

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

### Week 9 Review

Well, we're at the halfway point of another exciting season in MLB8. Though a lot of established teams continue to be strong, there is some parity in the league as no-one is on course to reach 100 wins. Unfortunately for their managers, 3 teams are on course for 100 losses (Seattle, Florida and Milwaukee). This is little surprise in Seattle and Milwaukee as their GMs embark on a long process of developing the roster. However, it is a major surprise in Florida where the Marlins have really failed to click.

The team with the best record in the league is the Toronto Blue Jays. They won it all in Season 2, had a disaster last year but are well and truly back this time. Their run difference isn't showing them dominating but they are winning games and the change in power in the division was summed up by their sweep of the Red Sox this week.

They're getting a real challenge in the division though with the Yankees 5 back and the Devil Rays only 3 back. For the first time in the history of the league, Tampa are really contending. They swept the Yankees in the Bronx this week and their pitching staff is really clicking at the moment. They currently occupy the wild card spot which must be a pleasant surprise to GM Dilworth at this stage of the season. (More on the AL East later on.....)

They are a game ahead of the Angels in the wild card. This is surprising in that the Angels aren't top of the division. They're not exactly far away though as they are only behind the Rangers on run differential – and by 3 runs! LA were dealt real bad news this week as their best lefty pitcher Bobby Abreu suffered a serious injury which might end his season. It is rumoured that, despite their divisional rivalry, the 2 GMs might be discussing a trade. The A's slump continues as they seem to lack any real direction.

In the Central, the Twins are top, but only 4 ahead of the Royals who got back on track this week – aided by a series win over the Twins. The White Sox had a difficult week and got swept by Boston in the middle series. They are certainly not out of it yet but are in danger of slipping out of the division and wild card race if they don't get going soon.

The Braves are in their customary position at the top of the NL East. They clicked nicely this week, losing only 1 game – and that was by just 1 run. Russ Ortiz tossed 2 more complete games and has been absolutely dominant this season, while new signing had an excellent start in a Braves uniform. The Phillies are still in contention but their chances were damaged by getting swept by improving division rivals, the Nationals.

The Nats have really stabilised the ship in recent weeks and GM Trice will be pleased with how things are going. The only major downside of the week was ex-Nat Livan Hernandez dominating his former teammates in his 2<sup>nd</sup>

game in a Giants uniform. The struggles continue for the Marlins, though GM Guard-Ward will hope that 2 wins against the Dodgers to end the week might signal an improvement in fortunes.

The Giants and Dodgers are now tied in the NL West. This battle looks as if it will just run and run with the loser of the race likely to be the wild card (currently a 6-game lead). The Giants might be done dealing for a couple of weeks though the Dodgers might be primed to respond and are known to be looking for quality pitching – possibly in exchange for SS prospect Jason Grabowski.

The big changes this week occurred in the NL Central. After their recent roster moves, the Pirates had an excellent week, starting with a sweep of the Brewers and ending with a sweep of the Rockies. New pitcher Okha was excellent, particularly in his debut as he threw a complete game 3-hitter. Even sweeter, this was against his former team, the team who made him a #1 draft pick, the Brewers.

The Pirates week pulled them to within 2 of the Cubs and 4 of the Reds in the division. This was partly due to a so-so week for the Cubs and a poor week for the Reds. The worst part of the week for the Reds was a crushing sweep at home to San Fran. The Brewers had a horrible week, outscored by 72 to 26. There was good news though as they signed young prospect Bill Washington from the Jays farm system. It took a huge signing bonus to get him but he is an outstanding prospect for the future – which is where the Brewers are looking to.

### Berg steps up for the Blue Jays by Philip Howard

The Toronto Blue Jays survived a week without All Star Orlando Hudson, thanks to the performance of under-pressure Dave Berg. The 10\* 1B usually plays second string to Hudson, but provided 18 hits for 21 RBI - including three multi-homer games - when promoted from cleanup to the number 3 spot. The Jays also benefited from vintage performances from Vinnie Chulk, who followed a quality start against the Red Sox with the team's first complete game of the season for an 11-1 defeat of the A's.

Elsewhere in the organisation, former 1<sup>st</sup> rounder Jason Frazor is being sheltered at AAA Syracuse, having picked up a 7.51 ERA in 9 major league starts early in the season. The club is far happier with this year's crop, with top pick SS Aaron Hill sure to see senior action later in the season. Pitcher Josh Banks fell to the 3<sup>rd</sup> round due to durability concerns, but his dominating relief efforts have the Dunedin Jays on course for the Florida State League playoffs, and he seems certain to be given an opportunity to work his way up the organisation in the future.

