

'Better Eight Than Never' - The Newsletter of MLB8

Week 6 Review

In the AL East, the Red Sox rescued what would have been an awful week as they won the last 2 games against Texas to go 4-5. The Yankees failed to take advantage, primarily due to getting swept by the Jays in Toronto. The Jays showed signs of life as they went 6-3 to pull to within 7 of Boston and 3 of New York. The Rays had another steady week and seem to have steadied their pitching, giving up just 36 runs over the 9 games.

The Royals travelled into Minnesota with a 3 game lead over the Twins. By the end of the series they were tied as the Twins swept the Royals in three close games. By the end of the week, the Twins had a 1-game lead. Kansas were joined on 29 wins by the Cleveland Indians who won series against the Yankees and Red Sox. The ChiSox had looked to be improving but fell victim to a sweep in Seattle as they struggled to a 3-6 week.

Out West, the A's won all their series to maintain and even extend their lead. The Angels started with a sweep in Seattle before losing series to New York and the Royals. That leaves them 2 behind Oakland but 1 ahead of Texas who struggled to a 4-5 week. The Angels are though in the wild card position. The Mariners are still in touch, just 5 games back.

Leadership in the topsy-turvy NL East changed again. The Expos now hold a 1-game lead over the Marlins and are 2 ahead of the Braves who had the best week of the 3 as they won all their series. The Phillies bounced back from series defeats against the Expos and Giants with a big series win against the Reds to remain in touch, just 4 behind Montreal.

Despite that series, the Reds went 5-4 and extended their lead at the top of the Central as the Cubs endured a horrible week going 1-8. This included being swept at home, at Wrigley by the Reds. The Cubs offense seems to have gone into hibernation as they could muster only 1 run against Cincy in a week when they were shutout on 4 occasions.

New GM Handley's Pirates showed promise as they went 4-5 and are just 3 games out of the wild card position. The Brewers won 2 series this week and, though swept by the Dodgers, did not embarrass themselves in that series so will hope that their fortunes are beginning to improve.

The Dodgers matched the Twins with the best record of the week and cruised to an 11-game lead. The Rockies had a winning week – including a sweep of the Cubs – and are sticking in there, just 2 games back in the wild card race. New GM Bradbrook went 4-5 in San Fran, including a series win against the Phillies. The D'Backs won both their home series in the desert as GM Stones continues to look to steady the ship in Arizona.

On the injury front, life continued to get worse for Stewart Jones in Chicago with the news that power hitting 2B Derrek Lee will miss 4 weeks. Phillies CF Nick Punto is out for a similar length of time and will be a loss for Philadelphia. The other long-term injury news was to Boston ace John Burkett who will be badly missed by the Red Sox for the next 30 games.

An inside look at an outside contender for the wild card by Guy Handley

It would be nice to be able to pen some coherent insight into this proud franchise. But, as a newcomer to gameplan baseball that is beyond me, and could be for quite some time.

The team seems to have done well enough under previous management, in fact my changes seem only to have resulted in us losing 1 more game than we did the week before and reducing the wage bill by 2 LP a week. Not the most auspicious of starts.

The wage bill is too high – even with the reductions of last week it's still the highest in the league. I will be looking to change some personnel around, although I'm sad to say that it's far from obvious with whom to replace them, as the free agent list is a little light of true value at the moment.

Our bullpen is very light and will need some reinforcement if the franchise is to compete for a wild card place. The batters are not performing (.241) which puts us in the bottom 5 for the League. I'm still at a loss to why as, on paper, they look OK.

The goal for this year will be to finish 2nd behind the Reds in the NL Central and try for that elusive wildcard place. Not that likely I hear the cry but worth a try nonetheless.

All-Star Offensive

It's probably a bit early to start talking about All-Stars but I thought I would spend some time highlighting the offensive players who have got off to a great start with us now being 1/3 of the way through the season.

