

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

Week 7 Review

The week began with the Yankees travelling to Fenway Park to face the Red Sox with the 2 teams tied at the top of the AL East. The Yankees won the first 2 games in closely-fought contests and could well have earned a sweep but for Boston prevailing 12-11 in a crazy back-and-forth contest in Game 3.

Both teams won 5 of their next 6 to leave the Yankees with a 1-game lead in a race that looks likely to go the distance. Boston hold a 1-game lead over Minnesota in the wild card race. Tampa continue to look slightly improved but their release of veteran pitcher Matt Ford this week may signal that they are giving up on this season.

Goodness knows what is going on in Toronto. The Jays are on an 8-game losing streak after getting conclusively swept by the Royals and Marlins and now have the 2nd worst record in the American League. Whilst they are renowned for strong second half's, it's looking increasingly unlikely that the World Champions will be in the postseason to defend their crown.

The NL East got a lot tighter this week. Sparked by a series victory over them in Florida, the Nationals closed to within 2 games of the Marlins. Florida's poor home form continued as they ended the week by getting swept at home to the Rockies. Atlanta's steady improvement continued as they won all 3 series in going 6-3. They are now just 5 behind Florida and 4 games out of the wild card position.

The NL West got tighter than tight this week. With a couple of big bats absent due to injury, the Dodgers could only manage a 4-5 week whilst the Giants went 8-1 including home sweeps of Arizona and Philly. This leaves the 2 teams tied with the Dodgers having the advantage in terms of run differential.

The Giants also added 2-time all-star reliever Ryan Drese from Texas to what is coming one of the most talented pitching staffs in the majors. The Rockies sweep of the Marlins keeps them in touch – just 4 games behind.

Rounding out the NL, it was a topsy-turvy week in the Central. The Pirates opened the week by making the statement they were looking for in Cincinnati as they swept the Reds. Frankly, it wasn't even close as they outscored Cincy by 32 runs to 10. However, the Pirates ended the week by getting swept in Philly by their Pennsylvania rivals.

Meanwhile, the Reds regrouped and, despite losing their final series to LA, their sweep of the Rockies means that the week ended with them still just 2 games behind Pittsburgh. The Cubs continue to perform steadily and maintain a watching brief a further 4 games behind.

There are new leaders in the AL Central where the White Sox continued their scintillating form as they went 7-2, sparked by a sweep of the slumping Indians. The Twins and Royals didn't have bad weeks but are now 3 and 4 games back as the ChiSox have now gone 27-9 in their last 36 games.

That leaves the AL West, which is probably the most boring division in the league at the moment. The Angels cruise serenely on and now hold a 9-game lead. Despite showing flashes, none of the other 3 teams have established any consistency and the 2nd placed Rangers are already 8 games behind the Red Sox in the wild card race.

Crisis in Toronto

What seems to be a growing crisis in Toronto continued this week with the release of Jay Powell. Powell pitched a complete-game shutout to win Game 6 of last year's World Series but has been released and replaced by former Red Sock Pedro Martinez.

Further illustrating this, another starter from last year's playoff rotation, Brian Fuentes, signed with Seattle this week. Though the pitching staff

has undergone major reconstruction, the offense has been just as worrying. They have scored only 19 runs in their current 8-game losing streak and, for the season, have scored the 2nd fewest runs in the AL.

The extent of the Blue Jays struggles are something that I don't think anyone expected this season – certainly not your editor anyway.

Christmas Time – Mistletoe and wine!!

Christmas – with New Year just around the corner – is a time to think of those who are no longer with us in MLB8. Namely ex-managers, Mark Gamble, Stewart Jones, Alan Molloy, David Ware and Chris Stones.

It is interesting to note that there have been no managerial changes in the AL. The only team already onto their 3rd leader are the Arizona Diamondbacks. The lack of continuity certainly hasn't helped this young team.

Ware left Arizona at the end of Season 1, having managed the team to a 64-98 record. He was replaced by Stones who actually did worse, amassing a record of 62-100 in Season 2. Stones walked out on the team in the preseason of Season 3. Considering that this meant that new man Graham Beaton took over after the draft had taken place, he is not doing too badly with the team standing at 25-38.

Gamble and Molloy both left the Pirates and Giants respectively in Week 5 of Season 2. Molloy struggled from early on and amassed a career record of 73-134 before departing. Gamble though did pretty well, ending with a career record of 102-105.

Jones only left Chicago pretty recently to be replaced by Marc Rivoira. After a great start in which his Cubs missed out on the wildcard by only 2 games in Season 1, things steadily deteriorated for Jones. They finished only 77-85 in Season 2 and had started this season at a disappointing 13-23 before he was dismissed. Nevertheless, his career record of 180-180 wasn't exactly bad and it was a shame to see

him leave Chicago. So, in order of success, our departed ones are as follows –

Stewart Jones	180-180	(.500)
Mark Gamble	102-105	(.493)
David Ware	64-98	(.395)
Chris Stones	62-100	(.383)
Alan Molloy	73-134	(.353)

Week 8 Preview

Over-used word but the week starts with a 'huge' series in LA as the Dodgers host the Giants. For the first time in league history, the Dodgers are facing a real challenge in the West and would like nothing more than to quieten San Fran's challenge by beating them at Chavez Ravine. It's a tough week for the Dodgers who also host Pittsburgh and travel to the Marlins.

The White Sox have a tricky week as they try and get accustomed to being a contending team. They host main divisional rivals Minnesota (who will be without Cy Young award winner Eddie Guardado), then have a home series against the Red Sox before ending the week with a trip to the Yankees. If they can come out of that week well then Chicago is definitely for real.

Other interesting series include the Marlins at Braves, Braves at Reds, Nationals at Rockies and Angels at Royals. Teams looking to make a move really need to start winning now or can perhaps start thinking about next season.

I'd like to take this opportunity to say that I hope that all managers had a good Christmas and wish everyone a happy, healthy and successful 2006.

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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 time, Ian.