

'Better Eight Than Never' - The Newsletter of MLB8

Week 6 Review

Things remain pretty tight across all divisions in MLB8. The team with the biggest lead is the Los Angeles Angels who hold a 7-game lead over the Rangers and A's. The big series between Texas and LA this week went the way of the Angels. The Rangers won Game 1 but then the Angels bats woke up and they won Games 2 and 3 convincingly. The Rangers and A's are trying to at least stay in touch but both teams are being let down by their home form.

The next biggest divisional lead belongs to the Florida Marlins in the NL East. They continue their good form and hot bats, winning all 3 series and scoring 8 or more runs in 5 of the 9 games. The Nationals had a relatively poor week, including being swept in Atlanta. Game 3 of that series featured a duel between Russ Ortiz and Livan Hernandez. On this occasion, Ortiz prevailed throwing a complete game, whilst Hernandez struggled.

The Braves seem to be really finding their form, particularly on the pitching side. They are now off the bottom of the division and are 7 games behind the Marlins. The Phillies had a poor week which ended with them being swept at home to the Cubs – a result which did not endear the team to their demanding home fans.

The Dodgers hold a 4-game lead in the NL West. Patrick Lee will be pleased with this as just a week ago they were tied with the Giants. Whilst the Giants struggled this week – including being swept by the Pirates – the Dodgers swept Arizona and won series against the Brewers and Braves. The Rockies remain in touch and are currently on a 5-game winning streak.

In the NL Central, the Pirates now hold a 2-game lead over the rebuilding Cincinnati Reds. The Pirates are achieving this behind the best pitching staff in the league and the best road record in the league. The Reds started the week by sweeping the Brewers but ended the week by getting swept by the Nats.

Marc Riviera had another good week in Chicago whilst the Brewers hold a 6-game lead in the 'race' for the #1 draft pick. The possible saviour of the franchise arrived this week in the sturdy figure of much-touted prospect 3B Prince Fielder.

Fielder is a switch-hitter with power who looks like he could be a force in a weak Brewer lineup straight away and could be a major force across the whole league in future years. He has apparently been given a very healthy signing bonus to encourage him to come to

Milwaukee but GM Martin Willan is certainly hopeful that that will be more than worth it in the long-term.

Two divisions have a tie for the top spot. Firstly, the AL East where Boston lead the Yankees on run differential. The Yankees have the league's best home record but have been caught by the Red Sox. Paul Denyer's men have certainly found their bats in the last couple of weeks. After hitting .248 over the first 36 games, they have batted a whopping .332 in the last 18 (slugging .554). The Jays remain in touch at 7 games back but it was a bad week for the Devil Rays as they went 1-8.

The other division that is tied is the AL Central.....

Things looking up in Chicago by Martin Halls

"Things have been going well recently in Chicago, (some might say not before time) winning 20 out of the last 27 has to be good.

I think I have always had a decent roster but in the past the pitching has underperformed and has perhaps been a little short in depth. But hopefully we have now turned the corner. Also, I think that we have lacked experience in the earlier seasons, which was pretty much caused by the players we drafted.

Last season we invested quite a number of losing points in coaching and this has resulted in some of the batters contributing more and also means we are financially sound. Also, this year we have concentrated more on getting on base and stopping the opposition getting on base rather than speed which is what we did last year. (No stolen bases if you do not get on in the first place). I think we should give Dave Brown something to think about this year as he goes for his third straight title".

Elsewhere in the Central, the Twins didn't have a bad week but lost the last 2 games in New York to the Yankees, meaning that they only hold the lead over the White Sox on run differential. The Royals, meanwhile, did have a bad week. They got swept by Chicago and lost series to the Rangers and Mariners to leave them 2 games behind the other 2. Their bats deserted them as they scored 2 runs or less on 6 occasions this week.

As well as Fielder, there were other free-agent moves this week but none of any big-name players, though the Marlins and Nationals signings of 3B Carl Crawford and C Jason Kendall respectively look solid moves. There were no long-term injuries but a few teams will have key players missing for this week (Hendrickson, Hawkins, Owens, Graves, Escobar, Cabrera).

