

INSIDE THE F-B-N

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Greetings fellow F-B-Ners. You will be receiving, approximately on a monthly basis, an edition of "Inside the F-B-N". This Hot-stove publication will offer an opinion regarding the 1996 division races. Each edition will analyze one of the four division, look at each team in the division and project the final standings. This is obviously prior to the draft and any off season trades. The projections will be based on the present make-up of the teams, as well as their positioning in the draft. Projected on-base and slugging % are based on the actual 1995 performances of the players. I've based all performance projections on lineups and rotations that I would field if I was managing the teams. For the starting lineups, I utilized the best possible lefty/righty matchups. Note that some team's %'s may change radically when they fill out their rosters during the draft (i.e. N.E.'s %'s are based on their available ABs and IPs....which are presently less than league requirements). Team ERA, HRs and AVG are based on the present rosters and what I'd expect to be acquired via the draft. If I don't receive any hate-mail or death threats, you will also receive a final edition at the beginning of the season which will include any appropriate re-evaluation of my previous projections..

This disclaimer is offered:

I will offer my honest opinion....which may be right or wrong. Only time will tell. I will do my best not to offend anyone. If the analysis indicates that your team is not good, that is what I will say. Let me say this; I hold in the highest regard the baseball knowledge of each member of the F-B-N. There is a great deal of luck involved in building a good team, and even more luck involved in winning the league championship...I would say some guys have had more luck than others. Nuf said.

I welcome any comments, criticisms or different views and will include anything I might receive. Finally, I hope you find "Inside the F-B-N" amusing.....ENJOY!!!!!!

THE NL WEST

"Same as it always wasalmost".

Projected 1996 finish:	Opponents:							
	Record	Avg	HR	OBP	SLG	ERA	OBP	SLG
1. Connecticut	95-67	.285	212	.353	.466	4.12	.306	.389
2. Bolton	92-72	.276	214	.355	.446	4.36	.319	.384
3. Farmington Valley	91-71	.290	251	.366	.487	4.67	.327	.398
4. Klees	90-72	.284	186	.359	.450	4.46	.323	.394
5. Kansas City	80-82	.290	198	.355	.465	4.99	.330	.396
6. New England	51-111	.255	125	.321	.391	5.31	.332	.419

CONNECTICUT BLUE DEVILS:

Outlook:

The Blue Devils won't be as good in "96" as they were this past season. In fact, there are signs that the team of the "90"s will soon be on the decline....Bonds a 2 in LF, and Gwynn a 3 in RF for starters. However, don't stick a fork in them too quickly; they're not done quite yet. Bonds, Gwynn and the guys can still hit, and Maddux can still pitch. In other words, they'll still win about 100 games. That's unless GM Gineo, frustrated after another too-brief stint in the post season, clears house.

Assuming the house is not cleared, expect the following rotation:

1) Maddux 2) Hershiser 3) Saberhagen 4) Wagner 5) Rijo/Cormier.

Not bad....Maddux will win his 25+, Hershiser although not great could easily win 20 behind the high powered CT-offense. Saberhagen and Wagner at 3 and 4 will win more than they lose. Cormier and Rijo will combine to fill the 5th slot and be about as good as anyone else's #5. The pen will be held down ably by the closer/setup combo of Risley and Holmes. Urbani will suffice in the long role, unless something better is acquired.

Probable lineup:

1B) Mattingly, 2B) Biggio, SS) Valentin/ Smith, 3B) Williams/ Vina, C) Steinbach/Mcfarlane, LF) Bonds, CF) Finley, RF) Gwynn, DH) G. Williams/TBA.

With Bonds, Gwynn and Finley, the Blue Devils' out field is unsurpassed. Biggio, Gwynn, and Finley give them great table setters at the top of the order. Bonds (40+ Hrs, .447 OBP vs RHP), 1/2 of Matt Williams (30+ Hrs, .811 SLG vs LHP) and the platoon of McFarlane and Steinbach (30+ HRs) will provide plenty of punch in the middle of the order.

