



League News *March 2003*

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Let the season begin!

Another off-season has finally come to a close. With free agency and the draft behind us we can look forward to our ninth championship season. The Cutters of Moline will defend in 2003 and David hopes to avoid a “sophomore slump.” The Ocelots are strong as usual in the NL and would like very much to make a third straight appearance in the Series. Cook County and Stanley are well positioned to start 2003. It’s too early to tell, but the fans in Iowa and Springfield must be very excited to see the calendar finally turn over to April 1. Both squads benefited from solid off-season acquisitions.

This issue of *League News* starts off with a recap of the recently completed draft. After that I delve into the makeup of all 24 teams and do a little forecasting as to how things may look come the end of September. As always- good luck to all and let’s have a great season!

Draft Recap

The story of the 2003 draft was the large number of players that were claimed from other rosters- 34 claims in total. As a reference here are the number of players claimed in the three previous drafts: 2002- 18 claims, 2001- 13 claims, 2000-5 claims. The Bees saw six of their unprotected players snatched up by other organizations.

Past #1 picks... 1998: Rick Reed 1999: Orlando Hernandez 2000: Tim Hudson 2001: Glendon Rusch 2002: Juan Uribe

The 2003 draft was noticeably different from our gathering a year ago as four amateurs went in the first six picks draft. In the 2002 first round only five AM’s were selected in the entire first round. 2003 saw nine AM’s selected in the first 24 picks.

Metropolis kicked off the festivities by taking Godzilla #1. In a bit of Steinbrenner-ish flair Andy followed that pick with his nabbing of Jose Contreras at #11. At picks #2 and #3 two fine young pitchers went to Plaza and Saint Barb: Oliver Perez and Rodrigo Lopez. Pick #4 started a run of three young AM’s. At #4 Lenny picked up the hulking young bat of Jason Stokes. At pick five Charlevoix grabbed Rich Harden. At #6 the Yellow Jackets made the second youngest draftee of the day out of phenom Scott Kazmir. The Top 10 was finished out with the selections of Cliff Lee, Jason Simontacchi, Ricky Stone and Travis Hafner. Three other teams possessed

multiple selections. Fleetwood picked up Laynce Nix and Chris Woodward with theirs, the Mudcats received Aaron Cook and Mark Ellis and Ocala chose Brandon Larson and Endy Chavez. Our new manager Bruce did not have a first so his inaugural pick was made in the second round when he chose Jayson Durocher.

As I did last year here is my subjective analysis of whom I thought made some “astute” picks and who made off with “steals.” For my purposes an “astute pick” was a player I thought was talented but possibly went a tad higher than most would have thought and thus may come back to bite us all. A “steal” is a reverse of the astute pick- that being a player who seemingly fell without an apparent reason. As always, what follows is simply my initial stabs at analysis and not meant to present other picks as errant.

	Astute picks	Steal Picks
Round 2	Khalil Greene (#29, BOX) Andy Marte (#36, GEM)	Franklyn German (#32, SPR)
Round 3	Jose Lopez (#68, OCA)	Kevin Cash (#51, MET)
Bonus	Aaron Taylor (#78, NG)	Brendan Donnelly (#88, GA)
Round 4	James Loney (#96, PLZ) Kevin Youkilis (#111, GA)	Brad Nelson (#100, NG)
Round 5	Johan Santana (#120, PLZ)	Ben Broussard (#138, BAK)
Round 6	Dallas McPherson (#157, BLO)	Yorvit Torrealba (#145, SB)

Here is a short rundown on five teams that I thought did particularly well for themselves on draft day.

North Georgia: Tony grabbed three lefty pitchers that have very nice upsides (Kazmir, Ben Kozlowski and Horacio Ramirez). Kazmir, in particular, could be really special. Added to those picks were fireballing reliever Aaron Taylor and slugging prospects Brad Nelson and Corey Hart in later rounds. To top it all off Tony landed a Bubba- Bubba Nelson. Never a bad draft when you can do that ☺

Springfield: For two drafts in a row now the Topes have selected very well, imo. This year Jon added the steal of the first round in Cliff Lee and stole big Franklyn German in the second. Further solid additions came in the likes of Macay McBride and Jeff Mathis. To top it off he strengthened his playoff contender status by snatching Steve Karsay from Bloomington.

Bloomington: I’m not sure what has Vaughn pleased more- the fact that he saw a bunch of player salaries removed from his roster or that he picked up a bunch of quality players. That he did both must have Bee management giddy. His picks included the precocious B.J. Upton who has the potential to be a “do-everything” shortstop. Francis Beltran and Joe Borowski were nice pickups for the pen. In later rounds Vaughn added potential starters in the likes of Koyie Hill and Dallas McPherson.

Metropolis: Andy made moves for quick improvement by selecting both Hideki Matsui and Jose Contreras in the first round. He picked up Kevin Cash in the third round and he should be starting for the Avengers in a year or two. Some nice carded arms came in the form of Brian Tallett, Justin Miller and Ben Howard. Lastly, Andy selected some solid amateur pitchers when he took Bobby Basham and Sean Burnett.