Texas Talk by Ian Gibson

After a poor start, some major changes have been made in Texas and, so far, we are pretty happy with

them. Despite the loss of Teixeira, the batting is certainly improved. Last year's NL MVP Ryan Freel is batting .318 and has knocked in 26 runs in 27 games.

Lead-off man, Manny Alexander is getting on base and leads the league in steals. He is being consistently driven in by Freel or RF Laynce Nix (53 RBIs). With Eckstein and Young both hitting .300 it sounds like this is an offensive powerhouse but this has to be tempered by acknowledging a major lack of production from the bottom of the order where some players have just been horrible (e.g. Atkins, Sullivan, Cordero).

The pitching hasn't been as good as hoped and has led to the release of former all-star Ryan Drese. Drese has been horrible this season (ERA 8.21) in a bullpen that has pretty much been a disaster. There are some pretty good guys down there so 1 save and numerous blown saves is simply not good enough and is costing the team dear.

We have plenty of proven quality (Benoit, Callaway, Cordero, Bale, Dominquez, Garcia) so I have decided the problem may partly lie elsewhere – namely the catcher position. We have been using a platoon and young right-hander Rod Barajas has simply not developed at all and has been released. Switch-hitter Wil Cordero has played the majority of games and has batted just .225 with very little power. More crucially he has already made 9 errors and seems to be a de-stabilising influence on the pitching staff.

Hence this week, the re-signing of former Ranger Einar Diaz. Diaz was the everyday catcher for most of the first 2 seasons and, whilst he doesn't exactly scare people with his bat (career avg .207) he is pretty solid with the glove and knows most of the current staff. Cordero will still play a little but it is likely that Diaz will get the majority of starts and hopefully have the desired effect on the pitching staff.

Stat Attack

We're a third of the way through the season and some batsmen are putting up some gaudy stats.

- Ø Milton Bradley is on course for 66 homers and 180 RBIs.
- Ø Corey Koskie is on course for 99 doubles and 102 fielding saves.
- Ø Alfonso Soriano is on course for 201 runs scored and 174 RBIs.
- Ø Miguel Cabrera is on course for 96 doubles and 177 RBIs.
- Ø Manny Alexander is on course for 57 stolen bases.
- Ø Young Tom Sanders is on course for an NL batting title, 45 homers and 162 RBIs.

With fatigue and other factors likely to take hold at some point, it is unlikely that many will reach what they are 'on course' for at the moment but it will be interesting to watch their progress.

Week 7 Preview

Week 7 starts with a very tasty looking series at Fenway as the Red Sox host the Yankees. This has been threatening to become a major rivalry for a while and with the teams tied at the top of the division, this one is pretty important. The Royals look to steady the ship but have a tough job as they travel to the Metrodome.

In the NL, the top 2 teams meet in the Central and East. The Pirates face a test of their mettle as they travel to Cincinnati to face the Reds. Cincy won the series earlier in the season in Pittsburgh and until the Pirates defeat the Reds in a series, you still have a feeling that the Reds have 'the sign' over them. The Nationals travel to Florida, where the Marlins will look to avenge a sweep earlier in the season at RFK. Though they are a team built around pitching and defense, the Nationals really need to find a bit more offense and will hope that the 21 runs they scored in sweeping the Reds is a sign of things to come.

The non-divisional games between playoff-contending teams include the Angels hosting the Twins, Nationals at the Dodgers, Reds at Rockies, Pirates hosting the Braves, Blue Jays at Royals, Angels at Red Sox, Rockies at Marlins and the Reds hosting the Dodgers. 3 pretty big series for the new-look Reds though 2 of them are at home. This week could be a real acid test as to whether they have got what it takes to hold off an improved Pirates squad in the Central.

Finally, the Brewers start on the road with a trip to Chicago but then host the Marlins in the second series. There will be an unusually large crowd at Miller Park as the fans come out to get a view of their new hope, Prince Fielder. The Brewers have hit 16 fewer homers than anybody and have the 2nd fewest stolen bases. Fielder will definitely have an impact but it will be important to manage the expectations of the success-starved fans in Milwaukee.

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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.