goes, swinging at the changeup that ends up low and in.

It's too bad speed only helps after you hit the ball. Davis is hitting .207 for the year. Oakland pretty much just has Emil Brown left on the bench, and Davis is a good defensive outfielder, so I guess I understand not pinch-hitting. You can't really say "damn the defense, we're going for the win" on the road, because you've always got to play the bottom half. Plus, Emil's not that great anyway. And Davis is down on strikes, also chasing a changeup down in the zone. Well, no, down out of the zone, almost in the dirt, it seems. So that's the A's half, and we go to the bottom of the tenth, sudden-death style.

The Yankees have Richie Sexson on the bench, but I guess we won't see him unless the A's end up using Jerry Blevins, a lefty. Ah, but look, there is Jerry Blevins after all. It's Jeter, Abreu, and A-Rod coming up, so Sexson won't hit for any of them. But if it gets the cleanup spot, where Justin Christian pinch-ran for Jason Giambi, you can bet he'll hit there. Christian hits righty, but he's got 18 major league at-bats. But look, we probably won't even get to that spot since Jeter just knocked the first pitch up the middle for a single. Winning run on first for Bobby Abreu.

I know Andrew Brown pitched yesterday, but with two righties and then the Justin Christian spot coming up, don't you want to use your right-hander out of the bullpen here? Especially since he's probably the better pitcher of the two anyway? Not my favorite decision by Bob Geren, although who knows what he knows about availability.

Abreu hits a grounder to Murphy at third who gets the force at second. This is where actually watching the game can't be beat. I have no idea how that play went down. Soft roller and it was a good play just to get the out at second? Throw down to first that Abreu barely beat? Bobbled transfer by Mark Ellis? Who knows! Anyway, here's A-Rod with Abreu on first and one out. Alex is 0-5 with three whiffs, so he's either due or he's not seeing it well, depending on your hopes and wishes.

2-2 count after five pitches, then a curve too low for ball three. Abreu steals second on the pitch. Which sucks. So they give A-Rod the intentional pass, bringing up the DH spot with the winning run on second, one out, and a large, lumbering slugger coming to the plate in Richie Sexson. The last thing Sexson does well is hit lefties, so I'm worried here. Blevins gets ahead with a low-and-away curve, strike one. Ground ball, Jerry, ground ball. A fastball right down the middle, but Sexson swings and misses, 1-2. Curve in the dirt fills the count. Strikes, Jerry, strikes. He struck him out! Got him swinging at the heat, pretty high from the looks of it, on the outer part of the plate.

So here comes Jose Molina, who I think is #2 of the Flying Molinas? Bengie's #1, right? Or is Jose #1? Anyway, another first pitch curve, hit foul for strike one. Jose's a hacker, so first-pitch off-speed ain't a bad idea. Another curve,

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even lower, and Jose grounds out to Crosby at short, ending the inning. Whew. Each side works out of a jam, and we're on to eleven.

The Yankees' remaining pitchers are Dan Giese (?), LaTroy Hawkins, and David Robertson (?). I wouldn't be surprised with a second inning of Ramirez despite that depth, though. For the A's, with just Andrew Brown left, I think it'll depend on if they score in this inning. And yes, it's Edwar Ramirez coming out for another inning of work. Top of the order for Oakland: Sweeney, Suzuki, Cust. Sweeney quickly is down 0-2 after swinging at a couple of those changeups. He gets another change on 1-2 and puts the bat on it, but it's a grounder to Betemit at first.

Suzuki to the plate, working on a 2-5 day. Just like Sweeney, he's down 0-2 as Ramirez doubles up on what Gamecast thinks are sliders. I'm suspicious, because I don't think he threw any sliders last inning. And just like that, there's a changeup and Suzuki strikes out swinging on three pitches. Ugh.

Well, here's the one guy who can put the A's up with one swing of the bat, Jack Cust. He does swing the bat, but through another changeup, so he's down 0-1. Ramirez could get out of this inning in about 10 pitches. That's another slider, and it really does look like a different pitch than the change, so maybe he really does have it. 2-1 count now after a slider misses well low and in and a fastball is up and off the plate away. Cust has three whiffs in the game and two walks, and it's now 3-1, so he's working on his third walk. Ugh, changeup called strike two, but it looks outside from here. And yet another changeup, down, Cust swings and misses, and he's got four whiffs in the game.

Bottom of the 11th. Ah! I missed someone in the bullpen! Lenny DiNardo is in to pitch for Oakland with Cano, Betemit, and Cabrera coming up. The Yanks only have Chad Moeller on the bench, so I'm guessing that what we see is what we've got for them. And with Emil Brown not likely to pinch-hit for any of the A's, and the same for Rob Bowen, it looks like we're hunkering down and going to war with these lineups.

DiNardo did pitch an inning yesterday, so I don't know how much he's good for today, but he's normally a long man, so if we remain scoreless, we might be seeing plenty of him. On the other hand, his ERA is over nine, so our odds of remaining scoreless in extras are low.

Another leadoff man reaches for the Yankees as Cano gets his fourth hit of the game, a single to center. Wilson Betemit to the plate with the winning run on first. Again. Betemit sacrifices Cano to second. Do you walk Cabrera to face Brett Gardner? Melky's hitting under .250 this year, so it looks like Geren says no to that option as DiNardo gives him an 83 mph "fastball" on the first pitch, fouled off. He fouls off a would-be ball one for strike two. DiNardo hasn't thrown a ball yet. Now, with Melky down 0-2, would be a good time. He gives him a fastball in a little further from the first two, and Melky takes it. A changeup misses badly on the other side and suddenly we're at 2-2. The fastball was a good idea. The changeup was just a bad pitch. A couple of foul balls, one on a curve. And now we're full. Come on Lenny, I know your stuff is marginal, but strikes! Well, that last changeup might not be a strike, but Melky hit it anyway, and he's out on a flyball to Carlos Gonzalez in right.

Two outs for Brett Gardner, who hit a double in his first at-bat. It was his first double. Ever. (Well, at least ever in the majors.) He's hitting .178 on the year, and he's left-handed. Let's go, Lenny. First pitch fouled off, 0-1. Gamecast is calling these 82 and 81 mph pitches changeups, but I think they might be fastballs. A marginal curve, looks a little high and a little outside, called for strike two, so we've got a 1-2 count. And DiNardo gets him on a fastball down the heart of the plate, getting Gardner to fly to right. Lenny's ERA is down all the way to 8.49 after that inning, a reduction of about a run and a half. Nice work, Lenny. See you in the bottom of the twelfth. (Although I'd rather see Andrew Brown and damn the consequences because it's back to the top of the order next inning for the Yankees. Granted, they're 1-13 on the day, but they've got five walks between them and they're still good, dangerous hitters.)

So in comes David Robertson, who doesn't even have a proper headshot in Gamecast -- his picture is a super-cropped action shot, so basically what I can tell is that he's white. He hasn't pitched much this year, only 34 PA's against, but he's done well so far. He'll face Carlos Gonzalez to start. Gonzalez is listed as having gotten an intentional walk back in the 7th, but it came on a 3-1 pitch with the bases loaded. Now, it's possible that Girardi walked him to avoid giving him a meatball, but that's kind of absurd, isn't it? He's not Barry Bonds. I think Gamecast just hasn't figured out that it was simply a bad pitch, waaay outside by Veras.

Anyway, Gonzalez flies out to Gardner in left. Gamecast alerts me that there's video of Gonzalez making a sliding catch last inning, so perhaps he's the reason we're still playing this game.

Bobby Crosby, 0-5, but, surprisingly enough, no strikeouts, is up now. Robertson's given him four straight curves, but on a 2-2 fastball, Crosby knocks a hit, a line single to right. Nice job, Bobby. Way to wait for your pitch.

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Ellis whiffs on a first-pitch fastball up high, so he's down in the count early. He's still 0-4 after taking that HBP in the 10th. He swings at another high fastball on 1-1, hitting it foul. He gets the count full, though, by taking two more high pitches from Robertson. Not one of these five pitches has gone below the waist of the graphical batter here in Gamecast. And Robertson ends up paying for it as he throws another high way that Ellis takes for ball four. First and second, one out for Donnie Murphy. Murphy walked his last time, and Thunder Matt Murton has sucked so far, but he had two hits today, and I'd rather see him in this spot than Murphy. But that's what happens when your closer blows games -- unfortunate late-game lineups. Murphy, by the way, strikes out on three pitches. Nice one, Murph. The last was a fastball that might be a little low and a little away, but it was 0-2, so you can't take that pitch.

Ok, I don't get this one at all. Emil Brown is in to hit for Wes Bankston. Bankston, who's probably the third-best hitter in this lineup, is being hit for by a guy hitting an empty .255. (Video alert tells me that Gardner made a nice catch on Gonzalez's inning-leading-off flyball. So I guess the favor has been returned.) And predictably, two pitches later, Emil Brown grounds out. So now what do you do defensively? I guess Emil plays first? That sounds like a recipe for disaster. He hasn't played a single inning there in the big leagues. But that's precisely what's happening. Emil Brown makes his first-base debut. Congratulations, Emil.

Jeter will lead off against DiNardo. He's reached via walk and single today. (I just realized that Gamecast actually adjusts the height of these batters to fit the player who's hitting. Mark Ellis's avatar was significantly smaller than Jeter's is. Nice!)

And yet again, a leadoff hit for the Yankees. Jesus. Another single up the middle for Jeter, and the winning run is on one more time. Abreu, who's walked three times so far, is up. A-Rod and Sexson will follow.

The count is 1-2 on Abreu. DiNardo seems to have one pitch, but Gamecast has him throwing this sequence to Abreu: change, fastball, slider, fastball. Odd. Abreu puts a fastball very low and very away in play. Unfortunately, it's apparently so softly hit that DiNardo has no play at second and can only get Abreu at first, so it's a de facto sacrifice bunt by the right fielder. Up comes A-Rod, who's got seven LOB already today, and three whiffs. Will they ... yes, they will intentionally walk him. How many guys go 0-5 with three strikeouts and get intentionally walked twice? That's amazing.

So, Sexson with two on and one out. GIDP, Lenny! First pitch ... ooh, low? I don't know. I guess. Ball one, though. Richie's knees are higher than most players', I guess. Next pitch a smidge higher, but also a ball. Third pitch is high enough, but just off the plate (I guess -- it might be catching a corner). God, what a time to get squeezed. Hey, strike one! But false hope abounds. Ball four, and the winning run is at third base for Jose Molina. If there's ever been a time for a 1-2-3 double play, it's now. If there's ever been a time when I've been more sure the A's were going to lose on a walk-off walk, though, I don't know when it was.

First pitch is way inside. Maybe almost lost the game on a walkoff HBP. Ball one. In the strike zone! Amazing. Fouled off, 1-1. Basically the same pitch, same result, 1-2. Holy god, what did I say. Walk-off HBP. Unbelievable. It's in the same place the first one way, but this one got him. In-freaking-credible. Lenny DiNardo, your A's twelfth inning man. Why? Why does this happen to me? Gallagher's final line looks bad (four walks and seven hits in five innings) but still only gave up two runs, the setup guys (Embree, Casilla, Zielger) threw scoreless innings, the A's eeked out some runs to take a lead, and Street blew it all to hell. Jerry Blevins was shaky, but got through his inning. DiNardo ... well, there's a reason he was in Sacramento five days ago.

