

MLB Baseball Weekly --- Friday, June 17th, 2005
BY MATTHEW HATFIELD

Lets do a little recap or week in review of what happened in Major League Baseball before we enter another important weekend of Interleague action.

Monday: It's time for the International League moment of the week. Esix Snead, a former player in the Mets and Cardinals organization, initiated a brawl between the Richmond Braves and Syracuse Sky Chiefs. Snead's been suspended ten games. As far as MLB action was concerned, Florida beat the Cubs thanks to a big hit by Paul Lo Duca. The Marlins catcher made his first plate appearance with the bases loaded and did not fail. End result: a two-run double just inside the right field line.

Tuesday: Six shutouts on this day: Boston (D. Wells start), St. Louis (Carpenter), Oakland (Joe Blanton), the Cubs (Mitre), the Yankees (Mussina) and Milwaukee (Tomo Ohka) were the teams benefiting from these great pitching performances. Frank Robinson and Mike Scioscia got into it late Tuesday night after Robinson decided to check the glove of Anaheim's Brendan Donnelly. Scioscia then went to check the glove of Gary Majewski and just an ugly display was viewed. The Nats ended up winning the game, solidifying their first place spot in the NL East for the rest of the week.

Wednesday: Washington did it again to the Angels, only this time in a low scoring affair. Ryan Drese made his NL debut after being cut by the Rangers, pitching eight spectacular innings of two-hit ball. Florida got even with the Cubs, destroying them 15-5. Carlos Delgado extended his current hit streak to 11 games in the victory. As for the rest of baseball, Seattle briefly cooled off Philadelphia, former Tide/Met Marco Scutaro delivered the game-winning hit for Oakland vs. his former team, and Jason Giambi hit a walk-off home run in extra innings to defeat Pittsburgh.

Thursday: Jeremy Bonderman got his eighth win, helping Detroit complete a sweep of the NL West leading Padres. A few more sweeps took place, including the Yankees' over Pittsburgh. Randy Johnson got his seventh win of the year (2nd straight), ironically with John Flaherty behind the plate for him for the second time in six days. In the lone NL vs. NL game, Atlanta got two hits apiece from four different players in a 5-2 win over the Reds.

Cleveland Rocks: Rest of the AL Central does, too

The Tribe now have the Majors' longest active win streak at six, sitting only three games back of Minnesota for the American League wild card spot. That means if the Twins were to lose two of three to San Diego and the Indians swept Arizona this weekend, only one game would separate the two clubs we thought would contend for the division crown all the way up until the last week of the season (see MLB Season Preview).

As bad as their offense was for the first two months of the season, they are four games over .500 entering Friday's play. Catcher Victor J. Martinez was an absolute disappointment for through May and not until Wednesday night Aaron Boone had been the same. It was then [Wed.] that Boone hit a walk-off homer to send the home fans home happy. They have picked up the slack this month swinging the bats. Guys like Travis Hafner (.279, 8HR, 27RBI), Coco Crisp (.282) and Ronnie Belliard are hitting really well for them. One stands out above the rest, though and that's outfielder Grady Sizemore. Team leader in runs scored, total bases, triples, RBI and stolen bases, Sizemore has been as good as any AL leadoff guy outside of Seattle's Ichiro.

But the main reason this team has won eight of its last ten contests is the pitching. Cleveland, at the top in the AL in ERA (**now 1st at 3.52**), has been able to ground teams to three or fewer runs on an number of occasions. We've got to give credit where credit is due, and that means the bullpen. Their pen has been better than I thought it would be as Bob Wickman is tied for the American League lead in saves at 18. Can it keep it up? I've got my doubts for a few reasons, mainly the Twins relievers are clearly younger, more reliable, and throw faster stuff. In the rotation, you've got three pretty good ones and two suspect pitchers.

Despite a 2-4 record, Kevin Millwood, who picked up his 100th career victory Thursday night, has pitched well enough to win and definitely well enough to keep his team in ball games. Millwood has 51 strikeouts, only 17 walks, and an ERA of 2.95. Absolutely sterling. Absolutely not is the fact his average out is less than six innings. He might need to go deeper into ball games down the stretch. So far Cleveland's best starter has probably been the guy going today - 7-3 Cliff Lee. C.C. Sabathia has been slightly better than decent I'd say and is the Indians biggest and best power pitcher. Not so good pitcher through mid-June: Scott Elarton and Jake Westbrook, a duo that's a combined 6-11, each with ERA's over 4.75 and together have given up 17 homers.

