

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

Week 6 Round Up

Big winners this week in the AL were the Boston Red Sox who continued their run of excellent form and are now within 3 games of the Blue Jays. On the back of good home form, the D-Rays and the Yankees are also showing signs of improvement.

The AL Central continues to be as it has been from the start. No-one really dominating and all 4 teams still able to realistically think they can win the division. So far it is the offense of the Royals that has them in the lead. The Rangers maintained their 2-game lead out West, courtesy of a 2-1 series win over rivals Anaheim. This was crucial, especially as we were out of it 30 to 21. Seattle and Oakland are struggling to keep up with the top 2.

The NL East continues to be the division to watch. The Braves started out in superb fashion but have been overhauled by the Phillies and Marlins. Have to also mention the Expos - bottom of the division at 30-24 but only 1 game out of the wild card slot! They have a bizarre split of 9-15 at home and yet 21-9 on the road so with a bit more home cooking could be top of the division.

The Reds were the big winners in the NL (8-1 and outscoring opponents 62-24) taking a 4-game lead over the Pirates. Good to see the Brewers starting to make some progress with 2 consecutive winning weeks. The Dodgers slightly extended their lead in the West as none of the rest were able to muster a winning week.

On the free-agent front some pretty big moves were made. Toronto got the prized signing of Jayson Werth (more below) which must have annoyed the Twins who were probably out-bid again. Though getting rid of a decent pitcher, the D-Rays signed talented SS Barry Wesson.

The Royals signed another powerful hitter in Cordero though they gave up a good pitcher to get him. KC have assembled a powerful lineup, particularly from the left-side of the plate. The Marlins made a bit of a splash signing LF Scott Mitchell. The Expos signed talented CF Everett from the ChiSox while the Phillies signed Colome from Tampa. This doesn't look much but adds to a very deep group in Philly.

View from the Sky Dome by Philip Howard

"Huge matchup with the Red Sox to start Week 7. Their pitching has got them a lot of wins, and my 10* CF Orlando Hudson will only be back for the final of the three

games. It's fair to say that new signing Jayson Werth will have a role to play, giving us proper outfield depth for the first time. He's our fourth decent switch-hitter, and has huge potential - while our bid of 47 LPs was high, his abilities seem to show this to be a good gamble.

Injuries have been tough on us recently: 2B Bordick was slugging .544 before he separated his shoulder at the end of week 5, and Hudson was leading us in batting average. We've had a lot of trouble driving in runs with both of these guys missing. OF Wells has come in and done well, but hits for average more than power. Our bright spot among the ever-presents is leadoff man Hinske, who leads MLB by a country mile with his 29 SB's (from a baseline of 35 singles and 24 BB's). 1B Dave Berg generates some power, with 8 HR's, but has been charged with 12 errors.

Pitching has been good: we've conceded fewer total runs than most, though we're in the middle of the ERA chart. We could do with some 7* relievers, but then couldn't everybody? Compared with our recent injury woes, losing our fourth starter, Kershner, for 14 days this week was a let-off by comparison.

Views and report on the league so far

Reporter John Boy Bush III has been conversing with managers about the league so far and the different approaches managers are taking in building their franchises. Initially he spoke to GMs Guard and Dilworth as they sat sunning themselves in South Florida.

SG – "My take has been to keep wages low. We are trying to cut any over expensive players where we can which has seen our wages drop, although as yet not as far as Troy's."

TD – "In the beginning, my personal view was this - if we'd have started well then I would have trained up the trainer as I didn't have much depth and would have been worried about injuries and fatigue to my few decent players.

However, we didn't start very well, so I didn't/don't see the point in investing in the trainer this season. I might as well use my losing points to gain me extra losing points and especially as it doesn't much matter whether I win or lose, thus doesn't much matter who I play or rest. Incidentally, expect more players out of Tampa Bay and I can't wait for my 8* pitcher to recover fully from his injury stint as he'll be shown the door as soon as he recovers.

