

'Better Eight Than Never' - The Newsletter of MLB8

Championship Series Review

And so, after 2 thrilling League Championship Series, the World Series will be a contest between the 2 Canadian teams in the league. Uh-oh..... sorry, it would have been had the Montreal Expos not moved mid-season to Washington to become the Nationals.

We will never know if the Expos would have made it if they'd stayed in Montreal but what we do know is that these 2 teams are worthy winners from their respective leagues. It is sure to be a good match-up with the added spice of it being the team from Canada against the team formerly from Canada.

The Jays prevailed in the all-AL East ALCS, despite ace Roy Halladay only throwing 4 innings in each of his 2 starts. Games 1 and 2 in the Sky Dome were close but Toronto prevailed in both, despite Boston having more base-runners in both games.

A 6-run 2nd inning for Toronto was the key to Game 1 with Trevor Miller closing it out for the save. It was an early lead again in Game 2 behind a Simon Pond homer. There was a bit of trouble in the 9th but Josh Towers came in to get the final out in place of Hendrickson.

Game 3 at Fenway was a reversal of this as, despite the Jays having 5 more base-runners, the Red Sox prevailed 3-2 as Boston starter Bronson Arroyo managed to pitch out of a couple of jams. Homers from Merloni and Ortiz provided the offense. Ortiz also completed the game making a catch at the CF wall with a man on in the 9th.

Game 4 was probably the key game of the series. Despite ace John Burkett only giving up 2 runs in a complete game effort, he was out-pitched by the Jays no.4 starter Brian Fuentes. He pitched 7 2/3 before handing over to the bullpen to close it out and give the Jays a 3-1 series lead. The Sox left men on base in each of the last 3 innings as they just couldn't get the crucial hit.

A poor start by Halladay, combined with a good one by the Red Sox Todd Jones, gave Boston victory in Game 5. They had to withstand a furious late rally though with Wakefield coming in to replace closer Jason Botts to get the final out and preserve a 3-2 win and force the series back to Toronto.

Game 6 was never really close. Maybe the travelling back to Toronto combined with the 5-game series

against the Twins was too much for the Red Sox as they just collectively seemed to run out of gas. Hinske, Hudson and Delgado all had 3 hits as the Toronto offense exploded in this game. They finished things off very nicely with Howie Clark hitting a grand slam in the 9th to put the 'maple syrup' on the American League Pennant cake.

Toronto pitcher Vinnie Chulk starred pitching a complete game marathon – his 1st of the season. Though this series finished a day earlier than the NL series, it will be interesting to see how Chulk's arm recovers and when he can start a game in the World Series.

So, for the Jays, it is onto the World Series. For Boston, the end to what has been a great season. Though they didn't quite have enough in the tank there have been so many positives from the season that they can take into next year.

In the NLCS, Game 1 set the tone for what would be a great series. Starters Hernandez and Etherton battled it out into the late innings and had both left after 8 with the score tied at 2. Into extra innings and it was the Reds who were able to eke out the win with a walk-off hit.

Back game the Nationals though in Game 2. Behind an outstanding complete game outing by Zach Day they eked out a 4-3 victory to tie the series heading back to RFK Stadium.

Games 3 and 4 in Washington were both close and the Nats probably had slightly the better of the games to be honest. They had more base-runners in both games but the veteran Reds were more clinical with runners on base and pinched each game by the odd run. A 3-1 series deficit looked too much for Washington to come back from.

Ace Hernandez took to the mound for Game 5, in a repeat of the Game 1 matchup versus Etherton. It was another tight battle but this time Hernandez and the Nationals prevailed to at least force the series back to Cincinnati.

Game 6 and the Nats hopes of taking the series to a deciding game lay on the shoulders of starter Day. He followed up his Game 2 effort with another outstanding display, again out-pitching the Reds John Bale on the way to a 6-3 victory. This set up a Game 7.....

