

WILL THERE BE A MIRACLE ON LAKE ERIE?

LAST YEAR'S WORST TEAM HAS THIS YEAR'S BEST RECORD AFTER SEVEN WEEKS

ERIE, PENN. (June 20, 1864) – Throughout the National Base Ball Organization's seven years of existence there has, perhaps, been no single club with a more significant record of ineptitude than Lake Erie of the Inland Championship:

Year	League	W	L	WPct	Finish	GB	Exp Rec	Diff	Avg	ERA
<u>1857</u>	NBBO	24	46	.343	8th	28	30-40	-6	.274	3.64
<u>1858</u>	NBBO	28	42	.400	8th	20	30-40	-2	.280	3.69
<u>1859</u>	NBBO	23	47	.329	8th	17	26-44	-3	.288	4.55
<u>1860</u>	NBBO	22	48	.314	8th	23	28-42	-6	.289	4.38
<u>1861</u>	NBBO	30	40	.429	5th	16	27-43	3	.276	3.87
<u>1862</u>	NBBO	28	42	.400	8th	13	30-40	-2	.287	4.18
<u>1863</u>	NBBO	22	48	.314	8th	22	27-43	-5	.277	4.43

For those keeping score, Lake Erie has six last-place finishes in seven N.B.B.O. seasons, their best single-season record has been 30-40, they have never finished closer than thirteen games behind first place, and their cumulative record over seven years is 177-313 – a Winning Percentage of .361.

Lake Erie has had either the worst or joint-worst record in the Northeastern League three times, and last season they and the Oceanic club were the two worst teams in the N.B.B.O. at 22-48. Lake Erie scored the fewest runs in the N.E.L. while having the worst Batting Average, Slugging Percentage, & O.P.S. They also allowed the most Home Runs in the N.B.B.O.

Over the winter the Lake Erie president, Ernest McLaughlin, and general manager, Jonathan Key, made numerous decisions that everyone simply assumed was the club spinning its proverbial wheels ahead of the new season. First was the hiring of Trenton United Hitting Coach Walter Banis to be the team's new manager. What followed was a number of player moves:

- Fredo Eccelino (RF – 1861 All-Star) joined from Newark after a lineup replacement for him was recruited
- Perry Hockensmith (P) was named a starting pitcher after four seasons as a reliever for Lake Erie
- Bubba Mack (P) was made a starting pitcher after the 24-year-old had spent six years training for the role.
- John Murphy (LF – 2x Golden Glove) joined after Excelsior informed him he would be a backup
- Robert Perkins (C) was given the every-game catcher role for his second season with Lake Erie
- Franklin Petty (CF - #3 in N.o.t.Y. voting) was moved to the #4 position in the lineup at the age of 22
- Jari van der Sanden (3B) was signed – a Dutch immigrant playing independent base ball in Pennsylvania

The results so far in 1864 have been nothing short of astonishing:

- Lake Erie has the best record (25-10) & Run Differential (+92) in the N.B.B.O.
- Lake Erie currently has a three-game lead in the Inland Championship
- Lake Erie's offense is in the top five of the N.E.L. in Runs, Average, O.P.S, and Batting W.A.R.
- Lake Erie's pitching leads in the N.B.B.O. in Runs Allowed (198, 5.7 R/G)
- Lake Erie's defense ranks in the top-third of the N.E.L. in Errors (3rd), Efficiency (5th), & Zone Rating (8th)

As for the Lake Erie players, the individual results have also been astonishing:

- Second-year 1B Wilbur Graff is batting .406 with 35 R.B.I. & 1.5 W.A.R. (1863: .344, 36 R.B.I, 1.5 W.A.R.)
- Franklin Petty is on a pace for 76 R.B.I. (44 in 1863) and Golden Glove defense at CF
- Fredo Eccelino is batting .342/.381/.479 with 1.0 W.A.R. (.276/.315/.351, 0.1 W.A.R. in 1863)
- John Murphy is batting .331/.338/.449 with 0.8 W.A.R. (.273/.292/.368, 0.1 W.A.R. in 1863)
- Jari van der Sanden is batting .329 in his first season of organized base ball
- Robert Perkins is batting .320 in his first season as a regular catcher (.285 over 43 games in 1863)
- Perry Hockensmith is 12-2 with a 2.66 E.R.A. and 2.3 W.A.R. in his first season as a starting pitcher
- Bubba Mack is 11-3 with a 3.39 E.R.A. and 2.2 W.A.R. in his first season as a starting pitcher

Never in their wildest dreams did McLaughlin & Key imagine that their decisions would turn Lake Erie into a powerhouse during the first half of 1864, but their work is not done. Of the two teams sitting three games behind them and tied for second place, Reading has a better Run Differential (+59) than three of the other teams that are leading their regional championships and Susquehanna has the second-best Run Differential (+76) in the entire N.B.B.O. While it is true that the bottom of the Inland Championship has been very weak, it is also true that both Reading & Susquehanna have been playing extremely high-quality base ball.

If Lake Erie were to hold on and win the Inland Championship, they could complete a number of N.B.B.O. maiden voyages:

- First team to go from last place to first place in one season
- First team to go from worst record to best record in their league in one season
- First team to go from worst record to best record in the N.B.B.O. in one season
- First team to lead their league in Runs Allowed after being in the bottom five the previous season
- First team to be in the top five in their league in Runs Scored after being last in the previous season
- First team to double their win total from the previous season
- Largest single-season improvement in wins

The unthinkable start to Lake Erie's season has seen the team become the subject of general rooting interest for fans of struggling teams across the N.B.B.O, and if they indeed take the Inland pennant it will show everyone that any wayward organization can undergo a massive upturn in fortune in just one year.