

## 2009 International League Preview – North Division



### **BUFFALO BISON**

*www.Bisons.com*      **Affiliate:** New York Mets  
**Year in IL (Buffalo, NY):** 95<sup>th</sup>      **Record:** 7,000-6,558  
**Governors' Cups:** 6      **Last Cup:** 2004  
**2008 Finish:** 66-77, 5<sup>th</sup> in North (-21.5)  
**Manager:** Ken Oberkfell (1<sup>st</sup> year in Buffalo)  
**Coaches:** Ricky Bones (1<sup>st</sup> year), Luis Natera (1<sup>st</sup> year)  
**Ballpark:** Coca-Cola Field (18,150)

**Probable Starters:** 1B – Nick Evans; 2B – Andy Green; SS – Jose Coronado;  
3B – Rob Mackowiak; C – Robinson Cancel; LF – Fernando Martinez; CF – Cory Sullivan;  
RF – Bobby Kielty; DH – Jesus Feliciano.

**Key Pitchers:** *Starters* – LH Jon Niese, RH Brandon Knight, RH Nelson Figueroa,  
RH Dillon Gee, LH Casey Fossum, RH Freddy Garcia. *Relievers* – RH Connor Robertson,  
RH Eddie Kunz, RH Kyle Snyder.

**Strengths of the Club:** Manager Ken Oberkfell should have an abundance of starting pitching,  
particularly once Freddy Garcia makes his anticipated arrival in Buffalo following extended  
spring training. Last season the New Orleans pitching staff paced the Pacific Coast League with  
12 shutouts.

**Weaknesses of the Club:** Offense remains a question mark for the Mets' Triple-A club. Last  
season New Orleans finished last in the PCL with a .258 team average and scored the 2<sup>nd</sup>-fewest  
number of runs (635).....In particular, power seems to be a weakness of the starting lineup.

**Top Prospects:** Fernando Martinez, a 20-year-old Dominican outfielder, is rated as the Mets' top  
prospect. He has been injury prone at previous stops and may start 2009 in extended spring  
training to recover from an elbow injury suffered in the Caribbean World Series.....1B Nick  
Evans was impressive in 2008 and may even start the 2009 campaign in New York. If that  
occurs, he would be a likely candidate to be assigned to Buffalo when Livan Hernandez is  
activated for his start on April 11.....Lefty Jon Niese is a curveball specialist that is the probable  
opening day starter for the Bisons. Niese pitched 8.0 shutout innings in a September start last  
year against Atlanta.....22-year-old Dillon Gee has had an impressive spring despite making  
only eight starts at the Double-A level entering 2009. Gee was 10-6 with a 2.92 ERA between  
Class-A St. Lucie and Double-A Binghamton last season.....23-year-old SS Jose Coronado hit  
.308 in the Venezuelan Winter League, his first real success at the plate at any level.

**Other Organizational Prospects:** RHP Brad Holt was 5-3 with a 1.87 ERA at short-season  
Brooklyn in 2008, his first as a professional. Holt has an outside chance of finding his way to  
New York sometime this year.

**Veterans to Watch:** RHP Freddy Garcia, the former Chicago White Sox ace, will likely begin  
the year in extended spring training and then join Buffalo later in the season.....OF Bobby  
Kielty homered in Game 4 of the 2007 World Series for Boston.....OF Cory Sullivan has hit  
.279 in 355 games with the Rockies since 2005.....Rob Mackowiak is a longtime Major League  
utility player who can fill several roles for the Bisons.

**Items of Interest:** Buffalo has changed parent clubs for the first time since Cleveland came in  
1995. The Bisons have unveiled new blue and orange uniforms to highlight the new affiliation,  
including a new charging Buffalo logo. The Mets were affiliated with New Orleans for the last  
two seasons on the heels of 37 years in Norfolk.....The former Dunn Tire Park has been  
renamed Coca-Cola Field.....After going to the playoffs 9 times in the first 11 years with  
Cleveland (including three league championships), the Bisons missed out on the postseason the  
last three years.



