

'Better Eight Than Never' - The Newsletter of MLB8

Week 9 Review

Except for the end of Season 2 Week 1, the LA Dodgers end a week in a position other than top of the NL West for the first time in league history. GM Bradbrook has transformed his Giants team behind a number of quality free-agents and outstanding young OF Tom Sanders. It was their sweep of the Reds that finally put them top of the division.

Meanwhile, the Dodgers were losing their last 2 games at home to the Cubs and then losing Jolbert Cabrera to another injury. However, it wasn't all bad for the Dodgers as there was as much happening off the field in LA as there was on it.

While the Cubs and Dodgers were playing on the field, the front office staff of the 2 teams were deep in discussions off the field. Cubs ace Kerry Wood was due to pitch on normal rest in Game 3 but, on the afternoon of the game, with no real explanation, he was scratched and replaced by Mark Prior who was rushed back from injury.

The real reason was announced to shocked reporters at the post-match press conference when Wood was introduced in a Dodger uniform! It appears that team officials had been talking for a while and Wood became a Dodger while top prospect and former 1st round pick Yhency Brazoban goes the other way.

Brazoban could well be an ace in the future and, in the long-term, will be a big contributor for the Cubs. Nevertheless, all-star Wood is a lot to give up and, along with Brown, Alvarez, Ishii and others, gives the Dodgers the sort of proven pitching quality that will make them a force to be reckoned with in the postseason – assuming they make it.

The quality in the West puts even more pressure on the NL East contenders to win the division, as the wild card may not be an option. Whilst the Braves have found their form (as evidenced by their current 7-game winning streak) the Marlins have slumped. Their offense has finally slowed down and their home form was perhaps summed up by them being swept by the Phillies. Unfortunately for GM Crowther's Phillies, their week ended with them being swept by the league's worst team – the Milwaukee Brewers.

The Braves are now 4 games ahead of the NL Champion Nationals – for whom ace Livan

Hernandez struggled in both his starts this week – and a further game ahead of the slumping Marlins. The Nationals will also be without all-star candidate Zach Day from their rotation for a few weeks.

The Pirates took advantage of the Giants sweep of the Reds in the Central as they won all 3 series to stretch their lead to 5 games. The Cubs are a further 2 games back but might be starting to look to next year. The Reds signing of Rockies prospect Ramon Guzman was slightly surprising when they probably could have reclaimed Randy Johnson (see below) who appears to be a better prospect both now and in the future.

The Central is THE division in the American League. The Indians are now well adrift – conceding almost 7 runs a game – but the other 3 teams are locked in what looks like it will be a season-long battle. The White Sox continue to lead the division but the Royals followed the Twins signing of Javier Lopez last week with a signing of their own. The Royals pitching continues to look good and the signing of SS Ronnie Belliard should help them both offensively and defensively and adds further spice to both the divisional and wild card races.

Out East, Boston maintained their position as having the best record in the league. The Yankees remain close – only 4 games back – and followed up their signing of C Barrett last week by splashing some money on lefty pitching prospect from Cincinnati, Randy Johnson. It is strongly rumoured that Johnson was being courted by both Boston and New York with the Yankees winning the bidding battle – will Johnson be able to help them win the war in the East? Tampa continues to improve while the Jays looked like they were having a better week until they ran into a rampant Angels offense in getting swept in LA.

For the Angels, this rescued their week somewhat as it followed them getting swept by the White Sox. The other 3 teams really aren't in the race, though the Rangers did make a free-agent move, signing ex-Red Sock Ortiz. The lack of competition in this division means that the traditional injury to SS Adam Kennedy is unlikely to be crucial and is only short-term.

Twins Thoughts by Dave Brown

Well, it's reached the halfway stage and the Twins, like many other 2-time division winners, are off the pace. I knew the White Sox were likely to provide tough opposition, but have to admit that the Royals have rather surprised me, especially with their pitching! And picking up Belliard can only make them

stronger. Expect the AL Central to be closely fought up to the end!

As for the Twins, well as a certain other GM correctly pointed out (*is this your editor??*), we have struggled a bit in recent weeks...but then find me a team who could lose their three main starting pitchers in consecutive weeks for 9 games, 14 games, and 9 games respectively and not struggle and I'll be impressed!!

Week 9 really saw the Twins scraping the barrel in their search for anyone who could start on the mound. So we were overjoyed with a 6-3 week, admittedly not against the toughest of opponents.

Javier Lopez gave a clear reply to certain critics who had described him as "over-priced" (*again! – me??*) by having 2 top-quality starts on his Twins debut. This included an especially satisfying complete game in the 7-0 shutout of the Rangers.

GM Brown spoke to the press afterwards: "Ian Gibson really should know me well enough by now to know that I don't make 'panicked' moves! The truth is that we've really struggled at 4th & 5th starter this year and that's why we badly needed a new pitcher. A week before, Drese was signed for 65 LPs – Lopez has got much more potential than him, and costs less wages. So I don't see how a slightly higher signing bonus (20LPs) can be described as panicking!

My question is 'Is there a prize for the most money in your account at the end of the season?' It's the only reason I can see for some team's reluctance to get their wallets out!"

Nonetheless, the Twins aren't expecting the blinding form shown by Lopez this week to continue – if he can become a solid 4th/5th starter to back up the big three of Guardado, Hawkins & Milton we'll be happy.

Editorial response!

I'm sure Dave has taken this in the right way (and if not his pitcher certainly made me pay for my words by whooping us this week!) and the early indications are that he certainly is not over-priced. My comment was more borne out by the 'signing bonuses' players are getting in being signed for a lot more than their value says they are worth.

I think Dave raises an interesting question about there being a prize for having most LPs at the end of the season. As we all know there isn't but I have to

be honest and say that I am really struggling to know how to spend all my losing points in this league.

This brings us back to a debate that has been briefly touched on before. My key questions are as follows;

Are there too many losing points in this league?

Does this lead to inflated bidding wars for any half-decent player on the free agent list?

Does this matter and is it good for the development of the league?

Is it just that it is 'early doors' in this league and the effect will considerably lessen in coming seasons?

Week 10 Preview

Here we are at the interleague week again. League history has the American League holding a slender 4-game advantage in interleague play, 1 win apiece in all star games but 2 World Series wins to none in favour of the AL. The NL teams will be out to at least re-dress the balance in interleague play this week.

Bragging rights will be at stake in Chicago to start the week as the Cubs host the White Sox at Wrigley as they begin life without Kerry Wood. These 2 teams both have excellent records in interleague play and are playing well so this could be a fascinating series. Wood's new team will look to take advantage of playing the teams who currently occupy last place in each of the three AL divisions.

The Giants have a tougher week, facing playoff contenders in the Royals and Red Sox. The Giants / Red Sox series is one of only 2 matchups between divisional leaders – the other being the Braves at the White Sox. There are a number of interesting series between wild card contenders – Yankees at Nationals, Twins at Reds, Marlins at Twins, Reds at Yankees and Twins at Nationals. On the basis of these, it could be a big week for the Twins who have not fared well overall in interleague skirmishes.

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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.