

Twins a lot more fun to watch

Written by Fred Easter
Thursday, 30 May 2013 13:35

Nobody asked me, but early returns of the Twins 2013 season suggest they'll be a little better this year than they were in the past two.

I didn't say, a whole lot better. GM, Terry Ryan, has engineered some acquisitions and the minor leagues have contributed, as well. I'm not saving up for World Series tickets, but this edition of the Target Fielders is a lot more fun to watch. Sadly, they'll be maddening to watch a bit too often, as well.

When the season started, Twins officials were saying, "This lineup will score runs, hopefully the pitching will hold up." Here's what I think I see.

Pitching: A bit stronger than last year. That may be what an old friend of mine called, "damning with faint praise." The subtraction of Matt Capps and Carl Pavano will strengthen any staff. This group will not likely dominate, but they will turn in a scattering of very well pitched games. Kevin Correia and Mike Pelfrey are established major league pitchers. Scott Diamond is an established major league pitcher, but he got a late start on the season because of an injury, so I don't think he's at full strength yet. Vance Worley is an established major leaguer too, but now he's going to have to prove that in Rochester. Soon, we'll get to add Samuel Deduno and Cole DeVries and there are intriguing names in Rochester, besides Vance Worley, but the rest of the league is not cowering in anticipation.

When half of the bullpen is not pitching every day, it'll be fine. Closer Glen Perkins can dominate. Jared Burton will be fine in the 8th inning. There are arms, but too much of the staff "pitches to contact." It'll be nice when we get a few more flamethrowers.

Defense: A work in progress. The defense is a bit disappointing so far but very promising. Pedro Florimon and Brian Dozier have excellent middle infield skills, but they are not established major leaguers, and therefore prone to youthful lapses of concentration and attempts to do too much. Trevor Plouffe, hurt now, seems prone to thinking about hitting home runs when he should be thinking defense. Jamey Carroll is a gem; at bat and anywhere in the field and Eduardo Escobar was a great addition.

The outfield, with the exception of young Aaron Hicks, is designed to hit rather than turn potential doubles into long outs. Chris Parmelee shows real promise, but neither he nor Josh Willingham and Oswaldo Arcia resemble gazelles. Happily, they all can throw. Until this infield jells into a cohesive unit, they will be prone to make great plays and botch routine ones.

Offense: These guys will hit. Some of them will even hit this year. Joe Mauer, Justin Morneau and Willingham are real hitters, which is not to say slump proof. Hicks, Parmelee and Arcia are going to be dangerous hitters. Pedro Florimon, Dozier, Carroll, Escobar and Wilkin Ramirez are piranhas. Ryan Doumit and Plouffe are muskie. They all can hurt you, but, less so, in critical situations. The bench is much stronger than last year, offensively and defensively. Jamey Carroll deserves special mention. Excellent defense wherever he's put and a quality at bat every time.

Coaching: Manager Ron Gardenhire has been masterful keeping everybody in the lineup

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enough to prevent rust and go with, you should pardon the expression, "hot bats." I do wonder why Florimon hasn't been tried at leadoff. He can hit and steal bases. I'm really not impressed with Pitching Coach Rick Anderson. His best position seems to be friend to Gardenhire. We seem to give up on too many pitchers who are successful at their next stops.

The major weakness in this group seems to me to be a belief in itself as a team and individually. Good teams feel they can reel in good opponents in the late innings. This group seems to be worrying that it will be reeled in. In a few years it'll learn how to stand on the other teams' throats. Until then, we'll lead the league for five innings or so.