

# From the Bleachers - Gameplan MLB1 Week 9, Season 11

## NL division races closest in MLB1 history as All-Star break approaches!

With just 9 games to go until the All-Star break, the NL division leaders have a combined 6 game lead over their nearest rivals.

MLB1 All-Star Game : Week 12/13 Miller Park, Milwaukee. Yes, the All-Star game is back after a short absence and unlike the All-Star game in MLB, this one will not end in a tie! The format of previous seasons where managers were nominated has been dropped for the MLB system where the managers from the previous season's World Series will manage the sides in the All-Star classic. The funding for this year's All-Star game has been kindly donated by Richard Ogg of Colorado, who also suggested the use of the World Series managers. Many thanks to Richard for the donation, making the game possible. This means the managers this year will be David Kinghorn for the AL and yours truly for the NL. I can't recall exactly but I think this is the first time I've been involved and I'm really looking forward to it.

Following the All-Star game there will be just 6 weeks of the regular season remaining, with about 16 teams still in with a chance of making the playoffs.

AL Playoffs		NL Playoffs	
East – Orioles		East - Phillies	
Central – Indians		Central - Cardinals	
West – Angels		West – Padres	
AL Wildcard	GB	NL Wildcard	GB
Blue Jays		Braves	
Red Sox	8	Astros	3
Athletics	17	Rockies	4
Rangers	18	Dodgers	6
Yankees	18		

The four AL playoff teams look fairly comfortable right now but the Indians and Blue Jays still have some work to do to ensure their positions come week 18. The NL teams are much less certain with any 4 from the 7 teams named very much in with a shout. Only 8 games separates the 7 teams, remarkably close for this stage of the season.

## Losing in Gameplan Baseball

Much emphasis is placed on winning in Gameplan Baseball, perhaps less so than in the football version but unlike the football, you can't really change your tactics in a single sweep. So what can you do if you inherit a losing team or if your team head into a slump? I have been asking myself the exact same question regarding my team in MLB3. It seems to start with pitching. Pitching seems to suffer with negative form quicker than hitting. It also seems harder to turn negative pitching form around than negative hitting form.

## Long-term view.

The more I play Gameplan baseball, the more I think you need to take a long term view, meaning a season on from when you take over to see how you are getting on. If you are in for a quick run to the playoffs as soon as you take over, most times you are going to be disappointed.

## Where to start?

Assuming you haven't inherited a winning team, then the first thing to do is probably to sort out your finances. Look for any veterans that are earning way more than average for their rating/position, taking into account potential. If a guy has 0 potential and you aren't going to make the playoffs, he could be excess to requirements, particularly if you could secure the services of a player with more potential.

Once you have your roster trimmed down a bit, have a look at the other teams in your division. You are going to have to play and beat them to ultimately be successful. Check out what their stadium is like, if they have a power team in a small stadium and your team leaks HRs you are going to struggle. Once a season you can change your stadium, a drastic option but it could be important in some circumstances.

## Be Realistic

If you have no chance of stopping your opponents hitting the long ball, look to see what you can do to hurt their weaknesses. If they are strong in one area, then they'll be weak in another. Scout them and find their weakness. Do the little things right and the big things will fall into place. If your bullpen is weak, make sure your starters can go deep in games. There are a number of parameters that affect this, so be sure you haven't overlooked any. If you have good young pitchers who are prone to the odd disastrous game, consider setting their MxH lower so they are pulled before too much harm can be done to their form.

## Vary your rotation

Starters come into and go out of form. You don't have to use 5 starters, at times, using 4 or 6 is very useful. I tend to do this when injuries force my hand or when I want to work a guy back into the rotation after an injury (e.g. player has 7 games injured remaining. You can write him into your rotation and he'll pitch in game 8 or 9 if you get the order right...) which may be preferable to him not pitching at all, particularly if he has positive form to protect.

## Use the Reserve squad

To build up some form on youngsters, or reverse a decline on a key player. If you aren't going to need the 26<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> players on your team often, make sure you are paying them as little as possible. Why pay a reserve player 2+ LPs a week?

## Consider platooning!

It is a very useful tool, particularly if you have a couple of mediocre players of opposite handedness, or if you have a player whose stamina doesn't allow him to play every day. Using a platoon can at least let you get the best use of the players you have.

### **Use the DH to rest tired players**

If you have any star players you just can't be without, consider putting them on the DH to help them save a bit of fatigue. It's not as good as resting them but it's better than losing their services completely.

