

PLAY BALL! THE 1867 NBBO PREVIEW

TRIO OF TEAMS TIPPED TO WIN 50; STJ EXPECTED TO SET RECORDS; BROOKLYN TO BE VERY CLOSE

NORTHEAST U.S.A. (May 1, 1867) – Year number eleven of the National Base Ball Organization begins this afternoon, with the first pitch of the season occurring just after 1:00 PM in Hartford where Oceanic hosts Green Mountain.

The new season comes with some changes. For the people of Pittsburgh, Alleghany BC's venue, the Recreation Grounds, has been expanded by 10,000 seats to become the largest in the sport. For pitchers, the width of the Pitcher's Area has been cut in half but they may now move around before delivering the ball. For everyone, standards for the game ball have been tightened up so that balls have a more uniform size & weight on a game-to-game basis.

The 1867 season is expected to be something a bit closer to the seasons before last year. The Writers Pool has projected three teams to win 50+ games – Knickerbocker, Shamrock, & St. John's – but three of the six regional championships are expected to be decided by less than a handful of games. One region in particular, Brooklyn, is projected to have the top five teams finish within three games of each other.

The team to watch this year is St. John's. The base ball observers of New England appear to be unusually terrified of them, and they have projected the men from Providence to equal Knickerbocker's 1865 win-loss mark and have a record-breaking Run Differential in the process.

Celebrated Newcomers are expected to go straight to star status, with the already famed James Burke of Shamrock and Monroe Munson of Niagara projected in the top three talents in the NBBO at batter & pitcher respectively.

Hopefully for the fans, this season is a more competitive one than last. In the case of three of the six regions it looks like the fight for the pennant should be a long & difficult one, and ideally the teams of New York City and the Atlantic Coast can push Knickerbocker & Shamrock to their limits. Time will tell, and if all goes according to plan after the commissioner put clubs on notice over cash payments to players then it will indeed be a far more competitive season.

WRITERS POOL PREDICTIONS & GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

These are the teams that the Writers Pool has named the favorites to advance to the Tucker-Wheaton Cup:

- BROOKLYN: Excelsior – 41-29, 495 R, 399 RA (four teams 1-3 GB)
- N.Y.C: Knickerbocker – 51-19, 599 R, 365 RA (Orange 10 GB)
- UPSTATE: Niagara & Utica – 44-26, +100-120 RD (Flour City 4 GB)
- COASTAL: Shamrock – 50-20, 551 R, 345 RA (Port Jersey 8 GB)
- INLAND: Alleghany – 41-29, 636 R, 506 RA (three teams 1-4 GB)
- N. ENGLAND: St. John's – 57-13, 699 R, 390 RA (Sons of the Ocean 18 GB)

Five of the six postseason favorites won their regional championships last year. Niagara last won the Upstate Championship in 1863, while Utica last won it in 1861.

When asked for other observations about the upcoming season, here were the main talking points offered up by the 48-member NBBO Writers Pool:

- The twenty most talented batsmen in the NBBO: Konrad Jensen (OF, STJ), James Burke* (OF, SHA), Nelson Townsend (OF, STJ), Edward Huntley (SS, KNI), Anthony Mascherino (SS, SHA), Willie Davis (CF, AME), Royal Altman (OF, ALL), Peter Boyce (2B, AME), Samuel Kessler (3B, ALL), William Johnson (CF, STJ), Thomas Maloney (OF, MB), Everett Schreiber (C, ORA), Gerhardt Berg* (1B, SotO), Franklin Petty (CF, LE), Werner Verstegen (3B, AME), Cormack Alexander (1B, KC), Henry Nabors (SS, VIC), Mario Fusilli (1B, SYR), Isaac Kelly (3B, ECK), Francis Smith* (OF, MET) – * represents Newcomer
- The ten most talented pitchers in the NBBO: Jim Creighton (EXC), Monroe Munson* (NIA), Raymond Newbold* (ATL), Frank Keeler* (NIA), James Goodman (MIN), Tom Ricks (SHA), Elmer Seabold (SUS), Grover Wright (CON), Olaf Sorenson* (ATL), Fred Richards (ALL) – * represents Newcomer
- The ten best newcomers in the N.B.B.O: James Burke (26 y/o OF, SHA), Monroe Munson (24 y/o P, NIA), Frank Keeler (23 y/o P, NIA), Raymond Newbold (35 y/o P, ATL), Olaf Sorenson (26 y/o P, ATL), Gerhardt Berg (24 y/o 1B, SotO), Francis Smith (22 y/o OF, MET), Paul LaGuerre (26 y/o 1B, KNI), Lee Taylor (25 y/o P, SPO), Harvey