However, the Blue Devils are not without their weaknesses. Mattingly is one of the more lame first-basemen, Valentin is no great shakes at short, there's not an adequate fill-in while Williams is resting his foot, and there's not enough quality ABs to fill the DH slot.

What to look for:

The Blue Devils could use a SS/3B type who can hit (particularly a SS who hits lefties), and a bat or two to fill the DH slot. They don't have a lot of depth, so a trade of any substance would have to involve a starting player or maybe one of the secondary starters. GM Gineo can afford to take a prospect with the 24th pick, but a guy like Wakefield, Percival, or Batalico would shore up the pitching staff and make the Blue Devils really tough to beat. Aside from Risley and Holmes the pen is suspect, so he'll have to pick up some bodies in the draft, but so will everyone else in the division. Bottom line.... I wouldn't bail out just yet if I were GM Gineo. It's better to get to the dance and lose than to not get there at all. Three quarters of the fun is the getting there.

BOLTON BLUE BALLERS:

Outlook:

This team, along with the Junk Yard illustrates why a recently prescribed argument about "why the 110% rule should be changed" holds no water. GM Statile, with a little help from the Glass yard sale, has turned his 3rd year expansion team into a bonafide contender. Good job Dominick!!! The Blue Ballers are one of the league's deepest teams, with a pitching staff just a notch below the Blue Devils, and an offense with plenty of firepower.

The probable rotation is as follows: 1) Smoltz 2) D.Martinez 3) Pavlik 4) Erickson 5) Hill.

GM Statile is to be commended for holding onto Smoltz amidst what must have been many tempting offers. With the acquisition of Martinez the Blue Ballers now sport one of the best 1-2 punches around, and a deep rotation relative to the rest of the league. The pen is a little weak, but as we all know, relief pitching is much easier to come by than starters. In Steve Reed, the Blue Ballers do have a great closer....with 104 innings, actually a set-up man and closer in one. After that there's the Eck who can be used judiciously to get out right-handers, and Brocail or Blair as a long man/spot starter.

The probable lineup is looking something like this:

1B) Gaetti, 2B) Morandini/Gomez SS) Wiess 3B) Castillo, C) B.Johnson/Karkavice, LF) Coleman, CF) Johnson, RF) Jordan, DH) Colbrunn/Blowers.

Besides Blue Balls, GM Statile has thirdbase/firstbase-types coming out of his ears. He's also got some extra value in the way of Jefferson, Whiten and Howard. The line-up as it stands is damn-near as potent as the Blue Devils or the Hawks, without all the big name guys. Gaetti (40+), Castillo (35-45), Jordan (25-30), Blowers & Colbrunn (20-30ea depending on how much they play) and even Karkavice (15-20) will provide the Blue ballers with tons of HRs. The trade for Wiess Gives the Blue Ballers an "on base-type" leadoff hitter, and Johnson, Coleman or Morandini could all fill in the 2 spot adequately. The biggest weakness is in the outfield where no one hits hit lefties that well. Also, as a team there are less on-base type players that the other contenders have. However, make no mistake about it; this team will score a lot of runs.

What to look for:

I don't see a pick until the 3rd round. That's Ok; The Blue Ballers' lineup is just fine as it stands. If GM Statile plays his cards right (intentional pun), he could potentially win the division. Turn some of those picks and extra bodies into a potent bull-pen, get a part-time outfielder or two that crush lefties, maybe even upgrade the catcher position.... and but-a-bing (sp?)....the Blue Ballers are in business.

FARMINGTON VALLEY HAWKS:

Outlook:

Now here's an interesting team.....very good, but with some big holes, but also with a big draft. Like the Blue Devils, the Hawks will not be as good in "96" as they were in "95". Too many buts. There must have been a collective five-man cheer as Belle and McGwire packed their bags for Hog-ville. Anyhow, even without those big-boys, the Hawks may return to the post season if they have a good draft.

