

2008 MLB Mid-Season Review: Magic 8 Ball says Cubs Win! Cubs Win! Cubs Win!

We've nearly reached the 2008 All-Star game, where the brilliance of big boppers and showstoppers are expected to deliver on queue. The passionate baseball fan basks in the rays of the perennial favorites: the A-Rods, the Jeters and the Mannys of the hardball world. While the youngsters likely find their new idols in the Sotos and the Longorias rising to meet new acclaim and new expectations in their 1st all-star bash.

It is great time set in an equally great ballpark. The 'Stadium' that shone brightly while Ruth, Gehrig, DiMaggio, Mantle and Jackson took their game to unparalleled heights. That had Larsen's perfect game in 1956 World Series. Jackson's three straight trips to *souvenir city* in 1977. Whitey Ford's scoreless brilliance topping Ruth's *in pitching*. And 26 times saw *the House* rock and roll before a new one was built. The passing of an 86-year old comrade that has shared its glory and defined a dynasty. *Yankee Stadium will be missed.*



Which is why this mid-heaven classic, during Manhattanhenge, is a time to pay homage, and to destine (possibly) whom will be in hunt for October glory.

AL East

The reigning world champions are playing to expectations (55-39) despite injuries (Schilling) and lack of huge production from the usual 3-4 bashers of Manny and Big Papi. That aside, Youkilis, Pedria, Lowell, Ellsbury and J.D. Drew have not missed a beat, supplying sabermetric prowess to **The Big Bo Sox Machine**. Keeping the rhythm on the mound is the nice combo of Jon Lester (7-3) and Josh Beckett (9-5). Each has ERAs under 4.00 throwing an average of 6.25 innings per start. (*How far we've fallen in terms of pitching expectations.*) With ageless knuckleballer Tim Lincecum and quasi-gyroballing Daisuke Matsuzaka (9-1), *Da Sox* will only get better with the addition of Big Papi and a surprising Bartolo Colon. (As the Sox are hitting .226 with runners in scoring position w/2 outs (20th), but have 18 stolen bases, 1st in MLB. A healthy Colon (something we should all strive for) might be the diamond-in-the-bowels you find when are rolling on the franchise high these guys are.) **Prediction:** AL East champion or 94-win wild card.



A car you just don't drive. You savor the ability to do what others dare to think about: like date Scarlett Johansson.

Tampa Bay, Hip Hop Hoo-Ray!

It only took a decade of misery *sans company* (park attendance is still tepid) for the Rays to put a team of the *future on the field*. A change of philosophy (old, high-price free agents from inception to 2003) and name (Devil Rays) seems to have been the medicine to the ills of this franchise. GM Andrew Friedman has to feel like an 18-year old driving a Bugatti, dating Scarlett Johansson and pressing the flesh with Barack Obama on the way to the AL East division title. It's surreal. **But it is the real vroom vroom.**

The Rays have maximized the acquisitions of top-of-the-rotation pitchers (Kazmir, Garza and Jackson) from their richer counterparts (Mets, Twins and Dodgers) to the effect of finally having a legit pitching staff (4th in MLB in ERA and WHIP (3.70 and 1.25).) They put together a flexible offense with speed-power youngsters B.J. Upton and Evan Longoria as their offensive flamethrowers, alongside speedy Carl Crawford and thick-legged Akinori Iwamura. Add some veterans, thought-to-be washed up closer Percival, odd man out Carlos Pena and sabermetric cast-off Eric Hinske, and the Rays are in the playoff hunt without a map, but close to the prize. **Prediction:** 90 wins and true wildcard possibility.



Yankees. New York, New York never had it so bad. I realize they have A-Rod, Joba and Jeter to mesh with an Abreu, and the mustache, but this ain't going to work. A-Rod's marriage is on the rocks, he still hasn't won the big one, and I can't see it *this time*. 3 teams winning 90 games in one division nowadays is *rarified air* – like me convoing with Jessica Simpson's slightly smarter half, Tony Romo. Yet they wear pinstripes, spend money like a Bush presidency, and can't be counted out just yet. Aw, *I am counting them out*. **Prediction:** 88 wins, a bronze in '08 for *the dynasty*.

AL Central

Reminds of the Titanic last murmurs, 'The World Upside Down.' The Cleveland Indians threw their 2007 AL Cy Young pitcher to the Milwaukee wolves, saving themselves to fight for another day – and getting at some cheap gold in Matt Laporta that the wolves guarded.

