



Ichiro Suzuki

SEATTLE MARINERS

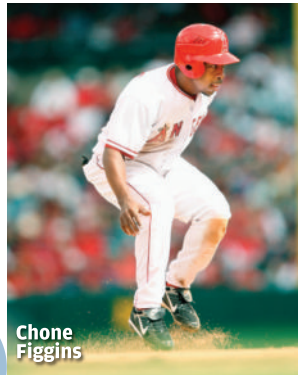
2007 RECORD: 88-74 (2ND)

WHAT'S GOOD: Seattle's defense is strong. 3B **Adrian Beltre** (.276, 26 HR, 99 RBI) won his first Gold Glove in 2007. SS **Yuniesky Betancourt** (.289, 9, 67) and 2B **Jose Lopez** (.252, 11, 62) are a talented young double-play combo. And CF **Ichiro Suzuki** (.351, 111 runs, 37 steals) is a seven-time Gold Glove winner. New lefty **Erik Bedard** (13-5, 3.16 ERA with the Orioles) will take some of the pressure off ace **Felix Hernandez** (14-7, 3.92). And closer **J.J. Putz** (40 saves, 1.38 ERA) is one of the best.

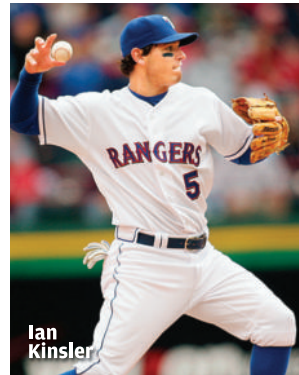
WHAT'S BAD: 1B **Richie Sexson** (.205, 21, 63) is a notoriously slow starter, but he barely got going at all in 2007. The bottom of the rotation is shaky.

OUR PREDICTION: Seattle's pitching is improved and their offense should bounce back from a slump and injury filled '07. If the Mariners stay healthy, they will win the West.

GRADE: B+



Chone Figgins



Ian Kinsler



Joe Blanton

LOS ANGELES ANGELS

2007 RECORD: 94-68 (1ST)

WHAT'S GOOD: The Angels finished fifth in the AL in ERA last season, and should be even better this season. The addition of **Jon Garland** (10-13, 4.23 ERA with the White Sox) gives them five strong starters, including reigning AL ERA champ **John Lackey** (19-9, 3.01). Free agent CF **Torii Hunter** (.287, 28 HR, 107 RBI with the Twins) gives the defense a Gold Glove boost.

WHAT'S BAD: Many of the Angels' veterans broke down last season, so the team is relying on a lot of young players. Several projected starters, such as SS **Erick Aybar** (.237, 1, 19 in 79 games), are in their first or second full season so expect growing pains.

OUR PREDICTION: With some players fading and others learning the ropes, first place is out of reach.

GRADE: B

TEXAS RANGERS

2007 RECORD: 75-87 (LAST)

WHAT'S GOOD: The Rangers have completely remade the outfield by adding CF **Josh Hamilton** (.292, 19 HR, 47 RBI with the Reds) and RF **Milton Bradley** (.306, 13, 37 with two teams). The strong double-play combination of SS **Michael Young** (.315, 9, 94) and 2B **Ian Kinsler** (.263, 20, 61) provides stability on a team with a lot of new faces.

WHAT'S BAD: Both corner infielders, 1B **Ben Broussard** (.275, 7, 29 with the Mariners) and 3B **Hank Blalock** (.293, 10, 33), are coming off subpar seasons. The rotation is unimpressive and injury prone.

OUR PREDICTION: The Rangers are building for the future, but they have enough talent to stay out of the basement.

GRADE: C+

OAKLAND A'S

2007 RECORD: 76-86 (3RD)

WHAT'S GOOD: The A's still have a pretty solid rotation, led by **Joe Blanton** (14-10, 3.95 ERA) and **Rich Harden** (1-2, 2.45), who should bounce back from a shoulder injury that limited him to four starts in '07. Talented young C **Kurt Suzuki** (.408 slugging, 7 HR, 39 RBI in 68 games) is ready to excel in his first full season behind the plate. Closer **Huston Street** (16 saves, 2.88) anchors an experienced bullpen.

WHAT'S BAD: The A's lost their best pitcher, Dan Haren, and their top position player, CF Nick Swisher. Their best defensive player, 3B **Eric Chavez** (.240, 15, 46), is recovering from back surgery — just one of many health concerns in Oakland.

OUR PREDICTION: This is a rare rebuilding year for the usually consistent A's.

GRADE: C

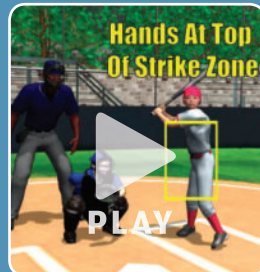
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ROBERT BECK (CHONE FIGGINS); DANIELE CARROLL (KINSLER); GREG NELSON (BLANTON); PETER GRECHER (WIZARD); BRAD MANVIN (CAN)

NEW YORK METS

2007 RECORD: 88-74 (2ND)

WHAT'S GOOD: Memories of their late-season collapse in 2007 should fuel this talented team. The arrival of ace **Johan Santana** (15-13, 3.33 ERA with the Twins) won't hurt either. Santana joins three-time Cy Young winner **Pedro Martinez** and **John Maine** (15-10, 3.91) in a stacked rotation. SS **Jose Reyes** (NL-best 78 steals) is a terror on the basepaths and a tremendous table setter for the Mets' power-packed lineup. CF **Carlos Beltran** (.276, 33 HR, 112 RBI, 23 steals) has power and speed, and 3B **David Wright** (.325, 30 HR, 107 RBI) continues to blossom as one of baseball's best young stars.

