

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

### Week 8 Review

As we approach the halfway point of the season, the NL East has once again become the tightest division in the Majors. The results of the final series of the week have left a tie between the Marlins and Braves at the top of the division with the NL Champion Washington Nationals just a game behind.

The Braves have really hit form whilst the Marlins ended the week by getting hammered at home to the Dodgers. The Nationals pitching and defense remains as good as anybody's but they have the 2<sup>nd</sup> worst batting average in the league which must be a worry to GM Trice.

The Marlins gave up 8 runs a game this week, which negated what continues to be a very effective batting line-up. They sought to improve this by signing ex-Rockie Justin Speier and releasing the under-performing Nate Bump.

Slightly under the radar compared to the other three, the Phillies had a good week and are back in the race. Their record at Citizens Bank is the best home record in the division but they have let themselves down on the road. If they could sort this, we could easily have a 4-horse race.

Similarly, the NL West has all the makings of a 3-horse race. The big series of the week saw the Giants take the first 2 games in L.A. against the Dodgers to take a 2-game lead. The Dodgers won a tight Game 3 and then won a series against the Pirates while the Giants were sweeping the Brewers to restore a 2-game lead.

However, whilst the Dodgers were sweeping the Marlins in the final series, the Giants were getting swept in a high-scoring series in Atlanta, which leaves L.A. 1 game ahead.

More good news for GM Patrick Lee was him becoming the first manager to reach 250 wins (achieved in Game 2 against Florida). He has won a clear 22 games more than any other manager and will hope to match that with postseason success this year.

Despite a number of recent personnel changes (highlighted by the release of former all-star and Gold Glove SS Ronnie Belliard this week) the Rockies

remain well in this race, just 4 games behind the Dodgers. The Giants currently occupy the wild card spot in what could be a season-long battle involving a number of teams.

Rounding out the NL, the Pirates edged their lead to 3 games over the Reds. The Pirates continue to impress and it will be interesting to see if they can sustain their form for the full season. The Reds may be rebuilding but are still very competitive whilst the Cubs remain in the race, just 3 games further back from Cincy. Mysteriously, all 3 teams are struggling to win at home and the winner of the division may be the team that sorts out their home form first.

In the AL, the Red Sox had an excellent week and now have the best record in the league – ahead of the Angels on run differential. This included a sweep of the World Champs in their home in Toronto. Game 1 was a 25-7 annihilation, which could be viewed as some sort of statement for both teams.

This helped put Boston 3 games ahead of New York whose week started by running into a rampant Tampa offense that scored 31 runs in a 3-game sweep. Following this, the Yanks stabilised and ended the week by sweeping a good Chicago team. This leaves them in the wild card position – a game ahead of the Royals. The Yankees also moved to sign ex-Nationals catcher Michael Barrett to replace John Flaherty in a move that they hope will improve them both offensively and defensively.

The Yankee series marred what started out as a good week for the White Sox. Nevertheless, they remain 2 games ahead of a Royals team that boasts the best pitching staff in the league and a lineup that has plenty of power.

The Twins – who have won the division both years so far – are struggling a little bit. They splashed a big signing bonus on pitcher Javier Lopez this week. Time will tell as to whether this was worth it and whether Lopez solidifies a pitching staff that already includes Hawkins and Guardado or whether he is an over-priced, slightly panicked move.

Out West, the Angels continue to cruise, winning all 3 series this week. Oakland and Seattle are up one week and down the next whilst Texas are slowly improving but nowhere near fast enough to threaten LA. The Angels can probably start thinking of the postseason already though they will undoubtedly keep the foot on the gas and look to secure homefield advantage throughout the AL playoffs.

## **Chaos in Toronto**

The World Champions season just goes from bad to worse. They are now 17 games behind in the division and 14 games out of the wild card with their World Series win now seeming an almost distant memory. Reports from Toronto suggest that things are getting even worse as the discipline in the team is falling apart.

Ace Roy Halladay pitched Game 1 of the week and was pulled after giving up 8 runs in 4 innings. This game ended in an embarrassing 25-7 defeat. Unconfirmed reports suggest that Halladay had left the stadium long before the end of the game and was involved in a heated dispute with members of the coaching staff the next morning.

While the rest of the team travelled to Minnesota for their series against the Twins, Halladay travelled back to Toronto. It is unclear whether he refused to travel or whether he was suspended from the team and no-one from the Jays front office was willing to comment.

A team source who spoke on the condition of anonymity said "the situation is now resolved and Roy has rejoined the team. He and everyone associated with the franchise is focussed on getting this team back to their rightful position. We won the last 2 games against Texas and feel we have turned the corner and are heading in the right direction again."

## **A look ahead to All-Star time**

A look at the Week 8 pitching stats got me thinking ahead to the All-Star Game. I am intending to start the voting for this after Week 10 (would someone mind getting the full stats and uploading to [www.gbspn.com](http://www.gbspn.com))? Would then give a bit of time for voting and run the game on Week 13 or 14. Hope that sounds OK?

As a preview in terms of pitching, there have been some excellent performers this season. AL starting pitchers first, there are a number of familiar names near the top of the list – Embree, Todd Jones, Burkett, Contreras, Chulk, Guardado, Hawkins, Brian Anderson, Washburn, Foulke.

There are also new names like Pete Foster and Jeremy Affeldt in Kansas, Neil Young and Tom Gordon in Chicago, Derek Lowe in Boston and young Dustin Moseley in Los Angeles whose all-star

aspirations have unfortunately ended with an injury that may keep him out for the rest of the season.

In the NL, there are again familiar names like Ortiz, Hernandez, Day, Bernero, Ishii, Brown. But also less well-known players who are playing at all-star levels like Jose Lima, Darren Oliver, Edgar Gonzalez, Terry Adams, Nelson Figueroa, Brian Meadows, Aaron Cook and others.

The managers would usually be the league champions in each league. This is fine in the AL and I propose that Philip Howard manages the AL All-Stars. However, in the NL, David Trice stepped in last year so perhaps David could nominate the manager he thinks is the most deserving of a number of worthy candidates in the NL. If not, then we could sort this as part of the NL voting? As manager of the reigning NL Champs, we'll see what David says initially.

## **Week 9 Preview**

The Jays, who are looking to get back on track, have 2 tough road series this week – starting with the Yankees and ending with the Angels. Elsewhere in the AL, the top 2 in the Central face off in Kansas as the Royals host the White Sox. In a tough week for the Royals, they also face the Red Sox and Yankees. The Twins will look to take advantage of these 2 taking games off each other as they face 3 teams with losing records (Cleveland, Seattle and Texas).

In the NL, the Nationals face a big series against the in-form Braves who hold a 5-1 advantage over them this season. They then face 2 other contenders in the Giants and Pirates so this could be a big week for Washington. The Marlins will look to get back to winning ways and have an 11-1 record so far this season against the 3 teams they face this week.

Other series of note are the Rockies at the Giants, Angels at White Sox, Dodgers at Phillies and Reds at Giants.

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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 time, Ian.