

'Better Eight Than Never' - The Newsletter of MLB8

Week 14 Review

This is just such a close league. The margins between success and failure are so slim and the margin between the 'good' teams and the 'bad' teams relatively small. Leads to exciting baseball and means there are no easy series and things are always unpredictable. Teams like the Rangers, Phillies and Rockies had great weeks to put themselves right back in their wild card races when they were probably thinking they were out of it. Others like LA and Boston aren't quite as assured of postseason play as they were.

The state of play has the Dodgers winning the West and being the #1 seed in the NL (magic number for the division 13, #1 seed 21). After a poor week for the Pirates and Cubs, the Reds are almost certain to join the Dodgers by winning their division.

The big race in the NL is in the East. Atlanta is currently 5 ahead of the Nats, 6 of the Marlins and 9 of the Phillies. This leaves the Nats as the wild card – a game ahead of Florida, 2 ahead of Colorado, 4 ahead of Philly, 5 ahead of Pittsburgh and 6 ahead of Chicago. These 2 races look likely to go down to the wire.

No-one is really assured of a postseason spot in the AL. But, Toronto, LA, Boston and Minnesota all look in strong positions. The champs are 7 ahead of Texas and Seattle in the West. The Twins are 7 ahead of the Royals and 10 ahead of the Indians in the Central. The Jays overtook the BoSox in the big battle out East this week. They now hold a 2-game lead. Boston, though, is still in a strong position in terms of the wild card. They are 6 ahead of Texas and Seattle, 7 ahead of Kansas, 9 ahead of the Yankees and 10 ahead of Cleveland.

In the battle for the worst record in the league (and #1 draft pick), the Rays now lead the Brew Crew by 1 game. The D'Backs are a further game 'behind' after an excellent 6-3 week which included an improbable sweep of the Dodgers and a 2-1 series win at RFK in Washington.

Ticking along in Philly by Rob Crowther

Another good week for the Phillies, beating the Braves in Atlanta and then sweeping the Giants, in a series that included a blow out (22-6), a shoot out (8-7 in extra innings) and a pitching battle (1-0). We ended up losing to the Reds at home, but not too badly. So once again we're within spitting distance of .500, which we could achieve and still finish last in the division.

I've managed to replace some of the mediocre players with not much potential with slightly more mediocre players with a bit more potential, so hopefully we'll do a bit better out of the end of season improvements this season (last year no class improvements), but our main problem continues to be under performance by the 'star' players. Our most

expensive players have generally mediocre form. I'd like to replace some of them, but realistically I'm unlikely to be able to sign anyone as good as they are off the FA list.

Braves review by Mike Sim

Just goes to prove there are no easy games in MLB8 - the wounded Phillies outplayed us and so did the Rockies who are quietly getting into wild card contention. Played solid ball to sweep the Pirates to put a little gloss onto the week. Still not expecting the other NL East teams to drop off so the next 4 weeks promise to be tough. And who'd have thought anyone would be ahead of the Dodgers in hitting average? Not me that's for sure.

Nice and relaxed in LA by Patrick Lee

Just goes to show what a tight league this is. All our losses this week were pretty close games and we've probably played no better and gone 7-2 or something other weeks. That said we are now resting at least two or three batters every week and we just don't have the depth not to be hurt by that. With Beltre injured no less than four starting bats will sit out the whole of week 15, so we'll likely have another losing week next time too!

Still in it, just! by Ian Gibson

This game never fails to amaze you does it? Last week, I thought I was totally out of it and had given up. Now after a 6-3 week, the Angels going 4-5 (and having SS Kennedy injured) and BoSox 3-6 we are back in with a squeak. Still 6 behind the wild card and 7 behind the division so very little chance but a lot more than last week despite 9 more games going by. All leaves me in a funny position where I still don't think my team is good enough but we're still in the race so should I rebuild and release a decent player or not? Think I still probably will.

Week 15 Preview

All being well, we should have the All-Star Game this week. Let's hope it runs and that it is a close, competitive game. Details on the teams further on.

In terms of the normal stuff, the Twins travel to Kansas where a Minnesota series win would leave KC with a mountain to climb. The Mariners travel to LA and need a series win to pull the Halos back into sight. The Rockies also travel to LA (the Dodger side) and will look to take advantage of a Dodger team that has some injuries and is resting others and really make a statement in the wild card.

The Twins and Angels follow their series just mentioned by facing each other in LA. It would be no surprise if this was a playoff preview. The Braves travel to LA (tough even if they are resting people) whilst the Nats, Phillies and Marlins have what look to be slightly easier series so will hope to reel the Braves in. Continuing what could be a defining week for them, the Rockies host the Reds and then travel to Florida.

