

**MLB Baseball Weekly --- Friday, June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2006**  
**BY MATTHEW HATFIELD**

**I**nterleague play is back. A total of 14 series' between American League and National League teams kick off Friday. Plenty of intriguing, different matchups too. In fact, there pitching matchups stand out to me for Friday. Minnesota's Francisco Liriano, with a 5-1 record, takes on Pittsburgh's Ian Snell (7-3). Both aren't well known to the common baseball, but each has shown they are gifted on the mound. Another good battle will come between a pair of sub-.500 teams that had playoff expectations before the season started: Cleveland and Milwaukee. C.C. Sabathia and Chris Capuano will go head-to-head. Aces for those staffs? Possibly. Then in Texas it'll be a couple of teams that have dropped out of first place, passed by California teams. Arizona will throw out 8-1 Brandon Webb, the Majors' ERA leader, versus 7-3 Kevin Millwood of the Rangers...



**Yankees Manager Joe Torre and his New York team sits in first place in the AL East before their trip to Washington to take on the Nationals. It'll be the first time the Yanks have gone to Washington since 1971.**

**Kendrick: Put A Sock In It**

Arizona general managing partner Ken Kendrick is just plain foolish. There, I said it – loud and clear. Kendrick was dead wrong to even bring up outfielder Louis Gonzalez' name, saying he's heard "whispers," in the past about Gonzo and performance enhancing substances. Come on? Are you serious? Why would you say a thing like that now? It just doesn't make sense.

Sure, it's easy to speculate about Gonzalez. In 2001, the same year he had the game-winning RBI off New York closer Mariano Rivera in Gm. 7 of the World Series, Gonzo blasted a personal-best 57 home runs. Exclude that year and he's never had more than 31 dingers in a single season. My problem with the whole thing is you don't bring it up... period. The timing of his comment was especially bad, not even two full weeks after the Jason Grimsley story. That 7-3 road Arizona had, vaguely remember? Where the three losses were all by one run apiece? It's long gone.

The Diamondbacks are in a horrible slump, losers of nine of their last ten and falling behind early and often in some of these games. Out-scored right out of the gate against the Mets, who got excellent pitching outings from Alay Soler and Orlando

Hernandez. Put one and one together and you see the D-Backs are 1-8 in their last nine games post Grimsley. Now another distraction? It certainly isn't a plus for Gonzo swinging the stick and it's not the type of positive energy you put out there – plain and simple. Next time Kendrick..... you should think harder before speaking.

### **Fish & Twins Won't Call It A Season Without A Fight:**

Both the Minnesota Twins and Florida Marlins aren't what they used to be. Low-spending franchises with multiple World Series Championships in the last twenty years, neither the Twins nor the Marlins look like playoff contenders for 2006. Heck, when one glances at Minnesota's 31-34 record and Florida's 26-37 mark – the thought process might be they'll call it a season before the All-Star break. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Under first-year Manager Joe Girardi, the fish have posted the second best record in baseball since May 21<sup>st</sup>. Now think about that for a second. They have the second best record in all of baseball since that time and only the Mets have done better. That's saying something for the team that is the youngest in all of baseball and there have been rumors about them dealing stud pitcher Dontrelle Willis or All-Star caliber hitter Miguel Cabrera. Florida is fresh off a sweep of the Braves this week and it's pretty startling they're only 5.5 games back of Philadelphia for second place in the NL East in a year the Marlins were clearly supposed to be re-building big time. Only nine teams in all of baseball have allowed fewer runs than this last place Marlins team.

Like Girardi, Twins Manager Ron Gardenhire was a former player himself. His Twins are in better position than the Marlins for the time being as they have a stronger shot to make a playoff push, even though they play in the same division as the White Sox, Indians and surprisingly successful Tigers. They completed a sweep of the Boston Red Sox on Thursday night as closer Joe Nathan got Jason Varitek out in the eighth inning with the bases loaded. Catcher Joe Mauer is playing as superb as any hitter in the entire American League, Torii Hunter is still patrolling center field and his name has kind of come off the trade block rumors, and Minnesota knows how to win with its pitching as well as its defense. What makes them a threat if they can ever get the offense (22<sup>nd</sup> in the Majors in runs scored) playing consistently at a high level is they have two really exceptional pitchers and an additional one they can use as a trade piece in Brad Radke. Johan Santana has been a Cy Young candidate the last three years and remains one, and Francisco Liriano is pitching very well, enough so much to be an All-Star in the making.

