

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

Lots of contributions (thanks to those below) so no space for any other league news. Also, I haven't really had time either so many thanks to those who have contributed.

Doom and Gloom in San Fran by Alan Molloy

More doom and gloom in San Francisco as the Giants go from bad to worse. It's amazing how quickly the season has flown by as we're already nearing the half way point. Unfortunately for the fans in SF it's been a long season already. Only one really good week to show for their efforts and little hope of short-term improvement.

The poor form does give us some hope as we now find ourselves in the race for the number 1 draft pick although we're not even winning that at present! It has to be said that this was always the plan albeit it's quite a negative one. From the outset it seemed as though we would struggle to be competitive so as I've said before the plan has been to get the finances in order and try and build from there.

The lack of decent free agents does make it difficult to improve quickly and it has to be looked upon as a long term plan mainly through coaching the current crop of youngsters while hopefully getting some improvement out of our veterans. The problem is that with our poor form their isn't likely to be much progression through the off season but I do believe that we will be in much better position to challenge next season.

Down but most certainly not out by Mike Sim

Braves...11-16 over the past 3 weeks and from first to last in the East. Yet, there are many reasons for optimism in Atlanta. Firstly, we'll have our strongest batting line-up available this week for the first time since week 1 (though whether we play them all is up for debate). Secondly we are in a truly competitive division - the Expos went from last to first in a week, perhaps we can follow suit. Thirdly, I can't believe the other 3 clubs in the division can avoid a bad week - the whole league is so competitive.

Ok, I'd prefer to be where the Expos are right now and form on our pitching has taken a beating the past weeks, plus fatigue is getting worse and there is little depth on our roster. Or any roster, or at least that's what I'm hoping!

Congrats to Philip Howard for a second unbeaten week - amazing and also to Paul Denyer in Boston for some sort of pitching week - I knew they were good when I saw

them dominate my hitters a few weeks ago - now they are really starting to show.

News from the Chi-Sox by Martin Halls

We have had a reasonable start in the windy city, although 3-6 was a bit of a disappointment last week, reducing us back to .500 and 4 games off the division lead.

Like most teams we have been trying to lower our wage bill without affecting the talent level of the starting 9 batters or the starting pitchers too much. So far success has been limited due to being outbid more often than not. We have however managed a reasonable investment in stadium and merchandising which should give us the LP's to invest in some of the many talented young players we drafted. In the next few weeks we are going to need to decide whether to invest further in the financial side or try to coach some players this season with the aim of making the play-offs.

On the playing side we have been particularly impressed with the pitching of John Adkins who has 10 wins already and also 9 complete games. On the batting side Aaron Miles 10* has been a bit of a disappointment as opponents key in on the talented youngster. Luckily, Roberto Alomar has picked up the slack and has 18 homers so far (almost as many as the rest of team put together). We lead the league stolen bases, (not particularly surprising as I did draft a lot of speedsters and a big stadium built to keep those fly balls in the park, though you wouldn't guess that from seeing the homers given up).

Yankees looking long-term by Bobby Dorman

We're halfway through the inaugural season of MLB8, and while I'm not too surprised at the way things have turned out it's still something of a disappointment. The decision to look to the long term was taken some time ago, although the paucity of the free agent market has prevented any major culls. With the wage bill relatively high, I've resorted to pruning the dead wood here and there when semi-decent free agents appear.

The rest of this season will be spent strengthening the finance base and building for the future. These Yankees are definitely something of a project though, and I doubt we'll be contending for a couple of seasons yet.

PITCHING - The "strength" of the team. Overall they've not performed too badly, although the fact that we appear to be playing in a pitching league means that statement is somewhat relative. From the original draft list only one player has been added. Potentially he could be a great one, but so far Javier Vazquez (3-2, 4.31 ERA) has had his fair share of rocky outings, mixed in with some good ones.

