

PRE-SEASON PROGNOSIS 1957

American League

Louisiana Lightning

Last year's edition won 108 games and cruised to the AL crown by 15 games and then won the World Series over the Beard Black Cats and this year should be a repeat performance as they have a thunderous offense which could easily hit 250 homers and are backed up by a very good pitching staff. They have two natural CF's in Mickey Mantle and Duke Snider but both will get plenty of playing time with the Mick having a decent shot at league MVP. Ernie (Let's Play Two) Banks is an anchor at short and could knock out 40 plus homers while his 2B mate Red Schoendienst is a solid fielder and very good hitter. Gil Hodges is a fixture at first with a great glove and 30-homer power. Jim Lemon and Joe Cunningham will get a lot of playing time in the OF but room has to be found for super sub Bob Hurricane Hazel. Smokey Burgess and Elston Howard will share time behind the plate while third sacker Don Hoak who would be a star on almost any other team will probably bat eighth in the order! Frank Sullivan, Connie Johnson and Don Newcombe are the leaders of the staff but Robin Roberts and Jack Harshman aren't too far behind and swingman Billy O'Dell will be a big contributor. The bullpen is OK but not outstanding but the offense will score so many runs it might not matter.

Massillon Tigers

The Bengals will battle the Frigates for second place but it would take a monumental falloff from the Lightning for them to contend for the pennant. They'll probably have no more than half as many team homers as Louisiana. Bob Boyd and Vic Power will share time at first with Vic also playing some outfield. Don Blasingame is a solid 2B with a good batting eye while Harvey Kuenn and Chico Fernandez will share time at short with Kuenn moving to third when Hector Lopez needs a rest. Al Kaline, probably the team's best hitter, will play both RF and CF while Bob Nieman and Wes Covington will platoon in left. Bill Tuttle will also get a lot of playing time in center. Hal R Smith is the best of a decent three man catching corps. The pitching staff is very good with a four man rotation of Vern Law, Brooks Lawrence, Lindy McDaniel and Moe Drapowsky the leaders while Frank Lary and Herb Score will also fill in. That leaves Bob Buhl as the odd man out and into the bullpen. Paul LaPalme, Don Mossi and Turk Lown will get most of the bullpen work along with Buhl.

Frankfort Frigates

The Frigates offense is below the level of the two teams above but they have the best pitching staff in the AL. They have good team power but might not be able to get all the power hitters into the lineup at the same time. Ed Bouchee is a good fielder with a nice batting eye and decent power at first while 2B Frank Bolling and SS Chico Carresquel are a decent double play combo. Andy Carey and George Kell will share time at third and neither will embarrass you. Four catchers may share time behind the plate but this is not a team strength. The outfield is relatively weak with Al Pilarcik the only one capable of playing in more than 120 games; a cast of thousands will fill out the other slots. However the pitching staff is another story as righty Jim Bunning and lefty Billy Pierce are both potential 20-game winners with Billy Hoelt and Johnny Antonelli not far behind. They also have several good swingmen and a cracker jack reliever in George Zuvernik.

Mound City Saints

The Holy Ones could contend for third and even second but it would indeed be a miracle if they can match the Lightning. The team has a better balance than the Frigates with an above average offense and a middling to average pitching staff. They do possess good power with the big gun being Roy Sievers who will probably get the bulk of his work in LF. Budding star Rocky Colavito will man RF and knock out a few homers while hulking Frank Thomas (the first incarnation of Frank Thomas) will play 1B and supply even more power. Jim Gilliam at 2B and Al Dark at SS are a decent if unspectacular DP combo. Young Gus Triandos and a fading Roy Campanella will handle the catching duties. Third base is a problem as Don Zimmer looks to be the incumbent but he is a weak hitter and can't play every day so Thomas may be pressed into service there which might then move Sievers to first. Carl Furillo is a decent hitter but pitiful fielder who will get some time in right or left while it appears that Gino Cimoli will be the more or less full time center fielder. Thomas can also play the OF in an emergency. Teen age rookie Milt Pappas is a diamond in the rough but won't do much in 1957. Dick Drott and Bob Turley are the leaders of the staff but both have serious control issues. Vinegar Bend Mizell has one of the more colorful nicknames and is solid as a number three starter while swingman Billy Loes will be a contributor but the bottom of the rotation is weak. Bob Grim and Bud Byerly are a good one-two punch out of the pen.

Wabash Six

A big drop off after the first four and the Six will be battling the Jakes all year for fifth place. The offense has serious problems with a lack of power. Ritchie Ashburn is a great leadoff man and a spectacular CF although his arm is weak. This will push Gus Bell to one of the corner OF slots and he is one of the few Six players with double-figure HR power. Bobby Avila is now of the downside of a good career but he will man 2B while Daryl Spencer will get most of the starts at short while also filling in at third to spell Eddie "the walking man" Yost. Frank Torre will be the first baseman by default but he has a punchless bat and may share time with Whitey Lockman when he isn't playing the OF. However, moving Lockman will mean the even more punchless rookie Jim Landis will play the OF. Hal W. Smith is a solid catcher and he will be spelled by Frank House who won't embarrass you at the plate or in the field. The pitching staff has some extreme highs and lows with big Don Drysdale and swingman Gene (basketball player) Conley on the top with Hal Jeffcoat and Herb Wehmeier on the down side. Dixie Howell is a decent reliever but Hoyt Wilhelm looks to fall off from his previous brilliance and there isn't a whole lot behind them.

