

NL WEST:

Year one of the Petco plan saw great improvement, which has San Diego fans craving even more for 2005



1. San Diego Padres: The San Diego Padres and their fans saw great improvement in the first season at Petco Park. Bruce Bochy's team won 87 of 162 games, including nearly 56% of their road games. That's just it --- San Diego was one of the few teams in all of baseball to play considerably better on the road than at home. Petco appears to be a pitchers ball park, not a friendly hitters one. The Padres were able to hit well for average, get quality outs when need be and not make glaring mistakes defensively. So what's missing? Home runs. The National League average for homers was 178, more than one per contest. Unlike most teams, they drilled just 138 out of the park, meaning they averaged less than a home run per game. Phil Nevin had 26 and Brian Giles had 23, but the next closest guy to 20 was catcher Ramon Hernandez (.276Avg. 18HR 63RBI 23 2B). Maybe Ryan Klesko can catch fire some month by burning RHP's.

Impact Deal: Bringing in Dave Roberts was an outstanding small move by GM Kevin Towers. In only 68 games with the Dodgers before being traded, Roberts stole 33 bases. Not to mention, had it been for Roberts stealing second in a key juncture of a key game vs. the Yankees, Boston would NOT have won it all!

What fans of the Padres can look forward to are the upcoming guys. Sean Burroughs, not much of a power threat, can be a better than solid fielder at one corner and hit .300 for several seasons. Khalil Greene, my pick for NL Rookie of the Year last season, was runner-up in the category after making some marvelous plays in his first year in the big's. Greene lets all hang out every time he steps on the field and plays the game with such a likable character. He's going to be around for a longtime, as will second baseman Josh Barfield, a young man that hopes to make a name for himself in the majors like his father did. Freddy Guzman, Ben Johnson and Xavier Nady are three promising outfield prospects that bring a little bit of everything to the organization. By the way, San Diego took shortstop Matt Bush with the first overall pick in the 2004 draft. No telling how good the young man can be come 2006-07 when he's playing every day in the big's.



Padres pitcher Brian

Lawrence led San Diego in innings pitched.

When you look at San Diego's fielding one word comes to mind: acceptable. Their defense is acceptable; nothing more and nothing less. Speaking of acceptable, Mark Loretta, the Padres' team MVP, would be accepted on any team out there. However, I don't see the Padres getting rid of him anytime soon, especially after being the team's lone all-star representative in 2004. While playing in 154 games, Loretta was third in the National League in batting average at .335 behind 143 singles (and 47 doubles). Backing up Loretta - Eric Young, someone that's been around the block and done the necessary things to help a team win. Other than him, most of the pinch hitters/pinch running possibilities will be youngsters. Due to that, don't be surprised to see the Padres, if they do make any kind of move, try to get someone with experience around 28-33 years of age. Specific purpose of that player would be to come in the 8th or 9th inning and deliver.

You've got to like the Padres young pitchers. Believe it or not, Jake Peavy, Brian Lawrence, and Adam Eaton may be the best young trio of starting pitchers in the Majors. Yes, even better than the Oakland guys, Cubs' pitchers, etc. No starter had an ERA as microscopic (a.k.a. lower/better) than Peavy, whose 2.27 earned run average at the age of 23 stood out significantly. They are now looking for either Eaton or Lawrence to do something similar in 2005, something that could propel this team to far places. Together Eaton (11-14) and Lawrence (15-14) whiffed 274 batters, but each an ERA around twice as much as Peavy. David Wells was kind of the leader of this team pitching wise, but replacing him with Woody Williams, a pretty good hitter, could turn out to be an 'upgrade'. Getting out of KC helps Darrell May (19 loses) discharge himself of a losers mentality. In the bullpen San Diego has four capable guys in closer Trevor Hoffman, Akinori Otsuka, Scott Linebrink, and newly acquired lefty Chris Hammond. All had ERA's under 2.70 in '04. Hoping Dennys Reyes, Blaine Neal and Rudy Seanez work out.

Bottom Line: Believe it or not, the Padres lineup might be at its strongest when the 6-7-8 hitters come up in Burroughs, Hernandez and Greene. Greene and Hernandez are good enough hitters to be moved up in the lineup, while Burroughs should benefit this year playing near the bottom instead of having to be the leadoff man on many occasions. All it takes is for Lawrence or Eaton to have a break-out year like Peavy did in '04 and San Diego could punch its ticket to the Fall Classic.

**Projected Order: CF Dave Roberts
2B Mark Loretta
RF Brian Giles
1B Phil Nevin
LF Ryan Klesko
3B Sean Burroughs
C Ramon Hernandez
SS Khalil Greene**

**Projected Staff: R Jake Peavy
R Brian Lawrence
R Adam Eaton
R Woody Williams
L Darrell May**

Pick: NL West Champions; fall to Yankees in the World Series in 6