

THE PRESSBOX

By Lenny Luchtefeld
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NL News



Opening Day Is Here!

Our 7th season is just around the corner. But before we get the season started, in this issue, the main focus will be looking at the National League preview. Who will be favored to win, who will fall from grace and who will make a big splash this year.

There are a couple of new owners over in the American League but everyone is returning for another season in the National. With all of the NL managers set in place, it should make for some great rivalries and great competition this year.

I look for some real parity from this year's National League action. All of last years second tier teams made advances during the off-season and should be much improved. I only see two teams winning around a 100 games and nobody winning less than 60. That should make for some great divisional and wildcard races this year. Hope everyone has a fun year.

2001 NL Preview

Please remember these are only my opinions about the predicted finishes. The League Administration Staff will disavow any knowledge of my existence should these predictions be wrong.

I am looking for Ocala, Stanley and Glen Allen to take their division titles. Fleetwood, Glen Allen and Bloomington among others should fight it out for the 2 Wildcard slots. I believe Stanley and Ocala will eventually battle for the N L crown this year in a 7 game series, with Ocala going to the Brassball World Series against Cook County. Who will win between those two, no one knows for sure.

NL EAST

Glen Allen gets the nod in this division this year because of their experience. The Mets made it all the way to the Brassball World Series last year and should easily take the division title. Glen Allen is not a power-laded team but has good team speed with some power and good pitching.

I believe the rest of the teams are evenly matched. The Tigers have some excellent bats in Olerud and Thomas. The starting pitching may be a little suspect with 3 lefty's but they should have enough weapons to take second place.

Racine and Wauwatosa will not be far behind. Racine has improved over last year and may have the best starting pitching in the division. The Heat drafted unprotected Brad Radke in the draft and he will be the number 1 starter.

Wauwatosa should also be an improved team as their pitching has improved. The Wizards will have to find a solid closer to finish out games. This will be a tough division from top to bottom. After Glen Allen, all these teams may finish within 5 games of each other when it's all over.

Predicted Order of Finish:

- 1- Glen Allen Mets**
- 2- Long Island Tigers**
- 3- Racine Heat**
- 4- Wauwatosa Wizards**

NL CENTRAL

Stanley still has too many weapons this year to finish anywhere but first and in the playoffs. They will definitely be a force in the NL. Stanley is solid at every position from top to bottom. They have power, speed and good defense. The Sioux have 5 stable starters lead by Randy Johnson.

Fleetwood has some very nice talent and will be a factor in the division and for a Wildcard spot. Abreu, Konerko and C. Jones will make for some very interesting games. They have a very nice lineup but could use some help in the form of a trade for more power.

Bloomington should finish third in the division. The Bees had too many key player losses in the off season. The Bees still could be one of the two Wildcard teams. They feature good pitching, an excellent closer and still a very potent offense despite the losses.

Columbus will be looking at another season in the cellar of the division. Although picked to finish 4th, they will be improved and are on the move upward in the future. Still a good team, but can't compete with the other 3. They still have question marks at 1st and at the closer position.

Predicted Order of Finish:

- 1- Stanley Sioux**
- 2- Fleetwood Walkers**
- 3- Bloomington Bees**
- 4- Columbus Buckeyes**

NL WEST

I predict Ocala will take the title in the West this year. The Ocelots have an excellent offense with speed. They have the best defense in the league and won't make many miscues this year. This could be the year that the Ocelots go all the way.

Gem City still features a great offense with Bagwell, Rodriquez, Larkin, and Vaughn. But they still lack the pitching to get to the next level. Add a couple of front line starters and a solid closer to this lineup and you have yourself a winner. If the team gets off to a fast start, they may look to lake a trade to help the pitching staff out.

North Georgia is going to be a solid team. They have good pitching and an above average offense. The Yellow Jackets just don't have the horsepower yet to compete with Gem City and Ocala. They should finish around .500 but won't have enough weapons to stay out of 3rd place in the division.

Metropolis is doom to finish last but that's the way they want it again this year. They have been acquiring talent over the last couple of years. If most of the prospects develop, this rebuilding stage should make them a very formidable team in the future.

