

## 13 Losing seasons... and counting?



**5. Pittsburgh Pirates (67-95):** Out goes Lloyd McClendon; in comes new Manager Jim Tracy. There's a new Skipper in town. Thanks to him, along with young franchise building blocks – LHP Zach Duke and catcher Ryan Doumit - there's also renewed optimism. Though, it's awfully hard to think the Pirates will get it all turned around in one year's time. I mean, they don't exactly have Willie Stargell or Roberto Clemente on the roster. And when you haven't had a winning season since 1992, you're bound to believe things are going to eventually change. For it to, the 15-28 record in one-run games must be fixed. That means execution at the plate, in the field and on the mound is mandatory at the end of close battles. Right now these guys just lack that confidence and maybe Tracy can do something to build the belief. To keep the folks coming out to PNC Park, GM Dave Littlefield, clearly on the heat seat, will be forced to do something if they're struggling going into interleague play. Or else fan attendance could plummet further.

Right now Tracy and the Pirates are searching hard for a dynamite, big bopper for their lineup. Jason Bay (44 doubles) is the closest thing they have to one as he comes off a season where he batted .306 drove in 101 runs, stole 21 bases and hit 32 home runs. Numbers look nice, however, he's not a household name. Collectively, the team hopes that the veteran acquisitions of Sean Casey at first, Joe Randa at third and Jeromy Burnitz in the outfield does the trick. Scrappy, hard-nosed shortstop Jack Wilson, who won the Silver Slugger award at his position in '04, plays exceptionally in the field. Even though he had 14 fewer extra base hits and saw his BA dip 51 points, Wilson remains one of the hardest working players in the game. His 126 double plays also topped all shortstops in the NL. When second baseman Jose Castillo landed a starting job, it helped Wilson out too. Castillo gave the offense a bonus 99 hits and can be a force when he's patient and that bat of his is hot.

Utility infielder Freddy Sanchez, a former member of the Boston Red Sox organization, hit safely in his final 17 games to end the season. Outfielder Nate McLouth may be a year away, yet if his 34 stolen bases at AAA Indianapolis are any indication, he'll offer power in spots and quickness in others. Behind the plate, many are very much looking forward to what Ryan Doumit can do. Whether or not Chris Duffy does a good job in the leadoff spot, the Bucs have to jump on teams early in some games and give the pitchers plenty of run support.

One of three live starting arms, Duke was brilliant in 14 starts, going 8-2 and posting an ERA of 1.81. Lefty Oliver Perez had a much better '04 than '05, partly because he walked 70 batters compared to just 97K's a season ago. Kip Wells' 18 losses were the most for a quality pitcher capable of winning 10-15. His walk total (99) put him in trouble a lot, but in his defense, he probably got the worst run support in the NL. Bullpen rates out to be average to above average. When lefty reliever Mike Gonzalez has

control on his pitches and is locating them well, he's near unhittable with that fastball of his. Joining him you have Salomon Torres, a workhouse in the pen who pretty much goes every other day. Roberto Hernandez won eight games a year ago in relief spots for the Mets, and Damaso Marte also has experience of holding a lead and getting lefties out. Provided he pitches like he did in mid-July and beyond, Ryan Vogelsong will have a prominent spot in the bullpen, too. No shortage or options for Tracy, but he wants to make sure they're still in contention around the deadline so that the team isn't tempted to deal one for a prospect.



**Canadian born Pirates outfielder Jason Bay was Pittsburgh's lone All-Star representative a season ago. (CP)**

**Bottom Line: The problem? Pittsburgh probably will score the least amount of runs in this division, if not in the entire league (except that's not a given since the Marlins and Nats will give them a run for their money). There are some arms to work with in the pen and three starters in Duke, Perez and Wells that you can build your staff around. After guys like Doumit and Bay though, the offense is very weak as there's no real big-time hitter to be found anywhere up and down the order.**

**Projected Order: CF Chris Duffy  
SS Jack Wilson  
1B Sean Casey  
LF Jason Bay  
RF Jeromy Burnitz  
3B Joe Randa  
C Ryan Doumit  
2B Jose Castillo**

**Projected Staff: L Zach Duke  
L Oliver Perez  
R Kip Wells  
R Victor Santos  
R Ian Snell/L Paul Maholm**

***Pick: 5<sup>th</sup> in the NL Central; fail to qualify for postseason play.***