

MLB Baseball Weekly --- Friday, June 10th, 2005
BY MATTHEW HATFIELD

87 years ago: the last time the Chicago Cubs and Boston Red Sox met. Ironically enough it came in the 1918 World Series where the Sox, with the pitching leadership of Babe Ruth, defeated the Cubbies. 86 years later Boston shocked all by overcome a 3-0 deficit in the ALCS and later going on to sweep St. Louis to win their first Championship in many fans' lifetime. Red birds got even, winning two of three in their regular season series earlier this week. In fact, over **50,000** came to Busch Stadium to watch the World Series re-match. Plenty more to talk about so lets get started...

MLB Draft: _

Earlier this week the Major League Baseball Draft was conducted and selected with the first overall pick was Great Bridge High School (Chesapeake, VA) shortstop Justin Upton. Some believe that Upton, like his brother B.J. - a current player with the Durham Bulls (Tampa Bay's AAA system) - will make the transition from the infield to the outfield. I could see it with B.J., but am not sure on Justin making that kind of move.

What was Arizona thinking drafting a shortstop overall, though? They already have Stephen Drew and another shortstop in their organization. Plus, it's not like Royce Clayton has struggled up at the big league level. D-backs CEO Jeff Moorad wanted the best player available and Upton fits that billing. It's also very conceivable that Arizona moves a prospect, one of their many, to acquire something to help them contend further for the postseason. At the age of 17, Upton may have the future of fellow first overall picks/shortstops who changed positions - Alex Rodriguez and Chipper Jones.



Yvonne Upton (left) celebrates as she finds out her son, Justin (right), is selected one pick ahead of her other son B.J. (AP)

At pick #4 overall, Washington took Virginia third baseman Ryan Zimmerman in the team's first ever draft in the D.C. area. Zimmerman draws comparisons to Travis Fryman and Aaron Boone. Finishing up the top ten, the Mets took 6'7" right-handed pitcher Michael Pelfrey from Wichita State, and Detroit followed up their choice of Justin Verlander last year by drafting potential switch-hitting outfielder Cameron Maybin.

Houston might have picked the sleeper of the draft in Tulane lefty hurler Brian Bogusevic (Tulane). One of the interesting sub-plots to me was that the Yankees passed up St. John's reliever Craig Hansen. Some believed New York would take him to groom as Mariano Rivera's future successor. After all, he does throw great heat, locates the slider, and is considered the most legit guy coming out of the pen in the '05 draft. Who took him? None other than the BoSox, of course.

Injuries to Chipper & Estrada:

You can easily argue that no team has two more important interleague series' coming up than the Atlanta Braves, who will face Oakland for three games in the last part of the home stand before traveling to play Texas. Thank goodness for Atlanta they were able to beat former Brave Paul Byrd and the Angels on Tuesday to salvage one game. Reason being because Anaheim beat them up pretty good, literally and figuratively. Darin Erstad, who **had an American League best 31 two-strike hits entering Saturday**, dove for home on a rough play that injured Atlanta's catcher Johnny Estrada. It created a lot of stir and controversy earlier in the week, but it truly stung them when they found out Chipper Jones is going to be out for 4-6 weeks.

So what can jump-star this squad that's lost seven of their last ten and is suddenly in third in the NL East? Well, maybe a move involving Rafael Furcal is in store. No, not a move to get rid of him, but change his offensive prowess. Furcal can hit, no question. However, Bobby Cox and the crew has considered having him just as a lefty instead of a switch-hitter. Raul Moñdesi is gone and that could turn out to be a plus long term. What's really got to be discouraging to Cox is that they've had some injuries in the starting rotation and now with injuries offensively you aren't sure if this team can put games away. If they score early can they score late? And then you get to the bullpen, where Chris Reitsma has been adequate, but they have yet to find a reliable closer with Danny Kolb unable to get the job done. An ERA over seven, three blown saves, and the same number of walks as strikeouts does not get you back to the All-Star game.