Predicted Order of Finish: 1- Ocala Ocelots
2- Gem City Wolfpack
3- North Georgia Yellow Jackets
4- Metropolis Avengers

Trades

- 1) **Toledo** trades Matt Kinney and \$100,000 to **Metropolis** for Travis Lee and \$100,000.
- 2) **Georgia** trades Jason Christiansen to **Columbus** for Mike James.
- 3) **Metropolis** pays 50,000 To **Georgia** for Matt Franco.
- 4) **Georgia** sells Chris Holt (pd) to **Racine** for \$3M.

Contract Signings

Long Island signs C. Guillen to his 1st month call up, R. Rivera to his 2nd month call up and L. Berkman to his 1st month call up.

Bloomington signs Gabe Kapler to a 4 year deal, Adrian Brown and Joe Slusarski to 2 year deals, Clay Bellinger to a 1 year deal, Ruben Mateo, David Ortiz and Jeff Weaver to their 1st months call ups.

Ocala signs Glendon Rusch to a 3 year contract, Jose Santiago to a 2 year contract, Adrian Beltre to his 2nd call-up and JD Drew to his 1st call-up.

Stanley signs Carlos Febles and Felix Rodriguez each to 3 year contracts.

Wauwatosa signs Redman, Ryan, Quinn, and Richard signed to MO-1 contracts and Elarton and E. Perez signed to 1 year contracts.

Columbus signs Daryle Ward to his call up.

North Georgia signs Scott Schoenweis to a 3 year contract.

Fleetwood signs Aybar to a 2-year contract, Cornelius to his first minor-league call-up, Elster to a 1-year contract, Molina and Pleasac to their first minor-league call-ups.

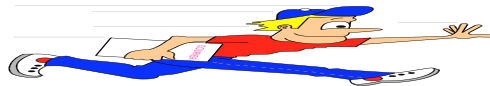
Metropolis signs Carlos Almanzar to a 1 year deal, Dan Serafini, Brian Hunter (The outfielder) and Rob Ducey to MTM contracts.

Glen Allen signs Melvin Mora to MO-1 contract.

Bits & Pieces

- Σ I am going to start posting in the N L newsletter the articles that are submitted each month. We used to just post them on the web site but to give them more exposure I will feature them at the bottom of the newsletter each month. This month we have 2 articles from Vaughn and 1 from Corey, Jim and Paul.
- Σ **WARNING**-I don't like to publish things like this in the newsletter because it doesn't pertain to all of you but this will serve as a public notice that the monthly deadlines will be strictly enforced in the NL this year. Since we have all been around in this league for a while and are now very familiar with the rules, I will no longer be able to have any flexibility with tardiness and just not sending information at all. I realize that there will be the occasional lateness due to an illness or some other unfortunate circumstances and those will be excused. But when someone, for example, doesn't send me a back up copy of the subset stats for their team each month that are suppose to go to Dave Little and ME, there will be a fine. If you are not sure of what is to be e-mailed each month then please read the constitution or ask questions before it is too late. The deadlines are also posted every month at the end of the newsletter. Handing out fines is not a fun part of the league for me. Unfortunately, it is a necessity to keep the league moving along and running smoothly. We are all in this league to have fun. I know that each of you are very knowledgeable and organized and can make your mailings on time. I hope I don't have to mention this again and that there are no fines given out this year. That would make my job more fun and make the league fun and enjoyable for all of us.

Upcoming Deadlines



April 15 - series result's mailings due to April home opponents, League, and Backup Statistician - trade deadline for May games. All trades due to your LD

April 25 - starting pitcher rotations/contract signings for May games due to your LD - road instructions for May games due to road opponents

We make it your "bee's wax" to know what's happening in Bees Baseball.