### **LEHIGH VALLEY IRONPIGS**

*www.IronPigsBaseball.com*      **Affiliate:** Philadelphia Phillies  
**Year in IL (Allentown, PA):** 4<sup>th</sup>      **Record:** 112-211  
**Governors' Cups:** 0  
**2008 Finish:** 55-89, 6<sup>th</sup> in North (-33.0)  
**Manager:** Dave Huppert (2<sup>nd</sup> year in Lehigh Valley)  
**Coaches:** Greg Gross (2<sup>nd</sup> year), Rod Nichols (2<sup>nd</sup> year)  
**Ballpark:** Coca-Cola Park (10,000)

**Probable Starters:** 1B – Andy Tracy; 2B – Jorge Velandia/J.J. Furmaniak; SS – Jason Donald;  
3B – Terry Tiffée; C – Lou Marson; LF – Jeremy Slayden; CF – Rich Thompson;  
RF – John Mayberry; DH – Mike Cervenak.

**Key Pitchers:** *Starters* – RH Carlos Carrasco, RH Andrew Carpenter, RH Kyle Kendrick,  
LH J.A. Happ. *Relievers* – RH John Ennis, RH Mike Koplove, RH Gary Majewski.

**Strengths of the Club:** There will be plenty of veteran leadership returning, including Andy  
Tracy and Mike Cervenak from the 2008 IronPigs.....Expect better team speed than a year ago,  
as well as better power.....The starting rotation is potentially very solid, although it lacks much  
Triple-A experience (particularly if Happ makes the Phillies out of camp).....Lehigh Valley's  
Coca-Cola Park provides one of the best home atmospheres in the League.

**Weaknesses of the Club:** The overall lack of Triple-A experience could be a concern..... The  
bullpen is without an established closer. It was thought 2008 IL All-Star Blaine Neal could fill  
that role, but he was released after a disappointing spring.

**Top Prospects:** RHP Carlos Carrasco projects to be a top-of-the-rotation starter for the Phillies.  
*Baseball America* rates Carrasco as the organization's #2 prospect. He was 2-2 with a 1.72 ERA  
in six starts last year with Lehigh Valley.....C Lou Marson was an Eastern League All-Star in  
2008 (.314, 5 HR, 46 RBI) at Reading. He also threw out 36% of base stealers and hit .308 at the  
Olympics.....SS Jason Donald was also an Eastern League All-Star (.307, 14 HR, 54 RBI) and  
led his Olympic team with a .381 average. Donald went on to hit .407 with 5 HR and 15 RBI in  
Arizona Fall League action.....RHP Drew Carpenter enjoyed a strong season at Reading last  
year after a dismal start attributed to reporting out of shape. He made one late-season start at  
Lehigh Valley and also made his MLB debut in August.....OF John Mayberry, a former No. 1  
pick by Texas, has 82 HR and 257 RBI in his first four Minor League seasons.....OF Jeremy  
Slayden hit .298 with 17 HR and 81 RBI at Reading last year. He has led the team he's played on  
in RBI the last three seasons (Lakewood, Clearwater, Reading) and improved his home run total  
in each of his first four seasons.

**Other Organizational Prospects:** #1 overall prospect OF Michael Taylor is on the fast track  
after hitting .361 with 10 HR and 50 RBI in 67 games at Lakewood and .329 with 9 HR and 38  
RBI in 65 games with Clearwater. He will probably start this season at Double-A Reading.....  
LHP Antonio Bastardo has a career 2.61 ERA with 309 strikeouts in 255 IP.....RHP Patrick  
Overholt is working his way back from 2004 Tommy John surgery and could end up in LHV.

**Veterans to Watch:** Andy Tracy led the IronPigs in homers (22), RBI (85), and doubles (34)  
while hitting .288 last season.....Mike Cervenak finished 5<sup>th</sup> in the IL with a .311 batting  
average.....Rich Thompson hit .264 and stole 25 bases in 27 attempts.....John Ennis was 4-3  
with a 3.67 ERA in 40 appearances.....Last year Terry Tiffée won the Pacific Coast League  
batting championship with an amazing .378 average.....Several members of the pitching staff  
have Major League experience, including Majewski (who may make the Phillies).

