

Tuesday, October 26, 2004

Predictions, pt. 2

I had the Marlins second in the NL East, but they finished third, three games behind Philadelphia, which is about where I figured they'd be in terms of games back. What I didn't figure is that they'd be just two games above .500. The theme in the NL East is high hopes dashed, especially after the Marlins's run to the championship. What happened?

The Marlins had hoped for a full season out of Josh Beckett, but, as any reasonable person might expect, they didn't get it. Beckett made 26 starts and earned 28.3 VORP. This ain't bad, of course, but it's also Woody Williams territory and you can forgive the Marlins for hoping for a little more out of their phenom. Dontrelle Willis pitched at about the same level, though he managed 32 starts and almost 200 innings. He wasn't stellar, but there seemed to be some thought that he was going to crater this season, that his rookie year was a huge fluke, but it appears that while it may have been a fluke, he's not a guy to shove to the bullpen just yet.

Brad Penny pitched pretty well, with a 128 RA+ in 21 starts, but he was traded (and just in time, too, given how his arm held up after the trade to the Dodgers) in the package that brought Paul LoDuca and Guillermo Mota to the team. Mota, by the way, was strictly average with the Marlins after putting up another year of nasty numbers in the Ravine out west. That trade was just awful for both teams, in terms of the performance of the players traded after the deal went down: Mota was disappointing, LoDuca put up a .305 OBP, and Juan Encarnacion hit .237. On the other side, Penny got hurt and Choi hit under .200. Talk about lose-lose.

Since AJ Burnett is a Marlin, he was hurt for much of the year, but he pitched in 20 games with a good 117 RA+. Having him healthy would have been nice, of course, but there's only so much you can ask. Miracles aren't part of that.

I know what you've been waiting for: Carl Pavano. What happened? He blew up is what happened. He almost doubled his 90th percentile VORP prediction by PECOTA, giving his team 62.4 by throwing well over 200 innings with a 136 RA+. He finished behind just Randy Johnson and Ben Sheets in NL pitcher VORP, finally fulfilling the promise he'd flashed for so many years before. Considering how mediocre the team was even with Pavano, it's a bit scary to think of how bad my prediction would have looked had he pitched like the Pavano of old (i.e. gotten hurt).

The non-regular part of the rotation was as pitiful as you might expect: it's the rare team that gets a quality contribution from the random guys that have to take the ball every once in a while due to injury or double-headers or whatever. What you can hold against the Marlins is that they had to give 33 starts to guys outside of their top five, guys with names like Nate Bump and Logan Kensing. Compare that to the playoff teams: The Angels had 14 starts outside their top five, but all went to Ramon Ortiz, who was actually the second-best pitcher on the starting staff by RA+; Atlanta gave away fifteen starts, nine of which went to Horacio Ramirez, who put up a 127 RA+; Boston had just five, and three of those were given to BH Kim to see if he could pitch or not; Houston had 28, none of them very good pitchers, and that's not counting the fact that Wade Miller and Andy Pettite essentially split the last spot; the Dodgers had 24, but fifteen of those were by one guy (Wilson Alvarez) and three more were made by Brad Penny; the Twins had 12; the Yankees had 36, though 15 were made by El Duque, who was essentially swapped in for Jose Contreras; finally, St. Louis, for all their pitching troubles, had just eight and they caught lightning in a bottle with three of them going to Al Reyes and Randy Flores, who lit it up with 606 and 235 RA+'s, respectively.

Notice that the only comparable teams were the Yankees, who had a crazy offense to make up for it, and the Astros, who had two full-time pitchers who were about as good as Pavano was for the Marlins, plus a bullpen that went better than one-deep (referring to Armando Benitez for the Marlins, who did have an excellent season).

The offense is sort of boring: everyone pretty much performed as you expected them to, except Juan Pierre probably had the season of his life, hitting .326, though he certainly hurt his value as much as he could by getting caught stealing 24 times. Other than that, everyone was just sort of solid. Jeff Conine didn't hit well, especially for a left fielder, but he wasn't atrocious, and that's what you have to expect out of Conine, anyway.

In other words, since nobody had a major collapse and everything just kind of hummed along for this team, this prediction falls on me. Maybe I was seduced by the World Series of 2003. I think the best thing I can say is that I should be ashamed that I picked a team starting Jeff Conine in left field to finish even second in its division.

Posted by jason in Baseball at 15:46

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Jason,
I lost that e mail address. Email me that file for the planning guide to Math A. Your site is great. But the Marlins?
Thanks,
Mark
Anonymous on Oct 26 2004, 23:56