

PRE-SEASON PROGNOSIS 1958

American League

Massillon Tigers

The Tigers won 94 games last year but still finished a distant second in the AL. However this year they are the favorites even though they do not possess either the best offense or pitching staff in the AL but both are a close second. For most games they will start five .300 hitters and they possess decent and diffused power. Bob Boyd and Vic Power will platoon at first but Vic can also play third where he will share time with Hector Lopez. Second base is the domain of Don Blasingame who has decent on base and is a solid defender. Right fielder Al Kaline is a solid hitter and excellent fielder while CF Harvery Kuenn should approach a .320 BA and 40 doubles and LF will be a solid platoon of Wes Covington (the team's top power hitter) and Bob Nieman. Shortstop is a major problem as Chico Fernandez has a weak bat and is a so-so fielder but he'll get some help from veteran Pee Wee Reese who is solid in the field if not so solid with the bat. Catcher is the weakest part of the lineup but there is enough pop from the other positions that this can easily be covered up. Frank Lary is the number one starting pitcher but rookie Ding Dong Gary Bell isn't far behind. The rest of the rotation is so solid that Vern Law will be forced to the bullpen. Swingman Stu Miller is the best man out of the pen when he isn't starting and his main helpers will be Murray Wall and Don Mossi plus Law but the pen is not a real team strength.

Frankfort Frigates

Not much separates the Frigates and the Saints but given that Frankfort has a better pitching staff, they get a slight edge. Greg Harris at first and Frank Bolling at second both have decent bats and good gloves. Joe DeMaestri is your typical good field no-hit shortstop while Eddie (the Walking Man) Yost holds down the hot corner. Elston Howard and Red Wilson will share time behind the plate and both are more than adequate. Harry Anderson is the closest thing to a full time OFer but his defense is weak. The other two slots will be filled by a parade of part-timers with Gus Bell being the best of the lot. The pitching staff has three standout lefties in Billy Pierce, Jack Harshman and Johnny Antonelli while righty Jim Bunning is also very good. Dick Hyde and Don Elston are excellent relievers and the depth behind them is more than adequate.

Mound City Saints

The Saints have a thunderous offense which could reach 250 team homers but the pitching staff is below par. Rookie Orlando Cepeda threatens to break in at first with a bang as he is capable of hitting over .300 with 70 extra base hits and he isn't even the best power threat on the team. That honor goes to slugging OFer's Rocky Colavito and Roy Sievers, both of whom could exceed 40 homers. Gino Cimoli is the only decent defensive CF on the team but his bat is so much weaker than others that the manager may be forced to give up some defense to get the likes of Joe Cunningham and Carl Furillo into the lineup. Junior Gilliam is solid at second although it would be nice if he had a little more pop in his bat. Al Dark and Don Zimmer will share time at sort with Dark the better hitter and Zim the better defender. Another power guy is big Frank Thomas at third, although his defense is questionable. And the script rolls on as Gus Triandos behind the plate is another potential 30-homer guy. Then we get to the mound staff; Bob Turley is the number one starter but he has serious control issues. The next best are Vinegar Bend Mizell and Bob Rush although Mizell also has some problems with the base on balls. The rest of the rotation is decent but not outstanding. If he is not needed in the rotation, Dave Hillman is probably the best reliever with George Zuvernik not far behind. The rest of the pen won't kill you but won't win a lot of games either.

Joliet Jakes

A drop off after the top three but Joliet could move up with a few breaks. They have good power and decent team on-base but not a great team BA and the pitching staff is middle of the road at best. Mickey Mantle is right up there again with his fabulous OBA and 40 home run power plus a good glove in CF. The Gene's (Green and Woodling) will get most of the starts in the flanking OF slots and both are good but not All-Star material. Roger Maris will also get more than a few OF starts as he has 30-home run potential but not much in terms of a BA or OBA. Moose Skowron and George Crowe will share time at first and both are decent. Billy Gardner is an offensive millstone at second but he'll share time with Bobby Richardson who is a slightly better hitter but neither of the two are much for the base on balls. Don Buddin at short has a great glove, decent on base and modest power. Don Hoak also has a great glove at third and some modest offense but he'll need to be spelled by Dick Gray for about 50 games. Yogi Berra is a great defensive backstop with decent offense and his backup Cal Neeman is solid. The pitching staff has no solid number one starter and several hurlers will have to move back and forth between the rotation and the bullpen. Goggle-eyed Ryne Duren could be a great closer but will need to control his walks. Willard Schmidt and Tom Morgan are also good relievers along with Jim Brosnan when he isn't starting.

