

'Better Eight Than Never' - The Newsletter of MLB8

Week 13 Review

The battle continues out in the NL West. Though the Giants went 7-2, the Dodgers actually pulled a game back as they went 8-1. The good week for the Dodgers at least strengthens their wild card position as they now lead the Reds by 5 games.

The Reds are still a game behind the Cubs in the Central and will be disappointed with this as they lost the last 2 games of the week at home to Arizona. Reigning divisional champions Pittsburgh quietly slipped completely out of contention this week, ending any hopes of a repeat and are currently on course for the #5 draft pick. Sadly, ex-Pirate Brian Boehringer retired this week as the Pirates (and everyone else) chose not to re-sign him.

The Brewers had an even worse week and are right in the race for the #1 pick. They made a move on the trade front though as they shipped out Kelvim Escobar to the Angels in exchange for Jarrod Washburn. Washburn has struggled a bit this season but is a proven winner which will help the Brewers. Escobar has struggled for a while since an excellent Season 1. He's been pretty awful this season but the Angels need a lefty and GM Beaumont must think he can get the best out of him.

The Braves didn't have a great week in the East but maintained a pretty unassailable 18-game lead and the best record in the league. The only bad news for the Braves is that Russ Ortiz will miss a couple of starts due to injury. Better to get this out of the way now rather than get a serious injury for the playoffs. The Phillies and Nats both had winning weeks but aren't really in contention. The Marlins dreadful form continued with their main news coming off the field as they took a risk in signing ex-Red young George Foster. Hopefully a change of scenery will help him.

In the AL East, the Jays opened the week by getting swept by the Yankees and, though they recovered, both the Yankees and Rays are only 4 games behind. It was a disappointing week for Tampa as they lost all 3 series but the Yankees had the best week in the AL. This was considerably helped by sweeping the Rangers to end the week. The Yankee offense was smoking this week. The Red Sox were having a good week until ending it by getting swept at home to the Angels.

2 of these games were extra-innings wins for LA and they were involved in 2 others (that they split) during the week. The Yankees sweep of Texas whilst LA were sweeping Boston meant that the Rangers slipped from 2 back to 5 back. Simon Dunkerley had a respectable first week in charge in Oakland whilst the Mariners had an excellent week. Series wins over the Angels and Tampa followed by a sweep of the Twins for GM Eatough's men.

This held the Twins back a little though they maintained their 2-game lead over the Royals. KC are just out of the wild card, being edged by the Yankees on run differential in what is currently a bit of a logjam as Tampa are also on the same number of wins. There was good news in Chicago as there is a new man in charge of the White Sox (see later).

All-Star Selections

The full selections haven't taken place yet but the probable starting lineups can be announced. These have not been confirmed but, at the time of going to press, are expected to be the lineups.

AL		NL
C	Michael Barrett	Todd Hundley
1B	Dave Berg	Adrian Beltre
2B	Aubrey Huff	Rich Aurilla
3B	Derek Jeter	Ron Coomer
SS	Corey Koskie	Carlos Rivera
LF	Frank Menechino	Todd Helton
CF	Orlando Hudson	Moises Alou
RF	Mike Sweeney	Tom Sanders
DH	Julius Matos?	Mark Teixeira?
SP	John Burkett	Russ Ortiz

This will be Russ Ortiz first appearance as starting pitcher though he has appeared as a reliever in all 3 games so far and was the MVP in the Season 1 extravaganza. He wasn't quite a unanimous selection despite having a spectacular season. The only unanimous selections in the NL were both Giants. Reigning MVP Tom Sanders probably wasn't a surprise though Rich Aurilla maybe is. His performances probably warrant it but it will be his first start at 2B, though he was the DH in Season 2.

In the AL, the only unanimous selection was CF Orlando Hudson though Mike Sweeney and Derek Jeter came close. Jeter has assumed the mantle of being the top bat in the Yankee lineup with reigning MVP Alfonso Soriano having a slightly down year. This will be Jeter's first all star appearance and it will be interesting to see if Soriano's run of appearances

will come to an end. This will be Sweeney's 3rd appearance and 2nd as a starter.

Similar to Ortiz, this will be John Burkett's 4th selection but 1st as starter. He's yet to actually get into a game so starting will guarantee he'll get some action. Elsewhere in the AL, Dave Berg's likely start at 1B will break Roberto Alomar's run of starts at 1B though he may feature as a reserve.

The only person who looks likely to keep his ever-present streak as an all star starter is the Twins Corey Koskie. His position as an all time great is cemented with his record of having gone 4-10 in all star games with 2 doubles and 4 RBIs.

Beltre resumes his position at 1B in the NL after not having even been a reserve last season. His teammate Todd Hundley appears for the 4th time, and 2nd consecutive as starter. Andruw Jones has been selected in all 3 games so far but may not this year as he had a bit of a down year.

The managers' selections of pitching reserves will be interesting with a couple of pitchers having appearance streaks on the line. In the AL, only Guardado has been selected for all 3 games (other than Burkett). In the NL, it's Livan Hernandez (other than Ortiz).

New man in Chicago

Craig Sandry became the new GM in Chicago, replacing Martin Halls. Sandry takes over what is far from the worst roster in the league. Infact, though slightly inexperienced, it is one of the most talented in the league. The batting lineup is blessed with perennial all-star Roberto Alomar as well as quality young hitters Aaron Miles and Tony Graffanino.

Though some haven't consistently performed to their best, there are also some quality arms. Adkins, Buehrle and Colon all have the ability to be top of the rotation starters. There's also young high-potential guys in Shingo Takatsu and last year's AL rookie of the year Bobby Jenks.

Sandry is apparently somebody who sees the world upside down compared to us normal people (he's an Aussie!!) but is well regarded and could do well. This season might be too early for him to make the postseason but at only 7 games back from the wild card they are not completely out of the race and a boost from their new manager might propel them into the race.

Week 14 Preview

The Giants and Dodgers clash again in San Francisco to open the week. The Dodgers are without Kerry Wood but the Giants are missing ex-Dodger LF Cesar Izturis. Though the Giants have the overall advantage this season, the Dodgers hold the advantage (8-4) in the season series and that will still give some psychological advantage to the Dodgers until the Giants start consistently winning games against them.

The other top of the table clash sees the Rangers travel to LA to face the Angels. The Rangers have the 8-4 advantage in the season series but will be missing Joaquin Benoit and have a batting lineup that is starting to feel the effects of fatigue. Other series with potential playoff consequences in the AL are the Jays at Rangers, Devil Rays at Angels, Rangers at Royals and Twins at Devil Rays.

In the NL, the Giants follow their series against the Dodgers with an equally tough-looking series at home to the Braves. The Dodgers have to visit the Cubs after hosting a Phillies team that they're 6-0 against this season. The Braves also host the Reds whilst the Phillies and Pirates have a state battle.

The free agent list is less than exciting. Freddy Garcia could be a decent pitcher. Todd Jones has a decent history but is pretty expensive and seems to be on a downward spiral in his career. Vicente Padilla has ability but there has to be a reason for the Phillies releasing him.

And then there's the all star game! It will be a welcome break for GM Paul Denyer whose Red Sox haven't done well this season though they've picked up as late. For Braves boss Mike Sim it is a fitting reward for how his team has played this season. With Ortiz carrying a slight injury, Sim will probably risk him as starter but limit his innings so as not to jeopardise the rest of the season. Whatever, I'm sure it will be an excellent game.

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<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.