Joliet Jakes

The Jakes could easily move up to fifth and probably will beat out the woeful Robbers and escape the cellar but it will be tough to achieve much more. The team has some power but a poor OBA and a terrible pitching staff with serious control problems. Ex-Yankees (a theme that will rebound through the roster) OF Gene Woodling and 1B Moose Skowron are the best hitters on the team. Jim Garner will get most of the starts at 2B but young Bobby Richardson will also be in there quite a bit. Ken Boyer will get the most of the starts at third but could get work in the OF to make room for Eddie Kasko who also plays short but that position will be ably manned by base-stealer deluxe Luis Aparicio who is also a good fielder. Yogi Berra (are you sensing a pattern) is a great defensive catcher and might have the best power on the team. Prized rookie Roger Maris will share the other OF slots with Hank Bauer and Rip Repulski. Now we get to the pitching staff where the manger will scramble to assemble a coherent rotation as Mike (the Bear) Garcia is the closest thing to a full time starter. Along with almost everyone else on the staff, Garcia is lavish in issuing bases on balls. Art Ditmar is a decent swingman but other than Jim (Ball Four) Brosnan who also has control issues, the bullpen is pretty bare.

Riverside Robbers

The Robbers were .500 in 1956 after being picked by some obscure prognosticator to win the pennant but they have fallen precipitously to a solid last place in 1957. The offense is poor and the pitching staff not much better. Outfielder Harry Anderson (one of the heroes of the play Bleacher Bums) probably wouldn't start for almost any other AL team but is one of the leaders of the offense which tells you something. Young Tony Kubek is a decent if pop-gun hitter and will shuffle between the outfield and short where he will share time with defensive wiz Billy Klaus. Bill Virdon, Wally Post and Jim Rivera will get most to the balance of the OF starts but none will end up with a good BA or OBA. Ray Boone and Walt Dropo will share time at first but neither will be confused with an All-Star. Second base is a serious problem if they don't give most of the starts to Gene Baker which will then create a problem at third which might necessitate moving Kubek there more or less full-time. Stan Lopata has some pop in his bat behind the plate and he'll be backed up by Russ Nixon. The best you can say about the pitching staff is that they are not as bad as the Jakes. Sal Maglie and Ralph Terry could be the staff leaders if they were able to start enough games but that role will fall to Jim Brewer and Burly Early Wynn who both have big time control issues. The balance of the rotation will be filled by a parade of non-entities. Swingmen Bob Trowbridge and Mike Fornieles are decent along with pure reliever Seth Morehead but there isn't much below them.

NATIONAL LEAGUE

Beard Black Cats

The defending NL champs are out to revenge their 1956 World Series loss but will be pressed all season long by the resurgent Schenectady Patriots. The 110-win season of 1956 is a distant memory and the tight pennant race may mean no more than 95 or so wins this season. The team has good power which is well diffused throughout the lineup. The OF is solid with Minnie Minoso in left, Jimmy Piersall in center plus Jackie Jensen in right and all three have decent power and know how to get on base. Jerry Coleman at second and Dick Groat at short are a solid middle of the infield duo. Frank Malzone is a vacuum cleaner at third and not a bad hitter either. Dick Williams and Joe Adcock will share time at first with super sub Pete Runnels filling in at first, second or third. Ed Bailey and Del Crandall will share time behind the plate and both have good power. Bob Friend, Dick Donovan and Curt Simmons will lead the rotation but the lower half is also very good. Gerry Staley, Marv Grissom and Roy Face are probably the best reliever troika in the league and swingman Ray Narleski will also contribute.

Schenectady Patriots

The Pats' should improve by 15-20 games on last year's 78 wins and press the Black Cats all the way in 1957. The team has some nice power with third sacker Eddie Mathews and outfielders Wally Moon and Charley (Paw-Paw) Maxwell the big guns. Unfortunately these two plus Bob Skinner and feeble fielding Hank Sauer are all natural left fielders which means the defense will suffer as someone plays out of position. And room has to be found for the young star in waiting Roberto Clements. Johnny Temple and Roy McMillan will man the middle of the infield and are more than adequate. Earl Torgenson and Dave Philley will man first base with Skinner getting some starts given the crowded nature of the outfield. Hank Foiles and Hobie Landrith are the incumbent catchers. The pitching staff is just a notch below the Black Cats with staff leaders Jonny Podres and Jack Sanford backed up by young Whitey Ford and Willard Nixon with Ron Kline not far behind. Turk (Dalton Gang) Farrell is the top man in the bullpen and he has some adequate support from a host of others.

