

INSIDE THE F-B-N

Circulation: 23

1996

THE AL WEST

Projected 1996 finish:	Record	Avg	HR	OBP	SLG	ERA	opponents	
							OBP	SLG
1. Baton Rouge	100-62	.292	234	.356	.478	3.81	.317	.405
2. Florida	94-68	.275	241	.348	.471	3.85	.331	.424
3. Yorktown	90-72	.277	175	.343	.433	4.08	.330	.422
4. Derby City	74-88	.280	195	.359	.437	5.66	.371	.459
5. Lake Wobegon	68-94	.264	139	.325	.393	4.84	.354	.426
6. Boise	60-102	.255	101	.316	.384	4.54	.350	.455

*I've made some adjustments to my formula used to calculate the opponents on-base-percent and slugging percent. I'll update what I projected for the NL West in my final edition.

BATON ROUGE SILVER BULLETS:

Outlook:

On paper, this annual underachiever may be the league's best team. It's hard to believe that this team has never made the post season. The Silver Bullets will have a very potent lineup and good pitching.

The Silver Bullet starting rotation, which is the best in the league should look like this:

1)Mussina 2)A.Fernandez 3)K.Rogers 4)Gordon 5)Schilling.

This is probably the only non-bum rotation in the league. Good for 276 innings, Mussina should have a huge season. Rogers and Fernandez are both good for 250+ innings with a 3.50-4.00 ERA, and Schilling should have a great card for 144 innings. Flash Gordon is the weak link, but even he should be good for 234 innings of 4.50 or thereabouts ERA. He'd be #2 on a lot of teams.

The pen needs some help, but not much. Leskanic can pitch 121 great innings, so expect to see many games where the starters go 7, 8, complete the game, or you see Kurt in there shutting the door. After Leskanic, the only decent reliever is Roberto Hernandez, and he isn't very good.

Deleon is usable vs. righthanders, but the rest are total wash-outs.

The starting lineup should look something like this:

1B)Palmiero 2B)Baerga 3B)Thome/Benjamin SS)Bordick C)Hundley/Pena LF)Gant

CF)Lofton RF)Eisenreich/M.Kelly DH)M.Lewis/Sheffield

Palmiero(45HRs, .321 & .605 SLG vs. RHP), Thome(32HRS, .327 & .601 SLG vs. RHP) and Gant(38HRs) will make for a very potent 3-4-5 combo. Lofton, even with his on-base down at

.361, and Baerga (.389 OBP vs LHP) or Eisenreich (.398 OBP vs RHP) make for a fine 1-2 punch. Toss in Hundley (good for 18 HRs vs righties), Pena (.298 vs lefties), Sheffield (264 ABs, 17HRs, .300+ both ways & .612 SLG vs RHP) and Lewis (.357 vs. lefties) and you've got some big-time run scoring.

What to look for:

Depending on how you view Sheffield, The Silver Bullets need to pick up some DH or OF ABs. That's unless GM Holbrook is satisfied using the weak hitting Mike Kelly or J.R. Phillips for a few hundred ABs. I doubt it. If he doesn't mind using Private Benjamin as back-up to Thome he could move Mark Lewis (but he's reluctant to lose a guy who hits lefties so well) for an outfielder.....or even some relief pitching. The Silver Bullets will need to acquire some support for Leskanic; probably about 100 pretty-good innings.

FLORIDA SUN:

Outlook:

This Sun team should be pretty similar to last year's model....Good hitting, so-so starting pitching, and a great bull-pen. Maybe the only difference is that the bull-pen isn't really that great; not right now.

The starting rotation should look like this:

1)Valdez 2)Burkett 3)Merker 4)Sanders/Oliver 5)TBA

Unlike last year, the Sun can cart out a certifiable ace. Ismail Valdez should be one of the league's best starting pitchers. However, after that things get a little ify. Burkett (233 IPs) and Merker (177 IPs) are both just mediocre as are Sanders (111 IPs) and Oliver (61 IPs). Plus GM Gerrack will have to pick up another starter somewhere or be forced to use Salomon Torres (89 IPs, 6.00 ERA). That would not bode well; but it shouldn't be difficult to improve upon that scenario. As I mentioned, the pen is not as good as last season....its just not as deep. Wetteland is still Wetteland, and Julian Tavarez has emerged to take the place of Cookie Rojas as the mega-inning/quality guy. Rojas and Fetters are still there but they didn't have good years. Then there's Ignasiak, Aquino and Meacham....one of which could fill the mop-up role.

