

**MLB Baseball Weekly --- Friday, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2007**  
**BY MATTHEW HATFIELD**

**I**nterleague action gets underway today, pinning National League teams versus the American League's squads for an 11<sup>th</sup> season during the regular season. Since it started back in 1997, plenty of intriguing matchups and memorable moments have come from the contests. One of the most attractive Interleague matchups include the New York Yankees against the New York Mets in the 'Subway Series.' Speaking of the Mets, they displayed some resiliency on Thursday afternoon at home against the Chicago Cubs, rallying from a 5-1 deficit to score five runs in the ninth inning and come away with a 6-5 victory. While the Mets now have the best record in the NL at 26-14 overall, the Yanks are 18-21 and 9.5 games of the Boston Red Sox in the AL East. With Roger Clemens' return on the horizon, Joe Torre's club could certainly use a dramatic win or two in this upcoming series to cut into that division lead. We'll start there with the series breakdowns.....

**Series Breakdowns:**

**Yankees @ Mets** - At this point in the season if someone told you the Mets would be in first place in the NL East and hold the league's best record with Pedro Martinez, Orlando Hernandez and Moises Alou all on the disabled list, few would've believed that to be true. But it is as is the fact that the Bronx Bombers are 2-16 when trailing after six innings of play. Also a little on the banged up side, the Yankees need to get it going before it's too late. The only two players that have consistently hit well for the Yankees in the past three weeks are shortstop Derek Jeter and catcher Jorge Posada. Both are hitting over .400 during this 12-game hitting streak for each. For the Mets, they seem to be getting contributions from everyone on board. Shortstop Joe Reyes, a legit NL MVP candidate ever since the season started, shares the league lead in base hits and also is tops in triples (7) as well as stolen bases (23). Guys that got off to slow starts, like David Wright and Carlos Delgado for example, are beginning to hit their stride. Manager Willie Randolph, whose daughter graduates from Fordham University on Saturday morning, couldn't be happier with his starting rotation either as the team has allowed the fewest number of runs in the NL. Three players have given Randolph's club an unexpected lift. Damion Easley (6HR in 64AB's) has been a major surprise for the Mets with his power, unknown reliever Joe Smith ranks at the top of the charts among NL rookies in appearances with 20, and Jorge Sosa through three starts is pitching well, particularly with his off-speed stuff. New York throws Andy Pettitte out in the opener of this series Friday night, so that's a good start to attack their city rival with the veteran. After all, the Yankees have made history with the youth they've sent out to the mound. By having four starting pitchers make their ML debut with the season's first 30 games – Matt DeSalvo, Kei Igawa, Phil Hughes and Chase Wright – they became the first team to have that many pitchers make their Major League debut that early in the season in the sport's history dating back to 1900. Only the St. Louis Cardinals back in 1955 had three pitchers make their ML debut within the season's first 30 games. **Pick: Yankees nab 2 of 3.**

**White Sox @ Cubs** - The White Sox have won two of three from the Cubs in each of the last two seasons. That being said, Ozzie Guillen's lineup hasn't exactly produced to the level they are capable of just yet. Their team batting average is the lowest in the American League and they go up against a Cubs team that'll throw out southpaw Ted Lilly in the series opener followed by Jason Marquis (5-1, 2.22ERA) and Carlos Zambrano. Guillen and co. will trot out lefty Mark Buehrle, who earlier in the season threw a no-hitter, in the series' opener on Friday afternoon. Playing at home at Wrigley Field, look for Manager Lou Piniella of the Cubs to get his team fired up after blowing a four-run lead in the ninth to the Mets on Thursday. His Chicago bunch is tied with Detroit for the ML lead in doubles, which means if the Sox' pitchers leave some over the plate then Derrek Lee (a .370 hitter in IL play) and Aramis Ramirez will make them pay. As long as their bullpen doesn't collapse to the likes of Jermaine Dye (8HR), Jim Thome and the struggling Paul Konerko (.190BA, 27 hits and 33K), then they should have a great chance to win at least two. **Pick: Cubs win 2 of 3.**

