

The Yankees didn't make the playoffs for the first time in over a decade, and the Steinbrenners weren't happy. The Yankees responded to the end of their 13-year playoff run by spending \$423.5 million during free agency on three players. Pitchers C.C. Sabathia, A.J. Burnett, and first baseman Mark Teixeira will do their best to catch up the down-and-out Bronx Bombers to the Rays and Red Sox. Dave Buona takes previews The Evil Empire in his latest look around the AL.



### **2008 Recap:**

The Yankees didn't make the playoffs for the first time in over a decade, and the Steinbrenners weren't happy. The Yankees responded to the end of their 13-year playoff run by spending \$423.5 million during free agency on three players. Pitchers C.C. Sabathia, A.J. Burnett, and first baseman Mark Teixeira will do their best to catch up the down-and-out Bronx Bombers to the Rays and Red Sox. Last year without those three the Yankees finished 8 games behind the Rays for the A.L. East crown and 6 games behind the Red Sox for the A.L. wild card, ending with a disappointed 89-73 record despite their \$209 million payroll.

### **2009 Outlook:**

The Yankees are pretty much bringing back the same lineup as last year except

for first baseman/ outfielder Nick Swisher (acquired from the White Sox) and three guys they picked up in free agency, minus Bobby Abreu, Jason Giambi, and Mike Mussina. Their payroll this year is only \$210 million (that sounds like some George Bush fuzzy math), and no matter how bad their season may get, rest assured there'll be some more spending come the July 31<sup>st</sup> trading deadline.

**Hello:** RHP A.J. Burnett, LHP C.C. Sabathia, OF Nick Swisher, 1B Mark Teixeira

**Goodbye:** OF Bobby Abreu, UTIL Wilson Betemit, 1B Jason Giambi, RHP Mike Mussina, RHP Sidney Ponson, C Ivan Rodriguez, 1B Richie Sexson,

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

*On Golden Pond.* This season will probably have the Yankee fans reminiscing early on about the glory years and pondering just how good things could be, but if their quarter-of-a-billion dollar arms show their wear quickly, they'll be shaking their heads like the aged Katherine Hepburn, wondering wear it all went wrong.

**The 2009 Projected Lineup:**

LF Johnny Damon

SS Derek Jeter

1B Mark Teixeira

3B Alex Rodriguez

RF Xavier Nady

DH Hideki Matsui

2B Robinson Cano

C Jorge Posada / Jose Molina

CF Nick Swisher / Melky Cabrera / Brett Gardner

Last year the Yankees batted .271 as a team last year, 6<sup>th</sup> in the majors but scored only 789 runs, 10 best in the bigs. To fix it former Angels stud Mark Teixeira was brought in following a .308, 33 homerun and 121 RBI campaign. Pretty decent numbers, but worth \$180 million over eight years? We'll find out, but with him and A-Rod put together, you've got a \$50 million dollar corner infield.

Speaking of Rodriguez, the steroid cloud will definitely hang over him all season, but I'm sure he'll be fine. Even if you take his worst numbers in a Yankee uniform, you're still looking at a .290 average with 35 homeruns, 103 RBI, and 15 stolen bases. Not to shabby.

Age again becomes an issue though with the Yanks, with a questionable farm and not much bench depth, especially in the infield. Every projected Yankee starter is over 30 except for Teixeira, Robinson Cano, and Nick Swisher. And of those three "youngsters," Swisher swung the stick for an alarming .219 average last year and Cano has seen his drop 71 points over the last two years (.342 in '06, .271 in '08).

My favorite Yankee (or should I say the only one I don't despise) is centerfielder Brett Gardner, who will challenge Nick Swisher and 4-A player Melky Cabrera for time between Damon and Nady. Gardner is the bunting speed freak type of player that I love, as evidenced by his 13 steals in only 127 at bats. If he could only raise his pitiful .228 average (he's a .291 hitter in his minor league career), he may be the Yankees future lead-off man when Johnny "Looks Like Jesus Throws Like Mary" Damon calls it quits.

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

LHP C.C. Sabathia

RHP A.J. Burnett

RHP Chien-Ming Wang

LHP Andy Pettitte

RHP Joba Chamberlain / Phil Hughes / Ian Kennedy

RHP Mariano Rivera

The Yankees spent some cash this off-season to shore up their rotation and find a replacement for the retired miracle worker Mike Mussina (20 wins in '08). Altogether, \$243.5 million was spent to bring in two pitchers whose arms are due to fall off. Two thirds of that money is going to Carsten Charles Sabathia, the 6'7" , 290 pound (listed weight) hurler that threw a major league high 3,814 pitches last year between Cleveland and the Milwaukee Brewers. The other one-third is going to former Blue Jay A.J. Burnett, who definitely cashed in on his

first season ever eclipsing the 12 win mark (he got 18). Burnett has been on the disabled list 10 times in his 10 year career, and 2009 would be a good bet as the time for his next. Like his fellow initially named counterpart, A.J. threw a lot of pitches last year, tops in the American League with 3,650 during his career high 221 innings.

The rest of the staff is made up of Taiwanese Chien-Ming Wang, Clemens 'roid buddy Andy Pettitte, and a conglomeration of youngsters Joba Chamberlain, Phil Hughes, and Ian Kennedy. Wang broke his foot last season and only managed to record 8 wins, but in the two previous seasons the breaking ball specialist netted 19 each year. Pettitte is 36 and clearly on the decline (especially now that the steroids can't be counted on to keep those muscles fresh), but Joba Chamberlain is just the opposite, just starting what will probably be an illustrative career. Joba won only 4 games last year and started only 12, but his numbers were fantastic. In only 100 innings he struck out 118 and had a shiny 2.60 ERA. The only question with him becomes can his shoulder and elbow hold up to give him 30 starts a year. If not, former failed wunderkinds Phil Hughes and Ian Kennedy will be leaned upon, and that may not be a good thing, since they both combined for 0 wins and 8 losses in 2008.

The bullpen of the Yanks will probably feature both Kennedy and Hughes, as well as former starter Alfredo Aceves, who

started four games last year for the Pinstrippers, winning one and putting up a 2.40 ERA. Set up men Damaso Marte and Brian Bruney help bridge the gap between the starters and cutter-extraordinaire Mariano Rivera. Acquired by the Pirates last year, the left handed Marte pitched in 72 games last year and averaged more than a strikeout per inning. The formally large tons-of-fun Brian Bruney pitched his butt off last year (literally, apparently) and has shown up this season 20 pounds lighter this spring training as he tries to improve upon his stellar 1.83 ERA as Rivera's right-handed setup man.

This brings us to Mariano Rivera. Last year the 39 year old dazzled again, blowing only one save opportunity on his way to 39, winning another 6 and ending with a 1.40 ERA. He had some calcification removed from his golden shoulder, but he should be fine and continue to *not* walk people at a ridiculous rate (6 walks in 70.2 innings last year).

**So Magic Eight Ball, will the Evil Empire give the Sox and Rays a run for the AL East or the wild card? &quot;Outlook good.&quot;**