Ah ha. Here's the story on the intentional walk, which I glean from video on MLB.com: Veras threw a wild pitch on 2-1 that allowed Bankston to score the tying run and allowed the other runners to move up. Thus, with a 3-1 count, a tie game, and runners on second and third, the Yankees elected to throw an intentional ball four to Gonzalez. Ok, so that clears that up.

As for the Gonzalez diving catch -- my god, that was a hell of a catch. Full extension, diving as the ball sliced away toward the right-field line. If he misses, the game is over. If he lets the ball drop in, Cano might score from second (although with just one out and Gonzalez perhaps catching the ball, Cano might not have gotten a great jump and thus might have held up at third). Regardless of its implications, though, just a great catch.

Gardner's catch on Gonzalez wasn't quite as nice. The Yankee announcers referred to it as "robbing Gonzalez of an extra-base hit", but what made it difficult wasn't so much the hit itself as Gardner's misread of the ball which forced him to have to reach back to his right to make the play. If he'd gotten a better jump and/or positioned himself properly, it would've been a catch not worthy of a highlight. I will note that it's easy to misjudge Gonzalez's balls, though, because the baseball really jumps off his bat. I haven't seen him hit as often as I wish I could, but the few times I have, he's really put a charge into the ball without seeming like he's swinging from his heels like Jack Cust or Jason Giambi. Just

smooth, easy power.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Oakland A's at 13:23

European money a big draw for tax reasons?

Marc Stein mentions that there's major European interest in Jorge Garbajosa, including from his hometown team and from the Russian team that just signed Carlos Delfino. He also quotes someone referring to Delfino's 3 million Euro deal being something like a \$9 million deal stateside, partially because of the exchange rate, but also because the European money is coming tax-free. (It's not clear why the money is tax-free, but there it is.) According to XE.com, it would take about \$4.75 million to equal to the 3 million Euros Delfino got. I don't know if Delfino loses 50% of his money in taxes -- he'll lose the max 35% to the federal government, and then, supposing he'd signed with Detroit, Michigan income tax is structured as a percentage of the federal tax paid, so Delfino would pay 3.9% of the federal tax liability. (Link.) That works out to only about 1.4% of Delfino's actual income. (And of course, he gets to deduct the amount he pays in state tax from his income for federal tax purposes.)

Of course, Delfino played last year in Toronto, so he was subject to Canadian taxes instead of American ones, and those may well be higher, but I'm not exactly prepared to go looking into that at the moment. In any case, I think equating Delfino's deal to a \$9 million deal strikes me as exaggeration. It seems to me to be closer to about \$7.5 million or so. (Adding a little cushion for things like Social Security, etc.)

Either way, though, the bottom line is clear: Carlos Delfino wasn't getting \$7.5 million from anybody in the NBA. The same thing could end up happening with Garbajosa, since I can't imagine the Lakers or anyone else ponying up a deal that would dissuade him (money-wise, at least) from heading overseas to take, say, 1.5 or 2 million Euros. Is he really a \$3.75 or \$5 million player in the U.S.?

While this quandary obviously highlights the difficulty the U.S. teams face because of globalization and the various factors that have caused America's economy to be in such deep trouble, it's also interesting because of the NBA's salary cap. A cap/luxury tax obviously only works if all competitors for the relevant good are subject to it, or at least all relevant competitors. Until recently, I don't think anyone thought the European teams were relevant -- whether it's because of the money or the level of competition or otherwise, it seems like players like Carlos Delfino preferred to come to the U.S. to sit on the bench (or players like Paul Shirley preferred to stay in the U.S. to sit on the bench) than take (relatively) big money to be starters, or even stars, in Europe. But with an unlevel playing floor between European and U.S. clubs, who's to say that the Delfinos and Garbajosas won't ever even see the light of day in the NBA anymore? What if Brandon Jennings really likes Europe and decides he'd rather not take the risk of coming here for less money? (Although if he's as good as they say he is, he won't have to worry about the money because he'll get a fat three-year deal after being a first-round pick.) I don't think this would be devastating for the league. I don't think Kobe Bryant and Kevin Garnett are going to play in Russia or Spain instead of the U.S anytime soon.

But obviously the depth of talent can be affected -- the question is whether the effect will be great enough to actually be noticeable by fans watching the games. Is having a guy who's clearly talented enough to be in the NBA like Carlos Delfino defect, and thus be replaced by a lesser player (Player #451 on the list), going to cause sloppier play, worse shooting, and so forth? I don't think it's a big deal -- the numbers are just too small. Even if we're dipping all the way down to have only the 1000th best player in the world as the last man on Memphis's bench, that guy is still so good that we're just not going to notice. Especially since he's only getting five minutes of run every two weeks.

The updated free agent target list:

Ronny Turiaf -- four years, \$17 million, Golden State
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David Harrison -- Denver?
Chris Andersen -- probably not Boston after signing O'Bryant; Cleveland? back to the Nuggets?
Primož Brezec -- Seattle, Chicago, Miami?
Jorge Garbajosa -- back to Europe?

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

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Basketball at 12:41

Saturday, July 19, 2008

Daric Barton to the DL

Daric Barton's headed to the DL. Apparently he dove into a shallow pool over the break and hit his head bad enough that he got six staples and some neck pain. Frankly, this probably helps the offense with Wes Bankston coming up to replace him, but still, you don't want to see Barton losing development time, even just two weeks. Plus, Bob Geren's kinda pissed: "I'm upset about it a little bit. It seemed to be a careless mistake that hurt the team." See, I told you he reminded me of Coach Taylor. He probably chewed him out in his office.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Oakland A's at 14:31

Bruce Jenkins off the rails

Bruce Jenkins starts so promisingly with this piece, and then he just loses the thread and completely falls overboard. (Mixed metaphor, what?)

If you're an A's fan and took the time Sunday to watch the Futures game, a minor-league prelude to the All-Star game at Yankee Stadium, you're probably not upset or disappointed over the Joe Blanton trade.

Ok, that's cool, that's your angle: the A's are building a really strong team for next year and the year after by making these recent trades as well as the Haren and Swisher trades this offseason. Jenkins mentions Cliff Pennington, who, despite no power whatsoever, has a .400 OBP at Sacramento; Henry Rodriguez, who impressed everyone with his 100 mph heat; Brett Anderson's two pickoffs in the game and his 12 K debut at AA; and Trevor Cahill, who's been whiffing people his entire career despite not having Rodriguez-type velocity. But then.

We could go on like this all day - about Carlos Gonzalez, about the other two pitchers in the Haren deal (Greg Smith and Dana Eveland), or about the immediate impact made by outfielder Matt Murton and pitcher Sean Gallagher (at some point, the Cubs are going to miss him) after arriving via the Rich Harden trade.

Matt Murton?! The immediate impact of Matt Murton? Dude's 1-13 with one walk in Oakland! His immediate impact has been to hit even worse than Emil Brown. That's a hell of an immediate impact.

Make no mistake, the deal makes sense for the Phillies. Blanton is only a shade beyond ordinary (and I have to mention this again, as the man makes his exit: Have you ever seen anyone who looks so much like a Joe Blanton?), but he fits one of the really pathetic terms of modern-day baseball: an "innings-eater." That means he's good for six or seven decent innings and then, what the hell, you're on your own. Not that this makes him much different from anyone else in this era of the 100-pitch limit, but despite his numbers (5-12, 4.96), he's considered a "serviceable" starter.

Of course Jenkins has to get in a dig at the idea of pitch counts. And, you know, saving pitchers' arms so they can live to throw another day. Because who the hell actually wants to watch Kerry Wood as a starter anyway? More importantly, Jenkins completely understates the value of a real innings eater like Blanton. "Not much different"? Over the last four years (counting this partial season we're in right now), Blanton has thrown 752 2/3 innings with an ERA+ just slightly over 100 (i.e. he's an exactly average pitcher for those innings). How many guys can say the same? Baseball-reference.com can tell us! There are sixteen pitchers who meet the Blanton minimum standards. There are, in fact, only seventeen pitchers total who have pitched Blanton's number of innings in that span. (The 17th guy is Livan Hernandez, whose ERA+ is just 92.) So at the very least this points out the relative rarity, contrary to what Jenkins thinks, of a guy like Blanton, even if he's not an ace. But what's a little more interesting is that Blanton's pretty unique -- as I said, there's only one pitcher on this list whose thrown as many innings as he has over the last four years but has a worse ERA+. There are only four other players with this many innings and an ERA+ under 110: the aforementioned Hernandez, Greg Maddux, Javier Vazquez, and Bronson Arroyo (who's at 109, so he could move off the list with a few good games). In any case.

Judging from the season's first half, Blanton could make a division-winning difference in Philadelphia. The Mets are going overboard on the wonders of new manager Jerry Manuel, but any change would have been welcome after weeks of chaos surrounding Willie Randolph and his fragile job security. The Mets will come back to earth because they're old, vulnerable and emotionally weak at some key positions, notably shortstop Jose Reyes and center fielder Carlos Beltran. The Phillies know that with their superior character, a third reliable starter (to join Cole Hamels and Jamie Moyer) can

put them over the top.

Emotionally weak? Really? Um, Bruce, you're based on the west coast. I don't think you go into the Met clubhouse all that often. Even if you did, what exactly is your evidence that these two are "emotionally weak"?

The beauty of this deal, for Oakland, is that unlike the Harden, Haren, Jason Giambi or Miguel Tejada decisions, this one won't cost them any fans. Wait - they don't have any fans to begin with. Maybe 10,000 die-hards, tops. It's a brutal world, but it's Billy Beane's world. No other executive in baseball could make it so livable.

Sigh. Can someone please, please, please not write an article about the A's that mentions how few fans there are? Please? I mean, clearly there are more than 10,000 A's fans in the world.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Oakland A's at 11:28

Ronny Turiaf, gone for good

Well, it's official: goodbye, Ronny. Thanks for the memories.

Thomas Lee thinks this was a bad move because Turiaf brings energy and hustle. My favorite line: "I know that the Warriors offered him more than the Lakers can afford, but why didn't the Lakers offer him something sooner? Why did the Lakers just sit and do nothing?" I'm curious who Thomas's inside sources are that told him the Lakers had no talks with Ronny and made him no offers.

Lee also suggests a classic "bunch of trash for all your good stuff" trade: Odom + Walton + Radman for Marion + Haslem + 2d round pick. Walton's contract looks pretty horrible right now (it's the longest contract on the Lakers, shockingly), Radman is a one-dimensional player 75% of the time (although his occasional sweeping drives to the hoop and pinpoint passes are pretty, they're much too occasional to be worth much), and in return the Lakers get a defensive player of Marion's caliber, a really useful banger inside, and a pick? For basically Odom plus salaries? No, I don't think Miami's ready to do that deal.

