

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

### Issue No.50

This is Issue No.50 of 'Better Eight Than Never'. 50 and counting. I hope you all enjoy it as much as I enjoy this league and editing the newsletter.

### Week 4 Review – Off the field

The Texas Rangers and Cincinnati Reds completed another trade as pitcher John Bale joined Texas with slugger Mark Teixeira joining the Reds. Teixeira replaces Ryan Freel as a right-handed slugger in the Reds lineup and will probably hit more homers in Cincinnati than he did at spacious Ameriquest Field. Bale gives the Rangers another solid pitcher who can pitch a lot of innings. His arrival is rumoured to mean the departure of an as yet un-named Ranger pitcher.

The other trade news saw switch-hitting OF Simon Pond join the Philadelphia Phillies with pitcher Josh Hancock going the other way and joining the World Champion Blue Jays. The Phillies still have plenty of depth to their pitching, particularly with the re-signing of Chad Cordero, and Pond gives them a versatile, solid presence in their lineup. He could make a major difference to a solid, if unspectacular, Philly lineup.

Hancock has been in excellent form this season (2.49 ERA in 7 starts) and Philip Howard will hope that he will be a major addition to the Jays staff. Pitching was key to their success last year but this season they have the 2<sup>nd</sup> worst ERA in the majors. Hendrickson will now miss a week and a half, Powell and Fuentes haven't performed as well this season and Vinnie Chulk's right arm seems to be suffering from his heroics in the postseason.

In Chicago, Stewart Jones became the victim of the Cubs slow start as he was fired. Back-to-back shutouts at home to the Nats were the final straw and he has been replaced by Marc Rivoira. Rivoira takes over a struggling team but the franchise is in a healthy financial position and has some good players to build around. His first task will be to stop his pitchers issuing so many walks, whilst trying to get his batsmen to show more patience at the plate.

### Week 4 Review – On the field

The Blue Jays had a terrible week, getting swept by Tampa and Minnesota before getting one win against Texas. Though the Jays started slowly last year before storming through in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the season, GM Howard must be worried that they are already 8 games

behind the Yankees in the AL East. The Yanks are off to a great start, including a comprehensive sweep of the Angels this week. Their star has been Cuban pitcher Jose Contreras who is 5-0 with a 2.43 ERA.

In the division, they lead Boston by 4 games. The offensive machine that was last year's Red Sox hasn't got going at all this year and it has been their pitching that has kept them at .500. GM Denyer will hope that replacing David Ortiz with ex-Rockie Preston Wilson will spark the offense. The Devil Rays are much improved this year – particularly on the pitching side – and will be revelling in the fact that they are 3 games ahead of the World Champions.

In the West, the Angels had an ordinary week but still managed to extend their lead as the A's lost all 3 series. Behind an outstanding week from new Ranger Ryan Freel, Texas went 6-3 and will hope that this can continue and get them back in the race. The biggest highlight of the week in Texas was Game 2 against Toronto when the Rangers overcame a 10-0 deficit to win 13-12.

In the Central, the Twins had the best week in the majors and are currently on an 8-game winning streak. Their offense continues to fire and they are the only team in the league with a batting average over .300. They also seemed to re-discover their pitching this week with Eddie Guardado particularly impressive (see later).

They now have a 3-game lead over the Royals who occupy the wild card position. KC took a chance in signing Mike Bordick and GM Brearley will hope that he is over whatever his problems were in Toronto. The White Sox had an excellent week and look to be starting to show the sort of form many observers expected this season. The Indians are struggling despite having the best outfield in the league. Perhaps the biggest problem is their fielding – they lead the league by some distance in giving up 51 unearned runs.

In the National League, despite all the changes the Reds continue to look good in the Central. Their pitching looks a bit iffy but the acquisition of Teixeira, along with the signing of ex-Giants SS Pedro Feliz means that the offense still looks strong. They are 2 games ahead of the Pirates who have been combining good pitching with solid batting and currently occupy the Wild Card position, ahead of Washington on run differential. The Cubs have a new manager and the Brewers continue to struggle.

