

PRE-SEASON PROGNOSIS 1959

American League

Massillon Tigers

The raw numbers, which are based on relative statistics within the division, say the Tigers and Jakes are very close and the pennant race should be competitive all year but Massillon's pitching staff, especially their bullpen, could be the decisive factor. The Tiger's offense is solid but they have one potential flaw, a glaring lack of left handed hitters. Only the second baseman and part time LF hit from the port side. They do have an excellent first sacker in Vic Power who has some decent power and is a wizard in the field. At second is Don Blasingame who hits from the left side, can slap the ball around pretty well, gets on base and is a good fielder. A last second trade brought shortstop Johnny Logan to the Tigers and he is a major addition to the lineup with a near .300 BA, decent OB, some power and won't kill you in the field. At third is Hector (no Hands) Lopez who has 20 plus home run power but is a defensive liability. Two OF spots are manned by potential All Stars, Al Kaline and Harvey Kuenn. Kaline should repeat his stellar stats and is a defensive wizard while Kuenn could challenge for the batting title with 40 plus doubles but is not a good fielder. Left field will be the domain of Bob Nieman and Wes Covington. Nieman has good power and can get on base while Covington provides a much needed left handed bat. Rookie Lee Maye is available to fill in at all three OF positions when needed. Most of the catching chores will be handled by Hal Smith who is good defensively and has some power but seems to be averse to the base on balls. Then we get to the pitching staff which has probably the best five-man rotation in all of SPB60 with Frank Lary, Don Mossi, Bob Buhl, Vern Law and Gary Ding Dong Bell. And when the starters falter the bullpen of Turk Lown, Stu Miller and Larry Sherry can take over and most of the time it will be lights out.

Joliet Jakes

The Jakes have a suspicious taint of the New York Yankees as Bronx Bombers feature all throughout the lineup and pitching staff. This isn't a bad thing as who wouldn't want the likes of Mickey Mantle, Roger Maris, Moose Skowron, Yogi Berra, Bobby Richardson and Gene Woodling not to mention Bud Daley, Art Ditmar and Ryne Duren? The Moose will share first base chores with Ray Boone and Rocky Nelson. Skowron has the best power of the three but Nelson knows how to take a walk. Richardson at second can slap the ball around pretty well and is as good fielder but doesn't walk enough. Don Buddin will do a workmanlike job at short and does possess some power. Eddie Kasko will fill in at short and third as needed. Don Hoak combines a good bat, nice batting eye and good defense at third. The Yankee trio of Mantle, Woodling and Maris will get most of the OF starts. The Mick is poised for another great season and Woodling, despite an atrocious glove, will give you a good bat in left. Maris will probably be limited to 120 or so starts with the balance being filled by several capable part-timers. Berra is superb behind the plate but in the 30 or so games he won't be able to play, the alternatives are grim. The Jakes have four good starters in Ditmar, Daley, Jim Owens and Pedro Ramos but the fifth spot will be a problem. Ryan Duren rules the bullpen and he can throw the ball through a wall but he has to see and find the wall first! Jim Brosnan and Tom Morgan will be his biggest helpers but they are far removed from the bullpen triumvirate of the Tigers.

Frankfort Fortress

The Forts won 99 games and the AL pennant in 1958 and took the Beard Black Cats to seven games before succumbing in the World Series but they appear to be doomed to third place in 1959. It would take a major falloff for both the Tigers and Jakes to get them in the pennant race and they would have to collapse totally to fall to fourth. They do have very good team power with six players capable of 20 plus homers. Jim Marshall and Marvelous Marv Throneberry will share time at first but this is not a team strength. Frank Bolling will get most of the starts at second and he is serviceable with some power. Shortstop will be shared by several players with the best being Joe Demaestri, a decent fielder who doesn't hit much and Ted Lepcio who can hit but not field. The walking man, Eddie Yost, holds down the hot corner and he can hit the ball out of the park in addition to getting on base and won't kill you in the field. They have five outfielders who could start for almost any other team in the league and the manager will be hard pressed to get them all adequate playing time. The best of this quintet are Gus Bell and Jackie Jensen but Charley Paw Paw Maxwell isn't far behind. Elston Howard is a very good catcher with a cannon arm and has two more than adequate backups when he needs a day off. Johnny Antonelli, Billy Pierce and Jim Bunning lead the starting corps and all are more than adequate. Jerry Casale in the fourth slot has some control issues and the balance of the starts will be filled by a parade of swingmen. Don Elston and Jack Meyer are adequate in the 'pen but there isn't much behind them.