The Hawk pitching is an issue. The probable rotation will look something like this:

1) P.Martinez 2) Avery 3) Clemens 4) Mcdonald/Grahe 5) TBA.

Martinez is a fine #1 guy who should win 20+ games. However, Clemens, Avery and McDonald all had sub par seasons, so the rotation is a big question. GM Boucher really needs to get another front-line starter. The pen is not bad; Nelson will provide an awesome 97 innings. so don't plan on beating the Hawks if you trail after 7. Dipoto, Minor and Patterson will all provide adequate, if not spectacular middle relief.

The probable lineup is as follows:

1B) Klesco/Conine 2B) Deshields 3B) Jones SS) Cordero C) Piazza LF) Conine/Tarasco CF) Griffey/TBA RF) Salmon DH) Smorgasbord led by Aldrete.

Even without Belle and McGwire, the Hawks will hit well over 200 HRs. Piazza (40), Salmon (40), Conine (30), Klesco (30) and Griffey (25) will lead the dinger-parade. There's a lot of on-base to go with the slugging. There are .400% OB-guys galore, and Deshields (.383 OBP vs. RHP) is OK as a leadoff guy. You can add Chipper Jones' 28HRs (assuming this is the 1st pick.....he better be or a Glen Boucher card rated for 3B will have to be ordered from Strat).

The Hawks have an AB shortage at second, center and DH. Even so, like the other contenders in this division, run scoring will not be a problem for the Hawks. Look for the defense to hurt the Hawks occasionally. Jones and Cordero will make a lot of errors and Klesco will be a liability if he plays the field. Also, opponents will run a lot on Piazza

What to look for:

Assuming that Jones will go 1st, Durham, Veras, Nomo, Isrenhausen, Damon or even Wakefield would all be logical choices at the 5th and 11th slots. If Nomo isn't available or isn't to GM Boucher's liking, some other quality starter needs to be acquired or it'll be tough for the Hawks to make it to the post season. The team seems too good to be looking strictly at prospects early on. The Hawks actually have the deepest bull pen in the division, which will allow them to go for some complimentary bats in the later rounds. As mentioned, GM Boucher also needs to find a back up at SS/2B, a backup for Griffey in CF, and someone to fill the DH slot (or else he'll end up using Tarasco in LF, Conine at 1B, and Klesco in the DH role.....not the end of the world). All-in-all, the Hawks are a team that has a lot of questions to answer, but they should be a big player in the division.

KLEE'S KLUBBERS:

Outlook:

Everyone...except for the rest of the NL-Westerners, should be pleased to see the indomitable Klee and his lovable Klubbers back in the playoff hunt. Such a situation should lead to larger volumes of the famous news-letter verbiage that the Klee-ful one is known for. The return to respectability for this Klubber edition is largely the result of some unexpected performances by some of the lesser known guys like Eric Young and O'Leary. But the key to the Klubber resurgence will be the improvement in the pitching staff. The probable rotation will be:

1) Castillo 2) Rapp 3) Portugal 4) Hitchcock 5) Mlicki

While these guys will not keep opposing managers up at night, they're not likely to keep GM Klee up either. Castillo should be a solid #1 guy and the rest should be just mediocre enough to keep the Klubbers in most games until the 6th or so when the bullpen will save the day ahh, but there's the rub. Klee....get some middle relief and setup...PLEEEASE!!! Aguilera will do fine as a closer, but only for 68 innings. No mega closers like those belonging to CT, FV and Bolton. Ayala and Kamienicki will provide the Klubbers with some so-so innings but the Klubbers will need to get more help ...ho hum...in the draft of course.

The probable lineup will look like this:

1B) E. Williams/Greer 2B) Cora 3B) Ventura SS) Offelman C) Hoiles/Stinett LF) Young/Burke CF) Hunter/Cangelosi RF) O'Leary/Tartabull DH) Gonzalez.