The Draft From Hell
**Or How I Managed To Have The 4th Pick And *Still Did Not* Get One Of My Top 4
Players**

BRASSball's 6th Annual Draft is in the books and I am still scratching my head over what happened to the best plans set forth by our draft staff with our first pick. In our preparations leading up to the draft, we had finally settled on the top 4 players on the board and were going to be very happy to have any one of them. But yet, when the dust cleared after our 4th pick, none of these players wound up being available for us to pick. Now how did that happen, you might ask? Fair enough. Let's have a look.

We liked a couple White Sox farmhands as the top two amateurs on the board. In the pitcher category, we liked 6' 11' right-hander Jon Rauch, who has "star" written all over him. On the offensive side, we liked Pale Hose slugging outfield prospect Joe Borchard. As far as carded players went, we liked Mets left-handed starter Glendon Rusch best. We thought he was the top carded player available. In order, we decided that we liked Rauch best, then Rusch, then Borchard.

Well, on the Friday before The Draft, I made a visit to the BRASSball chat room to make sure I could connect and see that everything was working correctly. As fate would have it, the BRASSball owners with the top two picks (from Ocala and Toledo) were there and revealed their picks about 12 hours early. Of course, as you all now know, their picks were Rusch and Rauch. Okay, I thought. That's pretty bad news because we really liked those two. But we still have Borchard out there and we can nab him, or we can nab or other favorite carded pitcher.

In an e-mail exchange late that night to our esteemed AL Director Kevin Kolb, I mentioned that we'd likely grab this carded pitcher and I mentioned him by name, Milwaukee right-hander Jamey Wright, who we liked very much. He later told me of course that my scouting staff had committed an error and listed him as one of the availables when in fact, he was already owned. Sure enough, he was right. There went out #4 choice, even before the draft started.

Then comes draft day and we've settled on making Borchard our pick at #4 and then, as we know now, his was the name called by the Iowa Rubes, this completing the perfect sweep of the top four names on our list after only three picks had passed. Our entire scouting department was fired and the picks from there were left to the owner. So, scrambling, he tabbed some guy from Japan (Ichiro Suzuki) who has never played a game in the U.S., same as every other Japanese position player in the history of the world, and pinned his hopes on him. On their way out, the former scouting department staff was overhead muttering about a meddling owner and used the pick as proof of how the franchise is destined to be run aground under the stewardship of this particular individual. Time will tell, as always.

We make it your “bee’s wax” to know what’s happening in Bees Baseball.

The Best Stories and Best Picks In The 2001 BRASSball Draft

BRASSball’s annual crap shoot is in the books and we seem to have perfected a pretty good model of running this with minimal time commitments and as much speed and fun as possible. As usual, we had our annual interruption by a comical presence from a foreign land. Our pal Floyd, whom we believed to be from England from his colorful characterizations and epithets, showed us that great spirit of international fellowship by insulting us profanely and repeatedly as we minded our own business in our little corner of cyberspace and held our little draft. This followed last year’s intrusion by a gentleman from South America who frantically implored us repeatedly (in both English and Portuguese) for our urgent help on some matter. The mind boggles at what entertainment or condemnation that next year’s chat room interloper will bring. BRASSball drafts are *never* boring!

I thought I would also take a few moments to pass on my views of some of the better picks in this year’s draft. I don’t really have a clear criteria for this, except to say that in general, they are players who I think have very high potential and were perhaps not selected as early as their eventual MLB talents or successes might warrant as one might look back at this draft in a few years. In short, perhaps it’s best to say that they are players who I think might well make it big and whose teams did an excellent job in selecting them.

1. Jon Rauch, P, CHI-AL (AM) *selected by Toledo at #2 (1st Round)*

The surprise one day may be that he lasted until pick#2 in this draft. The sky is the limit for this guy, which is approximately where his delivery starts actually with his 6’11” frame.

2. Paul Wilson, P, TAM *selected by Bloomington at #15 (1st Round)*

Wilson finally looks to be recovered from his incredible string of injuries and mishaps. It’s easy to forget that he was commonly regarded as the top minor league pitching prospect for about three years running. He figures to be even stronger and sharper next year. He’s lost a bit, but if he fills his potential, he could have a long major league career.

