

**MLB Baseball Weekly --- Friday, August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2006**  
**BY MATTHEW HATFIELD**

**T**oday's edition of MLB Weekly takes a look at a few of the post trading deadline moves that are sure to have an impact on the playoff races heating up in both the National & American League. Our focus this week – my idle/random thoughts on the happenings in the game of baseball in general. Be sure to look for my ***NEW HATFIELD SPORTS BLOG*** when it debuts later this month!

**Ten Idle Thoughts From The Past Week:**

\*\*\* On Wednesday night, Cardinals reliever Jason Isringhausen blew his eighth save of the season as the Cincinnati Reds moved within 2.5 of games of St. Louis in the NL Central. Izzy has had a rough year and how some people consider him an 'All-Star' is really beyond me. I don't care how good Albert Pujols is or how quickly their lineup can put runs up on the board – it's safe to say the Red Birds won't be going to the World Series and winning one as long as he remains their closer.

\*\*\* Speaking of that Cardinals/Reds series, Cincy let one slip away on Thursday by a count of 6-1 as Bronson Arroyo, who began the season so well, dropped his fourth straight decision dating all the way back to June 24<sup>th</sup>. Arroyo, now 9-7, last got a victory on June 19<sup>th</sup> when he pitched a complete game gem (7 hits, 2 runs and 5K's) at Shea Stadium in the team's 4-2 win over the Mets. After making several moves to fix their bullpen, the Reds went out and got two more pieces this past week in reserve outfielder Todd Hollandsworth and Phillies pitcher Ryan Franklin to take the spot of the injured Majewski. On Monday, Majewski, acquired in the highly criticized trade with Washington, went on the 15-day DL with right shoulder inflammation. **MEMO: That is why I said they should've requested Chad Cordero in the deal; he's still healthy and has saved his last seven games.** Also as it was predicted – Eddie Gurdado is thriving in the closer's role. Guardado now has seven saves, an ERA of 0.84 and has surrendered only one run in 10.2 innings. But can you imagine if they had him and Cordero? They'd stand a much better chance of holding a late-inning lead against a team like the Mets in a possible first round playoff series. What is now evident with Arroyo struggling a bit is that Aaron Harang is the team's most reliable pitcher at the moment. Though he has a slightly higher ERA than Arroyo, Harang has a 12-7 record in 25 starts, has given up four fewer home runs, pitched four complete games – two of which were shutouts – and strikes out a better percentage of the batters he faces (153-46K/BB ratio). For Cincy to get in the postseason, they are going to have to out-slug people and hustle around the base pads as well as in the field.

\*\*\* The other day I was thinking [*there's a news flash for you!*]... which post-deadline move will end up paying off more – Livan Hernandez going to Arizona or Javy Lopez going to Boston? Despite only banging out eight home runs so far this year, some – and maybe most – might go with Lopez because of his history of being a power catcher.

In fact, it was just three years ago that the 35-year-old Puerto Rico native cranked out 43 homers as a member of the Atlanta Braves. The next season he inked a big deal to go to the Baltimore Orioles. Anyhow, I'm going with Hernandez. As I've said before, I like him for the simple fact he is an 'innings eater', and if you follow the Arizona Diamondbacks as I do, you want him to eat up some of those innings so that it keeps them from having to use a bullpen that has been suspect. Heck, the pen was even suspect during the 2001 Championship season when B.K. Kim got burned twice in less than a 48-hour span at Yankee Stadium. But enough of that already. Hernandez now is a solid #2 guy to go with Brandon Webb in that rotation. Each of Hernandez' last five starts have been 'quality' one's, going at least six innings and allowing no more than three runs. It may be the kind of move that pays off enough that it pushes the Diamondbacks through to the postseason as either the division winner or wild card team. While my preseason pick was the Dodgers to win the NL West – and I am leaning back with them off their hot streak after the All-Star break – Arizona could beat them out because they are healthier. I'd be a pinch surprised if the Padres hang on and win the division, simply because their offense hardly generates a high number of runs on a night-to-night basis with outfielder Brian Giles enormously under achieving. Unlike last year, they haven't had a great year from Jake Peavy either. Believe it or not, veteran Mike Piazza has been carrying them from a power production standpoint. He showed it again in Thursday night's loss to the Mets as he returned to Shea Stadium and pumped out two homers (both of Pedro Martinez) – nearly a third that died at the warning track.

\*\*\* Can someone explain to me how Mets third baseman David Wright is guaranteed \$30 million dollars more on his recent new contract that he signed than shortstop Jose Reyes? Granted, Wright is a better hitter and should probably make a little more – I'm not debating that point. Also, let me make it perfectly clear that it is not Wright's fault the Mets gave Reyes that contract; it is his agent's and the organization. What doesn't make sense to me is how he makes significantly less than Jimmy Rollins of the Phillies and not significantly more than guys like Omar Vizquel (Giants) and David Eckstein (Cardinals). Reyes is just as valuable to the Mets as Wright is in the grand scheme of things. He sets the table for that entire lineup, including Wright. Yes – Wright is a middle of the lineup player and those guys generate greater dollars than leadoff man. Still, if we are going to judge the contracts on power, then I find it hard to value the 22 homers of Wright extremely higher than the 11 from Reyes when he also gives you stolen bases (on pace for 60+ for the second year in a row) and scores upwards of 95-100 runs. The difference in batting average, with both either slightly above or below .300, is less than 20 points. As far as fielding goes, Wright actually has made three more errors than Reyes, who has committed ten on the season heading into Wednesday night's action. Plain and simple, bottom line, it's just not right [no pun intended] for Reyes to only be guaranteed \$22 million compared to the \$52 mil of his infield teammate.