Mound City Saints

The Saints finished just a hair below .500 in 1958 and it will be a modest accomplishment if they can improve on that performance in 1959. The team has some good power starting with the Baby Bull Orlando Cepeda at first base. Junior Gilliam has some defensive issues no matter where he plays and is strictly a punch and judy hitter but he can get on base and will probably get the majority of starts at second base. Shortstop will be shared by hot shot rookie Maury Wills and Joe Koppe. Al Dark is a decent hitter and will get the majority of starts at third. The three best outfielders are slugger Rocky Colavito, Gino Cimilo and Joe Cunningham who is a one man on base machine. Time will also have to be found for Roy Sievers who has decent power. Frank Thomas is also on the roster and can play third or the outfield. Catcher Gus Triandos can hit the ball out of the park but will struggle to hit much more than .200. Milt Pappas and swingman Dave Hillman are the two best starters and they will be backed up by Vinegar Bend Mizell. Bob Turley (who has major control issues) and rookie Ernie Broglio will round out the rotation. The two Bobs (Rush and Locke) along with Harry Chittum will get most of the bullpen work but none of the three can pitch that much.

Wabash Six

The Six aren't far behind the Saints and the two will battle all year long for fourth place. They have some team wide on base issues and the pitching staff is mediocre at best. Ed Bouchee and Norm Seibern will share time at first but Norm can also play the outfield. Tony Taylor is a good fielder with a decent bat and will play second base. Daryl Spencer and Rocky Bridges will share time at short and are both adequate hitters but below average on defense. Jim Davenport will answer the bell third base for 120 or so games with his punchless bat while Dick Williams who can also play first and the outfield filling in the rest of the time. Bill Tuttle is probably the best outfielder on the team and plays a good CF but his bat is weak. The rest of the OF starts will go to Whitey Lockman and several of the players mentioned above but the overall quality of the Six outfield is not good. Catcher will be a running sore all season long with a cast of thousands filling in one after another. Hoyt Wilhelm and Billy O'Dell are two fine starters but neither can start a lot of games which will leave it to the likes of Jim Brewer, Ned Garver and swingman Barry Latman to fill in the blanks. Leo Keily and Brooks Lawrence are the "best: of a very bad bullpen.

Riverside Robbers

The Robbers and Lightning will battle to stay out of the cellar all year long. The Robbers have a terrible offense but their pitching staff is slightly better than the woeful Lightning. Dick (Doctor Strange Glove) Stuart has good power and will share time at first with Bob Boyd. Billy Gardner is a wizard with the glove at second but can't hit his way out of a paper bag and his backups can't field or hit. Tony Kubek can hit and field at short but doesn't walk much. Billy Klaus who is OK both offensively and defensively will get most of the starts at third but his backups are poor. Clint Courtney and Russ Nixon will share time behind the plate but neither is a standout. Jackie Brandt and Jerry Lynch are the best of the outfielders but both are limited as to playing time with the third slot largely filled by feeble fielding Wally Post. Boyd may also get some action in the garden but hulking Frank Howard and hot shot rookie Billy Williams are waiting in the wings but that is a discussion for the future not in 1959. Swingman Bob Shaw and Burly Early Wynn are the best starters but Ralph Terry and Bob Sullivan are also available with Bob Anderson rounding out the rotation. Mike Fornieles and Jack Acker, who has some control issues, are about all that is notable in the bullpen.

