

**This Bud's for you: Milwaukee will take anything including the sleeper tag in order to avoid another 90 loss campaign**



**6. Milwaukee Brewers:** Can Carlos Lee really help the Brewers improve dramatically upon a 67-94 finish one year ago? That's the major question right now for the baseball team in Milwaukee, which traded base stealer extraordinaire Scott Podsednik to the White Sox in exchange for Lee (.305Avg. 31HR 99RBI). He gives them the right handed power bat they've been lacking for a while to go sandwiched in between lefty hitters Lyle Overbay (All-Star) and veteran outfielder Geoff Jenkins. Jenkins (.851 career OPS), Lee and likely Brady Clark will compose the Brewers outfield. Behind the plate is Damian Miller, who works very well with start pitchers as he did in Arizona, Oakland and Chicago, so he will have no trouble handling Ben Sheets. Chad Moeller, an ex-teammate of Miller's with the Diamondbacks, should spell him for about 40-50 games and be a decent backup.

I question how good Clark can be in the everyday lineup, markedly as the leadoff man. Clark was decent in 2004, batting .280 and stealing 15 bases. Still, don't see him staying there long if he's only score 40-50 runs per season. And Clark will get the chance to touch home plate with guys like Lee, Overbay and Jenkins behind him. Russell Branyan poses a threat when on the field. Despite striking out quite often, he hit 11 dingers in 51 games. Branyan, whose 81 home runs are the most of someone with less than 1500 plate appearances, would relish the opportunity to start every day or get upwards of 250 at-bats. Battling him for the spot at third base might be Wes Helms (career .253 lifetime hitter), an ex-Atlanta Braves player.

**Durability not a problem: Overbay, Jenkins and Lee - the three prime hitters for Milwaukee - all played 153+ games last season. There are questions about the infield, though and whether or not Wes Helms and Junior Spivey can stay on the field plus produce when on it this season.**

For the most part, Sheets really looked good in 2004. His 8.25 strikeout-to-walk ratio was the best last year and was the sixth best all-time dating back to the embarking of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A lofty delivery, superb velocity and smooth movement on his pitches, Sheets would definitely be a Cy Young candidate on an above .500 baseball team. He'll really be dangerous if/when he learns to go to his curve to bail him out and control the plate vs. dominating lefty power men. If Milwaukee is to resemble anything of a decent baseball team they are going to need the #3, 4 and 5 pitchers step up their performance. Doug Davis (12-12 with a 3.39ERA in 34 starts) has to remain solid as the team's go-to left-hander.

**Do you know your AAA affiliate? It's no longer the Indianapolis Indians. Instead, the Brewers new AAA farm team resides in Nashville, Tennessee.**



**Brewers OF**

**Geoff Jenkins (AP - Morry Gash) has 826 career base hits and enters his eighth season with the same team.**

Of Milwaukee's last three guys in the rotation here on opening day - Victor Santos, LH Chris Capuano (formerly of the Diamondbacks), and Wes Obermueller (more suited to the bullpen) - none has gotten it done to solidify their spot in the rotation. Ben Hendrickson rather good in AAA Indianapolis, posting an ERA of 2.02 and going 11-3. However, he went 1-8 with the Brewers and had a 6.22 ERA - meaning what he did at the minor league level did not translate over to the Major League level.

If they're unable to solve the 3-5 pitching in the rotation, the left side of the infield, and center field, then it could be another long season of baseball in the Wisconsin state. I will say this: if all the good things being said about Yost are true then they can do better than expected. Even if they are true, they need to be at least .500 around the break to have a chance down the stretch. Last year they were six over .500 heading into July and how'd that work out?

**Bottom Line: Manager Ned Yost knows that for the Brewers to achieve their first winning season in 13 years they must get leads early in ball games. Because when they are down by two, three or four runs late in a contest they cannot get back in for a couple reasons. A.) they've lacked the personnel offensively to make comebacks and B.) the pitching, mainly in the bullpen, has been unable to hold the fort down in comeback attempts.**

**Projected Order: CF Brady Clark  
2B Junior Spivey  
RF Geoff Jenkins  
LF Carlos Lee  
1B Lyle Overbay  
3B Wes Helms/Russell Branyan  
C Damian Miller  
SS J.J. Hardy/Bill Hall**

**Projected Staff: R Ben Sheets  
L Doug Davis  
R Wes Obermueller  
L Chris Capuano  
R Victor Santos**

*Pick: 6<sup>th</sup> in the NL Central; promising team that crumbles later in the year.*