

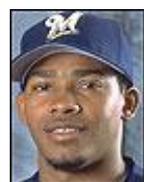
## 'Better Eight Than Never' - The Newsletter of MLB8

### Week 4 Round Up

Again, only 1 team in the league goes 7-2 or better – this week it was Bo Mayfield's Cincinnati Reds and gives them a 2-game lead over the Pirates in the NL Central. Preseason NL favourites the Dodgers were hammered as the Reds offense exploded for 33 runs. Elsewhere, all the NL East teams have winning records in what looks like it will be a great division. Out West, the Dodgers haven't really clicked and will be relieved that none of the other teams have got going yet.

In the AL, the Jays extended their lead over the Red Sox to 7 games, the Royals took the lead in the AL Central and the Rangers took advantage of a Yankee sweep of the Angels to take a 2-game lead in the West.

The league remains low-scoring, particularly the Brewers (sorry Martin!). This is mainly due to the number of excellent pitchers in the league. Adam Bernero cruised to a complete game against the Brewers this week and has the lowest ERA amongst starters at a staggering 0.88! The other top pitchers in the NL so far have been the Braves' Russ Ortiz (6-0), the Reds Juan Cerros (5-0) and Pirate Brian Boehringer (1.69 ERA).



In the AL, Mickey Callaway leads the majors with 7 wins and is the main reason that Texas has the lowest team ERA. The next best starter in the AL is probably the ChiSox Jon Adkins who has a league-high 5 complete games. Unlike the NL, the AL has some outstanding relievers, including the Rays Jorge Sosa, Mariners Julio Mateo and Aaron Loper and Angel Scott Shields.

### Ooh La La - Les Expos by David Trice

Montreal Expos manager, David Trice, lost his usual air of bonhomie this week, on learning of the injury to starter Tomo Ohka. Ohka suffered shoulder ligament damage last week in his final start against Arizona, and will miss 3-5 weeks. Although Ohka is rated as the Expos 4th starter, he has compiled a 2-2 record with 3.02 ERA in 9 impressive starts.

The Expos are 6-3 when Tomo starts, but will now find it difficult to fill his one quarter portion of starts in the Expos' four man rotation. Zach Day started during the early part of the season, but his 4.99 ERA and 1-2 record as a starter do not bode well for a team that trails the division leading Braves by 4 games.

Ohka's injury came during a week in which the Expos had plenty to celebrate. They finally broke their duck, winning a series against an NL Central team, and taking two of three from the Phillies. All this whilst they were missing their 10\* short stop, Orlando Cabrera. They now have a 6-3 record "tête à tête" against their two most prominent division rivals, and would hope to be further up the standings at this stage.

Their season has been one of inconsistency, though, for the Montreal club. 13-8 on the road, the club are 7-8 at home, and have only three players batting over .280. CF, Todd Zeile, began to get on and steal bases this week from the leadoff position, and this was the key to a team that kept on giving their offense the chance to win. In truth two final innings losses indicate that the team could well have won more than 6 games in the week.

The Expos are frustrated with their batting, but with excellent starting pitching have been able to make the most of low-scoring games. The team will undoubtedly stop their policy of recruiting promising young players and begin to chase higher value veteran pitchers to spell bullpen arms Claudio Vargas, Joey Eischen and Rocky Biddle, who recently lost the closers role. Vargas has a 4.15 ERA, but a 1-5 record - losing two games in final innings this week alone.

Complaining that some of his bullpen don't have the nerve, Trice has the difficult decision as to whether or not to go back to five man rotation and hope his starters will finish their own games. Their are advantages, but whilst Ohka is injured it means that Day and probably Vargas will start, leaving three games a week at least that the Expos will need to score some runs to win.

With Cabrera still out and Ohka rehabilitating, lowly Tampa's visit next week is far from a fait accompli, and a decision has to be made whether to coach existing talent,

sign new relievers, or continue the team's dangerous liaisons in the closing innings.

### **Twins Thoughts** by Dave Brown

Back to earth with a bump! After week 3's 7-2 best team in MLB8 performance, the mighty Minnesota Twins deciding to reverse things in week 4 by going 2-7 to be the worst team of the week in week 4! Nothing like consistency...

Overall, so far, the Twins are performing roughly in line with expectations though I had hoped for a bit better. The Week 1 re-run did us no favours: 2 games more lost and our best relief pitcher out for 26 games was not ideal.

And now another bullpen member, John Santana, has managed to break his arm (while cleaning his car! He slipped on the soap suds...) to put himself out for most of the season! Not that he'd have been playing much but he did look like a good candidate to get rid of to reduce the Twins' wage bill...

The Twins have also taken on a private detective! Three weeks in a row we were outbid for a free agent by a single LP. Rumours of a spy in the Twins camp are rife...

Overall then, we look unlikely to make the post-season in season 1, though there are hopes within the Twins camp that with our solid financial base we will see an improvement over the course of the season. But the aim with the initial set-up always was, with a young squad, to look more towards seasons 2 and 3 to challenge.

Additionally, the AL Central is, together with the NL West, one of only 2 divisions to lack a "whipping-boy" opponent, making our task all the harder. But considering that even the Brewers don't on paper look so weak says a lot for the strength of MLB8 as a whole.

Week 5 sees the first series of inter-league play – always an interesting yardstick! Come on the American League!!

### **Come on you Reds** by Bo Mayfield

Reds fans had reason to expect a competitive team but 23-13 and 2 games up after four weeks is a pleasant surprise. The early pick up of Joe Morgan has been a big plus. His performance has been no better than average but an extra 8\* switch hitter gives the team some much needed flexibility.

