

INSIDE THE F-B-N

CIRCULATION: 23

1996

I have to apologize for calling the Bulldogs the Blueballers. But I must say, the way owners are moving/and or changing team names is reminiscent of the Art Modell/Cleveland Browns fiasco. I think FBN management needs to address this dangerous phenomenon.

A note about ERAs. I often make mention of pitchers ERAs in my Analysis, which we all know can be highly irrelevant in Strat. I choose to note these ERAs because I figure it does offer some perspective on how effective a pitcher is likely to be. I will make note when I see a pitcher where I think the ERA is highly misleading because, for example he's a righty who gets crushed by lefties, or he lets up too many base runners.

THE NL EAST

	opponents							
	RECORD	AVG	HR	OBP	SLG	ERA	OBP	SLG
1. ALLYN STREET	95-67	.295	170	.364	.454	4.28	.338	.428
2. HAZARDVILLE	85-77	.279	209	.339	.454	4.79	.347	.444
3. WINDHAM	81-81	.288	176	.349	.449	5.02	.356	.455
4. HOTLANTA	80-82	.281	166	.343	.434	4.61	.345	.434
5. TAXACHUSETTS	79-83	.265	246	.338	.455	5.09	.347	.466
6. US JARHEADS	68-94	.268	153	.328	.427	4.89	.344	.460

ALLYN STREET 89ERS

Outlook:

The defending champs are the closest thing to a first place lock I see in the league. They're the only light in the league's most mediocre division. Their hitting will be tremendous, and their pitching while not great is still the best in the division.

Presently the 89er rotation is projected to look like this:

1) R.Martinez 2)Reynolds 3)Quantrill 4)Trachsel 5)Kile.

Martinez (255 IP, 3.67 ERA) and Reynolds (234 IP, 3.48 ERA) make for a good 1-2 punch and easily the best in this pitching poor division. The other three are batting practice quality pitchers, but do provide the 89ers with a lot of innings.

The best the pen has to offer is Todd Jones (124 IP, 3.06 ERA) and Bob Wickman (99 IP, 4.05 ERA). Both are pretty good, but by no means studly. Then there's Yorky Perez and Jarvis (stink and stinkier).

The lineup should look something like this:

1B)McGriff 2B)Knoblouch 3B)Martinez/Branson SS)Visciano C)Matheny/TBA
LF)Merced/Gallagher CF)Hamilton RF)Mabry/Meiski DH)Broyna/Molitor.

Edgar is going to have a monster MVP type year (.356, .37 HRS, .478 OBP, .630 SLG). Other than McGriff (34 HRS, .532 SLG vs. RHP) and Broyna (25 HRS, .531 SLG vs. RHP), the 89ers don't have a lot of power relative to some of the other NL teams. That's OK though...they've got high-average hitters and good platoons up and down the lineup. It starts with Knoblouch (.333, .423 OBP)....is there a better leadoff guy in the league? I doubt it. Mabry (.311, .349 OBP) or Merced (.324, .386 OBP vs. RHP) wouldn't be a bad #2 hitter. Hamilton (.283) and Visciano (.287) are adequate, while Gallagher (.317, .375 OBP) and Meiski (.306, .587 SLG vs LHP) are nice platoon guys. The only hole the 89ers have is at catcher.. Also, I wonder if GM Bruno is willing to play the 4-Big-E Martinez at 3B. All and all though, the 89ers should have one of the more potent offenses in the league....especially since they get to hit so much against the rest of the crappy NL East pitching.

What to expect:

An advantage that Allyn Street has is that they have about enough ABs and IPs to field a team right now. Come draft day, it's a whole lot better to be fine tuning than to be filling in holes. Sure, GM Bruno needs to fill the catcher slot, but he can afford to patchwork it together. He's got enough hitting elsewhere so he doesn't need a big offensive backstop. Also, the pitching needs to be shored up, but he can go for quality, not quantity. There's some trade material in the way of Arias, Branson (if GM Bruno decides to go with Edgar at 3B), Broyna or McGriff and Molitor. His first pick in the draft is at #32...a good place to pick up a pitcher. The 89ers are in the cat-bird's seat (anybody know what that means...I sure don't).

HAZARDVILLE POWDERKEGS

Outlook:

Another mercenary owner....the Kegs win the AL Championship and then jump leagues. Is there no loyalty? It looks to be a good move however, as the AL East should be a lot tougher than it's NL counterpart. Anyhow, this opinion doesn't see a repeat trip to the big dance in "96". The Kegs may make it to the post season, but they won't likely last long if they do. The Keg hitting, while still good, has definitely slipped some...and the starting pitching has gone in the toilet.

The toilet..err rotation presently looks something like this:

1)Hentgen 2)Tewksbury 3)Harnish 4)Swift 5)Perez/Reuter.