Also, Walter Herrmann might still be an option to return to Detroit

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Primož Brezec -- Seattle, Chicago, Miami?
Jorge Garbajosa

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in L.A. Lakers at 11:19

Friday, July 18. 2008

More Artest news

Check out Laker Nation for the newest Odom rumor: Artest, Shelden Williams, Quincy Douby. Not as horrible as Kenny Thomas, but the non-Artest guys are still worthless. Douby's no Jordan Farmar, and I think I'd even rather have Coby Karl off the bench than him. I'll take him over Joe Crawford, though. And Williams? He's better than Thomas, but he's still no Mikki Moore. The advantage is that both guys expire after this year, instead of after 2010, like Thomas. The question remains: do you give up a gifted rebounder, a mismatch nightmare, a guy who gets inside almost at will, a player who doesn't just know his role as a third option/playmaker but actually relishes that role, for a volume shooter who can't stay healthy and might smack his wife around the day after the trade? I don't, not if you're not getting back additional guys who can play (Moore) instead of just salary ballast (Thomas, Williams, Douby, who my iPhone always wants to change to Doubt).

All that said, the good recent news from Marc Stein is that the Lakers are "reluctant" to give up Odom in an Artest swap. I guess they're trying to get the deal done with Vlad Rad and Luke Walton or something, which doesn't strike me as a viable move for Sacto, but would be a relatively unobjectionable type of deal from my standpoint. Pretty much any Artest deal that kept Odom in LA is fine with me, even if it involves giving up a good player like Jordan Farmar to get it done. There's just no reason to rashly trade Odom.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in L.A. Lakers at 18:18

Thursday, July 17, 2008

Francisco Elson update

Here's a Francisco Elson update: [link](#). The teams in play are Denver, Seattle (I'm not calling them OKC. I'm just not. It's like Anaheim instead of Los Angeles for the Angels. Ok, it's a little different from that. But still. I'm basically going to just pretend they still play in Seattle for at least the next year.), Charlotte, and New Jersey. Oddly, the story lists those teams plus the Lakers, but the writer says "and possibly the Lakers." No qualifier is used for any of the other teams. I guess that means L.A. is a longshot (which is kind of too bad, because you can certainly do worse for an inexpensive interior defender).

This story also conflicts with wherever I read before that Elson would not be returning to Seattle. Newer stories take precedence, though, so they're back on the list.

The updated free agent target list:

Ronny Turiaf -- four years, \$17 million, front-loaded, Golden State (Lakers can match, but shouldn't) James Posey -- Hornets, four years, \$25 million DJ Mbenga -- waiting for the phone to ring, I'm sure Corey Maggette -- five years, \$50 million, Golden State Sun Yue -- Kupchak wants to bring him over, but no word yet on a deal Kurt Thomas -- Spurs are his first choice? Lakers? Brent Barry -- two years, \$3.9 million, Houston Craig Smith -- two-year deal to return to Minnesota Carl Landry -- qualifying offer extended by Houston Walter Herrmann -- big European money on the table? Randolph Morris -- Atlanta? Kwame Brown -- Bucks, Heat, Hawks apparently interested Eduardo Najera -- undisclosed deal with the Nets Juwan Howard -- ? Robert Horry -- not retiring; Spurs or Rockets? Francisco Elson -- Denver, New Jersey, Seattle, Charlotte, Lakers; Miami? Theo Ratliff -- back to Detroit? Adonal Foyle -- back to Orlando? Quinton Ross -- with Brand gone, maybe the Clippers bring him back, but everyone is interested, including Phoenix, Orlando, New Jersey? Bostjan Nachbar -- Detroit? With the Nets adding Najera and Jarvis Hayes, does that mean no room for Nachbar? Dorell Wright -- qualifying offer from Miami Sasha Vujacic -- qualifying offer from the Lakers Patrick O'Bryant -- two years, \$3 million, Celtics David Harrison -- Denver? Chris Andersen -- probably not Boston after signing O'Bryant; Cleveland? back to the Nuggets? Primož Brezec -- Seattle, Chicago, Miami? Jorge Garbajosa

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Basketball at 22:23

Blanton the next one out the door

A's fans have been waiting for the Joe Blanton hammer to drop for about two years now, and it finally did. The Phillies, who've been linked to basically ever pitcher who might be out there, swung a deal for Blanton today, sending the A's three minor leaguers: Adrian Cardenas, Josh Outman, and Matthew Spencer. Let's see what I can gather about these guys.

Cardenas is a 20-year-old second baseman playing in the high-A Florida State League this year. It's a notorious pitcher's league: the league OPS is .699, and his team is hitting .695. Cardenas, then, is smacking the ball, because his OPS stands at .818. He's been a high-average guy in his career, hitting .303 over his 1000 or so plate appearances, but with pretty decent walk numbers (.065 ISO-OBP this year), and pretty good power for a 20-year-old in pitcher's leagues: his ISO-SLG's are around .130. (His full line [here](#).)

Phuture Phillies recently noted that Baseball America put Cardenas just outside its Top 25 prospects list. Top 25 in baseball, not just in the Phillie organization. He's a former supplemental first rounder out of high school in Miami. According to Baseball Prospectus's (subreq) 2007 annual, "Cardenas graduated near the top of his class and entertained guests at his draft party by playing Liszt and Gershwin on the piano." That's impressive. Sickels had him this year as the second-best Phillie prospect, a grade-B guy. In 2007, he noted that Cardenas had a "quick bat".

Cardenas, then, looks like a good prospect, perhaps an elite one, and young enough that he's not super-redundant with Jemile Weeks or Eric Patterson.

Josh Outman, besides having a great name for a pitcher, is a 23-year-old lefty, pitching at AA. He pitched at that level for seven games last year but spent most of the year at high-A. His walk rate is less than stellar (about 4.5 BB/9), but his strikeout rate is good, whiffing nearly one per inning. He's also given up a grand total of three homers in his seventy innings, so he's had success (3.20 ERA, RA not much higher) despite the high walk rate.

Outman's an interesting guy for the A's to pick up because, as detailed here, his father taught him to pitch rather unconventionally (that article contains Outman's description, which is pretty much incomprehensible to me), but teams were worried about his injury risk because of it, so he adjusted to a conventional motion before the draft. He claims that the old motion was actually very precisely designed biomechanically, and that it was thus better for his arm, but that those around baseball worried about it because they'd never seen it before. The question I have, then, is whether the A's, a team that's well known for its advanced understanding of pitching mechanics, will allow him (or ask him) to revert to his old motion. A lot would go into this, of course: Outman's been a successful pro pitcher so far, posting an ERA of exactly three in his career with very good strikeout and homer rates; he's thrown 414 innings with his "new" motion, and thus countless bullpens and workouts as well; it's possible that his new motion is actually mechanically just fine; it's even possible that Outman and his dad didn't know what they were doing with the old motion. So will they just let him be and hope he develops into the 3rd starter that it looks like he might be able to become?

Sickels had Outman as the 3rd-best Phillie prospect, also giving him a B grade. He had given Outman a B- in 2007, and queried whether he'd be a starter or a reliever as he moved up.

Finally, Matthew Spencer, who looks like a throw-in. He's 14th on Sickels' list with a C+ grade. Spencer's another 22-year-old, but he's only at high-A this year. He's a corner outfielder who isn't really hitting like one in the FSL, with an OPS below both his team and league averages. He had a nice .200 ISO in his pro debut, at low-A in the New York-Penn League, but that's dropped to about .120 this year. When you're batting .249, walking once every eleven PA's, and don't seem to have notable speed (five steals, though just one time caught), you look like a marginal prospect. I think we can just forget about Spencer as a factor in this deal and focus on the possibly elite second baseman and decent left-handed pitcher discussed above.

What about the A's at the major league level now? Well, Blanton's ERA was nearly five, remember, and David Pinto points out that even that is lower than you'd expect, because Blanton's road ERA is a whopping 5.73. The key is that he's only pitched six times on the road, compared to fourteen at home. (Problem for the Phillies: they don't play in Oakland.) None of the three guys the A's got for Blanton is on the Philly 40-man roster, so the A's have a spot on their 40-man opening up. The possibilities for the new fifth guy in the rotation are, then, a little broader than they would be if Oakland could only work with its current 40-man setup. Will Gio Gonzalez be added and called up? Will we see the return of Kirk Saarloos or Lenny DiNardo? Or perhaps Dan Meyer, who's already on the 40-man?

I think DiNardo is probably the most likely. He's had some success with the A's and he's been decent enough at AAA (4.09 ERA). Gonzalez hasn't blown AAA away, although his strikeout rate is quite healthy (over one per inning). Furthermore, with Mike Sweeney returning to the 40-man roster at some point, the A's are going to have to remove someone. DiNardo's a guy who it doesn't really matter if you lose him on waivers.

As for the effects on the A's prospects of winning games this year, as bad as Blanton's been, we've seen him have some measure of success in the past. As between Blanton and DiNardo, I'd much rather put money on the former to put up a sub-four ERA in the second half of the season. DiNardo likely won't be much worse than Blanton was in the first half, but there's a very good chance he'll be worse than Blanton in the second half. In that sense, then, the A's may have lost a little bit at the major league level. Of course, by trading three starters (one of them was in the bullpen, but he could perfectly well start) in ten days, it's pretty clear the A's aren't thinking about this year.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski at 21:10

Craig Smith resigns

Craig Smith is off the market, having resigned with Minnesota. The Lakers were never linked to him in any reports I saw, and he's a restricted free agent, so I didn't really think anything was going to happen, but from the little I know of him, he might've been a nice fit.

The updated free agent target list:

Ronny Turiac -- four years, \$17 million, front-loaded, Golden State (Lakers can match, but shouldn't) James Posey -- Hornets, four years, \$25 million DJ Mbenga -- waiting for the phone to ring, I'm sure Corey Maggette -- five years, \$50 million, Golden State Sun Yue -- Kupchak wants to bring him over, but no word yet on a deal Kurt Thomas -- Spurs are his first choice? Lakers? Brent Barry -- two years, \$3.9 million, Houston Craig Smith -- two-year deal to return to Minnesota Carl Landry -- qualifying offer extended by Houston Walter Herrmann -- big European money on the table? Randolph Morris -- Atlanta? Kwame Brown -- Bucks, Heat, Hawks apparently interested Eduardo Najera -- undisclosed deal with the Nets Juwan Howard -- ? Robert Horry -- not retiring; Spurs or Rockets? Francisco Elson -- not

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going back to Seattle; Miami? Theo Ratliff -- back to Detroit? Adonal Foyle -- back to Orlando? Quinton Ross -- with Brand gone, maybe the Clippers bring him back, but everyone is interested, including Phoenix, Orlando, New Jersey? Bostjan Nachbar -- Detroit? With the Nets adding Najera and Jarvis Hayes, does that mean no room for Nachbar? Dorell Wright -- qualifying offer from Miami? Sasha Vujacic -- qualifying offer from the Lakers? Patrick O'Bryant -- two years, \$3 million, Celtics? David Harrison -- Denver? Chris Andersen -- probably not Boston after signing O'Bryant; Cleveland? back to the Nuggets? Primož Brezec -- Seattle, Chicago, Miami? Jorge Garbajosa

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Basketball at 13:28

Wednesday, July 16, 2008

Posey off the market

James Posey is a New Orleans Hornet. This is pretty much as good as it gets for the Lakers. It had started to become clear that whoever stepped up with a four-year deal was going to get Posey. This meant that if the Lakers signed him, they'd lose because four years is simply too much for a 32-year-old role player who does exactly two things: play defense and hit threes. Now, granted, those two things are valuable, and Posey was a big part of his two championship teams, but is going to be hitting threes at a 38% clip when he's 34? Will he lose a step on defense and stop being able to stay in front of guys without fouling? Those are the risks you take when you sign old players. Even Gary Payton lost a step on defense as he got older, and James Posey is no Gary Payton.