**Giants @ Athletics** - Highlighting this series is the fact that Barry Zito, a former ace for the Athletics, tows the rubber for the Giants in Oakland. The buzz surrounding San Fran usually centers around Barry Bonds, especially since he's inching ever so closely to the Home Run record held by Hank Aaron. But another player generating attention is 22-year-old pitcher Tim Linceum, who's coming off a seven-inning performance where he fanned ten batters and didn't allow a single run. More gems like that from him and Bruce Bochy's team may be thinking playoffs. For Oakland, the Angels are currently standing in their way, however, if a couple hitters emerge and they finally get healthy then they can possibly push them. The only team in the American League that has given up a few number of runs than the A's is Boston. Top three starters Joe Blanton (4-1, 3.32ERA), Rich Harden (1.42ERA) and Dan Haren (3-2, 1.64ERA) give them a rotation that matches the best of them in baseball. So the pitching is there, but the offense is another story as only the Mariners and Royals have scored fewer runs among teams in the AL. One person who has stepped up offensively for the A's is Jack Cust, who has seven homers and 15RBI in less than 40 at-bats. He's been a minor leaguer for much of his career, though and expecting him to keep it up might be asking a little too much. **Pick: Giants fall in opener, but take next pair.**

**Dodgers @ Angels** - Known as the 'Freeway Series' the Angels and Dodgers meet in a matchup of first place LA teams. Although it probably seems unlikely to most that it'll happen, this could be a preview of the World Series. Despite a losing record on the road (10-12), the Halos have a three-game lead over the rest of the AL West and must feel good about themselves for a couple of reasons. One, they haven't gotten much of a contribution from speedster/catalyst Chone Figgins, who's batting a paltry .121 with three times as many strikeouts (9) as bases stolen. On the plus side, starting pitcher Bartolo Colon is well ahead of schedule with a 5-0 record, ERA under 3.70 and respectable 26-7K/BB ratio in 39 innings of work. And of course, Vlad Guerrero is tearing the cover off the baseball as usual with division highs in homers (10), RBI (36) and batting average (.351). The pitching matchup to watch of the series comes on Friday night when Dodgers ace Brad Penny, who's 5-0 with an NL-low 1.39ERA, opposes

Ervin Santana of the Anaheim. If the Dodgers can keep the Angels from playing their 'small ball' and running aggressively on the base pads to get a lead and setup Francisco Rodriguez in the ninth, then they should be in good shape. It's doubtful they beat them more than once, though. LA's bats – meaning the Dodgers – have a tendency to go cold at times and I can see this being one of those times. **Pick: We'll call for the surprise sweep by the Angels.**

**Cardinals @ Tigers** - A re-match of last October's World Series, the Tigers are in much better shape to return to the Fall Classic than St. Louis is at this present time. Before dropping a Thursday doubleheader to the Red Sox and three of four in Boston, Jim Leyland's club was playing about as well as they have since the early stages of last season. Detroit began the month of May 9-1. Conversely, Tony La Russa's Red Birds couldn't have envisioned a worse month of April. While the reigning AL Champs got it going towards the end of April heading into May, the defending World Champs are still searching for that hot streak. They began the season being swept by the Mets and outscored 20-2. It didn't stop there as the Cardinals finished the month losing nine of their final 13 games. Plus the team had the tragic death of relief pitcher Josh Hancock to deal with, making it one of the most difficult months in franchise history. Other than Albert Pujols and Chris Duncan, a combo that has combined for 13 blasts out of the park, there's clearly a power outage in St. Louis. The next closest guy in the home run department on the team is third baseman Scott Rolen with two and he's hitting just .215. The key question for this series will be can the Cards solve Detroit's nasty bullpen, even with Joel Zumaya not in the fold? Unless something drastically changes offensively, which we don't foresee anytime soon, the answer is no. **Pick: Tigers sweep Cards, send St. Louis really reeling.**