Say, Reuter's going to have a great card! Too bad he's only good for 58 innings. Here's a helpful hint...don't waste him at Taxachusetts. Speaking of which, as you'll see, Hazardville and Taxachusetts have a lot in common....not the least of which is that their #1 starters are big inning bums. Hentgen's 249 innings from hell (5.10 ERA, 1.62 Ratio), followed by four other misfits

should be a boon for opposing batting averages. Harnish (136 IP, 3.68 ERA) is the only one of the bunch with a decent ERA, but don't expect him to replicate it as he gets hammered by lefties.

The good news is that the pen is much better, so if Mgr Figella maneuvers the relievers well their may be some hope. Castillo (90 IP, 3.21 ERA), Franco (64 IP, 2.45 ERA), Hoffman (66 IP, 3.91 ERA) and Plesac (74 IP, 3.60 ERA) are all pretty good middle inning or setup type pitchers. Then of course there's Wohlers (80 IP, 2.08 ERA) who's developed into a first class closer. So if the Kegs aren't down 8-2 after 4 innings, they will be in good shape.....big if.

The lineup should look like this:

1B)Bagwell 2B)Liriano/Kelly 3B)Hayes SS)Disarcina/Guillen C)Alomar/Wilkins LF)Sanders CF)Grissom RF)Green/Munos DH)Galaragga.

Reggie Sanders (36 HRs, .308, .399 OBP, .583 SLG) is the Keg's big gun this year. Galaragga (39 HRs), Bagwell (24 HRS) and Green (20 HRs) will supply a big portion of the remaining ammunition. Grissom (.258, .318 OBP) had an off year so the Kegs won't have a good leadoff man. Munos is a question mark. He hits lefties well (.310, .532 SLG) so makes a good platoon with Green, but do you want a 4 E-25 in RF. The only place GM Figella needs to pick up ABs is at catcher where Alomar and Wilkins are only good for 501 ABs.

What to expect:

Good hitting team....notice I'll say that a lot. Point being, there are a ton of good hitting teams. The teams with the pitching will win. Ipso facto, a starting pitcher at the 21st pick would not be a bad idea if there are any impact hurlers left at that point. The Kegs have some extra bodies in the way of Polonia and Hanson. GM Figella might also consider moving Munos or Guillen if he could improve his starting pitching. However, if memory serves, GM Figella's not a big trader.....so what you see might be pretty much what you get.

WINDHAM WARRIORS

Outlook:

At first glance, it looks like GM Mendez might have his work cut out for him. He doesn't seem to have enough players to account for the dead-body count in your average Jean Claud Van-Damm film. However, in this division, with a lot of 600+ AB guys, and David Cone, all is not lost for the W-men. As is the M.O. for the other teams in the NL East, the Warriors have good hitting and awful pitching. The thing that perks my interest is this....with so many teams having lousy pitching and a limited number of really good cards in the draft, will relief pitchers go higher than usual in the draft this year, or are GMs willing to go into the season with crappy pitching staffs?

And speaking of crappy pitching, the Warrior rotation presently looks something like this:

1)Cone 2)Drabek 3)Mulholland 4)Stewart/B.Williams 5)TBA

Cone's good of course....and for 283 innings worth...you gotta like that. Unfortunately, Warriors can not live by Cone alone...or something like that. Drabek had a bad year (is he on the same schedule as Saberhagen?), but at least he can suck up 229 innings. The other three just plain suck.

The pen is better but not great. Montgomery is pretty good (82 IP, 3.41 ERA), but Slocumb and his 80 innings are not as good as his 2.91 ERA might indicate...too many baserunners. X.Hernandez can toss 111 innings, but is mediocre at best. The Warriors need a lot of pitching help.

The hitting's not bad though. The probable lineup looks like this:

1B)Grace 2B)Lemke 3B)Caminiti SS)Clayton C)Oliver/Slaught/Obrien LF)Phillips CF)McRae RF)Bonilla DH)Stawberry/TBA.

Phillips had his usual good OBP at .394, but his 31HRs could also make him a good RBI type guy this year. Caminiti (31 HRs, .381 OBP, .509 SLG), Bonilla (27 HRs, .387 OBP, .575 SLG) and Grace (19 HRs, .400 OBP, .525 SLG) are the other big boys. The rest of the crew is unspectacular, but certainly more than adequate. The only slots GM Mendez needs to be concerned with is DH and a backup infielder.

What to expect:

GM Mendez really doesn't have much in the way of trade bait, so if he's going to improve the team he'll likely have to do it via the draft. Given their fine hitting, the Warriors are certainly a playoff contender. If the 12th and 35th picks are used to acquire some pitching support for Cone, the playoffs could beckon. I've probably said this same thing regarding 6 other teams, but Wakefield might be an option if the Warrior front office wants to go for it this year. If a pitcher is not taken with that 1st pick I don't see how the Warriors can have a winning record.

