

**MLB Weekly --- Friday, August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2005**  
**BY MATTHEW HATFIELD**

**Palmeiro's Black Eye On Baseball:**

**W**ith exciting pennant races and wild card chases on the horizon, baseball did not miss this latest chapter in the never ending steroid saga. Four and a half months after looking United States congressman straight in the eye, telling them he's never used 'roids, O's first baseman Rafael Palmeiro has been the talk of Major League Baseball this week. It's not for an achievement on the fielder either, but rather a bad mark off the diamond. Just 17 days following his 3000<sup>th</sup> hit, Palmeiro was suspended ten games for testing positive for steroids. The sad thing about all this from my point of view is that Palmeiro's credibility can never be restored no matter what he does from here on out. On the season he's batting a very .280 with 18 home runs and 59RBI's. But does it mean that much anymore? It's been a terrible past couple of weeks for the Baltimore first baseman and the Orioles team in general.

We all could see the slide coming with both Boston and the Yankees charging hard after the first place O's early on in the year. The team has gone 9-20 since the start of July and are currently in a 2-14 slump. Injuries to the top young pitchers in the rotation, a couple of dings to the bats, and a few questionable moves here and there have them now sitting behind the third place Blue Jays in the division. Sammy Sosa was the prized off-season acquisition and up until yesterday's victory over the Angels, Sosa had done very little. Staying pat at the deadline may have been a mistake, then again, something else was soon to come and it did. In addition to finding out about Palmeiro's failed drug test on Monday, Manager Lee Mazzilli was fired on Thursday. Is Mazzilli's permanent sabbatical related back to Raffy in any way, shape or form? Doubt it because even though he isn't solely the one to blame for the team's downfall, he did incorrectly use reliever B.J. Ryan in my opinion. Ryan got off to a nice start, but he's blown five saves out of 28 tries. Not bad, though a couple of them have come at wrong times like the one vs. David Ortiz and Boston last month. I certainly believe that Ryan (1-3 2.98ERA, 73-17K/BB ratio) should be used as a setup guy. An occasional save is fine. Where they need him is in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> innings. **From July 27<sup>th</sup> to August 2<sup>nd</sup>, Baltimore allowed 16 runs during those two innings, resulting in seven consecutive defeats.**

**What We Knew: That the Orioles pitching staff was not that great to begin with, but looked impressive early on thanks to guys like Erik Bedard and Daniel Cabrera.**

**What We Didn't Know: That Brian Roberts would get off to such an incredible start and then find himself slumping a bit here in the post All-Star break portion of the season. Also, that MVP candidate Miguel Tejada would cool off with him.**

One of the main questions people are asking this week is does this guy deserve to be in the Hall-of-Fame? Prior to Monday I would've said his numbers were worthy of

going into Cooperstown. At the same time I would've said that he was by no means a lock or his case was an open and shut one. If you really crunch the numbers (and we won't do so here) you will stumble upon the fact that he never hit 40+ dingers until the age of 34. Before reaching that age he was a pretty good, reliable hitter. Never has he been the best hitter in the American League or second best one. For someone like Barry Bonds, Mark McGwire or Sosa, I believe they could get in despite whatever steroid cloud hangs over their head. In Raffy's case, unless he has a fabulous finish to his career it's still up in the air. It was before and it still very much is now.

There's probably more to come as far as steroids and Major League Baseball are concerned. Many have forgotten that another guy tested positive and that's Seattle Mariners pitcher Ryan Franklin. When you really think about it - the effect on players not as established isn't as detrimental provided their team doesn't cut them. Other than that, it's a chance many minor leaguers and guys looking to take that next step are willing to take. For your big name guys it can diminish everything they've done and go on to do from here on out. In the end, what it all says to me is that maybe there's more truth to Jose Canseco's book than the public and media initially thought.

#### **Trading Deadline Recap:**

Very little movement last week during the trade deadline countdown. Alfonso Soriano stayed put. Other hot AL names like Manny Ramirez, Aubrey Huff and Danys Baez did also. Florida's A.J. Burnett stayed put, too. So what did happen? The best moves were the one's that didn't happen, but of the one's that did I have to say San Francisco picking up Randy Winn was a solid addition.

