

## PRE-SEASON PROGNOSIS 1956

### American League

#### Riverside Robbers

The Robbers have a very good offense with a pitching staff to match and are slightly favored in the AL but could be pressed by the Lightning and even the Tigers. OF Duke Snider is the big power man in the lineup but he'll get help from another seven players with double figure HR potential. The best of these are SS Harvey Kuenn and OF Bill Virdon. Jungle Jim Rivera will get most of the starts at the third OF slot. Slick fielding Gene Baker will hold down the keystone with Billy Klaus getting most of the starts at the hot corner. Super sub Jackie Robinson will put in some time at 1B, alternating with Walt Dropo but also get starts at 2B, 3B and maybe even a few in the OF. The team has three decent catchers and the trick will be finding enough playing time to keep them all happy. The pitching staff is top notch and led by Burly Early Wynn and Bob Lemon while Bob Rush, Murray Dickson and Curt Simmons round out the starters. Marv Grissom could be one of the best closers in the league and he'll get a lot of help from a deep staff.

#### Louisiana Lightning

Last year's World Series champ got redistricted into the AL this year and on the strength of a powerful lineup which could exceed 250 team homers they are poised to contend again this year. Centerfielder Mickey Mantle has a great glove and could easily compete for the triple crown and hit 50 plus homers in the process. And it doesn't stop there with another five players having 30 homer potential. Jim Lemon and Wally Post will flank Mantle in the OF and between the three of them could hit will over 100 homers. First sacker Gil Hodges has a flashy glove and good power to go with an excellent OBA. Ernie Banks at SS hits like an OF and won't embarrass you in the field. Red Schoendienst lacks power at 2B but he has a solid glove and should hit over .300. The weakest link in the INF is third base where Al Rosen is decent if unspectacular. And we haven't talked about catcher where Stan Lopata could knock out 30 homers with 100 RBI's and a good OBA. Don Newcombe is the acknowledged leader of the starting corps but the other four slots are filled with such potential that Robin Roberts could be shoved to the bullpen. They have some decent relievers but with these starters a bullpen might not be that important.

#### Massillon Tigers

The defending AL champs could contend again this year but will be hard pressed to match last year's 98 wins. They have a very good team with one glaring exception, especially as compared to the Lightning, a lack of home run power. In fact they might finish near the bottom of the AL in team homers. The outfield is solid with All-Star Al Kaline in right, a platoon of Bob Nieman and Moose Moryn in left and the dependable Bill Tuttle in center. In fact Kaline may get some games in center to maximize the at bats of Nieman and Moryn. It would be nice if the first base duo of Vic Power and Bob Boyd had a little more power but both are .300 hitters. Second baseman Don Blasingame is a wizard on defense and even though a Punch and Judy hitter he won't embarrass you at the plate. Third sacker Bob Boone is solid if unspectacular. The weak link in the infield is SS with several players putting in time, none of whom will be confused with an All-Star. There are also three candidates who will share time at catcher although they are a notch above the SS crew. On the mound, Massillon has three potential 20-game winners (assuming good support) in Frank Lary, Herb Score and Bob Buhl although all have control issues, especially Score. The bottom of the rotation is much weaker but might be able to get the job done with a little luck. Don Mossi and Lindy McDaniel are a decent L/R bullpen combo but this is not a strength of the team.

### **Frankfort Frigates**

A big falloff after the top three and the Tigers will battle the Saints for fourth place with a move up in the standings contingent on a big falloff by least one of the top teams. Neither the offense or defense is outstanding and many of the better hitters are part-timers. Billy Bruton and Larry Doby are both natural CF's but both must play as they are the two best full timers on the roster. The third OF slot is a grab bag of part-timers. Second sacker Frank Boling is solid when in the lineup, but might not be able to start much more than 100 games. By default Marv Blaylock will get most of the time at first base but he is mediocre at best. The same could be said for Chico Carresquel at short. Third baseman Ron Jackson is a vacuum cleaner on defense and not a bad hitter but also will be restricted in the number of game she can play. A cast of thousands will fill in at catcher with none being a standout. Lefties Johnny Antonelli and Billy Pierce would be at the top of the rotation for almost any team in the league but the quality falls off pretty fast after that and only Clem Labine can be counted on as a consistent performer in the bullpen.