Louisiana Lightning

The Lightning won only 62 games last year and will be hard pressed to do even that well in 1959. Their pitching staff is clearly the worst in the AL and except for the putrid Tarheels is the worst in all of SPB60. They have some fine young players but the key word here is future. Norm Larker, a good fielder, will take his punchless bat to first and be spelled by Kent Hadley. Norm (corked bat?) Cash is waiting in the wings. Defensive wizard Bill Mazerowski will man second but don't expect much offense from him. Luis Aparicio is a flashy fielder at short who can also steal a base but he has to get on base first. Clete Boyer is the third baseman of the future but this year the team will rely on Reno Bertoia and Dick Gray and the less said about that duo the better. The outfield is another story where they have two standouts in Roberto Clemente and Vada Pinson but also slick fielding Jim Landis and Willie Tasby with pint-size Albie Pearson waiting to fulfill his potential. However, then we get to the pitching staff which has workhorse Don Drysdale but not a lot else. Swingmen Mike McCormick, Danny McDevitt and Johnny Kucks will get most of the remaining starts but future stars Bib Gibson and Stan Williams are also on the roster. Lindy McDaniel and Tex Clevenger are available for bullpen duty but how many leads will they have to protect?

NATIONAL LEAGUE

Beard Black Cats

The Cats are the defending champs and clearly the class of the NL in 1959. They combine a solid power laden offense with an excellent pitching staff. "Who's on first" is a good question as they have three solid performers in Joe Adcock, Tito Francona and Gil Hodges. Adcock and Francona also play the outfield and they'll get a lot of work there. Pete Runnels who also can play first will settle at second where he is a good fielder and an on base machine who lacks only home run power. Dick Groat is a steadying force at short although it would be nice if he had a little more pop in his bat. Frank Malzone at third is a vacuum cleaner in the field and has good power. Ritchie Asburn and Minnie Minoso will man two of the outfield slots; both can do the job defensively and are offensive standouts. Francona and Adcock along with Lee Walls and Leon Daddy Wags Wagner will fill out the balance of the outfield starts. Del Crandall is a solid everyday catcher who has power and is a gem in the field with a cannon arm. Sam Jones, Dick Donovan, Glen Hobbie and Bob Friend are the mainstays of the starting staff but swingman Roger Craig will also get some work. You could probably argue that the bullpen of Roy Face, Gerry Staley and Bill Henry compare favorably to the Tiger bullpen trio.

Newark Bears

The Bears will have to seriously overachieve to match the Black Cats but look to have a clear shot at second place. The attack is well above average but the pitching staff is not. The Bears have a sensational outfield, maybe the best in all of SPB60, with Hammering Hank Aaron, Sey Hey Willie Mays and the Duke of Flatbush Duke Snider. Faye Throneberry is available to spell the Duke on occasion. Veterans Ted Kluzewski and Earl Torgenson will share time at first but both are now past their prime. Bill Martin is the best of the second base crew but his availability will be limited and he'll have to be spelled by Sparky Anderson who is the poster child for a punchless hitter. Shortstop is a grab bag and the manager will have to be very creative to get through the season. Third baseman Puddin Head Jones still has some pop left in his bat but when he rests the shortstop contingent will have to pull double duty. A parade of non-entities will cover time behind the plate. Pint size Harvey Haddix and veteran Robin Roberts are the best of the starters but they'll get some help from Paul Foytack and swingmen Skinny Brown and Bill Monbouquette. Don McMahon is a solid reliever but his primary bullpen mates are Ray Moore and Marshall Bridges; neither of whom will set the world on fire.

Schenectady Patriots

There could be a spirited contest between the Patriots, Argonauts and Ahabs for third place but moving up would be a real accomplishment for any of the three. Frank Robinson is a good start to any offensive attack as he can hit with power, has a good BA and knows how to take a walk. He'll spend most of his time at first but can also play the outfield. Johnny Temple at second can also contribute with the bat and will also take a walk when needed. Roy McMillan and Jerry Lumpe will share time at short with McMillan the better hitter and fielder. Ken Boyer at third is also a solid contributor with the bat and knows how to hit it out plus he is a superb fielder. Wally Moon and Bob Skinner are both decent outfielders but the third slot is up for grabs with Ron Fairly the "best" of a bad lot. The team lacks a full-time catcher and will run a relay behind the plate as they wait for hot shot rookie Tim McCarver to develop. Whitey Ford and Lou Burdette are the clear leaders of the staff with their main help coming from Don Cardwell, Johnny Podres and Ron Kline. Gordon Jones, Turk Farrell and Orlando Pena will man the bullpen but this is not a team strength.