### **Re-read section 3.8 of the rulebook on Batting Order**

Positions 3, 4 & 5 should be fairly easy to fill in a line-up. The remaining positions in the order are less easy to fill. If you have a player who can play 162 games without being too fatigued, try him near the top of the order even if his general play doesn't merit it.

### **Use all your special actions**

If you have spare actions, scout players. It'll help you learn whether your own players are good value and you may spot some bargains. During the run-in (15-18) scout the rookies, during the draft you can scout the players chosen by your divisional opponents. Information is always useful.

### **Don't underestimate good fielders**

Light hitting batters who have good fielding skills can be very successful in Gameplan baseball. Form can be gained as easily for fielding achievements as for hitting HRs. Sometimes good fielding will lead to positive form, which can lead to better hitting. Seems odd but it's a benefit not to be overlooked.

### **Players fielding out of position**

This can work, particularly if the difference in position is relatively small (e.g. 1b to 3b). In emergencies or dire need, playing completely out of position may be a workable option. Good long term planning should eliminate the need for this.

### **Pinch Hitting**

If you have excess of a position e.g. Infielders, rather than start one in the outfield in place of a weaker player, consider pinch hitting later in the game when the chance of a defensive mistake being the difference is reduced, or when you need a big inning to get back into a game.

### **Look for a lot of double plays or strikeouts**

If your team is hitting into a lot of these, or if you are leaving a lot of men on base through strikeouts, consider moving around the frequent offenders in your line-up. A guy with great power may strikeout a lot and rarely walk, which could be more of a liability than a benefit in the wrong position in the line-up.

### **Enjoy yourself!**

It's sometimes difficult to see if you are making progress. It seems to me that you get more inconsistency from young teams, even though they may have more skill. This is where taking the long-term view helps but if you've finally lost patience with a guy, let him go, pick up someone else and let another manager go grey working out how to get the best from him!

### **Disclaimer**

I have no insider knowledge and I make no assertion that the points I've mentioned are correct. They are merely my experiences/observations so treat with caution!

### **MLB1 Round-Up**

Topsy-turvy week in the NL West as the Padres relinquished 3 games from their lead following a tough week. They leaked more runs than usual and Paul Denyer will be looking for a big improvement this time around. The main beneficiaries were the Rockies who defeated the Padres before finding the Cardinals too tough. A convincing sweep of the Expos helped to silence the doubters and leave them within striking distance. The Dodgers impressed in beating Atlanta in Georgia, with some better than advertised pitching, particularly from Ashby responsible. LA followed that up with a home win over St Louis to leave themselves 5 games behind the Padres. In the Central, the Cubs enjoyed a good week, taking 2 of 3 from the Cardinals in St Louis before beating the Padres and sweeping the Giants for a strong 7-2 return. They close the gap in the Central to 19 games between them and the Cardinals so clearly they haven't given up the chase yet. The Astros also closed the gap, to just 1 game following fine sweeps of the Reds and Mets sandwiching a tough loss to the Phillies. The Phillies extended their NL East lead to 2 games with wins over the Expos, Astros and Padres with some strong pitching during the week. The Braves had a mixed week, sweeping the Mets, losing to LA and beating the Reds, but they keep the narrow lead in the NL Wildcard. In the AL the Angels moved to a 27 game lead in the West, virtually guaranteeing them another title. Behind them the Athletics and Mariners are improving, Oakland in particular active again in the free agent market. The Rangers showed they can still pull out a big series, a fine sweep in Seattle and a win over the Red Sox demonstrating that. The Indians saw another ex sign elsewhere, this time Langston to the Athletics but the remaining players are now enjoying a comfortable 9 game lead in the Central. The pitching in particular was better this week with Riske and Colon both notching complete game wins. In the East, the Orioles returned to the free agency market, snapping up ex-Red Tony Perez much to the delight of their fans. They followed it up with a important win over NY in the Bronx and a superb sweep of Chicago, allowing 2 runs in the process. Toronto returned to winning ways with a fine road win over Boston and a similarly fine sweep of Chicago before finding the Mariners too tough while the Red Sox slipped to 8 games behind Toronto after an up and down week.

Team of the Week : Chicago Cubs.

Looking ahead – this week sees some huge series, San Diego in LA, the Mariners trying to get a first win of the season from the Orioles, the Rockies and the Braves in a rematch of the NL championship of last season, similarly the Cardinals v Phillies which has been all Philadelphia so far this season. How will the Cardinals cope without long-term injury loss Steve Kline?

Sad to see Pedro Borbon (#120) about to retire. Pedro was a big star for Atlanta in our early seasons and was named as starter for the NL in an early All-Star game. Who will be the starters for this seasons All-Stars?