

MLB Baseball Weekly --- Friday, June 22nd, 2007
BY MATTHEW HATFIELD

A lot of interesting happenings going on in the world of Major League Baseball. One team suddenly making noise is the Colorado Rockies, who on Thursday completed a sweep of the Yankees, outscoring them 13-5 in the series. That's a great job by their pitching staff at Coors Field to hold a New York team always capable of putting up a lot of runs to less than two per game for the series. Not to mention, Colorado recently won two of three against the Boston Red Sox, so they've done extremely well in Interleague play. In fact, since May 22nd, Clint Hurdle's ball club owns a Major League-best record of 20-7. Other things that have caught my eye this week.....

Sosa Smashes #600:

But the bigger question remains, is he a Hall-of-Famer? My response is no. The Cubs never could get to a World Series with him. As an overall player, Sosa was a flawed one that just so happened to be a great slugger and used that to his advantage on his way to stardom. His fielding was far from spectacular, his base running was nothing special and like many power hitters he struck out too much for his own good. While some point to the steroid cloud as a reason possibly to keep him out of Cooperstown, that's not what first comes to my mind. Besides his memorable home run chase with Mark McGwire back in 1998, Sosa being caught using a corked-bat still stands out to me above most – if not all – of his career moments.

Earlier this week he became just the 5th player in MLB history to reach 600 home runs for a career. That puts him in elite company with Hank Aaron, Barry Bonds, Babe Ruth and Willie Mays. It's pleasing to see him making a solid contribution this season with the Texas Rangers when he appeared to have been on his way out and on to retirement after a short stint with the Baltimore Orioles ended sourly.

O's Give Perlozzo The Ax:

The man who replaced Lee Mazzilli as Baltimore Orioles Manager a couple years ago has now been replaced. Sam Perlozzo got the ax on Monday and the team's bench coach, Dave Trembley, was named his interim replacement. Also, Andy MacPhail resigned after 12 seasons as Chicago Cubs team President to take an executive position (COO) in Baltimore.

Since winning the World Series some 24 years ago, the O's have been struggling-g-g-g-g. They've had two playoff series wins in 23 seasons, a total of 15 losing seasons during that time span – including nine consecutive – and to top it all off, 11 different Skippers (none of which were named Skipper).

Earlier this week Joe Girardi, a former big league catcher that currently does TV analyst work, decided to decline an offer to manage the O's. But Girardi may be in line for higher-profile managerial positions down the road, including with the Yankees or the Cubs if Lou Piniella decides to walk earlier than expected. Maybe even the Houston Astros could go after him, or what about the Philadelphia Phillies? He got one NL East team – the Florida Marlins – to overachieve last season, earning Manager of the Year honors before being fired. The perennially under achieving Phillies need a firm, no-nonsense guy like him guiding the team.



Will Joe Girardi return to Major League Baseball as a Manager soon?

As for Baltimore, well, we know they won't be contending for much anytime soon. Except the title of worst record in the AL with Kansas City, Texas and Tampa Bay.

Barrett On The Move:

The San Diego Padres, with the NL's best record, traded for Cubs catcher Michael Barrett, giving them more stability behind the plate. But the bigger story is Barrett's exit from the Windy City, which comes less than a month after his dugout confrontation with pitcher Carlos Zambrano. What we'll find out over the next few months is whether or not the move turned out to be more of an addition for San Diego or addition by subtraction for Chicago. Barrett can be an adequate hitter and defensive catcher.

As far as the Cubs side of things, it's easy to decode the message being sent. With the team having a losing record, he's not going to allow players to be bad influences or get into it with other teammates. Rumors have linked Piniella to bringing in Alex Rodriguez over the off-season and/or Ken Griffey Jr. before the trading deadline, a couple former Mariners. He isn't afraid of getting rid of the Mark Prior's and Kerry Wood's of the world either. Whatever they do in building this team he wants them to be made in his image, his kind of ball players. Perhaps this can be viewed as a sign that Sweet Lou is beginning to clean club-house?

News & Notes:

*** Oakland Athletics outfielder Milton Bradley, known to have a short fuse, has been designated for assignment. We can definitely expect Bradley to finish up the '07 campaign in another uniform.

*** The Washington Nationals recently called up Brandon Watson, an outfielder who on Father's Day broke a 95-year-old record for the longest hitting streak in Minor League Baseball. His streak of 43 consecutive games with at least one base hit with the Columbus Clippers now stands as the International League's longest ever.

*** As if the Baltimore Orioles didn't have enough bad stuff to go around, shortstop and former AL MVP Miguel Tejada fractured his left wrist. His consecutive games streak of 1152 was the fifth longest in MLB history, but second in Orioles team history behind the great Cal Ripken Jr. Others in front of Tejada on the consecutive games played list include Lou Gehrig (2130), Everett Scott (1307), and Steve Garvey (1207). Depending on how many games he will have to miss, it could force Tejada to finish out the season in an O's uniform rather than being shopped around on the trading block as a healthy, impact contributor for a contender. The current active streaks of consecutive games played include Colorado's Juan Pierre (344), Grady Sizemore (267) of the Indians and Jeff Francoeur (237) at the top of the list.

*** In other injury news, Marlins pitcher Anibal Sanchez will miss the remainder of the season following an operation on Thursday to repair a torn labrum in his shoulder. Sanchez, a 23-year-old from Venezuela, is best known for throwing a no-hitter last September against the Arizona Diamondbacks. Florida's starting rotation has been decimated all season long by injuries; the list just keeps on growing.

