

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

### Week 1 Review

A new season – a new dawn. Every team approaching the new season with optimism and the hope that this year might be their year – they might be the team that wins it all.

The sun shone brightly in some places (Cleveland, Oakland, Florida, Washington, Cincinnati and LA – both Angels and Dodgers) whilst there was nothing but darkness in others (Tampa Bay, Chicago – White Sox, Texas, Philadelphia, Milwaukee, Colorado and San Francisco). The 2-7 teams (Texas and San Fran) must already be wondering whether their hopes have ended almost before the season has begun.

Despite this, the league overall remains incredibly competitive with 14 games decided in extra innings in the season's first week. A big difference – particularly from Season 1 – is the number of runs scored. The average team scored (and conceded) 43.7 runs in the 1<sup>st</sup> 9 games, an average of 4.9 runs a game. The average in Week 1 was 3.7 in Season 1 and 4.2 in Season 2. Raises the question as to whether the balls are being 'juiced' to help the offenses?

The Royals led the way with 65 runs whilst the Rockies surprisingly struggled the most, scoring only 21 runs. The stingiest pitching came from the Atlanta Braves whilst the most profligate were, surprisingly, the Yankees.

On the free-agent front, the biggest pickup was the Phillies acquisition of former Brewer CF Ben Grieve. He was signed to a surprisingly expensive signing bonus for a player of his productivity (.201 avg last year, with only 6 homers, 22 RBIs, 20 steals though) but with the high amount of finances available GM Rob Crowther will feel he is worth the risk.

A number of serviceable players were picked up by other teams to either slightly improve the squad or get the same quality for lower wages. Some very useful players (Millar and Izturis) remain available and it would be surprising if proven players such as these were not picked up this week.

### Trade rumours

The shock gossip this week surrounds reigning NL MVP Ryan Freel of the Cincinnati Reds. The strong

rumours are saying that Freel wants out of Cincy. It is said that, after consecutive NLCS defeats, he is disappointed with the lack of offseason preparation by his team-mates and can't see the team improving this season. Apparently, GM Mayfield has reluctantly accepted Freel's stance and feels that the best course of action is to bring in young talent in exchange for him and start a fundamental rebuilding job in Cincinnati.

As expected for a player of his proven quality, a number of teams are rumoured to be interested and offering a number of players. Cincinnati sources would not confirm who these teams (and players) are but an unnamed source has confirmed that Mayfield is considering these offers and that Freel will be leaving the Reds in a couple of weeks.

### "Bordick's Bicep Blamed for Blue Jay Bloopers

by Philip Howard

The Toronto Blue Jays struggled to a 5-4 start in the opening week of the season, held back by some awful fielding. The team recorded 18 errors, and no fewer than 10 of these were charged to 2B Mike Bordick. The 8-year veteran missed catches or threw beyond the reach of fellow infielders in seven of the nine games.

The low point was in the second game of the opening series against the Red Sox, where a 10<sup>th</sup>-inning error allowed Lou Merloni on. Merloni eventually scored on a Todd Walker single with two men out, for a 7-6 win. At the end of the week, Bordick admitted that he had been playing with a strained bicep and - as if his form left any room for doubt - would miss the next 9 games.

With an awful week for SS Carlos Delgado (batting .125 with 3 errors) and a lack of quality infield depth, Toronto management were left scratching their heads about how to handle their forthcoming series, including a return matchup with the Red Sox. One bright spot for the champs was the performance of Orlando Hudson, who hit .437 with 6 home runs.

### Same old Dodgers by Patrick Lee

7-2 is a satisfactory start for the Dodgers, especially with 2 series having been on the road. Several of the games were close – closer Mota was called into action for 5 saves - but we played pretty well overall.

Surprised that San Francisco and Colorado struggled in the first week but I still expect a tighter race for the division than in seasons 1 and 2. No great surprises

elsewhere in the NL, though it's interesting to see the Reds list Ryan Freel (last season's NL MVP) for trade.

### **Missed opportunities** by Marc Bradbrook

2-7. Our supposedly good pitchers had a nightmare week but the story of our week was the number of batters we left on base, far too many!! We also lost games 2 by 1 run and 2 by 2 runs.

I had 5 players hit .300 or better and still got screwed. Not the best start!

### **News from the Twin Cities** by Dave Brown

Well, a 5-4 week for the Twins, so I guess I can't complain as I always say that you should be happy with a winning week. Certainly was happy enough taking the series 2-1 against the White Sox as I think they'll be stronger this year. But 3-3 against the Mariners & Rangers was somewhat disappointing. And it wasn't as if the Twins deserved better - the two games we lost against Seattle, we were comprehensively outthit. Whilst against the Rangers, we managed to win 2 games in extra innings.

Batting was improved over the norm last year, as I hoped it would be, so no complaints there. The problems were on the pitching side where 3 out of 5 starters really did not perform. The experiment of using Jesse Crain as a starter is probably not one we'll be continuing with - he was lucky to escape with an ERA of 5.40 considering his hitting average of .361!!

### **Philadelphia Feelings** by Rob Crowther

In Philly things went much as expected. We played everyone close, we won a game in each series, but in the end we weren't quite good enough. As usual several of our 8\* players underperformed (two finished the week on -5 form). To add insult to injury, only one of the players on my reserve squad gained form. Can't win now, can't build for the future, ho hum... Did at least achieve the FA signing (Ben Grieve), though he looks to be a soft 8\* to me, we'll see how he plays.

### **Braves Views** by Mike Sim

Not a bad start for Atlanta - pitched pretty well allowing the least runs in the league (27) but weren't able to turn that into a big week. Scored twice as many runs as we allowed but most came in a single game against Milwaukee. It's odd to beat a division

rival on the road only to finish the week 2 games behind them on opening week!

Bit surprised that the Cubs snapped up ex-Braves OF Charles Thomas so quickly. Thomas never really lived up to expectations - he hit for average but had like 6 HRs and 5 SBs in 2 seasons. I hope he does better for the Cubbies though.

### **View from the Halos** by Paul Beaumont

Good batting and bad pitching was the story of the week for the Angels, pleased to go 6-3. Hopefully one will continue and the other will improve! Surprised by the bad start by the Rangers. In my head they are our main rivals in the division but I'd be foolish not to keep an eye on the others.

Too early to say too much except to echo the point that the free agent market is void of talent which is probably why there is so much trade talk. I'm thinking about putting a couple of players up for trade next turn to see what (if anything) is offered.

### **Week 2 Preview**

In the first set of games, divisional series from Week 1 are repeated. Seattle, Milwaukee and Colorado will look to avenge sweeps at the hands of LA (Angels), Pittsburgh and Arizona respectively.

A number of other series feature interesting matchups at this early stage. 2 fast starting teams meet up in Cleveland as the Indians host the Oakland A's. Also in the AL, the ALDS is repeated with the Twins looking for revenge as they host the Red Sox.

In the NL, the 7-2 Marlins host the 6-3 Reds who will still have Ryan Freel playing at 100%. As well as the Braves travelling to the Dodgers there is another playoff repeat. The Reds host the Nationals and will look to avenge the heartbreak of last year's Game 7 NLCS defeat.

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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.