Plaza: John did a real nice job of adding five players who potentially have very large upsides at their positions. Oliver Perez is a talented 21-year-old pitcher. Richie Weeks could be a slugging’ second sacker for the Lions. James Loney could play to the right of Weeks for ten

years once they both get to beautiful North Dakota. Johan Santana has filthy stuff and we all may be kicking ourselves five years from now for not taking him when we could. His last potential star comes in Felix Pie. He's a Cub, but very talented and could keep many balls from falling to the ground in Plaza.

Honorable Mention: Ocala, Minnesota and Cook County.

SEASON PREVIEW

Here is my unscientific attempt at predictions. I don't run any simulations or anything to achieve these standings. My analysis is nothing more than stacking the teams up and assessing them in my own quirky way. One thing I added this season was a note for each team called "Amateur on the Horizon." This player is an amateur in BRASSball terms who I feel is both talented and has the best shot on the team of getting some pub in next season's preview.

Our preview kicks off with the AL East. Last season the AL East was BRASSball's toughest as the fourth place Mudcats won 88 games. The division should be the most competitive again in the AL, but probably only three deep this season. BRASSball's defending champs call the East home. Are they set for another run? Let's see.

AL East

My predicted #1 may makes things difficult for me all season but I'm going to say my Mudcats have an excellent shot to go from last to first ☺ Owner Lentz spent a bunch of money to get the ship righted for another division crown. The biggest addition came in the form of Gary Sheffield. Sheff last year hit .350 and pounded out 42 homers for the Maulers. While the Mudcats don't quite expect to see those numbers they do expect him to provide protection for franchise player Alex Rodriguez. A-Rod enters 2003 after posting a fine 2002 season (.310-44-122). During the Mudcat off-season they directed their efforts towards improving the O and thus added Jay Gibbons and Kevin Millar to help out. Recent draftee Mark Ellis may surprise, as he has been strong in camp. On the mound ace Matt Morris returns. The rest of the rotation is solid, but far from outstanding. The bullpen figures to be Minnesota's vital weapon this season as it is quite balanced and strong-armed. Veteran Trevor Hoffman needs to return to form after a sub-standard 2002 (32 saves, 4.98 ERA). ***Amateur on the horizon: Jeremy Bonderman.***

Past AL East Champs 2002: Moline, 112-50 2001: Minnesota, 106-56 2000: Minnesota, 100-62 1999: Monroeville, 92-70 1998: St. Lucie, 97-65

Predicted for second is the Bakersfield Rattlers. Out east in Georgia last year this squad was difficult to face because of its excellent pitching staff. Because of the pitching they were able to upset Hessville in the AL Wild Card series. The Big Four all return for 2003, highlighted by Tim Hudson (19-10, 3.95) and ROY Wade Miller (17-10, 4.10). Russ Ortiz was actually the best starter last year (18-9, 3.53). Freddy Garcia rounds out the formidable four and I think it is sound to predict him to easily better his 2002 performance that saw him win only 9 times. The offense is going to be a yearlong concern for the Rattlers unless they are able to make some moves. Four positions (3B, 2B, C, DH) might not offer much pop. Derrek Lee does return and if he improves on his 2002 numbers (.334-23-109) even more he could find himself in MVP contention. The defense is quite sound however as Andruw Jones and Mike Cameron virtually cover the entire outfield by themselves. Pokey Reese is also very good around second. ***Amateur on the horizon: Angel Guzman.***

In third I suspect is where the Moline Cutters will land. Why? There are too many holes at the moment. There are some very nice parts in place (particularly on offense), but the pitching staff, mainly the pen, will be a hindrance unless improved. Gone from the staff is hero Curt Schilling. He was on a one-year mammoth contract last season and it paid off with a title. This season, BRASSball veteran Greg Maddux will have to take over the #1 reigns. While Maddux isn't a concern some other spots might be. Elmer Dessens is back and should be the #2 man. Ismael Valdes also should be quietly effective for the Cutters in 2003. Swingman Miguel Batista (9-5, 3.26) will most likely move to the rotation now. The Cutter pen is a shambles at the moment beyond Kelvim Escobar who is being converted back to the role of pen ace after a year in the rotation. Word out of camp is that phenom Mark Prior may break camp and head north with the big club. On offense the Cutters do return a formidable 3-4-5 in the forms of Barry Bonds, Torii Hunter and Bret Boone. Bonds is the reigning AL MVP after his .306, 58 homers and 131 rbi performance. After those three there are some holes, much like in the pen. ***Amateur on the horizon: Rocco Baldelli.***