### **Mound City Saints**

The Saints offense is a shade above the Frigates while the pitching staff is a bit weaker. Mound City does have some power with six, maybe seven, potential 20 homer guys. Carl Furillo and young Rocky Colavito will anchor two of the OF slots, although Rocky is not a full-timer. By default Carl Olsen will have to play most of the games in CF but he is distinctly below par. Roy Sievers will also play the OF regularly but may need to play a few games at first where the incumbent, Mickey Vernon, possesses outstanding statistics but will not be able to play a full season. Junior Gilliam is a star at second as he does everything you would want from a middle infielders offensively, defensively and on the bases. Frank Thomas (the first Frank Thomas) is a little weak with the glove at third but a solid hitter. Al Dark is a workmanlike SS who won't embarrass you. Catcher Roy Campanella is starting to feel his age but still is excellent defensively and has decent home run power. On the mound, the team has some issues although they do not lack for quantity as the opening day roster has 19 pitchers. Vinegar Bend Mizell and Don Kaiser are OK starters though Kaiser will be limited in his number of starts. After them Mel Parnell and Art Fowler are decent spear carriers but beyond them, the situation is bleak. They have some quality in the bullpen but no one who can give you 40-50 solid appearances.

### **Wabash Six**

Another falloff with the Six and Jakes battling to stay out of the cellar. Just like the Frigates, the two best Wabash hitters, Ritchie Ashburn and Gus Bell are both natural CF's although they have contrasting styles as Ritchie is a slap hitter who can get on base while Gus is the premier power man in the lineup. Ray Mueller fills the third OF slot but he is adverse to the base on balls, has no power and is mediocre in the field. Beyond him, the situation is ever bleaker. Whitey Lockman will split time at first with several part timers but he will be lucky to get much more than a dozen extra base hits. Bobby Avila at second appears to have fallen way off offensively from prior years and will split time with Daryl Spencer. Pee Wee Reese is starting to show his age but can still do the job at short and Eddie (the walking man) Yost will hold down the hot corner and make up for a weak BA with a great OBA and an occasional home run. Hal W Smith and Tom House will fill in unspectacularly at catcher. If rookie teenager Don Drysdale could start more games he would clearly be the leader of the staff but with his limitations, the starting corps is weak. Windy McCall and Hoyt Wilhelm are the best of the bullpen crew.

### **Joliet Jakes**

The Jakes were last in the NL last year and after realignment have a good chance to be last in the AL in 1956. Joliet has some power in the lineup but many homers will come with the bases empty as they haven't mastered the art of taking a pitch and getting a walk. Moose Skowron and Ken Boyer will anchor the corners of the infield and both have decent power and the ability to hit .300. Shortstop Luis Aparicio has a good glove and can steal a base but hasn't mastered the art of stealing first. Billy Gardner is the best of a bad lot at second although youngster Bobby Richardson appears to be a diamond in the rough, but not this year. Catcher is in the capable hands of Yogi Berra who has the best power on the team, can hit .300 and even has learned to occasionally take a walk. Except for Hank Bauer the outfield is among the worst in all of SPBII and Hank's biggest value is the home run as he might not hit .250. Mike (the Bear) Garcia is the leader of the staff but don't look for much quality below him and the bullpen is even worse, Can't get over how many ex-Yankees are on this roster, it must mean something but I can't figure out what!

### **National League**

#### **Beard Black Cats**

The Cats will battle the Lakers all the way down to the wire for the NL pennant. They have a slight edge on offense but are modestly behind East Kenosha on the mound. Ageless Minnie Minoso (is he 33 or 38?) along with Jackie Jensen will fill the two corner two OF slots while ballhawk Jimmy Piersall is a fixture in CF and Tito Francona a solid fourth outfielder. First baseman Joe Adcock has 40-homer potential while 2B Pete Runnels is a proven .300 hitter with a good OBA. Dick Groat will do the job at short but he won't get too many people excited about it. Third base is a problem with several players having to shuttle in and out and Minoso possibly even getting a few starts. Catcher is in the capable hands of a L/R platoon of Ed Bailey and Del Crandall. Bob Friend and Tom Brewer are solid at the top of the rotation with Dick Donovan not far behind. The last two slots will be capably filled by Brooks Lawrence and Sad Sam Jones. They have a wealth of relievers but no sensational standout.

#### **East Kenosha Lakers**

The Lakers frantic off-season dealings seem to have finally borne fruit as this year's edition of EKL is solid and will push the Cats all season long. Outfielder Frank Robinson will break in with a bang as is an early season favorite for Rookie of the Year honors with an outside chance at MVP. They have several others who will shuffle in and out of the lineup at the other two OF slots with Jackie Brandt and Al Smith the best of the lot. First sacker Vic Wertz has 30 homer potential while the keystone combo of Nellie Fox and Johnny Logan is top of the line both offensively and defensively. Andy Carey and Billy Martin will share time at third, but this position is not a strength. Sherm Lollar is a solid performer on both sides of the field at catcher. The pitching staff has a decided Milwaukee tilt with Warren Spahn and Lew Burdette as two of the top starters in the league. Paul Foytack, Chuck Stobbs and Joe Nuxhall round out the rotation and all are top notch. The bullpen has a lot of bodies and should be able to do the job in an adequate if unspectacular fashion.

