

BRASS BASEBALL LEAGUE

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Season #7 Gets Underway!

BRASSball's seventh season is underway! Once again, it looks like there will be several teams competing for the 10 coveted playoff spots. As we focus in on the American League, it appears that last year's division winners will once again be tough to beat. Still, there are a handful of upstart squads who may well find themselves playing when October rolls along. Here's a look at the divisions on a team-by-team basis heading into April.....

American League East

1. **Santa Barbara Outlaws:** The Outlaws won 90 games in 2000, and ran away with the division by 21 games. Still, the loss of Shawn Green (.347-55-129-45 steals) cannot be overstated. Fortunately, team management was on top of this development, and brought Carl Everett (.307-41-121 with Georgia) and Ellis Burks (.259-30-94 with Long Island) into the fold as replacements. Additionally, the team filled a gaping hole at third by drafting Robin Ventura (.306-40-122) away from the Bees. Garret Anderson (.326-32-94) and Raul Mondesi (.266-36-88) return and join Everett and Burks to form a most fearsome outfield. Team stalwart Mo Vaughn (.301-33-104) is back at first base, while Javy Lopez (18 HRs in 222 ABs) hopes to build on his success in an otherwise injury-marred 2000 season. On the mound, Orlando Hernandez (18-9, 4.10) returns as staff ace, though Bartolo Colon (14-13, 5.70) is expected to take a step forward into a top-of-the-rotation starter. With Darren Dreifort also expected to "step up", the top three spots in the rotation appear set. Whether veterans like John Burkett, Tim Belcher, or youngster Matt Clement contribute anything will go a long way in determining the Outlaws' fortune. The bullpen is outstanding, led by John Rocker (47 saves in 2000) and free agent acquisition Rob Nen. These two should form the best lefty-righty punch in the league. With Danny Graves and Arthur Rhodes also in the pen, the Outlaws should be tough to beat in the late innings.

Prediction: 94-68 1st place.

2. **Brooklyn Bulldogs:** The 'Dogs could quite possibly be the most improved team in the league. After suffering through a dismal 58 win season, some shrewd trades and the expected development of some key youngsters are the key to what should be a fun season in Brooklyn. No move was more crucial to the team hopes than the acquisition of Greg Maddux from Bloomington. Despite an awful season in 2000, Maddux looks like his old self this spring, and should anchor a fine starting five. Andy Pettitte (11-14, 5.13) should be good for double digit wins also. Keys to this team are the conversion of Garrett Stephenson (18 saves in 2000) to starter, and the development of top prospect Ryan Dempster. If all goes well, this could be one of the better rotations around. Japanese Import Kazuhiro Sasaki will be given the closers role, with southpaw Gabe White and righty Jose Paniagua. Serving in a setup capacity. Offensively, this team falls just a bit short of their rivals from Santa

Barara. Dean Palmer (.261-43-110) and David Justice (.253-16-51) return, but it's the new acquisitions which will make or break this club. Roberto Alomar (.317-28-76-35 steals) and Alex Gonzalez form a new middle infield which should be solid both offensively and defensively. Darin Erstad (.277-16-71 with Iowa) came over in a deal for Mags Ordonez to give the club some more left handed pop. Same goes for veterans Paul O'Neill and Tino Martinez. Overall, this club is very sound. They should be right up there with Santa Barbara come September.

Prediction: 90-72, 2nd place.

3. **St. Croix Rivermen:** 2001 could be the year that the plan all comes together for the Rivermen. After years of shrewd drafting and talent evaluation, this year's club could be ready to take a serious step up. Manny Ramirez (.334-50-136) is coming off another wonderful season, and Johnny Damon (.321-11-65-54 steals) is also poised to enter superstardom. Additionally, the Rivermen have third year outfielder Ben Grieve, who burst onto the scene last year with a .272-39-115 season. This trio also stacks up with the best outfielders in the league. Up-and-coming third baseman Eric Chavez (.255-13-54 in his rookie year) is back for his sophomore season, and veteran firstbaseman Fred McGriff (.292-25-95) returns as well. Key addition Mike Bordick should solidify the middle infield, while providing a little pop as well. On the mound, Kevin Millwood, James Baldwin, and Kirk Rueter should keep their team in games, while Carl Pavano will contribute if healthy. Rookie Bruce Chen could be a key to the Rivermen' fortune. Jason Isringhausen leads a deep bullpen which also consists of Shiggy Hasegawa and Paul Shuey.

Prediction: 85-77, 3rd place.

4. **Toledo Mudhens:** Toledo, after winning only 44 games last year while located in Morris, should surprise some teams this year with their deep pitching staff and solid everyday lineup. Dave Burba, Denny Neagle, and Jeff Suppan form a nice trio at the head of the rotation. If Kerry Wood bounces back from injury, look out! Meanwhile, Trevor Hoffman leads a nice relief corps, which also includes Bob Wells, Steve Kline, and Mike Stanton. Gary Sheffield (.286-31-93) returns, and will be joined by new acquisitions Jeromy Burnitz, Todd Zeile, and Eric Owens. Rookie Mike Lowell and 2nd year shortstop Orlando Cabrera man the left side of the infield. Youngster Ramon Hernandez could be with the big league club and starting at catcher by midseason.