\*\*\* Wednesday's loss to the Philadelphia Phillies was the unofficial official [huh?] nail in the coffin for the 2006 Atlanta Braves. They gave up eight runs in seven innings, once more indicating what a rough year it has been for their bullpen and overall pitching from top-to-bottom in general. I now really don't think they have even a remote chance

of grabbing one of the Wild Card slots as I did about a month ago. Interestingly enough, the 583 runs allowed by the Braves entering Thursday were six fewer than the 589 given up by Philly this season, who sit three games up on Atlanta in the standings and have won 11 of their last 16 games

\*\*\* If the Yankees, White Sox or Twins are beat out in the end for the postseason by the Red Sox – they will have Cleveland to thank for it as strange as it may sound. That's because the Indians bullpen, once one of their primary strengths a year ago, has become a total disaster and really fell apart last week against the Red Sox. Without veteran closer Bob Wickman, who was dealt to Atlanta, they have been unable to hold on to leads late in games. So maybe the Ortiz homer or game-winning RBI by Mark Loretta last week against the Tribe comes back to bite one of the other three teams vying for playoff consideration with Boston.

\*\*\* How can a team like the Kansas City Royals – that is so hideously bad – be a thorn in the side of someone such as the Boston Red Sox? Last month, all three of the Red Sox wins over them at Fenway came by a single run. Thursday night KC goes for the sweep of Boston, and with a Red Sox loss coupled with a Yankees win over the White Sox, the boys from Beamtown would be four games out of first place in the AL East.

\*\*\* Entering Thursday, nine teams were within seven games of the NL Wild Card leading Cincinnati Reds. Of those nine teams, only the 58-56 Diamondbacks and Dodgers – both a half game behind the San Diego Padres for the top spot in the NL West – had winning records. Unlike last year when the Houston Astros won the NL Wild Card and upset the St. Louis Cardinals on their way to the World Series, it is highly doubtful the Wild Card winner poses as a serious threat to reach October's Fall Classic.

\*\*\* Despite his team's recent troubles, slipping further out of the playoff race, Blue Jays pitcher Roy Halladay still should most definitely be considered for AL Cy Young. Tied with Curt Schilling and Justin Verlander for the Major League-lead in wins with 14, I've arrived at the conclusion that Halladay is like Seattle's Ichiro Suzuki. In what way you ask? When Ichiro entered Major League Baseball in 2001, he recorded 242 hits and has had over 200 every season, expected to reach that number yet again by the time this season concludes. You can argue that in that time he has been the best hitter in all of the AL just like Halladay has been the best pitcher in the AL since 2002. With an ERA under 3.50 for the fifth time in six years, the Toronto ace has the record (14-3) – and unlike the last two seasons – the innings pitched (170 and counting) to win the award. Since his 4-7 season of 2000, where he posted an ERA of 10.64 in 19 games and had nearly as many walks (42) as strikeouts (44), he has simply been the most consistent, lights out pitcher in an age of baseball where hitting is not the same as it was 15-20+ years ago. Despite allowing a career-worst 26 homers in '03, Halladay really improved his K/BB (204-32) ratio that year. Halladay has 75 victories compared to just 29 losses since '02, equaling out to a stellar win percentage of 72% you'd be hard pressed to find elsewhere.

\*\*\* This just in: the Cubs hitting stinks. Really [*like that is a major bulletin*]? Chicago's National League team has scored a Major League-worst 483 runs, which still ranks as 21 fewer runs as the two next closest teams – Tampa Bay and Pittsburgh. Think they might get rid of one of those pitchers for a bat in the off-season? Should've signed right then on a deal to give up Kerry Wood or Mark Prior for Alfonso Soriano when they had the chance. Because even when healthy, Derrek Lee can't get it done alone.

### **HOT:**

**Rangers second baseman Mark DeRosa - Five days after a win over the division rival Angels where he drove in five runs, DeRosa rose to the occasion again – this time in a 14-0 beat down of Oakland keep Texas alive in that AL West race. DeRosa pounded out four hits – two HR's – and finished with a season-high 6RBI.**

**Angels outfielder Vladimir Guerrero - Last week one of my 'hot' picks was fellow outfielder Juan Rivera. But let's get something straight – Rivera hasn't been doing it alone. The 2004 AL MVP has four homers and ten hits in his last seven games heading into Thursday night.**

**Twins pitcher Brad Radke - With young star pitcher Francisco Liriano (*is it me or is he now getting a weekly mention?*) on the DL, Radke knows his role in his final season becomes magnified. After a 4-7 start to the year, Radke is now 11-8 (7-1 over his last eight decisions) on the year and owns a 20-3K/BB ratio since July.**

### **NOT:**

**Devils Rays outfielder Jonny Gomes - With 20 homers already this year, Gomes finds his batting average 72 points lower than what it was a season ago. In his last three games, Gomes has gone hitless and struck out five times.**

**Blue Jays shortstop John McDonald - Heading into Thursday's game with the Twins, McDonald had one hit in his last 15 at-bats – an indicator of how the team has been playing following the departure of Shea Hillenbrand to San Francisco.**

**Braves catcher Todd Pratt - A former sixth round draft pick of the Boston Red Sox in 1985 that has played for division foes Philadelphia and the Mets, Pratt is batting .202 on the season. In addition, dating back to July 27<sup>th</sup>, he has just one hit in his last 13 at-bats.**

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

**This year the St. Louis Cardinals have had two separate eight-game losing streaks. The last time that happened was 1983.**

**TRIVIA QUESTION OF THE WEEK:**

**Cleveland's Fausto Carmona became only the second reliever ever to lose four games in a seven-day span. Can you name the other?**

*Last Week's Answer: Oakland Athletics*