

Happy to unveil the start of a new little series here, as we get ready for the start of the 2009 Indians season, now just six weeks away. In it, David Buona takes a look at the other 13 teams the Indians will battle for the American League pennant. Our first team up is the Baltimore Orioles, who had a suprisingly potent offense last year, and one that figures to be even better this season. But with questions in the rotation (led by former Indian Jeremy Guthrie) and a brutally tough AL East ... the O's will be hard pressed to not post a 12th straight losing season.



### **2008 Recap:**

After hovering close to .500 the first five months of the season, the Orangebirds floundered in September, closing out the month at 5-20 to put the finishing touches on their eleventh consecutive losing season, at 68-93. As a team the Orioles batted .267 (11<sup>th</sup> overall) but had a team ERA of 5.13, the second worst in all of baseball. Despite finishing dead last in the A.L. East, the Orioles did have a couple bright moments. First baseman Aubrey Huff rediscovered his former Astros self and lead the American league with 82 extra base hits, and Jeremy “Exhibit ZZ that Cleveland is Cursed” Guthrie won 10 games while sporting an efficient 3.63 ERA.

### **2009 Outlook:**

As a club, the Baltimore Orioles may historically be known for revolutionizing the dead ball era with the "Baltimore Chop" and for being the team that was lucky enough to have Cal Ripken for his entire illustrious career, but I don't see too much history being made with this 2009 squad. Offensively, the lineup can mash with the best of them but when it comes to pitching, yikes. Where have you gone, Sidney Ponson? (He's pitching for Team Netherlands in the World Baseball classic, if you really were wondering, but why would you be.)

**Hello:** UTIL Ryan Freel, UTIL Chris Gomez, LHP Mark Hendrickson, LHP Rich Hill, OF Felix Pie, RHP Koji Uehara, UTIL Ty Wiggington, and C Greg Zaun

**Goodbye:** RHP Daniel Cabrera, C Ramon Hernandez, 1B Kevin Millar, LHP Garrett Olson, OF Jay Payton, RHP Steve Trachsel

### **If the Orioles Were an 80's Movie They'd Be:**

*Over the Top.* Like Lincoln Hawk, they're all brawn but not much else. Maybe if the team were playing to win a semi-truck and the love of one of their illegitimate children they'd have a chance in the AL East, but with the Yanks, Red Sox, Devil Rays, and the Blue Jays, it won't happen.

### **The 2009 Projected Lineup:**

2B Brian Roberts

RF Nick Markakis  
DH Luke Scott  
1B Aubrey Huff  
3B Melvin Mora  
C Gregg Zaun/ Matt Wieters  
LF Felix Pie/ Ty Wiggington  
CF Adam Jones  
SS Cesar Izturis

By the time the 2009 season comes to an end for the Orioles, you'll probably find the Orioles offense ranked in the upper 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of baseball. They can mash, and as a team they hit a respectable .267 last year, the 11<sup>th</sup> best average in baseball.

The lineup features several 30-plus year-old stars, including underrated leadoff hitter Brian Roberts and the always consistent Melvin Mora, who despite beginning to show some wear and tear last year (only 135 games played) still hit 20 homers and drove in over 100.

But the Orioles are rebuilding and have added some top notch prospects (or suspects) from other organizations over the last couple years. Centerfielder Adam "Don't Call Me Pacman" Jones came over from Seattle in the Erik Bedard trade last winter, and this offseason they received former Cubs top prospect Felix Pie for a couple of minor league

pitchers. Both are centerfielders that are considered to have 5-tool qualities, but Pie has been an utter embarrassment during his major league cups of coffee (.233 average in 130 career games). Designated hitter Luke Scott came over from the Astros in the Miguel Tejada trade last winter, and he responded with 23 homers in only 475 at bats.

Hope for a bright future lies within Matt Wieters, the 2007 first overall pick. The catcher from Georgia Tech destroyed A and AA ball pitching last year, batting .355 with 27 home runs and 91 RBI despite only recording 437 at bats. He's legit, and while he may be Evan Longoria-ed to start the year, he'll be called up by May, and probably for good.

### **The 2009 Projected Rotation and Closer:**

RHP Jeremy Guthrie

LHP Rich Hill

RHP Koji Uehara

LHP Mark Hendrickson

RHP Danys Baez

LHP George Sherrill

RHP Chris Ray

Jeremy Guthrie is the ace of this Baltimore pitching staff, and that's not a good thing. Guthrie only won 10 games last year,

but in his 12 losses the O's could only put 21 combined runs on the board. After Guthrie, the rotation's 2-5 slots are completely interchangeable. The team attempted to bondo up their stable of arms by signing Japanese free agent righty Koji Uehara, but he's 34 years old and has pitched only 152 innings over the last two years. Acquisition Rich Hill may emerge as a solid number two if he pitches like he did in '07 (11 wins, 3.92 ERA, 183 Ks in 195 innings), but will be back in AAA Rochester if he pitches like he did in '08 (19.2 innings, 18 walks). The rest of the staff is up in the air, but will be made up of retreads like Mark Hendrickson or Danys Baez, unproven youngsters like Radhamez Liz, Jim Johnson, and Brian Burrell, or AAA fodder like Chris Waters and Hayden Penn.

Closer George Sherrill (31 saves) was an All-Star in the first half of the season and a chump in the second (6.59 ERA), which may open the door for former closer and Tommy John surgery recipient Chris Ray to take the job. Before blowing out his elbow in 2007, Ray saved 33 games in '06.

**So Magic Eight Ball, will the Orioles have a franchise record 12 consecutive losing season on their hand?  
&quot;You may rely on it.&quot;**