

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

Week 12 Round Up – Winners and Losers

The big winners in the AL this week were the Anaheim Angels. Their sweep of division rivals Texas (in Texas) sparked them to an 8-1 week. They finished the week with a sweep of the Yankees where they outscored New York 31-1! The Rangers went 4-2 the rest of the week and are just about hanging onto the wild-card spot.

The AL Central featured the continued improvement of the Twins. They are now just 1 game behind the Royals in the division and 2 behind Texas for the wildcard. The Indians and ChiSox are in danger of falling out of the race as they are now 7 games back. The Jays are 8 games clear in the East though Boston continue to stay just about in touch and are battling for the wildcard.

In the NL East, the Expos scored a massive series sweep against the Florida Marlins. They now lead Florida by 5, Atlanta by 7 and the slumping Phillies by 8. The Dodgers continue serenely on in the West but the Central is turning into a real dogfight. The Cubs swept the Brewers, Expos and Phillies to pull to within 2 games despite the Reds winning 7 of 9 themselves. The Reds also suffered a major injury that sent starting LF Tim Hummel to the DL for the rest of the season.

The major moves on the free-agent front involved the Royals and the Angels. The Royals tried to rectify their mistake of last week by signing SS Julio Lugo from the D-Rays. The Angels paid quite heavily to add quality depth to their outfield in the form of Keith Osik.

Sleepless in Cincy by Bo Mayfield

For the Reds this week it was the story of how a 7-2 week can look bad. It's tough to only lose 2 games and still lose 2 games in the standings. The Cubs are looking unstoppable at the moment. And then to lose my starting LF and lead-off man for the season.....

We did get a bit of luck against the Dodgers (as mentioned below). Could easily have lost that series. If there is a silver lining it's that both Larue and Castro sat out the week on the reserve squad to get some rest and rid themselves of their first bad form of the year from last week's 2-7 disaster so most of the team is reasonably fresh. OF will be a problem though with Hummel gone.

Going into Wrigley to face the Cubs on 10 straight wins leaves a manager with sleepless nights.

Good but could be better! by Patrick Lee

I guess 6-3 for the week and now 17 games clear in my division is acceptable for this league, but I felt disappointed upon reading the games. Basically we turned into an 8-inning team for the week, throwing away two games, and doing our best to throw away a couple more!

Against the Reds we were 2-1, 2-0, and 3-0 up going into the ninth innings yet came away with only one win from the series (and that was only thanks to a fielding save with the bases loaded!) We also did our best to screw up one of the Rockies games (5-3 up with 2 outs in the 9th) before winning in the 11th innings (an extra innings game in every series this week - how tight is this league?)

What's really galling is that my closer, Mota, had successfully saved in his last 13 opportunities, stretching back to week 3, yet this week he blew 2 from 4. Still reasonably pleased with things overall, especially our pitching. But the Reds, Expos, and Cubs all look formidable obstacles at the moment, never mind the rest of the NL and the best of the AL.

Everyone's on a downer! Mike Sim of the Braves

Well I have to say I was disappointed too, particularly against the Dodgers! Game one, we had 14 men on base, they had 6, we lost 3-2. Game 2, we had the better of and only just won. Game 3 they had the better of and won. That said, I know the Dodgers style is to pitch a tight game and wait for one of their studs to kill you with the long ball. It happened again.

Best matchup of the series for me was the 1b Adrian Beltre vs Adam LaRoche. Beltre was named starter at that position for the NL but LaRoche (and Bobby Hill) are both superb players at what is probably the strongest position on the all-star team. Beltre hit 2 homers and several RBIs, but LaRoche matched him with 2 of his own - 2 great players in top form. Could easily have turned a 6-3 week but pleased enough with 5-4 given it included series wins over a NL East rival and the Pirates.

Overall feeling a bit hard done by though. We are the top run scorers in the league, have one of the best runs for / against and yet are still off the pace by some distance. Too many close game losses are starting to mount up I think! I said a couple of months ago that the Cubs were set-up just how I like a team to be and now they are starting to show their power. Good race in the Central, but it's bad news for the NL East as the wild card is fast becoming a dream leaving 4 of us scrapping for the 1 spot. David's Expos impressed this week sweeping the Fish and have owned us (in fact if we could learn to beat the Expos, I think we'd have a great chance in the East!). Bugger.

