

Play Ball: Majors Open 1959 Season Tomorrow

New York American Repeater

NEW YORK (AP)—The rest of the American League may be catching up with the New York Yankees, but the year of reckoning is not yet here.

Because of their wealth of proven players, their vast depth in pitching, their multitude of extra manpower and their extraordinary maneuverability, the defending champions must be picked to win their fifth consecutive championship and their 10th in 11 years under Casey Stengel.

The Yankees are not invulnerable, but the feeling is that not one of their rivals has bolstered itself sufficiently to make a successful bid for the pennant. The team that has a chance to at least raise a token challenge seems to be Detroit with its vastly strengthened pitching staff and a lineup that includes such solid hitters as Al Kaline, Harvey Kuenn and Frank Bolling.

Chicago, the perennial runner-up, doesn't appear to have gained strength to overhaul the Yankees. In fact, the White Sox may have a difficult time beating off a challenge by the remodeled Cleveland Indians.

Boston, with a re-shaped pitching staff, and outfield problems stemming from the trade of center fielder Jimmy Piersall to a flock of injuries capped by Ted Williams' pain in the neck, may slip into the second division. That seems to be the final habitation of Baltimore, Kansas City and Hapless Washington.

The Yankees are a solid team with the possible exception of shortstop and left field. A return to form of Tony Kubek, back from the Army, and a revitalized Norm Siebern could erase these problems, too. The army troubles of Whitey Ford and Don Larsen could slow up baseball's mightiest machine, but in the long run it would seem that the champs' biggest enemy is complacency, real or imaginary.

How long Detroit stays in contention depends upon three things. Relief aces Don Mossi and Ray Narleski must do the job they were brought in to do—stop enemy attacks efficiently and promptly. Veteran third baseman Eddie Yost and shortstop Rocky Bridges must stay fresh and able for all of the campaign. First baseman Gail Harris and whoever plays left field—Charlie Maxwell or Larry Doby—must add their bats to Kaline, Kuenn and company.

The White Sox have a solid front line pitching staff, a brilliant defense sparked by the exciting double play combination of Luis Aparicio and Nellie Fox, a fine centerfielder in Jim Landis and stout catchers. They are weak, however, at first and third base and have an inferior bullpen.

Cleveland might be the surprise of the league, but they have too many ifs. Herb Score must come back with a bang out of season. Rocky Colavito must continue his spectacular hitting of last July, August and September. Piersall and Billy Martin must provide the spark and dash the club lacked last year, and Woody Held must fill the gap at shortstop. Minnie Miñoso, Vic Power, Russ Nixon, Dick Brown, Gary Bell and Jim Grant are strong assets.

The Red Sox should score more runs largely because of the addition of first baseman Vic Wertz and the availability of Hayward Sullivan behind the plate. The latter, who appeared to have won the No. 1 catching berth last spring, was sidelined all season with a back injury. Pitching may be Boston's biggest headache.

Baltimore has solid pitching headed by Billy O'Dell, Milt Pappas, Arnie Portocarrero, Jack Harshman, Hec Brown and Hoyt Wilhelm. The Orioles have a slugging catcher in Gus Triandos, a highly promising rookie centerfielder in Willie Tasby, and a pair of proven hitters in Bob Nieman and Gene Woodling. They are shy on power, have a shaky infield and weak bench.

Kansas City has added some bench strength, owns a solid front line outfield in Bob Cerv, Roger Maris and Bill Tuttle, and can throw a couple of good pitchers at you such as Ralph Terry and Bob Grim. But the Athletics have an infield problem and they could use more starting pitchers.

Roy Sievers, Albie Pearson, Pedro Ramos, Camilo Pascual and Dick Hyde. After that, Washington has a bunch of guys named Dave. It looks like another long season for manager Cookie Lavagetto.



ORE TECH HURLER — Scheduled to be one of coach Ralph Carr's pitchers for this weekend's baseball activity for Oregon Tech as the Owls travel to Reno for a single game with the University of Nevada on Friday and to Lassen for a doubleheader with Lassen Junior College on Saturday is LeRoy Rausch, above. Rausch hurled for the Owls against Humboldt last weekend in the first start of the year.

