

Clearly not the same veteran group that won the World Series in 2001, but it's also not the same team that lost 111 in 2004



3. Arizona Diamondbacks: Do you remember what happened in 2001? Diamondbacks fans do, but are slowly forgetting with the decrease in number of wins each year. Arizona had the worst record in the game in 2004. To top it all off, management looked like complete fools after the whole Wally Backman thing. Backman was the new Manager of the Diamondbacks for about two minutes before they went back to Bob Brenley's (who should still be managing the team in my opinion) old bench coach - Bob Melvin. Melvin, the former skipper of the Seattle Mariners, might teach his team to do more of the little things than Al Pedrique, the interim Manager towards the end of last season. Sacrifices, bunts, hit-and-run, etc. those type of things can win them more games.

Part of it was due to injuries, part of it was due to the loss of key veteran components such as Curt Schilling and part of it was the fact this was just not the same D-Backs team that beat the Yankees in Game 7 of the 2001 Series. Luis Gonzalez, who had the game-winning hit in that epic fall classic, has had substantial success at times and been hurt at other times. One guy that has not been the problem by any means is Randy Johnson. Johnson, the star lefty for the team since 2000, finally got sent to the Yankees in the off-season after almost going there before the trade deadline. Arizona must make do without the Big Unit and the guys to do it are who I call the "Killer G's" - Gonzalez, Troy Glaus and Shawn Green. The trio has compiled 755 career home runs during the regular season and come up big in the clutch. When all three are healthy and clicking, watch out. Because who are you going to walk? Who are you going to give the easier pitches to? And defensively none of them is a liability, even though each is getting near or at the declining stages of their respective career.

What's going to be key for them offensively is how some of the older vets or unproven youngsters play. Middle infielders Royce Clayton and Craig Counsell (now back where he won a ring in '01) can field well and come up with hits when need be. Jury is still out on Luis Terrero, Chad Tracy, Koye Hill, and some of the bench guys. Many have asked me where has the money come from? Arizona supposedly had some major financial issues that did not look like they were going to be solved any time soon. Well, it did not stop them from bringing in about ten new players, four of which I call big money men. The worst thing that could happen is another 5-23 July for the simple fact fans will stop coming to the ballpark in the summer months. Attendance down, but they want to keep it above the MLB average of 30,401.

Arizona's bottom line as far as pitching went last year was they just couldn't throw strikes... that is those hurlers not named Johnson. Brandon Webb, one of my preseason favorites to win Cy Young last year (boy was I wrong!) had an NL worst 16 losses and 119 walks. He's a better pitcher than that, trust me, and that may have done him some good in the long run. Some pitchers need to experience adversity in order to turn things around. Joining him are Russ Ortiz, Javier Vazquez, and Shawn Estes, all of which are new to the organization. All are veteran type pitchers that have been around

awhile and can benefit pitching at the Bob (Bank One Ballpark). Estes is out of Colorado and can keep most of your left-handed hitters under .260. As for the righties and switch hitters, who knows. Ortiz saw his role limited with the Braves come end of the season and into the postseason. Albeit less appearances toward the end, Ortiz still managed to win 15 of 24 decisions, whiff 143 players, and returns to the NL West where he used to take the mound for division rival San Francisco. Finally, Vazquez returns to the National League where he was an essential ingredient with the Montreal Expos. In the bullpen I like what Oscar Villarreal, Mike Koplove, and Jose Valverde can do when their roles are defined. Greg Aquino quietly shut the door 16 times, and Casey Fossum plays the team's versatile lefty. Fellow left-handed reliever Randy Choate is there to eat up innings.



New D-backs third baseman Troy Glaus provides power to a team that desired it enormously.

Inside the Numbers: Arizona issued 668 walks last season, the most in their short franchise's history. And that's without Ortiz, Vazquez and Estes - who altogether accounted for 277 walks.

Bottom Line: They were awful pitching wise, defensively and offensively last year. What's going to change that? Well, keeping the killer G's - Glaus, Gonzalez and Green healthy would be a good start. Then they need Ortiz, Vazquez, Webb and Estes to stay away from giving up the home run ball as well as walking more than they strikeout; locate the pitches well.

Projected Order: CF Jose Cruz Jr.
2B Craig Counsell
LF Luis Gonzalez
3B Troy Glaus
RF Shawn Green
1B Chad Tracy
C Koyie Hill
SS Royce Clayton

Projected Staff: R Russ Ortiz
R Brandon Webb
R Javier Vazquez
L Shawn Estes
L Brad Halsey/L Mike Gosling

Pick: 3rd in the NL West; D-backs win more, though don't reach .500.