

1961 PRESEASON PROGNOSIS

AMERICAN LEAGUE

Route 66 Hot Rods

With off-season acquisition Hammering Hank Aaron joining Frank Robinson and the Baby Bull Orlando Cepeda the Rods are loaded for bear and look to repeat as AL champs but the Monarchs, Stars and maybe even the Fortress could give them a run for the money. Slick fielding Louie Aparicio will hold down SS and steal a few bases whereas a combo of the "offensive team" (Jerry Adair) and the "defensive team" team (Bobbie Malkmus) will be at 2B. Jim Davenport is solid at the hot corner as is Johnny Roseboro behind the plate. The bullpen is loaded and will cover some deficiencies in the starting staff which is a little thin after Jim O'Toole and Joe Gibbon.

West Warwick Monarchs

The Kings fell only one game short in 1960 and could be that close or even win in 1961 with a few breaks although they cannot afford any falloffs in a shaky pitching staff. Al Kaline and Jimmy Piersall are two good outfielders and they have enough depth to cover the third slot adequately. Harmon Killebrew could flirt with 50 homers but is a defensive liability wherever he plays. Nellie Fox and Ron Hansen are a decent keystone combo but lack a little on the offensive side. Slugging Joe Adcock holds down first and Gus Triandos is a fine catcher. The pitching staff needs big years from Don Drysdale, Larry Jackson and Milt Pappas as the staff, including the bullpen, is pretty thin after those guys.

Detroit Metro Stars

The team formerly known as the Goshen Aces is under new management and a new moniker. They finished .500 in 1960 but promise to be much better this year and could even contend for the pennant. A nice mix of offense, defense & pitching although they could use a little more power. Except for slugging OF Bob Allison, second sacker Jerry Lumpe and third baseman Brooks Robinson they lack a day in day out lineup and the manger will have to juggle the rest of the roster very creatively although they do have a good bench. The starting pitching is very strong with five guys capable of winning 15 plus games. Closer extraordinaire Luis Arroyo leads a fine bullpen.

Frankfort Fortress

The Forts are loaded with power but a team aversion to the base on balls will mean that many homers will come with the bases empty. The big lumber will be carried by Rocky Colavito, Dick (Doctor Strange Glove) Stuart and Gene Freese. Center fielder Billy Bruton will run down a lot of balls and also contribute offensively. Jerry Lynch and John Blanchard will be tough off the bench and the overall team defense is good. Don Mossi, Ralph Terry and Frank Lary are all solid starters with Bennie Daniels not far behind. Don McMahon is a good closer and he'll get a lot of help from the rest of a fine staff.

South River Gladiators

There is a big falloff between the first and second division in the AL but all except the Hornets might climb up a notch although it would be asking a lot to do anything more. The Glads, traditionally a perennial power, suffered through 95 losses last year but could hit the .500 mark in 1961. Willy Mays should be brilliant and Wally Moon is due for an All-Star quality season but trying to play all the best hitters at the same time will cause some defensive problems. The catching chores will be spread around among several players, the best of whom (Haywood Sullivan) is no trip to Hollywood. Joey Jay is a solid number one starter but the rest of the staff has some issues, especially with control, and the bullpen is weak after Bobby Bolin and Dave Hillman, neither of whom are capable of full time duty.

Seattle Totems

The expansion Totems could field a respectable team and on paper are marginally better than the Lions and way better than the hapless Hornets. They have some power, especially from Leon (Daddy Wags) Wagner, Ken Hunt and Steve Bilko. Youngster Joe Torre could vie for Rookie of the Year honors and they will get some good part time production from veterans Gene Woodling and Duke Snider. Albie Pearson is a capable leadoff man and a fine centerfielder. Ken McBride is the leader of the staff and he has some decent support, especially from starter Dick Donovan and reliever Art Fowler.

East Kenosha Lions

The Lions should do better than last year's 95 losses but could also end up sixth, although falling all the way to the cellar would involve a big surprise from the Hornets. They have no one big time slugger but most of the players in the regular lineup are capable of double figure homers. The standout is certainly CF Vida Pinson who is sensational both offensively and defensively. Jake Wood and Maury Wills are a fine keystone combo and they have decent players at several other positions. Mudcat Grant is clearly the staff leader but at best he would be a number two or number three on a good team. The rest of the staff is composed of a lot of swing men, none particularly effective, and a capable closer is nowhere to be found.

Rossville Hornets

The Hornets won 85 games last year but could easily fall off to 100 losses this year. The pitching staff is Warren Spahn (no Johnny Sain) and pray for rain. Roy Face is a decent closer with good control but there aren't too many other quality hurlers on the staff. However, the real weakness of the team is at the plate. If you can pitch around SS Ernie Banks, there isn't a whole lot more in the lineup that will scare anyone. A few guys can hit an occasional home run but they can't do much else. The guys who can hit at all usually can't field and the guys who can field either can't hit or are incapable of playing every day.