By my calculations, I think we could possibly have 200 merchandising and a 15 stadium level come the end of the season. Makes balancing the books and increasing my trainer level at the start of next season much easier! But, that will come after I've increased my fan base first."

SG – “Interesting to see you going for 200 merchandising. There are several differing approaches being taken in the league. Guess the debate as to whether it's worth going to 200 now on Merchandise or staying around 100 is an interesting one. Also you always have to top merchandise up throughout the season to keep the money coming in, but the stadium doesn't drop until the end of the season, which is why some of us have taken that approach. On the Trainer front as well it seems it is a big factor on fatigue. Our trainer is only average and we're trying to improve but the fatigue has hit our batters a lot.”

TD – “You think you've got problems - my 10* CF Sandberg has 4 fatigue already and we have only played 54 games... how unfit is that!?! More likely it's an indication of how many times he is having to field the ball because my pitchers have been slapped to all parts so far”

SG – “will be interesting to see how the teams with the better trainers fare at the end of the season. Is keeping your squad healthy and available in this first season the most important thing, given the lack of skills in free agency that are available to plug gaps.”

At this point, Philip Howard phoned John Boy Bush III.

JBB3 – “I'm just talking to Stuart and Troy about the league so far – trainers, wages, etc, any views?”

PH – “My approach, as a team who have been winning (except last turn!) is to concentrate on immediate success. So, I'm holding off merchandise unless I accidentally (eg through failed FA bids) find at least 50 LPs sitting around. At under 50 LPs, the income benefits will be fairly slight compared with the lure of Addforms, improving depth, etc.

Training seems very important if one is to compete this season: I have four fielders on 2 fatigue and one on 3 fatigue, so will probably have to increase further from level 5 as soon as possible if we're not to be severely disadvantaged should we make the post-season.

Wages - considering that base and fan income are pretty good, even if we're down on merchandising and stadiums, this isn't a major concern. The level of competition for decent FAs means that a manager would have to be prepared to pay far over the odds repeatedly to get themselves into serious trouble, otherwise they'll just not sign enough high-wage players! I'm sure everyone will keep looking for value, and those pesky 4*s and 2-wage 5*s will be an endangered species by mid-season.”

SG – “The other aspect is where are the big name players going to come from to spend all the extra LP's on? Surely it will take a few seasons for squads to struggle under

salary caps and have to look at cutting older highly paid veterans? Maybe 3 seasons?”

JBB3 – “Thanks guys – interesting thoughts”

The editors' views are as follows. “Haven't put anything into merchandising this year. Have put it into having a decent stadium for the reasons Stuart alludes to above (regular income that doesn't have to be topped up). To be honest, if wages are low (which they are) you don't need to make anything from merchandising to be making LPs each week. Therefore, may not invest in that at all this season. In terms of what to spend LPs on, seeing is there is quite a bit of potential even on veteran players I think I am going to do a bit of coaching of key players.

Training certainly seems to be having a big effect. As soon as I saw the 70 game injuries early in the year I made a decision to invest relatively heavily in my trainer. Don't know about others but I don't have much depth and probably couldn't handle a lengthy injury to a key player. I've had a 30+ injury but have managed to cope and my other injuries have been relatively short so I think my decision has been vindicated so far. Also, I don't have any batsmen with fatigue over 2.

Obviously some teams are taking a shorter-term approach, others are looking to the long-term. It will be interesting to see how things pan out. Clearly, there are a number of ways to build a team which is one of the reasons why this is such a good league and a good game.”

Any other managers have views on how this league is developing and the different strategies being used?

Week 7 Preview

The week starts with an excellent series in Canada as the Jays host Paul Denyer's Red Sox. This is a big week for the Jays (see earlier) as they also face the other 2 division leaders in the AL. Every series in the NL East is crucial and this week the Marlins travel to Atlanta and the Phillies travel to Montreal with the Expos looking to improve their home form. On the free-agent front, some good players continue to appear and it will be interesting to see which teams try and make a move and improve themselves.

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Until next week, Ian.