He's the youngest member of the starting staff, headed by Jose Contreras (4-4, 3.12 ERA, 2 CG) and Felix Heredia (a surprising 3-3 with a 3.48 ERA). Both Mike Mussina (3-7, 3.94) and Roger Clemens (1-8, 4.73) need to pick it up over the rest of this season, although their poor records can be more attributed to the almost non-existent run support.

In the bullpen, nobody appeared as a preferred closer over the pre-season, leading to a committee arrangement headed by the clubs two best pitchers (statistically at least), Andy Pettitte (6-3, 2.73) and Mariano Rivera (4-8, 2.97). After those two, things are definitely a little dicey however. David Wells and Jeff Weaver have both performed well on occasion, but spot starter Jeff Nelson has been horrendous. Overall, I have no real concerns over this side of the ball club. We're playing in a pitchers park, and a few individuals aside, they've proved up to the task.

HITTING - Perhaps I should have changed the header to "missing". 13 of the 15 batters on the roster have seen action this season. Only two of those have less than 100 AB's. Unfortunately 9 of the 13 have batting averages less than .230. I suspect this is similar around the league?

One of my original problems when drafting the team was that the majority of my options were of "below average" experience. If I remember rightly, around 75% of my original drafting options had less than 4 years experience. That reflects on the terrible hitting doing the rounds in the Bronx. Too often I see 1-2-3 innings where no pressure is brought to bear on the opposition. If we fall behind early, we can just about write off our chances of coming back (something I think we've done about 3 or 4 times all season).

Guys like Jeter, Giambi and Boone, decent hitters on paper who have become automatic outs. Only Soriano, Wilson and latterly Posada and Sierra have proven to be consistent. The rest are streaky, and for the moment can't be depended upon to provide the goods when the chips are down. The potential exists for the offense to be good, somewhere down the line. At the moment, they're pretty hideous and that's unlikely to change this season.

In summary then. We're crap, but we will get better. The hitting needs an overhaul while the pitching should be good enough to keep us from losing too many games. It won't be pretty for a few seasons, but in the long run we should be fine.

Red Sox News by Paul Denyer

Looks like I am up against the class of AL this season if the Red Sox are to win the AL East. Philip has his Blue Jays playing some great baseball. I read through my turn this week amazed just how many runs I conceded this turn

with my starters doing a great job of staying in the game as long as possible only to find Toronto went 9-0!

Still with a good winning week keeps me out in front in the wildcard race but I think we will have stiff competition from at least five teams in the other divisions (cut down to three as two of those five will win the AL Central and AL West). So the middle and last series of week 9 are vital to stay ahead of the pack and keep that three game lead in the WC race.

The team hasn't really changed from the start of the season; only Timlin has gone from the initial roster replaced by up and coming rookie RF Nixon. It isn't a big secret (just look at the team stats produced this week) that the strength is in the pitching. The starting rotation have a 26-12 record for the season with Burkett on 10-0. Batting is just getting us by at the moment and with no outstanding free agents at the moment we are implementing a plan of developing our own players when we can.

Look ahead to an All-Star Game by Mike Sim

Run in other leagues but somehow more exciting in a new league, first season. In other leagues the teams are managed by the managers who won the previous league pennants but we can't use that so perhaps go with the skippers with the best records at say week 12 (giving everyone 3 weeks to get themselves into gear!). Sadly that'll rule me out but hopefully a couple of Braves (LaRoche and Ortiz) may play themselves into contention!

Editor – Mike read my mind really as I was going to bring up this subject this week. I think the idea of the manager being the ones with the best records in the respective leagues is sensible. I will arrange a voting form and get that out within the next couple of turns. Hopefully, the vast majority of you will vote to make the managers job easier and support the inaugural all-star game.

If anyone has any other views on the all-star game then please get in touch for the next edition. Also, I will order the full league stats at Week 10 (unless anyone else volunteers) and upload them onto David Trice's excellent gbspn website. This will help people make their selections and give no excuse for not voting!

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