In the West, the Dodgers are facing a real challenge this year. The Rockies and D'Backs are only 5 games back and the Giants only 2. The Rockies aren't repeating their form of last year yet but ace pitcher Adam Bernero seems back to his best. Arizona, under new man Graham Beaton, have the best pitching in the majors so

far, having issued the fewest walks and given up the fewest stolen bases. Despite their records being affected by a lack of run support, Edgar Gonzalez and Elmer Dessens are 1 and 2 in the majors in ERA.

The Giants have made a number of excellent signings and look set to possibly make a major challenge on the Dodgers this season. Their pitching should probably be performing better than it is (2<sup>nd</sup> worst in the NL) but their offense has been good – to the extent that they've actually hit more homers than LA. The Dodgers pitching is led by Kaz Ishii and Kevin Brown but last year's Cy Young contender Wilson Alvarez is conspicuous by his absence from the list of top pitchers.

In the East, the big series of the week was the Marlins trip to the nation's capital. Though all 3 games were pretty close, the series ended in the Marlins being swept. It was felt by some that this could lead to a collapse but they re-grouped nicely with a sweep of the Cubs and still hold a 3-game lead over the Nats. They continue to confound the fact that they have the worst pitching in the majors. The reason for this is that their offense has been fantastic as they lead the majors in runs scored. The question is whether the offense can maintain this over a full season?

The Nationals have a better record than their run difference would suggest but this is a solid veteran team built around pitching and defense. Their offense is fairly limited but with starters like Hernandez, Day et al along with Kershner in the bullpen (on course to pitch in 90 games) they look capable of staying the course. The Phillies are far from completely out of the race and will hope that Simon Pond is the spark they need.

The team with real cause for concern is the Braves. Their situation is pretty similar to the Jays in that they have come from being a number of games behind before but a 10-game deficit on Florida, coupled with a 7-game deficit on the wild card team must be a major cause of concern for GM Mike Sim.

They have really struggled at home and their pitching hasn't been at its best. They are currently led by youngster Roman Colon, not ace Russ Ortiz who – like Alvarez – is conspicuous by his absence amongst the top pitchers list in the NL. They moved to address this by signing veteran Brandon Backe to replace Will Cunnane. Backe isn't a superstar but has the experience to possibly help solidify the pitching staff.

### **Oh Eddie** by Dave Brown

Well, this week saw the closest I've had to a perfect game. And the pitcher was ..... Eddie Guardado - what a surprise! Game 3 vs the Royals (not exactly the worst batting team in the world) saw Eddie pitch eight perfect innings, then get the 1st out in the 9th to be just

two outs short of the perfect game before rookie Mark Green's single destroyed the dream.

The Twins aren't really a one-man pitching show – honest! Ok, it's true that Guardado is sitting at the top of the tree in the AL rankings, and is the only Twin in the top 30 ranked pitchers. Ok, yes he did play in the all-star game and then won the AL Cy Young last year. But we do have other pitchers too, believe me! You don't have to key him every game...

Overall very pleased with the Twins start to the season, and now nicely up in the Central with the joint best record in the league.

### **Week 4 Preview**

This week is interleague week. Amazingly, after 2 seasons of league history the scores are tied with both leagues winning 216 games. Whatever the outcome between the 2 leagues, there are a number of series that are interesting for various reasons.

The LA teams face off against each other in a repeat of World Series Season 1 as the Dodgers travel to the Angels. In other series between playoff teams of last season, the Nationals travel to Boston and the Braves travel to the Angels. Marc Rivoira looks to have a reasonable first week with a tough series at home to the Angels sandwiched between manageable series in Cleveland and Oakland. Another intriguing series is the one in New York between the Yankees and Marlins. Neither have made the postseason before but look ready to make a major run this time

For 'off the field' stories, 2 series stand out. In the first series of the week, the Phillies travel to Toronto to face the Blue Jays, allowing Josh Hancock and Simon Pond to re-acquaint themselves with their former team-mates before they have even really got to know their new team-mates.

To end the week, the Reds travel to Texas to face the Rangers. These teams have made 2 trades in the last couple of weeks so a lot of players will know each other. This series will not be a sign of who is likely to get the better of these trades but will be interesting all the same....

### **GAMEPLAN ADVERTISEMENTS**

<http://www.qbspn.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.