

'Better Eight Than Never' - The Newsletter of MLB8

Week 11 Review

As we move into 2007, it's good news and bad news for GM Mike Sim and his Atlanta Braves. The best news is that, quietly, they have ascended to the position of having the best record in the league and have been particularly good on the road. The other good news is that they acquired starting pitcher Armando Benitez from the Los Angeles Angels.

To get him, the baddish news was that they had to give up lefty pitcher Horatio Ramirez. Really, this is a trade of 2 pitchers who have disappointed and will hope that a change of scenery helps them. The other bad news in Atlanta is the current injury to Andruw Jones, though Andruw's batting average is well below his usual this year. Perhaps the 9-game rest due to injury will do him good?

This injury is unlikely to hold them back as they have a 14-game lead in the division – a massive advantage at this stage of the season. The Phillies have really fallen away, going 26-37 in their last 63 games. If a threat for the division comes, it seems likely that it will be from Washington who have really picked up. The Marlins are WAY adrift and now have the worst record in the league. Not only did they get swept at home to the Nats this week but also got well beaten at home to the Brewers.

This was part of a positive week in Milwaukee with Alan Milnes getting his first winning week since taking charge. The offense really picked up as they scored 76 runs in the 9 games this week. The pitching is still struggling though as they have given up almost a full run per game more than any other team in the NL.

Reigning division champions, the Pirates, ended the week by getting swept in Arizona and their hopes of retaining the division are starting to look slim. At the top of the division, the Reds and Cubs look likely to battle it out and the Cubs took the lead this week. The Reds also lost Joe Morgan for almost 2 weeks but have the track record that makes you think that they'll be in the race right to the end.

The Dodgers won the latest series against their rivals from San Francisco. All 3 games were close and LA were on course for a sweep until new 'Dodger-killer' Livan Hernandez pitched a gem in Game 3. The Giants won their next 2 series and the Dodgers didn't really take advantage with both teams going 5-4 and San Fran maintaining their lead. The Giants also welcomed back LF Perez. Elsewhere in the division, it was also a good week for Arizona who are definitely improving. They also signed veteran pitcher Cormier to bolster their pitching staff.

Though teams like the Rockies, Nationals, Pirates and Phillies will still hold slim hopes of making the playoffs, it looks like the wild card may already be a 2-horse race. The Dodgers are currently in the position with the Reds 2

games behind. The next furthest back are the Rockies who are a further 6 back of Cincinnati.

All 3 division leaders in the AL either maintained or extended their lead. The Jays maintained their position of having the best record in the AL and extended their lead to 5 games. This position was helped by the Yankees getting swept by the Angels in LA. The Rays are now back level with the Yankees as well after a solid week in which they took a series from the Jays in Toronto. Tampa also signed switch-hitting 1B Luis Gonzalez to a large signing bonus in the hope that he can add some 'pop' to their offense.

In the Central, the Twins and Royals went 6-3 meaning that Minnesota's 2-game advantage is maintained. It could have been even better for the Twins but they lost a tough Game 3 of the middle series against Texas. This was despite LaTroy Hawkins pitching 9 1/3 innings and giving up just a hit and a walk. The White Sox suffered following the departure of their manager and look as if they may start to slip out of what is a congested wild card race.

In the West, the Rangers took the first game of the series against the Angels behind a pitching gem from Benoit. The Angels showed their resolve though, winning the next 2 games to take the series. Both teams went 5-1 the rest of the week, which leaves the Angels with a 3-game lead. The A's and Mariners have the equal worst record in the AL and the A's are in danger of sinking without trace as they continue to look for a manager to replace Tom Shewry.

All of this leaves a very congested AL wild card race. All 4 of the Yankees, Devil Rays, Royals and Rangers are tied on 54 wins. The Yankees have the advantage in terms of run differential, followed by the Royals, Rangers, then the Rays. All the divisions and the wild card race look destined to go down to the final week and perhaps the final game.

Eternal optimism in Seattle by Tony Eatough

I came into Gameplan Baseball last Jan with the Mariners in MLB1 (also previously managed by Paul Coffey, ex-MLB8 Mariners GM), and have gradually increased to 5 teams now. The Mariners in MLB8 was my 2nd team and they have been the hardest to deal with. Last season the batting was OK but the pitching was awful. I've slowly been trying to improve the pitching, although pitching talent has looked fairly thin on the free agent list.

Meanwhile the batting has fallen to pieces with the exception of Borders who has improved, and Boone and Bloomquist who are about the same as last year. Even new arrivals Galarraga and, to a lesser extent, Walker have been disappointing. Because it is such a widespread collapse I have been reluctant to waive any of them as I feel there is some other hidden factor at work which, if it could be turned round, would make the batting pretty good.

