

'Better Eight Than Never' - The Newsletter of MLB8

Week 5 Review

After being tied following 2 seasons of interleague play, the American League took a narrow lead over their counterparts from the 'Senior Circuit' as they prevailed 56-52. The big winners in the AL were the Red Sox and Royals who both went 7-2. The NL's defeat was despite the Cubs going 8-1. This was a great start for new boy Marc Rivoira and even included a sweep of the AL West-leading Angels.

In going 7-2, the Red Sox re-discovered their offense, highlighted by a convincing sweep of the Nationals at Fenway. The Royals week was highlighted by a near perfect game from Brian Anderson. Against the Reds, he pitched a no-hitter, giving up just one walk in an outstanding effort. This follows Guardado almost pitching a perfect game against the Royals last week. Are we getting closer to a perfect game or will this be as near as anyone gets this season?

This was part of a sweep of the Reds in a week where the Royals also swept the Marlins. A bad week for the Twins means that the Royals have re-taken the lead at the top of the AL Central.

Almost under the radar, the Royals have reached a position where they have the best record in the majors. Key to this is that they have conceded the fewest runs in the league so far. This is a great achievement for a staff that doesn't look the greatest on paper and plays half of its games in the tight confines of Kauffman Stadium. The only dark cloud over Kansas is the injury to star Julius Matos who will miss a week and a half.

The 3-6 week for the Reds – combined with a winning week for the Pirates – means that the Pirates now lead the NL Central on run differential. An 11-game injury to switch-hitter Joe Morgan is more bad news for Cincy.

The other traditional NL powerhouse, the Dodgers, are also suffering their first serious challenge. The challenge is coming from the San Francisco Giants whose current 4-game win streak includes a sweep of the Twins and has them trailing the Dodgers only on run differential. Also, slugger Adrian Beltre will miss the next week and a half for the Dodgers.

Elsewhere in the league, the Angels cruise along serenely with the look of a team that is a major threat

again this year. The Marlins and Yankees – though showing the odd sign of weakness – continue to lead their divisions with excellent records.

In a series between teams who made a trade the previous week, the Blue Jays beat the Phillies 2-1. Both teams went 5-4 for the week as they look to re-establish themselves in their respective divisional races. The Reds and Rangers have made 2 trades recently so there were probably some confused players when they faced each other at Texas in the last series of the week.

The Rangers prevailed 2-1 in the series, though both wins were by only 1 run in what was that sort of week for the Reds. Ryan Freel went 1 for 11 with a walk, whilst Mark Teixeira went 5 for 14 with a walk and a home run. John Bale pitched Game 3 for Texas and went 8 innings though he didn't stay in long enough to earn the win.

The Rangers continued to re-model themselves on the Reds as they signed another ex-Red in LF Tim Hummel. He'll never be an all-star but provides a veteran left-handed bat to what seems to be an improving lineup. Other signings were mainly similar players to those released but for lower wages. It is rumoured that the Angels are willing to listen to offers for exciting CF Greg Robinson. It will be interesting to see if anyone will be willing to part with the quality veteran the Angels will surely want in return.

There is one player of major interest on the free-agent list and it will be interesting to see who bids for him and how much people are willing to shell out on someone who looks like he could be a good player now and a dynamite player in the future.

Interleague Standings

After 5 sets of interleague series in the history of the league, I thought it might be interesting to see which teams have fared the best in 'defending the honour' of their league. The standings are below –

American League		National League	
Boston	30-15	Chicago	28-17
Texas	26-19	Los Angeles	25-20
Chicago	25-20	Colorado	25-20
New York	24-21	Cincinnati	24-21
Toronto	23-22	Washington	23-22
Kansas City	23-22	San Francisco	23-22
Los Angeles	22-23	Atlanta	22-23
Tampa Bay	21-24	Pittsburgh	22-23
Minnesota	20-25	Philadelphia	20-25

Cleveland	20-25	Florida	20-25
Seattle	20-25	Milwaukee	19-26
Oakland	18-27	Arizona	17-28

Not really sure what this shows other than that the Red Sox and Cubs would probably gladly change leagues! This is obviously a small sample of games in the overall scheme of things and a number of factors – including luck and pure chance – could contribute to these standings but interesting nonetheless.

Another team who has performed better than you might have expected are the Chicago White Sox but I don't think the Commissioner will be allowing the 2 Chicago teams to swap leagues! Arizona and Oakland have struggled the most. Not particularly surprising for Arizona but slightly surprising for Oakland who have a .450 winning percentage overall but a .400 in interleague play.

In terms of divisions the standings in interleague play are as follows –

AL East	98-82
NL Central	93-87
NL West	90-90
AL Central	88-92
AL West	86-94
NL East	85-95

This is quite an interesting contrast with the overall won-lost records across the league after 2 seasons and 5 weeks. In terms of that, it is as follows –

NL East	789-687
AL Central	749-727
AL East	747-729
AL West	720-756
NL Central	713-763
NL West	710-766

So , the best division overall (NL East) is the worst in interleague play, with only Washington having a winning record. The NL West has been the worst division overall but is batting .500 in interleague play. The AL East has a much superior interleague record than overall with the Red Sox leading the way. The only team with an interleague losing record in that division is Tampa whose percentage (.467) is still better than their overall percentage of .407.

The Week in Atlanta by Mike Sim

Nice to break the streak of losing weeks but was hoping for more than 5-4 after going 5-1 to open the

week. Ran into a determined Angels team who pitched well and got the clutch hits. Highlight of the week was sending ex-Devil Ray Brandon Backe to the mound against his old team. He wasn't able to get the win but thanks to some good hitting we did manage to win the game and the series.

Picked up ex-Ranger SS Adrian Gonzalez to try and fill the void left by Marcus Giles departure at second base. He's a vet, his skills are uninspiring, but he may be better than the incumbent Garcia.

Week 6 Preview

Having got vaguely back in touch with them, the Rangers trip to the Angels to open the week will be a big one (though probably more so for Texas than LA), particularly as LA swept Texas at Ameriquest earlier in the season. In the NL, the Nationals at the Braves is always a big series and is the sort of series Atlanta will need to win as they look to make a move after an iffy start.

Elsewhere, the Red Sox travel to Minnesota where the Twins will look to avenge last season's ALDS defeat. The NL East-leading Marlins face the Reds who currently occupy the wild card position. The AL Wild Card teams in Seasons 1 and 2 respectively – the Rangers and Red Sox – meet at Fenway. And finally, the Reds travel to RFK looking to avenge their NLCS defeat of last season.

Following these games, we will be a third of the way through the season. Things really begin to take shape from about this point and there are a number of intriguing questions around the league. Will established powers like the Braves and Blue Jays continue to struggle? Are we seeing a change in the balance of power in the NL as the Reds and Dodgers face major challenges in their divisions? Will teams who have never made the playoffs like the Yankees, Royals, Marlins, Pirates and Giants be able to sustain their challenges? Should be a fascinating rest of the season.....

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.