3. Ben Christiansen, P, CHI-NL (AM) *selected by Metropolis at #18 (1st Round)*

This guy has big league stuff and it's nasty. So is he apparently, what with his well-documented case of unsportsmanlike conduct in a college incident that has him still facing civil liability. It won't be long before he figures to start a big league career that could lead him to being a star for years to come.

4. Keith Reed, OF, BAL (AM) *selected by Hessville at # 25 (1st Comp. Round)*

Those comparisons to a young Joe Carter are not without considerable merit. This guy has worked for everything he has gotten and didn't come up through the typical warm-weather college feeder factories. The Orioles have an old and fading outfield. It shouldn't be long before Mr. Reed takes his place in it and in the middle of their lineup.

5. Luke Prokopec, P, LA (AM) *selected by Gem City at # 51 (2nd Comp. Round)*

Signed as a 16-year old out of Australia and saw his career flame out after three years as an infielder who had a great arm, but could not hit. The Dodgers made a pitcher out of him and even as he continues to learn his craft, he has posted gaudy numbers thanks to his poise and awesome stuff. He made it to the big leagues last year at age 22 and six professional years under his belt already. Luke could be a special one at the rate he is going and if he stays healthy.

6. Scott Strickland, P, MTL *selected by St. Croix #59 (3rd Round)*

This guy has filthy stuff that he is just learning to control. Still needs to find a pitch to use to get out lefty hitters, but righties almost can't tough him now. When he puts that last piece in place, you could be looking at the next dominant NL closer in Mr. Strickland.

7. Chin-Hui Tsao, P, COL (AM) *selected by Brooklyn at #117 (5th Round)*

Okay, he stayed on the board probably because his name is unpronounceable and he is on the Rockies system. But this guy has been absolutely dominant so far in his minor league career and is one of the most polished and accomplished pitchers toiling in the minors today. Who knows if he will pass the Coors test one day, or even get a chance. But he has star potential and is showing it every time out to the mound. Superb return on a 5th Round selection.

8. Adam Wainwright, P, ATL (AM) *selected by North Georgia at #149 (6th Round)*

He's a long way away and he's just 18, but he has dominating stuff and he knows how to use it. The Braves have an outstanding track record with developing high school pitchers and this guy is already polished well beyond his years. He has the making of being a dominant major league starter, if things go right for him. A steal in the 6th Round.

9. Joe Torres, P, ANA (AM) *selected by Wauwatosia at #190 (8th Round)*

This one surprised me as much as any in the draft. I kept wondering when this guy would go. He was worth a first round pick in my book. The 18-year old lefty can throw the ball through a wall and has excellent poise and mound presence. He's cracked A ball already and will move fast if he keeps it up. Has the makings of a #1 starter in the bigs and nabbing him in the 8th Round may well one day look like an act of genius.

10. Doug Mientkiewicz, 1B, MIN *reclaimed by Racine at #194 (8th Round)*

Resilient player who bounced back with a bang after struggling in his first trip to the bigs. This guy could well be another Mark Grace and every BRASSball team who passed on him for 7 rounds may be kicking themselves one day. Strat has rated him as a '1' at first base defensively twice now, with limited cards. He also has a great hitting eye and gap power. He was the hitting hero for this year's USA Olympic team. He just needs another chance for the Twins at a position that is wide open for them. If he gets it, he could have a long career in the bigs.

WELCOME TO FLORIDA!

This METSWATCH reporter was glad to get out of the cold and go south to . . . warm temperatures, blue skies, no overcoats and of course the start of spring training. Last night I spoke briefly with bullpen and catchers coach John Stearns, who agreed to meet with me this morning and chat about the upcoming season.

"Hey Dude, what's up?"

Stearns replied, "I see that you are!"

"So how does the team look so far?"

John said, "This week it's only pitchers and catchers so let's just talk about them."

"Since you spent most of your career behind the plate tell me about the catching department.