I'm optimistic about the recent signing of Erstad from the Angels. His batting average may only have been .207 this year but he was .290 over the previous 2 seasons. He is a good fielder in a key position, and any player who can play

a key role for a Paul Beaumont side for 3 seasons has to be respected.

I'm also hoping he is going to have a positive vibe on the whole team. Paul was saying something had gone wrong with the Angels a few weeks ago that he could not put his finger on – maybe it was Erstad leaving?!? Do players have a positive or negative vibe on a team in Gameplan Baseball as a hidden factor? If they do, I'm hoping Erstad is going to give us the positive lift we need. You can tell I'm an optimist!

Missing in Miami by Stuart Guard-Ward

Season 4 has seen the Miami-based Marlins not only disappear out of the NL East Division race, which they have been involved in over the 3 seasons, but drop right off the bottom of the league with a 35-64 record. There are though maybe some reasons that at least allows the manager to, in part, understand the drop off.

In my eyes the Marlins have actually over-performed in each of the first 3 seasons in this league. The roster has never benefited from some good experienced star performers and with their decline on the cards some of the veterans have been shipped out this season in a bid to look down the line. This isn't a down the line in a single season view though. With a lack of quality experienced free agents around the Marlins have instead looked to build for the longer term. Of the 7 9* players on the squad all have at best 6 years experience and 5 of these have 4 years or less experience of the big leagues.

It will take time for these guys to develop and it's a dangerous approach given the lack of form the team is picking up currently. All-Star Chipper Jones was picked up with adding some experience in mind. The 10-year pro still has 5 seasons left in him hopefully and with a 2-3 season plan should help lead the younger players into the prime of their careers. A high draft pick will likely see us add more young talent to the team.

As for when the Marlins will be back? Well unless Free Agency changes a lot expect the answer to be not next season, but let's hope we get there and that we can be a little more competitive on the way. In the meantime, we have one of the happiest bank managers in the league!!!

Week 12 Preview

Both Central divisions have big divisional series as the Royals travel to Minnesota to face the Twins and the Cubs visit the Reds. The Cubs / Reds series could be particularly big as the Cubs are starting to get some momentum and hold a 6-3 advantage over their rivals from Cincinnati so far this season. The reigning AL Champs from Boston just want to take a series from Toronto as they are currently 0-9 against them this season.

A number of other AL series have divisional and / or wild card ramifications. The Yankees travel to Tampa to face a Rays team who have been excellent at home. The

Yankees then host the Twins who then themselves host the Jays. The Jays also host the Angels in a battle of the teams with the best records in the AL so far. The Angels also host the Royals whilst the Rangers are another team who have to travel to Tampa.

Not as many obviously major series in the NL but that may be because there aren't as many teams really in playoff contention. One series that does stand out is the Dodgers trip to Atlanta. The best record in the league and home advantage should stand the Braves in good stead but the Dodgers are 5-1 against them so far, following on from the sweep in last year's NLDS. The other eye-catching series sees the Giants host the Cubs in a matchup of what might be the 2 best batting lineups in the league.

With races so tight, a key signing might be a major difference maker. There are some solid pitchers available on the free agent market (Guardado, Johnson, Ohka, Vazquez, Byrd, Boehringer and Franklin) and strong rumours that the Angels may be willing to trade Jarrod Washburn in exchange for a left-handed pitcher.

All-Star Game Voting

Also, remember to get those all star votes in. Have had 6 sets of votes in (including mine) but need lots more so get looking at the stats on www.gbspn.com to help with your votes. In fact, NL managers really need to get themselves sorted – only 1 of the 6 voters so far is an NL Manager.

The managers are in place with Paul Denyer managing the AL and Mike Sim managing the NL. Having managed the team last year, Patrick Lee graciously gave someone else the opportunity this time and selected Mike. A good selection as his team currently have the best record in the league and look well on the way to their 4th consecutive NL East crown.

The venue is the Metrodome in Minnesota. No particular reason for this other than it's the AL's turn to have homefield advantage and I just want to reward the cities whose teams have tended to do well (following Dodger Stadium, The Rogers Centre in Toronto and The Great American Ballpark in Cincinnati). Major League Baseball are currently discussing the venue for next year and it is strongly rumoured that it will be Turner Field in Atlanta.

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<http://www.gbspn.com/> Gameplan Baseball news and statistics from all nine Gameplan Baseball leagues (now including MLB21 as well as the established 8 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.