

AMERICAN LEAGUE RACES LOOK TIGHT HEADING TO SECOND HALF OF SEASON

By W.G. Ramirez

With the second half of the major league baseball season getting underway, the National League contenders will be on a big chase for frontrunners San Francisco and Philadelphia. In the American League though, things will assuredly be different. With 14 teams in the league, 8 are within striking distance of the two division leaders - Toronto in the East and Chicago in the West.

Cleveland, Milwaukee, Oakland and Minnesota, the four remaining teams, that are in sixth and seventh place in their respective divisions, sit no more than 10-1/2 games out of first. In the N.L. West, third-place Houston and Los Angeles are 12 games behind the Giants. The fourth-place Cubs and Pittsburgh are 14-1/2 games back in the N.L. East.

The second-half will see both divisions clash before the "races" begin to heat up again. The most interesting series to open the second half, in the American League, will begin tonight in Toronto, when the Blue Jays play host to the Kansas City

Royals.

Kansas City is only one game back of the White Sox and could pose problems for the 'Jays, who is only 1/2 game in front of Detroit, in the East. The Royals find themselves tied for third, with Detroit, in the league in Batting, but first in the Western Division. Gary Gaetti, who came over from the California Angels, has proved his worth backing up rookie third baseman Phil Hiatt and first baseman Wally Joyner. Gaetti's second home run as a Royal gave K.C. a 3-2 victory over the 'Jays before the All-Star break.

The Chicago White Sox are in the middle of the league in Batting but hold their slim lead over the Royals in the West, and open the second-half in the Eastern Division basement, Milwaukee. Before the All-Star break, Bo Jackson replaced designated hitter George Bell in order to get more comfortable behind the plate. Jackson responded against Baltimore with a 426-foot home run. The White Sox will have to turn up the heat early on or be prepared to squander their lead away.



Centerfielder Ken Griffey, Jr., will be a vital part of the Mariners' drive toward the American League Western Division title.

The Seattle Mariners remain only two games back of the 'Sox and just may be the team that could make a run for the division title. If they can strengthen their starting pitching, the Mariners will be a team to be reckoned with. Centerfielder All-Star Ken Griffey, Jr., is on tap for another blockbuster season. He is batting .317, has 22 Home Runs, 60 RBIs, his slugging percentage is .600 and he has set an A.L. record by fielding over 500 straight chances without an error.

Lackluster Oakland may

make a run for the money as long as Rickey Henderson and Terry Steinbach's productivity continue. A decent addition to the pitching staff would not hurt, nor would a healthy Mark McGwire. The A's should be happy with the recent surge Ruben Sierra has made, hitting .366, with three home runs and nine RBIs during a 10 game stretch.

When it comes to the A.L. East, San Diego Padres first baseman Fred McGriff looks to be a hot commodity. Both the Baltimore Orioles and New York

SPORTS

AMERICAN LEAGUE NATIONAL LEAGUE

WESTERN DIVISION			WESTERN DIVISION		
TEAM	REC.	GB	TEAM	REC.	GB
CHICAGO	45-41	-	SAN FRAN.	59-30	-
KANSAS CITY	44-42	1	ATLANTA	50-39	9
TEXAS	44-42	1	HOUSTON	46-41	12
SEATTLE	44-44	2	LOS ANGELES	46-41	12
CALIFORNIA	43-43	2	CINCINNATI	45-45	14 1/2
OAKLAND	38-46	6	COLORADO	33-54	25
MINNESOTA	36-49	8 1/2	SAN DIEGO	33-56	26
EASTERN DIVISION			EASTERN DIVISION		
TEAM	REC.	GB	TEAM	REC.	GB
TORONTO	49-40	-	PHILADELPHIA	57-32	-
DETROIT	48-40	1/2	ST. LOUIS	51-36	5
NEW YORK	48-41	1	MONTREAL	48-40	8 1/2
BALTIMORE	47-41	1 1/2	CHICAGO	41-45	14 1/2
BOSTON	45-42	3	PITTSBURGH	42-46	14 1/2
CLEVELAND	40-48	8 1/2	FLORIDA	37-50	19
MILWAUKEE	37-49	10 1/2	N.Y. METS	27-60	29