In 2002 the story of the AL was the Hessville Everreadys. Predicted to finish last by this intrepid editor they ended up in second place with 101 victories and in so doing made their first post-season appearance. But gone now are the thunderous bats of Larry Walker, Jose Vidro and Jason Giambi that made 2002 possible. Offensively, the 'Readys will be quite weak with the bat. Terrence Long may be their best long ball threat. Much of the regular lineup will feature filler players who are holding spots till some impressive prospects are ready. Down on the farm in 2003 will be Travis Hafner, Jayson Werth, Joey Thurston and Milton Bradley. On the mound the quietly effective Aaron Sele returns to serve as the Hessville ace (19-9, 4.91 in 2002). Fifteen game winner Shawn Estes dropped in free agency and Jim was thus able to re-acquire his services with a management friendly contract. Rumor has it two free agent signees, Chris Carpenter and Brian Moehler, have been experiencing some shoulder tightness. They may not be ready to go in April for the 'Readys. The bullpen should be serviceable, albeit without the talent of the quietly unsung Josias Manzanillo. ***Amateur on the horizon: Jeremy Guthrie.***

AL Central

Judging by the chart at right projecting the AL Central should be a rather easy process, and alas, it is again. The Maulers have the horses to be the best in the AL, let alone the Central. The other teams, though, are quickly improving and appear closer than ever to wresting a divisional title away from the residents of suburban Chicago.

Past AL Central Champs	
2002:	Cook County, 122-40
2001:	Cook County, 122-40
2000:	Cook County, 107-55
1999:	Cook County, 123-39
1998:	Cook County, 118-44

The Maulers are looking very good to start the season. In 2003 some new faces will be key to the Mauler title hopes. First among the off-season acquisitions is Jason Giambi. Giambi is coming off a season that saw him hit .310 with 40 homers and 122 rbi. Giambi will now team up with holdover Jim Thome (.287-39-94) to form the most fearsome lefty combination in BRASSball. In between the two is where 2-time MVP Vladimir Guerrero (.323-45-134) figures to hit. Nomar Garciaparra is fully healthy now and should be huge for the Maulers again. There is a hole in CF at the moment for the Maulers, but they could frankly bat Reggie Taylor and Pete Bergeron there all year and not suffer terribly. The moundsmen will see a couple new faces. In was brought Steve Trachsel via trade (9-9, 4.30 in GA) and free agent swingman Tim Wakefield (4-5, 3.98 in GEO). Wakefield in particular was given big money and it is expected he will be a starter for the Maulers. The pen is solid, but a tad thinner than in past Mauler seasons. Mariano Rivera remains though as the rock and leader of the late-inning corp. ***Amateur on the horizon: Jesse Foppert.***

Iowa had a solid 86-76 record in 2002, but that was not enough to make the playoffs. This year the Rubes figure to be even better. The 2003 Rubes are deep and talented. The offense has four outfielders for three spots- Carlos Lee, Jose Cruz, Cliff Floyd and Mags Ordonez. Mags, however, doesn't have to fight for a spot after his super 2002 season saw him post a .338 average with 45 homers and 156 rbi. Skilled vets were brought in to man infield positions. At third will be Robin Ventura. He has much to prove after hitting only .228 in 2002. Craig Biggio was signed in free agency to play second. Finally, over at first will be Tino Martinez (.256-27-85 in BRO). Another veteran, Ellis Burks, needs to rebound after hitting .228 himself last year. Mark McLemore, Alex Ochoa and Matt Franco give the Rubes a sweet bench. The pitching staff figures to be equally talented. Rumors have it that Odie Perez has finally put it together and could be a huge factor in the AL in 2003. Jason Schmidt (11-8, 5.28) has returned and figures to best his 2002 numbers. The pen is deep and balanced. Young fireballer Francisco Cordero could make the ninth very difficult on opponents. ***Amateur on the horizon: Mike Gosling.***

Box City faithful suffered through an awful 57-105 2002 season. The 2003 version of the Boxmen should be better with bigger things awaiting them in the future. There are a lot of starters on this team and most have some talent. Vets Mike Hampton (13-13 in MIN), Jimmy Haynes and Esteban Loaiza figure to see the majority of starts. But four prospects in particular could make the rotation even better: Brian Lawrence, Cory Lidle, Ryan Jensen and Dan Wright. Depending on what Lenny wants to do he could have some nice trade commodities that may influence a race or two if nothing else. He might not see much time, if any, in 2003 but remember the name Francisco Rodriguez. The hitters will be lead by Miggy Tejada (.273-32-95). Miggy will be a free agent at season's end and could post huge 2003 numbers. Steve Cox could be a nice player in the lineup as in two months of play in 2002 he hit .308 with 10 dingers. Tim Salmon wants to prove he is not a .212 hitter. ***Amateur on the horizon: Choo Freeman.***

Like Box City, the Plaza Lions had a difficult 2002 season. But this team could be better than Box City if some youngsters come up and prove to be as good as advertised. Adam Dunn clubbed 17 homers in two months of 2002 play. If Eric Hinske and Junior Spivey get contracts they could team with Dunn to be a young, talented offensive core. Mike Lieberthal was signed to a big contract to be a leader for this young team. He should also be a huge influence on a precocious staff. While the retread arms of Scott Erickson, Jose Lima, Terry Mulholland and Masato Yoshii figure to see the bulk of starts a parade of youngsters will climb the mound again. Prospect holdovers Ben Sheets and Joe Kennedy might break with the big club at the end of March. Brett Myers is talented and young. Second overall pick Oliver Perez, like Myers, will be given some starts to audition for 2004 and beyond. ***Amateur on the horizon: Jose Reyes.***

AL West

Like the AL East I am going to predict a worst to first scenario in the West in 2003. Santa Barbara has completed their re-tooling. The other teams in the West are also in various stages of rebuilding, but should provide lively contests for all of BRASSball.

