

American League Preview

by John Musser
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The American League-East Division.

(1) **Toronto Blue Jays.** Last Spring, George Bell was upset when manager Jimmy Williams announced that Bell wouldn't start in the outfield and would DH most of the time. This year it has been serene in the Blue Jay's camp, and it can only benefit the team.

Williams had no trouble with his pitchers last year (3.80 ERA), thanks to Dave Stieb (16-8), Duane Ward (9-3, 40 saves), Jimmy Key (12-5), and Jeff Musselman (8-5).

Bell (24 homers, 97 ribbies), Jesse Barfield (18 HR's), Fred McGriff (34 HR's, 82 RBI's), and Kelly Gruber headed a Toronto club that smashed a league leading 158 roundtrippers.

The only question right now is whether Bell's right knee will hinder his play this season. A healthy Bell and a team first attitude should be enough for Toronto to win this year.

(2) **Milwaukee Brewers.** If the Brewers manage to stay healthy, Tom Tebelhorn's troops may surprise everyone. The Brewers have consistent pitching (3.45 ERA) with Ted Higuera (16-9), Mike Birkbeck, Don August (13-7), Jaun Nieves and Bill Wegman.

At the plate, the Brewers are powered by Rob Deer (23 HR's, 85 RBI's), Robin Yount (.306, 91 RBI's), and Paul Molitor (.312). After an off year, expect Greg Brock to produce more this year.

The Brewers are starting rookie Gary Sheffield at shortstop, who must prove that his four homers and 12 RBI's in 24 games last year was no fluke. Also, the injury prone Molitor must stay healthy for the Brewers to make a run.

(3) **Boston Red Sox.** During last summer's revelation about Margo Adams, Boggs merely hit .366. Either Boggs has mastered the powers of concentration or he should have been hitting about .450.

The Red Sox must find a way to replace 18-game winner Bruce Hurst as Oil Can Boyd will try to come back from two years of shoulder problems. Mike Boddicker, Roger Clemens (18-12), Wes Gardner, and newcomer John Dopson are the starters.

Nick Esasky adds righthanded punch to the Bosox order. Look for more punch from outfielders Ellis Burks (18 HR's, 92 RBI's, .294), Dwight Evans (21 HR's, 111 RBI's, .293), and MVP runner-up Mike Greenwell (22 HR's, 119 RBI's, .325).

If Boyd can return to the form he once had and Manager Joe Morgan can keep the off the field controversy from tearing the team apart, the Red Sox just may be

able to repeat last years pennant winning season.

(4) **Detroit Tigers.** The Tigers lacked hitting last season as Detroit was carried by their pitching staff. To rectify the situation, the Tigers dealt pitcher Walt Terrell for Chris Brown and Keith Moreland, who combined for only 83 RBI's last season.

Alan Trammell (15 HR's) and Dave Bergman were the only Tigers to hit above .275 last year. Chet Lemon (17 HR's) and Fred Lynn (25 HR's) add needed power to a weak offensive team.

Lack of offense and age will catch up with Detroit, as any injuries to pitchers will severely hamper their efforts. However, it's hard to count out a team with crafty manager Sparky Anderson at the helm.

(5) **The Cleveland Indians.** Surprised to see the Tribe this high? If they had a proven Major League shortstop and some more hitting, they might even be contenders.

Bud Black, Tom Candiotti (14-8), John Farrell (14-10), Greg Swidell (18-14), and Rich Yett (9-6) form a solid rotation. In relief, Doug Jones (37 saves) will have some help this year from Jesse Orosco.

Joe Carter (27 HR's, 98 RBI's) and Cory Snyder (26 homers) are the big guns for the Indians. After two straight 18 homerun seasons, Mel Hall hit only six last year.

Although the Tribe has good pitching, it won't be enough with the lack of offense after Carter and Snyder.

(6) **New York Yankees.** How long will Dallas Green last as manager? As long as Dave Winfield's (.322, 25 HR's, 107 RBI's) back holds up.

The Yanks have added free agents Andy Hawkins and Dave LaPoint, two hurlers who should give Green both quality and quantity, along with newcomer Jimmy Jones to an aging and unstable pitching rotation.