Anyway, I'm glad the Hornets ended up with him even though this makes New Orleans a tougher West team for the next year or two. Why? Because I still don't see who scores for New Orleans off the bench, and this signing keeps Posey from going back to Boston.

The Celtic bench is now Big Baby Davis (7" vertical), JR Giddens (a rookie guard who was a volume shooter in college, a poor free-throw guy, and couldn't hit the college three ball), Leon Powe (motor, but what else?), Bill Walker (knee troubles), and Patrick O'Bryant (um). And I guess Gabe Pruitt? This is a bench that has to back up a starting lineup that includes two youngish guys (Rondo and Perkins are "young vets", but they definitely play young at times) and three guys with a lot of mileage on their bodies in Pierce, Garnett, and Allen. If Allen gets hurt, is your starting two-guard really JR Giddens or Gabe Pruitt? If Pierce goes down, is your small forward Bill Walker? Is this seriously a championship team?

Of course, this just means that Detroit will beat Boston in the Eastern Conference Finals, so that if the Lakers manage to push through New Orleans and San Antonio to have a shot at the championship themselves, they'll still face a tough team with an excellent mix of veteran talent and young gunners, a team that can beat you with starters or with bench guys, and a team that can win with offense or defense.

The updated free agent target list:

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Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in L.A. Lakers at 17:22

Murray Chass makes me angry

Dear Murray Chass,

You're an asshole and a moron.

Best wishes,

Jason

(From Murray's new not-a-blog website: "this site will most likely appeal primarily to older fans whose interest in good old baseball is largely ignored in this day of young bloggers who know it all, and new-fangled statistics (VORP, for one

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excuse-me example), which are drowning the game in numbers and making people forget that human beings, not numbers, play the games."

I'm not even going to rehash the arguments against this brand of nonsense. You can read them at Baseball Prospectus, at Fire Joe Morgan, in Joe Posnanski's columns or his blog, at Baseball Musings, and anyplace else you find smart, numerically literate analysis of baseball written by people with a true passion for the game. Because guess what, Murray, you fucking dinosaur, your kind is on the way out. Your approach is tired and your unwillingness to embrace new sources of understanding about the game (which I'm going to go ahead and attribute to a lack of intellectual capacity until you show me otherwise) aren't welcome. It's a new world, Murray. Evolution. Survival of the fittest, and your chances of getting eaten by a tiger are getting better every day.)

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Baseball at 16:09

Monday, July 14, 2008

Posey and Thomas updates ... but not really

Sean Deveney at The Sporting News says that the Lakers have interest in Kurt Thomas, so I'll update the list below. He also says that the Hornets, Cavs, and Lakers are all Posey suitors along with the Celtics, but so far, none of them have been willing to bite on Posey's request for a four-year deal. This is smart on the part of all four teams, because Posey is 31 years old already, as I've mentioned before. Having him around at 34 and 35 isn't going to make anyone happy.

The Globe, meanwhile has Washington and Detroit in the running with Charlotte, Cleveland, and Boston, but doesn't mention L.A.

Ronny Turiaf -- four years, \$17 million, front-loaded, Golden State (Lakers can match, but shouldn't) James Posey -- Celtics, Lakers, Cavs, Hornets, Wizards, Pistons? DJ Mbenga -- waiting for the phone to ring, I'm sure Corey Maggette -- five years, \$50 million, Golden State Sun Yue -- Kupchak wants to bring him over, but no word yet on a deal Kurt Thomas -- Spurs are his first choice? Lakers? Brent Barry -- two years, \$3.9 million, Houston Craig Smith -- qualifying offer extended by Minnesota Carl Landry -- qualifying offer extended by Houston Walter Herrmann -- big European money on the table? Randolph Morris -- not welcome back in New York? Kwame Brown -- Bucks, Heat apparently interested Eduardo Najera -- undisclosed deal with the Nets Juwan Howard -- ? Robert Horry -- not retiring; Spurs or Rockets? Francisco Elson -- not going back to Seattle; Miami? Theo Ratliff -- back to Detroit? Adonal Foyle -- back to Orlando? Quinton Ross -- with Brand gone, maybe the Clippers bring him back, but everyone is interested, including Phoenix, Orlando, New Jersey? Bostjan Nachbar -- Detroit? With the Nets adding Najera and Jarvis Hayes, does that mean no room for Nachbar? Dorell Wright -- qualifying offer from Miami Sasha Vujacic -- qualifying offer from the Lakers Patrick O'Bryant -- two years, \$3 million, Celtics David Harrison -- Denver? Chris Andersen -- probably not Boston after signing O'Bryant; Cleveland? Primož Brezec -- Seattle, Chicago, Miami? Jorge Garbajosa

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Basketball at 19:05

It's Patterson ... it's Patterson time

Let's just call up Eric Patterson now and move Mark Ellis over to shortstop. Or put Patterson at third. Or at short. Or put Kurt Suzuki at third and let Patterson catch. I don't care, because he's on fire at AAA and the A's can't hit. Patterson had three more hits yesterday, including another double and another homer. In his four games in the A's system, he's got an OPS of 1.576. (This is after putting up a robust .875 for the Cubs' AAA squad.) I'm pretty sure the man can hit. He's stolen 12 bases at AAA this year, and has been caught exactly zero times. This brings his career minor league rate to 79%, which isn't Carlos Beltran, but it is the kind of rate that can help the A's if he can keep it up in the majors.

I'm getting a little too excited about this, I know, because it's been four games with Sacramento. That said, the general statement you can make about Patterson ("he can hit") remains true whether you're looking at these four games or his nearly 2000-PA minor league career: .303/.367/.475 is an excellent line if he can stick at second base (and based on the fact that he's played second base in all four of his games at Sacramento, it looks like the A's will give him every chance to prove that he can stick there).

We all love Mark Ellis, partly because he's one of those "best defensive players never to win a Gold Glove" guys, partly because he's gritty and awesome, partly because he's said he wants to stay with the A's, and partly because he's the career leader in homers hit by players born in South Dakota (although watch out for Jason Kubel -- he's coming hard). But you have to ask about the warts as well, and here's the major one: Mark Ellis cannot be counted on to consistently hit the baseball. He had an excellent 2005, with an .861 OPS, and a good 2007, with a .777 OPS. But in those two years, his batting averages were .316 and .276. In 2003 (he was hurt in 2004) and 2006, he batted .248 and .249. This year, he's at .238. His OPS is in the low .700's. Is that the kind of performance you want to pay free agent money for, from a guy who'll be 32 next year? Patterson's PECOTA weighted mean for this year is basically what Ellis hit last season (and that doesn't take into account how well he's hit and stolen bases this season) -- isn't it worth it to get Mark Ellis's peak offensive performance out of a much younger and cheaper Eric Patterson, rather than paying Ellis himself to hit below his peak? And to be a constant declining presence in the 8th spot of the order for the next three years?

Fortunately, I have faith that the A's understand this, and that they're perfectly willing to let a fan favorite walk (they traded Rich Harden!) to replace him with a guy who will bring about the same value (just in a different shape -- more

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offense, less defense) for much cheaper.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Oakland A's at 12:28

Sunday, July 13, 2008

Harden trade update

Eric Patterson continued to make his case as the better Patterson brother and a valuable member of the Harden trade as he went 3-4 with a double, a homer, and two walks in leading Sacramento to a 12-2 win over Anaheim's AAA outfit. Danny Putnam tried to stifle claims of his demise by hitting his 13th homer of the year. The 25-year-old outfielder is hitting a robust .357/.505 despite a batting average of just .264. That's nice power for the lefty swinger trying to redeem himself after pitiful showings at AAA and the majors last year.

Josh Donaldson, meanwhile, also went 3-4 with a double and a homer, but with no walks, as Stockton managed 12 runs in their own win. However, backing up the claims that Donaldson's trouble is behind the plate, not at it, he had his third passed ball of the year. I'm not sure, but I think that's only counting the three games he's caught in the Cal League. He's hitting .500/.538/.833 in his first twelve at-bats, which is a hell of a way to make an impression, but he's going to have to start actually catching the ball if he wants to have a future with the A's.

Meanwhile, at the big-league level, Rich Harden made his Cubs debut. It was the best of times and the worst of times, though, as he struck out ten in 5 1/3 innings, but he only lasted 5 1/3 innings, throwing 96 pitches in that time. He also had his lowest proportion of swing-and-misses since a May 28 game against the Blue Jays -- that's an odd stat given ten strikeouts out of 24 batters. Of course, the Cubs also blew a seven-run lead before coming back to win the game in extra innings, so Harden was robbed off the win he deserved. Chad Gaudin relieved Harden, inheriting two runners but stranding both in pitching two thirds of an inning before yielding to lesser pitchers like Kevin Hart. (Harden, by the way, was 0-3 with three whiffs in the game.)

Thunder Matt Murton was less than thunderous, going 0-4 in a 4-1 loss to the Angels.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Oakland A's at 17:26

Two more cents on Ron Artest

Let me, really quickly, just throw in two more cents on Odom for Artest and Thomas. What's the stated reason for the Lakers doing the deal? The media reports are never about worries that Odom can't play the small forward position, while Artest's position is small forward. No, the reports are always about "toughness" and "getting punked" (as Marc Stein put it). This, not to put too fine a point on it, is stupid. The Lakers won the West last year. They rolled through the playoffs handily. Did you notice who they played in the playoffs? Utah and San Antonio (along with Denver). Those aren't teams that routinely test your toughness? Those aren't teams that hammer you inside? Yet nobody questioned the "toughness" of the Lakers all year, during the regular season or the playoffs, until Boston beat them. So is Boston really so super-awesome-tough that the Lakers just couldn't handle it, despite winning eight out of eleven games against Utah and San Antonio? Despite winning some of those games on the road? No, really, they're not. Boston was just better. Ray Allen shot like the Ray Allen of old, Paul Pierce played at the top of his game, and the role players all chipped in. Boston rebounded better than the Lakers, and they defended the paint against L.A.'s inside scoring (Pau, Kobe, and Lamar), but were they tougher? Or were Pau's rebounding weaknesses, Lamar's penchant to use his length instead of his strength, and Kobe's inability to go 1-on-5 (not to mention the wild inconsistency in defensive three seconds calls) the real reasons for Boston's interior dominance?

You know where I stand on this. Ron Artest is a perimeter player. He might bring "toughness", but he also brings mediocre jump shooting and a complete absence of rebounding. Sure, he can guard Paul Pierce, but the Lakers are only playing Paul Pierce twice next year. (Mark my words. Especially if they do this deal -- I don't think L.A. gets back to the Finals if Artest is on the team, and I don't think Boston gets back to the Finals at all, whether James Posey is back or not.) So why not keep the better player who's actually been on the team, knows the offensive and defensive schemes, and now has serious recent playoff experience. (The last time Artest was in the playoffs was 2006, and the only time he's been out of the first round was 2004. He's never been to the Finals.)