John crossed his arms as he began, "Last year the core group was Todd Pratt, Tom Lampkin and Brook Fordyce. They played solid defense, worked well with the pitchers and take a look at their stats: together 30 Homeruns and over 100 RBIs batting about .275. Combined they were like an All-Star catcher but did not get the recognition. I was impressed with Fordyce's batting and see the potential for more power and higher average this year. Behind the dish he gained the respect of pitching Coach Jimmy Key as he worked on controlling the game for our young pitchers while learning from the veterans.

I'm going to miss Tom (Lampkin) and Todd (Pratt) because both played their roles so well and knew what had to be done without being told. Tom was a free agent who moved on during the off-season. Todd was traded to Cook County before the rookie draft. The Mets welcome John Flaherty as the new #2 backstop. He brings to Glen Allen a fine reputation as a solid veteran to complement Brook. In the minors we have Paul Mirabelli another notable defensive catcher who needs to work on his hitting if he hopes to stick at the majors. Also Hector Ortiz and Giuseppe Chiaramonte both need to work on their defense to get more of a chance. Again no one is going to the All-Star game, but our pitchers will not complain about their battery mate."

"Thanks for all the great in-site about the catchers. Now how does your bullpen look?"

Stearns stretched his arms as if getting ready to throw a ball, continuing "As you know Roberto Hernandez our closer since I've been here has moved on as a Free Agent. Roberto did a solid job and will be missed in the clubhouse, but we welcome Bob Wickman another veteran to close games for the Mets. Joining him will be Wayne Gomes, who was inconsistent last year but capable of saving a game or set up. The new lefties set up are Felix Heridia and Chuck McElroy. Chuck has more experience, but I think Felix can throw harder. Mikes Magnante and Venafro will share duties with the other southpaws. Marc Wilkins and Bronson Arroyo are the two new right-handed pitchers. Since the starting rotation has not been determined, I'm not sure who else will be joining us. Maybe Chuck, I mean Charles Nagy, Scott Erickson or Lance Painter are all veterans who can provide middle inning relief."

"So Dude will the Mets return to the World Series?"

"Wow! I'd like to hope that we can, but first let's start spring training, play the season, win the Eastern Division again and then see what happens. OK?"

"OK, John help the Mets to have a great season!"

An Open Letter to Frank Thomas:

Frank:

I read that you want respect (and more money). Hey, it's a free country. You can always ask, but don't expect to always receive.

Let me define respect, and then let's talk about your \$9.9 million contract

R - revenue. Whiners don't generate as much revenue as winners

E - excellence. aka - When you can play 1B half as well as A-Rod plays SS.

S - smarts. Don't sign a long term contract with clauses you don't like, and then hold out.

P - playoffs. Defined as getting hits and winning playoff games - unlike your 0 fers.

E - entertainment. Other players are more entertaining.

C - consistency. 15HR's one year, 43 the next is not consistent

T - toughness, or team leader. Enough said.

Based on RESPECT, the general public feels your 9.9 million this year is more than adequate.

Respectfully submitted,

Stanley Sioux management

MO Call-up Proposal

As you already know, Mark and I have been discussing how Major League Baseball really handles contracts and payroll. Players that arrive from the minors are paid dirt-cheap. If they don't perform, they are sent back to the minors for more seasoning. If they do stay, they eventually get signed to a pre-arbitration contract or enter into arbitration with the ball club. At the end of this contract or arbitration process, the player enters the free agency market to get paid what they are worth. Mark and I worked up a contract system that takes this into account. The main points on this would be that young players are paid cheap, and young stars are paid what they are worth. Additionally, this would essentially make all players available for use. This would result from every player being paid some type of Brass major league contract. This would certainly simulate MLB, but how difficult it would be to implement is still undetermined.

My philosophy behind keeping players on MO contracts is a three-part answer. Don't sign a player with a poor card to a contract just to get innings or plate appearances. Second, don't sign a player to a long-term or short-term contract until you have a reasonable idea of how much the player is worth. Last, don't waste a year of that player's contract when your team is not competitive. Whether or not you agree, this philosophy is what I follow. My main focus of this proposal is to get more innings and plate appearances available for use while not allowing players to remain on MO contracts forever.

