

Baseball review: the year of the new manager

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Major League Baseball comes to a stinging start April 7, and my mind percolates with prognostication. Granted, I have some ungainly opinions but also a few stats to back them up so if you find yourself wondering who will win the American League East or any other division, you needn't wonder any longer. The answers are herein (with teams listed progressively from pennant winner down).

The AL East, unarguably baseball's toughest division, is the wellspring of polemics among the pundits. Can the Yankees with an inexperienced manager outgun an always powerful Detroit and ever pesky Toronto. And what of those fiery Orioles and the trenchant Red Sox? My word what a division, not even to mention Milwaukee and Cleveland (I may heed this rhetorical request).

Quite simply, the Yankees will take the division. What team has a more potent offensive threat: Mattingly, Winfield, and Henderson. The pitching staff is entrenched with the acquisition of Britt Burns and the always brilliant Ron Guidry. Crafty Joe Niekro can provide 15 wins even though still fuming over the Yankees rough handling of his 300 game-

winning brother Phil. Dave Righetti can be counted on for the bullpen firepower. The arrival of DH Mike Easler from Boston will further help Lou Piniella's struggle as fieldleader under Steinbrenner. Look for the Yanks to prevail in the American League East; still, rest assured that there will be a few fireworks.

The Blue Jays have proven their mettle after last year's heated pennant struggle. But where they've gotten into trouble lies in their inability to become any better in the off-season without any major acquisitions to improve 3rd base and a platoon catcher. And Bobby Cox migrated south to fill the Atlanta general manager position leaving a void which will be occupied by another first-year skipper: Jimmy Williams. Look for a solid season but no golden egg this year for the Jays.

Detroit obtained some speed in Dave Collins, but they remain a basically lethargic, albeit powerful team. They're sure to be solid under Sparky Anderson and are compiling an impressive spring training record, but don't look for a repeat of 1984.

The Red Sox hitting acclaim is warranted (they led the league in team batting average), but the defensive story is one flawed by a league leading total of errors and ineffective relief pitching. Even

Tom Terrific, who is rumored to be heading northeast, won't save the Sox unless the defense improves.

The Brewers purged a lot of old faces from their line-up and moved Robin Yount (during last season) to centerfield because of his prohibitive injuries at short. They have many youngsters who are promising but their lack of experience will probably keep the Brewers down in the AL East this season.

Pat Corrales has little new to work with in Cleveland, but Brett Butler was a fresh breeze from the South last year, leading the team in a sundry of offensive categories. One man does not a contender make (although Julio Franco also had a great season), and the Cleveland management chose not to send any reinforcements Corrales way.

I realize the following must seem as though I have fallen off of my soothsayers perch and rent my crystal ball, but I have the stirrings of faith and the bouancy of some solid stats, both of which point to the Seattle Mariners pirating the pennant in the AL West (the fact that they lend themselves to lively prose is just a bonus). Consider the following stats from last year: leftfielder Phil Bradley (.300, 26, 88), first baseman Alvin Davis (.287, 18,

78) and third baseman Jim Presley (.275, 28, 84). This undeniably shows that players in three very important positions can generate some power as well as sport impressive averages. The Mariners acquired Steve Yeager to help guide an ostensibly leaky pitching staff whose success will naturally determine whether the '86 squad will float to the top of the AL West.

Make no mistake, the Royals are going to be zealous in their championship defense, but I warrant the notch decline in light of their inability to score runs for that premier pitching staff. One other reason I'm leaning toward Seattle is because of their domination of K.C., last year with a record of 3-10. I know this evidence is flawed: Kansas City still won the pennant and there are six other teams in the division just to name two such flaws, but allow me some portentous license.

The Twins could also be a challenger coming off of last year's strong showing with some promising young talent. But a shortage of quality starters could deter them; unless a parsimonious Bert Blyleven earns his multi-millions, the Twins shortcomings may be identical to last year's--some foot speed would definitely help too.

The Angels with a lean but inac-

tive(?) Reggie Jackson, might pose a serious threat, but they remain a question mark with a trio of aged stars: Jackson, Doug DeCinces, and Bob Boone, and a horde of hard luck pitchers. The one relief come from the re-signed Donnie Moore who figured in 43 percent of all Angel wins last year--a repeat will be in order or else divine intervention will be necessary.

The A's might rank first in the lexicon, but their starting pitching is a veritable zoo unless the newly-acquired Joaquin Andujar can bolster the ranks (with some wins). Alfredo Griffin is stallwart at short but there are likely to be too many other snags for his defensive prowess to really matter. Anyway, don't look for any turnaround unless the organization gets some more fan and municipal support.

The Rangers are again written off this year. It doesn't always seem fair but this year I have to agree in spite of a strong spring training record. Their lack of run production last year which is bound to improve and their green talent this year mean that in a few years they might at least crawl out of the cellar, but for now, it will have to provide bitter solace from the Blazing Texas heat.

Look for the National League next week.

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