

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

### **All-Star Game Review**

What a game! The AL gain revenge for last year's defeat but it was mighty close as they earned the win in the bottom of the 11<sup>th</sup>. The end came in the most surprising way on an error by Reds SS Ryan Freel who hasn't committed an error in the regular season.

Difficult to pick an MVP but in the end it went to Cleveland Indian Alex Escobar. Escobar drove in the 2 runs that tied the game in the bottom of the 5<sup>th</sup> and then led off the 11<sup>th</sup> with a single and stolen base that led to the winning run. He just about got the nod over Halladay and Guardado who pitched superbly to keep the AL in it after Benoit got knocked around in the first 3 innings.

### **Week 15 Review**

Back in regular season play, nothing much really changed this week. The Twins virtually clinched the Central with a sweep of the Royals in KC and the 2 game gap between Boston and Toronto in the East was maintained. The West isn't completely over but it would be surprising if the Angels were to throw away what is a 5-game lead over Seattle and 6-game lead over Texas.

The Dodgers continue to cruise and rest their starters for the postseason. Their magic number for the division is now 6 so they should clinch this week. The Reds seem to have weathered their iffy spell and have all but clinched the Central. Even the East isn't as tight as usual and it would now be a surprise if the Braves weren't to win it.

The real race still going is for the Wild Card. The Nats currently hold the position but are looking increasingly precarious. Since moving to Washington they have gone just 15-21, including a disastrous 8-13 at home (this after having a great 31-17 record in Montreal). They are now only ahead of the much improved Rockies on run difference and have the Marlins, Phillies and Pirates all within 3 games.

The 'race' for the #1 draft pick is now led by the Brewers. They are a game ahead of the Devil Rays who are 2 ahead of Arizona. The disappointment for whichever team wins this race (apart from their record) is that there is a sense that there aren't any truly outstanding players available in the draft who could come in and make a huge impact right away.

### **Twins thoughts** by Dave Brown

After things being very tight for most of the season, most of the play-off issues for MLB8 now seem to be pretty clear. In the American League, the Blue Jays and the Twins now look almost certain, with the Bosox & Angels highly likely to join them. The main things still open are who'll win the AL East & the issue of homefield advantage in the play-offs.

Over in the National League, the NL West & Central have been wrapped up for a long time, Mike Sim's Braves look to be coming good at the right time in the East leaving the only real issue for the wild-card spots being the wild card in the National League.

So overall, 7 of the 8 teams going to the post-season could be the same as last year (exception being Boston for Texas)...who'd have believed that a few weeks into the season when the Blue Jays, Twins, Angels and Braves were all badly trailing!

As for the Twins, we're looking in pretty decent shape for the play-offs. Pitching's been very solid all year, but the concern is with the batting – 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest runs scored in the American League tells its own story.

We've been reliant on nicking a large number of pitching duels, while suffering the occasional blow-out. Indeed Week 13 saw the Twins go 6 and 3...with every win being by a single run! This week sees a couple of star names being rested, so expect to see the Twins tally of runs scored reach new lows – we'll be happy to scramble a winning week!

All-Star Game – A win in the 11th for the American League, thanks to an error by Ryan Freel! The National League being kept scoreless after the 3<sup>rd</sup>. This indicated the problem of voting taking place well before the game as the Rangers' Joaquin Benoit started for the AL despite his form slumping over recent weeks and being in virtually every department statistically worse than 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> choices Halladay and Guardado by the time the game was run.

So it was no surprise to see Benoit taken long twice whilst Halladay & Guardado combined for 5 perfect innings. Presumably Benoit's slump has been instrumental in the Rangers losing touch in the play-off race...?

Finances – As has been commented on previously by another GM, the end of season 2 in MLB8 sees virtually every MLB team wallowing in cash. Next season is likely to see massive bonuses paid to free agents as teams try to work out what to do with all

their dollars. Surely the time is getting close when league commissioner McConnell must be lobbied to take action to restructure team's finances??

### **News from the Bay Area** by Marc Bradbrook

Blimey! I was on the edge of quitting and the team respond with an 8-1 week, my best ever.

I guess the series against Arizona was one both coaches were looking as winnable. A good 6 innings start from Scott Eyre in game 1 and all the runs scored in 2 inns, Arizona in the 1st and San Fran in the 3rd. Barry Bonds the hero with a 2 run double but the decisive run on 3rd baseman Kata's error.

Game 2 - a complete game shutout from Jim Brower. A tough break on Arizona losing out by the odd run again. Game 3 - For the first time in a long while the bullpen came through and the batters finally found form in the 6th and 7th with 5 and 3 runs respectively.

Big underdogs against the Pirates but Joe Beimel finally earned his wages against his old team, with an almost flawless complete game 2-hitter. Recent addition, experienced 1B Brian Banks, knocked in 2 RBIs.

Game 2 - Another solid start and a good finish from Kirk Rueter for the win. Game 3 - the first loss of the week, when Eyre finally runs out of steam in the 8th and gives up 4 runs. Very little support from the batters as the Pirates bullpen delivers.

The Nationals next and despite being 15 games back, 1 great start and 2 complete games (one of which was another by Beimel) later and the expensive Giants starting lineup really shows it's worth, as the Nationals are swept in the capital. Brower is helped in game 1 by excellent fielding which saw him give up 9 hits but only 1 run.

Very chuffed overall and renewed my desire for this team. We got our free agent (2B Geoff Blum) which gives us more depth in the infield. We improved our stadium, invested in merchandising and my 3 future star batters are gaining form nicely in the minors, which should hopefully allow me to improve the batting lineup for next season.

### **Braves review** by Mike Sim

5-4 for a week including a road trip to LA so I can't complain even if it wasn't the strongest Dodger line-

up. Toughed out a series win vs Florida which was pleasing. Didn't really get to grips with some decent LA pitching and I'm not reading much into our pitching effort versus LA with 4 starters missing.

Got to say the Brewers pitching looks very good, they just can't seem to get the extra base hits, else they'd have beaten us. Interesting that Martin signed ex-Brave Adam Wainwright and dropped Ford. Wainwright has been a bit disappointing this season and struggled when I started him. Hope he works out for you Martin.

Big series this week for us versus the Nats. Can't afford a bad week with a modest lead in the division.

### **Week 16 Preview**

As Mike mentions above, this is the biggest divisional series of the week. The Nats have been struggling but a sweep would put them right back in the race. There is another traditionally important divisional series in the AL West as the Rangers travel to California to play the Angels. It's very much a long shot but the Rangers will need an improbable sweep to make their playoff hopes realistic again.

A tough week continues for Washington as they also face the Reds and the Dodgers. The Rockies look ready to take advantage if the Nats have a poor week as they face Arizona, Philadelphia and Milwaukee. The Marlins and Phillies look to have reasonable weeks on paper and will look to stay right in the race.

There aren't that many mouth-watering series in the AL this week though Boston's visit to Minnesota is likely to be a great series. The first division title is likely to be settled and it may well be that the Dodgers clinch it in front of the home folk in the middle series as they host the Cubs.

It will be interesting to see whether a contender throws any money on any of the decent players let go this week (particularly pitchers Belisle and Ford).

### **GAMEPLAN ADVERTISEMENTS**

<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.