Here is the proposal related to the call-up of players on MO contracts.

- Σ A player may be called up 8 times.
- Σ Once a player has been called up 4 times, the player must be signed to a ML (Major League) contract at the end of the current season or the player becomes a RFA.
- Σ Once a player has been called up in two separate seasons, the player must be signed to a ML contract at the end of the current season or the player becomes a RFA. These seasons do not need to be consecutive.
- Σ Once a player has been called for the 1st time, the player must be signed to a ML contract at the end of the second season after the call-up or the player becomes a RFA.
- Σ A player that has been called up 3 times in a season is eligible for the playoffs as long as the player has at least one call-up remaining. If a player is activated for the playoffs, this is considered one call-up. At a minimum, the player competing in the playoffs will have been called up at least 4 times. As a result, this player must be signed to a ML contract one week after the player's team completes its participation in the playoffs or the player becomes a RFA.
- Σ A call-up would still cost \$35,000.
- Σ MO contracts would be designated as:
 - Player that has not been called up – MO
 - Player that has been called for the 1st time – MO(yyyy)-n
 - yyyy designates the year of the 1st call-up. n designates the number call-up.
 - Player that has been called up in a 2nd season – MO(2)-n
 - n designates the number call-up.
- Σ Any player that is currently on a MO-1, MO-2 or MO-3 contract would have their contract changed to MO(2001)-1, MO(2001)-2 or MO(2001)-3

Some examples:

1. Call-up Eddie Murray in April, June and July of 2001. His contract would be MO(2001)-3. In July of 2002, Murray is called up. His contract becomes MO(2)-4. Murray will need to be signed to a ML contract at the end of the 2002 season or he becomes a RFA.
2. Call-up Murray every month of 2001. His contract would be MO(2001)-6. Murray will need to be signed to a ML contract at the end of the 2001 season or he becomes a RFA.

3. Call-up Murray in August of 2001. His contract would be MO(2001)-1. In August of 2002, Murray is called up. His contract becomes MO(2)-2. Murray will need to be signed to a ML contract at the end of the 2002 season or he becomes a RFA.
4. Call-up Murray in June and July of 2001. His contract would be MO(2001)-2. Murray is called up every month of 2002. His contract becomes MO(2)-8. Murray is ineligible for the playoffs. Murray will need to be signed to a ML contract at the end of the 2002 season or he becomes a RFA.
5. Call-up Murray in June and July of 2001. His contract would be MO(2001)-2. Murray is not called up again. Murray will need to be signed to a ML contract at the end of the 2003 season or he becomes a RFA.
6. Call-up Murray in June, July and August of 2001. His contract would be MO(2001)-3. Murray is activated for the playoffs. His contract becomes MO(2001)-4. Murray will need to be signed to a ML contract within one week after his team completes its participation in the playoffs or he becomes a RFA.

By implementing this proposal, more innings and plate appearances would be available for use. This would allow managers to get better usage from major league players (still on minor league contracts) before determining the type of contract to sign the player to. However, if you use a player via a call-up, they would be signed to a ML contract within a specific time range. No longer would you be allowed to "stash" a player for several years. Currently, once a player hits MO-3 status they are, more or less, a MO in the old system.

As with MLB, young players are paid dirt-cheap; this proposal would allow the same to occur for 2 seasons. Additionally, players like Timo Perez (52 PAs) and Barry Zito (92.2 Innings) could be available for use in the playoffs just like MLB. Granted, Perez probably wouldn't be, but players with a 200-400 plate appearances or starters with 80-120 innings would certainly have more value. These players have playoff value in MLB, why shouldn't they have the same value in Brass.

My team has several MO players, but I think this would make the call-up system and contract costs of rookies in Brass more realistic. A rebuilding team would have access to more innings and plate appearances without having to make contract decisions immediately, but it would force them to make a decision within two years. By doing so, they would not need to sign the poor players of the world just to have enough plate appearances or innings so as to allow them to "stash" their MO players for another year.

In case you are curious, I used to Eddie Murray in my examples because he is my favorite player of all-time.