New Bedford Ahabs

A big falloff after the top two but the Whalers should dramatically improve on last year's 51 wins. Any team with Ted Williams has to be taken seriously but Ted won't get a lot of help as the only other consistent power source on the team is Gus Zernial who will struggle to hit .250 with a .300 OBA and since both Ted and Gus are natural left fielders that means one will have to play out of position. Dee Fondy is a nice slap hitter at first but his playing time will be limited and his backup, Art Schult, has an even more punchless bat. Shortstop Charley Neal is the closest thing to a full timer in the infield as second and third will be filled by a procession of part-timers. Brooks Robinson is a star in waiting but won't do much in 1957. Sandy Amoros, Johnny Groth and ancient Enos Slaughter will get most of the remaining OF at bats but none of the trio are standouts. Clint Courtney and Valmy Thomas will get most of the starts at catcher with budding star John Roseboro waiting in the wings. Pint-size Bobby Shantz is a nice pitcher but won't get enough starts to be a major factor. Duke Maas, Don Larsen and Camilo Pascual round out the starting corps with Ed Roebuck, Ken Lehman and Cal McLish a fine bullpen crew but the quality of the rest of the staff is limited.

Newark Bears

The Bears have some hope of overtaking the Ahabs for third but could just as easily fall to fifth. The offense isn't bad and they have first class power but the pitching is weak. You have to like any team which has Willie Mays and Hank Aaron who will be joined by Del Ennis in the outfield. George Crowe at first is a 30-home run man and his backup is Ted (Big Klu) Kluszewski. Danny O'Connell is a nice workmanlike if punchless second baseman but shortstop Granny Hamner and third sacker Willie (Puddin Head) Jones are well below par. Catcher is a grab bag with as many as five non-entities getting playing time. Harvey Haddix is a decent starter but a very poor number one in the rotation and the quality goes down pretty fast after him as the manager will scramble to milk 154 starts out of this staff. The two best relievers, Don McMahon and Tommy Byrne, both have serious control issues while swingman Virgil Trucks suffers from the same problem.

East Kenosha Lakers

The ELK crew could make it to fourth but they have little hope of replicating last year's 89 wins. They do have some power with OF Frank Robinson and first sacker Vic Wertz the big guns. Pepper pot 2B Nellie Fox teams with SS Johnny Logan to give EKL the best defensive DP combo in the league and they aren't too shabby with the bat either. Al Smith will get most of the starts at third although he might also play a little outfield to give volatile Billy Martin some playing time. Lou Skizas is the best of a weak OF crew other than Robinson. Cal Neeman and Sherm Lollar will share time behind the plate. There is a lot of quantity if not much quality in the balance of the lineup. They have some quality on the mound with Warren Spahn, Paul Foytack, Lew Burdette and Ray Moore plus swingman Larry Jackson. A lot of bodies but not a lot of quality in the bullpen.

Asbury Argonauts

A well below average attack coupled with a below average pitching staff is not usually the recipe for SPB success. Advancing out of sixth place will be a major accomplishment but falling to the cellar would represent a complete disaster. Stan the Man Musial is a fixture at first and will give you his usual superlative numbers but he'll get little help from anyone other than OF Moose Moryn and SS Gil McDougal. Bill Mazerowski at second gives you a good glove and an OK bat but third will be split between Ray Jablonski and Billy Goodman neither of which have much power. Billy Hunter will fill in at second, short and third but can't hit his way out of a paper bag. Harry (Suitcase) Simpson and Bobby (the Giants win the Pennant!) Thompson will get most of the remaining OF starts but it is pretty bleak beyond them. The catching duo of Sammy White and Rube Walker is among the worst in the league.

Tom Sturdivant, Jim Wilson, Johnny Kucks and Ruben Gomez are a decent big four but the fifth slot will be a problem. Swingman Al Worthington is probably the "best" in the bullpen but just saying that tells you how poor the rest will be.

Raleigh Tarheels

The Heels' have the unique "honor" of achieving a quintana (sic?) of finishing last in all five of the categories in my complex forecasting formula. And in all cases their stats are well below the next worst team which virtually guarantees a last place finish. Las Vegas is taking even money as to whether or not they will exceed last year's putrid 31-123 record. Roll forward a few years and this could be knockout squad with such budding future stars as Curt Flood, Harmon Killebrew, Sandy Koufax, Joey Jay and Claude Osteen but these guys will do little or nothing in 1957. In the current day world first baseman Dale Long and OF Woodie Held represent about half the total homers the team will hit this season. Third sacker Gene Freese should also have some better years in the future but for now he will be just another hitter. Bubba Phillips will move between third and the OF but not distinguish himself in either slot. Other than second baseman Bobby Morgan the rest of the team consist of a collection of Punch and Judy part timers. Curt Barclay and swingman Bob Purkey are the leaders of the staff but the manager will need to dig deep and start pitchers such as Chuck Stobbs and Ted Abernathy way more than he would like to do. The fact that the team will have very few leads to protect means the non-existent bullpen won't really be a problem!