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in L.A. Lakers at 12:35

Saturday, July 12, 2008

Najera gone

The Nets signed Eduardo Najera, which I guess I missed the first time around. Najera's a guy I thought could help the Lakers' depth inside, but he's off the table now. Here's the list of players I've mentioned as possibilities for the team and who's now gone (note that most of these aren't players I've seen in rumors; they're mostly just "available bigs", although some of them are rumor guys; against my better instincts, I've included some centers on the list instead of just power forwards, as I had before, because I guess if it comes down to it, the Lakers might just have to bring in a big body instead of someone who'll replace Turiaf more directly):

Ronny Turiaf -- four years, \$17 million, front-loaded, Golden State (Lakers can match, but shouldn't) James Posey -- still waffling DJ Mbenga -- waiting for the phone to ring, I'm sure Corey Maggette -- five years, \$50 million, Golden State Sun Yue -- Kupchak wants to bring him over, but no word yet on a deal Kurt Thomas -- Spurs are his first choice? Brent Barry -- two years, \$3.9 million, Houston Craig Smith -- qualifying offer extended by Minnesota Carl Landry -- qualifying offer extended by Houston Walter Herrmann -- big European money on the table? Randolph Morris -- not welcome back in New York? Kwame Brown -- Bucks, Heat apparently interested Eduardo Najera -- undisclosed deal with the Nets Juwan Howard -- ? Robert Horry -- not retiring; Spurs or Rockets? Francisco Elson -- not going back to Seattle; Miami? Theo Ratliff -- back to Detroit? Adonal Foyle -- back to Orlando? Quinton Ross -- with Brand gone, maybe the Clippers bring him back, but everyone is interested, including Phoenix, Orlando, New Jersey? Bostjan Nachbar -- Detroit? With the Nets adding Najera and Jarvis Hayes, does that mean no room for Nachbar? Dorell Wright -- qualifying offer from Miami Sasha Vujacic -- qualifying offer from the Lakers Patrick O'Bryant -- two years, \$3 million, Celtics David Harrison -- Denver? Chris Andersen -- probably not Boston after signing O'Bryant; Cleveland? Primož Brezec -- Seattle, Chicago, Miami? Jorge Garbajosa

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in L.A. Lakers at 12:47

Harden trade paying dividends already

Everybody already knows that Sean Gallagher pitched a marvelous game, striking out seven in his seven innings while giving up just two runs. Yes, this was Anaheim, which has an underachieving offense, but it's still a great performance. Here's MLB.com video of Gallagher's day. (It's actually the entire package of highlights from the game, but it leads off with Gallagher's performance.) Note especially the tremendous bite on his breaking pitches, and the fact that his fastball was in the mid-90's. With Harden's velocity falling off in the last two starts, the A's were down to exactly zero starting pitchers who could bring the heat. But they're back to one now.

You should also check out Emil Brown doubling to left to score Jack Cust. (a) Juan Rivera really made an atrocious play out there, trying to slide in front of the ball. I'm not sure if he was attempting to catch it or just stop it from getting past him, but he accomplished neither. (b) Jack Cust really unhitched the trailer, scoring on a slide just ahead of the relay to the plate. Wow.

Anyway, as for the rest of the returns on the trade: Matt Murton only went 1-5, but the hit came on an 0-2 pitch from Jon Garland with the bases loaded and two outs in the third inning. It's hard to call any hit key in a seven-run win, but at the time, the score was 5-2 A's, and getting Murton out in that situation would have left the Angels in a much better situation. Instead, he drove the single to right field, it was a five-run game, and Jack Hannahan capped the scoring in the next frame.

Meanwhile, Eric Patterson flashed the power-speed combination that's the entire reason the A's picked him up in the trade, hitting his first Sacramento homer and his stealing his first Sacramento base, though the River Cats ended up losing on a three-run homer off the bat of Sean Rodriguez in the bottom of the tenth. Landon Powell and Brooks Conrad also homered for Sacramento -- for Conrad, it was his 19th of the season, though his overall hitting stats are unimpressive: .230/.315/.464. That's a great ISO, especially for a utility guy (he played left field last night), but you'd like a little more contact ability from a 28-year-old in AAA.

Finally, for Stockton, Josh Donaldson had a couple of RBI singles, although he also struck out swinging three times and made an early throwing error. The Ports pulled out the win despite all five pitchers giving up at least one run.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Oakland A's at 12:13

Friday, July 11, 2008

Welcome to Oakland, Sean and Thunder Matt!

So Sean Gallagher's currently working with a 9-2 lead in the top of the fifth, which I think is more runs than Joe Blanton had gotten all year before his last start. That's quite a welcome.

More importantly, though, the A's did the right thing with Thunder Matt Murton: he's in the starting lineup today, batting second and playing left field. Wes Bankston, despite hitting quite well, was sent back to AAA. This is simple recognition of a basic fact by the A's front office: Thunder Matt might contribute to a winning A's team next year, while Bankston is unlikely to do so. Of course, with Daric Barton still not really hitting, even halfway into the season, it might have been acceptable to send him down instead of Bankston, but that's again an easy choice for a developing team: play the kids who might be around for five years, not the Quad-A guy who's just as likely to be a Twin next year as an A.

And you know, not to get too optimistic, but with the A's teeing off on Jon Garland and Gallagher racking up seven whiffs through five innings, and even Jack Hannahan getting into the act with a homer, maybe Thunder Matt and Barton will help the A's push this year. The trade might have been a white flag, but that doesn't mean the players will stop playing.

(By the way, how cool is MLB Gameday's rollout of the 3D pitch visualization? It's not perfect, but we're really getting there with this pitch tracking stuff.)

EDIT: I'm an idiot. Wes Bankston isn't an old guy, he's only 24. (Although Jane Lee at MLB.com thinks he's just 22.) I just assumed he was old because he'd been DFA'd and waived by the Rays and Royals. I can see why the A's claimed him: he's still young, and while he's been up and down, he's definitely hit: .289 .385 .513 at A-ball as a 20-year old (repeating the level); .292 .362 .482 in AA at 21. He struggled after being pushed to AAA at 22, and didn't have a good consolidation year at 23. The worry for the A's is that he's abandoned his plate discipline as he's moved up (or else he's one of those hitters that takes bad stuff from bad pitchers at lower levels but gets exploited by better pitchers who are willing to challenge him as he moves up): his walk rates have been 6.8% at 18 in rookie ball; 12.4% at 19 in A-ball (he more or less skipped Low-A); 13.4% repeating A-ball at 20; 19.2% at 21 in High-A; 8.9% the same year in AA; 6.6% at 22 in AA; 4.8% at AAA the same year; 5.9% at 23 at AAA; and 4.5% at AAA this year. Oddly, his ISO's don't seem to track his walk rate, as they've come down from when he was at lower levels, but he's still ISO'ing .216 this year and was at .180 last year despite those bad walk rates. Also, just eyeballing it, his strikeout rates don't seem to have differed at the extreme level that his walk rates have. In short, what's going on with Wes Bankston? Who knows!

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Oakland A's at 23:48

No Barry for the Lakers

Well, there goes Brent Barry. Highly affordable contract, too, coming in at under \$2 million per year for two years.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in L.A. Lakers at 13:58

Wednesday, July 9, 2008

Jack Hannahan

Wow, Jack Hannahan just leveled Jeff Clement, the Mariners' catcher. The video should be on MLB.com somewhere. Blogged with the Flock Browser

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Oakland A's at 23:24

Say Goodbye to Ronny Turiaf

I think Broderick Turner at the Press-Enterprise had it first: Ronny Turiaf has signed an offer sheet with the Warriors. The deal is four years, \$17 million. That's \$4.25 mil/year, for the mathematically disinclined. And when you write out that per-year number, you kind of realize the Lakers will (and should) never match this offer sheet (and you kind of wonder what the Warriors are thinking). \$4.25 million isn't a ton of money in the NBA-verse, but it's still a lot to pay for a guy who'll play 15 minutes per game, even if he is a stellar defensive player. Given that I referred to a four-year, \$4 million per deal as "going nuts" in this post, I think I have to stick to my guns and vote no on a four-year, \$4.25 million deal.

Now, it turns out that my list of guys who might replace him might not be as much in reach as I thought it was. DeSagana Diop, for instance, signed a full-midlevel deal for five years and \$31 million to return to Dallas. Diop is a guy who's offensively even more limited than Turiaf, with no post moves to speak of and certainly no midrange jumper (which Turiaf improved this year). That said, there are still players out there should the Lakers get a little desperate for big man help (and it's not clear they will be: they might just go with Chris Mihm as their main backup big and leave it at that): Craig Smith, undersized PF from Inglewood, two-year vet, restricted free agent with Minnesota, not a shot-blocker, but a good rebounder and a much better offensive presence than Ronny; Carl Landry, undersized PF in Houston, restricted free agent, similar profile as Smith but an even more valuable offensive player; Walter Herrmann, a little skinny at PF, listed by ESPN as a SF, but tall enough to play up front, good offensive numbers in Charlotte two years ago but bad ones last year with Detroit and Charlotte, good rebounder, not a shot blocker, restricted free agent; Randolph Morris, the guy who loopholed his way from Kentucky straight to the Knicks, bypassing the draft, but hardly played last year, sizeable, but who knows what his game is, restricted free agent. Then there are a bunch of unrestricted free agents: Kurt Thomas, who I've talked about; Kwame Brown (who some people seem to be excited about, but I can't really advocate this point of view -- I don't think Phil likes him, and he's a liability offensively); Eduardo Najera, another undersized guy, but an energy-and-hustle player who's not an offensive zero; Juwan Howard, who's probably done, but could still bang some bodies underneath for a few minutes a night if he had to; the aforementioned Bob Horry; Francisco Elson, because how else should we fill out the Lakers' international roster than with a guy born in the Netherlands?; Theo Ratliff, again mentioned before, and the one guy I see out there who can match Ronny's shot-blocking; and Adonal Foyle. A lot of these guys are bubble players, people who won't even make it onto NBA rosters next year, so given the sheer number of useful players available out there basically for free, you have to ask whether it makes sense to pay big (relatively) money for long (relatively) years to keep a guy like Turiaf instead of wishing him well and hoping he's still got some hugs for the Lakers when they visit Oakland.

So what does everyone else think? Lakers Nation figures L.A. won't match. Forum Blue and Gold agrees with me that the Warriors are overpaying (and compares this to the Derek Fisher signing of a few years ago). Kurt Thomas and Craig Smith are advocated as potential replacements, either of which I'd be perfectly happy with. (But neither of which will happen if James Posey is signed, I should add, seeing as how the entire reason he's upset with Boston is that they're not offering the full MLE. Giving Posey what he wants would result in no room for adding any more players, right?) Brian Kamenetzky refers to Turiaf as a "luxury" given a healthy Bynum and Mihm, but would still like to match Golden State's offer, keeping the known quantity around rather than trying to go out and find a replacement. There's certainly logic to that, given the potential incompatibility between signing a guy the Lakers covet like Posey and also bringing in a replacement backup big, but at the same time, the money has to start being a concern: the last thing Jerry Buss wants is to pay a Knicks-like luxury tax bill, isn't it? When we're talking about keeping around spare parts, not re-signing Kobe or Pau or something?

