

'Better Eight Than Never' - The Newsletter of MLB8

Week 5 Review

A triumph for the AL as they go 60-48 against the NL. This gives them a very slight overall advantage in regular season play at 164-160. The NL won last year's All-Star Game, the AL the World Series. A slight advantage to the AL but little or nothing between them.

If the NL needed a boost perhaps it got it as 2 new managers were appointed. Guy Handley assumed the reins at the Pittsburgh Pirates and Marc Bradbrook became the man in charge at San Fran. Welcome and good luck to both.

The only team that won more than 5 games in the NL were the Central Division leading Cincinnati Reds. They exuded class as they swept the Royals in Kansas and then won series against both the Angels and Rangers. Their performance puts them 2 games ahead of the Cubs who also had a winning week and are currently in the wild card position. GM Handley takes over in Pittsburgh with his team still in contention at 21-24, whilst the struggles continue in Milwaukee.

Another team to go 7-2 were the AL East leading BoSox who extended their lead over the Yankees to 3 games. The Yankees are currently the wild card team. The Jays continue to be unable to find any rhythm and are 9 games back of Boston. A big hurrah for the Devil Rays as they had their first winning week of the season.

Out West, the Dodgers actually had a losing week, including a series loss in a rematch of last year's World Series against the Angels. They still however extended their division lead to 9 games as the Rockies went 3-6. New GM Bradbrook's Giants stand at 19-26 and another big hurrah. This time for the D'Backs as they went 5-4 including series wins against the A's and Twins.

In the other NL division – the East – things continue to be as close as ever. Taking advantage of poor weeks by the other 3 teams, the Florida Marlins went 5-4 to take the lead in the division on run differential from the Expos. Trice, Sim and Crowther will be very disappointed with their team's performances and will look to get back on track this week.

The AL West is just as tight. Despite a losing week, the A's cling onto the division lead, now by just a game from both the Rangers and Angels. The Mariners had a superb 7-2 week, including sweeps of Colorado and Atlanta, and are just 3 games behind Oakland. The other big news in the division was the Rangers signing of ex-Angel all-star 2B David Eckstein.

Things got a little closer in the AL Central. The Royals went just 3-6, though the Indians failed to take full advantage as they went 4-5. Minnesota had a winning week as they pulled to within 3 games of Kansas and the White Sox had an excellent week, winning all 3 series and getting back into some sort of contention.

New Man in San Fran by Marc Bradbrook

Overall we don't seem to be in too bad a shape. I know last year was a nightmare and we're already playing catchup but we can still make something of this year. I'm not sure what the previous manager was doing but some key guys have missed games, although that could have been due to injury or holdout.

We're in good shape financially and need to look at how we can best use the LPs to improve the team, especially looking at the free agent market over the coming weeks.

Pitching - We have a good set of starters but they're young and may need an old head in there, especially as we're not getting production out of Herges and Christiansen. I guess our team ERA is about mid-table, but we give up too many hits. I need to get our "stars" performing and maybe drop one of the starters to the bullpen to add some quality there.

Batting - A mixed bunch here. Aurilla is a star, batting 373 with 12 RBIs in 24 games. I hope he was injured because there's no other excuse for him missing 21 games. The same goes for Bonds who has only played 18 games, although he needs to start firing for us to compete. Otherwise, I'll be making changes to the lineup and looking long and hard at bringing Tom Sanders in from the minors as he looks the real deal and could contribute this season. Our team average must be near the bottom of the league and that's got to be a big factor in our record.

The View from Turner Field by Mike Sim

I'm not really sure I can sum up last week in words but I'll try. We flat out stank! I thought I'd seen everything in my soon to be ten years playing Gameplan Baseball, but nothing prepared me for the past week.

Losing 20-0 to a struggling Jays team in the first game should have prepared me for the debacle that was about to unfold, but I still kept clinging to hope until we found ourselves swept by the Mariners and beaten by the White Sox. Impressively we managed to make the bottom 2 teams in the AL Central and West look fantastic (no disrespect to Paul and Martin - I'm still hoping your teams are fantastic to put our dismal efforts into a better light!).

