

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

Week 3 Around the League

The overall parity of the league was summed up this week by the fact that only one team had a record better than 6-3. That team – Dave Brown's Minnesota Twins – are part of an AL Central Division that really caught fire this week. All 4 teams have winning records and even the team that is bottom of the division (Cleveland) is in the midst of a 6-game winning streak. The division-leading White Sox had star pitcher Jon Adkins throw 2 complete games this week, giving up just 1 run in the process.

In the AL West, the Anaheim Angels took the series against the Texas Rangers and moved to the top of the division by virtue of a better run differential. It looks likely that these 2 teams will battle it out for the division. In the East, Philip Howard's Blue Jays extended their early lead to 6 games as Boston struggled and New York and Tampa head to what may be a battle with the Brewers for the honour of having the top pick in next year's draft.

Over in the NL, the East looks to be the toughest division with all teams having a winning record. Mike Sim's Braves look very strong though they have a couple of major injuries at the moment that the other 3 teams will be looking to take advantage of.

In the Central, the top 3 teams had strong weeks while the Milwaukee Brewers continued to struggle (1-8) going down to 4 1-run defeats. They will hopefully be buoyed by the signing of Terry Adams whose signing frustrated his former employers Philadelphia who were keen to re-sign him. At the top of the division Mark Gamble's Pirates have quietly conceded the fewest runs in the majors.

In the NL West, Patrick Lee's Dodgers stretched their lead to 5 games though they have probably yet to really hit top form. The main news in the rest of the division is the continued excellence of Rockies pitcher Adam Bernero who, this week, dominated the Dodgers with a 1-hit shutout.

View from San Francisco Bay by Alan Molloy

A poor week in San Francisco saw the Giants slump to the bottom of the division and unfortunately there is no immediate light at the end of the tunnel. We lost every series 2-1 this week although one of our opponents was the Braves and some might argue that our best performance of the week came against the Braves, losing the 2nd game by

1 run and shutting them out in the 3rd. However, at the end of the season you don't get extra points for playing well it's wins that count and after 3 weeks we only have 9.

We missed out on our free agent target this week which slows up our rebuilding exercise. The positive is that our finances are building quicker than expected as a result of our poor performance on the field. We'll try and lure another free agent this week but the bottom line is that in a new league players will want to go to competitive teams.

Halo Hollerings by Paul Beaumont

One month of the season gone and the Angels top the AL West, albeit on points from the Rangers. These two teams look to be the class of the West, although it is still early on. Both have strong pitching units, but the Angels look to have the edge with the bats. Like all teams, the Halos have weaknesses within their line-up and no depth or cover to speak of.

The Angels do have a very experienced infield of Riggs, Kennedy, Eckstein and Figgins which is a big plus for the side, with only Figgins batting under .300 through April. Catcher Molina is playing well in a platoon with Wooten, the Halos will be careful with his development early on as he is seen as a key player for the future. The first four pitchers in the rotation are set with Ortiz, Lackey, Sele, and Washburn filling those slots. Donnelly, Shields, and Weber are the first to be called upon in the bullpen, after that the quality and experience tails off. Thankfully the main starters tend to go 7+ innings so the bullpen don't get too fatigued.

Injuries are going to play a big part this season. CF DaVanon sprained his foot in Week 2 and misses 14 games, starting pitcher Sele currently has a sprained ankle and misses 14 games. These injuries, whilst to key players, haven't been as severe as some teams have experienced and the Angels are planning on improving their trainer when possible.

Early on in the season LPs are tight for everyone. However, as the season progresses a key for teams will be how they invest the increasing amount of LPs they will receive. The Angels feel that they can compete for the AL crown this year so would like to strengthen their playing staff, but want to achieve this without sacrificing the future - which will be a fine balance. The AL East looks to be a battle between the Blue Jays and Red Sox, whilst the Central is wide open with only two games separating the four teams.

Currently four of my tips for division winners are top (Blue Jays, White Sox, Pirates, Dodgers) whilst the

Rangers are joint top (with the Angels who were my wildcard pick). Therefore, the only team I seem to have given the 'kiss of death' to were David Trice's Expos, who trail the Braves by five games. Not too bad so far, but still a long way to go. (Pretty impressive so far I'd say – ed).

Bravo to the Braves by Mike Sim

"Three weeks gone and everything going according to plan! Ok I'm kidding 100%.. the re-run turn helped us in the win column and may yet prove to be a watershed week for us - not so much for the additional form gained (it was 5 total IIRC) but because it meant I didn't tinker with my line-up after week 1.

That line-up has been rock solid so far, from the incredible start of Adam LaRoche to the pleasantly surprising production of young Andrew Jones. Young RHB in particular are not noted for big numbers. Unfortunately Jones posted another big number this week - 30. That's not his RBI total, but rather the number of games we'll be without him. He'll be missed in the 3 hole of our line-up, though hopefully Mark DeRosa will fill in - he shouldn't have too much trouble, he's already got the team lead (and perhaps league lead?) in RBIs.

It does mean shuffling our hitters up a spot, which of course weakens the team. Good job I've already had a chance to look at my backups - both Onil Joseph and Cory Aldridge are promising - neither will post Jones' numbers but it could be worse!

Biggest dilemma of the opening 3 weeks has been whether to rotate backups in with a view to keeping starter fatigue under control. So far Chipper Jones and Furcal has sat out some games and this week it'll be the turn of C Johnny Estrada. Not expecting much from his backup Marrero but he needs a few games off so he'll sit the Marlins series.

Going to be relying heavily on the pitching again. It's great to be leading the league in runs scored, but more enjoyable has been the outings by Ortiz and Smoltz who have both really started well. My plan to only use the 5th starter once a week has been scuppered this week and the man in question, Adam Wainwright will get 2 starts which again may be a problem. The long term injury to star reliever Mike Hampton hasn't really hurt us so far, with Ray King and John Thomson subbing admirably but I am looking forward to having him back - 3 more weeks though! Overall, I would expect us to lose a bit more over the next 3 weeks.

Looking around the NL - great looking league! The NL East is stocked with superb skippers and all are off to pretty good starts. The race is going to be tough all the

way. The Central is looking interesting too - good to see an old gameplan friend of mine, Mark Gamble doing so well. Not looking forward to facing his team this week though! Also good to see Bo has been dealt some offensive players after his endeavours in MLB1. The Cubs are the team I'd probably fancy managing most if I weren't the Braves skipper - Stewart has a good looking team there and I'm glad he's getting them going. The West has a long way to run yet - can't see the Dodgers having an easy time once the other guys get their teams going.

As for the AL..... well we'll know more after week 5 but I am really looking forward to playing Mr Denyer's Red Sox. The Braves will be particularly fired up for that one!

Week 4 Preview

Divisional races will continue to take shape this week. The Jays travel to Boston looking to extend their lead, the Central teams clash in what are very important series in such a close division.

The wounded Braves travel to Florida to face the Marlins who will hope to drag the Braves back to the rest of the division. The Pirates travel to the Brewers for a series that must be very worrying for Martin Willan – fewest runs conceded against fewest runs scored! For the rest of the week, the Braves tough week continues as they host Pittsburgh and then travel to L.A.

Looking further ahead, Week 5 will bring MLB8's inaugural inter-league series. This is always an exciting time and is the first opportunity for each league to gain bragging rights and stake a claim for being the 'best' league – even at this early stage.

There are now no players on the free-agent list who are 8* or better. Therefore, though there are some bargains to be had there are no big-impact players that can be picked up. As the season progresses, it will be interesting to see whether any teams who are out of the race will be dumping any 9* or 10* players.

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Until next week, Ian