

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

### **Week 10 Round Up – Winners and Losers**

The second interleague week in MLB8 history resulted in a tie – 54 wins for each league. Only 1 team won 7 games (Reds) and only 1 team won fewer than 3 (Mariners) as the closeness of competition continued.

In the AL, the Red Sox picked up a game on the Jays in the East but are still 9 games back. The Royals maintained a 4 game lead in the Central over the improving Twins. In the West, the Rangers picked up 2 games on the Angels to be only 2 back. In terms of the wildcard, Texas are currently ahead of Boston on run differential, with the Twins only 3 games behind.

In the NL, it was a disappointing week for the East, meaning that no-one took advantage of a 4-5 week from the Expos who hold a 4-game lead. In the Central, the Reds extended their lead to 8 games but the Cubs have been hot in recent weeks and are currently 3 games clear in the wildcard race. Out West, the Dodgers look assured of the title already as they hold a 16 game lead and have pitched noticeably better in the last few weeks.

On the free-agent front, the Rays continued their purge, releasing pitcher Brandon Backe. He's been injured much of the year but could be a good pickup for a team looking for a veteran, middle of the rotation starter.

The big signing was the Phillies acquisition of former Devil Ray Antonio Perez who picked up a healthy signing bonus. Philly fans will be hoping this investment sparks a second half surge. Also, the Blue Jays look to have improved even further with the signing of veteran 2B Cristian Guzman from the Twins.

### **Report from Halo Country** by Paul Beaumont

After 10 games of the inaugural season of MLB8 the Angels have to be pleased with how things have gone to date. They currently reside in first place in the AL West, with the second best record in the American League. However, they are only two games ahead of a strong Texas team in their division and with most teams still in with a shout at making the post-season there is no time to rest on the achievements so far.

Through ten weeks the pitching ranked third in the AL with an ERA of just under 3.00, even though top end

starters have missed many games due to injuries. The batting also ranked third in the AL. Playing home games in the spacious Edison Field the Angels still rank second in the AL in round trippers.

The Angels star SS Adam Kennedy, looks to be drawing the most attention from the opposing team which has helped several other players perform beyond expectations.

In the early weeks of the season the Angels trimmed payroll whilst maintaining quality on the roster. This went as low as the management felt prudent and now depth is being added.

Quality players have been few and far between on the free agent list and the Angels have so far refused to pay 'over the odds' for any of these players. However, the management are pleased with the signings of Weber, MacPherson, Clayton, Lewis, and Halter which has added depth to the roster and potential, in a few cases, for the future.

The Angels have been conscious to improve the clubs trainer in order to keep the players in a condition to be fully effective on the field. This will be key to the team's success in the last few weeks of the season, and hopefully the post-season. With the addition of depth to the roster the Angels will be employing platoons and resting players in some series to further aid this.

With teams being fairly evenly matched in the first season it is hard to see a clear favourite in either league. The Blue Jays look to be the team to beat in the AL, with the Reds looking good in the NL.

In the end there's a good chance that starting pitching will be the key for the team that prevails this season. The Angels are confident that their top four in the rotation match up to any other team in the league. Now they just need to be able to consistently get them starting eight games out of nine, something which has proved somewhat of a problem so far.

### **Twins Thoughts**

Atmosphere in the Twins camp has really buoyed up these last couple of weeks. 7-2 in week 9 followed by 6-3 in week 10 has moved the Twins up to 2<sup>nd</sup>, just 4 games behind the Royals and 3 off the Red Sox and the Rangers in the race for the wild-card. This week's interleague 6-3 week included an impressive sweep of

division-leading Expos, and that with the Twins resting 3 players...maybe the NL East isn't so great, after all!!

A real improvement was made to the squad with the signing of ex-Brewers RF Richie Weeks. As was pointed out last week, he cost a lot of money, but the feeling within the Twins camp was that the infrastructure for the team is in place so we could afford a big money signing in a push for a play-off spot. The only downside was the injury in week 9 to closer Romero, putting him out for 39 games, to go with the long-term injury to reserve pitcher Johan Santana.

When asked if he thought the Twins could make the play-offs, GM Brown commented "I think we can give the Royals a run for their money but only IF we remain relatively injury-free from now on. A significant injury, especially to our all-star candidate pitchers, Guardado or Hawkins, would really end our chances. But I still think it's seasons 2 & 3 when we will really be challenging for the top spot!"

