

Blue Jays' chances look good for '85 season

Indicator for World Series: Jays play Yankees to close out season

By LORNE MANLY

The optimism emanating from Dunedin—the Blue Jays' spring training base in Florida—has fueled pennant fever even though it's still only March. The Jays' 13-4 record (as of Tuesday) has touched off victory celebrations despite the fact spring training records mean very little. For example, the Detroit Tigers were 11-16 in the Grapefruit League last spring and went on to win the World Series.

Many sportswriters and fans seem to feel that there's not much point to the season as the Jays are destined to triumph anyway. However, one of the toughest battles in baseball's history is shaping up in the American League East, and if anyone is expecting a cakewalk for the Jays, s/he is in for a rude awakening. Detroit, New York, Baltimore and Boston are all legitimate contenders for the divisional crown in the toughest division ever.

The major reason for this optimism is the off-season acquisition of relief pitchers Bill Caudill and Gary Lavelle. From having one of the worst bullpens in the majors (their 28 losses was the worst in the American League), the Blue Jays now have one of the best.

Caudill is only 28 and is coming off his best season ever, picking up 36 saves. That is three more than the Jays managed all of last year. Lavelle, a lefthanded veteran obtained from the San Francisco Giants, is a proven stopper and can

still fire the ball at 36. Together they give the Jays a potent one-two bullpen punch.

The trading of Alfredo Griffin and Dave Collins to Oakland for Caudill also opens the way for two of the most promising players in the majors—Jesse Barfield and Tony Fernandez—to play every day. Barfield has a howitzer for an arm and a cannon for a bat, as two years ago he smashed 27 home runs in under 400 at-bats. Fernandez can make plays at shortstop that even Ozzie Smith cannot and anything is an improvement over Griffin's anemic bat.

Many lamented the loss of Collins and Griffin, feeling that the atmosphere they brought to the clubhouse was invaluable. However, no one has proven that a joyous atmosphere brought about wins (witness the 1976 Yankees) while Barfield's bat will.

The Jays' starting staff is solid. Led by Dave Stieb, the rotation consists of Doyle Alexander, Luis Leal, Jim Clancy and Jimmy Key. Key gives the Jays their first bonafide lefthanded starter in their history. The Jays have gone 594 games without a lefty starter winning a game, dating back to Paul Mirabella's 3-1 win at Boston on October 4, 1980.

Competition in Dunedin for the remaining two jobs on the pitching staff is fierce. Concede one of these spots to Dennis Lamp, even if he doesn't deserve it, because of his big \$900,000 per year guaranteed contract. Roy Lee Jackson

will probably be traded before the start of the season, despite the fact he can sing both the Canadian and American national anthems. Chances are he will go to the Mets or the Astros so the Jays will be able to keep either Luis Thornton or Manny Lee in the organization. Competing for the final spot are Ron Musselman, Jim Acker, Matt Williams, Colin McLaughlin, John Cerutti, Bryan Clark and Tom Filer.

Fred Manrique will back up Fernandez and Damaso Garcia, while Willie Upshaw at first and Buck Martinez and Ernie Whitt at catcher round out the infield. The outfield is set with Lloyd Moseby and George Bell. Willie Aikens and Jeff Burroughs are both stinging the ball at camp so the designated hitter position is not a worry.

Outfield depth, however, is lacking. Mitch Webster and Ron Shepherd are unproven and a serious injury to any of the starters could be devastating. General Manager Pat Gillick will likely swing a trade soon, using his surplus pitching talent as bait.

Optimism abounds that the Jays will equal the excellence displayed by York teams this year. And if one is a betting person the odds are in your favor. Whatever team the New York Yankees finished the regular season against in the last two seasons have won the World Series. Two years ago the Yanks finished in Baltimore and last year they finished in Detroit. This year they finish—you guessed it—in Toronto on October 4, 5, and 6. Remember, you read it here first.

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