Past AL West Champs 2002: Toledo, 82-80 2001: Toledo, 94-68 2000: Santa Barbara, 90-72 1999: Santa Barbara, 104-58 1998: Albany, 108-54
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The Outlaws had a miserable 57-105 record in 2003, but they should easily reverse that in 2003. Santa Barbara should give Bakersfield competition for title of "Best AL Staff." Bartolo Colon returns to front the rotation. Colon battled to a 14-15 record

in 2002 on a rough squad. Matt Clement has the stuff to be much better (5-17, 6.54). Roy Halladay figures to become a fixture on the Outlaw staff for years after his impressive half season in SB last season (7-7, 3.06). Watch out for Rodrigo Lopez. Pre-draft scouting indicated Lopez was the prospect most able to help a BRASSball team now. The pen is very tough, but lacks lefties for balance. Robb Nen and Byung-hyun Kim provide the Outlaws with a lights out duo in the late innings. Ugie Urbina and Danny Graves allow Brian to make games six inning contests. The offense will revolve around franchise hero Garrett Anderson (.301-33-119). Rich Aurilia was brought in from Cook County and if he remotely approaches his 2002 numbers (.350-46-146) then SB made a steal. Three Outlaws in particular appeared poised for breakout seasons: Aaron Boone, Jacque Jones and Adam Kennedy. Veteran Mo Vaughn returns after injury to stand at first base. ***Amateur on the horizon: Khalil Greene.***

Second through fourth place will be a yearlong scrum in the West and I predict La Crosse will finish behind Saint Barb. The Lagers feature some dangerous hitters, mainly Manny Ramirez (.294-47-105) and Mike Sweeney (.298-21-74). Johnny Damon also returns to kick start the offense from the leadoff spot (46 steals in 2002). Like SB the Lagers have a trio of players ready to step it up in 2003: Aubrey Huff, Gary Matthews Jr and Jerry Hairston Jr. The starters will follow in line behind ace Kevin Millwood. Millwood somehow received a huge contract after 2002 saw him go 6-10 with a 7.85 ERA. Youngster Kip Wells figures to improve also on his 2002 numbers (9-7, 4.94). Veteran John Burkett was brought in after the draft to stabilize the rotation. The last two spots should generate a spirited fight between three recent draftees: Jason Simontacchi, Michael Tejera and Miguel Ascenio. Octavio Dotel is a premier BRASSball reliever (145K's in 106 innings). ***Amateur on the horizon: Todd Linden.***

Last year's division champs, Toledo, I predict to tumble to third. Then again, last year I foresaw a third place finish also so what do I know ☺ Ray strengthened his pitching staff with the recent pickup of Mike Mussina. Moose was the staff leader of the Bees in 2002 (17-14, 3.89). Chris Reitsma figures to have a rotation spot after his productive rookie campaign (10-8, 4.54). Big free agent signee Bret Tomko most definitely has a spot locked up. The remaining spots will be filled from youngsters fighting it out. Jon Garland, Ryan Franklin and Mike Maroth appear to have the inside track on starts at this point of spring. The bullpen will need to be sorted out from a plethora of young arms. The Mudhen offense, as usual, should lean toward the speedy side. Dave Roberts and Alex Sanchez, while unproven, are fast and have had good springs. Luis Castillo was signed from Plaza where he stole 49 bases in 2002. Richie Sexson (.268-34-105) will be counted on to drive in the whirling dervishes batting in front of him. Shannon Stewart came over in a trade from Fleetwood and should be solid in the middle of the order. Orlando Cabrera is looking to rebound from a mediocre 2002 (.258, 6 HR). Acquisitions Moises Alou and Adrian Beltre add some pop to the Mudhen offense. ***Amateur on the horizon: Billy Traber.***

Brooklyn is predicted for fourth, but easily could finish in second in this division. There really isn't much difference between these three teams here. The big off-season news in Brooklyn was the stunning signing of Kerry Wood. Wood is now the man for the Bulldogs and will be expected to lead the pitching staff. Spots 2-4 in the rotation will come from vets Ryan Dempster (8-14, 6.19), Omar Daal (12-9, 6.17) and Denny Neagle (11-13, 5.00). As you can tell by the numbers all three have something to prove this season. Youngster Josh Fogg has looked good in camp and could make the rotation. The bullpen will be staffed by veterans and is fronted by Kaz Sasaki (36 saves, 2.04). Brooklyn management hopes the infusion of Ken Griffey Jr (21 HR in CC) spurs the offense. Juan Pierre returns after a solid freshman season (.275 with 53 steals). Phil Nevin was the offensive core of the 2002 Bulldogs but he was recently traded to Santa Barbara. The Bulldogs sport one of the more intriguing prospects to keep an eye on in 2003: Austin Kearns. Kearns came over from Moline in the Greg Maddux

deal. He probably won't head north with the big club, but should play more than a few games in Brooklyn. ***Amateur on the horizon: Jim Journell.***

NL East

The NL East has been the weakest BRASSball division the last few years, but that is starting to change. I predict two teams from this division should stay in playoff contention all season long.

