

MLB Baseball Weekly --- Friday, May 20th, 2005
BY MATTHEW HATFIELD

Interleague play commences Friday, and one of the intriguing series' will be between the New York Mets and New York Yankees. Can you believe the Mets enter this year's Subway Series with a better record (22-19) than their inter-city rival (21-20)? Still, they are a game and a half back of Atlanta for first in the division with a 7-12 record away from Shea. That series is definitely one of the matchups to watch, but here are some of the other good one's as well as not so good series':

The Good:

Atlanta @ Boston - What makes this an intriguing series to me is that it will be played in Boston. Therefore, the Red Sox should not have any trouble hitting if the Braves pitching does not overwhelm them. Question is can Atlanta keep up in a shoot-out?

NY Yankees @ NY Mets - Yanks want revenge for the Mets stealing some games from them last year. Look for them to take two of three at Shea in spite of Beltran's bat.

LA Angels @ LA Dodgers - This now has a new Los Angeles ring to it which should bode well for the attendance on the weekend. I wonder do the Dodgers know how to pitch to dangerous guys like Vlad Guerrero and Garrett Anderson? Answer: very carefully.

Not So Good:

Arizona @ Detroit - Arizona's been playing some really good baseball as of late, but what history do these two teams have? Inconsistencies have kept the Tigers from getting above .500. They will need a sound series from third baseman Brandon Inge to arrive at .500.

Milwaukee @ Minnesota - Has the word yuck written all over it as the Brewers enter this series one week too late, performing on the cold side of the ledger rather than hot.

Hottest Team in Baseball:

The San Diego Padres, who scored ten runs in the 7th inning on Sunday to complete a sweep of the Florida Marlins, came back the very next from a 2-0 deficit to defeat Atlanta. San Diego is **16-3 in their last 19 games and enter their series with the Seattle Mariners fresh off a sweep of the NL East-leading Braves.** Brian Giles, Mark Loretta, Ryan Klekso, and most recently Khalil Greene have been doing the same as of late. Giles and Klesko really got off to a slow start this season, but have picked up, thankfully for one of the game's top managers - Bruce Bochy. Bochy has to love what his pitchers are doing.. The duo of Adam Eaton (6-1) and Jake Peavy are a combined **9-0** with a 90-28 strikeout-to-walk ratio. A win by San Diego in their next game and loss by St. Louis --- **Padres have the best record in the National League.** And you all thought we were nuts projecting them to play the Yankees in the World Series?

Deadline Deals:

There are a number of teams that will be trying to rid marquee players (i.e. Cincinnati), while there will be plenty of buyers still in contention out there. The trading deadline is not too far away and it's never too early to begin speculating now is it? It's what makes my job so much fun at times.

Some moves of late include the Phillies trading Marlon Byrd to Washington for fellow outfielder Endy Chavez. Who do I think got the better of the deal? It's pretty even, but I give the Nationals a slight edge with Byrd. Chavez lays down bunts better and plays a pretty well in the field. Ultimately, Byrd should turn out to be a better hitter and player, someone the franchise can build around with Jose Guillen and Brad Wilkerson.

Another savvy pick up made in Major League Baseball was done by the Pittsburgh Pirates, who acquired former Twins and Rockies outfielder Michael Restovich. He smashed many AAA pitchers the last two years, and at 6-4 251 can turn out to be an above average power hitter from the right side of the plate.

I definitely think the Mets are going to be in the market to add before the July 31st deadline. Could they send Tom Glavine elsewhere? Wouldn't rule it out completely, but it will be hard to do. He had his first great outing of the season last Friday in a home win over St. Louis. It's also doubtful they will move Mike Piazza. Either Victor Zambrano or Aaron Heilman is going to have to go to the bullpen, especially if the Mets plan on adding another starter, or a reliever for that matter. Met that won't be a Met for long: **Mike Cameron**, who has value now since coming back from an injury. San Diego's been in the market, but don't rule out this place: **San Francisco**.

Oakland's Barry Zito has not been pitching like the hot commodity he's been in the past. Nevertheless, Zito could be dealt to a contending team in either the National League or a big-time AL franchise (a.k.a. the Yankees). Of the big pitchers being rumored to go - Clemens, Zito, and Glavine - I believe Zito will end up being traded. A couple of the less known pitchers that are being discussed include Colorado's Jason Jennings, closer Jose Mesa of the Pirates (still throwing on fire), and Jason Schmidt only **if** the Giants are completely out of it and he's unhappy. Although, with Schmidt I think it's similar to Andy Pettitte. Pettitte is not going anywhere and neither should Schmidt when all is said and done.