HOTLANTA POSSUMS

Outlook:

Looks like the Possums might be ready to make some hay this year...if only a small stack. Say, I hope you don't mind me digressing a bit, but do you figure Peter Gammons' Sunday column has anything on "Inside the FBN" (aside from small things like baseball knowledge and reality). I don't see any of these colorful haystack sorts of analogies in his column. Anyhow, I better get back to those Possums; they're getting older by the minute.

The Possum rotation should be something like this:

1)Navarro 2)Osborn 3)Doherty 4)Bohanon 5)Bielecki/Rhodes.

You know, if you put all the starters in the NL East together, you'd have a pretty good 5 man rotation....and Navarro (248 IP, 3.29 ERA) would be right in there. The other five....keep Osborn (140 IP, 3.82 ERA) and throw the other four burns on the reject pile. If Marley's ghost were here, he'd surely point out what a ponderous pile it is (if you don't get the seasonal reference call the Hogline for explanation).

Jose (you know I'm getting a big time card) Mesa for 79 innings and Mathews (3.38 ERA, 1.17 Ratio) for 103 innings will fortify the Possum-pen. Carrasco, Guordado and White are all mop-up quality. So, surprise, overall the Possum pitching staff leaves a lot to be desired.

Watch for this probable line-up:

1B)Karros 2B)Whitaker/Frye 3B)Boggs SS)Stocker/Gutierrez C)Stanley/Hasselmann LF)Greenwell CF)Puckett RF)Devereaux DH)TBA.

Good year for many of the Gerritol crew. Over 30ers Boggs (.325, .414 OBP), Greenwell (18 HRs, .300), Puckett (.316, 26 HRs), Devereaux (15 HRs, .293), Stanley (22 HRs) and Whitaker (17 HRs, .291) will supply much of the firepower for the Possums. Add in youngster Eric Karros (34 HRs, .294) and you have a not-too-shabby offense. SS is not a strong point, and GM Jalutkewicz (Jim, your name's too long to type more than once) needs to acquire some DH ABs....otherwise the Possums are in good shape offensively.

What to expect:

For starters, GM J. has the 7th and 29th pick in the draft to try to improve his team. He took Ontiveros in the 1st round last year; would he take Wakefield this year? You can probably tell that I'm very curious as to who will be the 2nd GM to take the risky knuckleballer in the 1st round. If he's going to take pitching with that 1st pick, a guy like Isrenhausen would probably be a better

idea. Don't expect any big trades coming out of Possum land. GM J. has also not been a big trader, plus he doesn't have any extra bodies to deal in. If he can pick up a couple of decent starters the Possums could make a run at the playoffs.

TAXACHUSETTS CHIEFS:

Outlook:

Are you sitting down? Good, because I'm sure you will be shocked by this concise and profound analysis of the "96" Chiefs.....low OBP, tons of HRs and lousy pitching..... Are you over your temporary stupification? Good. In all seriousness (if you believe that, have I got a trade for you), I must congratulate the ultimate Chief benefactor. GM Drapeau, for his unwavering loyalty to the sacred long-ball. I sort of picture Bud, sitting high above his Chief minions, and like Al Davis of the Raiders, he has a motto...."Just homer baby".

Anyhow, the "as usual" suspect Chief rotation will look like this:

1)Tapani 2)Saberhagen 3)Witt 4)Ontiveros 5)Cormier.

The acquisition of Saberhagen and Cormier sure helps out...other wise the Chiefs would have had to cart Moore and Bere out there....how ugly would that have been? So now the Chiefs have 5 starters, that if thrown in a bag, shaken up, and dumped out one at a time would almost assuredly provide a pitcher, who while not inherently awful, is already prone to giving up the longball....put him in the homer-dome, andwell you get the picture. My guess is that the NL ERA champ will not come from this group.

Henneman should be good coming out of the pen (62 IP, low ERA, OBP & SLG). His usefulness may in part be determined by how his two cards turn out. They should both be good. Chubaca, W.Williams, and Whiteside (combined 171 IP) are all fair to middling. GM Drapeau needs to pick up some more relief help.

The lineup will look like this (notice I can say "will", not "may" as the lineup has thankfully been provided by Bud):

1B)Fielder 2B)Roberts/Gates SS)Valentin/Belliard 3B)Leuis/Palmer C)Tettleton/Laker LF)Carter CF)Finley RF)Buhner DH)Canseco/Plantier.

Buhner (could be this years 60+ HR hitter), and the Canseco-Fielder-Tettleton trio (who should each be good for 40+ dingers) will lead this season's Chief tater-fest. Add Carter (25-30) plus Valentin and Finley (about 15 each) and the Chiefs are good for about 250 round trippers. The OBP won't be discussed here as it's irrelevant in the well known Chief Quotient.....besides, there's none worth mentioning. What is worth mentioning is that Palmer absolutely mashes lefties (.757 SLG)...youch.