Wabash Six

Another falloff when you get to fifth place and Wabash should fight it out all year with the Lightning. They have one of the weakest outfields in the league with only banjo hitting Dick Williams good enough to start for many other teams. The bulk of the remaining OF starts will go to Jimmy (I'm not crazy and I have a paper to prove it) Piersall and Bill Tuttle, neither of whom will scare you with the bat. Three guys will share first base but only Norm Zauchin has anything close to the power you'd like from the position and he might not hit .230. Bobby Avila, who might also get some starts at third, will share second with light hitting but slick fielding Tony Taylor. Shortstop Daryl Spencer also has a decent glove and might be the best all-around hitter on the team. Jim Davenport is a serviceable third sacker. Three different players will share time behind the plate but this is not a team strength. Jim Brewer and swingman Billy O'Dell lead the starting staff with Ned Garver not far behind. Hoyt Wilhelm might get a few starts but he is most valuable as a top notch closer and he'll get a lot of help from Leo Kiely and the non-starting starters.

Louisiana Lightning

The defending champs decided to completely retool in the off season, trading good veterans for draft picks and younger players. I suspect this will pay off in the end, but for 1958 they seem destined for a fifth or sixth place finish with some chance of rising to fourth with a few breaks. Norm Sieburn and Roberto Clements are good corner OFer's with Jim Landis in center although this does not promise to be one of Roberto's better seasons. Despite some fielding issues, Jerry Lynch will also log in some OF playing time and hot shot rookie Vada Pinson is waiting in the wings but his future is still in the future. Storming Norman Cash is the first baseman of the future but this year the likes of Marvelous Marv Throneberry and Jim Marshall will split time and the results won't be pretty. Defensive wiz Bill Mazerowski will man second and for a change he might actually be an above average offensive player. Luis Aparicio at short won't draw many walks but he can steal a base and is a defensive standout. Cleve Boyer is the third baseman of the future but this year several non entities will man the hot corner, the best of whom is Johnny Goryl and he isn't much. Earl Battey is another future standout at catcher but Bob Schmidt will get most of the starts in 1958. Pedro Ramos, Stan Williams, Mike McCormick and swingman Don Drysdale are the best of the starting corps and all have bright futures. The bullpen will consist of several non-starting starters and Tex Clevenger.

Riverside Robbers

The Robbers have some hope of escaping the cellar but I wouldn't put a lot of money on it. They will probably be dead last in the AL in team homers and the pitching staff is by far the worst. Ray Boone, Norm Larker and Dick (Doctor Stangeglove) Stuart will share time at first with Larker possibly getting a some OF starts. Stuart has some power with Boone a little less so but they won't light up too many scoreboards. Veteran Red Schoendienst is the best of the second basemen but he won't be able to play much more than 100 games and his replacements are pretty grim. Shortstop Tony Kubek can field but he has a punchless bat and an aversion to the base on balls. Third base is another problem as feeble fielding Preston Ward will get most of the starts and he does have a decent bat, at least in the context of this team. Super sub Alex Grammas can't hit much but won't embarrass you in the field when he plays second, short or third. Outfielders Bill Virdon and Wally Post are mainstays on this team but wouldn't start for any of the contenders or near contenders. The third OF slot is pretty poor as Gene Stephens and his putrid bat will get the majority of the starts. Early Wynn and Ralph Terry are the leaders of the staff but the quality drops off pretty quickly after them and even they aren't that great. A disproportionate amount of starts will go to the likes of Dick Drott on whom the opposing batters will tee off on like batting practice. Bob Shaw and Billy Muffett are the mainstays of the bullpen and that isn't saying much.