The potent-as-always lineup should look something like this:

1B)Thomas 2B)Alomar 3B)King SS)A.Gonzalez/Abbott C) Rodriguez LF)Alou/Becker CF)Lankford RF)Walker DH)Barberie/Stahoviak.

The Big Hurt (51HRs, .524 OBP & .849 SLG vs LHP), Walker (46HRs, .300+ both ways & .637 SLG vs RHP), and Lankford (31HRS, also hits LHP for a change) will provide the power, while Alomar (.323 & 14HRs vs. RHP), Rodriguez (.300+ both ways), and Alou (.341 & .622 SLG vs. LHP) will cause their share of problems for opposing GMs. The short-stop position is a liability defensively, but Sun-fans must be used to that by now. Abbott and Gonzalez should combine for about 25HRs so that's a plus. DH is a question mark with the likes of Manwaring, Stahoviak, Barberie and Becker not really up to the task. I also wonder who'll be leading off. Alomar (.375 OBP vs RHP) and Gonzalez (.372 OBP vs LHP) are probable the best candidates.

What to look for:

GM Gerrack needs to shore up the pitching staff. If he can't solidify the 5th spot in the rotation, and add a good relief pitcher, the Sun could possibly fall to 3rd place. He also needs one good bat to fill the DH slot. I've always wondered why Manwaring has never been traded. It seems a shame to have a quality 400+ AB catcher sitting on the bench year after year. This might be a good time for

the Man-of-war to move on. Anyhow, a few tweeks and the Sun should be back in the post season ... continuing their quest to surpass Connecticut as the best team that's never been to the big-dance.

YORK TOWN ADMIRALS:

Outlook:

The Admirals are not far behind the Sun. The starting pitching and bull pen are pretty much the same. There's just no Larry Walker or Frank Thomas. So I went with Florida on more of a gut level. Anyhow, the Admirals will be a pretty good team again in "96".

Look for the following rotation:

1)Hamilton 2)Stottlemire 3)Foster 4)Henry 5)Burba/Anderson.

Hamilton's a good one, and a fine #1 guy. Aside from Anderson, who had a terrible year, the rest of the guys are OK....nothing great. Burba is probable the second best. Stottlemire offers up 260 mediocre innings. The bullpen includes two studs...Todd Worrell and Dave Veres. They'll combine for 204 terrific innings. Hipopotomus Pichardo is the only other serviceable guy with 79 middle-relief type innings.

The probable starting lineup looks like this:

1B)T.Martinez 2B)Oquendo/Cedeno/Pena 3B)Wallach/Strange SS)Larkin C)Ausmus/Girardi LF)Kelly CF)Sanders/Dykstra RF)Justice DH)Gibson/Morris

Tino Martinez (38HRs, a lefty who hits lefties better....389 OBP & .605 SLG vs south-paws) and Justice (31HRs) will provide the power for the Admirals. Larkin (19HRs, 400 OBP vs. RHP) is the best table-setter they have. The rest of the crew is comprised of guys who had OK years....Ausmus (.415 OBP, .500 SLG vs LHP), Morris (.292, 15HRs vs RHP)....so-on and so-forth. As you can see from the line-up, the main weak-spot for the Admirals is at 2B.....can't catch, can't hit.

What to look for:

To be honest, I'm not really sure what Gm Merklin might do. No pick until #40, so he probably won't be able to radically improve the team through the draft. I'm sure he'd like to pawn the gross Gross off on someone, or maybe move Girardi to improve the 2nd base situation, but other than that I'm clueless.