Winner-Hating Loes Now Feels At Home

NEW YORK (UPI)—Billy Loes, a pitcher who doesn't want to win too many games because it might set a precedent of expectancy, is comfortably installed today where he doesn't have to worry about such a calamity.

Loes, a young man of infinite and sometimes incomprehensible ideas, has been swapped from the Baltimore Orioles to the Washington Senators. It's simply a matter of giving your business to a new pawn shop.

Nobody expects Washington to win much of anything and this is right up Billy's alley. When he went to the Orioles three years back, that was their situation. Some people contended he belonged there anyhow, what with Billy being for the birds, but he and Manager Paul Richards formed an instant mutual admiration society.

It lasted just as long as nobody, including Richards, expected the Orioles to be winners. Not that Loes couldn't be if he so desired. This 29-year-old right-hander has all the "stuff" necessary to be a 20-game winner. But, as he once explained it, "If you win 20 games one year then they expect you to do it every year."

WOULD REQUIRE EFFORT This, of course, would require a great deal of effort. That's not for Billy, who also has confessed in the past that baseball is simply an easy way to make a comfortable bundle but that, aside from this, he hates the sun and the game hates him.

A screwball is a pitch and a screwball is a pitch and a screwball is a pitch.

Bevos Beaten By Suds, 4-2 EL CENTRO, Calif. (AP)—Two left-handers allowed only six hits in pitching Seattle to a 4-2 victory over Portland in a baseball exhibition game between the two Pacific Coast League teams here Tuesday.

Claude Osteen, a 19-year-old on option from Cincinnati of the National League, was credited with the win. Seattle's first in four games with Portland this spring. Both Portland runs, one of them unearned, were scored off Osteen. Veteran Bill Kennedy relieved him in the eighth inning.

Glenn Cox, burly right-hander on option from Kansas City, pitched the distance for the Beavers. He blanked the Rainiers in all but two innings. But in each of these, the third and the fourth, Seattle scored two runs.

Dave Melton's 330-foot homer over the left field fence in the seventh inning was Portland's only earned run.

Managers Predict Winners

NEW YORK (AP)—Unbounded optimism was the keynote today as the 16 major league managers, to a man, hailed their clubs as "greatly improved" on the eve of the opening of the season.

Two of them — defending champions Casey Stengel of New York and Fred Haney of Milwaukee — stated flatly their teams should win again. Bill Rigney of San Francisco, Danny Murtaugh of Pittsburgh and Al Lopez of Chicago's White Sox, said their teams "could" win the pennant.

Harry Craft of Kansas City and Cookie Lavagetto of Washington boldly predicted their teams would win more games than they did in 1958. Paul Richards called his Orioles the best club that has represented Baltimore since its re-entry into the majors in 1954.

The most succinct comment was made by Stengel, who will be trying to nail down his fifth consecutive championship, and tenth in 11 years with the Yankees.

"I've got the American League by the tail," he said. "I can throw two teams at 'em if I have to. That is, I can play a right-handed and a left-handed team."

Haney's comment was equally definitive.

"We've got the best players, the best pitching," he said. "We've got the experience and the confidence. I see no reason why we can't win again."

Stengel's appraisal of the rest of the American League notwithstanding, the seven other AL managers agreed the race will be closer this year.

"The Red Sox are an improved club this spring," said Boston manager Mike Higgins. "I know the Yankees still have to be beaten. I think they can be beaten. They are only human."

"The Red Sox might do it. It looks like a great race from first to sixth. It will be close all the way."

Lopez, Chicago: "The Yankees are still the team to beat but I believe the White Sox have to be considered a chance to win the pennant."

Joe Gordon, Cleveland: "I honestly feel the Indians have improved quite a bit. How we do in the pennant race depends on how many of the players have a good year. The club is faster, has a better bench and better spirit."

Bill Norman, Detroit: "I know we've improved our pitching and we've helped our infield because of the trades for Ray Narleski, Don Mossi, Eddie Yost and Rocky Bridges."

Harry Craft, Kansas City: "I think the Athletics will be a better ball club. Our aim is to reach the 500 mark."

Lavagetto, Washington: "I think the Senators will win 60 games this year. We have good potential."

Richards, Baltimore: "We have added a great deal of punch to the infield with the addition of Billy Klaus, Chico Carrasquel and the improvement of Billy Gardner. Our pitching should be among the best in the league."

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