STAT OF THE WEEK: Cleveland is 18-0 when they score six or more runs in a ball game this season.

As for the rest of the division, it's better than it was last year at least at this point. Since Buddy Bell took over, Kansas City has played considerably well. They not only swept the Yankees, but are now coming off a sweep of the LA Dodgers. The White Sox went 3-3 total vs. Arizona and San Diego, winning a big one Wednesday evening. At 43-22, Ozzie Guillen and company have the best record in the big's still and welcome in those Dodgers. Minnesota got pummeled last night as the Omar Vizquel-led Giants collected a 2005-best 18 base knocks. However, they remain my pick to win that division when the dust is cleared. Detroit's very much in the discussion if they can follow up a sweep with the Padres by winning at least two vs. San Francisco before heading on the road.



Indians left-handed reliever Arthur Rhodes, a former member of the Seattle Mariners, has been as close to flawless as you can be. He's 3-1 with an 0.99ERA and has struck out 25 while walking just four in 27 relief appearances.

Carl Everett:

On Tuesday, White Sox outfielder Carl Everett went 1-for-4 with a solo home run in a 10-4 loss to the Arizona Diamondbacks. That very same day his comments in *Maxim* magazine came out. They were very Everett-like if you know what I mean. If you don't, listen up, and hear what the born-again Christian who hasn't acted like one at times has to say.

Everett (.264, 9HR, 41RBI) fired off about Wrigley Field, homosexuals, war and steroids. To sum up everything he said, Everett dogged Wrigley, said we should be focusing more on the war than steroids, and doesn't believe in gays being gay. This coming from a guy that doesn't believe in dinosaurs or man ever walking on the moon. "Nobody ever saw a dinosaur. The bible doesn't say anything about them," said the then 29-year old Red Sox center fielder back in February of 2001. About man walking on the moon? "Were you on the moon with him? This also coming from a guy who once said, "I don't mind being the bad guy."

Really? We kind of thought you did there. Some advice: buddy, zip it because you're offending people (gays and baseball fans) and need to refrain from making these type of comments. Wait till your career is over, which may be shortly if your production drops off and your mouth doesn't. My opinion on these subjects? This isn't the place or

time for my thoughts on these matters. And to be perfectly honest, I don't think the public cares what he or me think on these type of issues. Everett's entitled to his own opinion. Question is does anybody want to hear it anymore?

HOT:

Marlins first baseman Carlos Delgado - As mentioned earlier, Delgado is on an 11-game hit streak going into Friday's road series with the Angels. A couple of preseason MVP choices in Delgado and Vlad Guerrero square off, but the real one's might be Garrett Anderson and Miguel Cabrera (or Dontrelle Willis).

Rangers second baseman Alfonso Soriano - Speaking of MVP candidates, the guy that was traded for Alex Rodriguez has been on a huge tear offensively, part of one of baseball's elite infields. Soriano is 7-19 with 3HR and 8RBI in his last seven.

Red Sox outfielder Manny Ramirez - Getting hot at the right time after hitting cold for about two-three weeks, Ramirez is starting to re-discover his rhythm at the plate. With three dingers and eight RBI over the past week, question now is can he become a better than average, or even decent, left fielder?

NOT:

Mets outfielder Carlos Beltran - Earlier this week (prior to Wednesday's action), Beltran had homered just once in his last 25 games. He got the bad streak on Thursday when he went deep for the first time in a non-Pedro Martinez start.

San Diego Padres - Losers of 11 of their last 14, the Padres carried nothing over from May, where they had the best record in all of baseball those four weeks. The culprit: Brian Giles, who's 1-19 since last Friday with not a single run batted in.

TRIVIA QUESTION OF THE WEEK:

Only three center fielders in Major League Baseball history have recorded two or more seasons of 140+ RBI. Ken Griffey Jr. is the only active player on the list. Can you name the other two, both of whom are not active?

Last Week's Answer: Angels relievers Scott Shields

Our Top Ten Hitters/Players of All-Time:

Joe DiMaggio - His marriage to movie actress Marilyn Monroe made him a celebrity off the baseball diamond. Some say no player had more charisma and charm. And one once told me he's the greatest Yankee ever, quite a statement to say the least. Yes, we're talking about three-time AL MVP Joe DiMaggio. Most famous for his unprecedented baseball best 56-game hitting streak in 1941, many don't know that in addition to making ten World Series trips, DiMaggio had a 61-game consecutive hits streak in 1933 (three years prior to joining the Bronx Bombers) with the Pacific Coast League's San Francisco Seals.

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