Javier Vazquez faced up against the Reds Mario Soto who'd been great so far in the playoffs. He was pretty good again but left in the 7th with the Nationals holding a slender 3-2 lead as Vazquez stifled the Reds offense through 7 innings.

Despite a general feeling that the Reds could strike at any moment the spark just wasn't there and it didn't

happen, as they produced nothing in 2 innings against the Nationals bullpen. Washington were even able to add a couple of insurance runs for a 5-2 victory and a series win which looked inconceivable when they faced a 3-1 deficit after 2 gut-wrenching defeats at RFK.

The end of another great season for Bo Mayfield and the Reds but one which, like last season, ended in Game 7 of the NLCS. This time may have hurt even more as this was at home. Only time will tell as to whether this will demoralise them or whether they will be back even stronger next year. For the Nationals, it's the World Series and a trip back to Canada.

World Series thoughts by Philip Howard

We're reasonably confident going into the World Series. We have some pitching issues but the bats are on fire with a .298 post-season average. Washington's pitching is formidable, but we feel we can win if we manage to score 5 runs a game.

World Series Preview

In a postseason that has been as eventful and closely-contested as this one, it is impossible to confidently predict what will happen in this World Series.

Both teams can pitch as they led their respective leagues in ERA. Toronto are led by starters Halladay and Chulk but are supported by 2 of the best relievers around in Mark Hendrickson and Aquilino Lopez. They have also had pleasing contributions from their no.3 and 4 starters Powell and Fuentes in the postseason.

The Nationals are led by ace and Cy Young candidate Livan Hernandez. He is strongly supported by starting colleagues Vazquez and NLCS MVP Zach Day. This trio were the only 3 starting pitchers in the majors to hold opposing batsmen to a batting average below .200 – an outstanding achievement. They have other guys who've pitched well (Almonte, Kershner) but if the 'Big 3' are on form they don't need much else.

Both teams are also amongst the top 4 or 5 fielding teams in the league and feature a number of Gold Glove contenders (e.g. Hudson and Pond for Toronto, Cabrera and Barrett for Washington).

The Jays do have an edge when it comes to the bats. Whilst they have 6 everyday players who batted over .290, the Nats batting average leader (Orlando Cabrera) only batted .272. As a team, the Nationals batted only .241 in the regular season. This, and the fact that the Blue Jays have homefield advantage if it goes 7 games, would appear to give Toronto the edge.

However, this Nationals team seems a better one than the one that has played for most of the season. There

are also the intangibles – the move to a new city, momentum and that funny feeling that this may be a team of 'destiny'. They are certainly on a roll at the moment – there is no doubt about that.

Don't feel I can make a prediction other than that I just can't see a sweep by either team so am certain that it will be a longer series than last year. May the best team win.....

End of season feeling in Pittsburgh by Guy Handley

After the 2nd round of the draft I'm feeling up beat. It could very well be because I don't realise what a mess we are in but still, ignorance is bliss, or at least very comforting.

Santan Juan a promising right handed pitcher with good potential. Steve Miller is a young left handed CF who may have what it takes to make it in the big time.

A lot will depend on what happens in the end of season sort but we are hopeful. Last seasons end of term slump was caused by the lack of any talent behind the starters, we need to get some average players to spell our starters and not suffer the ignominy of having to send a second string team to the slaughter.

As ever we will all start equal, even if some are a little more equal than us!

Post mortem at the Metrodome by Dave Brown

Suffice to say, the Twins' hitting problems through the regular season continued to haunt them in the play-offs. Never really found the reason – my pitching did all year about what I expected of it. I had the plus of being in a big stadium too, which helped on the HRs conceded.

But my hitting, which I felt should've been one of the best in the league, was never better than mediocre. What was shocking was to see us knock in 21 runs in game 2 of the ALDS. I think that's the best Twins effort in 2 season of punchless batting!

End of season award winners in next couple of issues (Cy Young's, MVPs, Rookies of the Year). Any thoughts on these most appreciated.

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.