On the James Posey front, the Boston Globe says that the Celtics have increased their offer to him from the three years, \$12 million they initially put on the table. It isn't clear how much the offer was increased, but it seems unlikely that the full MLE was offered, since you'd have to figure that Posey would sign that straightaway -- if that's the most he can get anywhere, why not get it in Boston? I think he's going to end up with a Diop deal, the full MLE, but given those dollars

and that length, I think it won't (and shouldn't) be the Lakers. Posey, let's not forget, is 31 already. Does L.A. really want him badly enough to keep him around until he's 36? Is he really that valuable? Can't you get Brent Barry for shorter and cheaper? Quinton Ross is available if you want guard defense. Bostjan Nachbar? Dorell Wright? None of these guys bring the package that Posey brings, but they also don't come with the "Wow, the Celtics would have totally lost if not for Posey" (a debatable point) factor, either. Excelling in the Finals is like playing well in the NCAA tournament used to be: a guarantee of more attention (and thus more money) than you're really worth.

Finally, the Ron Artest talk just won't die. Sam Amick at the Sacramento Bee claims that the Lakers are willing to give up Odom to get Artest, but the question is whether they'll take back Kenny Thomas in the deal. Let's Trade Machine this -- can the deal happen any other way than Odom for Artest and Thomas? (Artest makes like half of what Odom does, so that's the problem that has to be solved.) Let's set some parameters and then I'll give you the trades the Trade Machine approves of. The Lakers aren't giving up Bryant, Bynum, Farmar, Fisher, or Gasol. The Kings aren't giving up Francisco Garcia, Spencer Hawes, Kevin Martin, or Brad Miller.

So here are some possibilities besides the Artest+Thomas one: Artest and Shareef Abdur-Rahim for Odom; Artest and Mikki Moore for Odom; Artest and John Salmons for Odom. You can add Quincy Douby to any of those deals and it still works. Same for Shelden Williams. You can add both Douby and Williams to the Salmons deal. Douby and Williams could be added to the Abdur-Rahim or Moore deals if the Lakers sent back Chris Mihm or Trevor Ariza.

Ok, so that's everything plausible I could find that doesn't include Kenny Thomas. Now, none of those are particularly appetizing deals, but at least they don't include an \$8.5 million, 2-year contract for a mediocre backup power forward. On that list, I think my favorite, if a deal has to be done, is the Mikki Moore deal. I don't think the Lakers want Douby, because when would he play? He's not going to be on the court over Farmar or Fisher, so what good does he do? Anyway, Moore's deal also has two years left, but it's \$3 million cheaper per year, and he's a high-energy guy who'll block some shots, be a decent rebounder, and provide some of that "toughness inside" that everyone seems to think the Lakers are lacking. A Lakers-Celtics rematch might end up with Moore and Kendrick Perkins suspended for the entire series. If Odom has to go, and Artest has to be the one coming back, then I hereby demand that Mikki Moore come with him. The Kings won't want to give him up, but you've got to give value to get value, right? And the Kings would be getting one hell of a value in Lamar Odom, both his talent and his \$14 million expiring deal. Blogged with the Flock Browser

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in L.A. Lakers at 21:31

Rich Harden, part 2

Second post on the Rich Harden trade, with some outside commentary.

First, I feel worse about the whole thing, but I don't think it's as dire as everyone else seems to. There's a lot of "my goodness, is this the best we could do for a pitcher of Harden's caliber"? And I think Joe Sheehan gets it mostly right: nobody has any idea what Rich Harden is. He could finish the year with a 2.50 ERA, he could finish the year with exactly the numbers he has now because he gets hurt in his next bullpen session (remember: one quality start in his last four, and a notable decrease in velocity ...). This isn't the 2004 Rich Harden the A's traded, but the 2008 version, the one who hasn't just been hurt, but has been chronically hurt, and not the way Bobby Crosby has, but in his pitching arm. The A's weren't going to pry Matt LaPorta from the Brewers or Joey Votto or Jay Bruce from the Reds or Josh Vitters from the Cubs. Harden simply isn't worth that much. Maybe you'd like to see the A's have picked up Felix Pie in the deal or Rich Hill, but you know, would Rich Hill instead of Eric Patterson really have made us feel better? Pie instead of Gallagher? Outside of Geovanny Soto or maybe Vitters, the Cubs don't have any young players anybody would feel excited about.

Christina Kahrl is much more down on the deal, and she's where my invocation of Pie and Hill come from. "Where's ... somebody with real upside?" she asks. Maybe they just couldn't get Pie from the Cubs, or maybe the A's don't actually like Pie and would rather have the average guy they know will be average (Murton) than the guy who might be awesome but might hit .230/.260/.400. In the end, Kahrl labels this a salary dump (though a misguided one), but I think I agree with Sheehan's idea: this is a high-risk asset dump, getting something for him while you still can.

Ken Arneson says what I think a lot of A's fans feel, which is that the A's gave up one of the most exciting pitchers in the game and got back nobody who arouses any kind of excitement at all. He's exactly right, and he's also smart enough to realize that this doesn't necessarily make it a bad trade, but it does make it one that hurts. Blogged with the Flock Browser

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Oakland A's at 20:26

Sigh: Dallas Braden up

The A's did exactly what I hoped they wouldn't and called up Dallas Braden. My first thought was that he was just up to patch the bullpen hole left by Chad Gaudin, but that doesn't fly because even without Gaudin, Oakland has six bullpeners active. So maybe he's up to take a spot start in Rich Harden's spot? But that spot doesn't come up until Friday, which should be plenty of time for Sean Gallagher to arrive. In fact, ESPN has him listed as Friday's probable starter. So I guess Oakland's going with 12 pitchers again, even though Duke is a machine, even though Thunder Matt Murton is coming to push Emil Brown to the reserve spot he deserves. Maybe the A's will go with Murton anyway and cut bait on Brown now. If either of these guys is going to help the A's next year as a reserve or platoon bat, it's Murton, not Brown. So let's see what he can do starting every day for the rest of the year.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Oakland A's at 12:11

Tuesday, July 8, 2008

Awesome NBA free agency: Maggette and Pietrus off the market, Brand leaves L.A.

Ok, so free agency is heating up: we've got Baron Davis in L.A. for some time now, and now Elton Brand has decided to move on to Philadelphia of all places. This is an amazing bit of news for all the people who suddenly were happy that Baron + Brand = relevance for the Clippers, because guess what? Baron + nobody = 11th best West team. They're not better than any of last year's playoff teams, I don't think Baron's loss hurts the Warriors as much as it helps the Clippers, especially since they've added another scoring piece in Corey Maggette (so they're not passing them), and Portland is set to be awesome. That's ten teams ahead of L.A. Too bad, so sad.

Meanwhile, though, Philly is looking rosy. They were already the seven seed out East last year, and Brand is an awesome player. I think this pushes them past Washington, although I don't know how much higher they'll go: Jermaine O'Neal + Chris Bosh is pretty awesome in Toronto, LeBron is still a Cavalier, Orlando should come back some, but I don't know if it'll be 12 games worth (plus they've added Mickael Pietrus), and Detroit and Boston should remain the class of the conference. Blogged with the Flock Browser

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Basketball at 23:37

Thunder Matt

Jake informs me that I was mis-stating Matt Murton's name. It's actually Thunder Matt Murton. I will absolutely be taking up this name, and I hope Thunder Matt can become the power source in the outfield he was supposed to be for the Cubs.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Oakland A's at 21:22

Harden traded!

So with the A's six games back, Billy Beane throws in the towel, trading Rich Harden and Chad Gaudin to the Cubs. Baseball Musings had the first story that I saw. Dave Pinto's initial reaction is that Beane didn't get enough back.

So who did the A's get back?

Sean Gallagher's a 22-year old righty starting pitcher. He threw eight games out of the Cub bullpen last year and has made ten starts this year, with an ERA of 4.45, but a DERA (defense-adjusted ERA) of 4.86. His homer rate is low in the minors (0.49) but high this year (0.92). His strikeout and walk rates are 7.52 and 3.38, so he's missing bats, but you'd like to see him cut a walk or so off those numbers. His BABIP of .310 looks about right given his line drive percentage (17.9%). So what's Gallagher? How about a younger, cheaper, better Chad Gaudin who's under the A's control for the next four (?) years, and still has one (?) year before he hits arbitration.

Next is Eric Patterson. He's a lefty hitting second baseman with a grand total of 20 big-league games under his belt. He is, of course, the brother of the much-maligned Corey Patterson. His PECOTA had him hitting .270/.340/.441, which around here is what we like to call "Mark Ellis". His walk rates in the minors have been just shy of 10%, but down to just 5.6% this year, while his ISOs have trended up: .145 at AA in 2006, .159 at AAA last year, and .197 this year (though his .388 BABIP is likely fueling some of this). Patterson's already 25 this year, so he's not likely to make any more huge leaps forward, but he does seem like a nice player to have around at second base when the A's don't resign Mark Ellis. (As much as we'd like Ellis to stay, doesn't it seem rather un-A's-like to give a guy who'll be 32 next year a free-agency-fueled extension?)

Third is Matt Murton. Murton's been talked about for a while as an easy "plug him in and let him hit" solution in left field for the Cubs, but they've never really given him a shot. He's already 26, and while he's hitting .298 with an OBP of .391 in Iowa, his slugging has dropped to just .382. This is a guy whose ISOs in the minors were normally in the .150 range, so unless something's gone horribly wrong, we might expect him to hit better than he's showing right now. In fact, given his years of being jerked around, this might be the kind of scenery-change trade that gets him back on track. PECOTA had him hitting 288/354/453 this year, producing an EqA that would rank him sixth on this year's A's, just behind Ryan Sweeney.

Finally is the first guy I haven't heard of, Josh Donaldson. Donaldson's 22 this year, a former sandwich pick out of Auburn who plays catcher. Despite his age and college pedigree, he's playing at A-ball after spending last year at the Rookie and Low-A classifications. He hit 346/470/605 last year at Low-A, but he's not exactly tearing up Peoria, hitting just 217/270/349. His BABIP is way down, but so are his walk rate and strikeout rate, so who knows what's going on.

John Sickels had Donaldson as the Cubs' sixth-best prospect coming into the year, and the best catcher not named Geovanny Soto. He gave him a B, which is a nice grade for a guy with just one pro season under his belt. Baseball America ranked Donaldson seventh. Gallagher was fifth on BA's list, with Patterson not making the top-ten. Sickels has Gallagher third and Patterson fourth, both grade-B, with a note that Patterson would be a B+ except for his defense.

So for Harden and Gaudin (a guy whose ERA is deceptively low, given his high walk rate and low strikeout rate; Cubs fans may end up unpleasantly surprised with him), the A's get three of the Cubs eight or so best prospects, just one of whom is a ways away from the majors, as well as a guy who could slot into left field and be a decent power bat right away. A's fans might tear out their hair that Josh Vitters wasn't in the deal, but even for a pitcher of Rich Harden's caliber, asking for Vitters was probably too much. Harden is simply too much of a question mark (still) to get a top-notch prospect in return, especially since he's being traded to the NL, where he'll have to swing the bat and run the bases. Who knows what could happen to him on a slide into second base.

