

Will all the steroid discussion surrounding Barry Bonds keep them from achieving their ultimate goal? Or will it be lack of speed due to age that grounds San Fran?



2. San Francisco Giants: Two words: Barry Bonds. Will he be available at all for the 2005 Major League Baseball regular season or postseason? It's not very up in the air with his chronic knee problems and all the pain he has internally suffered from the whole steroids debate. But hasn't Bonds brought much of it upon himself? He's openly told the media that he basically does not like them all and that they've tried to bring him and his family down. Plus, Bonds has not been the friendliest person off the field to fans. **Spectacular player? Certainly - as suggested by the fact that he is the single-season record holder for home runs, walks, on-base percentage and slugging percentage.** What 69-year-old Manager Felipe Alou and all the Giants faithful hope is that this slugger's career does not end before it ever re-starts again.

Brian Sabean and the Giants organization did all they could to make this team better equipped for a run in '05. They added a big-time closer in Armando Benitez, acquired one of the best defensive shortstops in the game in Omar Vizquel (solid .291 hitter last year), and look more comfortable behind the plate with former Cardinals catcher Mike Matheny. Backing up Matheny will be Yorvit Torrealba, who saw time in over 60 games as A.J. Pierzynski failed to fit in with this group. Hopefully San Francisco can use these upgrades on defense to commit fewer errors than the 101 they had in 2004. In 2003, the year they were considered the favorites in the National League prior to losing to wild card Florida Marlins in postseason play, San Francisco made just 80 regular season errors. With Bonds out for at least the first couple months of the season, will Michael Tucker, a slightly better than average veteran outfielder, be able to hold down left field with consistency? It's one of the many questions the Giants have this coming yr.



Former Indians and now Giants shortstop Omar Vizquel (AP) had his best game of the 2004 season on August 31st. That night he went 6-for-7 as Cleveland bashed the New York Yankees, 22-0 (not a misprint).

We know getting Vizquel at short is an upgrade on defense and the same thing can be said with Matheny at the backstop. After that, where does this team rank defensively? More than likely middle of the pack again like they were a season ago. San Fran ranked in the middle of the pack in the NL fielding statistics last year. Not a team with much speed, the Giants tend to make up for it on defense by not committing errors. Ace Jason Schmidt set the team record for strikeouts in a season last year with 251. He's good for another 15-20 win season out by the bay. Lefty Kirk Rueter (9-12), 34, has the makings of a 15-game winner if he can get better velocity and control with his pitcher than in 2004. Jerome Williams went 10-7 last year and some believe he could be the NL's version of Johan Santana in 2005. Don't know about that, but I do believe he and changeup stud Noah Lowry are the future of the Giants on the rubber. Jim Brower, Jason Chirstiansen, Matt Herges, Jesse Foppert (lighting fastball), and Scott Eyre - all are situation relievers.

Prospectus: San Francisco does not have the best prospects in the National League West and in fact, you can make a case they have the worst farm system of the five teams in their division. They'll need Fred Lewis, an outfielder, and Brad Hennessey, a starting right-handed pitcher, to come in right away and step up.

Making up for the lost homers via the bat of Mr. Bonds will be outfielder Moises Alou, who at the age of 38 is coming off an incredible season with the Cubs where he hit 39 dingers and drove in 106 runs. Alou, if Bonds is healthy, can be one of the best protection hitters in the game. If not, then he will be the team's top power hitter an older age without much speed. Another guy like Alou, son of the Manager, that would be up for All-Star consideration with Bonds would be third baseman Edgardo Alfonzo. Alfonzo can play some at second when they want to use Durham in the outfield. Stepping in at first is a guy who I've said all along is underrated - J.T. Snow, an even better fielder than his .327 average from last season.

Bottom Line: It's all about Bonds and his availability to this team. Some are now saying he could be done for half the season, the whole year or his career might very well be over. Find it hard to believe myself, and even if he can play, the Giants desperately need an impact speedster. If they're looking up at the Padres all year, unlike in some seasons, I do not see them catching the first place team.

**Projected Order: 2B Ray Durham
SS Omar Vizquel
RF Moises Alou
LF Barry Bonds* (Questionable - Inj.)
CF Marquis Grissom
3B Edgardo Alfonzo
1B J.T. Snow
C Mike Matheny**

**Projected Staff: R Jason Schmidt
L Kirk Rueter
R Brett Tomko
R Jerome Williams
L Noah Lowry**

Pick: 2nd in the NL West; finish five out of first and one out of the Wild Card