#### **Asbury Argonauts**

A falloff after the top two but the battle for third place should be a dogfight between the Argonauts, Patriots and Bears. Asbury is a little more balanced and as such get a slight nod over the other two teams. Stan the Man Musial will hold down 1B and give his usual stellar performance at the plate. Billy Goodman and Bill Mazerowski will share time at second with Goodman giving you a better bat and Maz

a better glove. Hector No Hands Lopez will fill the hot corner and has a good glove to go with a solid bat. Gil McDougal and Don Buddin will share time at short with McDougal by far the better option. Bobby Thompson is the closest thing to a full time outfielder and he is no trip to Hollywood. The rest of the garden slots will be filled with an ever changing cast of characters. The pitching staff is not a strength with Johnny Kucks and swingman Tom Sturdivant the best of the lot. Nellie King is the top reliever but he won't get a lot of help from his mates.

### **Schenectady Patriots**

The Pats have two good power guys in third baseman Eddie Mathews and OF Charlie Paw Paw Maxwell but not a whole lot more. Wally Moon could hit 15-20 homers at first base but the team will be hard pressed to find anyone else who can hit double figure dingers. Roberto Clemente and his cannon arm is a fixture in RF and will hit over .300 but like a lot of other Latin players is averse to the base on balls. The third OF slot will be manned by a flurry of part-timers. The double play combo of Johnny Temple at second and Roy McMillan at short can make all the plays and are at least decent at the plate. Behind the plate is a problem as none of the catching corps can hit their way out of a paper bag. Lefty Whitey Ford is the ace of the staff and he'll get some good support from Ron Kline but the manager will have to shuttle several swingmen in and out of the rotation to get through the season. Ellis Kinder is the top man in the bullpen but there isn't a lot behind him other than the swingmen when they aren't starting.

### **Newark Bears**

The Bears could climb to third without a lot of trouble and they do possess good team power. The outfield of Hank Aaron, Willey Mays and Del Ennis could combine for 85-90 home runs and except for Ennis they are sensational in the field. First sacker Ted "Big Klu" Kluszewski could knock out 35-40 homers and hit over .300. Willie Jones is an accomplished third baseman but the DP combo is not strong at the plate and won't win any gold gloves in the field. Mike Hegan is still a master behind as opposed to at the plate as age is beginning to take its toll. There isn't much depth on the bench which means resting the starters will result in a big drop off in performance. Pint size Harvey Haddix and Roger Craig lead the staff but they might not make the fourth or fifth slots on better teams. The depth behind them is thin and the bullpen is one of the weakest in the league.

### **New Bedford Ahab's**

The Ahab's are pretty well set in sixth place; it will take a major collapse of at least one of the teams above for them to advance to fifth and it's hard to see how the woeful Tarheels can escape the cellar. The team has minimal power and will probably only beat out the 'Heels for the lowest team homer total. Ted Williams is the one shining light in the lineup (and what a light) but he won't get much help. Shortstop Willie Miranda and first baseman Dee Fondy are the only others close to full time players and although Miranda can field he is an offensive millstone while Fondy is one of the weakest first sackers in the league. Outfielders Sandy Amoros & Gus Zernial do have a little pop in their bats but both are part timers with questionable gloves. They have some decent future value such as 3B Brooks Robinson but he won't help much in 1956. Almost everyone on the roster will need to shuffle in and out of the lineup in order to get through the season. Catcher Clint Courtney will be decent for 100 or so games but after him the outlook is grim. Don Larsen is the best pitcher on the team but he is severely limited in the number of starts he can make and his best support will come from Jim Hearn who is even more limited. Even Dean Stone might log a few starts but few will be quality. Ed Roebuck would be well down the list as a reliever on almost any other team but here he is the best they have. The starters will get shelled quite often but don't look for the bullpen to staunch the bleeding.

### **Raleigh Tarheels**

With all due respect Raleigh is far and away the worst team in all of SPBII. They lost 114 games last year and might challenge that mark in 1956. It's sad but the two best power hitters on the team, Dale Long and Bill White, are both first base only. The rest of the roster is littered with part timers who will constantly have to be shuttled in and out of the lineup with only a handful capable of even playing 100 games. Twenty-year old Harmon Killebrew and eighteen year-old Curt Flood both look to have great futures but won't help much this year. The team BA might not hit .230 and team OBA will barely exceed .300. There isn't a whole lot more to be said about the offense but we haven't yet gotten to the woeful pitching staff. There are several diamonds in the rough such as Sandy Koufax and Bob Purkey but also some washed up former stars such as Larry Jansen and Bob Feller. The manager will need to utilize the "bonus rule" quite extensively. Since they will have very few leads to protect it's really not that significant that the bullpen stinks.