DERBY CITY DRAGONS:

It seems I remember a newsletter comment by GM Sprague saying that with the years that Ramirez, Snow, Valentin and the other Dragon-men had, his team should be three times as good in "96". Well, the hitting is about three times as good. Unfortunately, the pitching is not any better. So, while the Dragons will be better this year, their improvement will be stifled somewhat by the lack of pitching. Instead of losing 10-0, the Dragons will now lose a lot of games 10-9. The bad news...the presently pitiful starting rotation might look something like this:

1)Gubicza 2)Belcher 3)Darling 4)Scanlan 5)TBA

Actually Gubicza is not bad. He'd be a good #2 or 3 guy. Belcher is a bum, but a bum who can throw 222 innings. Darling (129IP, 6.23 ERA) and Scanlan (103IP, 6.61 ERA) are just bums. The Dragons really could use three starters.

The pen is also terrible. Mike Perez is OK (88IP, 3.68 ERA). Casian would be OK for a poultry 28IP if he gets a card. After that there's Carlos Reyes and Ken Ryan....both mop-up quality guys who may well be pitching with the game on the line.

Now the good news...the projected starting lineup looks like this:

1B)Snow 2B)TBA/Espinoza 3B)Leis/Livingstone SS)Valentin C)Parent/Knorr LF)Gilkey CF)Nixon RF)Mouton/Diaz DH)Ramirez

Valentin (33HRs & .500+ SLG both ways), Ramirez (39HRs), Gilkey (20HRs) and Snow (28HRs) will lead a potent offensive attack. Also, Parent could hit 30+ HRs if he is platooned to maximize his ABs vs. lefties (he had a .742 SLG and a HR every 6.9 ABs vs. south-paws). Ramirez also has Frank Thomas-like numbers vs. lefties (.507 OBP and .659 SLG)...yauww!! My man Otis (Nixon) will provide the Dragons with an adequate leadoff hitter, although Gilkey (.358 OBP vs RHB & .378 OBP vs LHB) and James Mouton (.381 OBP vs LHP) might also be used in that capacity. Livingston's .314 vs. RHP will also add some unexpected punch. The only major hole in the lineup is at 2B.

What to look for:

The Dragons need pitching in a big way. Does GM Sprague take Nomo at #2. My guess is no.....the old FBN adage is "you don't take pitchers that high". My guess is Charles Johnson, but what do I know. I wouldn't expect the 2B hole to be a huge priority in the draft; a patchwork job would do for now. Anyhow, Mr Sprague better take some pitching eventually or he'll be picking high again next year. Even with all that hitting, the Dragons won't win much with that hideous pitching. I rated the Dragons 4th in the division based on my expectations that they will pick up some decent pitching in the draft, presumably in the second round and so forth....if they don't, they could finish last again.

LAKE WOBEGON WHIPPETS:

As indicated by the Ricky Henderson trade, this will be a rebuilding year for the Whippets. Mediocre seasons by several of the Whippet hitting and pitching stars make the upcoming season's Whippet model something less than intimidating.

The projected rotation is as follows:

1)Appier 2)Benes 3)Finley 4)Jackson/Juden 5)TBA

Hate that TBA guy. The 1-2-3 slots are OK, and at least provide a lot of innings, which is more than you can say for the rest of the staff. Appier (249IP) had a pretty good season, but as usual he's susceptible to lefties. Benes' SD card (147IP) is so-so and his Seattle card (78IP) should be crummy. Finley (251IP) also had an OK, not good year. Benes and Finley are both good candidates for the 20 loss club. Danny Jackson had an awful year, but Juden's 78 usable innings will help a little. After trading Delucia, Orosco and Scott, the pen is pretty depleted. Beck isn't what he used to be, and neither is Radinski. Leiper, Dewey and Bankhead round out this unimpressive group.

An equally unimpressive line-up projects out like this:

1B)W.Clark 2B)Lansing 3B)Young/Brown SS)Bell C)Pagnozzi/TBA LF)Jefferies CF)Kingery/Huff RF)Raines DH)Bass/TBA.

No surprises here. Clark (22HRs, .302) is the best GM Ferguson has to offer, and given his .480 slugging percent, he's probably less than average at 1B. Raines (.395 OBP vs. LHP, .365 OBP vs. RHP) will probable lead off. Lansing, Bell and Jefferies all had very uninspiring years. Thirdbase and Catcher are weak areas. The Whippets will not be scoring a ton of runs this year.