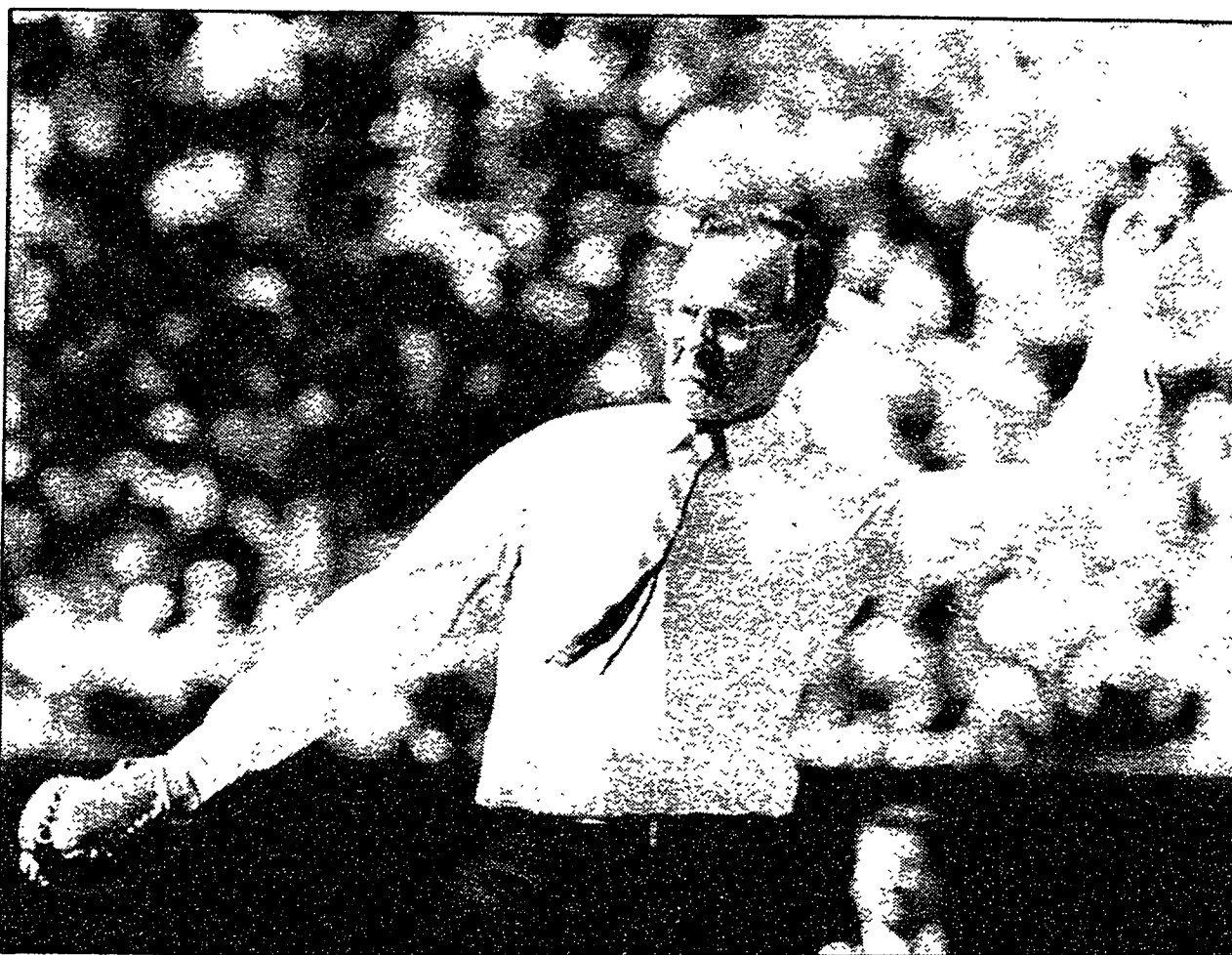
With Steve Sax and Rickey Henderson hitting in front of him, Don Mattingly will have many chances to drive in runs this year. If Winfield is sidelined by back surgery, Mattingly will only have Kevin. Phelps to protect him in the line-up.

(7) **Baltimore Orioles.** The O's don't have much, but what they do have is youth.

The O's have an almost totally inexperienced pitching staff, and vet Cal Ripken (23 HR's) is the only major threat with a bat. Whoever said rebuilding a ballclub was a long a painful process had Baltimore in mind.

American League- West Division.

(1) **Oakland Athletics.** The A's have made few changes



President George Bush throws out the ceremonial first pitch to mark the start of the 1989 baseball season at Baltimore's Memorial Stadium Monday. The Orioles faced the Boston Red Sox in the season opener.

since last season, and when you win 104 games, why should you?