NATIONAL LEAGUE

Lafayette Slims

The Slims have been hanging around .500 or less for years but this year the youngsters matured and several veterans are poised for breakout season. They are the prohibitive favorite to win it all but you don't win any pennants in April and that's why you have to play the games. Norm Cash did some heavy duty off season workouts that some people claim were augmented by a corked bat and should have a fantastic season. Roberto Clemente, Curt Flood and George Altman could end up as an all .300 hitting outfield. Bill Mazerowski will act as a vacuum cleaner around 2B and SS Dick Howser is a fine leadoff man capable of leading the league in steals. The rest of the lineup and bench is as good as anyone else in the league. The team starts will be spread around among a variety of fine pitchers and the bullpen, anchored by Stu Miller is sensational.

Los Angeles Surfers

Either the Surfers or Cruisers could surprise and contend for the pennant but that would require a significant falloff for the Slims. The Surfers are loaded with power, beginning with their perennial All-Star CF Mickey Mantle. They could easily end up with half a dozen, or more, 20-homer players. Chuck Schilling and Woodie Held are solid on either side of the middle infield and Frank Malzone is a solid, if unspectacular, contributor at 3B. They have several role players to fill in at the other spots and overall the offense is solid. The workhorses of the staff are Jim Bunning and Jack Kralick but Juan Pizarro and Skinny Brown will also be big contributors. Closer Tom Morgan leads an excellent bullpen.

Hampton Road Cruisers

Roger Maris leads a power packed lineup and will surely contend for the home run title, if not the all time single season record. Moose Skowron and Clete Boyer hold down the corners of the infield; Boyer's defense is second to none but he could use a little more pop in his bat. Frank Bolling and Don Buddin are an above average keystone combo while Elston Howard is a standout catcher and they also have a decent bench. Whitey Ford and Jim Archer are a pair of very good lefty starters and they have several capable helpers. Lefty Ron Perranoski and righty Jim Brosnan are arguably the best bullpen duo in the league.

Salzburg Bishops

The Prelates won 100 games last year and made it to the World Series but will be hard pressed to climb over the three teams above and repeat in 1961. Diamond Jim Gentile at first and Eddie Mathews at third represent cannons at the corners but the outfield is not strong. Pete Runnels is a good hitter at 2B but SS Roy McMillan is not. Fireballer Sandy Koufax is poised for a breakout season and will be ably supported by Bill Monboquette and Curt Simmons but the rest of the starting corps is spotty at best. Bill Henry and Barney Shultz are a good lefty/righty bullpen combo but there isn't a lot of depth.

Portland Beavers

The Beavers lost 90 games in 1960 and might even hit the break-even point this year but anything more will be asking a lot and they could easily fall to sixth behind the Rivers. Third sacker Ken Boyer is the leader of the attack and he'll get a lot of support from outfielders Billy Williams & Felipe Alou plus SS Tony Kubek. The right side of the infield is not that strong and the catching corps is mediocre at best. The top three starters could each win 15 plus games but could also blow up as they share serious control problems. Turk Lown is a good closer and he has a little help from a few other hurlers but depth is lacking.

Wabash Rivers

Wabash lost a league high 102 games last year and should improve significantly but anything beyond fifth place would be a stretch. They do have slugger Roy Sievers at first and a fine catcher in Johnny Romano. Two of the best players on the team (Stan Musial at 40 and Ron Santo at 21) have almost as much of an age differential to be father and son. Zoilo Versalles and Tony Taylor are an OK if unspectacular in the middle of the infield but the outfield has very little power. The starting staff has no clear number one and Hoyt Wilhelm, a superb closer, might be wasted as he might not have that many leads to protect.

Evanston Elephants

How the mighty have fallen! Evanston management built the team to peak in 1960 and that's exactly what happened as virtually the entire roster either played up to par or exceeded expectations and they won 96 games, the second best in franchise history which goes all the way back to 1944. This would have been enough to win the AL flag but they were in the NL and finished behind the 100-game winning Bishops. The piper now has to be paid and the team was forced to restock by trading super star Hank Aaron in the off season. This year's crew will battle the Hornets & Seals all year for the worst record and have by far the least power in the league. There is very little quality in the everyday lineup although it is hoped that youngsters Rich Rollins and Johnny Callison will develop in subsequent years. There is some quality starting pitching but almost no bullpen and the manager will be forced to leave the starters in way too long.

Winter Harbor Seals

A classic expansion team, the Seals have a combination of a few promising rookies and a lot of veterans who have seen better days. Outfielder Carl Yastremski was the consensus number one pick in the recent draft and promises to have a long and productive career. He will get some outfield help from the likes of George Thomas, Jim King and Chuck Hinton but no one on the roster other than Yaz is anything close to an everyday player so the manager will need to constantly shift his lineups. Dale Long provides a bit of power, albeit as a part timer but the team has defensive problems at just about every position other than 2B. On the mound, Tom Sturdivant and Ted Bowsfield will provide a few quality starts but there isn't much behind them and most of the staff especially erstwhile relief ace Ryan Duren have serious control problems.