THURSDAY'S GAMES

California at Cleveland
Oakland at New York
Kansas City at Toronto
Minnesota at Baltimore
Seattle at Boston
Chicago at Milwaukee
Detroit at Texas

Philadelphia at San Diego
New York at San Francisco
Florida at Cincinnati
Pittsburgh at Atlanta
Colorado at Chicago
Houston at St. Louis
Montreal at Los Angeles

Yankees have shown some interest but both suffer from the lack of one additional starting pitcher. New York has brought Cincinnati pitcher Tim Belcher and Montreal Expos pitcher Dennis Martinez up in recent conversations, and could be on their way to acquiring a solid right-hander. Starting pitcher Jimmy Key is on pace to win 20 games this season.

For Baltimore, the McGriff trade would leave the Orioles

depending on a staff of veterans, and Ben McDonald. First baseman David Segui became the first Oriole since Eddie Murray in 1982 to bat .400 or better in a month, finishing the month of June batting .403. Do they really need McGriff over another pitcher, or not? If Baltimore can carry their winning ways through July and into August, make a reservation for them in the A.L. East race. (See American, Page 19)

THE REV. JESSE JACKSON LEADS ALL-STAR MARCH OUTSIDE ORIOLE PARK AT CAMDEN YARDS TUESDAY

Sentinel-Voice

Led by The Rev. Jesse Jackson, 300 protesters marched outside Oriole Park at Camden Yards Tuesday evening during the All-Star Game, demonstrating their dissatisfaction with Major League Baseball's hiring of minorities.

Jackson's Rainbow Commission for Fairness in Athletics has kept pressure on all sports league's hiring practices.

Included in the barrage of demonstrators walking around statues of baseball players standing outside the stadium included: Rep. Kweisi Mfume, D-Md., and the Rev. Al Sharpton of New York. Jackson marched in similar fashion on Opening Day of the season while Mfume

sat with President Clinton. Jackson did say that the crowd of marchers on Tuesday evening was larger than the crowd on Opening Day.

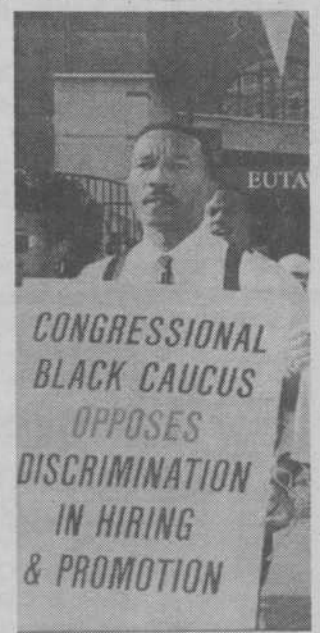
Mfume made it clear that the protest was not aimed at the City of Baltimore or the Baltimore Orioles.

Last week the team agreed to increase their hiring of minorities in the front office and vendor businesses.

"This is not designed to embarrass (the Baltimore Orioles)...It is clearly designed to embarrass Major League Baseball to do what apparently one would think they would do 46 years after Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier," said Mfume.

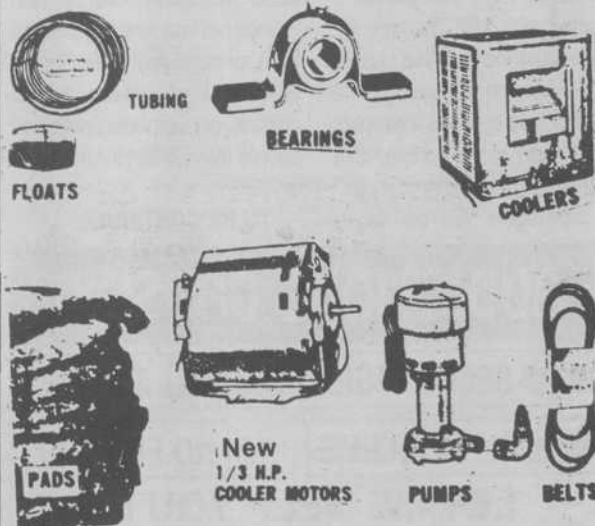


Rev. Jesse Jackson



Rep. Kweisi Mfume, D-Md.

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