### **Notes:**

**State of Red Sox Nation:** Amazingly, the once powerful, destructively offensively minded Red Sox are 4<sup>th</sup> in their own division when it comes to runs scored. Trot Nixon and Mike Lowell are both hitting over .300, Manny Ramirez and David Ortiz continue to pound out the home runs as well as drive in a large portion of Boston's runs, and Kevin Youkilis (.319BA) is doing an above average job as leadoff man. So what's the problem?

Boston isn't getting the same kind of production they have in the past from their bench, and catcher Jason Varitek (.251BA) has been so-so at the plate. We're also seeing that the Red Sox can go cold for a few days when Curt Schilling and Josh Beckett don't have solid outings on the mound because their pitching rotation lacks depth in the 3-4-5 spots. Tim Wakefield (4-8 with 3.97ERA) and Matt Clement (5-5 with 6.61ERA) aren't exactly the answer to their pitching problems so a trade may be in the works.

**Mr. Wright & The Mets:** Guess who has the best record in all of Major League Baseball. That other team in New York, the Mets. Led by young star third baseman David Wright, the New York Mets went 9-1 on their latest road trip. Wright's performance and popularity have both taken off as he recently passed Cardinals third baseman Scott Rolen, who's leading the NL in batting average, on the All-Star balloting. Mets haven't been 19 games over .500 since 2000. And you remember what happened that year? They played the Yankees in the Subway Series World Series.

**End of A Run?** The Atlanta Braves are struggling, and at 30-37, it might only be the beginning. They are coming off a sweep suffered at the hands of the Marlins, and with a 2-8 record in their last ten games, it's easy to wonder will the Braves consider trading away a player or two to get younger? It sounds crazy because annually they are in the playoff picture. Times are changing though, and no one is more missed than former pitching coach Leo Mazzone.

**Ready For Rocket:** What two guys will be glad to have Roger Clemens back? Andy Pettitte and Roy Oswalt. Because less of the load will be on those when the Rocket makes his return. It will be very shortly as Friday Clemens makes his first AAA start since 1995. If he elects to retire after this season, it'll be his last one, too.

**What's wrong with Kansas City?** Everything. When you are 17-48 and 25 games back of first place, very little is going right. At the heart of their problems you find the closer spot, where Ambiorix Burgos has nine saves (six blown saves), but is 1-3 with 7.12ERA. Even a closer on the Royals isn't safe from criticism.

### **HOT:**

**Mets third baseman David Wright - Hard to believe this guy is not even 24 years old, right? Not until December. But Wright (.335BA, 14HR, 50RBI) is swinging the bat incredibly, hitting a homer in each of the last three games for the baseball's hottest and best team.**

**A's first baseman Dan Johnson - Riding an eight-game hitting streak into Friday, Johnson has put together a pretty strong month of June. He's got 15 hits and 12RBI's in ten games this month and the A's have won seven straight.**

**Blue Jays catcher Bengie Molina - Numerous fans of the Angels would love to have him back as their catcher. Because that teams is in last in the AL West, while the Jays sit just a game out of first. Molina currently is on a 14-game hitting streak.**

**Dodgers outfielder Matt Kemp - Who is this guy?? Over the past seven days, Kemp has gone 7-for-15 with three home runs. He's been a quiet reason why the Dodgers have passed Arizona for first in the NL West.**

**NOT:**

**Yankees third baseman Alex Rodriguez - Even though he is struggling, could the media be any harder on him? You'd think he robbed a bank or something. Still, a 6-for-40 slump with five runs, seven walks, 15 strikeouts and just three runs batted in and a single home run so far this month won't cut if for New York baseball fans.**

**Red Sox starting pitcher Josh Beckett - MVP of the 2003 World Series for Florida, Beckett got off to the type of start that would've made him a top candidate for AL Cy Young. However, since May 26<sup>th</sup>, he's 0-2, allowing 17 earned runs (7 being homers) and 22 hits in 11.1 innings.**

**Atlanta Braves - If the Braves somehow pull out an NL East title this year, they may never miss the playoffs again. They're 30-37 and have dropped four in a row.**

**Reds outfielder Austin Kearns - For the month, Kearns is 9-for-44. He is 1-for-16 without an RBI in the last seven days. Cincy will need his bat to stay in the NL Central division race.**

**STAT OF THE WEEK:**

**On Saturday, June 10<sup>th</sup>, Kansas City Royals outfielder Reggie Sanders became only the fifth player in Major League Baseball history to record 300+ home runs and 300+ stolen bases. The other four are Barry Bonds, Bobby Bonds, Willie Mays and Andre Dawson.**

**TRIVIA QUESTION OF THE WEEK:**

**Sunday the Oakland Athletics swept the New York Yankees at Yankee Stadium. Before that, when was the last time the A's swept the Yanks on the road?  
*Last Week's Answer: Chipper Jones, who passed Dale Murphy earlier this year.***