

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

Week 9 Review

Arguably the biggest news this week came off the field as the Pittsburgh Pirates released star pitcher Joe Beimel. With his team only on the fringes of the NL Wild Card race and with the highest wages in the majors, GM Handley made the move to reduce the wage bill and rebuild for next season.

Handley was quoted as saying – "My main aim is to build the finances to allow me to assemble a team that has depth and is not just sprinkled with stars. I always like to think that it is a team sport and as such a good team will beat a team with stars."

Beimel has not been at his best this year but was an all-star and one of the best pitchers in the league last year. A number of teams are certain to be interested. Unconfirmed reports quote Beimel as saying – "Let the bidding commence! I'll go to the team who can pay me the most."

On the field, the Red Sox had a superb week and stretched their division lead to 6 games. For the week, they outscored their opponents 84-32. GM Denyer has done an outstanding job with this team and deserves all the plaudits for his team's position. The other big movers in the AL this week were the Rangers and Mariners. Both had excellent weeks, with the Rangers moving into the wild card position, with the M's just one game behind them.

The big losers in the AL were Chicago and Oakland. Chicago had a horrible week, including getting swept at home to Tampa! They don't look a bad team but seem unable to put it together. The A's went 1-8 and have fallen to the bottom of the AL West, though they are still well in contention.

In the Central, the Royals swept the Twins in KC but then got annihilated by the Red Sox and, overall, only pulled back 1 game and are now 4 behind.

Despite the off-field move, the Pirates were one of the main movers on the field in the NL as they got back onto the fringes of the wild card race with a 7-2 week. The Cubs replace them as having the highest wages in the league but had a dreadful week including what only be described as a thrashing from the division-leading Reds who now lead the division by 15 games.

The Dodgers continued their imperious march out West and now hold an 18-game lead. Congratulations though to Chris Stones as his D'Backs had a winning week including a series win in Atlanta over the Braves. Hopefully this is the sign of better things to come in Arizona.

The NL East remained pretty much in formation though the Phillies poor week saw them overtaken by the Braves and drop into last position. The Expos lead and the Marlins hold the wild card position. The editor wishes the Marlins well with the signing of SS Alex Rodriguez who was an under-achiever in Texas. Maybe the sun of Florida will bring out the best of him. A-Rod will get a chance to face his former team-mates when Texas travel to Florida this week.

Looking to next year by Marc Bradbrook

After a 2-7 week last time out, we could have done with better than 3-6. Add to that we lost out on the free agent we bid for. In general it was a fairly anaemic week on both sides of the mound. Even Scott Eyre, who was 6-3 with an ERA of 2.31, went 0-1 with an ERA of 9.76!!

There is some good news as Barry Bonds has batted .349 since coming back from injury, knocking in 35 RBIs in the last 4 weeks, which is pleasing. I am still undecided as to whether star rookie Tom Sanders will make his debut next week.

Anyway, it seems we're only looking to next season, so the remainder of this campaign will see the Giants strengthening for a real push next year.

News from Toronto by Philip Howard

The Toronto Blue Jays were optimistic at the halfway point in the season after a 6-3 Week 9, one of their best weeks of the season. GM Philip Howard said that the team's bad luck seemed to be ending, and that the week had seen them win a lot of close games they might previously have lost. The team only gained a winning record in the final game of the week, and their 41-40 record still barely reflects a 379-338 run tally.

Principal reliever Mark Hendrickson had a busy week, appearing in 6 of the 9 games, including all three games against the Yankees. Recent investment in training staff is considered to have aided his durability. Consistent production from the top 7 batting spots also helped, including star OF

Orlando Hudson's solid return from his second injury of the season.

The back office is currently concentrating on improving the range and quality of merchandising available to fans, seeing little of interest in the current free agent market. A known need is a fourth starting pitcher, with recent signing Jay Powell delivering an ERA of 5.55 in his 13 starts for the whole season.

However, the ace one-two punch of Roy Halladay and Vinnie Chulk are dominant and, along with Hendrickson, deliver 40% of all innings pitched, with a collective ERA under 3. The ability of this trio to stay on form and free from injury may determine whether the Jays can get the wins they need to make the playoffs in the very competitive American League.

All Change in Tampa Bay by Troy Dilworth

OK, so what can the manager of one of the worst teams in Baseball possibly say for himself? Apart from being slightly embarrassed ...

Well, in light of some recent discoveries, the Devil Rays approach to squad management and free agency will be radically changing over the coming weeks. The changes will almost certainly mean an upturn in fortunes for this under performing organisation. Obviously, they will come too late for this season but may signal a start of better things to come. Hopefully meaning that next season will be a tad more fruitful for these long suffering Devil Ray fans.

So what are the positives? Well, the finances have long been the best in baseball. The stadium and trainer level are at maximum. The merchandising is not far off maximum too and will be by season end.

The only downside is that the number of fans watching isn't the greatest but who in their right mind would come and pay to watch them at the moment? I considered trying to improve the fan level but unless I get bucket loads of losing points that I don't know what to do with (actually looking like a possibility?) then this won't be touched for the time being.

The total wage is still in the mid-60s and I know the results suggest otherwise but this squad is improving all of the time. I'm more than happy with the squad progression to where we are wanting to get to, but I won't lie, the results have been disappointing in light of this general squad improvement.

Even though we are trying to win baseball games, another positive is that at this moment in time we are in line for picking up some decent rookies at draft time as we will be picking top 4 (probably at 1 or 2). Not a great positive though, if this years 1st round pick is anything to go by as Lance Carter has really struggled with the weight of responsibility and expectancy on his young inexperienced shoulders. He will undoubtedly improve in time and he's certainly got time in his favour.

I'm still here as you can see and planning on making a real noise in this league one day. Just don't count on it being real soon, that's all!?!

Week 10 Preview

Inter-league week again and some interesting looking matchups. The first set of games includes the BoSox at Marlins, Yankees at Phillies, Rangers at Dodgers and a big Chicago series as the 2 struggling teams from that city meet up at Wrigley.

There is also the big series in Canada as the Jays travel to Montreal to face the Expos. This series has extra meaning as it almost certain that this will be the last meeting between 2 Canadian teams, as David Trice looks certain to move his Expos to Washington in the next few weeks.

Other series between potential playoff participants are as follows – Marlins at Indians, Phillies at Angels, Expos at Twins, Braves at A's, Red Sox at Reds, Royals at Dodgers, Dodgers at Red Sox, Reds at Yankees, Rangers at Marlins, Indians at Phillies, Mariners at Expos, Twins at Braves and A's at Cubs.

The NL teams will be keen to get revenge on the AL for the interleague series earlier in the season. They are likely to be led by the 'big 2' of the Dodgers and Reds who, though they have tough opponents, have 2 series each at home so would be fancied to do well.

But the main interest may be how much is someone willing to pay Joe Beimel? Start the bidding.....

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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.