

MLB Baseball Weekly --- Tuesday, April 24th, 2007

BY MATTHEW HATFIELD

In this condensed version of *MLB Weekly*, we hit you with our first 'Power Rankings' of this 2006 baseball season. Starting next week we'll move back to our traditional date for this column of Friday. Here's the much anticipated Top Ten...

Hatfield Sports Top Ten Rankings: 4-24-07:



1. Boston Red Sox - Coming off a much-needed sweep of the Yankees to give them a confidence boost, Boston might have everything needed to win it all. Three solid SP's in Curt Schilling, Josh Beckett and Daisuke Matsuzaka, and offensively they remain dangerous with David 'Big Papi' Ortiz and Manny Ramirez in the middle of the lineup.



2. New York Mets - The big question mark coming into the season about the Mets was their starting pitching. It hasn't held them back yet, and with an offense unmatched by anyone else in the National League, it gives them a great shot in October.



3. Minnesota Twins - You know where you're getting with Ron Gardenhire's club: hustle, quality pitching and timely hitting for contact. All that adds up to a recipe that'll win you a whole bunch of games, which has been the case here for a few years now.



4. Atlanta Braves - After watching their string of winning 14 consecutive NL East division titles come to an end last season, the Braves have renewed energy in 2007. A healthy and effective Tim Hudson (3-0 with an 0.62ERA) is a major reason why.



5. Detroit Tigers - Even without Kenny Rogers and Gary Sheffield struggling, the Tigers are showing 2006 wasn't a fluke as their young arms and no-nonsense Manager Jim Leyland will keep them competitive



6. Los Angeles Dodgers - Veterans Luis Gonzalez, Jeff Kent and Nomar Garciaparra are all batting over .300, which is a good sign early on this season for the Dodgers. What remains to be seen is whether or not this aging team stays healthy.



7. Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim - Once relief arms Scott Shields and Francisco Rodriguez get back on track, look for the Angels to get on a hot streak and make some noise in the AL West division.



8. Milwaukee Brewers - Some experts had this team as the trendy surprise pick to unseat the defending World Series Champion St. Louis Cardinals atop the NL Central. So far, so good as they have the biggest division lead of anyone in baseball.



9. Cleveland Indians - As long as Grady Sizemore and Travis Hafner are hitting at a high level, the Tribe seem poised to be in the AL Central hunt all year long - even with a shaky bullpen.



10. New York Yankees - When the Yankees can get a starting pitcher other than Andy Pettitte to go further than five innings, then they might be able to make a charge in the AL East.

Keep An Eye On: San Francisco Giants - Have won 5 in a row.



Dmitri Young and the Washington Nationals honored victims of the shooting tragedy in Blacksburg last week by wearing Virginia Tech hats. (Photo Courtesy of Kevin Wolf/Associated Press)

HOT:

Yankees 3B Alex Rodriguez - He's not hot; he's 'ON FIRE'. With Major League highs of 14 homers – tying St. Louis' Albert Pujols (2006) for the most in April – and 34 RBI, A-Rod is playing better than ever before. And if he continues to swing the bat like this, all kinds of records could be shattered.

Indians DH Travis Hafner - For the year Hafner is batting .390 with four homers, 13RBI and 11 runs, plus pitchers are starting to respect him so much that he has more walks (14) than strikeouts (12).

Brewers infielder J.J. Hardy - Playing very well as he's 9-for-26 with five homers and 10RBI over the past week. Milwaukee is in first place in the NL Central and Hardy is doing his part to help.

Rockies outfielder Matt Holliday - While Colorado sits in the bottom of the NL West, it's not because of Holiday by any means. His .400 batting averages leads the league and he's putting them in position score runs with six doubles and 11RBI.

NOT:

Mets 3B David Wright - After putting together a team record 26-game hitting streak (continued over two seasons), Wright finds himself in a mini slump. The All-Star hasn't had an extra base hit since April 12th and is 0-for-14 in his last four games. Also, his strikeout total (20) is more than double his walk total (9).

Orioles outfielder Jay Gibbons - On the season he's batting .220 without a homer. In his past four contests he has gone 0-for-12. But it hasn't affected his team too much as they are 3-1 in those games.

Marlins reliever Jorge Julio - Over his last 5.2 innings, Julio has struggled mightily to say the least. In that span Julio has allowed 12 earned runs and is at the forefront of Florida's bullpen problems.

Tigers outfielder Gary Sheffield - He's 9-for-63 with one homer and is on the bench.

DID YOU KNOW???

Baltimore Orioles shortstop Miguel Tejada is playing his 1110th consecutive game on Tuesday, putting him three games shy of Joe Sewell for sixth place all-time. To reach the franchise record, Tejada will have to play in 1522 more straight games to tie Cal Ripken Jr. – who played in a Major League record 2632 consecutive contests over a 16-year span from 1982-98.

TRIVIA QUESTION OF THE WEEK:

Earlier this season, one team in Major League Baseball became the first ever to not score in the first three innings in each of their first ten games. Can you name that team?

Last Week's Answer: Roger Craig and Alvin Dark