Past NL East Champs 2002: Glen Allen, 81-81 2001: Glen Allen, 78-84 2000: Glen Allen, 92-70 1999: Long Island, 93-69 1998: Long Island, 104-58

Glen Allen has ruled the East roost for a few seasons now, but I predict the Springfield Isotopes will come out on top in 2003.

No team did more during free agency to establish themselves as a contender as the Topes. Last season Corey Koskie was often the lone offensive threat for Springfield (31 HR, 96 RBI). But in 2003 Koskie will see the likes of Larry Walker (.364-36-121), Luis Gonzalez (.286-47-147) and Jeff Bagwell (.320-37-119) surrounding him. This powerful trio is the main reason the Topes now find themselves as the favorites. The middle infield is weak with Rey Sanchez and Damion Easley as the starters. A feisty fight for the remaining outfield and DH spot will leave the Topes with a solid bench. Michael Tucker, Matt Stairs, Marquis Grissom, Orlando Merced and Rickey Henderson all have something to offer offensively in those last two lineup holes. The moundsmen are young and talented in Springfield. The ace figures to be Mark Mulder (16-12, 4.29). Fellow sophomores Ramon Ortiz (12-12) and Jarrod Washburn (9-17, 4.84) give depth to the rotation and should be better than the opponents on most nights. Unproven youngsters Mark Redman and Kyle Lohse have looked good in camp. Billy Wagner returns to lead a revamped pen. If Wagner matches his ferocious 2002 numbers (45 saves, 1.55 ERA) then games versus Springfield will only be for eight innings. Able-bodied help will come in the likes of Steve Karsay, Paul Shuey and Alan Embree. ***Amateur on the horizon: Justin Morneau.***

I predict the Mets to fall to second, but I still see them as a dangerous team that should continue to contend for a playoff spot. The team strength is a talented starting rotation that is both veteran and youngish. Rocket Clemens was brought in from Cook County to be the new Met ace (21-9, 3.72). This move alone should improve young Barry Zito who seemed overburdened by the high expectations placed on him last year (10-13, 4.65). Andy Ashby and Orlando Hernandez were also brought in to strengthen the rotation. Holdover Eric Milton received a large contract and figures to be right around the 15-10 mark that he posted in 2002. The offense should be "sneaky" good as the parts here are quite possibly better than they are on paper. One thing is for certain: Eric Karros needs to rebound after a disappointing 2002 campaign (.246-19-73). David Justice should fit nicely in a DH platoon with Greg Colbrunn. Trot Nixon has one OF spot nailed down but the other spots will see the likes of Mel Mora, Ricky Ledee, Danny Bautista and Quinton McCracken rotate in and out. Reigning ROY Albert Pujols figures to see the bulk of his time at third, but should also find time in the outfield. Pujols is unquestionably the hub of the offense after his stellar rookie season saw him hit .321 with 46 dingers and 146 rbi. ***Amateur on the horizon: Kevin Youkilis.***

Port Richey should finish in third. The newly christened Everglades will be a pesky team that will frustrate opponents with their above average defense and small ball skills. David Eckstein now has a mirror image of himself at second in the likes of Fernando Vina. Doug Mientkiewicz is the best fielding 1B in BRASSball and did hit a robust .320 in 2002, albeit with only 9 homers. Three players will be expected to provide the 'Glades with at least some power: Juan Encarnacion, Jay Payton and Herb Perry. Joe Randa figures to be better than his .243 2002 average. The pitching situation is a bit muddled at the moment. Talented staff leaders Joe

Mays and Brad Radke have had their troubles in spring training. With their status unclear at the moment it is difficult to sort out some roles. Longtime prospect Damian Moss appears ready to deliver in 2003. Victor Zambrano could start or relieve depending on Mays and Radke. Veterans Jamey Wright and Julian Tavarez could fill some rotation spots also. The bullpen should be better than most clubs. Billy Koch has much better stuff than what he showed in 2002 on his way to a 5.09 ERA. Jose Jimenez is also better than his 6.40 2002 ERA. Mike Lincoln, Guillermo Mota and Justin Speier should be effective in the later innings. ***Amateur on the horizon: Ben Hendrickson.***

