

Sports

Pro baseball playoffs coming together

by Ron Doin
The Collegian

National League East

The only thing left for the Pittsburgh Pirates to do now is wait for the playoffs. Pittsburgh ran away with the division this year, making it two years in a row.

Jim Leyland has become one of the major leagues' best managers. Leyland is a player's manager but can also be critical and demanding if needed. The Pirates will either be playing the Los Angeles Dodgers or the Atlanta Braves.

The Pirates are led by the best outfield in baseball. Barry Bonds is one of the best hitters in baseball. Bonds is batting .289, has scored 100 runs, 111 runs batted in, 41 stolen bases, 103 walks, and an on-base percentage of .407.

Rightfielder Bobby Bonilla is batting .304, with 44 doubles, 100 runs, 98 runs batted in, 85 walks, 170 hits, 280 total bases, and an on-base percentage of .391.

Centerfielder Andy Van Slyke is much better than his statistics indicate. Van Slyke, who is batting .268 has been hampered by injuries this season but is still one of the best, if not the best, defensive centerfielders in the game today.

The infield is led by the double-play combination of always steady shortstop Jay Bell and Jose "Chico" Lind. Lind's range at second is unmatched by any other second baseman in the

National League, including Ryne Sandberg. Steve Buechele, aquired in a trade with Texas, fills in the gap at third with both power at the plate and good hands at the corner.

Rounding out the infield are first baseman Orlando Merced, who alternates with Gary Redus and catchers Mike LaValliere and Don Slaught.

The Pirates also have premier all-around pitching. Right-handers Doug Drabek and Bob Walk along with lefties Zane Smith, John Smiley and Randy Tomlin are all worthy starting pitchers. As far as relief pitchers go, the Pirates are stacked. This group includes right-handers Bob Patterson, Stan Belinda, Bill Landrum along with lefties Neil Heaton and Bob Kipper.

Look for the Pirates to be very tough to beat by either the Dodgers or the Braves.

National League West

The National League West is still "up for grabs." The Los Angeles Dodgers and Atlanta Braves are involved in a see-saw battle for the division title. Look for this race to come right down to the wire.

The Dodgers' power is their pitching. Starters Ramon Martinez, Mike Morgan, Tim Belcher and Orel Hershiser form a foursome of very dangerous hurlers. Power pitchers Belcher and Martinez compliment finesse pitchers Morgan and Hershiser. Relief pitching is anchored by Roger McDowell and often injured Jay Howell.

The outfield of the Dodgers is one of the best offensively, but it is only mediocre defensively.

Rightfielder Darryl Strawberry has bounced back from early season injuries to have a productive season at the plate. Strawberry, who is one of the most feared hitters in baseball, is also one of the most inconsistent defensive players in the game.

Leftfielder Kal Daniels possesses power at the plate to make up for his average speed and throwing ability. The anchor of the outfield is Brett Butler. All Butler seems to do is get the job done. The veteran comes through in the clutch.

The suspect infield needs to come through. Steady Eddie Murray can not do it all. Error-prone second baseman Juan Samuel and shortstop Jose Offerman must come to play. Hopefully, Alfredo Griffin will return in time.

The Atlanta Braves (American Team?) have played outstanding baseball this year. They have good all-around talent but experience is lacking.

The starting pitchers have been very important to Atlanta's success. Lefties Steve Avery and Tom Glavine have combined to win 36 games. Glavine is 19-11 and has an E.R.A. of 2.60, 187 strikeouts, 9 complete games, and 238 2/3 innings pitched. Avery is 17-8 and has an E.R.A. of 3.32.

Righthander John Smoltz has had an incredible second half. After starting the season 2-11, he has rebounded to a 13-13 mark

and has returned to his old self. The relief pitching is led by Alejandro Peno, Kent Mercker, and Jim Clancy.

The outfield consists of power-hitting rightfielder Dave Justice who was injured part of the year, dangerous Ron Gant (31 homeruns, 96 runs, 102 runs batted in) and leftfielder Lonnie Smith, who is filling in for suspended Otis Nixon.

The infield is led by third baseman Terry Pendleton. He has an average of .314, 90 runs, 178 hits, 286 total bases, and a slugging percentage of .504. Pendleton is also a gold-glove candidate. The rest of the infield consists of Sid Bream at 1B, Mark Lemke and Jeff Treadway at 2B, Rafael Belliard at SS, and Greg Olson at catcher.

The Braves have the talent to win, but do they have the desire?

American League East

Will Toronto fold again? This is the question baseball fans all over the world are asking. Twice in the past four seasons the Blue Jays have blown leads in the final weeks of the season. They maintain a 3 1/2 game lead over the Boston Red Sox, as of Tuesday, Oct. 1.

Toronto's starting pitching is admirable. Tom Candiotti is 13-11, has a 2.23 E.R.A. and 6 complete games. Jimmy Key is 16-12 and has an E.R.A. of 3.05. Juan Guzman is 9-2 and his E.R.A. is 3.08. Relief pitching could present a problem. Tom Henke is probably lost for the season, and Duane Ward will

have to become the stopper.

The outfield is led by rightfielder Joe Carter. Carter is batting .275, has 33 home runs, 41 doubles, 106 runs batted in and 316 total bases. Devon White plays a great defensive centerfield and Mookie Wilson and Candy Maldonado alternate in left.

As for Boston, it is too bad Roger Clemens can't pitch every day. Clemens is 18-8, has a 2.38 E.R.A., 12 complete games, 227 strikeouts, 257 1/3 innings pitched and 4 shutouts. Time may be running out on the Red Sox, but they still have a chance.

American League West

The Minnesota Twins, managed by Tom Kelly, clinched the division title last Sunday. The only thing is that they do not know which team to prepare for: Toronto or Boston.

The Twins are led by three powerful starting pitchers: Scott Erickson, Kevin Tapani, and Jack Morris. Erickson is 19-8, has an E.R.A. of 3.34, 4 complete games and 3 shutouts. Tapani is 16-9, with a 2.90 E.R.A., 4 complete games and 1 shutout. Morris is 18-12, 9 complete games, 1 shutout and 232 2/3 innings pitched. Right-hander Rick Aguilara leads the team with 40 saves.

The infield is not flashy, but it is consistent. Shortstop Greg Gagne and second baseman Chuck Knoblauch are a good double-play duo. First baseman Kent Hrbek, an average fielder, can also hit for power.

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