

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

Week 18 Review

And then there were 8! Eight teams remain after all remaining issues were resolved this week. The Angels prevailed in the AL West as the Rangers bullpen imploded, ruining any slight chance they had. The East was retained by the Blue Jays who also secured the #1 seed and are probably the form team in the AL entering the postseason. The Red Sox have the 2nd best record in the AL but have to settle for the wild card.

In the NL, the Braves clinched the East by the 4th game of the week but the wild card went right down to the wire. The Marlins were left with a mountain to climb after losing their opening series and never really got into the race – so it was left to Colorado and Washington.

It was nip and tuck between the 2 teams all week and they entered their final series still tied. Washington had to travel to Arizona while the Rockies hosted the Cubs. The Rockies initially took the advantage as they won comfortably whilst the Nats lost 2-1 as they were shut down by D'Back pitcher Chris Capuano.

Washington came straight back though as they won 7-0 whilst the Rockies were shutout 4-0. All tied again with 161 games played, the Nats still having the advantage in run differential.

The Rockies game was played early and featured a matchup of aces as Adam Bernero faced Kerry Wood. Wood had one of his few bad outings of the season and was knocked out after 3 innings. Meanwhile, Bernero – who hasn't performed as well this year as last year – cruised through the game, giving up just 2 runs in a complete game performance. So, it was win or bust for the Nats in Arizona.

The game lived up to its billing in a tension-packed affair. The Nats held a tenuous 1-0 lead behind starter Almonte who left in the 7th hoping the bullpen could hold the lead. This they did as they pitched a perfect 2 2/3 to preserve the win. This great season and great wild card race came down to the very last pitch of the regular season. A fitting end but so disappointing for Colorado. Neither team deserved to lose this race. In the end, the Nats had a run difference 19 better than the Rockies.

In matters unrelated to the postseason, the Milwaukee Brewers more than comfortably secured the #1 pick in the upcoming draft as they ended the season with a 9-game losing streak. In these 9 games, they scored a paltry 8 runs so it's not difficult to see what the biggest problem is in Milwaukee.

Wild Card Reaction by David Trice

Well, first of all let me start by paying tribute to both Mark Hall and Stuart Guard-Ward who hauled their teams right in to the playoff race with some excellent late season form that backs up a strong performance all year. At some point I think each of us was in the wild-card spot this past week, and in the end the Nats clinched it on a runs difference tie-breaker.

This was sweet considering that last season we lost the division title under similar circumstances, although bitter for Colorado who were 7-2 against me until last week's sweep at the tail end of the week.

It was a first-class wild-card race that brought out the best in each team and we now go in to the playoffs sharper – especially the pitching – but exhausted from our efforts to get to this point.

More reaction by Stuart Guard-Ward

A thrilling last week wildcard battle that went right to the wire. I was surprised we won as many games as we did and indeed was surprised to even get back in the wildcard race after dropping away in the 3rd quarter of the season. Pleased with the way we played the season and for a team that I don't really think have what it takes at the moment we played well throughout. Good luck to all involved should be another cracking battle to the World Series.

Ranger end of season review by Ian Gibson

Oh well it is season over in Texas. Congratulations to Paul on retaining the AL West and congratulations and good luck to all those who've made the playoffs.

After winning the first game of the week we ruined our chances by blowing late-inning leads in all of the next 4 games. This was not only costly this week but has been costly to us throughout the season. Probably the key reason for not making the postseason has been the bullpen's inability to hold leads.

Biggest culprit has been Ryan Drese who was outstanding last year. Despite making the all-star game again, he has been nothing like as effective this year. He had 16 saves but a 4.70 ERA and a 2-10 won-loss record. That combined with bullpen colleague Reynaldo Garcia (4.76 ERA, 9-10 with 8 saves) was key in keeping us out.

Having the luxury of two relatively expensive 8* pitching from the pen but having that sort of ERA and combining to lose 20 games is very disappointing. However, other players performed slightly above themselves and these things all even out. Simply, we were not quite good enough. The postseason will be very interesting and

am looking forward to observing it even though I'm not in it.

Divisional Series Preview

The National League Divisional Series are a repeat of Season 1 as all divisional winners and the wild card team repeated. Based on regular season record and last year's NLDS, it would be widely expected that the Dodgers would repeat their 3-1 victory over the franchise that is now the Washington Nationals.

However, their injury problems are well-documented and the Nats have the pitching to limit what will be a depleted Dodger offense. LA are probably still favourites but far from conclusively. (*Regular season series won 7-5 by Washington*).

The Atlanta / Cincinnati series went entirely with the homefield last year in 5 very closely-contested games. This could be crucial as, despite being statistically better, the Reds do not have the homefield this time. It would be no surprise to see 5 close games again and I wouldn't like to predict who will come out on top. (*Regular season series tied 6-6*).

Things are slightly different this year in the AL though only 1 different team features (Red Sox replacing the Rangers). The Sox face the Twins in a matchup of the 2 teams with the best home records in the AL. This could be a crucial factor with the Red Sox having 3 of the 5 games at home. The Twins though have top of the rotation pitching that could limit the highest-scoring offense in the majors. Looks another incredibly tight series. (*Regular season series won 7-5 by Boston*).

The other series pits the World Champions against the Toronto Blue Jays. The Jays have hit top form at the right time and, having lost at this stage to the Twins last year, will be doubly keen to do better this time and have home advantage. The Angels are the champions though and will hope that they found their pitching form in the last series of the season against the Royals. If they can continue like that they will be very difficult to beat but the Jays are probably slight favourites. (*Regular season series won 7-5 by Toronto*).

May the best teams win. Will we see a repeat of last year's championship series (Reds / Dodgers and Angels / Twins) or will it be different this year?

Views From The Managers

Trice – "We don't have high hopes for our series against LA, although the Dodgers problems have been discussed at length. We edged them for the Team ERA lead, but their batting is significantly superior, even missing a few pieces here and there to start the series. Our best hope is to win two in RFK and hope to snatch

one in Chavez Ravine. I hope we can at least acquit ourselves a little better than last season's effort."

Lee – "I don't have high hopes either, so I suppose one of us is going to be pleasantly surprised! At least we finished with our best week for a while, despite the usual lengthy list of absentees (only three of our first choice batters were in the lineup until midway through the week). Cabrera and McGriff will be missed, and I just hope their recoveries won't come too late to help us. At least form and fatigue aren't a big problem though.

Whilst our batting average has unsurprisingly dropped a bit lately, our pitching has also become a bit erratic, and I've no idea as yet what my starting order will be for the playoffs, or even which starter will drop to the bullpen as we move to a 4-man rotation."

Sim – "Delighted with the Braves second half performance. We were bottom at week 8 and struggling. Over the 2nd half of the season, the difference between .500 baseball and winning the division is one win a week which is a pretty small margin.

Reds v Braves features the two best teams on batting average. It's a repeat of season one and for the Braves, the Reds are a tough opponent who have swept us as recently as last week. One slight surprise is we snatched homefield advantage for the series, but don't know whether or not this is actually an advantage."

Beaumont – "The Angels are still in with a shot at retaining their title. The odds are against it, but the chances have risen after some Week 18 performances that improved the pitching form going into the ALDS against the Blue Jays.

We have a couple of issues with fatigue and form on the batting side for the post-season, but we have no key injuries this year. Winning the AL West was our goal for the season, and it's especially pleasing to do this after the strong starts to the season made my all four teams.

Obviously we'd like to retain our title but with our goal achieved anything now is a bonus. We're happy to be here and will do our best but there's some very good sides in the AL in the playoffs; not to mention the NL.

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.