

MLB Baseball Weekly --- Friday, June 13th, 2008
BY MATTHEW HATFIELD

There was plenty that stood out this week in Major League Baseball. The team with the top record in the sport, the Chicago Cubs, suffered a major blow when they learned that outfielder Alfonso Soriano will be out 4-6 weeks with a broken left hand. Chicago has played on without Soriano before, but hanging on to their narrow division lead over the St. Louis Cardinals in the NL Central won't be an easy task while he's gone.

Needing a good showing at home against the Arizona Diamondbacks, the New York Mets didn't help Willie Randolph's job security, especially closer Billy Wagner. Wagner blew a save over the weekend vs. the San Diego Padres when ex-Diamondbacks hitter Tony Clark took him deep. On Tuesday, the D-Backs trailed 5-1 before scoring eight unanswered runs to win by a count of 9-5. Stephen Drew and Conor Jackson each cranked out home runs in the ninth inning. Amazingly, in 20 of Arizona's first 41 games they had at least ten hits. This was only the second time since May 15th they got 10 or more hits in a game. Although Mark Reynolds' three-run homer with two outs in the ninth inning wasn't enough to beat the Mets in extra innings on Wednesday, Arizona closed out 21-19 all-time at Shea Stadium when they rallied from four runs down to beat New York on Thursday as Wagner blew another save.

In the American League, the Chicago White Sox have been the hot team as of late. At one point they had 10 hits or more in eight consecutive games. The Yankees are beginning to play better, including on Thursday night when they got a grand slam from Hideki Matsui and a strong starting pitching performance from Andy Pettitte to outlast the Oakland Athletics, who continue to trail the Angels in the AL West.

This week's edition of *MLB Weekly* focuses on the All-Star game that will be held at Yankee Stadium in July. I'll make my picks for the starting position players in both the NL and AL this week, and then next week pick the pitchers for each league.....

AMERICAN LEAGUE:



Catcher – A.J. Pierzynski – Chicago White Sox



First Base – Justin Morneau – Minnesota Twins



Second Base – Dustin Pedroia – Boston Red Sox



Shortstop – Derek Jeter – New York Yankees



Third Base – Alex Rodriguez – New York Yankees



Designated Hitter – David Ortiz – Boston Red Sox



Outfield – Manny Ramirez – Boston Red Sox



Outfield – Ichiro Suzuki – Seattle Mariners



Outfield – Josh Hamilton – Texas Rangers

NATIONAL LEAGUE:



Catcher – Bengie Molina – San Francisco Giants



First Base – Lance Berkman – Houston Astros



Second Base – Chase Utley – Philadelphia Phillies



Shortstop – Hanley Ramirez – Florida Marlins



Third Base – Chipper Jones – Atlanta Braves



Outfield – Alfonso Soriano – Chicago Cubs



Outfield – Nate McLouth – Pittsburgh Pirates



Outfield – Ryan Braun – Milwaukee Brewers



Reds outfielder Ken Griffey Jr. recently joined the 600 home run club, but could be on the trading block as well. A team that can use a little more offense trying to make a playoff push, like Tampa Bay for example, would love to have him. (Associated Press Photo)

HOT:

Royals outfielder Jose Guillen - Anyone looking for a right-handed bat that can play in the outfield and help them out ought to consider Guillen. In his last six games, Guillen is 14-for-25 with four home runs and 12RBI.

Diamondbacks third baseman Mark Reynolds - Over the past five games, Reynolds has hit four home runs, including a game-tying three-run blast in a loss to the Mets on Wednesday. For the season he has 15 homers, 20 doubles and 45RBI.

Yankees outfielder Johnny Damon - Raising his batting average from .250 in the middle of May to .320 going into Friday night, Damon has gotten red hot lately, going 6-for-6 last Saturday against Kansas City and 39-for-87 since May 21.

NOT:

Mets closer Billy Wagner - Twice in three days, Wagner blew a save in the ninth inning against the D-Backs. Had he not, the Mets would've swept Arizona. Instead, Wagner has blown three straight saves and the Mets are 31-34 rather than 34-31.

Minnesota Twins - Ron Gardenhire's team has lost eight of its last ten to fall 5.5 games behind the first place White Sox in the AL Central. Minnesota's pitching has failed them lately as they've allowed the third most runs in Major League Baseball.

Braves bullpen - Injuries have devastated the Braves in the month of June, and on Thursday, their bullpen coughed up a win to the Cubs to lose their sixth straight game. Atlanta hasn't won a one-run game on the road in ten months.

STAT OF THE WEEK:

New York Mets third baseman David Wright is the only player in all of Major League Baseball to play in every inning and every game for his team in 2008.

TRIVIA QUESTION OF THE WEEK:

Name the last member of the Cincinnati Reds to win the National League Rookie of the Year award?

Last Week's Answer: Alex Rodriguez