A tough week for the Angels finishes with a trip to Canada for another series where it would be no surprise if it were repeated in the postseason. The Rangers have a tough series as they look to chase them with a trip to Minnesota to face a Twins team who have an 8-1 record against the Rangers this year.

Looking at the schedule, it could be a defining week one-way or another for a number of teams.

All-Star Game

American League All-Star Team (by Paul Beaumont)

1 - 2B Damian Jackson - BR
2 - CF Michael Young - TR
3 - LF Alfonso Soriano - NY
4 - DH Alex Escobar - CL
5 - 1B Roberto Alomar - CW
6 - 3B Mendy Lopez - OA
7 - SS Corey Koskie - MT
8 - RF Milton Bradley - CL
9 - C Jose Molina - LG

IF - Julius Matos – KC OF - Jared Sandberg - TB
FLD - Royce Clayton – LG FLD - Brandon Phillips - CL
CAT - Carlos Beltran - KC

SP - Joaquin Benoit – TR BP1 - Roy Halladay - TO
BP2 - Eddie Guardado – MT BP3 - Chad Bradford - OA
BP4 - Vinnie Chulk – TO CL - Aaron Loper - SM

PIT - John Burkett – BR PIT - Jake Westbrook - CL
PIT - Todd Jones – BR PIT - Ryan Drese - TR
PIT - Rick Reed - MT

Team Notes - Alex Escobar, with his 35 HR, 108 RBI, 59 BB, and 33 SB was chosen to DH for the AL. Jared Sandberg got the nod as the Rays representative in the OF position meaning the third member of the outstanding Indian outfield, Brandon Phillips, only got the FLD outfield position on the team. Other non-voting picks were straight-forward as each player earned their position.

The pick of Royce Clayton as FLD infield may look odd now. At the time of voting he was hitting .335 and has fallen off since. He has played 1B, 3B, and DH this season. Possibly Adam Kennedy would have been the more popular pick but the manager feels Royce deserves his 'moment of glory'.

The 'weak' position on the AL team appears to be at C where Jose Molina dons the padding. With only one full year under his belt his best years are still ahead of him but he has progressed quickly, he batted .226 last season, and is hitting .260 so far this year. Veteran Toby Hall looks to be struggling with the Devil Rays this season as he was pre-season favourite to make the AL All-Star team at C.

Benoit starts for the AL, as voted by managers, and is the only active leftie on the roster. The pitching to follow of Halladay, Guardado, and Bradford looks strong and has

been tough on AL bats this year. The Seattle rep on the roster, Aaron Loper, gets the nod as closer.

Hopefully, the AL will play their part in the spectacle and that at the end of the day baseball will be the winner!

National League All-Star Team (by David Trice)

C – Jason LaRue - CI
1B – Adrian Beltre - LA
2B – Jolbert Cabrera - LA
3B – Miguel Cabrera - FM
SS – Ryan Freel - CI
LF – Todd Helton - CO
CF – Mike Kinkade - LA
RF – Fred McGriff - LA
DH – Rich Aurilia - SF

IF – Jason Bay - PI OF – Sammy Sosa - CU
FLD – Kit Pellow - CO FLD – Andruw Jones - AB
CAT – Todd Hundley - LA

SP – Wilson Alvarez - LA BP1 – Russ Ortiz - AB
BP2 – Livan Hernandez - WN BP3 – Terry Adams - MB
BP4 – Eric Washington - AD CL – Ryan Madson - PH

PIT – Kerry Wood - CU PIT – Eric Gagne - LA
PIT – Seth Etherton - CI PIT – Brian Meadows - PI
PIT – Billy Koch - WN

4 Dodgers amongst the batting starters. It is tough to say they don't deserve it on their performance in the past two seasons, and I feel good about the idea of having this group as my starting lineup in Toronto.

Starting pitcher, Wilson Alvarez of the Dodgers. Alvarez was the consensus selection as starting pitcher, and it is hard to argue against this after a season in which he has emerged from the shadow of Russ Ortiz, Adam Bernero and Livan Hernandez. That triumvirate battled for All Star and Cy Young honours last year, but this year Bernero didn't even gather a single vote.

In terms of others, Eric Washington (AD) is an astonishing rookie who is pitching so well, I'm sure he has been coached a lot. A formidable candidate with a 2.70 ERA out of the bullpen in Arizona. Ryan Madson (PH) closes. I feel very worried having a 7* come out of the pen to close the game, albeit a veteran, but Madson is 9-3 with ten saves and a 3.32 ERA, so I am hoping that he won't fear the occasion and will pull through if required.

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Until next week, Ian.