One change for the A's is the signing of free-agent Mike Moore (3.78 ERA) of Seattle, as if Oakland didn't have enough pitching ahead with Storm Davis (16-7), Dave Stewart (21-12), Bob Welch (17-9), and Curt Young. Manager Tony LaRussa has a strong closer in Dennis Eckersley (45 saves).

Another change was Dave Parker replacing the departed Don Baylor at DH. Even if Parker doesn't produce, 40-40 man Jose Canseco, Mark McGwire (32 HR's, 99 RBI's), and Dave Henderson (24 HR's) will.

Combine the talent with the embarrassment of the World Series loss as motivation and the A's are a lock.

(2) **Kansas City Royals.** Last season, racial tensions caused a split in the team. Manager John Wathan is hoping his charges have matured and will concentrate their energies to matters on the field.

Mark Gubicza (20-8), Charlie Leibrandt (3.19 ERA), Floyd Bannister, and Bret Saberhagen (3.80 ERA) give the Royals quality starters.

The offense is in good hands with George Brett (.306, 24 HR's, 103 RBI's), Kevin Seitzer (.304), Bo Jackson (25 HR's), and Danny Tartabull (26 HR's, 102 RBI's).

If the relief pitching develops into what the Royals think it will, look for a possible upset.

(3) **Minnesota Twins.** Once again manager Tom Kelly has assembled a talented group in the Homer Dome.

Kelly has some fine pitchers, including Cy Young winner

Frank Viola (24-7), Allan Anderson (16-9), Shane Rawley, Fred Toliver and Charlie Lea. Jeff Reardon (42 saves) is the stopper.

Kirby Puckett (24 HR's, 121 RBI's, .356), Jim Dwyer (.293), Gary Gaetti (.301, 28 HR's), and Kent Hrbek (.312, 25 HR's) give the Twins power and timely hitting. They have also added some speed with former Met Wally Backman (.303).

Lea and Toliver are question marks, and there is a need for more power in the outfield other than Puckett.

(4) **Texas Rangers.** Manager Bobby Valentine has Texas thinking pennant this year, but it is still to soon.

Valentine has two fastballers in Nolan Ryan (3.52 ERA, 228 strikeouts) and Bobby Witt (3.92 ERA). He compliments them with knuckler Charlie Hough (3.32 ERA 174 K's) and junkballer Jamie Moyer.

The Rangers have some impressive batters with Pete Incaviglia, Ruben Sierra (23 HR's, 91 RBI's), Buddy Bell, and former Indian Julio Franco (.303).

While the Rangers have spent time solidifying the infield, they have not filled the gaps in centerfield or at catcher.

(5) **Chicago White Sox.** Skipper Jeff Torborg has a group of young pitchers to develop, but has little else to work with.

The young starters include Jack McDowell, Melido Perez, and Shawn Hillegas. Jerry Reuss won 13 games last year, but his age (40) will start catching up to him this year. Bobby Thigpen (34 saves) is another good young arm who developed as the stopper last year.

Carlton Fisk, Daryl Boston, Ron Kittle, and Dan Pasqua all hit at least 15 homeruns last year, with Kittle hitting his in Cleveland.

With the inexperienced staff and few quality players after the top six or seven, the Chisox could plummet even further.

(6) **California Angels.** The Angels have added some veteran players this year with Bert Blyleven, Lance Parrish, and Claudell Washington.

Blyleven joins Mike Witt (12 complete games), Dan Petry, Kirk McCaskill, and Chuck Finley. Unless some of the Angels young farmhands develop, or the front office cuts some deals, this aging rotation will fall apart by mid-season. One bright spot is second-year man Bryan Harvey, who had 17 saves with a 2.13 ERA.

Brian Downing (25 HR's), Chili Davis (21 HR's), and Tony Armas (13 HR's) provide what little punch there is to the Angel order. Lance Parrish, who returns to the AL after two seasons with Philly, should add to that power.

(7) **Seattle Mariners.** The joke on the coast, with new manager Jim Lefebvre, has little to offer to baseball this year.

Mark Langston (235 strikeouts) was the only Mariner to crack the ten win plateau last year. The only other bright spot is free-agent reliever Tom Niedenfuer, who comes from Baltimore with 18 saves.

A good example of how low the Mariners have gone is there high hopes for Darnell Coles, who they think will have a 90-rbi season. While this may be possible, it will be difficult without any runners on base.

AP Sports Photo