

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

### **All-Star Game Report** by Bo Mayfield

Certainly the most difficult part of managing the NL All-Star team was deciding the reserves. Players such as Adam LaRoche and Ramon Martinez among others deserved a spot but I wanted all teams represented so there just wasn't room.

The game proved exciting with the ninth inning decisive and the NL's bullpen making the difference after both starters failed to pitch up to expectations. Either Cora or Beltre of the Dodgers would be good choices for the MVP but I'll go with Russ Ortiz as a representative of an excellent performance from the bullpen.

Now let's hope the NL can keep their edge right through the World Series.

EDITORIAL – Interesting inaugural All-Star Game. Both of the managers selection (DH) were chosen to lead off for their teams. Though it could be argued that Philip Howard was slightly biased towards his own guy in selecting Eric Hinske, it is difficult to overlook someone who plays for a division leader and leads the league in doubles and steals – though many all-star voters surprisingly did overlook him.

Both pitchers started well. Bernero got into slight trouble in the second before lone Texas playing representative Callaway had the wheels completely fall off in the NL half of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, giving the NL a 4-1 lead. The AL battled back in the 4<sup>th</sup> against Bernero to tie it up at 4. Both bullpens then took over and pretty much dominated (Jones and Harden for the AL and Beimel and Ortiz for the NL).

Heading into the top of the 9<sup>th</sup>, the score was still tied. Julio Mateo of the Seattle Mariners had pitched a 1-2-3 eighth but walked the lead-off batter Andruw Jones. He then served up a hanging curve ball that Alex Cora dispatched into the right-field seats (6-4). Mateo was visibly shaken and proceeded to walk Barry Bonds on 4 pitches. This was followed by a fastball that was grooved to Adrian Beltre. The leading home run hitter in the league didn't miss and crushed it to the deepest part of the ballpark in centre field (8-4).

The AL vaguely threatened in the bottom of the 9<sup>th</sup> but Liván Hernández pitched out of the jam to preserve the

8-4 win. Fittingly, the 2 home runs were hit by hometown Dodgers to send the LA fans delirious. However (perhaps swayed by the manager Bo Mayfield's comments), the voting panel selected Atlanta pitcher Russ Ortiz as the MVP – which didn't impress the Dodger faithful!

### **Week 13 Round Up**

Back at the day job, both Central divisions are now tied. The Twins (who now have the best pitching in the league) have a 4-game winning streak (including a 3-game series shutout against the hapless Mariners) and have taken the lead from the Royals on run differential. In the NL, the Cubs have reeled the Reds in and Cincy are now only holding on due to a better run differential. The consolation for Messrs Mayfield and Jones is that the loser of this battle is likely to be the NL Wild Card team.

Elsewhere in the AL, Philip Howard can console himself following the All-Star Game with his 9-game lead in the East. The BoSox have stayed in touch but can't seem to get close enough to really threaten the Jays. In the West, the Rangers cut the Halo lead to 2, holding onto the wild card position by their fingertips in the process. They are a game ahead of KC and two ahead of Boston.

In the rest of the NL, the Dodgers have more than Cora, Beltre and hosting the All-Star Game to celebrate. They are 21 games clear and look as if they will be the first team to assure themselves of playoff participation. They will hope that the Reds and Cubbies focus on each other so that they can gain homefield advantage throughout the postseason.

In the East, the Expos sweep of the Giants to close out the week means that they maintain a 5-game lead over the Marlins. The Braves seem to have hit form again and are 6 games back. The Phillies are now 9 games back and on the verge of being out of the race. The Fish and Braves are staying close but the Expos have had a 4 or 5 game lead for a few weeks now so will be tough to catch.

The big individual news came from Arizona. The D'Backs and Rockies have both struggled this year but Rockies pitcher Scott Elarton hurled a no-hitter in Game 3 of their series. He was just 1 walk away from becoming the 2<sup>nd</sup> player in league history (and Rockies history!) to throw a perfect game following team-mate Adam Bernero's no-no in the 1st week of the season. If

only the Rockies could find an offense to support this pitching staff.

On the free-agent front, something of a bidding war took place between the Marlins and D-Rays for talented power-hitting 2B prospect Eric Brooks. The 2 state rivals both coveted this prized prospect and attempted to persuade him by showing him all that Florida had to offer. In the end, the fact that the Marlins are in the postseason race (and a massive signing bonus!) persuaded Brooks to join Florida rather than Tampa.

In another move, 2 division leaders (the Angels and the Expos) both wanted ex-Rockie pitcher Matt Miller. This excellent youngster in the end opted for Montreal. It is widely felt that his decision was swayed by a bigger signing bonus and the fact that the kid might prefer to quietly develop in Canada without the media frenzy of California.

Whilst this couple of bidding wars took place, the Phillies snuck under the radar and cheaply signed a good, young 1B prospect in Jason Lewis. Other teams slightly tinkered with their rosters, though the Indians and Braves both invested quite heavily in talented catching prospects.

### **Russ Ortiz or Adam Bernero – who's the best??**

Fresh from his MVP performance as a reliever in the All-Star Game, Russ Ortiz was keen to prove that maybe he should have been the starter rather than Adam Bernero of the Colorado Rockies. These 2 aces met this week in what was billed as a titanic matchup. An extract from the game report in the Atlanta Daily News is re-printed below -

“As hoped, the meeting between arguably the best two pitchers in the NL (perhaps the whole league) took place this week as Colorado's Adam Bernero faced up to Atlanta's Russ Ortiz. Bernero got the starting nod for the All-Star game after a sensational first half of the season including a perfect game. Ortiz's ERA has been under 2.0 for all of the season and is hovering around the 1.5 mark, slightly higher than Bernero.

The stage was set for a pitching duel of legendary status but the Atlanta hitters had other ideas. In the top of the first Giles and Matthews Jr got aboard before Adam LaRoche crushed a Bernero pitch into the upper deck of Coors Field to spot Ortiz a 3-0 lead. Temporarily stunned, Bernero gave up two more runs in a 6 hit, 5 run first inning.

That was all the offence Ortiz would need as he struck out 9 en route to a 1 run complete game win. Bernero settled down after the first, giving up just one single after that before leaving in the 7th to watch his rival stake a claim to being the best pitcher in the league!”

### **Week 14 Preview**

In the AL Central, the Twins will look to take advantage of a relatively easy week as they host the ChiSox and Yankees before travelling to Tampa. The Royals play Cleveland and Seattle before hosting Texas in a series that will have divisional and wild-card ramifications. Elsewhere in the AL, the Angels travel north of the border to play the Blue Jays in what may be a preview of the ALCS.

In the NL Central, the Cubbies follow a trip to Pittsburgh with tough series against the contending Braves and Marlins. The Reds will be looking to take advantage as (with all due respect to their opponents) they have an easy week, playing the Brewers, D'Backs and Rockies. The big early series of the week sees the Braves travel to Montreal. The Expos have owned Atlanta so far (9-3), a trend the Braves really have to turn around if they are going to have a realistic hope of catching Montreal.

There doesn't look to be any free-agents on the market who will spark a bidding war this week. However, with 4 of the 6 divisions still extremely close, a lot of teams will be looking for any small improvement they can make to their squad as the stretch run continues.

Any comments on the All-Star Game (or anything else!) would be welcomed for the next edition. Clearly the NL is the power of the 2 leagues so far. Only the World Series to come for them to earn a clean sweep having already claimed the inter-league series and the all-star game. Some AL teams may have something to say about that though!

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Until next week, Ian.