**Braves @ Red Sox** - Rolling with a 28-12 record, the Boston Red Sox hold baseball's best record and a big part surprisingly has been their pitching more so than the team's traditionally strong hitting. Boston has the best ERA in the AL and starters Josh Beckett (7 wins), Curt Schilling, Daisuke Matsuzaka and Tim Lincecum make up arguably the most effective rotation they've had in quite a while. The bullpen is more than solid, too. Since he gave up a home run early in the season to Kansas City's John Buck, Hideki Okajima has been lights out in the pen. Going by his sick 0.44ERA, he's the perfect complement to closer Jonathan Papelbon (46/53 on saves since 2006 and an ERA under 1.25). One guy looking to seek revenge on the Bo Sox is Braves shortstop Edgar Renteria, who the team parted ways with after the 2005 campaign. Renteria's .331 batting average qualifies as easily the squad's highest and some will tell you he's the most feared hitter in the Atlanta lineup other than the Joneses – Chipper and Andruw. That tandem is off to a great start, combining for 55RBI, 24 doubles and 17 dingers. Youngsters such as Kelly Johnson, Jeff Francoeur and catcher Brian McCann – all of whom are hitting over .275 with plenty of extra base knocks – may determine how well they do offensively in this series and the rest of the season. Bobby Cox also knows a big reason for their success has been the team's revamped bullpen with Rafael Soriano (formerly of Seattle) and ex-Pirates closer Mike Gonzalez filling key roles. Those guys will be important when it comes to pitching to David Ortiz and Manny Ramirez late in the game. Not to mention, starter John Smoltz hurt his pinky on Monday night against

the Washington Nationals and they're not sure what he will be able to give them or how far he will be able to go into the game over his next few starts. **Pick: Boston takes 2 of 3.**



**Tony La Russa and the Cardinals took four out of five against the Tigers in the World Series. Now they're aiming to win this weekend's series in Detroit to get back in the right direction.** (Photo Courtesy of Al Bello/Getty Images)

#### **STAT OF THE WEEK:**

**Since 2005, the Seattle Mariners have had 13 players in their organization test positive for a banned substance.**

#### **HOT:**

**Padres pitcher Jake Peavy - Want to know why San Diego has made the playoffs each of the past two years and can make it three in a row? Closer Trevor Hoffman. Seriously, besides him, Peavy has been a big part and he currently maintains the NL's second lowest ERA (1.64) while leading the bigs in K's with 71.**

**Brewers closer Francisco Cordero - He's a perfect 16 for 16 on save opportunities and has a microscopic 0.50ERA. 'Nuff said.**

**Astros outfielder Hunter Pence - Not a single player has a higher batting average on Houston than Pence. Not Lance Berkman, Carlos Lee or even the ageless Craig Biggio. Pence (.348BA) is red hot, having gone 12-for-18 since May 12<sup>th</sup>.**

#### **NOT:**

**Indians pitcher Jeremy Sowers - Although the Tribe sit atop the AL Central, the club may be souring on Sowers. The Vanderbilt product is 0-3 with a 6.56ERA and has allowed 12 runs in his last 14 innings of work with only 2K's and four walks.**

**Brewers outfielder Kevin Mench - Referred to by his teammates as 'The Mighty Peking Man,' Mench has been anything but mighty swinging the bat lately. Given \$3.4 million to play in Milwaukee for one season, Mench (hitless since May 8) must turn it around or else he could find himself on the bench... and not temporarily.**

**Yankees first baseman Jason Giambi - He's 1-for-24 in his last 24 at-bats and his terrible slump also comes with his comments, speaking out about baseball and steroids to the *USA Today*.**

**TRIVIA QUESTION OF THE WEEK:**

**With Interleague play starting up this weekend, it seems appropriate to ask which two teams shared the best record vs. the opposing league at 16-2?**

*Last Week's Answer: Ferguson Jenkins & Don Sutton*