

## AL East in '90

# Toronto can win title again - by default

By George Robinson

The AL East is still the most competitive division in baseball. That's because none of these teams is very good. The survivor here wins by default.

Here is the predicted order of finish in the AL East in 1990:

**1. TORONTO BLUE JAYS (in 1989: 89-73, first).**

Why not? They return with the same cast that squeaked to an AL East flag last year. Manager Cito Gaston seemed to make everybody happier.

The rotation, led by Dave Steib (17-8, 3.35 ERA) and Jimmy Key (13-14, 3.88), is as good as any in the division. And the new Sky Dome is a pitcher's park. Closer Tom Henke (8-3, 1.92; 20 saves) returned to dominating form. Tony Fernandez (.257, 11 HRs, 64 RBIs) is the best shortstop in the league. AL homer champ Fred McGriff (.269, 36, 92) and Geroge Bell (.297, 18, 104) supply the punch. If Mookie Wilson (.298 in Toronto) resumes his second-half role as the igniter, the Jays will fly again.

**2. BALTIMORE ORIOLES (in '89: 87-75, second).**

From the 1988 Woes, they became the '1989 Ohs' — a 32-game turnaround after a 107-loss season. It's amazing what talented (and hungry) fledglings can do.

Manager Frank Robinson got the most from his young pitchers — including AL Rookie of the Year Gregg Olson (5-2, 1.69; 27 saves) out of the bullpen. Top starters: Jeff Ballard (18-8, 3.43) and Bob Milacki (14-12, 3.74).

Behind them was a defense that made the fewest errors in the majors.

Baltimore's offense was led by Cal Ripken (21 HRs, 93 RBIs), Mickey Tettleton (26 HRs) and Phil Bradley (.277, 11, 55); who scored 83 runs.

Last season, the Orioles had 22 players with less than two years of major-league experience. They return with the same group — a year more mature.

**3. MILWAUKEE BREWERS (in '89: 81-81, fourth).**

What happened to Milwaukee? All that young pitching, all those hot bats, all those swift gloves — all those doctor bills.

The team ERA (3.80) was OK. Starter Chris Bosio (15-10, 2.95) and reliever Dan Plesac (2.35, 33 saves) did fine. Still, the Brewers need a healthy Teddy Higuera (9-6, 3.46) and Juan Nieves (who missed all of '89).

Manager Tom Trebelhorn also needs more production from catcher B.J. Surhoff (.248, 5, 55), and recoveries by Greg Brock (.265, 12, 52), Dale Sveum (out all year), Jim Gantner and Gary Sheffield.

Among Milwaukee's healthy contributors: AL MVP Robin Yount (.318,

21, 103) and Paul Molitor (.315, 11, 56). Free-agent pick-up Dave Parker (.264, 22, 97) can provide extra leadership off the field.

**4. BOSTON RED SOX (in '89: 83-79, third).**

The Bosox of Fenway Park led the majors once again in hitting (.277). They also led the AL in on-base percent, total bases and runs batted in.

As usual, the pitching was mediocre.

Roger Clemens (17-11, 3.13) and Mike Boddicker (15-11, 4.00) had physical problems. John Dohson (12-8, 3.99) was a mild surprise. The rest of manager Joe Morgan's rotation was a shambles. The bullpen, with the addition of Jeff Reardon (5-4, 31 saves), is strong. Lee Smith (6-1) had 25 saves in

1989.

**5. NEW YORK YANKEES (in '89: 74-87, fifth).**

Former skipper Dallas Green says the Yanks will never win again as long as they're owned by George Steinbrenner. He's probably right.

Manager Bucky Dent has pitching worries. He has no ace — off-season additions Pascual Perez (9-13, 3.31) and Tim Lary (8-14, 3.52) don't qualify. Nor does Andy Hawkins (15-15, 4.80). New York does have a deep bullpen. But fireman Dave Righetti (2-6, 25 saves) shows signs of burn out.

**6. CLEVELAND INDIANS (in '89: 73-89, sixth).**

Is rookie catcher Sandy Alomar Jr. as good as his hype? If not, one of the worst offenses in baseball may get

worse. Last year's Tribe was last or next-to-last in seven major offensive categories. Now subtract the departed Joe Carter.

Skipper John McNamara faces a long, unpleasant season.

**7. DETROIT TIGERS (in '89: 59-103, seventh).**

Manager Sparky Anderson used 22 pitchers last year, a club record. Nothing worked. Old reliable Jack Morris (6-14, 4.86) even fractured his elbow.

Behind the hurlers, the fielding was poor. There was no "D" in Detroit.

Paper Tigers limped from the plate. Lou Whitaker (.251, 28 HRs, 85 RBIs) was an exception.

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