

'Better Eight Than Never' - The Newsletter of MLB8

End of Season releases

The biggest names released this week were the Dodgers LF Cesar Izturis and the Red Sox Gold Glove SS Kevin Millar. The Dodgers offense can probably handle the loss of Izturis, whilst Boston have plenty of depth on offense and spent heavily to recruit touted SS prospect Tony Graffanino from the Dodger organisation.

Whilst there are some players that would represent good value on the free agent list these 2 are the only star players available. With finances under control a number of teams look set to retain some of their rookies in their minor league system until later in the season.

Does Size Matter? by Troy Dilworth

Don't panic fellas as I'm not questioning your manhood! Answering the question in hand, I would have to say that maybe it does matter. So far in MLB8 there have been 2 World Series winners, both of whom played their home games in a Large stadium. In fact, 3 of the 4 league winners have had Large home stadia too. The only exception being the Dodgers (Small stadium) who got gubbed 4 zip in the World Series (sorry Patrick!).

Look at my Devil Rays for example. In season 1, my squad were a joke, I can't put into words quite how bad they were! In season 2, my squad were miles superior and I was quite hopeful at the outset. Yet, we obtained 8 more wins in Season 1 ... go figure!?! Well, in Season 1 we were playing in a Large Stadium at home and Season 2 we were in a Small stadium.

Could this really have made such a difference? However, to me this really isn't very logical? When a new league begins most of the players in a squad don't have an abundance of skills. Therefore, it would make sense that certain skills need to be relied upon more than others.

Look at the OF players for example. Due to throwing in from the outfield these players are said to require POW. Add to that the DH and catcher (who needs to throw to 2nd base) and I reckon there are 5 players in a batting lineup that require decent POW. So I would have thought that it would make more sense to concentrate on POW as a whole and thus to have a Small home stadium as well.

The only problem is that the league World Series history doesn't back up this assumption. So the question is why? The first anomaly for me is that in my view for Home stadia teams to work best they require HIT+SPD for batting and ACC+QUI for pitching. I can't believe that at the start of this league that the home stadia teams are set up perfectly like this already? So I've resulted to reverting to the rulebook for the potential answer.

Within the game processing, the first thing that is looked at is whether the pitcher actually strikes out the batter. That would suggest that the ACC of the pitcher is always compared against the HIT of the batter. The fourth thing that is looked at is the POW and CON matchup but only if the batter has actually hit it in the first place. Let's face facts, if the computer has already worked out that it's a strike out then it doesn't matter how flaming good the batters POW is, as it doesn't even get looked at!

This comes back to my original question, "Does Size Matter?". If a side has a Large stadium they are more likely to concentrate on recruiting and training in HIT+SPD and ACC+QUI, thus these teams would appear to be "ahead of the game" when considering the game processing which could go a long way in explaining why the Large stadia teams are winning it all for the moment.

In my opinion, in time, when the number of skills increase these small stadium teams would have more HIT and ACC on board thus bringing the POW and CON aspects more into play. Maybe Season 3 will see the first Small stadium team win the big prize but I'm not sure there are quite enough skills flying about even now?

Or maybe you all think I've been talking gibberish and you have a completely different view on what's been happening? The joys of Gameplan Baseball, eh? As you can never quite be certain what is happening – gotta love it!

End of season awards continued

AL Rookie of the Year - The winner by a huge margin is #1 draft pick Randy Winn of the Seattle Mariners. He was the key to a huge improvement in Seattle, leading the majors in doubles, 3rd in RBI's, 4th in batting average, 10 triples, 26 homers and 23 stolen bases.

He also showed tremendous leadership and work ethic in playing all 162 games and getting stronger and stronger as the season went on. As a rookie, he was a major runner in the AL MVP race and it will be fascinating to see if he continues to develop and become the best player in the league.

Other AL rookies worthy of specific mention are Timo Perez of the White Sox, Todd Jackson of the A's, Dave Roberts of the Red Sox and Scott Brown of the Indians. Brown was probably the best of the AL rookie pitchers. He spent all year in the bullpen but threw 120 innings, going 8-6 with 7 saves and a 4.11 ERA. Especially impressive with Cleveland playing in such a small stadium.

Roberts was part of a speedy Boston offense. He batted .263, with 15 homers, 56 RBI's and 25 steals. Todd Jackson batted .280 with 49 RBI's and 21 steals. He also showed excellent patience, drawing 59 walks. 2B Perez is a key part of a young and improving White Sox team. He batted .273, stole 24 bases, knocked in 68 runs and was excellent in the field. He looks a likely future Gold Glover.