*** LA's Dodgers are last in the Majors in hitting, yet they entered the day only one game back in the NL West race. All things considered they are in good shape, though. A lot of people are talking about getting Ken Griffey Jr. to bolster their offense and I ask why not LA? They certainly could use someone, whether it's Griffey or not.

*** The latest All-Star voting came out for the American League earlier this week. Here's how things look, position-by-position:

Catcher - Pudge Rodriguez, Detroit Tigers
First Base - David Ortiz, Boston Red Sox
Second Base - Placido Polanco, Detroit Tigers
Shortstop - Derek Jeter, New York Yankees
Third Base - Alex Rodriguez, New York Yankees
Outfield - Manny Ramirez, Boston Red Sox
Outfield - Ichiro Suzuki, Seattle Mariners
Outfield - Vladimir Guerrero, LA Angels of Anaheim

*** On Tuesday night there were plenty of great pitching performances, and while Justin Verlander of the Detroit Tigers or John Lackey from the Angels might end up as the

AL's starter for the All-Star Game next month in San Francisco, it's worth considering a few others that have been lacking help in run support.

Four of the five best starting pitchers in the Majors statistically sit in the AL without gaudy records. They are Johan Santana (Minnesota Twins), Gil Meche (Kansas City Royals), Andy Pettitte (NY Yankees) and Erik Bedard (Baltimore Orioles). The other is Matt Cain of the San Francisco Giants, who's really struggling to get much help as he's only won two games on the year and a big reason has been the 3.21RPG support he has received thus far. Pettitte isn't going to finish among the league's leaders in victories, but his transition from the National League back to the AL hasn't affected him at all. Bedard most likely will finish in the Top 5 in the AL in strikeouts, though because he pitches for Baltimore his opportunities for wins are few and far between. Meche also is hurting by playing on the Royals, but teams like the Houston Astros, who instead opted for a Jason Jennings, may now be kicking themselves they didn't give Meche a better look in spite of the high dollar signs it would've taken to get him.

Santana on Tuesday pitched a complete game shutout of the New York Mets, arguably the NL's best hitting squad. He allowed four singles the entire night in a game that lasted less than 2½ hours. Josh Beckett of Boston became the Majors' first 10-game winner that same night. Beckett won 16 games all of last season and he's well on his way there. Jake Peavy from San Diego should be in the running for NL Cy Young honors; he's now at 75 innings and counting without allowing a home run, improving to 9-1 in the process as the Padres defeated Baltimore. His ERA is under 2.00 and as long as he keeps from giving up home runs than San Diego will like its chances much better in the postseason considering the Cardinals burned them with the long ball the last two years. Of all the Cy Young candidates in both leagues, the guy that might be getting the least attention is Brad Penny from the Dodgers believe it or not. Penny went seven strong innings and gave up just one run for his ninth win as LA defeated Toronto. The ERA for Penny dropped even lower to 2.12. In 11 of his 15 starts he's allowed one run or no runs. Doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that's pretty good. And then finally there was Ben Sheets of Milwaukee, who was lights out yet again, recording his 12th consecutive outing where he gave up three runs or fewer. But the best thing of all is that he's healthy and the Brewers have a cushion in front of the other five teams in the NL Central.

HOT:

Brewers RF Corey Hart - Hitting over .300 with 13 stolen bases, Hart has been an instrumental piece in Milwaukee sitting atop the NL Central practically the whole season. Hart has eight multi-hit games since May 28th.

Cardinals OF So Taguchi - Filling in for the injured Jim Edmonds, the Japanese product has a 13-game hitting streak going and has raised his batting average from .224 to .309 in a month's time.

Phillies OF Shane Victorino - Currently riding a 13-game hit streak, Victorino is having the best season of his career. His 22 stolen bases are among the most in all of baseball and 18 more than he had all of last season.

Indians C Kelly Shoppach - Though he's played less than 30 games, Shoppach has made his presence felt with a .391 batting average, eight doubles and 25 hits in 64 at-bats for the Tribe. He has a hit in seven of his last eight games played.

NOT:

Mets OF Carlos Beltran - David Wright went through a slump in mid-late April, Jose Reyes cooled off after April and had a mini one in May, and Carlos Delgado has been struggling pretty much all season long. Beltran is in a rut now, with a .182BA, 12 hits, only one homer and 4RBI during the month of June.

San Francisco Giants - Losers of seven straight, San Fran has fallen 11 games behind the first place Padres, the team Bruce Bochy used to manage. The Nationals and Reds are the only two teams in the NL with records worse than the Giants.

Braves OF Andruw Jones - This year isn't one of those All-Star type seasons for Jones, who's 0-for-16 without a homer or run driven in over the last seven days.

STAT OF THE WEEK:

Earlier this week, Prince Fielder of the Milwaukee Brewers hit an inside the park home run against the Minnesota Twins. Fielder, the son of ex-baseball great Cecil Fielder, is now the heaviest man in the MLB history to record an inside the park homer, doing so at 260 pounds. Dave Orr previously held the record at 250 pounds. Orr played from 1883-1890, playing as a member of the New York Metropolitans, Brooklyn Bridegrooms, Columbus Solons, New York Gothams and Brooklyn Ward's Wonders.

TRIVIA QUESTION OF THE WEEK:

Which active pitcher holds the Major League record for the most career Interleague wins?

Last Week's Answer: Connie Mack (3776)