In terms of AL outfielders, reigning MVP Milton Bradley has been off to a good start but his power numbers are down (only 6 homers so far). Such is the strength of the Indians outfield that he has been outshone by 2 of his teammates. LF Alex Escobar leads the AL in batting average and is joint leader in RBIs. CF Brandon Phillips isn't far behind in either of those categories and leads the AL in runs scored.

Other outfielders off to particularly good starts are the Yankees Alfonso Soriano, the Rays Jared Sandberg and the Jays Eric Hinske. Soriano leads or jointly leads the AL in hits, total bases, doubles, homers and RBIs as he has paced a Yankees offense that has been one of the best in the majors this year.

Sandberg has been one of the only 'rays' of light in Tampa and, in a team with the worst offense in the AL, is on course for 132 RBIs. As he doesn't hit for much power, Hinske can often be forgotten (as he was in the all-star voting last year) but in a Toronto offense that doesn't have much power he is the man that makes them tick and a .350 avg can't be ignored.

The SS battle last year was pretty much a duel between Corey Koskie and Adam Kennedy. Neither have particularly disappointed this year but both have been out-performed by the Royals Julius Matos who is off to an outstanding start. In terms of infielders, he is joined by Koskie, the Yanks surprising Jason Giambi, Nomar Garciaparra of the BoSox and Roberto Alomar of the ChiSox who, as well as leading the AL in steals, is on course for 150 RBIs.

The NL is led in nearly every category by Reds SS Ryan Freel who is also having a gold glove year in the field. In terms of other infielders, reigning NL MVP Adrian Beltre is joint leader in RBIs and on for a 40-40 season. His teammate Jolbert Cabrera has been just as good and is putting up similar numbers. Other mentions should be given to David Bell of the Phillies and Alex Cora of the Dodgers (again!).

Not many outstanding OF's in the NL but the best have probably been Andruw Jones, Aramis Ramirez, Todd Helton and Placido Polanco. Great catchers again in the NL as Jason LaRue and Todd Hundley are having fantastic years. They may have been joined by Johnny Estrada of Atlanta but he has been bothered by injuries recently.

Week 7 Preview

The BoSox will begin their spell without Burkett by hosting the Yankees in a crucial series. The Yanks have the better offense and pitching staff statistically

but Boston hold an important 4-game lead. A tough week for Boston also includes a visit to the ChiSox and a home series against West-leading Oakland.

The Royals will look to bounce back in the Central but face series against Cleveland and Toronto. The Twins have series against Anaheim and Texas as well as a divisional battle against the ChiSox.

Without wanting to take any attention from the A's, the big series in the West is Anaheim's trip to Texas. This series doesn't need much extra spice anyway but this is not only the first series since the Rangers signing of Eckstein from Anaheim but the Angels will also be keen to avenge the Rangers sweep of them in Anaheim earlier in the season.

The Angels tough week continues with series against Minnesota and Toronto. Texas also face Minnesota who will be hoping that the 2 will have a 'let-down' against them. Oakland have a divisional battle against the Mariners before hosting Cleveland and travelling to Boston.

In the NL East, the Phillies travel to Florida and the Braves travel to Canada. Following that, all 4 teams seem to have manageable series – other than Atlanta's trip to LA to face the Dodgers.

In the Central, the Reds look to have a reasonable week as they face Milwaukee, Colorado and Arizona. The other teams will look to just keep in touch. There's a matchup of 'new boys' in San Fran as Guy Handley takes his Pirates to face Marc Bradbrook's Giants. The Pirates follow this with their first taste of those LA Dodgers – though they are at home.

Marc Bradbrook also gets his 1st taste of playing the Dodgers this week as the Giants open their week with a trip to LA. The Rockies have series in Arizona and Florida as well as hosting Cincy. They will look for another solid week as they look to stay in what is likely to be the wild card race bearing a major breakdown by the Dodgers.

Any contributions appreciated as ever.

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<http://www.qbspn.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.