What to look for:

Look for GM Ferguson to go the smart route; scarf up as many prospects as he can, and fill the holes with what-ever. One of the out fielders like Ochoa or Cedeno might be a nice pickup at # 16. If he really gets into the rebuilding mode, he might even trade Raines or Clark....who can say what

plans might be brewing. I would expect he'll hold on to his starting pitchers unless a real good offer comes along.

BOISE COUGARS:

Outlook:

The Cougars look to be pretty much status quo for the 3rd straight year. GM Siebler has had unusually bad fortune in terms of having players go the no-card route. It's tough to build a contender when your players keep fading into oblivion. This years club has sufficient starting pitching but has shortages in most of the other key areas.

The projected starting rotation is:

1)Wells 2)M.Leiter 3)Langston 4)Bosio 5)Heredia.

Four 200+ inning guys are nice to have. Wells (if he doesn't succumb to the Strat-Lefty-Death syndrome) and Leiter both had very solid years. The other three guys are just so-so. The pen is very thin with only Timlin (gets out righties) and Wegman (gets nobody out). So in the draft GM Siebler needs to pick up a couple hundred innings of relief....no big deal. All and all, the pitching should be greatly improved.

The position players are another story. The present line-up looks something like this:

1B)TBA 2B)Hudler/N.Martin 3B)Ziele SS)Blauser/Beltre C)Lavalliere/Sheaffer LF)Mclemore CF)Butler RF)McGee/Walton DH)D.Smith/TBA.

This is likely the weakest offensive team in the league. Given the decent starting pitching, it was hard to project 100 losses for this team. However, I just don't see them scoring many runs. Ziele (17HRs, .397 SLG) is the closest thing the Cougars have to a power, RBI guy. Blauser had a bad year; and they're short of ABs at 1B, catcher and DH. Butler (.377 OBP) and Mclemore (.346 OBP) are adequate 1-2 guys but there's no one to drive them in. GM Siebler has to find 1700 ABs to start the season. As he's noted, its tough to do that and build for the future.

What to look for:

As far as I can tell, the Cougars don't have a draft pick until the end of the second round. It's going to be very difficult for GM Siebler to improve his offense noticeably. He has to pick up about 650 ABs at 1B/3B, 150 ABs at 2B, 200 ABs at catcher, 600 ABs to cover the DH slot and 225 innings. That's going to be tough given the Cougars draft position.

SUMMARY

The AL west is a three team race. If Baton Rouge doesn't finish in the top two, GM Holbrook should fire the manager. The Silver Bullets have the best hitting and best pitching in the division. Having Ron Gant come back along with the timely emergence of Jim Thome and Kurt Leskanic will make them tough to beat. I expect a tight battle for the other playoff birth. I give the edge to Florida, but I wouldn't be surprised if YorkTown hung in there tough. The success of guys like Mercker and Burkett for the Sun, and Stottlemyre and Foster for the Admirals will be key. Also, Tino Martinez will need to have a monster year to keep the A-Men close.

Derby City is an up and coming team in the division. GM Sprague has taken a wise route in building his team....take a beating and get those big time prospects. With another big prospect coming this year, expect the Dragons to start impacting the division in 1997. Lake Wobegon has an aging core....GM Ferguson may need to retool the team significantly before the Whippets return to power. As for Boise, a little luck will go a long way. If some of the Cougar players stay in the majors, maybe GM Siebler will be able to build a contender...for now he'll have to suffer another year.

