

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

### Week 17 Review

What a week for the Boston Red Sox! GM Paul Denyer is keeping his feet on the ground but is obviously delighted by his team's current 11-game win streak. Their performance – combined with a down week by the Jays – has the AL East all tied up. The Sox infact lead on run differential by 14 runs. This is going right down to the wire.

The only bad news for the Red Sox is the injury to 1B Nomar Garciaparra which is likely to keep him out of the divisional series. (*Ed. – Injuries are a bit of theme as tired bodies seem to be wearing out towards the end of the season*).

The race in the AL West is still alive as well as the Rangers have closed the gap on the Angels to 2. Though not nervous, the Angels are casting concerned looks over their shoulder as the Rangers have kept this race alive with much-improved performances in recent weeks. It's still a big ask but the Rangers will give it everything in the final week despite an injury to star RF Laynce Nix.

As predicted, the Twins wrapped up the Central. They haven't been entirely convincing throughout the year but they will be feared in the playoffs. The top of their rotation (Guardado, Hawkins) is as good as any and they have a chance of homefield advantage throughout the AL playoffs. They are always tough to beat in the expansive confines of the Metrodome.

In the NL, the Dodgers had more bad news, following on from the injury to McGriff last week. This week, all-star 2B Jolbert Cabrera caught the injury bug. His injury is not as severe but it seems certain that he will miss the divisional series, meaning that 2 big bats will be missing for LA.

It is difficult to guess who the team will be who will get the chance of taking the weakened Dodgers on. The Reds clinched the Central but had a worrying 2-7 week, made all the more worrying by the injury to pitcher Juan Cerros. His injury is likely to keep him out of the divisional series.

The Braves made a big step towards clinching the East as they won all 3 series this week to take a 6-game lead. The wild card race just gets closer and closer. The Nationals are currently in the position but only courtesy of their home sweep of rival Colorado. The Rockies may really rue what will go down as a huge missed opportunity if they fail to make it.

The season-ending injury to catcher Charles Johnson will be another huge irritation to GM Mark Hall. The catching duties will be given to veteran Chris Stynes. Stynes will likely do a solid job behind the plate but is nothing like the offensive threat that Johnson is.

The Nats, Colorado and Florida are all tied in the standings. Nats are +45 on run difference, Rockies +15 and the Marlins –21. The Marlins have momentum though and GM Guard-Ward's recent signing of pitcher Matt Belisle from the Reds may turn out to be inspired. With his help, they only conceded 20 runs in 9 games this week. This is another race that will go right down to the wire.

### A's Ambitions by Tom Shewry

Well Week 17 summed up the 2nd MLB8 season for the A's. A great start, some promising performances, but overall a bit of a disappointment. The first half of the season was going so well, the A's were challenging for the division, the pitching was top of the league and then the wheels fell off. As predicted by the preseason pundits the inexperienced A's team couldn't keep the performances going and our fall was as meteoric as our rise.

Initially Week 17 had the potential to be a disaster. The A's were going head to head with the 3 American League divisional leaders and had 3 star players (including All-Star Mendy Lopez) rested for either injury or fatigue reasons. In hindsight a 5-4 week was pretty pleasing – that was until I really analysed the results and found that a 9-0 record would not have been unreasonable.

The Angels - The A's deserved better than to go down to the World Champions 2-1. Having won game 1 with great relieving from Lilly, we then – in my view unluckily – lost the next two games.

Game 2 was tied at two in a tense contest until the 14th when a solo home run from big-hitting Menechino looked to have wrapped things up. But a bases loaded homer by the Angels wiped away any trace of celebration with the key play an error by catcher Hernandez that gifted the Angels their chance to win the match. Game 3 was similarly disappointing with the A's taking a 3-0 lead into the bottom of the 9th when another grand slam for the Angels broke A's hearts.

The Twins - Another strong A's performance. A 6-3 win and then 5-4 loss set things up for the last game of the series. A huge 8 run 6th inning performance was the foundation for a 10-4 win and a winning series.

The Blue Jays - The A's helped dent the Jays divisional aspirations with another series win that again could

have been better. Opening up with a 11-1 drubbing then a 1-0 loss and 2-0 win completed the series.

"If only" is the saying of the week in the Bay. 4 lost games which could so easily have been 4 wins. Two losses by a run and two with last inning home runs show that this young team have what it takes if only they can keep their confidence and control at the death.

So confidence is high in the A's camp for next year as I believe that our record, and bottom position in the division, doesn't tell the story of our performance this season. Having a losing record despite a positive run differential confirms my view that we lost the close games and made hay in the easier ones.

With our talented young team a year older and the backing of league leading finances, next year may well be the year of the A's.

#### **News from Toronto** by Philip Howard

The Blue Jays are philosophical about their 3-6 week, which started with being swept by the Red Sox and ended with their AL East rivals regaining the division lead with just 9 games left in the regular season.

GM Philip Howard said "Anyone can see that we were extremely unlucky over the week, especially in the Red Sox series. If I'm annoyed with anyone, it's certain umpires who couldn't find the strike zone if you sat them on home plate (*ed. – 35 walks issued by the Jays this week*). Our batting is still strong, and our pitchers will seek to recover from the disappointment of those losing decisions. As long as we get into the post-season, we've got as much chance as anyone"

Star outfielder Orlando Hudson strained a bicep at the end of the week, but team physicians say that he will be ready for the final regular season series in Seattle. "This is a tribute to our improved medical staff", said Howard. "Earlier in the season, Orlando might have been out for longer. Next season, we'll be at this kind of level throughout the year, and will get more games out of our more fragile players, especially Eric Hinske".

The Jays key series this week is at home to the Twins, which could have homefield implications if Boston are overhauled. Texas still have a theoretical chance of depriving Toronto of the wild-card spot, so at least 3 wins over the 9 games are vital.

#### **Week 18 Preview**

For teams still fighting to make the postseason, every series is a big series but there a few that stand out in the season's final week. The Marlins try to carry their momentum into the first series of the week as they

travel to Atlanta. The Nationals and Rockies begin with home series, against Philly and LA respectively.

The Marlins then face the Reds and Dodgers, whilst the Rockies face the Braves and Cubs. The Nats have a home series against the Pirates before ending with a series in Arizona against the D'Backs. Washington certainly look to have the easier week but that probably means little at this stage. It's just too close to call so let's just see what happens.

Boston begin the week with a trip to Tampa followed by a home series against the Indians and then a trip to Texas. The Jays face New York and Minnesota before ending the season in Seattle. No clear advantage in terms of schedule for either team and difficult to know whether all opponents will be putting out full-strength squads at this stage of the season.

The Rangers will hope their season is still alive by the time they host the Red Sox in their final series. For it to be they simply have to win road series in Oakland and Kansas. Even then, it may mean nothing if the Angels get back on track in road series against Seattle and the Yankees. If it goes to the last series, the Angels host the Royals.

Outside the radar compared to all of this activity at the business end of things, the Brewers and Devil Rays end their season battling for the #1 draft pick. Both teams have had another disappointing season but anyone who knows Messrs Willan and Dilworth will know that success may be just round the corner for these 2 franchises.

It's going to be a fascinating final week and a thrilling end to another great regular season. The playoffs are likely to be just as close. The Dodgers look head and shoulders ahead of everybody (14 games better than their nearest rivals) but everyone starts from zero and their injury problems mean that it is difficult to pick a favourite. Hitting form this week could spark a team and carry them through the postseason.

We'll see what happens.....

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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.