

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

Week 2 Review

The slightly quirky start to the new season continued this week, summed up by the fact that only one reigning division winner currently tops their division. In fact, 4 of the reigning champions are actually 3rd in their divisions at this early stage. Added to this is that last year's wild card teams are currently bottom of their respective divisions. Should make for another exciting season.

The only reigning champ top of their division are the mighty Dodgers. They wished GM Patrick Lee a happy break in Australia with an 8-1 week to already be 5 games clear in the division. They look so good (best pitching and batting in the majors at this early point) that Lee must be confident that they will still be in a strong position when he returns from Oz.

The Rockies went 2-7, including a painful sweep in Atlanta whilst the growing pains continued for new boy Chris Stones in Arizona. His offense went 7 consecutive games without scoring more than 2 and it is unfortunate for them that they have already had to face the Dodgers 6 times.

The Cubs top the Central after a week that included a sweep of the D'Backs. The Reds are right behind them and bounced back with a sweep of the Phillies after they had been swept in Florida by the Marlins. The Reds continue to be tremendous at home. Conversely, the Brewers have been awful at home (1-8) but good on the road. If they could sort out the home form they could join the race for the division. The Pirates look to be struggling, though they ended the week with 2 consecutive wins against the Braves.

Speaking of the Braves, they sit 3rd in the NL East at 9-9. Much like last season, they have a great run differential (+26) but have yet to turn this into the expected number of wins in the early going. The Expos have spluttered so far and are bottom though still well in it at 8-10.

The Phillies lost the division lead as they ended the week by getting swept by the Reds at Fortress Riverfront. Sweeping under the radar to take the lead

are the Marlins. They won series against the Expos and Reds before losing their final 2 games against the Dodgers. This team doesn't look as talented on paper as their division rivals so GM Stuart Guard deserves great credit for getting them ahead at this early stage.

The AL West is led by the young Oakland A's. They won all 3 series this week and boast the best ERA in the American League. GM Tom Shewry deserves great credit for his team's fine start. As last season, the Mariners have struggled to score runs but have won a number of close games as they sit at 10-8.

The World Champion Angels have been inconsistent so far whilst the Rangers have lost a number of close games (3 1-run defeats this week) and would be in real trouble if they hadn't managed a surprising sweep of the Red Sox to end the week.

In the Central, the Twins bounced back as they won all 3 series to even their record at 9-9. Like Texas, the ChiSox were the victims of some close defeats leaving them at 8-10. The Indians are 10-8 but all are led by the 12-6 Royals. Their week included a sweep of Texas and their overall performance must be extremely pleasing to GM Alastair Brearley.

Out East the Jays have got off to a decidedly iffy start and lost all 3 series to sit at 6-12. They are only propped up by the Devil Rays. GM Dilworth must be disappointed that the moving in of the fences at Tropicana Field doesn't seem to have helped his batsmen too much – the Rays have scored the fewest runs in the majors.

The Yankees look to be improved this year and feature LF Soriano who leads the AL in runs (17), homers (8) and RBIs (21). However, the division is currently led by the BoSox. Things could have been even better for Boston but their week ended with them getting swept in Texas.

Injury News

A number of major injuries this week. Starting pitcher Billy Traber of the Cleveland Indians will miss significant time which will test the depth of the Indians rotation. All Star 3B Anderson Machado will miss about 40 games for the Phillies and All Star RF Sammy Sosa joins teammate Ramon Martinez on the injury list for the Cubs who will hope that they are

getting their bad luck in terms of injuries out of the way early in the season.

OF Carl Everett's fast start for Montreal has been brought to a halt as he will miss about a month for the Expos. Also, CF Richie Sexson's injury (though not long-term) is something the offensively needy Brew Crew could well do without.

Free-agent moves

There were a number of free-agent moves this week and, though a number were teams picking up former players at lower wages, some were potentially major moves. Perhaps the biggest was the Marlins signing of exciting former Yankee CF Enrique Wilson.

The other major move was the Indians rather expensive signing of former Brave Mike Hampton who will now be needed with the injury to Traber. The Indians still look to have financial muscle left and may look to continue to add to an already impressive roster. Other franchises who look to have the muscle to add anyone they want are the Brewers, Devil Rays, Giants and Cubs (who may need to with their growing injury list).

The offensive continues

The increase in run scoring seemed to continue this week. It is interesting to look back at Week 2 last season when the average ERA in the AL was 3.19. It is 3.90 so far this season. Slightly more homers have been hit but the key difference is the jump in batting average from .233 to .256. The difference isn't as marked in the NL but runs have increased (ERA up from 3.58 to 3.87).

Interestingly, though runs have gone up, fielding seems to have improved. In both leagues, the average at Week 2 last year was .984. This year it is .987 in both leagues. The number of fielding saves has also increased though this may just be due to their being more balls being hit into play?

News from the champs by Paul Beaumont

So far the World Champions pitching has been 'indifferent'. We haven't played well, only 18 games gone though, and 9-9 despite scoring 82 runs and leaking 100! The batting picked up a bit this turn,

but we are waiting for the pitching to do the same.

The A's and the M's have made good starts, and if they continue it's going to be a very interesting division this year. They both are in very strong financial positions and can add to their squads whilst the Halos are lagging a bit behind in the financial scheme of things.

The Halos GM may look to shake things up, to give a wake up call to the players that this isn't good enough. Players who are happy to just collect their wages, and not earn them, will shortly be looking for a new club.

Week 3 Preview

The week opens with a big series in Kansas. The Royals will look to make use of homefield advantage and try and put some distance between themselves and the reigning division champion Twins. In other big divisional series, the Braves travel to the Marlins looked to re-assert themselves in the NL East and the Cubs travel to Cincy to take on the Reds. A series win in Cincinnati would really signal the Cubs intent to take the division from the Reds.

A big week continues for the Twins as they host the Angels (in a rematch of last year's ALDS) and then host the Rangers. The Braves will look to take advantage of the absence of Patrick Lee as they host the Dodgers. Two division leaders meet as the A's host the Red Sox at the Coliseum and the Angels follow their trip to Minnesota with a home series against the Blue Jays.

No contributions this week other than Paul's from the Yahoo site. Let's get some coming guys – I've actually had to work a bit to put this issue together! Seriously though any contributions or suggestions for topics would be really appreciated.

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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.