What does this mean for Oakland's roster? I assume Gallagher slots directly into the rotation, since Oakland is now a starter short (where yesterday they were a starter long with Gaudin sitting around not doing much of anything). I hope that Murton now slots in as the everyday left fielder, with Ryan Sweeney in right and Carlos Gonzalez in center. Jack Cust can DH, Em(a)il Brown is the fourth outfielder, and Rajai Davis continues his role as defensive replacement and pinch runner. Oakland had been carrying twelve pitchers, so hopefully they use this opportunity to get back down to eleven, putting Murton on the roster without having to send anyone down. (A bullpen of Street, Embree, Andrew Brown, Ziggy, Jerry Blevins, and Sandy Casilla is a damned good one, and I see no need to go dipping into Sacramento to pull up Dallas Braden.) Eric Patterson is more of a mystery. Do the A's keep him in Oakland as a utility infielder and send Gregorio Petit back down? Even though Patterson can apparently barely even handle second base? Is the acquisition of Patterson a prelude to a trade of Mark Ellis? My guess is that for now, Patterson will be the backup infielder and Petit will go back down to Sacramento. Donaldson will presumably join Kane County, where Jake Smith, a 25-year-old, is currently the starting catcher.

The next question is what happens when Frank Thomas comes back. Three-way platoon for two spots between Cust, Sweeney, and Murton? And what about when Travis Buck gets himself right? And what about Patterson, who may already be transition to the outfield since his infield defense is rocky? The "too many players" problem has never been nearly as big a worry as the "not enough players" problem, though, so I think Billy Beane is probably not fretting overmuch about this.

It is a sad day as an A's fan to see Rich Harden go. I'll root for him in Chicago because he was always a guy you wanted to see succeed. It's a cliché at this point to say that Harden is a guy who looks like he can throw a no-hitter every time out, but it's true. What's even crazier is that people still say that the fact that he's now a two-pitch starter: fastball and changeup. But what a changeup!

Milwaukee's acquisition of CC Sabathia appears to have set off a chain reaction in the NL Central, so the next question is whether the Rich Harden trade sets off a similar chain reaction in the Oakland front office. Mark Ellis? Huston Street? Joe Blanton? Alan Embree? If any of these trades happen, can we please get a third baseman who will out-hit Jack Hannahan? Or maybe Eric Patterson is already in the A's designs to be that guy? (Patterson has played nothing but second and outfield in his professional career, so third base may be asking a bit much. But he'd have to hit better than Hannahan, right?) Blogged with the Flock Browser

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Oakland A's at 20:07

A few more players for L.A.?

Turns out I've left off a few players the Lakers have been connected to and how they might fit into the roster:

Brent Barry has been named, and he wouldn't be a terrible replacement for Sasha Vujacic, though he doesn't really play defense. Greg Popovich did run with him as his point guard for a time during the Lakers series, though, so he can handle the ball better than a lot of guys that have been named as potential replacements if Vujacic doesn't resign. (And this is somewhat important, since Sasha brings the ball up the floor with some frequency when he's on the floor.)

Kurt Thomas's name has also been bandied about as a guy to bring in if Ronny Turiaf can't be brought back. I wouldn't

really object to this so long as the money and/or years aren't large. Thomas is basically the same player as Turiaf, but a little smaller and with a little better outside shooting (15 feet) touch (though Turiaf has improved on this since he's come into the league).

Mickael Pietrus is apparently also on the table, but I'm not sure the purpose of that. He's an exciting slasher and finisher, but I'm not sure that offensively he adds much over Trevor Ariza, combined with the fact that he doesn't know the triangle yet, while Ariza at least has half a year of playing and watching to figure things out.

Finally, Sun Yue's name keeps popping up. He's a 6'9" guy who plays the point in China, which makes Lakers fans all fuzzy for Magic Johnson. I've mentioned my skepticism in a previous post, and I'll reiterate it here. Do we really want to bring over a promising young guy like Yue to sit on the bench as the 11th or 12th man on this team? I seriously doubt he'd play right away, especially since his outside shooting game is apparently pretty shaky, and the triangle isn't really a point guard system, which is reportedly his great strength: court vision, passing. He's also potentially not even the best point guard in China, which doesn't bode well for his ability to come here and thrive. He did average 13.5 points and 10.5 assists in the ABA in 2006-07 (his Chinese team was involved in a controversy that resulted in the team moving to the U.S. and playing in the ABA instead of the Chinese league; this actually probably benefits Sun because he's able to play against (slightly?) tougher competition).

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in L.A. Lakers at 18:53

Possible rosters for 2008-09 Lakers

Now that the free agency period is underway, and players can start officially signing on Wednesday, I thought I'd take a look at where the Lakers stand and what the roster is shaping up to be next year.

Definitely on the team next year: Kobe, Pau, Bynum, Fisher.

On the team partially because they're useful and partially because they're untradeable: Radmanovic and Walton.

Almost certainly on the team, barring crazy trade that none of us sees coming: Farmar, Mihm, Ariza.

On the bubble: Odom, Vujacic, Turiaf.

Guys on other teams who might end up in LA: Artest, Posey, Maggette.

Scenario 1: Vujacic and Turiaf resign with the Lakers.

Subscenario A: No Odom trade. This is my preferred scenario. The team comes back for year two with a healthy Bynum and Ariza, and has the nice problem of figuring out what to do with too much talent. My favorite lineup: start with Bynum, Pau, Radmanovic, Kobe, and Fisher. Odom comes off the bench sometimes playing the 3 (if you want a huge lineup) and sometimes the 4 (most often the 4, if I have my way), depending on matchups. Pau swaps between the 4 and 5 as needed, and Bynum plays the five. If only one of that group of three is on the floor, you fill the other big spot with Turiaf, who plays the 4 with Pau or Bynum and the 5 with Odom. Vujacic is the backup shooting guard, sometimes with a traditional small forward, sometimes with Kobe at the 3, depending on matchups. Farmar backs up Fisher: one of these two is always on the floor, and they're never there together. Ariza plays the three as the shutdown defender, but only when he can be the fifth option offensively. He should never be on the floor with Turiaf, in other words. Walton plays the three as the facilitator when Kobe is out, getting the ball to the right spot for the bigs and being the fifth shooting option (so again, no overlap with Turiaf). When Turiaf is in the game, either Radmanovic or Kobe should be at the 3. Mihm is an emergency twelfth guy, playing about as much as a twelfth man should. But goodness, isn't that a nice team? Eleven useful players! I like this plan, fitting the rotation together this way.

Subscenario B: Odom traded for Artest and Kenny Thomas. One thing that makes this less likely is that now you've got thirteen players. I guess you just deactivate Chris Mihm, though, and run with a Kobe through Thomas roster. In this case, the starters are Pau, Bynum, Artest, Kobe, and Fisher. Farmar is in the same role as before. Vujacic is probably now a more traditional backup two because you've got Artest as a legitimate three, so why move Kobe over there? (This is another reason not to do the deal: why limit Vujacic's role after a big-ish contract and a breakout year?) Radmanovic is a shooter off the bench behind Artest, and he might nominally play the four if the other team has gone small. Ariza is ... redundant. Artest is your lockdown defender, and Ariza isn't much offensively, so his minutes would likely take a huge hit, down to like eleventh man status. And Walton isn't in any better boat. As I said, this is why Odom for Artest doesn't work: it leaves you down to zero good power forwards (Pau's a center) and four small forwards. The existence of Kobe means you can't shift any of them to shooting guard for very long, so you just get redundancy without

those guys being trade chits because their contracts make them untradeable. Anyway, Turiaf and Thomas split minutes at the backup big spots. I'm not enthused by this at all.

Subscenario C: Posey signs. Mihm is again shunted off to the inactive list. I think here, Posey becomes the starting three and matches up against McGrady, Pierce, Kirilenko, Peja, Durant, or whoever right from the start. Radmanovic is a shooter at the 2-4 spots, Ariza plays defense for Posey when he's out, and Walton doesn't get many minutes. Why am I more comfortable with this than the Artest situation? Because Odom is still here, playing the four with either Bynum or Gasol. This lineup actually leaves more room for Sasha because while Posey is a useful offensive player, you can still feel ok putting him on the bench and sliding Kobe to the three in a way you can't with Artest. I like this situation, not least because it gets Posey away from those bastard Celtics, but also because it really looks like a nice team, one where Ariza still has his uses because Posey won't play the minutes that Artest would be expecting.

Subscenario D: Maggette signs. Here, I think Radmanovic is the starter and Maggette comes off the bench as a dynamic offensive player. He's especially useful when Kobe is on the bench, but he's of course not limited to those times. This again limits Sasha's minutes because you don't play him over Maggette if you need offense. Everyone else's roles stay the same as in previous situations.

Scenario 2: Turiaf gone (to the Jazz?), Sasha back.

Subscenario A: No changes. Now LA is short a player and stuck with Mihm as your only backup big, which is problematic because he's not a power forward the way Ronny is. You probably then have to resign Mbenga as the twelfth man or else run with Coby Karl or Joe Crawford in that spot. The back three spots in the rotation play out as above, with Odom off the bench, etc. This is not horrible, although I'd like to have Turiaf's energy and defensive chops playing a few minutes a night for my squad instead of Mihm.

Subscenario B: Trade Lamar. Now you've basically got Pau playing power forward full-time because Lamar isn't around. On top of that, any time either Pau or Bynum sits, you've got Kenny Thomas on the floor. And don't even think about sitting both Pau and Bynum, unless you're turned on by the thought of Mihm at center with Thomas at PF, or Thomas at center with Radmanovic at PF. And you've still got a logjam at small forward, unless you want to Radmanovic or Artest spending significant time at the four.

Subscenario C: Posey. This isn't so bad. You've got to figure that with Bynum, Pau, and Odom, Turiaf wouldn't be logging many minutes anyway, so moving to a smaller lineup for those few minutes, probably with Posey at the four, isn't so bad.

Subscenario D: Maggette. This isn't optimal because you get the worst of both worlds: no reliable backup big and Sasha squeezed out of PT by the fact that Maggette would take some of the floor time he earned last year.

Scenario 3: Sasha leaves (Houston?), Ronny back.

Subscenario A: No change. I think I move Ariza to the starting lineup here so that the knock-down shooter off the bench can be Radmanovic. For the eight minutes or so that Kobe is on the bench, I guess you can run with Ariza at the two, or maybe Vlad. The mechanics of that may be awkward with Ariza starting, so maybe Walton starts instead? Neither is ideal, but as long as Odom is out there with that unit, you've probably got enough ballhandlers to survive. In this lineup, Kobe never leaves the two spot because he's really the only two-guard on the roster.

Subscenario B: Artest. Now you've got Turiaf or Thomas playing whenever Pau or Bynum is out, and occasionally both together. That's not horrible because at least Turiaf can fake being a center for a few minutes. However, one of the major worries about a new small forward, being redundant with Sasha, would be alleviated here. That said, you've still got just one two-guard on the roster, although Artest kind of approximates one in that he's not really an interior presence, so you could go with a big lineup of him, one of the small forwards, Pau, and Bynum, which would be a hellaciously large group.

Subscenario C: Posey. Posey addresses the loss of Sasha's three point shooting the way Artest doesn't. Anything else there is to be said about this is said above.

Subscenario D: Maggette. Again, it's been said before: gain Maggette's dynamism, lose backcourt depth, cause tangle ups for playing time at SF, likely resulting in the burying of Luke Walton.

I refuse to even address the doomsday scenario of both Sasha and Ronny leaving town. When you've got three small forwards, and Lamar Odom might have to play out of position there, and your only real free agent targets are small

forwards, you can't really lose a backcourt guy who gives you active, tenacious defense and an energy big at the same time. The replacements for these two just aren't out there, especially since LA only has cap exceptions to pay outside free agents.

