

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

### **Week 15 Round up**

19 extra innings games this week!! Further evidence – if it was needed – of what a competitive league this is and has been throughout the season. Haven't done any working out but I have definitely never experience so many extra innings and 1-run games in any league.

Evidence of the competitiveness around the league in Oakland this week. It was admittedly against the Mariners but in a pretty meaningless game, young A's ace Chad Bradford was one hit away from hurling a perfect game.

A number of other pitchers threw complete game shutouts this week – Cliff Lee of the Indians, Jon Adkins of the ChiSox, Travis Harper of the Rays, Kevin Brown of the Dodgers, Adam Bernero (again!) of the Rockies, John Bale of the Reds, Tomo Ohka of the Expos, Brian Boehringer of the Pirates and John Smoltz of the Braves.

The big story in the AL this week was the Rangers sweep of the Angels in Anaheim. Two of the victories were blowouts and, along with a sweep of the Blue Jays, gave Texas a tremendous week. By the end of the week, they hold a 4-game lead over the Angels.

Halos Manager Paul Beaumont was not only licking his wounds from this but also the disastrous news that star SS Adam Kennedy will miss the rest of the regular season and possibly the playoffs. The only consolation for Beaumont is that his team still hold a 5-game lead in the wildcard race.

The Twins strengthened their grip on the Central. While they had a good week, the Royals were another victim of the 'swept at home' curse as they suffered at the hands of the Blue Jays. Funny week for Toronto as they swept Tampa and KC before running into the rampant Rangers. Their 11 game lead over the BoSox is surely secure though and they still lead the race for homefield advantage in the AL.

In the NL, the Dodgers magic number is 1! The only thing remaining for them is to clinch homefield advantage in the NL playoffs. The Cubs look as if they maybe succumbing to the 'deep hole theory'. After doing all the hard work and catching the Reds, they seem to have hit a bit of a slump. This have helped the Reds edge back into a 4-game lead.

In the East, the Expos remain in the lead though it is a tantalising 4 games over the Braves and Marlins. The Expos took the last 2 games of the series in Florida (both crucial 1-run victories). This clearly affected the Fish who then got swept in LA. Their 3-game sweep of the Brewers that followed just about keeps them alive.

The Braves swept the Phillies (ending Philly hopes) but then dropped 2 games to the Brew Crew. The Braves seem to be in the strongest form of the 3 at the moment – and hold what could be a crucial advantage in run differential – but may well live to regret dropping 2 games in Milwaukee.

### **The Draft**

The Seattle Mariners hold a seemingly unassailable 4-game 'lead' in the race for the No.1 draft pick. Their AL-worst offense will be delighted to pick up one of the two outstanding batsmen available. The 'race' for the second one is mainly between the Giants and Brewers.

Both clearly need more talent but the Brewers have had the worst offense in the league all season and would surely covet a power-hitting outfielder. However, GM Willan has always been a fan of pitching so don't be surprised if they go for the best pitcher available even if they get the 2<sup>nd</sup> pick.

There are a number of good players available who could make an immediate impact in the majors. This first season of MLB8 has been one where, in the main, pitching has had the advantage. This draft though may start to swing that balance of power as there are far more quality bats available than pitchers.

Teams will probably need to make their improvements through the draft as there are unlikely to be too many big-name players released due to wage demands. Speaking of wages, special mention must be given to the job GM Dilworth is doing down

in Tampa. They have easily the lowest wages in the league but have invested in a wonderful stadium and training facilities. They are also not the worst squad in the league so better times may be around the corner for the fans at beautiful Tropicana Field.

### **Expo Weekly Report** by David Trice

Satisfying week - beating the Marlins in the series, and then resting a lot of players in the remaining series and emerging 3-3, including an inevitable defeat against Bernero and the Rockies. At this stage I'm happy to go 5-4, and keep the form ticking over.

A 6 game injury to Vidro is not disastrous - he was scheduled to rest this week anyway - but another player has reached 4 fatigue and I hadn't as yet planned to rest him. However, Schneider and Zeile are fitter for their break, and the shuffling continues.

I must say I'm very nervous leading out this sprint to the finish in the NL East! Glad to see the Cubs lose a few - hopefully if we keep winning we can get at least a wild-card place. I play the Cubs head-to-head this week and will hope to get a very good result in that series.

The draft list looks pretty tasty, even down the order the 7\*s seem to have a decent amount of potential. I expect that there are some happy coaches amongst the very worst teams in the league at the moment – two 9\*s on the list. I hope the race for last place doesn't end up meaning that teams set out to lose and thus skew the results for those of us in tight title races. I guess that's baseball though.

### **Week 16 Preview**

In the AL Central, the Royals have a chance to get right back at the Twins. Realistically, then need to sweep Minnesota but they are at home so you never know. The Twins then host the Blue Jays and travel to Fenway so a tough week. By the end of it, they are likely to be sweating or have pretty much clinched a postseason place.

Boston can't realistically catch Toronto for the division but need a big week to get right in the wild card race. Again, tough week though, as they play all 3 division leaders in the Jays, Rangers and Twins.

The Angels have a reasonable week as they attempt to bounce back. They will be hoping that the Rangers have exhausted themselves by putting everything into last week. Also, the Rangers have tough series hosting Boston and travelling to the 'Jake' in Cleveland.

In the NL, the Braves and Marlins will look to reel in les Expos. They face each other at Pro Player initially. The Braves then travel to Pittsburgh and host the (by then) Western Champion Dodgers. Meanwhile, the Marlins have 'winnable' series against the Giants and Pirates. GM Guard's men will surely need to win those series to have a chance.

The big series though is the one at the Great American Ballpark in Cincinnati. Stewart Jones' Cubbies are essentially down by 5 games (due to run difference) so surely need to win the series – if not sweep. This will be tough as the Reds have the best home record in the majors.

The Cubs then host the Expos before visiting the Phillies – a team they have owned so far this season. The Reds end the week with a relatively easy series at home to the Giants but, before that, have to travel to LA. GM Mayfield will be worried that the Dodgers will be in celebratory mood in front of their home fans and want to make a statement in what could be an NLCS rehearsal.

There are probably 12 teams who could still argue that they are in contention for the 8 postseason places. At least 1 (the Dodgers) will clinch their place this week, while for probably 4 others (Boston, KC, Atlanta and Florida) a bad week could be fatal for their hopes.

Congrats to the Dodgers!

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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.