

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

Week 5 Round Up – Interleague Play

Well, the inaugural interleague week of MLB8 has been played and the NL has initial bragging rights (58-50). The biggest winners were the Giants, Rockies, Pirates, Expos and Marlins. The only team who can really hold their head high in the AL is the Boston Red Sox who went 7-2.

Interestingly, the NL went 11-3 in extra-inning games – not sure whether that means there are better bullpens in the NL or whether it was just sheer coincidence.

Boston's performance this week has pulled them to within 5 games of the Jays in the AL East, and only out of the wild card position on run differential. Their joy will be tempered though by a lengthy injury to Pedro Martinez. The Central remains tight and it would be difficult to pick a winner at this stage. Out West, both the Rangers and Angels were poor against the NL so Texas maintain their 2-game lead despite going 3-6.

In the NL, the East is now very tight following a disappointing week for the Braves. The Marlins are currently at the foot at the division but with a record that could lead the NL West. The Pirates overtook the Reds in the Central, the Cubs seem to be improving and the Brewers also as they posted their first winning week. In the West, the Dodgers continued to stutter and are now just 2 games ahead of the Rockies and 5 ahead of the surging San Francisco Giants.

On the free-agent front, teams continue to tinker with their rosters. Due to the low initial wages, everyone has losing points so the few excellent prospects appearing on the free-agent list may mean a bit of a bidding war. We'll see.

I was expecting a number of NL gloaters to contribute this week but oddly the only one to speak is Mike Sim of the Braves who actually had a losing week. The rest of the NL must be too modest to want to rub the AL's nose in it!!

Interleague reflections by Mike Sim

I enjoyed the inter-league week even though it didn't go quite as I hoped, more as I feared. It's clear Boston under Mr Denyer are a decent pitching side and they held us to 13 hits in the series which was disappointing from an Atlanta viewpoint. Not quite sure how we lost game one after getting 7 walks, but we weren't really threatening in games 2 & 3 and the Sox deserved their sweep.

In retrospect, my decision to rest LaRoche for the opening 2 games backfired as he might have been the difference in game 1. Still, he was beginning to flag and he can't play 162 games for sure.

The series against Cleveland was the opposite - both teams were potent at the plate sharing 50 runs though the Indians deserved at least a game, 2-1 was probably fair. Ironically Ramirez pitched the best of the 3 Braves starters in the series and yet lost!

The series in Oakland was disappointing as we totally didn't show up for the first 2 games. Harden in particular owned us in game 2. Game 3 was better and winning the last game of the week gives you a bit of a boost.

Giving us a further boost was the news that Furcal is coming back this week and that Andruw Jones and Hampton are just a week away. We tried to re-sign Betemit but he chose to join the Giants in a smart move by Alan. In fact the Giants had a good all-round week, getting back into contention and adding a speedy guy with potential - SBs had been a problem for them.

It seems all the NL divisions are getting tighter. In the West the Rockies moved closer to the Dodgers whilst the Pirates and Reds flip-flopped. As for the East, at this rate we're all going to be tied by week 6 - talk about competitive!

The Phillies 2-headed managerial monster!

Fans and managers around the league have been wondering what has happened in Philadelphia and what M.Rob Crowther means!/? Better Eight Than Never has got the truth on this from 'M'.

The 'M' is Mark Dixon and he and Rob Crowther have formed a managerial double act. While this experiment has failed in many sports (e.g. Roy Evans and Gerard Houllier) things seem to be working well so far as the duo have got the Phillies breathing down the neck of the division-leading Braves.

'M' reveals more – "It's a democracy! By and large Rob is taking most of the roster type decisions and I'm doing the gameday stuff. But we both have input into all facets of the 'plan'.

The basic philosophy is that we talk through what we both want to do and then pick the 'best' option by consensus. It's a good job we're both such nice blokes though otherwise it could get messy.

Rob and I also run a Gameplan team (American Football) where nominally Rob does the offense, I do the defense and we do the roster stuff together, the experience of doing that means we know we can work together and so far we've not had too many fallings out. (well none to be honest)."

Whether this co-management will work as the pressure mounts later in the season remains to be seen but the combo is certainly working well at the moment and the deadly duo are certainly getting the best out of what (on paper) doesn't look the strongest roster.

Week 6 Preview

Thankfully (for the AL anyway) it is back to normal this week. Out West, the top 2 face each other at Arlington in what could be a crucial week for the Angels – particularly as ace pitcher Jarrod Washburn is missing. Similarly, the top 2 in the Central face off as the ChiSox travel to Kansas. In the East, Boston will continue to chase the Jays who will be without star OF Orlando Hudson as they face Tampa, Chicago and Anaheim.

In a division as good as the NL East every series is a big series but the Braves will travel to Philly looking to cling onto a lead that they have only on run differential. The Reds travel to Pittsburgh looking to retake the divisional lead against a Pirate team who will be without star SS Carlos Rivera. The Cubbies looked to be primed to get into the race but will be without Kerry Wood this week.

In the West, the pressure will be on the Dodgers to really start performing as they host the Rockies and their outstanding pitching staff. The Giants will try and take advantage of what looks a reasonable week on paper and continue to close the gap on the top two.

Only 1 team has a record better than .600 and only 4 teams have a record below .400. Makes for close games and a close league which has to be good for the game.

A shorter newsletter this week as you can see. Thanks to Mike and Mark for their bits and hopefully we can get some more contributions for the next edition.

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<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.