

1963 PRESEASON PROGNOSIS

AMERICAN LEAGUE

Route 66 Hot Rods

The Rods are far and away the best team in the Junior Circuit. They probably won't match the 120 victories of last year's champs, the Metro Stars, but it would be very disappointing if they didn't hit the century mark and beyond. They have cannons at all four corners with Hammering Hank Aaron in RF, Frank Robinson in LF, the Baby Bull Orlando Cepeda at 1B and sensational rookie Max Alvis at 3B. Ball hawk CF Willie Davis might not have a great offensive year but he'll catch anything hit in his vicinity and forget about running on his cannon arm. They will employ a five or six man pitching rotation but all of them could be number one or two on almost any other team. Ernie Broglio and Jim O'Toole could each approach 20 wins. The bullpen is out of this world with three sensational closers and the only "problem" will be trying to figure out which one to use.

Detroit Metro Stars

The defending champs have a very good team but certainly won't achieve the heights of last year's juggernaut although they could approach 100 wins with a few breaks though the Hot Rods would have to stumble badly to give them a shot at a repeat. The lineup ripples with power and they could exceed 200 homers but it will be challenging to get the right players in the game at the right time to maximize both offense and defense. Slugger Willie McCovey needs to play every day but if you play him at 1B or LF it will take at bats away from another good hitter; the same with Tom Tresh and Tony Gonzales. Shortstop will be a season long head ache and catcher will involve several players, one of whom, Smokey Burgess, can hit but is a shaky fielder and others who can field but not hit. On the mound the big three of Warren Spahn, Billy O'Dell and Bob Gibson could all have great seasons and the rest of the staff is very good. The bullpen is much better than most teams but nowhere near the level of the Hot Rods.

West Warwick Monarchs

There is little to choose between the Monarchs and the Totems but I give the Kings a slight edge because of their greater power. Slugger Harmon Killebrew is a fixture in LF, although his fielding is shaky while Al Kaline will patrol RF although he may need to play some CF to make room for others. Norm Siebern is solid both offensively and defensively at 1B but the rest of the infield will require a lot of juggling and guys playing multiple positions. The team lacks a natural CF which is why Kaline may need to play there at times. George Altman is adequate but nothing special in LF. The pitching staff, led by Don Drysdale and Larry Jackson is the strength of the team and if they achieve any success it will be due to their efforts. Besides the big two there are four other guys who could start for just about any team in the league. Jack Baldschun is a standout closer but the bulk of the other bullpen duties will probably be taken up by one or more of the starters mentioned above who won't be in the rotation.

Seattle Totems

The Totems should improve on last year's 79 wins and will definitely challenge the Monarchs for third place but any more would be tough. The team lacks power and will be hard pressed to get the best players in the game at the same time. Joe Torre is by far the best 1B but if he plays there, who will catch? If he doesn't, the rest of the 1B crowd is well below par. The infield is very weak offensively and they will be forced to play good fielding light hitting Mike Hershberger a lot of games in the OF. As an aside, Mike was a friend of my brother when we all grew up in Massillon, Ohio. Ken McBride and Johnny Podres lead the starting staff and the others are decent. While Art Fowler is a capable closer the rest of the bullpen is shaky at best.

Frankfort Fortress

A fall off from the top four to the rest of the league but the Forts and Gladiators are closely matched. Frankfort won 98 games in 1962 but that will be an impossible dream this year. Dick "Doctor Strange Glove" Stuart will make a few errors at 1B and strike out a lot but could also easily hit 40 homers. Rocky Colavito should decline from his big 1962 but remains a solid OF. Ed Bailey and John Orsino are an excellent catching combo and both could hit 20 homers if they get enough at bats. The rest of the IF and OF has a few decent players but not contender quality offensively or defensively. The pitching staff has some quality but nowhere near the level of the teams above except for Dick "the Monster" Radatz who will dominate the reliever stats and if the team can milk a lead until the 8th or 9th inning it will be lights out.

South River Gladiators

South River should definitely improve on last year's 67 wins and will challenge the Forts all season long for fifth place but moving up beyond that will be a struggle. Willie Mays remains the heart of the team and will shine once again in 1963. Rookie Pete Rose will provide a spark and hit well but his defense at 2B is questionable. Norm Cash will push Joe Pepitone to the OF where he will be a capable sidekick to Mays but they will be weak at LF and SS & 3B will be problems all year. Del Crandall has some power at catcher but he might not hit his weight and there isn't much behind him. Lefty Dick Ellsworth should have a sensational season and could easily win 20 games with proper support but Cal McClish is the best of an otherwise ordinary starting corps. Ron Taylor is a decent reliever but the balance of the staff is ordinary to poor.