National League

Schenactady Patriots

As was the case in 1957, the NL is much weaker overall than the AL but the standings in your own division are all that count. The Pats are the defending NL champs and could repeat but the Black Cats should give them a run for the money. They have a very good offense and the best pitching in the NL. Outfielders Bob Cerv and Frank Robinson are the big power guys while Bob Skinner combines a .320 BA with a decent OBA and nice extra base power Bob has some defensive issues. Charley (Paw Paw) Maxwell is also available for spot OF play. Frank Torre has a good BA and OBA but you'd like a little more pop out of first base. Johnny Temple at second is very solid offensively and more than adequate in the field. Roy McMillan is another example of a good field no hit shortstop but Ken Boyer at third is first rate both at bat and with the glove. Harry Chiti (the only man traded for himself) and Hobie Landrith will share time behind the plate. Whitey Ford and Lew Burdette lead the staff and both should be sensational. The lower half of the rotation (Arnie Portocarero, Rob Kline and Johnny Podres) are also very good. Turk Farrell and Tom Gorman are fine relievers and will get a lot of help from the rest of the staff.

Beard Black Cats

The Cats aren't far behind the Patriots in my complex formula and could definitely overtake them for the top spot but just as easily fall to third. Their offense is first rate and the pitching staff not bad. Centerfielder Ritchie Ashburn is the quintessential leadoff man as he has a great BA and OBA plus he can steal a base and is an excellent defensive OF although his arm is not the best. Jackie Jensen has good power from another OF slot and Minnie Minoso is also first rate and both know how to take a walk. Joe Adcock and Mickey Vernon will share time at first; Joe has more power while Mickey has a better OBA. Pete Runnels at second and Dick Groat at short could be the best DP combo in the league and both should hit over .300 while Frank Malzone is a vacuum cleaner at third with some good power at the plate. Del Crandall is the number one backstop; his defense is superb and he's a more than adequate hitter. His backup Ed Bailey is also top notch. Sad Sam Jones and Dick Donovan lead the staff but Bob Friend will also contribute. George Witt will give you some quality starts, if he can control his walks.

Several swingmen round out the rotation but the bullpen is superb with Bill Henry, Roy Face and Gerry Staley.

Newark Bears

The Bears will be in the fight for second and maybe even first all season long. The offense is not quite up to the level of the Black Cats but the pitching staff is a tad better. Two OF slots will be filled by Willie Mays and Hammering Hank Aaron and you can't ask for much more. Duke Snider and Del Ennis will get most of the starts in the third slot although Duke is a much better hitter. Ted Kluszewski and Earl Torgenson will share time at first although Ted's legendary HR power seems to have deserted him. Solly Hemus and Danny O'Connell will share second base with Solly the better hitter and Danny the better fielder. Billy Martin is the shortstop by default as there isn't much else but his bat is not strong. Puddin Head Jones will start 120 games or so at third with Granny Hamner getting the nod in the rest. The team lacks anything like a full time catcher and will run in several non entities behind the plate to get through the season. Robin Roberts, Paul Foytack and pint-size Harvey Haddix are the leaders of the staff and should acquit themselves well. Hal Skinny Brown should do well in limited starts and with Ray Moore round out the rotation. Don McMahon, Morrie Martin and Hank Aguirre lead the bullpen but this is not a team strength.

Asbury Argonauts

A big falloff after the first three and the 'Nauts are much more likely to fall to fifth than rise to third. However, any team which has first sacker Stan the Man Musial has to be taken seriously even though Stan's power numbers may be down a bit from his sensational 1957. Gil McDougal at second is solid if unspectacular but shortstop Ernie Banks is sensational and could easily grab the home run crown and even approach 50 dingers. Billy Goodman will get most of the starts at third but even though his BA and OBA are decent, his power is not. Ned Jablonski will fill in when Goodman sits but that will be a big falloff. Bobby Thomson, Hank Bauer and Milt Moryn will get the lion's share of outfield starts but room has to be found for Jim Lemon and his good home run bat. Smokey Burgess and Sammy White will share time at catcher with Smokey the better hitter and Sammy better on defense. The team doesn't have anything close to a standout number one starter and the manager will have to shuffle quite a few guys in and out of the rotation. Al Worthington, Johnny Klippstein, Marv Grissom and Clem Labine will man the bullpen.