What to expect:

Aside from some innings, the Chiefs are ready to go. The Chiefs first draft choice is at #36. That would be a fine place to start improving the pitching. Since the division is so weak, the Chiefs have a good shot at the playoffs. Like the 89ers, their position of strength lies in the fact that they can use the draft to improve positions, not fill them. The glaring weakness is that the Chiefs are depending on Tapani as a #1 starter.

US JARHEADS

Outlook:

If this were Sesame St. I might ask, "Now children, which of these teams is not like the others?". The answer of course would be the Jarheads, which is the only team in the division that has tons of roster spots to fill. GM Nieman needs to pick up about 1400 ABs and 400 IPs to field a team. That's a big disadvantage, and why I'd expect to see the Jarheads bringing up the rear in "96". The Jarheads rotation should look something like this:

1)Smiley 2)Bullinger 3)Guzman 4)Pugh/S.Fernandez 5)Mike Williams

Smiley is good (219 IP, 3.46 ERA) but it scares me to see a lefty as the #1 guy. He could have a good year, or get crushed regularly. Bullinger will be so-so (186 IP, 4.14 ERA) as will Pugh (121 IP, 3.86 ERA). Fernandez will have an excellent 80 innings (3.32 ERA, 1.06 Ratio) compliments of his Philly card, but his Baltimore card will be un-usable. Williams, who might end up in the pen, had a breakthrough season (109 IP, 3.27 ERA). Guzman sucks, but in spite of him the Jarheads rotation actually compares favorably to the rest of the division.

Henry (83 IP, 2.96 ERA), Russell (41 IP, 3.00 ERA), and possibly Williams will anchor the bullpen. There's no-one else in the pen except for Lilliquist and Martinez who will combine for 54 trash time innings if they even get cards.

The lineup presently looks something like this:

1B)Jaha/Rodriguez 2B)Kent 3B)Fryman SS)Dunston/Gagne C)Wilson/Hemond LF)TBA/Coles CF)Curtis RF)TBA/C.Jones DH)TBA

Nothing to get real excited about here. Only Jaha (23 HRS, .314, .565 SLG) had a big year. Kent (26 HRs, .281), Fryman (18 HRs, .272), Dunston (19 HRs, .295) and Curtis (23 HRs, .273) will supply much of the remaining offensive punch, but they just don't add up to the sort of run scoring potential that the rest of the teams in the division have. Additionally, the DH and outfield positions really need to be addressed.

What to expect:

GM Nieman gets to drool over the 3rd selection in the draft (I wonder if the Hawks have inquired about that pick....GM Boucher looks to be after the entire 1st round). I figure he'll take Cordova, Anderson or Damon with that pick. I don't see the Jarheads competing this year, so my guess is he just patch-works the holes together and tries to build for next year. A valuable commodity that the Jarheads own, which might be moved, is their extra shortstop, either Gagne or Dunston. If no trade is made, one of them will probably get some time at DH.

SUMMARY

Unless some genius GM improves his team substantially, Allyn Street should easily repeat as NL East champion. Although the 89ers don't have a lot of big HR hitters they do sport a ton of guys who bat for a high average and get on base a lot. Edgar Martinez is going to be a one-man wrecking crew. He's my preseason MVP selection. The 89ers will score a ton of runs, particularly because of the crumby pitching in the division. Their pitching will probably be a little better than any one else in the division. After the 89ers, literally any team aside from the Jarheads could emerge and grab a playoff birth. The Jarheads just have too many holes to fill. The Kegs, Chiefs, Warriors and Possums are all very similar. None of them has good pitching, and they all have good hitting. Why did I choose Hazardville to prevail? No particular reason...just a guess. The race is

really too close to call. Originally, I had the Warriors in 2nd place. Then I looked at their pitching, and just couldn't bring myself to predict a playoff birth for a team with one good starting pitcher. The recent trade made by Taxachusetts with the Blue Devils has helped their cause. Previously, I had The Chiefs closer to the Jarheads. If the Chiefs make the playoffs, credit GM Drapeau for being active in the off season. However, I just don't see their stadium as an advantage. Sure, they'll hit a lot of HRs, but so will their opponents. The Chief starting pitchers are all too susceptible to the long ball. And the Possums...well....they haven't been any good since I've been in the league, so they'll have to prove to me that they can win. That leaves Hazardville... presently my choice by default. They'll start backing into the playoffs the first game of the season. In any case, I'll hopefully have a more clear-cut guess after the draft. Like the NL West, a lot will depend on which team improves it's pitching staff the most during the draft or via trades.