Prediction: 78-84, 4th place.

American League Central

1. **Cook County Maulers:** Looking for their 5th consecutive division crown, the Maulers are hoping that they can translate some of their regular season success into postseason success. Losing in their first playoff series last year left a bitter taste, and the team loaded up in hopes of a World Series title. Pedro Martinez (20-8, 2.95, 318Ks) was acquired to help bolster a rotation which was flawed in the postseason of 2000. Kevin Brown (20-8, 3.92) returns looking for a THIRD consecutive AL Cy Young award, and free agent acquisitions Chan Ho Park and Robert Person will pitch out of the #3 and #4 slots in the rotation. Mariano Rivera was signed to close, while Terry Adams was brought in to set up along with Scott Williamson. Roberto Hernandez gives the club another power arm for late in the games. The lineup is superb, with reigning AL MVP Vladimir Guerrero (.339-62-176) and All Star catcher Mike Piazza (.319-54-144) leading the way. Nomar Garciaparra (.365-29-107) will be with the club for a full season, after coming over from Iowa late last year. And with Carlos Delgado (.259-55-123) and rookie monster Troy Glaus, the corners of the Mauler infield are in good hands.

Prediction: 110-52, 1st Place

2. **Plaza Lions:** Coming off a 96 win season in 2000, the Lions look to improve on their 3rd place finish in the rugged central division. This year's team looks to be built more around a strong starting rotation, whereas last year's club simply bashed you into submission. Tom Glavine (13-11,

5.16) and David Wells (15-7, 5.15) return, looking to improve on last year's mediocre seasons. Paul Abbott, Gil Heredia, and Woody Williams round out a solid rotation 1 thru 5. Armando Benitez defected from Cook County to close in Plaza, and Juan Acevedo and Turk Wendell are solid setup options. Offensively, the Lions are led by outfielders Luis Gonzalez (.352-18-99) and Steve Finley (.267-30-94). Jeff Kent and Rich Aurillia provide one of the better offensive middle infields around, and Mark Grace is steady at first. Matt Williams needs to stay healthy though, as does catcher Mike Lieberthal.

Prediction: 90-72, 2nd Place

3. **Iowa Rubes:** This could be a far more enjoyable season than has been the case the past couple years. Where once Nomar Garciaparra was the "man", the Rubes appear to have several players ready to carry more than their share of the weight. Jason Varitek and Todd Hundley give the Rubes a strong presence behind the plate. Eric Young and rookie Cristian Guzman form a lightning quick middle infield, while Cliff Floyd, Magglio Ordonez, and Carlos Lee form a fine young outfield. Veterans like Chuck Knoblauch and Matt Stairs give the Rubes depth they have not had before. On the mound, the Rubes will miss Chan Ho Park. Still, they'll have Kris Benson (9-11, 4.81) looking to improve on his fine rookie year, along with free agent signee Kenny Rogers and draftee Jose Mercedes. John Snyder and Jamey Wright should see time at the bottom of the rotation. Dave Veres, Scott Sullivan, and Rick White form a nice threesome in the pen.

Prediction: 82-80, 3rd place

4. **Box City Parcelmen:** What?! 4th place?? How can BRASSball's defending back-to-back champs be picked for dead last?? P-I-T-C-H-I-N-G.....or a lack thereof. Unfortunately for the Parcelmen, the staff which led the team to 100 wins in 2000 essentially disintegrated over the offseason. Staff leader Andy Ashby (20-7, 3.94) left via free agency, as did fellow double-digit winners Steve Trachsel and Kevin Tapani. Even worse, two thirds of their most dominating bullpen will not be with the club. Trevor Hoffman departed via free agency after coming over in a "rent-a-player" trade late last year. Ugueth Urbina is lost for the year with an elbow injury. Eighteen game winner Andy Benes returns to head up the staff, which will count on the likes of rookie John Halama, and veterans like Terry Mulholland, Omar Oliveras, Pete Harnisch, and Dave Mlicki. Jeff Shaw (2.66 ERA in 2000) will serve as the closer this year, with Heath Slocumb and Mike Morgan backing him up. This team can still hit, with the likes of Albert Belle (.329-64-169) and Ray Lankford (.325-16-59) returning. Mike Sweeney also returns (.349-22-89) with an eye on another huge season. Meanwhile, new signees like Jom Thome and Kenny Lofton help to ensure the team will score. Could this be the year Miguel Tejada breaks loose?