Asbury Argonauts

The Asbury offense is poor but the pitching staff is arguably the best in the NL, save the Black Cats. Stan the Man Musial is starting to show his age and will be limited to not much more than 100 games; he still has some power and on base but his batting average may fall. Mickey Vernon and Larry Osborne will get the balance of the 1B starts but neither will contribute much. Gil McDougal is a flashy fielder at second but doesn't hit much. Ernie Banks at short is poised for another great season and is that rarest of birds, a power hitting middle infielder. Billy Goodman at third will give you 100 games of solid defense but don't look for much hitting. Ray Jablonski and Jim Pendleton (who also plays the OF) will fill in the blanks at the hot corner. Sammy White and Smokey Burgess will share time behind the plate. White is better defensively but a punchless hitter while Smokey can hit but is not a good receiver. Don Newcombe is the closest thing to a staff ace with basketball player Gene Conley not far behind and the trio of Jim Perry, Jerry Walker and Ike Delock will fill out the rotation. The swingmen plus Jack Fisher and Al Worthington will man the bullpen.

New Bedford Ahabs

The Ahabs have a middle of the road offense and pitching staff and as mentioned above should be in a tough fight for third place all year. Dick Gernert and Vic Wertz who both have modest power will share time at first base. Second baseman Charlie Neal is arguably the best hitter on the team and also a fine fielder. Eddie Bressoud and Dick Schofield will share time at short but don't look for much offense from either. Brooks Robinson, a defensive wiz who can't hit much, will share time at third with Felix Mantilla who can't hit or field. Hobie Landrith and John Roseboro, a budding star with a cannon arm, will share catching duties. An aging Ted Williams, who at this point is a serious defensive liability, is still probably the best outfielder on the team and in the 100 or so games he will play can still get on base and hit an occasional homer. Dave Philley and Russ Snyder are decent part timers who can help in the garden but after them it's pretty bleak and the manager may even be forced to play 43-year old Enos Slaughter whose glory days are long in the past. Camilio Pascual and Cal McClish could both approach 20 wins with proper support but don't count on it from this team. The balance of the rotation is very thin with Ray Herbert, who definitely does not have 20-win potential, forced to start a significant number of games. Bobby Shantz and Jim Coates are nice relievers and if the offense can generate some late leads, they will be effective.

Raleigh Tarheels

With a few positive breaks, the 'Heels could rise to fifth and if they falter might even sink to the cellar. They do have surprising team power but will be seriously hampered by the worst pitching staff in SPB-60. Rookie sensation Willey Stretch McCovey will be spectacular when he plays but will be limited to 50 or so games at first with the balance being handled by veteran Dale Long. George Strickland, a better 3B will be forced to play the majority of his game at second but no matter where he plays his bat is punchless. Woody Held at short has good power and a decent glove. Hard hitting Gene Freeze will play third but his defense is suspect and he'll be spelled by Bubba Phillips who can also play the outfield. Harmon Killebrew, a defensive liability, will certainly get into the lineup in left as he has tremendous power and great on-base potential. Bill White, who also plays first will get the most of his starts in the outfield for lack of a better alternative. Curt Flood, a budding star, will also be a regular with the remaining starts going to Phillips and Jim Busby. Catcher is a real problem with four players alternating in and out, none of whom will contribute much. Bob Purkey is the clear leader of the staff but youngsters Sandy Koufax and Joey Jay are waiting in the wings but we'll see only occasional flashes from them in 1959. The balance of the rotation is a disaster waiting to happen and the bullpen (what is that?) is almost non-existent.

East Kenosha Lakers

East Kenosha does have some decent team power, especially from third sacker extraordinaire Eddie Mathews who might approach 50 homers with a very good on base but the balance of the attack is not that strong. Gail Harris and Gene Oliver will split time at first but neither will contribute much to the offense. Pepper pot Nellie Fox can do it all except hit the ball out of the park at second and Alex Grammas won't kill you at short and he does know how to field. Sherm Lollar is a solid defensive catcher who also has some decent power. Al Smith, Wilie Kirkland and rookie George Altman will get most of the outfield starts but when they have to sit the manager will be forced to use a cast of no-name and no-hit part timers. Warren Spahn, Jack Sanford and Larry Jackson are three fine starters and could pitch for any other team on the league. Bill Fischer and several decent swingmen will fill out the rotation. These swingmen will have to pull double duty in the bullpen because other than Hal Woodeshick there isn't much else.