

Good news for Royals fans: There's only one way to go and that's up



5. Kansas City Royals (56-106): When you win less than 60 games in back-to-back seasons, you know there's only one way to go and that's up. Kansas City, which got another new Manager last season in Buddy Bell, somehow swept the Yankees during the regular season, but were unable to turn build something from the landmark series. We proved to be correct when we said in last year's Season Preview that, "the Kansas City Royals are not going to make any noise in 2005." Their 56 wins are pale in comparison to the 83 games they won under Tony Pena during 2003. That year they got off to a red hot start in April and stood atop the division for a brief period of time. It'll take that kind of over achieving job for them to even sniff .500. That's because these Royals were last in the American League in ERA (5.49), hit a Major League low 126 home runs and committed the most errors in all of baseball. Except the good news is they made some veteran roster changes, adding pitchers Elmer Dessens, Scott Elarton, Joe Mays and lefty Mark Redman. That quartet went a cumulative 23-36, though the previous staff had a lot less experience to surround rotation ace Zach Greinke (5-17 with 5.80ERA and a 114-53K/BB ratio). On the hitting side of things, they brought in outfielder Reggie Sanders and second baseman Mark Grudzielanek from the Cardinals – the team with the best record in baseball a season ago. They're hoping that winning attitude, the defensive depth plucking of catcher Paul Bako and first baseman Doug Mientkiewicz, and another year of experience for the youngsters make this a much more competitive club.



Well traveled outfielder Reggie Sanders, who had an enormous postseason for the Cardinals last October, comes to a Kansas City team that knows his bat can only help an offense that hit just 126 homers last year.

Greinke – with a fastball that tops out around 94MPH and a curveball slow enough to tempt impatient, undisciplined hitters – has the best stuff to be the first Royals

pitcher since '03 to win double-digit games. In order to do it, he mustn't get rattled and give up the bomb (allowed 23 homers and 48 doubles) with men on base. How he works the outer edges of the plate could determine his success on the mound. Despite less zing on his pitches, Runelvys Hernandez has the ability to win 8-12 games again and re-discover the form that made him tough to hit in '03. Guy to watch in the bullpen: 23-year-old left-handed reliever Andrew Sisco. He's shown that he throws heat and would develop into a household name on a quality franchise down the road. Offensively, the man leading the Royals attack will probably be DH/1B Mike Sweeney. The 33-year-old with a lifetime batting average over .300 has never hit 30+ homers in a season, although when healthy, he's extremely productive on the baseball diamond. Their second best field player happens to be shortstop Angel Berroa, who's going to have a good double play partner in Grudzielanek.

Bottom Line: Can anyone on this team hit upwards of 25-30 home runs? It remains to be seen. Staying out the AL Central cellar is going to be awful tough because the Royals' only .500 month last season came in October when they went 1-1 [and does that really count?]. Overall, the improvement made only looks to be slight/minimal unless someone on the staff (namely Greinke) can bust out and the offense heats up during the summer.

**Projected Order: CF David DeJesus
2B Mark Grudzielanek
DH Mike Sweeney
LF Reggie Sanders
1B Doug Mientkiewicz
RF Emil Brown
3B Mark Teahen
SS Angel Berroa
C John Buck**

**Projected Staff: R Zach Greinke
R Runelvys Hernandez
L Mark Redman
R Scott Elarton
R Joe Mays/ L J.P. Howell**

Pick: 5th in the AL Central; finish 61-101 overall.