

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

Week 1 Review

Well the new season is underway and I think it's fair to say there were some surprises to start the season.

In the AL East, the reigning champion Jays started the season by getting swept in Boston on their way to a 3-6 start. Meanwhile, the Red Sox start 6-3 and added a series win over the World Champion Angels to their sweep of Toronto. The Yankees started a solid 5-4 and 2 of the 4 defeats came in extra innings. The Rays started a poor 2-7, only scoring more than 2 runs on three occasions though GM Dilworth hopes that this is not a sign of another long season ahead.

The AL Central was another division where the reigning champs started by getting swept. Even the top of the Twins rotation was no match for the Indians lineup as Cleveland went on to go 6-3. The Twins won their last 2 games to rescue the week but 3-6 is not the start GM Brown would have been looking for. The Royals won all 3 of their series to also go 6-3 whilst the White Sox only went 4-5 but addressed their big weakness by signing C Sandy Alomar.

The trend of champs starting badly continued even in the AL West where the Angels only went 4-5. GM Beaumont will be disappointed by the start of his pitchers as, at this early stage, they are tied for the league lead in runs conceded. The wild card Rangers fared no better going 4-5 so the A's and Mariners took advantage going 6-3 and 5-4 respectively.

In what was an incredibly competitive NL East last season, the reigning champion Braves looked to have started well but their week fell apart at the end as they were swept in Wrigley by the Cubs to fall to 4-5. The Expos fared the same as their week fell apart in Coors, getting swept by the Rockies. The Marlins reversed it by ending the week with 2 wins to join these 2 on 4-5. The impressive looking Phillies got off to the best start as they swept the Brewers in Milwaukee on the way to 6-3.

Even in the NL West, the reigning NL Champion Dodgers didn't start off that well. They went 5-4 but

are led by the Rockies who are 6-3 after that sweep of the Expos. New man Chris Stones got a baptism of fire as his team were hammered by the Dodgers in the first 2 games of the season. They re-grouped though to go 3-4 the rest of the way for a respectable start. The Giants went 4-5 to complete the division.

Only in the NL Central was there immediate continuity from last season. The Cubs sweep of the Braves rounded off a 6-3 week and the Reds 6-3 start was sparked by a sweep of the Pirates to start the season. The Pirates and Brewers both went 3-6. The Brew Crew started the week looking pretty good but reverted to their problems of last season in scoring only 3 runs in the entire series against Philadelphia.

A number of good players already injured (Hudson, Hawkins, Sweeney, Sele, DeRosa, Beckett, Cerros) though none very long-term. The most severe is the injury to Cubs starting SS Ramon Martinez who will miss almost a month.

More offense?

My first glance at the scores around the league in this Week 1 made me think some things seemed slightly different. Yes, there were some slightly unpredictable results but it's early in the season so that's maybe not THAT surprising. No, the thing I noticed was that teams seemed to be generally scoring more runs. And when I saw that the Angels had conceded 57 (6.3 per game) I thought this was worth looking into further.

So I did the only sensible thing – I consulted stats guru David Trice and his www.gbispn.com website. And for once in my life, my suspicions were proved true by the stats. The most runs scored in a week last season were 863 in Week 6, with an average of 795 a week.

However this first week of Season 2 saw a new high of 912 runs scored in the week. This is almost 50 runs more than any other week in the league's short history, 117 more than the average week and 111 more than Week 1 of last season.

I suppose the interesting thing is what might have caused this. Have teams focused on improving their offenses? Have offseason skill changes favoured the offense? Or have the commissioners' office changed

the pressure in the baseballs to help out batsmen?
Any thoughts / views on this for the next edition?

And I suppose the other questions are – will this continue or was this week just a blip? And if it does continue does this favour or disadvantage any particular teams? My impression would be no but I may need this is an excuse as the season continues!!

Offseason moves

Perhaps the biggest name to be released in the offseason was Jorge Posada from the New York Yankees. Posada was the starting catcher for the American League last season but news out of New York was that Posada has lost something so they were going to go with Flaherty as their starter with younger (and cheaper) Dioner Navarro as back-up. Posada was promptly released and has sensationally retired and gone back to his home country.

Another 'name' player to be released was pitcher Mike Crudale of the Milwaukee Brewers. He remains on the free-agent list and is probably the only available player who would make a major impact on a team. There are other good players available but he could be a major addition to a team's pitching staff.

Free-agent moves

As mentioned, Sandy Alomar was the biggest pick-up this week and will be a big improvement at catcher for the ChiSox in the competitive AL Central. The Blue Jays poor week continued as an administrative error in their front office led to them paying former BoSox reliever Jerome Gamble a \$2.1 signing bonus. Are things imploding in Toronto?

The Devil Rays released power-hitting SS Jason Romano in signing young power-hitting 3B Dan Wright from the White Sox. The Braves trimmed salary by signing former Red Sock David McCarthy. The Phillies also made a salary move as they replaced Kevin Millwood with Chad Cordero from the Expos.

The other signings were all former Devil Rays as teams looked to pick up some of the useful players that have been released in the Devil Rays purge of last season. Gerald Laird joins the third team of his young career as he goes to Minnesota, providing

them with a younger and perhaps more talented option at 3B than Denny Hocking who was released.

The A's cut some wages and got a workable veteran to complement the many budding young stars in their lineup as they signed switch-hitting 3B Travis Lee. And finally, Jeremi Gonzalez made the trip across Florida to join the Marlins. He replaces Derrick Turnbow and could be an excellent addition to the Marlin bullpen or as a spot starter.

Shock news from LA!

Unconfirmed reports from the Chavez Ravine area are suggesting that Dodgers manager Patrick Lee has decided to go on an extended holiday to Australia during the season! It is suggested that he has no long-term plans to leave the Dodgers but needed the break to recharge his batteries following their World Series quest of last season.

It will be interesting to see what happens to the Dodgers if this absence takes place. Cynics may suggest that the Dodgers are so talented that Lee could leave for half the season and his Dodgers would still lead the division. But, the Diamondbacks now have direction under a new leader, the Rockies have some very talented players and may be much improved and the Giants would like nothing more than to pick off the Dodgers. Watch this space!

Week 2 Preview

Four teams have chances to avenge season-opening sweeps. The Jays, Rays, Twins and Pirates all host their Week 1 conquerors and will be looking to return the favour. Another big matchup features the Blue Jays hosting the Twins. Toronto will also be looking for revenge in this series following their defeat to Minnesota in last year's ALDS.

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Until next week, Ian.