

the 1958 Baseball Season

PREVIEW:

HERE'S HOW THE PENNANT RACES



Norm Siebern—Steve Bilko
Rookies of the Year?

Stan Musial—Ted Williams
Batting Champions?

Mickey Mantle—Gil Hodges
Home Run Kings?

BY JOSEPH N. BELL

A former member of the St. Louis Cardinals' publicity staff, Joseph N. Bell has contributed sports articles to various national magazines. And like any sports writer worth his salt, he doesn't hesitate to stick his neck out—as the reader will discover in this forecast of the 1958 season.

SPRING WILL BE ushered in officially this week with the opening of the major-league baseball season—which, in 1958, will feature the closest pennant race in history in the National League while the Yankees are clinching the American League flag early in September. At least that's how it looks in March, after a poll of 73 taxi drivers, 113 elevator operators, seven ouija boards, and two Univac machines.

Four teams will be in the thick of another exciting, down-to-the-wire National League scramble, with the Dodgers bringing Los Angeles its first World Series after snatching the pennant in a virtual dead heat with Milwaukee, St. Louis, and Cincinnati. In the American League, all the excitement will be wrapped up in the race for the runner-up spot. Detroit will surprise many by edging out the White Sox, Indians, Orioles, and Red Sox—all bunched closely behind.

Here's how the two pennant races shape up, team-by-team:

National League

First, Los Angeles Dodgers. Walter O'Malley has all the cards stacked for him—a pantywaist 250-ft. left-field wall for his right-handed swingers to aim at, the enthusiasm of a new home and baseball-hungry fans, and a talented, if aging, ball club that has one more pennant thrust left in it. The near-tragic loss of Roy Campanella will hurt the Dodgers—but not fatally. The Los Angeles pitching staff—which had the best earned-run average in the majors last year—will be even tougher in 1958. Gil Hodges is a fixture at first, with Char-

ley Neal, Don Zimmer, and Pee Wee Reese or Ransom Jackson rounding out a fine infield. Snider, Cimoli, and Furillo in the outfield are as tough defensively as they are with their bats. These veteran Dodgers still have one last collective effort in them, and the psychological adrenalin of a new home may be just enough to bring Los Angeles its first pennant in its first year of major-league baseball.

Second, Milwaukee Braves. The world champions are intact and have added

strength with Bob Rush from the Cubs. Lew Burdette, Warren Spahn, Bob Buhl, Gene Conley, and Rush will make up a tremendous group of starting pitchers. Both the infield—with Adcock or Torre, Schoendienst, Logan, and Matthews—and the outfield with the splendid Henry Aaron, Bill Bruton, and Wes Covington are holdovers from 1957. But there are some cracks showing. Bruton is a decided question mark, and only game competition will show whether his injured leg will hold up; Schoendienst and Spahn began showing some signs of brittleness last year. These are key men. The Braves haven't the depth to replace them. The champions are loaded with front-line talent, but if they slip there will be several clubs looking down their throat.

Third, Cincinnati Redlegs. The Redlegs had one crying weakness last year—pitching. Gabe Paul has gone all out during the off-season to bulwark his pitching staff without sacrificing too much power. He acquired Harvey Haddix from the Phils, Bob Purkey from the Pirates, and Willard Schmidt from the Cardinals—all solid front-line pitchers. If they can help Brooks

Lawrence and Joe Nuxhall hold the Cincinnati opposition to three or four runs a game, the Redlegs will be very tough. Roy MacMillan and Johnny Temple form the best second-base combination in the National League. Burgess and Bailey are the best one-two catching staff in baseball, and the outfield of Bell, Robinson, and Thurman packs a mighty wallop.

Fourth, St. Louis Cardinals. St. Louis is going to miss Frank Lane—but he left them a fine legacy. The Cardinals' hopes in 1958 depend on a young pitching staff which blew hot-and-cold last season. Wilmer Mizell, the McDaniel brothers, and Herm Wehmeier flashed tremendous talent some of the time, but Larry Jackson was the only consistent performer. The Cardinals still have Stan Musial—almost a team by himself. Whether he's stationed at first or in the outfield, Musial is a pro through-and-through, with a hitting eye that hasn't been dimmed by his 38 years. As long as Musial is active and taking aim on his eighth batting crown, the Cardinals will be a threat. The rest of the Cardinal infield—with Kasko, Dark, and Blasingame—is solid, and the outfield

SHAPE UP ON THE EVE OF OPENING DAY.