Rossville Hornets

Another big falloff for the last three spots and the Hornets could sink to eighth although the Mets would have to overachieve for them to fall to the cellar. Tommy Davis is an excellent hitter who might challenge for the batting crown but he will be forced to play 3B for lack of alternatives where he is poor defensively. The double play combo of Ken Hubbs and Andre Rodgers will excel in the field but neither will contribute much offensively. First base will be shared by veteran Joe Adcock and youngster Willie Stargell but neither will scare you with the bat. Outfielder Willie Kirkland will hit a few homers but also strike out a lot and not hit for much of an average while the rest of the outfielders are even worse. Dean Chance and Bob Buhl are decent starters but there isn't

much behind them other than swingman Bob Veale who probably won't get enough appearances to be a major factor.

East Kenosha Lions

The Lions won 86 games last year but that will be an improbable pipedream in 1963. Centerfielder Vada Pinson and SS Maury Wills are both All-Star quality but there isn't much behind them. Lou Clinton has a little bit of power but will struggle to hit .250 and have an OBA above .300. The catching duo of Johnny Romano and John Bateman might be the worst in the league and 1B is a disaster waiting to happen. Often times the lineup will feature a majority of hitters with BA's under .230. The pitching staff has a lot of bodies but no one who could be considered a 1 or 2 starter on a decent team. Don Larsen is an OK reliever but he won't get much help from the rest of the staff.

New York Mets

The Mets won only 59 games last year and might be challenged to achieve that many in 1963. They are dead last in almost all offensive and pitching categories and the team BA might not exceed .220. Dave Nicholson has a little power but is also a strikeout machine and won't hit for much of an average. Aging veterans Stan Musial and Duke Snider will contribute some but they will be limited in playing time and both are defensive liabilities. The infield is woeful both offensively and defensively and the catchers (a cast of thousands) are even worse. Ken Johnson could be a top pitcher on a better team but he won't get much help other than Hal Woodeshick who would be a decent closer if the team could ever hand him a late lead. In the beginning of the era of the pitcher, the Mets could have a team ERA over 4.00, a full half run worse than the league average.

NATIONAL LEAGUE

Salzburg Bishops

The Prelates will be in a tough three way race with the Slims and Rivers but they appear to have a slight edge on the other two. They should top 200 homers for the year and have six players capable of hitting 20 or more. Rookie OF Jimmy Hall will be a welcome addition and should end up with 30-40 homers. Veterans Eddie Mathews and Jim Gilliam will anchor the infield although Mathews may need to play some LF to get Pete Ward enough playing time. Diamond Jim Gentile is a solid first sacker but they will have to run a relay of part timers to cover the catcher position. The incomparable Sandy Koufax leads the pitching staff and he'll get able support from veteran Curt Simmons; the rest of the starting staff is adequate but not outstanding. Al McBean and Dick Hall are the heart of a good bullpen.

Lafayette Slims

The Slims were a pre-season favorite in 1962 but they disappointed with only 84 wins. On paper they should compete in 1963. Outfielder Roberto Clemente and first baseman Bill White are sensational and defensive whiz Bill Mazerowski anchors a good infield. The bench is strong and will provide decent fill ins when the regulars need a rest. Versatile Chuck Hinton will log most of the playing time in CF and hard hitting but

feeble fielding Wes Covington will get most of the at bats in LF. The starting pitching is sensational and the guy who might have the highest ERA, Jack Sanford, might win 20 games. Stu Miller, Johnny Klippstein and Don Elston form a great bullpen and the rest of the staff isn't too shabby.

Wabash Rivers

The Rivers should make a giant leap from last year's 68 wins and could battle for the pennant all season long. Ron Santo and Leon "Daddy Wags" Wagner lead a strong attack and Earl Battey has developed into one of the premier catchers in the game although he may have to yield a few games to youngster Johnny Edwards. Aging veteran Ernie Banks will get most of the playing time at 1B but he has fallen well off from his glory days of a few years ago. The double play combo of Tony Taylor and Zoilo Versalles are adequate defensively and above average with the bat. The pitching staff has three solid starters in Jim Bouton, Jim Maloney and Claude Osteen while part timer Johnny Buzhardt will also contribute. Hoyt Wilhelm is a great reliever but he'll get great help from Gary "Ding Dong" Bell and Al Worthington.