Prediction: 73-89, 4th place

American League West

1. **Minnesota Mudcats:** After winning the East last year with 100 victories, the Mudcats are looking to take the next step. They are a serious contender for the AL pennant. Perhaps only rivaled by Cook County, the 'Cat offense could be downright dastardly this year. Start in the outfield, where young bucks like Andruw Jones (.290-32-118-30 steals), Brian Giles (.346-39-123), and Geoff Jenkins (.293-22-94) reside. The infield could be just as lethal, starting at first, where rookie of the year Sean Casey (.293-24-100) and newly signed Jason Giambi (336-34-109 in 2000) should rotate between 1B and DH. Oh yes.....Alex Rodriguez is on this team also! With Fernando Vina at 2B, and Jorge Posada behind the plate, there are no breathers in this lineup. Staff ace Mike Hampton (16-10, 4.73) re-signed in the offseason and will lead a vastly improved rotation. Daryl Kile, Esteban Loaiza, Jason Bere, and Kevin Tapani provide veteran stability 1-5. In the pen, Todd Jones, Greg Swindell, and David Weathers should take the heat off the rotation when relief is needed.

Prediction: 104-58, 1st place

2. **Georgia Braves:** Last year's Florida Hurricanes took the money and ran to Georgia over the off-season. Fortunately, they brought their players with them. This is a fine young team, and figures to get better over time. Tim Hudson (7-6, 3.68 in 125 innings) emerged as a potential ace last year, and should fit into the top of the rotation along with Russ Ortiz (14-6, 4.14). Sid Ponson, Freddy Garcia, and Albie Lopez are all promising as well. Rubber-armed Keith Foulke returns, but this year he'll replace the departed Billy Wagner, who took his 38 saves and left for bigger money this offseason. Bullpen depth may be an issue as the year goes on, though 30-year old rookie Matt Herges has looked great this spring. Derrek Lee, Pokey Reese, Deivi Cruz, and Travis Fryman can each do it offensively and defensively. They should combine for a terrific infield. Mike Cameron, Mark Kotsay, Dmitri Young, and Rondell White are all solid performers in the outfield.

Prediction: 84-78, 2nd place

3. **Morris Monarchs:** Though this team has some talent, it could be a long year in Morris. True, Barry Bonds (.228-33-103), Tim Salmon, and Jim Edmonds could make up one tremendous outfield. Bret Boone and Tony Womack should be sound up the middle as well. But the pitching could be a sore spot, depending on how some veterans perform. Pedro Astacio (7-19, 4.97 with Brooklyn) and Jamie Moyer (19-9, 4.20) are respectable at the top of the rotation. After them, you'll see the likes of Ismael Valdes, Rolando Arrojo, and youngster Elmer Dessens. Rookie Brian Tollberg could surprise. Curt Leskanic and Jeff Brantley will try to hold the lead late in games this year, with John Franco also in the picture.

Prediction: 79-83, 3rd place.

4. **Hessville Evereadys:** Last year's 80-82 finish was disappointing considering the two studs the team put on the field every day. Sammy Sosa (.281-62-182) and Larry Walker (.382-36-111) were about as dangerous a duo as you could find anywhere. Ah, but alas two men do not a team make. Sammy has since moved on the greener pastures in Ocala, and Walker has struggled with injuries all spring. Still, there is *some* hope for this club. Youngsters Jose Vidro (.274-11-42 in his rookie year) and Terrence Long appear to be the type of players you can build around. In addition to Walker, the club brought in veteran slugger Andres Galarraga to try and replace some of the "sock" which was lost when Sosa left. It's a risky move, as the "Big Cat" missed all of the 2000 season. How much does he have left? Damon Buford should see the bulk of the time in CF, with veteran Shawon Dunston playing a little bit everywhere. Still without Sosa and a healthy Walker, runs could be in short supply. The pitching appears to be decent, with Aaron Sele, Shawn Estes, Jimmy Haynes, and Frank Castillo in the rotation. The bullpen will be this team's achilles heel, with little depth and no proven closer.

Prediction: 69-93, 4th place

Trades

- 1) TOLEDO trades Matt Kinney and \$100,000 to METROPOLIS for Travis Lee and \$100,000.
- 2) GEORGIA trades Jason Christiansen to COLUMBUS for Mike James.
- 3) METROPOLIS pays 50,000 To GEORGIA for Matt Franco.
- 4) GEORGIA sells Chris Holt (pd) to RACINE for \$3M.
- 5) COOK COUNTY trades Benito Santiago to GEORGIA for 625k.

Contract Signings

- GEORGIA signs Derrek Lee to a 3 year contract
- COOK COUNTY signs Troy Glaus to a 4 year deal, and Julio Lugo to a 2 year deal

- TOLEDO signs Mike Lowell to a 3 year deal, and Terry Jones and Benny Agbayani to 2 year deals.
- IOWA signs Cliff Floyd, Cristian Guzman, and Tanyon Sturtze to 3 year contracts.
- HESSVILLE signs Terrence Long to a 4 year deal, and Cliff Politte and Juan Castro to 1 year deals.