Someone who is happy! Paul Beaumont

Good week for the Angels. First time my top 4 starters have been fit for a whole week for a while I think, and we allowed only 16 runs in the 9 games. A sweep of the Rangers in Texas will hopefully propel us to greater things for the rest of the season. The last game was won 3-2 though Texas left the bases loaded in the bottom of the 9th.

2B Eckstein was rested for the final 6 games of the week, and RF Anderson for the final series vs the Yankees. The signing of CF Osik gives us a fourth 'quality' OF which should mean we can maintain a decent line-up whilst resting players.

The View from Texas by me!

Congratulations to Paul on the sweep of us in Texas in the opening series. Games 2 and 3 were only by 1 run but the Angels deserved the sweep. Conclusive proof (though I suspected it anyway) that pound for pound they are better than us. Our pitching may well be slightly better but they have much more firepower on offense (e.g. 4 doubles by DaVanon in Game 1 alone). Though I do think they're the better team we certainly won't be giving up on the division with just a 3-game deficit.

We hold onto the wild card slot courtesy of a 2-1 series win over Paul Denyer's Red Sox. The pitching got right back on track as the BoSox went 15 for 97 in the series. We are a game clear of Boston and 2 games clear of Dave Brown's ever-improving Twins. They flexed their muscles this week, sweeping the Indians and then the AL-leading Jays before slipping up against Boston as the BoSox bats got back on track after our series. We have the Twins at home in the middle series this week in what is looming as a pretty massive series.

The state of play in Milwaukee by Martin Willan

I've been studying my team this turn, so here are some notes from Milwaukee. I was surprised to see in the week 12 pitching stats that I have 3 starters in the top 30:

53	Ben Diggins	(5th)	ERA=1.96	RunS=3.60
48	Mike Crudale	(11th)	ERA=2.30	RunS=1.50
52	Matt Ford	(26th)	ERA=2.87	RunS=2.47

I'm happy with my team ERA of 3.40 which is the NL average, however run support of 2.33 (MLB8's worst) explains my 36-72 record. I'm hoping there'll be some good power hitters at the top of the draft!

Unbelievably, Ben Diggins and Matt Ford lead the team in run support (apart from 2 relievers with 15 innings pitched

between them). Ben Diggins is the only pitcher with a winning record at 7-3 (except for a reliever at 1-0), but overall we're 8-9 when he pitches because the bullpen is weaker than the starters.

On the hitting side, the top 2 players in the 2 major categories tell their own story:

HR - Richie Sexson 12, Wes Helms 5 (team total is 36)
BAvg - Jeromy Burnitz .297, Richie Sexson .240 (team average is .200)

Week 13 Preview

The big divisional series in the AL feature the Twins hosting the Royals in a battle for the division title and the Red Sox travelling to Toronto. To give them a realistic chance of the division, Boston may have to sweep in Toronto. The BoSox continue what could be a 'make or break' week with a trip to Anaheim, while the Twins continue their week with a trip to Texas for another series with postseason ramifications.

A huge series kicks things off in the NL Central. The Cubs hold a 10-game winning streak and host the Reds at Wrigley. Cubs at home, surging, Reds with injuries – could the balance of power in the division change in this series? The Reds have a tough week overall as they also face Atlanta and Florida. Les Expos will look to take advantage of having series against struggling Milwaukee and San Francisco and try and put what could be a decisive distance between them and their rivals.

And, of course, we have the All-Star Game! Who will earn bragging rights? The NL triumphed in the first interleague week but in the second week the AL battled back and that week was dead even. The NL are probably slight favourites but (as referred to earlier) Bo Mayfield may be a bit tired from thinking about those Cubs so Philip Howard's AL squad will look to take advantage.

Thanks to all who voted, contributed and offered credits for the game. Good luck gentlemen!

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Until next week, Ian.