Juan Cerros' spectacular start highlights a pitching staff that has otherwise simply been good enough. Looking at available stats for the batters nothing really stands out but

they have been solid in all areas and very good with runners in scoring position.

The team's undoubted strength so far has been the glove work. Only 5 errors in 36 games meaning the pitching staff have only been burdened with 3 unearned runs.

Injuries have been about on par with the rest of the league in terms of numbers and duration but all have struck the top 5 or so players on the team. One of these weeks it will have to be the turn of a bottom of the bullpen type or reserve.

So, cause for optimism after the season's first month but also cause for concern on closer inspection. The rest of the season starts with a very difficult inter-league week and we'll face more road than home games from here on out.

Our reserves are either very young or career minor leaguers getting a chance and can't be expected to play at anything close to the level of the regulars as fatigue and injuries take their toll. Two reserves saw their first playing time of the season this past week and hit a combined .460 so we have probably already seen the best we'll get from the end of the bench.

Of most worry is a league low LP balance. Mid season improvements via free agency or coaching are certain to favor the competition.

The balance of the season should prove very entertaining.

### **News from sunny Florida** by Stuart Guard

We kicked off the week against the Braves, and things didn't start well. Our lack of big hitting cost us dearly, and the Braves played steadily to record first a 4-2 win and then a 6-2 win. We were however able to win the third game 6-5 at the bottom of the 11th is what was to be a tiring week for the team. Next up the Giants and this time it took us to the bottom of the 12th before we were able to sneak the winning run, taking a close 3-2 win. They struck back in game 2, with a 4-0 win, but we found some form in the 3rd game to win 10-4 and level us up at 3-3 for the week.

Our trip to the Pirates started well with a 4-0 game 1 win, but it was levelled with a 2-4 loss in game 2. This left the final game and we held on despite a spirited Pirates 9th innings comeback to win 6-5, and record a 5-2 week overall. Good job we did all in all as we are bottom of the mighty East now with a 19-17 record, just 5 games back from the leading Braves.

Off the field we took a bit of a chance in releasing the young pitcher Urbina and resigning Carl Pavano who was

released earlier in the season. Pavano had a great pre-season but his ratings were low for his value. Looking back we wondered if we had done the right thing, so knowing we would get half the value back bid a bit over the odds to pick up the rookie player, who we think has a big part to play in the Marlins future. It kept our wage bill the same and we believe improved the team, which is what the free agency market is about for us.

Enjoying the new league a lot, and interesting to see the different strategies being taken by the various teams. We have pushed our Stadium level up high as we believe this gives us long term return, and wages are set at a low level. Building for the future is still the focus but we're happy to be hanging on to the battle in the East. This week we may struggle with Beckett missing from the lineup, but it is a short injury so we should be grateful.

#### **Views and look ahead to interleague** by Mike Sim

Another good week in MLB8 - tough week for Atlanta as I expected without Andruw Jones. Pretty pleased to secure a winning week with series vs Florida and the other 2 division leaders, Pirates and Dodgers.

Offence struggled a bit, possibly keys on LaRoche have slowed him or he's just settling down but he's not getting on base as much and we're not driving in as many runs. Still just leading the league, for this week at least. Our pitching is dividing into 2 camps - the sublime (Ortiz) and everyone else.

Another blow this week as Furcal went down injured (will miss him as he was hot this week) but on the plus side, we won't get any injuries next week as we're already too banged up!

Round the league... jeeppers what is Ian feeding his pitchers? Less than 100 runs conceded in 4 weeks - bet the other AL teams are glad it's inter-league week. How bout the NL East... 4 teams, 4 winning records - will be interesting to see how we all fare vs the AL.

Now for Boston! (an interleague rivalry already!– ed)

#### **Continued despair in Tampa** by Troy Dilworth

My Tampa Bay Devils rank dead last in the league in terms of ERA. My relief pitcher Sosa has the best ERA in the league after 4 weeks of 0.61!! So what the heck are the rest of them doing???? Idiots!

To make matters worse, he is ONLY a 5\* pitcher. Welcome to the "Tampa Triangle" where good pitchers disappear never to be seen again if they first put on a Devil Rays uniform that is!



**Frustration levels are so high in Tampa that players have now resorted to eating their own bats!**

#### **Week 5 Preview**

As mentioned above, Week 5 sees the inaugural interleague play in MLB8 and the first opportunity for one of the leagues to gain bragging rights over the other. Thus far, there have been slightly more runs scored in the NL, despite the fact that slightly fewer homers have been hit.

The main reason for this seems to be that more walks have been drawn in the NL. Is this due to the patience of NL hitters or a lack of control from NL hitters? We'll get part of an answer this week. Also, fielding has been slightly better in the NL – will that prove to be a crucial edge against sloppier AL teams?

The only division leaders facing each other this week are the Dodgers and Rangers, and Reds and Blue Jays. But there are a number of intriguing matchups and a number of teams will be playing without some 'big-name' players – Adam Kennedy (Angels), Josh Beckett (Marlins) and Rey Olmedo (Reds) just 3 of the players who succumbed to injury this week. The biggest injury this week was to Johan Santana (Twins) but he is not a key part of their team. Bigger long-term absentees will be Mike Bordick (Jays), Kevin Millar (Red Sox) and Tomo Ohka (Expos as previously mentioned).

#### **GAMEPLAN ADVERTISEMENTS**

<http://www.gbspn.com/> Gameplan Baseball news and statistics from all 8 Gameplan Baseball leagues.

<http://www.uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/gameplanbaseball/messages> A discussion group for Gameplan Baseball managers. The group includes discussions on the features of the game, news, results, and possible developments.

Until next week, Ian.