

Detroit could be pretty decent in 2005 after suffering through one of the worst seasons in baseball history two years ago



3. Detroit Tigers: I really like what Tigers GM Dave Dombrowski is doing in Detroit. They were unable to snag a couple of the big name free agent during the off-season, but that did not get to the front office. Yes, Detroit inking Magglio Ordoñez to a five-year, \$65 million dollar contract may have been a bit on the too much side. However, Dombrowski is working wonders there and letting everyone know he wants this ball club to be successful under Manage Allan Trammel.

Ordoñez was not the only recognizable name making the move from one city to play at Comerica Park 81 games a year. Former Angels closer Troy Percival will team up with Ugueth Urbina to make up a nice back-end of the bullpen. Dmitri Young, Detroit's lone All-Star in 2003, had 18 home runs and 49 RBI's at the break that season. Young also had 92 hits, including 18 doubles through July 13th '03. We're projecting young right around .280, 20 homers and 80RBI if healthy. Ahead of Young and Ordoñez is the inspirational leader of the Tigers - Pudge Rodriguez. He hit a sick .334, which was the best in over 70 years for an American League catcher. Defensively he's going to throw out runners sharply and guard the plate with good caution. At the top Alex Sanchez excites the fans because he's going to lay down bunts and get on the base pads. Sanchez must continue to work on the average, though to be an all-star caliber player.

Up the middle shortstop Carlos Guillen performed surprisingly well and will team with triples extraordinaire - second baseman Omar Infante. In left field is a guy that's now been apart of five different organizations in Rondell White. Since being draft by Montreal with the 24th overall selection in 1990, White has produced success, scoring 667 runs and driving in 657. Never has he hit 30+ home runs in one year, nonetheless he's attempting to smack double-digit homers for the tenth time in his career. At third base the Tigers have someone who can play as many as five different positions in Mr. Utility - Brandon Inge.

When it comes to striking out or homering - Carlos Peña is your man. Peña (72HR 146K) did either or nearly 36% of the time he stepped in the batter's box. When it comes to filling out the depth chart/roster these names come into the picture: ex-Cardinals second baseman Fernando Viña (DL to begin season) - an above average fielder, long-time Tigers contributor Bobby Higginson, new backup catcher Vance Wilson, and Craig Monroe - 18 homers plus 27 doubles. There are very few ascending rookies on this team, except Old Dominion right-hander Justin Verlander.

Throwing the ball a good 30-35 times apiece will be Mike Maroth and Jeremy Bonderman. Technically, neither is the ace according to some 'so-called experts'. But let's face facts, Bonderman and Maroth, each of which made 33 starts, are the money guys. By that I mean they are going to make more money than anyone on this staff for years to come (excluding Verlander), and will win between 10-15 games annually. It was pretty even last year as far as the starts go with those two getting 33, ex-Orioles pitcher

Jason Johnson (8-15 5.13ERA) seeing 33, and Nate Robertson making 34 starts. Key is for all four guys to be clicking on all cylinders. It can happen, with some major good fortune and misfortune (i.e. injuries) for Minnesota, Cleveland and the White Sox too.



New Tigers outfielder Magglio Ordoñez can bring an extra punch to Detroit's lineup.

Amongst the top four you have 42 wins, but 51 losses. If all can go about 13-9 or 15-10 the Tigers would be in excellent shape. All of those 'ifs', 'maybes', and 'could' words are hopes for Detroit and their fans. What's not going to help those pitchers is the defense. Last season they were dead last - 14th - in American League fielding percentage at .977. To make a good comparison - Detroit is pretty similar to Baltimore. Only big difference is the Tigers lineup is not quite as powerful as Baltimore's, yet their starting pitching has more quality starts in them. Top to bottom, neither lineup can probably match what Boston, the Angels, and Yankees do throughout 2005. And if you want to make the playoffs in Detroit or Baltimore's case, you have to either A.) pass somebody in your division or B.) have someone completely fall apart at the end of the year. Plus, the AL Central does not look like a division producing a wild card club.

Bottom Line: To be honest, Detroit could be pretty decent. Pretty shocking for a team that won just 55 games in '02, right? Of course, they would need both the Twins and Indians to falter, and see Bonderman and Maroth develop into two of the league's premier pitchers. Not likely, though somewhat conceivable.

**Projected Order: CF Alex Sanchez
SS Carlos Guillen
C Ivan 'Pudge' Rodriguez
RF Magglio Ordoñez
DH Dmitri Young
LF Rondell White
1B Carlos Peña
3B Brandon Inge
2B Omar Infante**

**Projected Staff: R Jason M. Johnson
L Mike Maroth
R Jeremy Bonderman
L Nate Robertson
L Wilfredo Ledezma**

Pick: 3rd in the AL Central; tough August leads to no postseason participation