There's no guarantee that Winn will be a member of the Giants next year, though if he is it will be a great help to an outfield that already includes aging guys like Barry Bonds, Moises Alou (.323Avg. 13HR 43RBI) Michael Tucker and Marquis Grissom. Pedro Feliz can now play the infield more often and rising power hitter Jason Ellison can man the left field spot if Bonds doesn't return (i.e. when he's gone). Winn has the ability to play in left, center or right. His fielding has been so solid at times that the Yankees seriously considered bringing him in as did other teams. At 46-61 the Giants are amazingly only 6.5 games out of first. It's still attainable

**What does San Fran need to make a run next year? Speed. Omar Vizquel has stolen 19 bases for them and done it in his 17<sup>th</sup> season at the big league level. Ellison has 12 to rank second on the team. Nobody else has double digit bags stolen so in the off-season they may want to look at someone who can offer up speed for fielding and aggressive base running assistance. Winn will give them a bonus in those two departments.**

Seattle made some moves. Jamie Moyer is still a Mariner, Joel Piñeiro (3-7 6.06ERA) too and even steady everyday Eddie Guardado remained in Seattle when the deadline clock struck. What they did do is deal left hander Ron Villone to Florida, release starter Aaron Sele and move Winn to San Fran for prospects. Right now the M's are hoping that some of the young pitchers in their organization pan out sooner or later.

Offensively, you cannot fault this team but so much. Richie Sexson has 26 homers so far, Ichiro is the best leadoff spark you can find, and Raul Ibanez has hit for power with a .299 batting average. **Third baseman Adrian Beltre is the key the rest of the way out and on into 2006.** Beltre has hit just .257 on the year and has only 14 homers following up his career year with the Dodgers in 2004.

Arizona has gotten back in the NL West playoff chase and to help them out will be left handed reliever Buddy Groom. It was a given that Groom would not be welcomed back by the Yankees due to the comments he made about NY Manager Joe Torre. Groom should fit in all right in the desert as he sets things up for Jose Valverde and Brian Bruney. Florida ought to like their lefty pickup of Villone, who got the M's out of a number of jams. He'll try doing likewise for the Marlins to get Guillermo Mota on the rubber. A team that has enough starting pitching, but could've used another quality reliever is the White Sox. They were able to pry away Padres third baseman/utility man Geoff Blum from San Diego. Blum will be a serviceable guy to push Joe Crede at third and fill out Chicago's bench.

The Diamondbacks did acquire a reliever, but had to give up an outfielder in Jose Cruz Jr. to Boston. The Red Sox were hoping for some help in their bullpen. A deal for Guardado fell thru and for now they will have to keep using Curt Schilling and co. until Keith Foulke comes back 100%. Two more outfielders were on the move in Jody Gerut and Matt Lawton. Dusty Baker's Cubs are elated to see Nomar Garciaparra and Kerry Wood - about to take on a new role in the pen - returning from the DL. Chicago's NL team made a move to get Jody Gerut from Cleveland in exchange for Jason Dubois and that deal enabled them to make a play for Matt Lawton of Pittsburgh. A one time Twin, Met and Indian, Lawton will be the leadoff guy and steady outfield contributor they hoped to have with Corey Patterson. **That move is 1B with the 1A deal of Winn.**

### **What Happened Thursday?**

\*\*\* Hitting just .217 since his 41-dinger Home Run Derby party, Phillies outfielder Bobby Abreu took a step in the right direction towards getting back to his May form on Thursday. Abreu's grand slam took care of Mark Prior and the Cubs in an important win for Philadelphia. Another clear sign that Prior pitches much better at night than in the daytime.

\*\*\* The two teams fighting it out for supremacy (or should we say mediocrity bragging rights) in the National League West won yesterday. San Diego got the nod over Pittsburgh as Brian Lawrence beat his brother-in-law Mark Redman. It marked the first time that the two opposed on another on the mound. In Arizona the Diamondbacks put a stop sign in front of the Astros parade. Pitcher Brad Halsey got his eighth win of the season thanks to the home run help of teammates Tony Clark, Troy Glaus and Shawn Green. Arizona stays just a game back of the 53-55 Padres for the division lead.

\*\*\* Milwaukee is only .5 game back of the Cubs for third in the NL Central and would actually be winning that National League West if they were in that division. They faced a currently .500 Mets club and battled back greatly from an early 6-3 deficit.

Outfielder Geoff Jenkins went 5-for-5 and led a hot Brew crew lineup vs. a Mets bullpen that had a blowup. A five-run ninth inning and 21 hits in all gave Ned Yost's team the win, 12-9. Derrick Turnbow got save #23 of the '05 campaign.

\*\*\* Did the Fish and Jays make proud statements against the NL and AL's best? Despite losing back-to-back following a 6-5 win on Monday, Florida re-grouped to win a 4-3 close on at St. Louis. The Marlins salvaged a split in the series and should give much of the credit to starter A.J. Burnett. Burnett's string of 21.1 consecutive innings without allowing a run ended, but he got win #9 on the year and allowed just three runs vs. the National League's top dog. Meanwhile, the White Sox, who have the best record in all of baseball, avoided a three-game sweep at the hands of Toronto, winning 5-4. The Roy Halladay-less Blue Jays are 11-8 since the break and have two important home series vs. the Yankees and Tigers. After that comes a brutal 13-game road trip.

