

## AL EAST:

### **Baseball's top payroll got even larger with the additions of Big Unit and others in Yankee pinstripes**



**1. New York Yankees:** Greatest collapse of all-time. Chokers! What do you do when your team (which has won more Championships than any other franchise in sports) becomes the first ever to blow a 3-0 playoff series lead (to the arch enemy Boston Red Sox of all people)?

Just reload once again. George Steinbrenner and the New York Yankees, who have not won the whole thing since 2000, bolstered the rotation. By adding a left-hander in Randy Johnson, a key piece to the Arizona Diamondbacks team that beat the Yankees in the 2001 Fall Classic, New York finally has that dominant southpaw they've been searching for. On a team that went 51-111 overall (worst in the major's), Johnson posted a record of 16-14, was second in the NL in ERA at 2.60 and whiffed 290 men he faced. What's most impressive about the 41-year-old Johnson, the 2001 World Series co-MVP and five-time Cy Young recipient, is the fact he threw a perfect game vs. Atlanta last season on an awful team. However, I'm not surprised that he threw the perfect game as much as I am the Diamondbacks were able to win. Carl Pavano and Jaret Wright are two other big pickups. Pavano, known for giving up record home run #70 to Mark McGwire back in 1998, had the best year of his career in 2004 as a member of the Florida Marlins. He went 18-8, had a 3.00ERA on the money and pitched in 222.1 innings. Wright was a 15-game winner with the Atlanta Braves is now one of four current Yankee starters that threw 130+ innings and struck out 130+ batters. The other one is right-hander Mike Mussina. Moose will try to rebound from getting down in the count so many times like he did a year ago. Adding those three will certainly give him more comfort and potentially help his cause towards winning a Cy Young, an award he has finished in the top six eight times but never won.

New York's front-end of the rotation right now could be even better than when pitching coach Mel Stottlemyre (in his last year) had the luxuries of Andy Pettitte, Roger Clemens, David Wells and Mussina. At age 35 closer Mariano Rivera, considered the greatest postseason closer of all-time, remains one of the toughest guys to hit in all of baseball. Despite a couple of blips on the radar screen vs. Arizona in '01 and Boston last year, Rivera still has a couple of seasons left in the tank. Throwing in front of him once again will be Tom Gordon in his 17<sup>th</sup> season. Gordon was such a steady force setting up Rivera in the Yankees bullpen that he was named to the All-Star team. Those two can locate their pitches unbelievably, but question is can the rest of the relievers do the same? Lefty Paul Quantrill is the one to watch because he was doing a very good job all the way up until about August when his arm essentially gave out on him. Steve Karsay and Felix Rodriguez have closed before and will get the chance to throw long, while Tanyon Sturtze can be used in the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> inning.



**The Yankees payroll approached the \$200 million dollar figure with the addition of one Randy Johnson. How Big Unit is able to block out all distractions could determine how far New York goes in the postseason.**

Believe it or not, the Yankees problem, if one is to arise, could be hitting instead of pitching. In 2001 and '03 their problems were hitting, whereas 2002 and '04 it was the lack of quality pitching in big spots that killed them. Sure, the lineup looks unstoppable with Derek Jeter and Alex Rodriguez at the top, Hideki Matsui, Jorge Posada and Bernie Williams in the middle, and newly acquired vets (Tino Martinez and Tony Womack) at the bottom. It never really occurred to me until I started thinking about it that Jason Giambi could be needed to contribute. Last year in the last few games with the Red Sox, NY did not get the timely hitting. Jeter is not a power guy and can get into slump, in spite of the fact he can make some clutch plays on offense or defense. A-Rod has yet to deliver in the clutch, Matsui is a defensive liability, Bernie is aging, etc. Nice problems to have, though.

**Bottom Line: Farm system and bench may be bare... however the starting order and rotation are anything but. Watching Johnson in Arizona was a joy if you're a D-backs fan. Getting him, Pavano and Wright has to put them over the top. Then again, anything can happen in sports. My money is on the Yankees this year.**

**Projected Order: SS Derek Jeter  
3B Alex Rodriguez  
RF Gary Sheffield  
LF Hideki Matsui  
C Jorge Posada  
DH Jason Giambi  
CF Bernie Williams  
1B Tino Martinez  
2B Tony Womack**

**Projected Staff: L Randy Johnson  
R Mike Mussina  
R Carl Pavano  
R Jaret Wright  
R Kevin Brown**

***Pick: World Series Champions; Defeat San Diego Padres in 6 to win 27<sup>th</sup> title.***