To answer my originally proposed question of what can jump star this team: only productive play from youngsters Wilson Betemit, Andy Marte, Ryan Langerhans, and Adam LaRoche. Other than that, all they can do is hope the hurt guys come back sooner than expected, or go out and get a Paul Bunyan-like bat and a Jose Mesa-type closer.

Pedro & the Mets:

Every team in baseball can use another bat, even the Cardinals, who added Larry Walker to their already potent lineup last season. Every team can use another starter, especially for injury insurance. Last but not least, every team also can use another reliever to hold a lead or shut the game down. Question is what it is that the Mets need to get over that hump and make a run? They actually could use any of those three things. **What it is they need is an extra player with good skills that can make the guys around him better.** Does that equal another bat? Possibly if it means Todd Helton or Lyle Overbay is available. I personally believe New York needs one more bona-fide

pitcher - starter or in relief. If Tom Glavine can keep taking ball games to the seventh inning then they don't need another starter. Having that said, unless Kaz Ishii and Victor Zambrano can be consistent at the back-end of the rotation then they may want to pursue that route. Braden Loper has been decent in the ninth, blowing only two of 14 save opportunities. Still, the combination of Roberto Hernandez, Mike DeJean, Manny Aybar, and Heath Bell in the 7th and 8th is probably not one Willie Randolph feels great about. Signing Danny Graves, as they did a few days ago, makes him the x-factor if he can repair the mental part of his game.

Chris Burke's solo home run to left in the 7th, his first of the year, broke up a no-hit bid by Pedro on Tuesday night. Speaking of Pedro, Martinez got his second base knocks in as many starts. Martinez pitched a complete game, allowing only one run and two hits while striking out double-digit batters. **It's also worth noting that it came against an Astros lineup that you couldn't pick out of a lineup.**

Trades:

Detroit has an important stretch coming up here as they try to make it back to .500. In order to do so, management shipped off reliever Ugueth Urbina and infielder Ramon Martinez to get utility stud Placido Polanco. My opinion is that it is definitely an even trade for both clubs. Philly gets that final piece to their bullpen to complement Ryan Madson and Billy Wagner. For Detroit, they are getting the second best utility guy in the game if you ask me. I put Polanco just ahead of a couple of the guys in Seattle and right behind Chone Figgins, who was obtained by the Angels via Colorado.

Another move of interest involved two American League teams: the Baltimore Orioles and KC Royals. Eli Marreo was sent to the O's to give them an extra bat and player in the field. Kansas City more than likely isn't done wheeling and dealing. Expect sometime here soon to here either the name Tony Graffanino or Mike Sweeney in the mix of a trade. Baltimore aims to keep its three game lead over everyone else in the division by smacking the ball around with Melvin Mora, Brian Roberts and Miguel Tejada. Will it be enough without another arm in the rotation? Tough to say right now, but believe me, the Orioles front office is thinking the very same thing this second.

TRIVIA QUESTION OF THE WEEK:

What American League West pitcher once threw 261 pitches in a 16-inning High School game?

Last Week's Answer: Dave Winfield

Our Top Ten Hitters/Players of All-Time:

Barry Bonds - The Giants outfielder has countless record and accolades, but has yet to win a World Championship. Nonetheless, Bonds has won seven Most Valuable Player awards, is 3rd on the all-time home run list with 703, and despite all the steroid talk is the most recognizable player in the game today.