NL Rookie of the Year - In what was a bleak year for the Arizona Diamondbacks franchise, the NL Rookie of the Year is pitcher Eric Washington. Between starting and the bullpen he threw 178 innings, including 3 complete games and had an outstanding ERA of 3.33. He, along with a number of other young players in Arizona, gives hope that the good times may not be too far away for D'Back fans.

Other rookies worthy of specific mention are Roman Colon of the Braves, Matt Williams of the Pirates and Corey Hart of the Brewers. In 30 starts for the playoff-chasing Braves, Colon threw 175 innings and went 13-11 with a 4.73 ERA. Hart was a bright spot in an anaemic Milwaukee offense. His average was only .245 but he hit 16 homers and amassed 68 RBI's. 2B Williams was a solid performer in Pittsburgh, batting .251 with 10 homers and 48 RBI's.

Gold Glove Winners

AL

C – Flaherty (Yankees)
1B – Erstad (Angels)
2B – Broussard (Indians)
3B – Jeter (Yankees)
SS – Millar (Red Sox)
LF – Teixeira (Rangers)
CF – Hudson (Blue Jays)
RF – Weeks (Twins)

NL

Barrett (Cubs)
Castillo (Marlins)
Cruz (Brewers)
Bay (Pirates)
Freel (Reds)
Helton (Rockies)
Kinkade (Dodgers)
Rollins (Phillies)

Interestingly, no players repeated as Gold Glovers.

Silver Sluggers

AL

C – Varitek (Red Sox)
1B – Alomar (White Sox)
2B – Jackson (Red Sox)
3B – Merloni (Red Sox)
SS – Matos (Royals)
LF – Soriano (Yankees)
CF – Hudson (Blue Jays)
RF – Sweeney (Royals)

NL

LaRue (Reds)
Beltre (Dodgers)
Aurilla (Giants)
Coomer (Dodgers)
Freel (Reds)
Helton (Rockies)
Kinkade (Dodgers)
Sosa (Cubs)

Repeating as Silver Sluggers are Alomar in the AL and LaRue, Aurilla and Sosa in the NL.

The only players who are Gold Glovers and Silver Sluggers are Hudson, Freel, Helton and Kinkade. Vindication I think of Hudson and Freel's selections as MVP and evidence of what great years Helton and Kinkade had.

Season 3 Preview

 by Dave Brown

From the Season 1 division winners, how many managed to make it back-to-back wins in season 2? All six you say? How right you are! So are there any prospects for change in season 3?

AL East - No change I'm afraid. The top 3 look pretty close, but who's going to bet against the Blue Jays? World Series Champs, with two stars in Hudson & Berg and

pitching which, despite not looking so impressive, was the AL's best last year. The Bosox and Yankees will be in the wild card hunt. Tampa Bay are making progress, but need another year – look for them to step up in season 4.

1. Toronto, 2. Boston, 3. New York, 4. Tampa Bay

AL Central - The Twins were drafted with an eye firmly fixed on the future, and look to have improved over the close season, but expect them to have strong competition from the White Sox this time. Chicago's squad certainly looks like it should be a match for anybody's! The Royals and Indians didn't really go anywhere in Season 2 – I don't see a reason at the moment why season 3 will be any different.

1. Minnesota, 2. Chicago, 3. Cleveland, 4. Kansas City

AL West - The AL West was about the only division in Season 2 which was tighter-fought than in Season 1 – expect Season 3 to be closer still! The 4 teams look very even, and indeed, Oakland's financial and trainer base maybe gives them a slight edge. But can you bet against the Angels? Texas look like dropping a bit.

1. Los Angeles, 2. Oakland (WC), 3. Texas, 4. Seattle

NL East - The Nationals might have gone to the World Series, but I'm afraid I don't see them overhauling the Braves this season. Both teams look weaker than most financially, which may give hope to the Marlins & Phillies. But these two need to strengthen their squad quickly if they're going to be able to challenge the top two.

1. Atlanta, 2. Washington (WC), 3. Florida, 4. Philadelphia

NL Central - The one division where I'm going to stick my neck out and predict a change. The Reds team seem to have had their feet up too much over the close season and their infrastructure could do with some work too. The Brewers squad looks the best, but they looked good in theory last year too. The Cubs went backwards last season, maybe they can reverse that this time? Or can the Pirates perform? This division is the most open in MLB8!

1. Chicago, 2. Cincinnati, 3. Milwaukee, 4. Pittsburgh

NL West - Another division that could be tighter this season. The Dodgers' offense still looks awesome, but their finances are possible the worst in the league. If the Giants or the Rockies can make a step up, they have a chance to stir things up in the NL West this year. Arizona have got some promise, but this year is likely to be one of consolidation not inspiration.

1. Los Angeles, 2. San Francisco, 3. Colorado, 4. Arizona

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<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.