There are those good players out there on good teams that could be compensated by a championship contending team for a need. For example, take the St. Louis Cardinals. They might want an extra infielder for depth in case of further injuries, or may want an extra relief pitcher. Outfielder Reggie Sanders has been gone from team to team so don't rule out the Cards using him as trade bait to get something extra they'd like. Ken Griffey Jr. is a good player with Hall-of-Fame credentials. We can debate whether he deserves to get or not at a later, but he's got to play well enough for his team to inch back to respectability. Sean Casey has been rock solid at first base for the Reds for years, though could be one of two premier first basemen on the trading block. Who's the other one? In my estimation, it's got to be Mike Sweeney of the Royals, whose current .326

batting average speaks volumes as to what kind of contact hitter he is game in and game out.

Finally, your Kansas City's and Cleveland's of the world may look at ridding players. Royals would be foolish to ship away promising pitcher Zach Greinke and the same can be said for the Indians regarding some of their blue-chip type offensive players who just aren't producing right now. We're almost positive the A's will be unloading players and maybe the Mariners (not Beltre or Sexson though) if it gets sour there. Other teams to watch out for in the buyers market include the Cubs (**desperately need bullpen help to block bad moments from LaTroy Hawkins**), Orioles, Dodgers, and perhaps the Twins for a minor move.

STEP UP TIME:

So many players on the DL, so little time to list the numerous guys. We've decided to comprise a list of the top five players who need to step up for their respective teams in this time of need (no particular order).

- | | | |
|--------|--|------------------------|
| 1. | Orioles pitcher Daniel Cabrera | 3-2 4.93ERA 41-23 K/BB |
| 2. | Brewers infielder J.J. Hardy | 0-for-13 slump |
| 3. | Cubs third baseman Aramis Ramirez | .248AVG 7HR 18RBI 19K |
| 4. | Rangers second baseman Alfonso Soriano | .276AVG 11HR 35K 8E |
| 5. | Braves pitcher Horacio Ramirez | 2-3 4.69ERA 15-15 K/BB |
| Bonus: | Tigers reliever Ugueth Urbina | 0-3 3.54ERA 5/7 Saves |

Hot:

San Diego Padres: We just talked about them - 16-3 in their last 19 affairs, outscoring their opponents a respectable 47-28 since May 9th.

Astros third baseman Morgan Ensberg: Ensberg recently became the 8th Astro in history to hit three home runs in a game, joining the likes of Jeff Bagwell, Lance Berkman, and others.

Angels outfielder Steve Finley: Lets take note of Finley's career accomplishments this week. He is first on the active triples list (110) and is one of the game's elite defensive center fielders. Finley, who batted .368 for the D-backs in the 2001 World Series, is also in select company as the only active player with 300+ doubles, 200+ homers, and 100 or more triples.

Not:

Boston Red Sox: It's not that Boston (12-12 away) is playing badly , but more average at this lull point in the yr. Did not look good in their 2nd series w/Oakland, showing me that if they don't find another arm the Yanks could fly by 'em.

Catchers Jason LaRue of Cincinnati and Victor Martinez of Cleveland: Martinez is in an 0-for-11 slump... 'nuff said. LaRue went into last Friday in a 4-for-50 slump, including 22 straight at-bats at the time without a base hit.

TRIVIA QUESTION OF THE WEEK:

We told you that Steve Finley is first on the active triples list, but who's second? Last week's answer: Benito Santiago

E-mail us at hatfieldsports2k4@yahoo.com to answer the question and possibly win!

Our Top Ten Hitters/Players of All-Time:

Ted Williams - Williams was the last man to hit .400 or better in a season back in 1941. A man that served in World War II, Williams will forever be remembered as one of the game's all-time great overall players.

Already on the list: Babe Ruth

MY RANKINGS:



1. San Diego Padres - Winners of seven in a row, the Padres are atop my latest rankings list despite a 10-11 record within the division. Very good pitching, too.



2. New York Yankees - We sadly have to face the painful reality that the "Evil Empire" is back from its dead period. Offense will be anything but dead vs. the Mets.



3. St. Louis Cardinals - Magic number is 3. Must have a semi-comfortable three game lead on everyone else in the division when Scott Rolen makes his return.



4. Chicago White Sox - Can be there if the pitching remains steadily good, but I say they are too aggressive. Entered Sunday 17th or worse in OBP, SLG & BA.



5. Atlanta Braves - A good team that got swept by another good team at the wrong time. This veteran squad doesn't want to go into the break like they did last year.

Honorable Mention (6-7-8): Orioles, Diamondbacks, and Angels.