New Bedford Ahabs

The Whalers could rise to fourth but just as easily fall to sixth depending on how the cookie crumbles. Ted Williams promises to have another spectacular season with his fabulous batting eye and great power but age should limit him to only 130 or so games. Albie Pearson will man another OF slot with the third being the purview of a host of part timers which will include aging veterans Gus Zernial and Enos (Country) Slaughter. Dick Gernert will get most of the starts at first with Dee Fondy picking up the balance. Gernert has some power but not much else while Fondy is an extreme punch and judy hitter. Charley Neal is a solid second sacker with surprising power for a middle infielder. Shortstop is a major problem with nothing close to a full timer and the part timers are all pretty poor. Brooks Robinson will bring his great glove but a very inadequate bat to third base. John Roseboro and Valmy Thomas will share time behind the plate with Roseboro the far better player. Cal McClish, Camilio Pascual and part-timer Don Larsen are the top starters with a host of swingmen rounding out the rotation. Ed Roebuck, Ken Lehman and Phil Paine along with the non-starting starters will fill out the pen.

East Kenosha Lakers

The Lakers have a much better chance to climb to fifth or even fourth than falling into the cellar which looks like a lock for the Tarheels. The offense has some good power and it is diffused throughout the lineup. The big guy seems to be surprising outfielder Lee Walls, who comes out of obscurity to be a real player with a .300 BA, very fine OBA and good power. Corked bat? Willie Kirkland and Al Smith look to fill the other two OF slots and both are decent hitters but none of the three is very good defensively and there isn't a natural CF between them. That might leave some room for Marty Keough but he isn't going to light up many scoreboards. Gil Hodges at first is solid defensively and in the context of this team a good hitter. Pepper pot second sacker Nellie Fox and his perennial punchless bat is poised for a decent season specializing in what he does best, getting on base, putting the ball in play and playing good defense. Long time fixture Chico Carresquel is fading and Johnny Logan is poised to replace him at short, although Johnny is your typical good field no-hit type SS. No problems at third where fan favorite Eddie Mathews just keeps rolling along with 30-homer power and decent on base. Sherm Lollar will get the vast majority of starts behind the plate and he combines a cannon arm with good power. The consensus leader of the pitching staff is Warren Spahn (do you detect a bias in favorite of the Milwaukee Braves?) who has definite 20-win potential given proper support. Swingman Larry Jackson, Joe Nuxhall, rookie Mudcat Grant and Jack Sanford round out a decent rotation. Ron Blackburn is the only decent pure reliever but the non-starting starters will give him more than enough bullpen support.

Raleigh Tarheels

With all due respect the Tarheels are the worst team in all of SPB60. They were one point away from finishing dead last in all of the categories of my complex formula and even that was the result of a tie in one item. Most of the shortcomings are by wide margins and a last place finish is almost guaranteed. They probably won't exceed 100 team homers and have only one decent power hitter, first baseman Dale Long who won't get much more than 20 dingers. Second base is something of a mystery as several very poor players will have to play to their limits just to get through the season. Woody Held will get the majority of starts at shortstop but don't expect much offensive pop from him. Down the road, Harmon Killebrew looks to be a power hitting if feeble fielding third baseman but in 1958 Gene Freese and several non-entities will staff that position. Center fielder Curt Flood is a rising star and on this team an above average hitter. The other OF slots are a mishmash with players moving in and out of the lineup but none contributing much. Bubba Phillips is the second best OF after Flood but he might have to play some third base. Along with Killebrew, Johnny Callison, Ron Hansen and Bill White are all young with promising futures but won't do much this year. On the mound, the story is much the same although the staff leader Bob Purkey is solid and could start for any other team in the league. The second best starter is Sandy Koufax who has a world of potential but the key word in 1958 is potential. The rest of the staff is a mishmash with ancient Murray Dickson probably the best of the lot.