For the all-star game, the Twins have two strong candidates for a pitching spot with LaTroy Hawkins and Eddie Guardado. Guardado's ERA of 1.80 (after week 10) and Havg of .208 is just topped by Hawkins (Havg .208, ERA 1.77). Hawkins has a 10-6 winning record, Guardado a disappointing 6-8...but that's what happens when you play for a team who sometimes forget how to hit the ball!!

On the batting side, the only realistic Twins candidate is SS Corey Koskie, who has shown impressive stamina to play all 90 games so far (he's taking his first break this week).

Koskie looks to be in a straight fight for the short-stop spot with Adam Kennedy of the Angels. Koskie edges it for getting on base, and is much the better fielder of the two (33 FS's and 7 ER's to 15 FS's and 8 ER's) but Kennedy hits for power better with a SlgP of .546 compared to .468 for Koskie. Take your pick!

### All-Star batting preview

Following the pitching preview in the last newsletter, I will now quickly look at some of the batsmen who may feature in the game. In the AL, some of the outstanding infielders include Roberto Alomar (White Sox), David Eckstein and Adam Kennedy (both Angels), Corey Koskie (Twins), Aubrey Huff (Devil Rays) and Eric Chavez (Athletics). There is a dearth of catchers but people to consider are Jorge Posada (Yankees), Toby

Hall (D Rays), Victor Martinez (Indians) Greg Myers (Blue Jays) and A.J. Pierzynski (Twins).

Despite these players, there are probably a greater number of excellent outfielders. These include Mike Sweeney (Royals), Alex Escobar, Brandon Phillips and Milton Bradley (all Indians), Alfonso Soriano (Yankees), Jeff DaVanon (Angels), Bill Mueller (Red Sox), Mark Teixeira (Rangers), Orlando Hudson and Eric Hinske (both Blue Jays).

The NL look to have a greater number of star infielders. These include Adrian Beltre, Jolbert Cabrera and Alex Cora (Dodgers), Bobby Hill (Pirates), Adam LaRoche (Braves), Ramon Martinez (Cubs), Jose Vidro (Expos) and Juan Castro (Reds). The NL also has some excellent catchers in Todd Hundley (Dodgers), Jason LaRue (Reds), Ivan Rodriguez (Marlins), Johnny Estrada (Braves) and Mike Lieberthal (Phillies).

In terms of the outfielders, some of the names to consider are Barry Bonds (Giants), Andruw Jones (Braves), Sammy Sosa (Cubs), Ray Olmedo (Reds), Mike Lowell (Marlins) and Fred McGriff (Dodgers). Interesting that the AL look to have the outfielders while the NL look to have the infielders.

These lists won't include everybody and I urge you to take a look at the GBSPN website mentioned in this newsletter (<http://www.gbspn.com/>) if you have web access. Full stats are available on there (as at Week 10) and will help you with your voting. You will find attached a voting form, which I hope is self-explanatory but if you have any queries then get in touch. **Could votes please be returned to me by Friday 4<sup>th</sup> June.**

A plea for as many of you to vote as possible (would be really good to hear from people I haven't heard from so far). This will make it a representative team and make it easier for the managers of the 2 teams. Also, it's supposed to be fun and provoke debate so get involved by getting votes in and commenting on team selections.

Not even room for any previews this week!!

### GAMEPLAN ADVERTISEMENTS

<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.

**ALL-STAR GAME VOTING FORM**

1B – 1: .....

1B – 2: .....

1B – 3: .....

2B – 1: .....

2B – 2: .....

2B – 3: .....

SS – 1: .....

SS – 2: .....

SS – 3: .....

3B – 1: .....

3B – 2: .....

3B – 3: .....

C – 1: .....

C – 2: .....

C – 3: .....

LF – 1: .....

LF – 2: .....

LF – 3: .....

CF – 1: .....

CF – 2: .....

CF – 3: .....

RF – 1: .....

RF – 2: .....

RF – 3: .....

P – 1: .....

P – 2: .....

P – 3: .....

P – 4: .....

P – 5: .....

P – 6: .....

Please vote for your top three positional players, and your top six pitchers. The top vote getter at each position and top pitcher will start the All-Star game. The All-Star manager will decide on the DH, the batting order and where the other pitchers pitch.

The respective managers for the all-star game will be the managers in each league who have the best record at the end of Week 11. If, for whatever reason, they do not wish / can't be the manager, then the manager of the team with the second best record will be given the option.

Please feel free to replicate this, complete, and return the form via e-mail if it's easier.

The All-Star Game is scheduled to run in Week 12. Complete statistics for the league are available on the GBSPN website. So get voting.....