

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

Week 8 Review

The first game of the week looked like the Giants were breaking the 'hoodoo' the Dodgers had over them as they won and went top of the division on run differential. However, normal service was resumed as the Dodgers won Game 2 13-4 before they prevailed in extra innings in a tight Game 3. Doubly cruel was that the Giants had tied it in the bottom of the 9th before giving it straight back up in the 10th.

By the end of the week, the Dodgers had a 2-game lead over their bitter rivals, though the Giants have a 4-game lead over the Cubs for the wild card. GM Bradbrook will be hoping Livan can be the spark they need as the issues with the league office have been resolved and he will be eligible to pitch in Colorado this week. Though GM Lee will be focused on bigger issues, he became the first manager to win more than 350 regular season games, reaching 351 by the end of the week. This is 27 ahead of his nearest challenger (Dave Brown).

The Giants financial position was further improved by the Pirates signing of ex-Giant Ryan Drese. Drese (and the Pirates) will hope that his recent struggles are just a blip and he can settle in Pitt and return to his form of a couple of seasons ago. This wasn't the only pitching move they made as they also traded for Tomo Okha from the Brewers.

Okha was the overall #1 draft pick in the draft at the end of Season 2. Okha lost more than 20 games in his rookie season but he threw over 200 innings and had a 3.73 ERA. He could be a solid addition for the Pirates and is an indication that new GM Alan Milnes isn't afraid of taking tough decisions as he reconstructs his team.

Nunez will provide the quality left-handed bat the Brewers need. He was a contender for an all-star spot last year and will get better and better. After the drama of last week's trade, this is a big move as well, particularly as it is between 2 teams from the same division. On the field, the Pirates had a good week though getting swept by the Reds in Cincy was damaging. Mayfield's boys are 4 games ahead of the Cubs and 9 ahead of the Pirates. They also signed pitcher Rob Bell to further bolster their pitching staff.

The Braves had a poor week, culminating in them getting swept at home to said Pirates. The Phillies only pulled back a game and are now 2 behind. The Nats have now pulled to 9 back after their season looked over a couple of weeks ago. The team that is really struggling are the Florida Marlins. They now have the worst record in the league. Though they have the

lowest wages in the league, this has to be a disappointment to GM Guard-Ward.

In the AL, the Rangers excellent week was mirrored by an equally poor week for the Angels. This has left the Rangers top on run differential (more later). The Mariners had a decent week while the A's continue to disappoint slightly. There are unconfirmed rumours that Oakland GM Tom Shewry may be on his way out as the results on the field continue to disappoint in comparison to the talent and potential on the roster.

The East remains tight. The Jays lost their last 2 games of the week to leave them 2 ahead of the Yankees who won all 3 of their series. Tampa Bay got swept in the middle series against Texas but recovered to then sweep the Indians. This leaves them 3 behind New York who currently occupy the wild card spot, ahead of the Angels on run differential. GM Denyer won't be getting carried away but Boston did have a winning week and showed signs of re-discovering their offense.

The Twins maintained their lead in the Central with a solid 5-4 week. GM Brown was pretty happy with this as they had a tough week and were resting some key bats at times during the week. The Royals and White Sox equalled the Twins record to stay 4 back. The Royals really got back on track by sweeping the Angels to end the week – form which GM Brearley will be hoping they can maintain after an indifferent run. Sadly the Indians seem to be slipping out of contention.

Who's hot!

Ranger pitching – 2.74 ERA in last 18 games.

Reds pitching – 3.02 ERA in last 18 games.

Devil Ray pitching – 3.28 ERA in last 18 games.

Mariners pitching – 3.94 ERA in last 18 games (big improvement as team ERA was 5.32 before then).

Twins batting - .302 avg in last 18 games.

D'Backs fielding – only 5 errors in last 18 games.

Nationals fielding – only 6 errors in last 18 games.

Who's not!

Yankee pitching – 4.78 ERA in last 18 games.

White Sox batting - .243 avg in last 18 games.

A's batting - .221 avg in last 18 games.

Mariner fielding – 17 errors in last 18 games.

White Sox fielding – 14 errors in last 18 games.

A's team – 4 and 14 in last 18 games.

Marlins team – 6 and 21 in last 27 games.

Texas Talk by Ian Gibson

Hopefully people won't mind if I indulge myself and do a bit of a review of how the Rangers are doing at the moment. I'm sure it'll be the only time we're ahead of the Angels so had better make the most of it!!

It's interesting to contrast our position from Week 8 of last season. We've got 7 more wins in the bag but it's more about how we've done it. We've actually scored 24 fewer runs but conceded 81 less (which is more than 1 run a game). There is the odd different face in the bullpen but generally the pitchers are pretty much the same. Below are the ERA comparisons of our main pitchers from Week 8 of last season to Week 8 of this –

	Season 3	Season 4
Cordero	4.71	2.15
Bale	4.37	2.46
Benoit	4.69	2.79
Dominquez	2.98	4.18
TEAM	4.78	3.78

Other than Dominquez who is the exception to the current rule, the ERAs of our best pitchers are all down by almost 2. Now we've possibly been a little lucky but I'm also sure that fielding has played a part. The team has made 15 less errors and achieved 15 more fielding saves. It's obviously hard to quantify the impact of this but, other than the ERA and hitting average, the pitching doesn't look remarkably different –

	Season 3	Season 4
Base on Balls	241	235
Strikeouts	447	429
Stolen Bases against	97	99
Home runs against	70	63
Hitting average	.270	.254

The staff has issued very slightly fewer walks and slightly fewer home runs but slightly more stolen bases. Fewer strikeouts meaning that more balls have probably been put into play. My only conclusion is that my fielders are making nearly all the plays they should make and a number of other plays that are outstanding to take away the base hits. And these overall improved pitching statistics come after significantly bringing in the fences at Ameriquet Field.

It's likely that the pitching and fielding won't be able to keep up these incredible standards all season long so it would be nice if the offense picked up. A number of players are playing well but there is almost no

production whatsoever from the C and 1B positions. There's also some fatigue starting to affect some of the key players so it's unlikely that there'll be a sudden power surge. So, IF we're going to sustain our current lofty position, I think we'll have to rely on pitching and defense and hope the Angels continue to struggle to reach their usual stride and level of dominance.

I'm not super-confident that's for sure but we're happy with our current position and long may it continue (I hope).

Week 9 Preview

The Royals recent good run will be tested as they open the week by hosting the division-leading Twins. They also face the Yankees and Blue Jays so it'll be a tough week, particularly as they will be without slugger Mike Sweeney. The other big divisional battle sees the Cubs host the Reds. The Reds then face the Giants so it's a tough week for them as well and they'll be without slugger Mark Teixeira.

The Angels will look to get back on form as they face the A's and Red Sox either side of a series in Minnesota. There aren't that many other series between the real top teams but it will be interesting to see if Livan Hernandez will pitch against his former team as the Nats face the Giants. Also, the reigning AL Champs look to have a tough week as they face teams against whom they have a combined 1-11 record so far this season.

One of these series is in Toronto against the Jays. GM Howard faces the rather unpalatable thought (from his perspective anyway!) of a week without former MVP Orlando Hudson who is a frontrunner for the award again at this early stage of the season.

This time of the season can be a little unpredictable as teams perhaps start to look at resting players to manage the stress of a 162-game season and ensure that players aren't exhausted by the time of the 'stretch run'. It will affect different teams to different extents but a big injury to one of the stars can be even more important at the moment as that can throw out plans of resting others.

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Until next time, Ian.