The Tigers of Charlevoix admittedly had a poor season in 2002, but they were very entertaining many times. The 2002 version could hit with anybody, but they had a difficult time keeping their opponents at bay. For 2003 the starters at the moment do appear better. Jimmy Anderson (8-16, 5.32) returns to the Tigers. He will be joined by an influx of veterans in the likes of James Baldwin, Dave Burba and Jeff Suppan. Suppan actually should be the Tiger ace as his 13-10 record in Toledo was the best of any pitcher the Tigers have in camp. The offense probably won't be as excitable as it was last season but it should continue to produce runs. Frank Thomas appears healthy after an injury marred 2002 season. Brad Fullmer is still on board after a fine 2002 season (.292-28-99). Todd Zeile also returns to play third after hitting .281. Like any rebuilding franchise the fans of Charlevoix should be excited by the reports on prospects Russ Branyan, Carlos Pena, Eric Munson and Mike Cuddyer. All figure to get some PA's in 2003 at some point or another. Lance Berkman will be missed in Charlevoix but the future is looking brighter with the prospects Al is stockpiling. ***Amateur on the horizon: John-Ford Griffin.***

NL Central

The Central held the most drama for BRASSball followers in 2002. All four teams were very good and when it was all said and done, Fleetwood bested Bloomington in a playoff game for the final playoff spot. I'm not predicting such a close division again, but talented teams continue to reside here.

I predict Stanley to make it four years in row atop the Central. Paul's Sioux valiantly fought back determined competition in 2002. Now that he has finally wrested the division crown from Bloomington he does not want to yield it quite yet. The big news in Stanley is the awesome addition of World Series hero Curt Schilling. Schill signed another big contract and now gives the Sioux two devastating starters. The other you ask? Why Randy Johnson himself. The Unit was 21-8 with 359 whiffs in 2002. Rick Helling figures to return to one rotation spot and should ably keep his teammates in contests. The other two spots are up for grabs at the moment. Veterans Kevin Brown and Woody Williams have been sluggish in camp. If those two falter then rooks Denny Stark and Joel Pineiro may get their shot in 2003. Pineiro was particularly impressive in 15 starts last year (7-2, 3.46). The bullpen has some solid arms but lacks lefty balance. Offensively this is a lineup that just smacks the ball around the field. Only Ocala and Cook County can chortle about possessing superior offenses than Stanley. Jeff Kent is simply an awesome producer (.324-35-125). Ageless Raffy Palmeiro could best the 36 taters he launched in 2002. Bernie Williams is better than his respectable .274 average in 2002. Ryan Klesko (.935 OPS) and Paul LoDuca (.297, 23 HR) extend this potent lineup even further. Like any contender they sport a solid bench with the likes of Tony Womack, Olmaedo Saenz, Eduardo Perez and Todd Pratt. ***Amateur on the horizon: Gavin Floyd.***

Past NL Central Champs 2002: Stanley, 100-62 2001: Stanley, 103-59 2000: Stanley, 92-70 1999: Bloomington, 108-54 1998: Bloomington, 127-35
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Fleetwood battled back from a horrible start last season to make the playoffs in a playoff game. Once again the Walkers are predicted for big things. They are no slouch to Stanley and have the talent to pick the Sioux off this year. Offensively the core is quite impressive. Chipper Jones returns after getting MVP votes for his 2002 season. Bobby Abreu quietly contributes to the squad (.988 OPS, 31 steals). Jim Edmonds gives the Walkers three potent lefty swinging bats. Jim should be better than his 2002 numbers (.263-24-94). Paul Konerko offers righty power (33 HR) to balance the lefties. Raul Ibanez was impressive in a half season of play and appears to have won a full-time role for the Walkers. Second and third is a mish-mash at the moment. Four players are vying for two spots. I expect 2002 sparkplug Marcus Giles (.317, 13 HR) to emerge. The pitchers are talented and some are carrying the load of big expectations. Both Al Leiter and Derek Lowe were given hefty one-year extensions for this season. Lowe's extension was more curious as he was respectable in relief (8-7, 4.16), but is now being asked to shift to the rotation. All who saw AJ Burnett last year know he most definitely is better than his 10-11 record and 6.14 ERA. Brad Penny also has a spot after a solid rookie season (16-8, 4.71). The pen has some good parts in Ramiro Mendoza, Mike DeJean and Dan Plesac, but needs some depth to emerge out of camp. Look for Jorge Julio to become a contributor in 2003 for the Walkers. ***Amateur on the horizon: Laynce Nix.***

The Buckeyes surprisingly took second in the Central last year. They have the offense to cause trouble in 2003, but the pitching is not on the par of their division mates at the moment. When John snared Livan Hernandez away from Fleetwood during the draft he instantly became the second best pitcher on the club. While Livan is durable, his 2002 numbers belie future issues: 4-12, 6.53 ERA. The ace of the staff will continue to be Randy Wolf (15-7, 3.78). Two years removed now from a ROY award Wolf remains a hidden gem in BRASSball. The rest of the rotation is going to come from a collection of vets (Daryl Kile, Joey Hamilton) and youth (Johan Santana, Darrell May). The bullpen is deep, but lacks lefty balance and an ace closer. Roberto Hernandez holds the closer role for now after having saved 13 games for Toledo in 2002. The offense remains potent and is led by do-everything CF'er Carlos Beltran. Beltran received MVP consideration in 2002 after hitting .312, smacking 15 triples, stealing 23 bases and driving in 140 runs. John Olerud quietly continues to put up solid seasons (.306-22-93). DH supreme Edgar Martinez came over in free agency after posting a 1.017 OPS in 2002. Scott Rolen is always difficult for opposition pitchers (.306-32-119). Energetic Jimmy Rollins had a fine start to his BRASSball career as he hit .291 and swiped 40 bases. Bobby Higginson has to be better than 8 homers for the Buckeyes in 2003. ***Amateur on the horizon: Jeremy Brown.***

