

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

Week 16 Review

Well it didn't happen in the first series of the week against the Nationals but that just delayed the inevitable. In the next series, in LA, the Braves clinched their 4th straight divisional title. They went on to win the series against LA to continue in a very strong position in the NL. They have an 8-game lead over the Cubs for homefield advantage and, though there was some bad news with an injury to Mike Lowell this week, it isn't felt to be serious and he'll be back for the postseason.

The Cubs look likely to be the next team to clinch a postseason spot. After the Reds ended the week by getting swept in Philly, the Cubs have an 11-game lead with 18 to play. The Reds only managed 4 runs in the Philly series and it's been their run production that has held them back from competing with 'the big four' in the NL.

The Brewers (and more of them later) had a horrible week with their pitching performing even worse than normal. In a way this may be good news as it means they are likely to get one of the first 2 draft picks.

The Dodgers and Giants both continued to sputter a bit in the NL West, going 4-5. This maintains the Dodgers 2-game lead. Though the Giants clearly aren't performing at their best, they are 7 games clear for the wild card so need to focus on getting into form for the playoffs.

Elsewhere in the division, the D'Backs traded pitching prospect Simon Thompson to the Nats for switch-hitting Todd Zeile. Zeile has never quite performed up to his undoubted ability but Arizona have the makings of a good offensive lineup next season and into the future.

In the AL West, the Texas Rangers effectively conceded the division to the LA Angels. Though the Angels haven't really been at their best, it will be their 4th straight divisional title. The Rangers really stunk this week, starting by getting swept at home to the A's – scoring a solitary run in each game. There were 3 other games in the week

when the offense scored zero or one and that's simply not good enough.

It was a strange week for LA as they swept Toronto but got swept by Seattle and Kansas City. It was a good week for the Mariners as they went 6-3 and also signed Juan Dominquez from the Rangers to bolster their pitching depth and experience. It was a good week for the A's as well. This pretty much rules them out of the race for the #1 draft pick but GM Simon Dunkerley is more focused on his team just playing well and winning some games.

The Twins are another team currently in position to win their 4th straight division crown. They have a 6-game lead over KC which should be good enough though ace Eddie Guardado will have to miss probably 3 starts. The Royals got back on track this week and are 4 games behind in the wild card race.

The White Sox and Indians continue to struggle though Chicago did spend some money on CF Randall Simon. Chicago has the highest wage bill in the AL but the players really haven't lived up to that.

For the first time in league history, the Tampa Bay Devil Rays lead the AL East. It's taken them a long time but Week 16 is a pretty good time to do it! They've been in excellent form recently while the Jays have only been playing .500 ball for quite a few weeks now. Their great start though does mean that they're the wild card team – 4 games ahead of the Royals.

The Yankees have slipped away and GM Dorman must be very frustrated that his team have a better run differential than both Tampa and Toronto. The league-leading 115 unearned runs they've given up have been VERY costly.

More turmoil in Milwaukee

The Milwaukee Brewers today announced that GM Alan Milnes would be taking an extended leave of absence. Milnes has been in talks with the organisation who have been concerned over the amount of time he was dedicating to the team. Milnes said:

"I am currently involved in a project that will revolutionise the way Coaches view the game. However ownership felt that, due to this, I was not dedicating enough time to the team and reluctantly I had to agree. We have agreed that the team are free to look for a successor but if none is found then I may return sometime next season"

This is more sad news for the franchise that has comfortably the worst overall record in MLB8 history. Milnes only took over after 36 games so his reign lasted only 108 games. He only 40-68 but there was a feeling that he was getting the team headed in the right direction. Ownership will now take on responsibility for draft planning which is unlikely to be a good thing. Time will tell as to whether ownership will find a successor or whether Milnes may return sometime.

A look ahead to Cy Young awards

Accepting that there are still 18 games to play, there is a clear frontrunner for the NL Cy Young award. And, if he were to win it, it wouldn't be for the first time. The man referred to is Atlanta Braves ace, Russ Ortiz. Ortiz has the league's lowest ERA (an amazing 2.06), the most strikeouts and 2nd most complete games and innings.

Surprisingly, his record is 'only' 16-8. This is pretty good obviously but perhaps not quite as good as you would expect of someone with such a low ERA. His career record by the way is an amazing 70-25. Whilst there are other candidates, it's difficult to put a convincing case for anyone else. That won't be Ortiz's focus at the moment though – he will just want postseason success for his team.

The other NL candidates worth mentioning are, Kerry Wood (16-3, 3.31 ERA), Chris Capuano (2.88 ERA, 11-6), Livan Hernandez (11-4, 3.34 ERA) and Joe Beimel (though an ERA of 4.03, has gone 22-5 and leads the league in wins, innings and complete games).

The AL isn't quite as clear cut but Joaquin Benoit of the Texas Rangers is probably the favourite. He has the best ERA in the AL (2.30) and, unlike previous seasons, has a record to match this year (14-3). The main rival is probably John Burkett who leads the AL in innings, strikeouts, complete games and wins (19). In a season where the Red

Sox have struggled, he has really maintained his high level of performances.

Other candidates worthy of a mention are Vinnie Chulk (17-6, 3.41 ERA), Jon Adkins (11-5, 3.25 ERA), and Michael Tejera (19-6, 3.42 ERA). Eddie Guardado is also worth a mention (17-7, 3.69 ERA, nearly 215 innings) though he hasn't been quite as good as usual this season. His teammate Javier Lopez is also an intriguing option. He's not a starter but gives some real security due to his presence in the bullpen (121 innings, 2.68 ERA, 11-6 with 7 saves).

Week 17 Preview

There are 2 marquee divisional series this week. The Devil Rays take their slender 1-game lead over the Jays into Toronto. Tampa have the form and momentum but Toronto have a league-best 52-20 record at the Rogers Centre. The other big one is that Giants / Dodgers thing again. It's in LA and the Dodgers hold an 11-4 advantage in the season series. This is their last meeting of the season unless they meet once again in the postseason.

The Giants also play the Reds and Nationals, against whom they are a combined 15-3 this season. So if they can win the Dodgers series, they'll feel they can still win the division. Elsewhere, the Twins visit the Angels in what might be a playoff preview whilst the Jays also host the Royals who are currently their main rivals for the wild card.

The Cubs may well clinch this week, the Angels might do, it's possible the Twins could as well but it still looks like there'll be plenty of issues to resolve in Week 18....

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Until next time, Ian.