Klee's got lots of on-base guys with Young, Offelman, Cangelosi and Cora. They'll be setting the tables for Ventura (30HRs) and Gonzalez (35HRs). Hoiles (.720 SLG), Young (.648 SLG) and Gonzalez (.653 SLG) are big-time lefty killers in the finest of Strat-tradition. Although not big power guys, O'Leary (.320 vs RH) and Hunter (.307 vs RH) will also add punch and on-base to a pretty solid lineup. The biggest pitfall for this team may be defense. With Williams, Offelman, Cora and Ventura good for about 120 errors between them, this team might better be named The Klees Eeeees.

What to look for:

Who knows what GM Klee will do with the 22th pick in the draft. Would he dare follow up the Eddie-Ballgame selection with Tim Wakefield (if he's there)? If he does, expect to see some sort of Klee Memorial Award presented draft-day 1997. There really ought to be one anyway. If Wakefield's not there Battalico or Percival would both fit in nicely. Also, the Klubbers could really use some better defense on the infield and a better first-baseman but I don't see that coming via the draft. Other than the usual draft day filler, don't be surprised if the Klubbers go as is into the 1996 season. They're not bad, but I think a major move would be necessary for them to hang in there for a playoff spot in this tough division.

ARSENAL GUNNERS (a.k.a. KANSAS CITY MONARCHS):

Outlook:

Just when it looked like the Monarchs were ready to move out of the second division they didn't; and they changed their name as well. The "Dean of Strat" will have some fun this season. He's got some "Big Boys" in Bichette and Edmunds, but alas... there just aren't enough supporting characters to make it to the top of this tough division..

As it stands the probable starting rotation is:

1) Glavine 2) Bones 3) Alvarez 4) Clark 5) TBA

The 1-2-3 guys are not bad, but no #5 starter, and Clark is not a good #4. In the pen, it's Charlton, who'd be close to the best stopper in the league if he was righty. As is, he'll still be one of the best. The rest of the pen consists of Mike Magnante, MTV softball pitcher Roger McDowell, and Lance Painter (remember ... the guy you saw start against Atlanta in the playoffs, and said "that would never happen in Strat"). My calculations say the Gunners need about 300 innings just to field a team ... yausa! It ain't gonna be easy to get that much quality pitching.

The projected Gunner lineup looks like this:

1B) Olerud 2B) Ygisagam/Lind 3B) Seitzer/Gomez SS) Ygisagam/Fermin C) Servais/Taubansee LF) Berroa/Plantier CF) Edmunds RF) Bichette DH) White

The good news Bichette, Edmunds and Berroa. There's gonna be some run scoring, no doubt about it. Also, the catching platoon of Taubensee and Servais will do just fine, and at first Olerud's OK but nothing to get excited about. The bad news crappy infield. Looking at the lineup, you might ask who this Ygisagam dude is? Did I miss him? Is he in the draft, you ask? Maybe Hideo's half/bother Japan's

best infield prospect? Afraid not Ygisagam "Your Guess IS As Good As Mine". Seitzer was a good pick up, or else Ygisagam would have been covering 3rd as well.

What to look for:

Don't get me wrong, the Gunners are not a bad team....but in this division forget about it. As I've said, they have some outstanding hitters, but so do the top four teams in the division. Arsenal just doesn't have the pitching depth or infield to compete in "96".

Now, if you're in need of a center fielder, I'd call GM Morris? I'd say that Devo can be had. It seems a shame to play a 1-CF at DH, which is where Edmunds or White will have to play. I'd say that Plantier and Turner Ward might go as well, for what they're worth. At the #10, unless some real appetizing prospect is there, expect the choice to be someone that's got some IPs or ABs. Might Durham or Veras drop that far?? If GM Morris can get a viable SS and 2B-man and another starter, they could make some noise. The Gunners certainly have plenty of offense. By the way...I liked "Monarchs" better.

