

Major League Baseball preview 1998

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headache.

Who wouldn't have laughed ten years ago if someone described the **Cleveland Indians** as future perennial contenders? They are the only team in the Central with a chance at heading for the playoffs. After their disappointing loss to the Marlins in the big show last year, don't expect them to make it past the first round. The Tribe has acquired some new faces in Travis Fryman, Ben McDonald, Ron Villone, Steve Karsay and Dwight Gooden. And one old one — Kenny Lofton, the keeper of his own discontent. However, the loss of Marquis Grissom, Jeff Juden and Dave Justice will keep them from winning baseball's top crown.

The **Detroit Tigers**, who have spent the last few years languishing in the basement of the AL East, could breathe new life in the Central. They won't challenge for first, nor will they have a hope at the wild-card, but look for them to finish about 5-6 back from Cleveland. Buddy Bell is a good teaching manager and, with a young team like this, look for the Tigers to win 80-85. With Justin Thompson starting and with a Doug Brocail-Todd Jones one-two punch to close, there is a solid pitching core. Speedy Brian Hunter and powerful Tony Clark will provide the offence.

Chicago's long-vaunted **White Sox** are in the midst of rebuilding. While they have a good core including Frank Thomas, Robin Ventura, Albert Belle and Jaime Havarro, the payroll has been chopped by \$19-million and the pitching is a mess. Havarro will be the team ace, but Jason Bere and James Baldwin are too unreliable. Matt Karchner replaced Roberto Hernandez fairly well but he's practically alone in the bullpen. Ray Durham may be the most exciting thing in Chi-town this year. Sorry, Oprah.

The **Kansas City Royals** are suffering from serious ownership doubts. While they will provide solid day-in day-out play, there is nothing spectacular here. Jeff Conine and Hal Morris have been brought in to join former Texas slugger Dean Palmer. Kevin Appier, who has been one of baseball's best pitchers for five years, is having arm troubles

which he just reagravated. Tim Belcher is solid too, and he's backed up by Jeff Montgomery, but the rest of the bullpen is a mess. One bright spot is Jermaine Dye, who has the potential to be a real power threat in the AL.

The **Minnesota Twins** have a philosophy of building teams for one-year stints at greatness. Such teams won the World Series in both 1987 and 1991. They require the Twins to get as bad as is humanly possible and then rebuild with a solid core of veterans and some brilliant youngsters. However, since the retirement of Kirby Puckett, the Twins have been unable to climb from the cellar. Paul Molitor might have provided Puckett's leadership, but he's 42 and destined to retire at the end of the year. Brad Radke is the only other highlight on this team, a solid pitcher who should win 17 games this year. Otherwise 'there will be no joy in Minneapolis in 1998'.

American League West

The West was made famous in the 80s for pioneering a style of football offense which made the San Francisco 49ers potential contenders. Baseball GMs have

tried to do the same with limited results. Although the Oakland A's were a force in the late eighties, no West Coast team has been to the World Series since them in 1990. Big offense isn't always enough.

The **Seattle Mariners** are in trouble. While they will undoubtedly win the West this year, their future is looking bleak. They still have tons of power with David Segui replacing Paul Sorrento, and sliding into the slugger core of Ken Griffey Jr., Alex Rodriguez, Edgar Martinez and Jay Buhner. Joey Cora is still amazing having hit .360 last season. The problems are pitching woes. The Big Unit, Randy Johnson, looks to be leaving at the end of the season, and Jaime Moyer and Jeff Fassero are reasonably strong. The M's have one of the most pathetic bullpens in the majors. Despite Canadian Paul Spoljaric and Mike Timlin and returning closer Heathcliff Slocumb, when the Mariner's bullpen comes a-calling, the opposition goes a-hitting. They won't make it past the first round of the playoffs unless they play Cleveland.

Texas has always prided itself on being ever-present, a style which will make the **Rangers** infuriating this year.

The lawmen still have their core of big-hitting, hard-throwing veterans including Ivan Rodriguez, Juan Gonzalez, Rusty Greer and John Wetteland. They have also added some promising arms in Aaron Sele and Matt Perisho. For once, Texas will have a decent shortstop in Kevin Elster. Johnny Oates, who suffered through his first losing season, in 1997, since he was a rookie manager, will have the opportunity to be more aggressive on the basepaths and not have to wait for a 400-foot Juan Gonzalez gift.

There are times when teams should invest money in a full-time hospital staff instead of players. The **Anaheim Angels** have proven why health insurance is a must in the US. In 1997, six starters underwent surgery including star center fielder Jim Edmonds. Chuck Finley spent six weeks in a cast, and all of the following underwent surgery: Todd Greene, Dave Hollins, Gary DiSarcina, Randy Velarde, Darin Erstad, and the biggest man in baseball, Cecil Fielder. The Angels have all the tools to contend, a great pitching staff, a solid defensive core, and a consistent offense. All they need is Apollo to smile down on them and they'll be fine.

The **Oakland Athletics** will spend

another year in the basement of the AL West. Management must be pining for the days that Rickey Henderson, Jose Canseco, Mark McGwire and Geronimo Berroa gave new reason to fear green and yellow. The A's are pursuing a new style as they redesign the worst pitching staff in the AL. They've added Kenny Rogers (not the Gambler) and Tom Candiotti to the promising young arm of Jimmy Haynes. They have completely rebuilt their bullpen with Mike Fetters as their first promising closer since Dennis Eckersley. Jason Giambi and Scott Spiezo will make up the infield core for the foreseeable future. Mike Blowers is an offensive threat and can guard the hot corner. Shane Mack will anchor the outfield that may or may not include fading star Rickey Henderson.

The playoff picture is fairly secure. The **New York Yankees**, **Cleveland Indians**, and **Seattle Mariners** will win their respective divisions. The **Toronto Blue Jays**, **Baltimore Orioles**, and **Boston Red Sox** will be fighting over the wildcard spot. Teams that could play spoiler include the **Texas Rangers**, **Anaheim Angels** and maybe the **Detroit Tigers**.

MANAGER WANTED...

The Dalhousie men's varsity hockey team is looking for an energetic student-manager to assist with the day-to-day operation of the team.

Applicants must be goal-oriented, able to manage time very wisely, capable of budget management, and familiar with the game. Knowledge of skate-sharpening and equipment would be an asset. They must have great interpersonal skills and be assertive. There will be some travel involved, mostly on weekends.

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