Tough to slot the Bees fourth but there just isn't enough here for me to predict them higher. The pitching in Bloomington is going to be good and if combined with the Columbus offense would make for an excellent team ☺ Too many potential holes on the Bees offense headed into the 2003 season. Instant BRASSball star Ichiro returns after hitting .355 with 89 steals in 2002. Preston Wilson (.305-28-111) also should generate much offense for the Bees. Marlon Anderson returns to man second, but it is difficult to see him hitting .341 again. Same goes for Roger Cedeno and his .324 2002 average. Juan Gonzalez was powerful for the Bees with his 39 jimmy-jacks in 2002, but reports are that his back is bothering him in camp. Not good. 3B will be ably handled by either of two veterans: Vinny Castilla or Tony Batista. The loser figures to DH. The pitching staff is still young but talented. Mike Mussina was jettisoned recently with an eye focused on the future. His departure means Mark Buehrle must be the staff leader and his 2002 numbers indicate he is ready for the role: 22-6, 3.09 ERA. Jeff Weaver, like AJ Burnett in Fleetwood, has much better stuff than his 2002 numbers would indicate (10-16, 6.07). CC Sabathia returns after steering his way through his rookie season. New youngsters on the pitching horizon for the Bees will be seen in the likes of Vicente Padilla, John Lackey

and heralded Josh Beckett. Beckett in particular is poised to begin paying huge dividends for Bees management. ***Amateur on the horizon: Felix Diaz.***

NL West

I don't predict much changing in the NL West in 2003 as far as the order of finish goes. The Ocelots are still the class of the NL, let alone the West. However, I do see two other teams in the playoff mix. The Avengers, for their part, should have a pleasantly feisty offense to watch all year long.

Past NL West Champs

2002: Ocala, 117-45

2001: Ocala, 113-49

2000: Ocala, 105-57

1999: Ocala, 93-69

1998: Channel Islands, 103-59

Another year and another division crown appears in the offing for the Ocelots. Ocala brings back 2002 Triple Crown winner Sammy Sosa. Sam destroyed BRASSball to the tune of a .356 average, 79 homers and 216 rbi! It would be obviously unfair to Sosa to expect him to repeat that performance, but with the talent surrounding Sosa it won't matter much if he suffers a misstep. Todd Helton (43), Shawn Green (56) and Brian Giles (29) provide massive lefty power. JD Drew returns after posting a 1.036 OPS in 2002. Ocala can even reasonably assume that Derek Jeter (.285), Edgardo Alfonzo (.284) and Jason Kendall (.277) could improve over their 2002 numbers. Egad! It doesn't much matter to Corey at the moment that second base is slightly unsettled. On the mound Weisser will ride four starters as often as he can. Roy Oswalt had a superb rookie season as he finished 16-3. Javier Vazquez won the CY after his 26-4 record and 3.04 ERA. Lefties Glendon Rusch and Kenny Rogers should keep the opponents at bay most times out so as to let the offense bomb away. The bullpen is unheralded, but deep and balanced. Key free agent pickup Arthur Rhodes whiffed 71 in 50 relief innings last season in Moline. Mike Williams does have the unenviable task of trying to replace super-closer Troy Percival who departed during free agency. ***Amateur on the horizon: Xavier Nady.***

Gem City has some big expectations to fulfill in 2003. No team in BRASSball is being paid more collectively. But Dave does have some solid talent in those dollars and it should be good enough for second in the West and make the Wolfpack a solid playoff contender. Offensively the team is balanced and should have quality depth. The outfield sees 3 players fighting for an open LF spot. The outfield holdovers are Steve Finley (.280-20-74) and Reggie Sanders (.234-27-84). The big stick continues to be held by Carlos Delgado (.294-34-111). Scott Spiezio was brought in to play 1B and allow Delgado to concentrate on hitting as the DH. Pudge remains behind the plate and is still an offensive threat in BRASSball (.313-33-97). If Pudge could get in a full year this season the Wolfpack could be even better. The starters are a tad undefined at the moment for Gem City. Veteran Rick Reed (15-11, 4.11) is assured a spot as is Jason Johnson (9-16). Andy Benes would also appear to have a spot after inking a large free agent contract. Chan Ho Park also came back to Gem City and should be in the rotation, although he has admittedly struggled in camp. Look for the fifth spot to be filled by youngster Jason Jennings. Jason Isringhausen holds down the closer role after posting a fantastic 2002 season: 32 saves, 1.48 ERA. ***Amateur on the horizon: Andy Marte.***