Chronic negative form followed making reversing that disaster more difficult. Another IF injury only added to

our woes - we already had a 3B playing SS, but now with the injury to the starting 3B, we'll have 3 infielders playing out of position which is hardly encouraging!

We badly need SS Furcal back (and agree wholeheartedly with David Trice's comment about building a strong spine (CF-SS-2b-C) for your team). So far this season we've lost our C Estrada, our SS Furcal and our CF Andruw Jones to injury. They also happen to be 3 of our best 4 hitters! Before this starts to sound like excuses or a cue for violins I'll admit injuries hit everyone and we're hardly the only ones to lose key players. More a reason than an excuse then!

How can I turn this around? I need 2 solid starts from Ortiz and 2 from Smoltz - they've been by far our best pitchers and if they can give us a chance to win their starts we're halfway to a winning week. It's a big ask for either of them to blank opposition hitters for 9 innings though and our bullpen is turning my hair grey!

The most positive slant I can put on last week is that we started well last year and then went from 1st to 4th at a similar time, but managed to turn it around. Here's hoping.

Growing rivalry or just business?

As mentioned earlier, the big player move this week was the Rangers signing of David Eckstein. It has been queried as to whether Texas have made this move as part of what seems an obsession with beating Anaheim.

GM Gibson says, however, that this is just paper talk – "Signing David is a purely business move. We had the finances available and him being a switch-hitter gives us a lot of flexibility. Also, with his experience and fielding ability we feel he will be able to play a number of positions and solidify our lineup." Rumours in Texas are that he will play much of his time at SS as the Rangers look to get rid of the under-performing Alex Rodriguez.

Whilst Gibson was conciliatory, Eckstein wasn't so guarded. When questioned as to whether he thought he was being made the scapegoat for Anaheim's poor start he said – "If I'm honest, yes I do. I wasn't performing well but I wasn't the only one. I had great times there and still have a lot of friends on that club but there were people who wanted me out. I don't want to escalate things but I have to be honest and say that I am looking forward to battling the Angels when we play them soon."

Unconfirmed rumours out of Anaheim suggest that Paul Beaumont is totally unfazed by these comments. It is said that he feels confident that his team can more than cope without Eckstein, a fact probably confirmed by his signing of SS Chris Singleton. This guy is far from the finished article but has a massive upside and is regarded as one of the best SS prospects around.

Week 6 Preview

The AL West begins with the Rangers visiting the division-leading A's. Whilst they battle it out the Angels visit the Mariners. The Angels and Rangers both have tough weeks the rest of the way as they both face Kansas, whilst the Angels face the Yankees and Texas the Red Sox. Oakland and Seattle have arguably easier weeks the rest of the way so will look to take advantage.

Guy Handley's Pirates start out by hosting the Brewers in what is a very winnable series. They will then be tested by the Expos and Braves who are both coming off disappointing weeks. Marc Bradbrook starts off with a visit to the desert following by a home series against the Phillies and a visit to Milwaukee.

In the rest of the NL West, the Dodgers (with manager Patrick Lee now back from his break in Australia) face Colorado and Milwaukee before a test in Florida against the division-leading Marlins. The Rockies have a pretty tough week so it is more than possible that LA will have a double-digit lead by the end of the week.

In their seemingly continual battle at the top of the Central, the Reds travel to Wrigley. Their tough week continues as they host the Fish and then travel to Philly. The Cubs will hope to take advantage against slightly weaker opposition in the form of Colorado and Arizona.

Boston are looking good and face Tampa and Cleveland before hosting the Rangers where they will be looking to avenge a sweep in Texas earlier in the season. The Yankees have a tough looking week as do the Blue Jays who need to start clicking if they are to get back in the race. The D Rays have 2 home series and will look to better the performance of the Brewers and, therefore, lose the mantle of the worst team in the league.

The Royals need to bounce back from an iffy week but have to travel to Minnesota and Texas before hosting Anaheim (all 3 teams were in the postseason last year). The Indians and Twins are hovering, looking to take advantage of any further slips. The ChiSox have 2 home series and will look to get right back in contention. Their run differential would suggest that they are a better team than their 19-26 record would suggest.

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<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.