Detroit is still in the game, but has to be frustrated by the rash of injuries to pitchers and hitters and their early season woes. At under 10 games out, they still have the bangers to clang to the division title. But they pull it together quick. **Prediction:** Not likely in my book.

Minnesota's cry-poor owner, Carl Pohlad must always feel like a genius. The Twins trade away the best lefty in Santana, and still, *get by*. The *barely hit* home runs (63-26th) by are 5th in runs scored. The have a team of relative unknowns (C Joe Mauer and 1B Justin Morneau notwithstanding), but get it done between the lines. Scouting, defense, groundballs and late-inning opportunism works in 10,000 Lakes Land.

The Twins are 1st in batting average after 6 innings (.287) with the Cubs and Bo Sox trailing. The Twins more significantly have a closer; 25 saves, 1.19 ERA, .96 WHIP and .200 BAA from Joe Nathan. It just doesn't always look pretty or dominate, it just adds up to 85-90 wins per season. **Prediction:** Short on pitching, unless Livan Hernandez & Co. make some strides quickly. 85 wins.

Not-so-shy Sox. I hear about the good guys wearing black, grinders and 'put 'em on the board yes' chatter from the Southside hitmen. The bastard child of Chicago baseball (Northside fan, can ya tell?) that should have been aborted to Tampa Bay in the early 1990's. Instead, they built an overpriced sterile ballpark, have less-than-stellar attendance and a fast-talking, foul mouth manager who won one. Gotta love 'em (or hate 'em.) If there is an *End of Days* on the horizon, then the White Sox and Cubs will be the *Warm up Act of the Apocalypse* when they meet in October.

KC & the No-Sunshine Band. Got some talent. Got it young. But is impatient (.317 OBP reflects that) and that means no sunshine yet. The dog's ass still is dark.

AL West

Angels in the Playoffs. Unless the Rangers can miracle up two starting pitchers that can survive the *Arlington* experience (5.04, last in MLB), they will score a crap load of runs just to watch their opponen'ts walk, bang, and schlack their way past them *again*.

Oakland: Hey, if you had only \$40 million to spend in today's baseball market, you'd sell too.

Seattle: Like Starbuck's, it has seen its *better times*. Come to Seattle as a free agent/trade, prepare to see amazing declines in production or freak injuries. Oh, how we miss the 1990's: *President Bill, A-Rod, Junior, Johnson, Martinez, Buhner and Sweet Lou. The last team to crack 110 wins.*

Angels. 5 consistent starters, Scot Shields, Justin Speier and K-Rod. A smart manager that brings his own *LA story* to the table. *And money helps too.* **Prediction:** Battling Boston or Tampa.

NL Race

Unlike, the drawn out analysis of the American League, this will be *the quick and the dead* bullets:

- Mets, Phillies, Marlins and Atlanta will role a D&D dice to decide the National League East. Marlins have the MVP in SS Hanley Ramirez. Phillies' Howard will K 200 times. Atlanta sans Smoltz sans playoffs. ***Mets miracle, yes!***
- NL West. Are we going to see another 83-win World Series champ? Who wants the NL West title? Dodgers have talent enough to win...if Torre is what New Yorkers trumpeted for all those years. San Francisco go get Richie Sexson and pray...Arizona, luck isn't forever. Colorado: you got Obama coming to town. Hooray! Padres, who is your daddy? Maddux can't father along these guys to the playoffs. He's gramps to those young bucks.
- Finally, Cubs win! Cubs win! Cubs win! Milwaukee finds playoffs.

AL Playoffs:

Red Sox vs. White Sox

Rays vs. Angels

NL Playoffs:

Cubs vs. Dodgers

Mets vs. Brewers

ALCS: Red Sox vs. Angels

NLCS: Cubs vs. Brewers

World Series: Angels vs. Cubs

Cubs WIN the World Series against the only other team that had a Wrigley Field. (Angels played in Wrigley Field **West**, *the original*, back in 1961.)

As a biased Cub fan, the logical options to the Cubs are (in order):

Los Angeles Angels (overall pitching and a few bats)

Boston Red Sox (top tier pitching, more bats and playoff experience)

Milwaukee Brewers (bats plus 2 top pitchers, lack experience)

New York Mets (lefty ace, veteran righty and 2 youths on the left side, chokemasters)