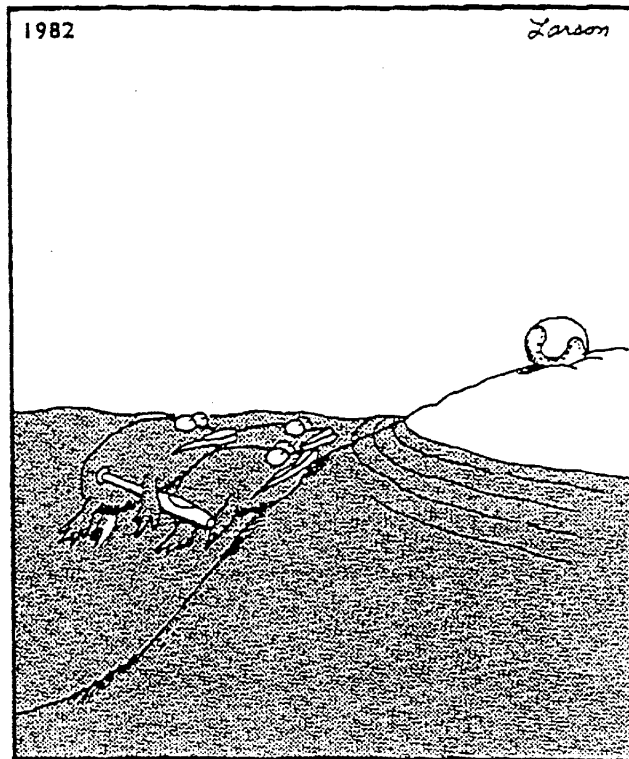
NOTES:

A recent trade that has sent Barry Bonds and Oral Hershiser to the Arsenal Gunners for Berroa and picks is expected to catapult the Gunners into playoff contention while seriously damaging the hopes of the Blue Devils. More on this in a later edition.

Attached is a note sent in by Klubber GM and owner for life, the benevolent Roland Klee. I thank Roland.

Season's Greetings,

Ed



Great moments in evolution

INSIDE THE KLUB

What's going on here? An underground journal perhaps infiltrating the inner sanctum of the Fly-By-Night? My subversive nature likes it! Especially when the analyst concludes that the Klub will return to its former glory. I would not have been so optimistic about the Klubbers' fortunes next year, although the team will certainly make some noise, much like the slovenly, ravenous, and bombastic Owner-for-Life.

Actually the Klubbers are still in a rebuilding mode, as Klee has decreed that 1996 is the Year of the Infielder and hopes that a winning record can be had in spite of a defense that will more resemble a foosball than a baseball team. The wretched gloves are not confined to the infield but also include the key centerfield spot where students of the Charlie Lau method will enjoy scooting grounders through the middle for inside-the-park homers and numerous lesser extra base hits. Hunter will unfortunately be in the neighborhood of e20 which combined with Cora's e36 and Awfulman's e52 will be a sight to behold.

The actual line-up will deviate slightly from the editor's version; leftfield will be occupied by Cangelosi and Young with the dung beetle also seeing a fair amount of time against reverse-righties at second. Hunter and Burks will be stumbling around center. As for the rotation, Mlicki has too wide a platoon differential to be more than the occasional starter; he will be in the bullpen to provide a ton of relief. The only question is to which side. That means Kamieniecki and others will fill the 5th starter's spot. Kammy can't possibly be as bad as he was this past year when a late salary drive in which he won 4 of his last 5 enabled him to post a 6-18, 7.27 record. Can he?

The draft promises to be the best we've seen in years. Who will make the mistake of taking a relief pitcher in the first round for the sake of contending for one year? Whatever became of Olson, Hernandez, and Timlin? Relievers are generally effective for a year or two and then fall apart. As Boucher has delighted in telling everyone within spitting distance (and his spray has tremendous range), the Jeff Nelsons of the world are generally found in the middle and later rounds where they are picked up as fillers and blossom a couple of years later or rot away unnoticed as career mop-up men. The Klubbers have twice picked relievers prior to the 4th round. Jerry Don Gleaton and Jose Bautista can hardly be considered successes after their initial years with the Klub. Having said that, Klee is quite high on Ricky Bo, if only because he's a graduate of Hartford's South Catholic High and an alumnus of the Jaycee Courant League, a summer league upon whose board of directors Klee once sat (shaddap!)

By the time you read this, the balance of power in the NL West will have shifted rather dramatically. The Blue Devils have thrown in the towel and given the Gunners Bonds and Hershiser at the small cost of a couple of first rounders and a leftfielder. What is it you yell while jumping off a cliff?

Geronimo-o-o-o-ohhh!!