

'Better Eight Than Never' *- The Newsletter of MLB8*

Preseason Round-up and outlook from the 'Ballpark'

Interesting second week of preseason. Overall, teams have averaged less than 4 runs a game in the preseason which should mean a lot of close games. Only 3 teams averaged more than 5 runs (LA, Cleveland & Toronto) while 7 teams had ERA's less than 3 (Arizona, Philly, Milwaukee, the Cubbies, Anaheim, Boston & Pittsburgh).

11 teams made free-agent moves as they look to immediately strengthen through the free-agent market or look to trim costs by bringing in players of similar ability but for a lower cost. The main teams who signed players who were a noticeable improvement on the player they released were all from the same division in the shape of the Cubs, Reds and Brewers. Derrek Lee who the Cubs snared looks a particularly good player and I have to confess to being relieved he wasn't re-signed by the A's!

In terms of stat leaders, KC's Mike Sweeney was the only batsman to bat over .400 whilst also leading the majors with 15 stolen bases! Leading power man was Dodger Adrian Beltre who blasted 10 homers on his way to 25 RBI's. The more I look at the Dodgers roster the more convinced I am that they are THE team to beat.

In terms of Texas, we pitched well which was very pleasing. However, our batting average was worst in the AL to go along with AL-low 8 stolen bases. Our fielding was also amongst the worst which is most worrying when many games are going to be close. However, 9-9 is OK and I'm sure the batting will improve (it has to! only 2 players batting above .250!). Though it will not carry into the regular season it is also slightly worrying that 2 of my key batsmen already reached fatigue of 1.

As everyone looks to the start of the season and wonder whether their initial roster selections were any good, we have some views from a few managers as they look ahead to the inaugural season in MLB8.

Don't 'Tampa' with the Devil Rays by Troy Dilworth

After reflecting on the previous edition of this newsletter when it was predicted that his squad would finish bottom of the AL East, manager Troy Dilworth had the following to say -

"On reflection my squad could be a lot worse so fairly happy with the hand we've been dealt. The potential of the squad looks healthy but then this looks to be the case

league wide. In general, my players themselves seem to be overpriced so expect a revolving door policy to free agency in Tampa. Much of my original squad will do well to avoid the chop in the next couple of seasons. The two stars of my batting lineup are Sandberg 10* CF and Hall 9* C. These guys need to avoid injuries, fatigue and negative form if we are to stand a chance of reaching post season play.

My main concerns with my batting lineup are on one of my infield fielding positions and the obvious lack of depth that my Devil Rays possess. But then, nobody has any real depth either, so the fact that only one of my fielding positions is causing me concern has to mean that the overall batting situation in Tampa Bay is pretty encouraging. I'm guessing that quite a few teams have got many more problems with their fielding positions than my Devil Rays. This has to give my team a real edge and good possibility of getting some wins early on whilst team's are in the process of filling these holes on their rosters.

The pitching appears to be where most of my problems lie however and we don't possess any big name pitching stars which is a worry. What doesn't help matters either is that a few of my pitchers are not well off in terms of potential. So we'll look to replace these guys in time. Plus, the overall quality needs quite a bit of improvement too so this could be what ultimately prevents a successful season.

That being said, my own prediction is that my Devil Rays will be mighty close to achieving post season play come season end. I guess only time will tell!"

The outlook from Turner Field by Mike Sim

"Very pleased with the Braves progress thus far. Decided to play everyone this week (ok I couldn't bring myself to play my backup 4* catcher) and rested 3 of our top 4 hitters for the whole week – they are definitely going to play so I figured I'd get a look at their backups to see who I can rely upon.

Learnt quite a lot too - young OF Onil Joseph may be a 6* but is going to be good for a few pinch hit HRs (2 in 9 games this week) while 1st yr 1b Mike Hesseman is not going to be a clutch hitter this season and may find himself languishing on the practice squad.

Nice bonus was Ryan Langerhans showing he can be the cleanup hitter if / when the Joneses or Furcal aren't in the lineup - he leads the league in BAvg with a very nice mark. Also pleased to see 3 other Braves in the NL charts - none are power hitters, which remains a team weakness.

Pitching was pretty good - I sent out the likely season

starting rotation and everyone pitched well enough (not like I have any depth to drop them of course!). The Marlins didn't seem to get anything going against my right handers and the series with the Pirates could have gone either way.

The Dodgers was exactly the sort of test we were looking for in our last series. They seem to have the most explosive offence in the NL. We somehow outslugged them in the first game, only to lose the next 2 as their impressive batting order got hits up and down the line-up. They are going to be tough, specially in LA.

Negative points... well for a team with as much FLD ability as we have, we were terrible this week. Errors all over the place, though thankfully mostly from likely backups. We'll not outscore many people if we give up 6 unearned runs as happened to Smoltz in his 2nd start!

Bullpen depth is non-existent. It's coming to something when you sign a 6yr rookie with 12 pot and he's an immediate upgrade to your pen. Still could do with another cheap signing or three.

Final thought - at least we'll be solvent come the end of week one!"

Long-term view from Florida by Stuart Guard

"Well a better week last week for the Marlins, but still not great. We did manage to get back to 4-5, but after a 3-0 series loss to the Braves, where we only managed to score 2 runs in total over the 3 games. The pitching has got a little better and the starters seem to be finding their feet, with Redman staking a claim for an starting slot from the bullpen.

On the batting front we have started to get some players on base but we do lack the big hitters to drive them home, and this looks likely to be the pattern for the season really. We could of certainly done with more power on the books. We did manage to sign a Free Agent in Keith Marshall who has dropped our wage bill slightly and does appear to offer us some stability in the bull-pen.

We remain one of the few teams in the league without a 10* player, and whether this will haunt us will have to remain to be seen. Given the strength of many it seems we have a lot of work to do, but the idea is to build the franchise over time. Out stadium facilities are good, and we're only likely to go mad on Free Agents if funds permit. The main driver will probably be reducing costs for the talent we have, and some shrewd signings are more likely than big names. I'm hoping to be around for a long time to

come in MLB8, and hope the rest of you are as well." (A *sentiment echoed by many – ed.*)

Week 1 Preview

Everyone starts with important divisional series, followed by some intriguing matchups. Two of the big-hitting teams in the AL meet up when the Jays entertain the Indians while the two teams who pitched the best in the AL meet up in Boston as they host Anaheim. In the NL, the Phillies who (perhaps surprisingly) had the 2nd best ERA in preseason host the offensively potent Dodgers while the Marlins host the D'Backs – two teams who hit only 13 homers between them in the preseason.

Newsletter by e-mail

I have the e-mail addresses for 16 of the managers in MLB8 and, whilst not wanting to exclude in anyway those who don't have or would prefer not to receive this by e-mail, I would ideally like to send this by e-mail and not send a paper copy for Danny to send onto people. The managers whose addresses I don't have are Douglas Crawford, Martin Halls, Alastair Brearley, Paul Coffey, Tom Shewry, Stewart Jones and Mark Hall so if you have e-mail and want to share your address with me then e-mail to the address at the bottom of the newsletter.

Also, what do people think of this idea? Do people want to receive it by e-mail only or would they prefer a paper copy anyway? Again, let me know your views – you lot are the consumers of this newsletter and I will endeavour to do things how the majority want it – even it means a hard copy, an e-mail copy and a fax copy as well!!

I would welcome any contributions, including people's views on how they performed in Week 1 and what they think of the immediate & long-term outlooks for their teams. Also, any comments on the newsletter so far would be good. Send by post or e-mail to the addresses below.

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Until next week, Ian.