AMERICAN LEAGUE

New York
Detroit
Chicago
Cleveland
Baltimore
Boston
Kansas City
Washington

NATIONAL LEAGUE

Los Angeles
Milwaukee
Cincinnati
St. Louis
Philadelphia
Pittsburgh
San Francisco
Chicago

of Cunningham, Moon, Ennis, and Boyer is better noted for its hitting than its fielding.

Fifth, Philadelphia Phillies. The key to the Phils' chances is held firmly in the confident, determined right hand of pitcher Robin Roberts, who got his first major-league lumps last year. Still only 30, Roberts is convinced he's ready for a big year; if he's right, the Phillies will be troublesome. The addition of Wally Post from the Redlegs will add power to a woefully weak attack. Richie Ashburn is a fixture in center, and several talented rookies will compete for the third outfield spot. Jones, Fernandez, and Hammer around the infield need to hit if the Phils are to be in contention. Stan Lopata, one of the best hitting catchers in baseball, may wind up playing first base. Jack Sanford, a phenomenal first-year pitcher in 1957, and Curt Simmons could team with Roberts to give the Phils rugged front-line pitching.

Sixth, Pittsburgh Pirates. Danny Murtaugh, in his first full season at the Pirate helm, may climb a couple of notches. The Pirates have good power with Frank Thomas, Dick Groat, Ro-

berto Clemente, and Bill Virdon. They could have a great deal more if Ted Kluszewski—practically given to them over the Winter by the Redlegs—comes through. The outfield of Meijas, Clemente, and Virdon is one of the best fielding units in the league, and the catching staff, headed by Hank Foiles, is above average. Pitching is still something of a question mark. Bob Friend, Ronnie Kline, and Vernon Law have been very good pitchers on occasion. If they all happen to have a good season, along with Big Klu, the Pirates can climb higher than sixth.

Seventh, San Francisco Giants. Even the magic of San Francisco and the lift of seeing people instead of empty seats won't be enough to overcome the talent deficiencies of the newly moved Giants. Willie Mays can play only one position—or perhaps two—at a time; and there just isn't enough of Willie to go around. Behind Johnny Antonelli and Reuben Gomez, there isn't much pitching. Bobby Thomson and Hank Sauer might support Mays with their hitting, but they'll let Willie chase most of the fly balls. The infield is undistinguished.

Eighth, Chicago Cubs. Ernie Banks and the nation's most attractive ball park don't add up to a pennant. Without some help from unexpected quarters, the Cubs can look forward to another dismal season. They have one hope of salvation: a young and talented pitching staff featuring Dick Drott, Moe Drabowsky, Don Elston, and the newly acquired Taylor Phillips. Walt Moryn is the best of a mediocre batch of outfielders. The Cubs need a take-charge guy to build a fire under them—and a front office which doesn't make deals like the horrible trade of Bob Rush, a talented and seasoned pitcher, for young Phillips.

American League

First, New York Yankees. The Yankees can spread-eagle the American League field almost by default. Rookies Tony Kubek and Bobby Richardson will be better with a year of seasoning, and Yogi Berra is due for a comeback after a dismal slump—for him—in 1957. To these, add the brilliant Mickey Mantle, the steady performance of Gil MacDougald, Hank Bauer, Bill Skowron, and Andy Carey, and a bench unexcelled in either league for strength in depth, and you have the makings of a pennant winner. Whitey Ford should improve on his '57 record, and Bobby Shantz, further along the comeback trail, might be the biggest winner on a pitching staff that will include Bob Turley, Art Ditmar, Don Larsen, Bob Grim, and Johnny Kucks. Indicative of Yankee strength is the fact that hard-hitting Norm Siebern, last year's outstanding minor leaguer, will probably have a tough time breaking into the lineup. It looks like a shoo-in for the Yankees against a rather mediocre field of also-rans.

Second, Detroit Tigers. If anyone is to give the Yankees trouble, it will probably be the Tigers. Billy Martin, acquired from Kansas City over the Winter, will finally plug a gap at second base that has plagued the Tigers for years. Boone, Kuenn, and Bertoia will round out a hard-hitting infield; and outfielders Al Kaline, Charley Maxwell, and Gus Zernial boast good power. Tiger pitching is on the upswing. Frank Lary is due for a big season, and Jim Bunning, Paul Foytack, and Billy Hoelt look like steady winners. The combination of effective pitching, potent slugging, and a fiery competitor in Martin should bring Detroit the runner-up spot in 1958.

Third, Chicago White Sox. The White Sox of 1958 will lose more 1-0 and 2-1 games than any two teams in either league. Chicago has speed and good defense, but it still takes some punch to win ball games—and this the Sox don't have. Their pitching is magnificent. To a staff already boasting Billy

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