Los Angeles Dodgers

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2006 in a Nutshell

Last Year's Record: 88-74
Division Rank/Games Behind: 2nd in the NL West. The Dodgers and Padres finished the regular season with identical records, but San Diego was awarded the division title due to winning the season series.
Runs Scored: 820 (4th in the league)
Runs Allowed: 751(4th)
Run Differential/Record: 69/88-74
Win Shares:
- Batting: 129 (3rd)
- Pitching: 96 (4th)
- Fielding: 39 (11th)

Win Shares Age: 30.3 (4th oldest)

What Happened: Clinched Wild Card berth on Sept. 30. Swept by the New York Mets in the NLDS.

Player Surprises: Japanese League veteran Takashi Saito, a 36-year-old rookie, stepped into the role as the closer after Eric Gagne was hurt and Danys Baez failed, saving 24 games in 26 opportunities while fashioning a 2.07 ERA.

Player Disappointments: Gagne and Baez. Brad Penny in the second half (6-7, 6.25 ERA). Free agent third baseman Bill Mueller injured his knee in early May and never played another inning the rest of the year.

Team Strengths: Led National League in batting average (.276), on-base percentage (.348), and batting with runners in scoring position (.286). Also led the league in Fielding Independent Pitching ERA (4.12), due in part to allowing the fewest home runs (0.9/G) in the league.

Team Weaknesses: Power. Ranked second-to-last in the league in home runs. Team defense (.683 defense efficiency ratio, tied for second-worst in the NL).

General Comments

The General Manager Is Known for: Favoring veterans over young players. Overpaying free agents in dollars to save years on the length of contracts. Listening to Logan White when considering any deal involving prospects.

The Manager Is Known for: Leaving Pedro Martinez in the eighth inning of Game Seven of the ALCS in 2003, allowing the New York Yankees to forge a tie and win in extra innings.

Most Overrated Player: Juan Pierre.

Most Underrated Player: Olmedo Saenz, who has torched left-handed pitchers to the tune of .315/.393/.618 with 19 home runs in 238 at-bats during his three-year stay in Los Angeles.

Ballpark Characteristics: Classic pitcher's park although it favored hitters last year for the first time in its 45-year history. Dodger Stadium has enhanced home runs by 10% over the past three years while suppressing doubles by 6% and triples by a whopping 48%.

The Minor League System Is: Easily one of the top five in baseball.

Favorite Team Blogs: Dodger Thoughts (dodgerthoughts.baseballtoaster.com) and 6-4-2 (6-4-2.blogspot.com)

Keys for 2007

Players Lost from Last Year's Team: J.D. Drew, Eric Gagne, Toby Hall, Kenny Lofton, Julio Lugo, and Greg Maddux.

Players Acquired: Luis Gonzalez, Mike Lieberthal, Juan Pierre, Jason Schmidt, Chin-Hui Tsao, and Randy Wolf.

Reasons To Be Optimistic: Pitching. Jason Schmidt, Derek Lowe, Brad Penny, Randy Wolf and either Chad Billingsley or Hong-Chih Kuo could form one of the best rotations in the NL. Closer Takashi Saito and set-up man Jonathan Broxton struck out 204 batters in 154.2 innings in 2006. Strong bench and minor league system should prove valuable over the course of the season.

Reasons To Be Pessimistic: Likely 3-4-5 hitters average 37 years of age and hit only 49 home runs among them last year.

Due for a Better Season: Jeff Kent may not improve his rate stats (.292/.385/.477), but he is a good bet to improve upon his counting stats by playing in more than the 115 games he appeared in last season.

Likely To Have a Worse Season: Andre Ethier hit .308/.365/.477 but slumped to 4-for-43 with no extra-base hits in the final four weeks of the season. Marlon Anderson slugged seven home runs in 64 at-bats after he was traded to the Dodgers on Aug. 31. He had previously averaged one home run per 56 at-bats in nearly 1,000 career games.

Most Likely Team Outcome: Will be favored by most pundits to win what should be a young and improving division.