Since it's not my money, I prefer the situation where both guys come back and the team lures either Maggette or Posey to LA. Given the unlikeliness if that, I'm a fan of the status quo: nobody new on the roster going into the year. Failing that, the only obviously bad thing to do is trading Odom. Everyone's focused on his ability to play the three, but there are two responses, both of which have been mentioned before, here and elsewhere: first, he doesn't have to start, but could come off the bench to form a potent big-man triad with Pau and Bynum; second, focus on the negatives instead of the positives: he can rebound over nearly any small forward in the league, he can post them up with his size and strength advantages, and his length can help make up for his quickness deficiencies on the defensive end. For instance, maybe Paul Pierce could get by him to the hole, but don't forget that there will be two excellent shot blockers waiting, plus Odom's long arms chasing from behind. And Odom can get in his face in a jumpshot. Also, how many top-flight small forwards are there out there? Pierce isn't typical; Odom's more frequent matchup would be Shane Battier, Jeff Green, or Bruce Bowen. On the other end, can Pierce (or any of these guys) really do anything against Odom if he goes into the block? Or if he grabs a rebound and goes back up? Of course the problem with this is that there's not enough room for Odom in the paint because you've got the Towers down there at the same time.

Regardless, the point is that it'd be a huge mistake to trade a clearly talented player because you're worried about what he can't do instead of asking what he does that helps you.

By the way, the rest of the Laker blogosphere agrees with me on Lamar: here's Andrew Kamenetzky, trying to put together a feasible Artest trade not involving Odom and basically failing; and here's a tremendous analysis of Artest's game vs. Lamar's by Kurt, concluding that Artest's volume-shooting ways on offense aren't what the Lakers need, especially when giving up Odom's rebounding (Artest's is miserable) and passing.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in L.A. Lakers at 01:54

Sunday, July 6, 2008

Maggette and Duhon

Question: if Corey Maggette is considering signing with a contender for the midlevel, and the Lakers are willing to pay the midlevel for James Posey, then where on earth are the Lakers in the Maggette talks? They're in a position to pass up an excellent small forward who costs nothing but money?

Also, interesting note about Chris Duhon: apparently, he likes the nightlife. So maybe this wasn't the all-around awesome signing for the Knicks I thought it was, and maybe he had more reasons for coming to Manhattan than a promised starting job. If you like the clubs and your choices are NYC or Disney World, I think we all know where to go.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Basketball at 19:12

Saturday, July 5, 2008

Duhon to the Knicks

ESPN has the story that Chris Duhon has picked the Knicks. Orlando was apparently his other major suitor. I think this is a great pickup for New York. We keep hearing about how the NBA has turned (back?) into a point guard's league, and the crop of good points, old and young, is huge: Chris Paul, Deron Williams, Steve Nash, and Baron Davis are the first tier. Derrick Rose might join them soon. The second tier is also outstanding: Tony Parker, Jose Calderon, TJ Ford, Chauncey Billups, Mike Bibby, Devin Harris, Rajon Rondo, and Jameer Nelson. D.J. Augustin could join this group. Then there are the combo guys, Dwyane Wade, Brandon Roy, Randy Foye, Allen Iverson, and Monta Ellis. You'll notice from that list that the West dominates the East, but the Eastern guards are still formidable.

Unless the Knicks managed to get TJ Ford or wanted to draft DJ Augustin, they weren't going to end up with a guard with the offensive or all-around skills of the guys on this list. So what's the next best thing? Get a guy who can defend against all these guys. That's what Duhon brings.

But this is Mike D'Antoni! Doesn't he need a Steve Nash guard to run his offense? Well, sure, that'd be nice, but it wasn't going to happen this off-season, so you work with what you've got and upgrade your team as best you can. It's not like Duhon's worthless on offense, either. He shoots it at 35% from three, and carries a better than 3:1 assist-to-turnover ratio. His turnover percentage (an estimate of how many turnovers he commits per 100 plays) has gone down from nearly 19% his rookie season to just under 16% last season. Context: Steve Nash was at 21.6% last year, Chris Paul was 12.1%, Deron Williams was 17.7%, and Baron Davis came in at 11.9%, a career low. So Duhon could be better, and he could be worse. He isn't as good as any of these guys, but he probably plays better defense than all of them. Offensively, maybe the best word to describe him is "steady".

The other notable part of the story is that Duhon was apparently promised a starting role, so I guess Mikey D. isn't bothering with Stephon Marbury. Or else he's going to use Steph off the bench, assuming Starbury isn't going to pout his way through the year in that situation.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Basketball at 16:33

Thursday, July 3, 2008

Bynum wants the max contract?

Contradicting earlier language by Bynum that he didn't want the max contract, that something less would still make him happy, the Orange County Register reports that Bynum will be asking for the max (5 years, \$80 million) in contract extension talks with the Lakers. Now, "asking" for the max is a whole different thing from, say, "demanding" the max. Obviously, when the league sets a max contract, that's a cap on the negotiation, and when you're a player of Bynum's caliber, you may as well start the negotiations at that point and work down from there until you reach a point the two sides can agree on. (This is obviously why the league sets a max contract in the first place.) Might Bynum be able to hold off signing an extension and extract the max from L.A.? It's possible. The media would certainly be all over the Lakers for not locking up the guy who brings what everyone thinks they need: "toughness" inside. So that's Bynum's bargaining chip. Well, that and he's set to be at worst the fourth-best center in the league (Dwight Howard, Greg Oden, Yao Ming) for the next ten years or so. On the Lakers side, they've got the fact that he's had exactly half of one good year, it's not clear how he'll play with Pau Gasol, and his future is generally not a sure thing in the least.

I think he'll eventually settle for less than the max, but not substantially less. Maybe \$65-70 million over five years?

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in L.A. Lakers at 00:12

Vujacic to Houston?

Here's a fun rumor from Lakers Nation: Sasha Vujacic may have been offered a 5-year, \$30 million contract. That is, I think, the max mid-level exception contract that can be offered. Were it true, you'd have to think the Lakers would let him go and go after Brent Barry or James Posey, as today's L.A. Times reports that those two guys are on Mitch Kupchak's list for backup plans. Vujacic is a nice player, but \$6 million is a lot of money, especially over five years. Even that amount over three years wouldn't be so bad, although obviously you'd prefer something like \$4 million for three years or so. Anyway, as Lakers Nation notes, it's just an unsourced rumor, so let's not get too crazy at this point.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in L.A. Lakers at 00:08

Tuesday, July 1, 2008

Roger Goodell a huge crybaby

Waa, waa, we can't take care of ourselves, waa, waa, even when these rookies have NO BARGAINING POWER AT ALL we give them too much money, waa, waa, we need rules to keep ourselves in check, waa, waa.

News to Roger: contracts for employment are not rewards. You do not earn the right to get paid a lot of money by playing well in the past, except insofar as your past play indicates that you might be a good player in the future. Roger, you have an undergraduate major in economics! I would expect you to understand this. No, Roger, I know you understand this, economics degree or otherwise. I know you're up there on the stage putting the word out that you're going to be asking for even more concessions from that giant fucking pushover Gene Upshaw at the next round of bargaining. You already own players basically in perpetuity, you don't have to give them guaranteed money in their contracts, you have a salary cap, there's no free agency to speak of, there's no trade activity, players can't celebrate the way they want to, they can't take their helmets off (and thus make themselves more recognizable and marketable personalities), retired players don't have decent health coverage, and you rule by fiat. What the hell more do you want, Roger? Back the hell up and let us enjoy our Jake Longs and Jamarcus Russells.

And by the way, if I ever hear you refer to anything causing things in the NFL to be "financially unworkable" again, I swear to god I'll say the meanest things about your mother. The league is raking in money hand over fist. Hand over fist! I don't even know what that means, but I know it means "metric asstons of money"! Jake Long wouldn't get \$30 million guaranteed unless the Dolphins could afford it. You know that. So stop playing dumb and start focusing on the real problems. Like whether you're going to let Pacman Jones actually be called Adam on TV or not.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Football at 14:38

Ronny Turiaf

It is time for me to weigh in on Ronny Turiaf. I think the Lakers can't keep him. There, I have weighed in.

Ok, no, wait. Look, I love Ronny. I love that his name is spelled "Ronny" but it's pronounced "Rony" like "Rony Seikaly". Who didn't love Rony Seikaly in NBA Jam? I love that Ronny is the best dancer in the league. I love that the fans and his teammates love him. I love that he's a monster shot blocker despite not being the biggest guy in the world. I love his hair. I love how barrel-chested he is. No, scratch that. I love how he's basically just a barrel on legs that jumps a lot. I love his energy, his infectious love for the good things his teammates do.

But you know what I don't love? I don't love that when he's on the floor, it's 4-on-5 when the Lakers have the ball. I don't love that his rebounding percentage was even below Pau Gasol's, despite his entire job being to rebound and play defense. I don't love that his skill set is basically replaceable.

But here's what I really don't love: I don't love that I'm completely uncertain about whether losing him to another team will affect the Lakers' makeup. I have no mixed feelings whatsoever about chemistry in baseball: it doesn't matter in 99% of situations. I have much more mixed feelings about chemistry in sports like basketball and football, however. On the one hand, the Shaq-Kobe thing was pretty much poisonous for at least the last three years of their five-year run, yet they won a championship and got to the Finals one other time in those three years. On the other hand, it seems hard to discount the joy this Lakers team played with in completely overachieving this season. So would removing Ronny make the team less happy? Probably. Does that matter? I really don't know.

Of course, it's not just a question of losing Turiaf's lack of skills as well as his emotion: he was actually fifth on the team last year in Win Shares Above Average and third in Defensive Win Shares, so his defensive skill set is showing up in some of these numbers. (The same numbers on the offensive side of the ledger confirm how awful he is on that side of the court.)

There's also the question of if he does get away, who actually replaces him? Supposing Lamar Odom were traded for that Chicago package that just seems better and better to me every day, the answer is "Joakim Noah and Ty Thomas". But failing that (and I'm pretty sure an Odom trade isn't forthcoming), who's out there? Jamaal Magloire? Eduardo Najera? Theo Ratliff? DeSagana Diop? Melvin Ely? (cringe) Bob Horry? Primož Brezec? Some of these guys aren't bad: Najera, Ratliff, and Diop can all provide defensive lift off the bench, but do any of them give you things Turiaf

doesn't? And if that's the case, then does it make sense to bring one of them in when you could just bring back Ronny?

Here's what it comes down to: if someone goes nuts and offers Ronny like \$4 million for four years or \$3.5 for five or something like that, I just don't see how L.A. can match. Since they're over the cap, double the dollar values to get the real cost out of Jerry Buss's pocket, and you see how those prices could be steep, especially given Turiaf's limited skills. It'd be crazy for someone to give Ronny that kind of money, wouldn't it? Sure, of course it would, but this is the NBA, where L.A. lost Mark Madsen to a big-money Minnesota contract a few years back, you'll recall. Turiaf's got to be twice the player Madsen is, right? (Though they're probably on the same level, dancing-wise.)

So, conclusion? It depends. That's an awful, wishy-washy conclusion, but it's true. It really depends on what kind of money is out there for him from other teams. You can't begrudge a second-rounder with a heart condition taking the biggest dollars he's likely to ever see, and I'd wish him well if he got them. I just hope that they don't come from Dr. Buss.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in L.A. Lakers at 00:32