NEW ENGLAND LIME SOX

Outlook:

If you ever said to yourself "I'm sick of this team; I'd just as well draft a new one", then watch to see how GM Fogg makes out. In effect he's drafting a new team. So, while it's hard to say what his opening day squad will look like, it's not hard to predict the cellar for the Lime Sox. While there may be a lot of talent in this year's draft, there won't be an enormous quantity of impact-type cards.

A very shaky rotation presently looks like this:

Projected Rotation:

1) Hammond 2) Reynoso/Haney 3) Miranda/TBA 4) TBA 5) TBA

As you can see, there's a HUGE innings shortage going on here. The pen's not a lot better. Henke is good, Cummings is OK for spots, and then you got Springer, Arocha and Acre yucko. We're talkin big-time ERA here. GM Fogg needs to pick up a whopping 600 innings via the draft or trades. Unless I'm totally out to lunch, that's trouble.

The projected lineup presently looks like this:

1B) Carreon 2B) Boone 3B) Scarzone/Hollins SS) Shipley/TBA C) Motley Crew LF) Hulse CF) Anderson RF) Clark/Bragg DH) Motley Crew reunion

As you can see, not a whole lot better than the pitching Not much power relative to the rest of the division, and way too many holes to fill. Four catchers with 400 ABs put together ... and Lance Parish is the stud. Carreon Boone and Anderson, all who should hit 15-20 HRs will supply the power (about as much as Mike Piazza). Aside from Anderson (.394 OBP vs. RHP) there are no real on-base guys. If my over-worked staff has calculated correctly, GM Fogg needs to acquire about 1600 ABs to field a team. The acquisition of Dave Clark was a good one....as much for unloading Mike Moore as for helping to fill an outfield slot

What to look for:

I count nine picks in the first three rounds. That's nice but it's not enough to salvage "96". The future is the way to go ... the Red Sox haven't won in 78 years; what's a few more years for the Lime Sox? If GM Fogg is the luckiest man alive, Charles Johnson will drop to 6, but I doubt it. Anyhow, with 4 picks in the top 25, a few holes ought to get filled. Maybe Tom Goodwin will be available for one of the mid-first round picks ... he would be a big help. Trades involving Carreon, Weiss (sold), and Henke (while they still have value) might be the way to go. The key to this draft for the Lime Sox is weather or not GM Fogg is able to draft for potential at the top, or if he falls into the old "gotta get those ABs and IPs" death-trap. It will be interesting to see.

SUMMARY

The West is the best. There would be some better records except that I expect the top five teams in the division to beat each other up on a regular basis. Connecticut, Farmington Valley, Klee's and Bolton are all playoff caliber teams. The Blue Devils have slipped some but still have to be the favorite. The Blue Ballers are actually stronger up and down the lineup and have a deeper starting rotation than the Blue Devils. I would not be surprised to see them win the division. I also wouldn't be surprised to see them come in 4th. The Blue Ballers don't have Maddux, and the pen isn't as good as what the Blue Devils or Hawks have. Right now, the Blue Devils still have the best pitching in the division.. The Hawks are also good but have a lot of questions to answer. I like those 3 1st round picks, but unless they pick up a big-time stud, their starting pitching could be a real achilles heal. If GM Boucher gets Nomo in the draft, the Hawks could be very tough. The Klubbers are also right there. Their defense could hurt them, but other than that they could contend. Arsenal is just a step below; primarily because of the lack of depth in their pitching staff. They could make some hay by filling a hole by moving Devon White. New England is going to have a very long year.

The top five teams can all hit. They'll all probably score 900-1000 runs. The team or teams that pick up the most quality pitching through the draft or through trades will rise to the top or stay there. The only pitchers I see in the draft that could really impact this race are Nomo, Wakefield, Percival, and Batalico. Isringhausen and Florie would help some. Connecticut, Farmington Valley and Klee's should all get a shot at least one of these guys. Bolton doesn't pick until the 3rd round, so GM Statile's going to have to make a trade to get some help. We'll see what happens come draft day. After that, there may be a total change in the projected standings.

NEXT EDITION: THE AL WEST!!