Already on the List: Babe Ruth, Willie Mays, Stan Musial & Ted Williams

MY POWER RANKINGS: 6-10-05

1. St. Louis - Quietly rolling along without star 3B Rolen thanks to the play of David Eckstein and catcher Yadier Molina, both of whom had to replace Renteria and Matheny.
2. Minnesota - This team has all the necessary ingredients: an awesome bullpen, great starters, and players predicated on speed and defense. Torii Hunter is heating up, too.
3. San Diego - Pads drop two spots from last rankings after the bad spell they went on there where they couldn't score a run to save their lives. Still, they are 35-25.
4. Chicago White Sox - Am I dissing Ozzie Guillen's club? Not at all. We'll see what their hitters are made of against the good pitching of San Diego and Arizona.
5. Anaheim - There's a reason why Garrett Anderson has the most hits in the last decade. He's been very solid in the absence of Vlad Guerrero. Need DH production quickly.
6. Washington - They won't stay here, but seven straight and 21-9 at home speaks volumes. Ryan Church has given them an extra spark in the outfield as well.
7. Boston - Suffered a disheartening loss to the Angels last Saturday then turned around to lose two of three to St. Louis. In the one win vs. STL - David Wells was magnificent.
8. Texas - Had we done this about a week ago I may have put Texas at #2. Hitting is electric, though the team must get sharp starts from someone other than Kenny Rogers.
9. Baltimore - Palmeiro, Mora, and Bedard have been wonderful for the O's through May and now into June. Third in the AL in opponents' batting average, whereas NYY is last.
10. Chi. Cubs - Will they struggle again? Probably so, but stealing 3 in San Diego was impressive and other guys besides Lee are now hitting (Ramirez, Perez, Burnitz, etc.).
11. Philadelphia - Philly fans are casting those Bobby Abreu MVP votes, Jon Lieber and Pat Burrell have been startling in a positive way, and Thome is bound to only get better.
12. NY Mets - Jose Reyes is the catalyst of this team. Had a .312BA, and 17 runs + stolen bases in his last 19 games leading up to Sunday night. Mr. Wright can play, too.
13. NY Yankees - Mediocre right now, yes. However, Joe Torre showed some life and fire by getting ejected the other night with a few choice expletives in an A-rod-led win.
14. Arizona - Love those juicy stats like the Yanks are 0-21 wen scoring three or fewer runs? Check this out: Javy Vazquez went eight straight starts without issuing a walk.
15. Florida - Still a strong playoff contender, Florida better get it going. Fish are 4th in Majors in ERA, which some is attributed to D-Train. The bad: 26th in runs scored.

16. LA Dodgers - Whether it be the defense of Cesar Izturis or the bat of Jeff Kent - the duo is one of the finest in baseball up the middle. Is there room for Gagne and Brazoban?
17. Atlanta - My pick to win the division, Atlanta cannot afford to blow ball games, especially now with the injury bug plaguing them. Time for an unsung hero to step up.
18. Toronto - Nobody is questioning the Jays' pitching and fielding. What is kind of interesting is they are 3rd in baseball in hits from the 7th inning on. Can it continue?
19. Pittsburgh - Pirates, 7-3 in their last ten, have been getting good pitching lately from Perez and Kip Wells. Not to mention, Rob Mackowiak is on a major tear.
20. Cleveland - Indians are batting right around .245 for the season. Dismissing hitting coach Eddie Murray was no real surprise. What is? Jake Westbrook: 2-9 record.
21. Milwaukee - Unlike Pittsburgh, who has a winning record vs. the NL East and West, Milwaukee has done better within the division. The building blocks are there for them.
22. Detroit - Addition of Polanco cannot hurt can it? He'll help out at 2nd quite a bit.
23. San Francisco - Giants are dreadful late in ball games, partly because of the pitching.
24. Seattle - Nice success in Florida and Randy Winn is hitting well on this 7-3 streak.
25. Cincinnati - Ramon Ortiz got lit up in Tuesday's start: a microcosm of their woes.
26. Oakland - Bad offense doesn't lead to good pitching as Oakland is finding out.
27. Houston - Aren't faring well without Kent and Beltran: top two bats in 2004.
28. Tampa Bay - Record: Lost fourth straight by blowing a 3+ run lead. Yikes!
29. Colorado - Lets talk about the bright side - Clint Barmes might be an all-star.
30. Kansas City - D.J. Carrasco recently threw a 5-hitter as the team snapped road skid.