### Tampa Bay, slowly does it! by Troy Dilworth

Probably a little unsurprising that you are hearing from me as it coincides with the best week ever for my team (8-1). It's taken 3 and a half seasons and at last my team sit in a Wild Card position. Considering the shambles of Season 2 I'm a little surprised we have come this far already.

The fact of the matter is that we are still basically in rebuild mode as we have the lowest wage in the AL by quite some distance and the second lowest wage overall. This is possibly the most encouraging aspect of our current position as surely we can only get better from here?

Now a word of warning, even though we sit proudly on a 46-35 record our run differential is minus 11. This does beg the question, are we simply a lucky team? I guess the second half of the season will go a long way to answering that question. However, if my pitching continues to perform as they are currently doing then there would be a very strong possibility of reaching the post-season for the first time ever. God forbid!

The second half of the season starts here and I have to admit that I do feel a little aggrieved at having to play the leaders of all 3 NL divisions this week with the first 2 series on the road! This should quite clearly show me what standard my team have reached. If we win more games than we lose, this would greatly increase my (and the fans) optimism for the rest of the season. This could well be a defining week coming up in the history of this ballclub.

#### **Better news in Beantown** by Paul Denyer

A slight improvement in performances has put the Red Sox nation in a better frame of mind as the team is now fighting even though the season looks dead and buried even at the halfway stage.

Alan Embree returned to the rotation and didn't have the best returns allowing 12 runs in his two outings so a decision is to be made to send him back down to AAA. The other leftie in the rotation Kyle Lohse has been a breath of fresh air. Todd Jones also returned from AAA and injury this week and pitched through a no decision but looked good.

Batting-wise the signing of Olivo has helped Merloni and the rest of the line-up and he is hitting .283 for the season but it hasn't really helped the power number as we have hit only 58 home runs in 81 games this season (conceding 112!!). What are the fans saying? Well the radio talk shows have mellowed a little from a few weeks back, they see the team fighting on every play now and the introduction of Lohse and Olivo who are players not as talented as some players on the team performing well they are becoming crowd favourites very quickly.

There will be no fire sale in Boston this year, the management have decided to keep the core of the squad and try and improve on the fringes with better players when possible. The team itself will play its part in the race for the AL Eastern title trying to upset the challengers all the way to the end!

#### **Change and more to come** by Alan Milnes

Here in Milwaukee we are very happy with our first few weeks. The previous Manager had a very different philosophy and we have had to move a few players on.

Steve Wilson is a young 1B acquired from the Nationals, he has a very intriguing skill set and is one for the future. Nick Neugebauer is a good player but we had a rather unbalanced squad with too many good pitchers so he was expendable.

Next to go was Tomo Okha, another good pitcher traded to Pittsburgh for 2B Abraham Nunez who really gives our line-up some pop. Free agent Mike Mordecai was brought in as we felt our outfielders lacked power.

Finally we made a major move this week in signing Rookie LHP Bill Washington from the FA list for 137 lps. Having traded away some experienced talent we wanted to bring someone in who has the potential to be a No 1 starting pitcher in a few years. Our scouts feel he was undervalued and is probably not far off moving up a class. So a couple of youngsters and a couple of veterans and at least one more deal in the works has us looking better than a few weeks ago.

Now we need to go out and prove it on the field, our league worst 27 wins is not acceptable and if some highly paid stars don't start to perform soon then they may be shown the door as well. It's probably more about next year now but we want some good performances in the second half of the year to set us up.

#### **Week 10 Preview**

We're at interleague week again. GM Dilworth has voiced his displeasure at his team's upcoming schedule. They play all 3 NL division leaders, with the Braves and Giants series on the road. Other teams who have tough weeks are the Dodgers (against the Rangers, Jays and Royals) and the Giants (Angels, Tampa and the White Sox).

In other series, the last 2 World Series runners up meet up in Washington with both teams having shown signs of improvement in the last few weeks. The Mariners have a round-robin type of week towards the bottom of the league as they face the Brewers and Diamondbacks. The Rangers play 3 teams with winning records and, whilst the Angels don't have an easy schedule, their week does end against the Brewers so there may be a lead change in the AL West.

Thanks for the contributions guys – much appreciated.

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Until next time, Ian.