#### **Other Stuff Worth Chatting About:**

Entering Wednesday, the Nationals had lost their **last 11 one-run games**. Washington might be back on the right track as they didn't need to pull out a close one vs. the Dodgers on Thursday, pitching a 7-0 shutout..... While we're on the subject of the NL East it comes to my attention that the Phillies – who play in a hitters friendly park – are soon to be descending, whereas as division foe Florida should be ascending. What leads me to this conclusion? Charlie Manuel's Philly team has 14 road games the rest of August, most of which come far away from their home (i.e. it is a west coast swing). Of the Marlins last 22 games this month, 16 of them are at home..... The Fish face Cincinnati starting tonight, a team that could be playoff bound in 2006. Cincy held onto outfielders Willy Mo Peña, Austin Kearns, Adam Dunn and Ken Griffey Jr. With slow improvement from the infield and starters like Aaron Harang and Brandon Claussen really showing they may soon be turning over a new leaf, this team has pesky written all over it till season's end..... Boston's Manny Ramirez (just being Manny) has been the talk of the town. On Wednesday night he collided with shortstop Edgar Renteria. Ramirez recently became the first player this season to reach the 100RBI plateau. And they wanted to trade this goofball?

#### **HOT:**

**Yankees 1B/DH Jason Giambi:** Giambi has been a dynamic force in the New York batting order as of late. The former Oakland Athletic that was an MVP recipient hasn't quite returned to that form. Still, if you're Joe Torre you've got to love the production he's been giving the past month. The Giambino has 16 homers from July 4<sup>th</sup> through August 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Astros closer Brad Lidge:** Pettitte, Clemens and Oswalt get all the attention in the rotation as Houston still sits atop of the NL wild card race. However, they wouldn't be doing as well as they are without Lidge. He has nine saves over the past month and the last time he blew a save - June 11<sup>th</sup> - Lidge was labeled with the W.

**Boston Red Sox bats:** Boston enters its three game road series with the Twins on an eight game winning streak. The Sox, who are averaging 7.12 runs per game during this streak, currently hold a 4.5 game lead on the Yankees in the American League East.



Ever since 2004 AL Rookie of the Year Bobby Crosby has come off the DL, Oakland has been playing the best baseball around. They're just fourth team ever to win 33+ in a 40 game stretch. (AP)

**NOT:**

**Kansas City Royals:** Does it come as a surprise that the Royals are once again the worst team in baseball, boasting a current seven game losing skid? Tonight they throw out 3-13 Zach Greinke on the hill to face a red hot Oakland baseball team. Don't expect above average run support for him either as Mike Sweeney is the only everyday guy on the team with a BA over .300.

**Orioles versatile hitter Melvin Mora:** A perennial since the dawning of the new millennium, Mora has been in a slump over the past week and a half. He's hitting an abysmal .083 since last Friday and the play of usually superb middle infielders Brian Roberts and Miguel Tejada hasn't helped.



**Terrible Twosome:** Usually it's in a good way, but Vladimir Guerrero and Garrett Anderson might have strong finishes in store to counter a sluggish July. Any minute now the Angels outfielders Garrett Anderson and going to erupt. (AP)

**TRIVIA QUESTION OF THE WEEK:**

Ryne Sandberg and Wade Boggs were inducted into baseball's Hall-of-Fame this past weekend. Name me the four Hall-of-Fame teammates of each one.

**Hint:** one man played with both of them during his baseball career

*Last Week's Answer: Nebraska*

**OUR TOP TEN PITCHERS OF ALL-TIME: (no order)**

Bob Feller & Bob Gibson - You simply can't go wrong with these two Bob's. 'Rapid' Robert William Andrew Feller struck out 15 guys in his first ever Major League start. This fastball throwing right-hander totaled 266 wins and nearly 2600 K's during his 18-year career as a member of the Cleveland Indians. Feller allowed one hit or fewer 15 times in his career and led the Tribe to a World Series appearance in 1948. Speaking of Championships, when it was that times of the year nobody pitched better than Bob Gibson, a two-time World Series MVP. His 1.12ERA in 1968 was the lowest in 54 years for the Cardinals right-hander that won over 20 games five different times in his 17-year career. Gibson also was an athletic pitcher that went from playing basketball with Creighton to becoming a Harlem Globetrotter.

*Already on the List: Walter Johnson, Cy Young, Roger Clemens & Sandy Koufax*