North Georgia I predict for third but the 'Jackets should stay in the playoff hunt all season. The main reason: pitching. The starting staff is seasoned and good. Jon Lieber (14-13, 4.01) returns as the staff ace. Free agent Paul Byrd came over from Hessville and is expected to be an anchor in the rotation. Veteran lefties David Wells and Andy Pettitte make this a four-deep rotation. Look for talented youngsters Casey Fossum and Ted Lilly to take turns in the fifth spot. The bullpen will be led by John Smoltz. Smoltzie's first year as a closer was a smashing success: 33 saves, 0.70 ERA. Watch out for Eric Gagne in 2003. Reports out of spring training have this strong-armed reliever throwing some of the filthiest stuff in spring. Mike

Jackson and Scott Schoeneweis give Tony solid balance in front of Smoltz. Offensively, the team won't crush huge numbers of homers but it still should be able to produce runs. Sophomore Shea Hillenbrand has much room to improve (.267) and that is good news for North Georgia faithful. Brian Jordan (.290-27-93) and Fred McGriff (.292-21-76) are responsible for driving in runners in this offense. Edgar Renteria is better than his .263 2002 average. Placido Polanco is a plucky contributor to the 'Jacket offense. In CF heralded youngster Corey Patterson may be ready to start in career in 2003. ***Amateur on the horizon: Mark Teixeira.***

In Metropolis advancement is starting to come along quickly now. The pitching remains circumspect but the hitting has the potential to be irksome to many an opponent. The new star in town is 3B Eric Chavez (.293-41-119). Chavez came over in a trade from La Crosse and his defensive ability will allow Andy to shift Aramis Ramirez (.278-34-83) over to DH. Lance Berkman was landed from Charlevoix and his 2002 numbers were outstanding: .330-31-110. Yet another trade acquisition was made to get a 2B. In came Jose Vidro and his .329 average from Hessville. Youngsters Vernon Wells and Brad Wilkerson may land an OF spot. The pitching staff is scrambled. Tony Armas returns and is the ace after a tough 6-19 record in 2002. Veterans Wilson Alvarez and Steve Parris should have rotation spots. The rest of the starts will most likely be a season-long audition for the future. Some of the better prospects that will come through Metropolis will include Brandon Duckworth, Carlos Zambrano and Justin Miller. ***Amateur on the horizon: Hideki Matsui.***

Important Game Settings to Verify

Please remember to do the following two things before you start playing any league games.

First, enable "Closer Rules." To do so you need to do the following:

1. Select the 2003 BRASSball league
2. Select the OPTIONS menu and then RULES
3. Check the "Use Closer rules" box
4. Click OK

Second, set all unplayed games to "HOLD" status. To do so please perform the following steps:

1. Select the 2002 BRASSball league
2. Click on LEAGUE
3. Select SCHEDULE BATCH CHANGE
4. Check the box for "Set Unplayed games to Hold"
5. Click "OK"

In Season Standings Incentive Program

Please remember to pass along the results of your home series' to me during the season. As always, there is monetary remuneration for those who do so ☺

All you need to do is send me an e-mail with the subject line filled out that simply and plainly lets me know the results, i.e. OCALA (2) @ MINNESOTA (2).

Of course, check in regularly to the website during the season for the latest standings.

League Files in PDF format

For those not aware, Andy converts all my official league docs into PDF for the website. Some of you may find using/printing from these files to be easier. All documents will continue to come from me in Excel and Word formats.

Pitching Rotations

I've been asked by a member whether they can use the SOM game's HAL setup to report their pitching rotation to me each month.

I have no problems with this method. Now that we all will have the schedule programmed into the league files this is easily doable and a nice benefit of switching to game files and the scheduled game method.

Please remember, though, that you will need to pass along the file's password for me so I can open it and verify your rotation.

Game File Reminder

Please remember that BRASSball is no longer utilizing subsets for stats reporting. We now are utilizing the game file system. Please refer to last month's newsletter for a refresher or ask Corey and I if you have some questions.

Trades and Roster Stuff

48. Brooklyn trades Bob Wells, Kyle Sleeth and \$1,000,000 to Metropolis for Denny Neagle.
49. Metropolis trades John Burkett to La Crosse for Jason Arnold.
50. Gem City trades Julian Tavarez to Port Richey for Port Richey's 2004 4th round draft choice.
51. Bloomington trades Mike Mussina to Toledo for Toledo's 2004 1st round draft choice and Minnesota's 2004 1st round draft choice.
52. Brooklyn trades Travis Driskill to Charlevoix for Charlevoix's 2004 5th round draft choice.
53. Brooklyn trades Phil Nevin and \$4,100,000 to Santa Barbara for Brent Abernathy and Jose Nieves.
54. Minnesota trades John Vander Wal, Gary Knotts, Luke Hudson and \$350,000 to Hessville for Rusty Greer.
55. Plaza trades Mike Mordecai to Brooklyn for Garrett Stephenson and \$1,750,333.
56. Toledo trades Troy Percival to La Crosse for Randall Simon and Scott Strickland.

Upcoming League Deadlines

April 15th Trade deadline for May games

April 15th Results due to both opponents and Dave and Corey

April 25th Instructions and rotations due out for May

Next Issue of “League News”

A review of the first month of play.