Portland Beavers

Outfielder Billy Williams and third sacker Kenny Boyer lead the attack but Felipe Alou, Don Demeter and Donn Clendenon will also contribute. The keystone combo of Tony Kubek and Bobby Richardson are sensational on defense although it would be nice if both would take a walk occasionally. The bench is strong and the only problem might be finding enough playing time for everyone. Lefties Gary Peters and Steve Barber lead a decent starting staff but most are cursed with shaky control. The bullpen is not strong although Gary Roggenburk should be decent if he can control his walks.

Hampton Road Cruisers

They won 91 games last year and probably won't reach that far in 1963. The team has a decent amount of power but it is diffused throughout the lineup. The roster includes both Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris but both will be hobbled by injuries which will hold down their playing time. Catcher Elston Howard and RF Floyd Robinson are the leaders in the lineup. Don Mincher and Gene Oliver will share time at 1B and even though both are capable of the long ball they will also each commit a ton of errors. The left side of the infield with Dick Schofield and Clete Boyer are great defensively and both will contribute with the bat. Whitey Ford and Juan Marichal are among the best lefty/righty duo in the league and both could win 20-25 games with the right amount of support. The starting staff falls off after those two but is still adequate. Tommy Sisk is a decent reliever but the rest of the bullpen is mediocre.

Evanston Elephants

Last year's NL MVP Johnny Callison returns and should have another good year along with SS Dick Groat and 3B Rich Rollins. John "Boog" Powell and Charley Dees will share time at 1B and ballhawk Jim Landis will patrol CF but it would be nice if Jim would hit a little better. Wally Moon and George Alusik will platoon in LF but neither will be big contributors. Rookie Bill Freehan will get most of the playing time at catcher but his stats and those of his cohorts will be no more than average. Bob Friend is a horse

as a number one starter and might win (or lose) 20 games if he gets enough support. His only reliable helper will be Don Nottebart. The bullpen lacks a top flight closer but has several pitchers who can get the job done.

Winter Harbor Seals

The Seals offense is not bad but they will be hampered all season by a poor pitching staff. Carl Yastrzemski and Curt Flood are two-thirds of the outfield and both are very good but the third slot will be filled mostly by Jim King who has some power but a poor BA. Jim Fregosi is a fine SS and several players can adequately cover 2B but they will have a year-long problem at third. If Fred Whitfield could play every day at 1B, that position would be solid but when he doesn't play, watch out. They have a similar problem at catcher where Tom Haller is fine but his at bats will be limited and no adequate backup is on the roster. On the mound, Lee Stange and John Tsitouis are good but between them they might not start much more than 40 games and the rest of the starting staff is mediocre to poor. Ron Kline and Julio Navarro are good relievers but they may not have a lot of leads to protect.

Los Angeles Surfers

The Surfers do have some power with Frank "Hondo" Howard and CF Don Lock while Frank Malzone is one of the better 3B in the league but most of the rest of the team except catcher Tim McCarver has issues either offensively or defensively. Woodie Held can play almost anywhere and has some pop in his bat but if he plays SS, the team will suffer defensively and if he plays 2B, then Chuck Schilling will be relegated to the bench. The Surfer's manager will have to run a lot of part-timers into the lineup just to get through the season. Juan Pizzaro, Jack Kralick and veteran Robin Roberts lead the pitching staff and Jim Bunning is a capable number four. The bullpen is adequate but the team will have to overachieve on offense if they wish to move up significantly in the standings.

Fairfax Colts

The Colts won only 48 games last year and they certainly should surpass that total and the Mets will probably edge them out for the worst record in the league but you can't say a whole lot more positive about them. Rookie Tony Oliva has a bright future but the key word is "future" as he will be severely limited in how much he can play in 1963. Lou Brock is a potential All-Star but probably not this year; the same can be said of Rusty Staub. They don't have a full time catcher but should be able to get by with a relay of part timers. Don Zimmer will probably get the most time at 3B and will hit a few homers but also have an OBA under .300. The pitching staff has some ability with Turk Farrell, Carl Willey and swingman Bob Miller plus reliever Bobby Shantz but there is little of real value after them.