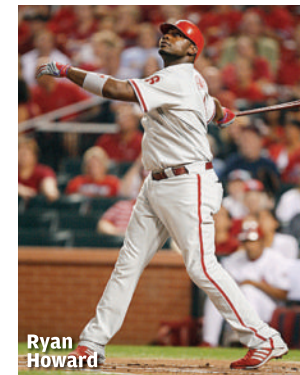
WHAT'S BAD: The Mets outfield has been the weak link for a few years now. In 2007, injuries dogged LF **Moises Alou** (.341, 13, 49 in 87 games), who will turn 42 this season. If he breaks down, new RF **Ryan Church** (.272, 15, 70 with the Nationals) must pick up the slack.

OUR PREDICTION: With a powerful lineup, an improved pitching rotation, and a chip on their shoulder from last year, the Mets are our pick to win their first World Series title since 1986.

GRADE: A



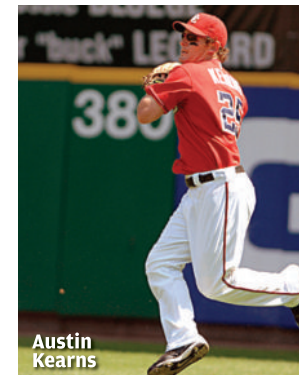
Johan Santana



Ryan Howard



Mark Teixeira



Austin Kearns



Scott Olsen

PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES

2007 RECORD: 89-73 (1ST)

WHAT'S GOOD: The Phillies led the NL in runs in 2007 (892) and could do it again in '08. 1B **Ryan Howard** (.268, 47 HR, 136 RBI) is a nightmare for opposing pitchers. The 2006 NL MVP is joined by the 2007 MVP, SS **Jimmy Rollins** (.296, 30, 94), and 2B **Chase Utley** (.332, 22, 103). **Brett Myers** returns to the rotation after serving as closer last season. He joins **Cole Hamels** (15-5, 3.39), who had a breakout season in '07.

WHAT'S BAD: The hot corner is a big concern for the Phillies. **Greg Dobbs** (.272, 10, 55) and **Wes Helms** (.246, 5, 39) contributed almost nothing at third in '07. And with CF Aaron Rowand off to San Francisco, the Phillies must shuffle their outfielders to find a combination that works.

OUR PREDICTION: The Phillies are talented but have too many positions up in the air to top the Mets.

GRADE: B

ATLANTA BRAVES

2007 RECORD: 84-78 (3RD)

WHAT'S GOOD: The Braves are trying to recapture past glory by re-signing former stars. Veteran C **Javy Lopez** returns to mentor and back up All-Star **Brian McCann** (.270, 18 HR, 92 RBI). Veteran pitcher **Tom Glavine** (13-8, 4.45 ERA with the Mets) rejoins **John Smoltz** (14-8, 3.11) in the rotation. 3B **Chipper Jones** (.337, 29, 102) still anchors the lineup, but now he has some help. 1B **Mark Teixeira** (.306, 30, 105 with the Rangers and Braves) is one of the league's most dangerous switch-hitters, and SS **Yunel Escobar** (.326) is one of the best young players in the Bigs.

WHAT'S BAD: All those veterans have the Braves looking a little long in the tooth. And the loss of CF Andruw Jones leaves the Braves with a huge gap to fill in the outfield and on offense.

OUR PREDICTION: The aging Braves will spend a third year in third place.

GRADE: B-

WASHINGTON NATIONALS

2007 RECORD: 73-89 (4TH)

WHAT'S GOOD: The Nationals are building a decent lineup around 3B **Ryan Zimmerman** (.266, 24 HR, 91 RBI). 1B **Dmitri Young** (.320, 13, 74) and 2B **Ronnie Belliard** (.290, 11, 58) are also dangerous. In the outfield, RF **Austin Kearns** (.266, 16, 74) provides defense and stability, and LF **Wily Mo Pena** (.253, 13, 39 with two teams) and CF **Lastings Milledge** (.272, 7, 29 with the Mets) will try to turn their talent and potential into every-day success. The workhorse bullpen led the NL in innings in 2007 (590.2) but still managed a respectable 3.81 ERA.

WHAT'S BAD: The rotation is stocked with injury-prone arms, and **Shawn Hill** (4-5, 3.42 ERA) is unproven as a Number 1 starter. The Nats don't have an established shortstop.

OUR PREDICTION: A .500 season is a possibility as the Nats take another small step forward.

GRADE: C

FLORIDA MARLINS

2007 RECORD: 71-91 (LAST)

WHAT'S GOOD: The Marlins are once again full of fresh talent but light on experience. This year, the position to watch is catcher, with **Mike Rabelo** and **Matt Treanor** looking to grab the starting slot. With a few years under their belts, SS **Hanley Ramirez** (.332, 29 HR, 51 steals) and 2B **Dan Uggla** (.245, 31 HR, 88 RBI) have made a name for themselves as a strong middle-infield combo.

WHAT'S BAD: The Marlins may get worse before they get better. They traded 3B Miguel Cabrera and former ace Dontrelle Willis to Detroit. Florida got some young talent in the deal but lost its biggest bat and most experienced arm. The remaining starters, led by **Scott Olsen** (10-15, 5.81 ERA), have good stuff but are inconsistent.

OUR PREDICTION: These fish lack seasoning and consistency. It adds up to a last-place finish.

GRADE: D+