

In one year's time, the Marlins have gone from World Series contender to a team that lost ten key players and has a first-year Manager



5. Florida Marlins (83-79): Rebuilding is something the Florida Marlins franchise is familiar with pretty well. After they won the 1997 World Series over the Cleveland Indians in seven games with a bunch of veterans, they decided to break the group up. Six years later in '03, they had a solid core of youngsters and vets that came together when aging, cigar smoking Manager Jack McKeon took control. They stunned the San Francisco Giants in the NLDS, won back-to-back games at Wrigley Field to finish off the Chicago Cubs in the NLCS, and conquered the evil giant known as the New York Yankees. Now here they are, in another rebuilding mode as the team said good-bye to about 40% of its roster personnel from a year ago. Effective starters Josh Beckett and A.J. Burnett – both of whom have experienced injuries in the past – fled for American League East clubs [Boston and Toronto]. Outfielders Juan Pierre and Encarnacion headed for the NL Central, while catcher Paul Lo Duca stayed in the division by going to the Mets. Going with Lo Duca to the Mets was first baseman Carlos Delgado, one of four infielders when you include Damion Easley, Luis Castillo and Mike Lowell - that also departed. And last but not least, forty-save guy Todd Jones said adios, too. Former Major League catcher Joe Girardi, 41, is the team's new Manager yet still happens to be 34 years younger than the guy he replaces in McKeon.



For the Fish to have any chance of swimming come October, they'll need Dontrelle Willis to lead the National League in wins for a second consecutive season. (AP/Rex Arbogast)

Chemistry and adapting to a new Manager will take time for Florida. The leaders? Carrying the wood you have third baseman Miguel Cabrera. Much better on a team where he could hit cleanup or down further rather than in the #3 hole, Cabrera still poses to be a threat. He ranked third in the NL in batting average and had 33 jacks, 116RBI and 43 doubles to go with his .323BA. Developing outfielders Jeremy Hermida, a 6-foot-4 Rookie of the Year candidates, and Chris Aguila could turn out to be key contributors past 2006. They'll look to guys like second baseman Pokey Reese and catcher Miguel

Olivo to provide experience leadership. Problem is both of those guys may have to be full-time starters after spending a little bit of time in the minors.

3: Number of players on the 40-man roster as of April 1st that were 31 years of age or older. It definitely indicates the youth on this team.

On the pitching side, it's the D-Train, left-hander Dontrelle Willis (Known for his funky delivery and pizzazz on the mound, Willis absolutely cannot afford to let little run support frustrate him or the entire staff, featuring a pair of lefties and right-handers, will collapse around him. What's strange is he probably is one of the team's best hitters as a pitcher. Sergio Mitre had a couple big moments during the month of June, but other than that, it's hard to pinpoint who'll bust through towing the rubber besides the D-Train. In the pen, Florida will look to a couple of journeymen in Joe Borowski and Kerry Lightenberg to take control. Both turning 35 in May, there's an injury risk with each.

Bottom Line: Florida's lineup is Cabrera... and everyone else. Florida's pitching staff consists of Willis... and everyone else. Well, it doesn't quite go that way, but you get the picture. Those are really the only two true recognizable names from the Marlins' 2003 Championship team. Lets hope having baseball's youngest roster as well as Manager doesn't keep these fish fried for long.

**Projected Order: SS Hanley Ramirez
RF Jeremy Hermida
3B Miguel Cabrera
1B Mike Jacobs
LF Josh Willingham
2B Pokey Reese/Daniel Uggla
C Miguel Olivo
CF Chris Aguila/Reggie Abercrombie**

**Projected Staff: L Dontrelle Willis
R Brian Moehler
L Jason Vargas
R Sergio Mitre
L Scott Olsen/R Josh Johnson**

Pick: 5th in NL East; lowest win total in the National League.