O'Donnell (24 y/o C, CAN)

- The ten best reserve squad prospects in the NBBO: Charles Sturch (22 y/o P, QS), George Cerven (21 y/o P, GOT), William Dickerson (20 y/o 3B, QS), Troy Oberst (20 y/o OF, MET), William Spears (20 y/o P, PJ), William Hatch (18 y/o P, GRA), Willie Gray (23 y/o P, FC), Charles Washer (19 y/o OF, MB), Fred Lydon (21 y/o CF, TU), Edward Pillsbury (21 y/o P, KNI)
- Brooklyn has the potential to be the most exciting regional championship fight in NBBO history. Thanks to winter improvements made by various clubs, the quartet of Bedford, Continental, Eckford, & Kings County are all expected to finish within three games of favored Excelsior, making for a five-way race to the pennant.
- Knickerbocker's surprising recruitment of five-time All-Star 3B Jerald Peterson, with two-time Team of the Year 3B Hugh Harris moving to OF as a result, has made Knickerbocker the clear favorites in NYC. They are considered to have top-five players at four positions: Paul LaGuerre at 1B (4th), Jerald Peterson at 3B (4th), Edward Huntley at SS (1st), & Hugh Harris at RF (5th). None of the 47 other teams can match that level of top-end talent.
- No surprise – Upstate is expected to be a fierce dogfight once again. Niagara are co-favorites because of their addition of two five-star indy pitchers: Frank Keeler & Monroe Munson. Utica are the other co-favorites because of continuity from their 42-28 team of last year. The only change in their lineup is at CF, where promising 23 year-old William Buschmann takes over. Flour City is expected to be a close 3rd because of their typically dominant offense. Defending champions Syracuse are expected to finish around .500 and in 4th place.
- After last year's dominance, Coastal is considered Shamrock's to lose after the addition of James Burke. Their defense is second to nobody, and Burke's debut season should add plenty to their attack. If another team gives them serious competition it is likely to be American, due to a lineup that features Peter Boyce, Willie Davis & Werner Verstegen.
- Alleghany is expected to top Inland for the third season in a row, but by a closer margin this time. There are questions about their #2 pitcher role, and the trio of Merrimack, Sportsman's, & Susquehanna all have some serious offensive talent and thus should have the ability to keep Alleghany within arm's length.

- On paper, New England should be a party for St. John's due to the talent that left other teams. The WP has projected them to match the 1865 Knickerbocker team's 57-13 record. They have also been projected to score 699 runs (9.9 R/G) – a record – and finish with a Run Differential of +309 (+4.4 R/G) – another record.
- James Burke hit .310 during preseason exhibition games, but the WP thinks he has what it takes to hit .400 during his debut season in Boston. He will be batting leadoff in the Shamrock order, and with his speed and the talent behind him in the order pitchers will want to avoid walking him at all costs, giving him plenty of good pitches to hit.
- Even though they play in one of the biggest Pitcher's Parks in the NBBO, Knickerbocker is projected to have three of the ten best batsmen in the NYL this season thanks to the additions of 1B Paul LaGuerre and 3B Jerald Peterson.
- Thomas Maloney could have a tremendous debut season with Mass. Bay. He is a .357 career hitter after ten seasons playing home games in pitcher's parks and neutral parks for Shamrock & Reading, but his new home of Oceanside Park has a LHB AVG Factor of 1.161, the biggest of any venue in the NBBO. This could be his second .400 season.
- After his performance with both ball and bat in the Tucker-Wheaton Cup last year, Excelsior is going to have Jim Creighton be the NBBO's first two-way player this season. He will be their #1 pitcher while playing 1B the other game. His career AVG of .341, OPS of .805, and WAR of 5.4 are the best batting marks for any pitcher.
- Kings County is expected to see an improvement of a dozen wins or more this season thanks to numerous offseason additions: 2B Romano Bessi from Mass. Bay, 3B Leen van Rooij from indy ball, SS Per-Olaf Bakken back from Orange, CF Alex Leininger from indy ball, & OF James Hoyt from Knickerbocker. They did not get Jerald Peterson to return with Bakken like they had hoped, but K.C. should be a much better team.
- If James Burke fails to live up to expectations, then this year's best new batsman might be Mitchell Schwarz, a 2B who will bat leadoff for Flour City and could make good use of their friendly confines for right-handed batsmen.
- Taliesin Buckley had a very good second half to the 1866 season, and the WP thinks that as a result his second season with Niagara could be one in which he is the very best batsman in the NYL.