**Items of Interest:** Reliever Mike Koplove is a Philadelphia native and sports fan. Koplove made  
his Major League debut (and got the win) on May 13, 2003 against the Phillies in Veterans  
Stadium.

## 2009 International League Preview – North Division



### **PAWTUCKET RED SOX**

*www.PawSox.com*      **Affiliate:** Boston Red Sox  
**Year in IL (Pawtucket, RI):** 37<sup>th</sup>      **Record:** 2,516-2,589  
**Governors' Cups:** 2      **Last Cup:** 1984  
**2008 Finish:** 85-58, Wild Card, lost to SWB in First Round  
**Manager:** Ron Johnson (5<sup>th</sup> year in Pawtucket)  
**Coaches:** Russ Morman (2<sup>nd</sup> year), Rich Sauveur (2<sup>nd</sup> year)  
**Ballpark:** McCoy Stadium (10,031)

**Probable Starters:** 1B – Jeff Bailey; 2B – Jeff Natale; SS – Gil Velasquez; 3B – Angel Chavez; C – Dusty Brown; LF Chris Carter; CF – Jonathan Van Every; RF – Zach Daeges; DH – Paul McNulty.

**Key Pitchers:** *Starters* – RH Clay Buchholz, RH Michael Bowden, RH Charlie Zink, RH Devern Hansack, RH Enrique Gonzalez. *Relievers* – RH Daniel Bard, LH Hunter Jones.

**Strengths of the Club:** Right-handers Clay Buchholz and Michael Bowden could give Pawtucket a solid 1-2 punch at the top of the rotation (unless Buchholz wins a job in Boston this spring).....The same thing goes for righty Daniel Bard and lefty Hunter Jones at the back end of the bullpen.....As evidenced in 2008, Chris Carter, Jeff Bailey, and Jonathan Van Every provide plenty of punch to the PawSox lineup. The trio combined for 75 long balls last season..... C Dusty Brown is coming off a solid season at bat and behind the plate. The starting catcher's position is his to lose.

**Weaknesses of the Club:** The infield is potentially weak at multiple positions.....Long relief is another question mark. It's unclear who will serve that role.....The starting rotation could be a major concern if Buchholz and Bowden are called to Boston at some point.

**Top Prospects:** RHP Michael Bowden, ranked as Boston's No. 2 prospect by *Baseball America*, has a plus fastball and the makings of a plus curveball. He jumped three levels last season to make his major league debut with Boston after splitting most of the season between Double-A Portland (9-4, 2.33 ERA, 101 strikeouts in 104 1/3 innings) and Pawtucket (0-3, 3.38 ERA, 29 strikeouts in 40 innings).....RHP Clay Buchholz struggled last season and ended up back in Pawtucket, going 4-2 in 9 games with a 2.47 ERA. He has four plus pitches but must develop consistency in order to land a permanent job with Boston.....RHP Daniel Bard topped out at 100 MPH during spring training. A potential closer for Pawtucket, Bard was converted from a starter to a reliever just last season (4-1 with seven saves, a 1.99 ERA, and 64 strikeouts after promotion to Portland on May 18).

**Other Organizational Prospects:** Other Red Sox prospects who could reach Triple-A this season include 1B Lars Anderson, OF Josh Reddick, LHP Kris Johnson, RHP Junichi Tazawa, and C Mark Wagner.

**Veterans to Watch:** OF/DH Chris Carter has nothing more to prove at Triple-A. He has hit consistently for power and average at every level, though he does leave something to be desired in the outfield.....1B/DH Jeff Bailey, the 2008 International League MVP, likewise has zero to prove in the minors. Bailey is a positive influence in the clubhouse.....RHP Charlie Zink, the League's reigning Most Valuable Pitcher, finally made his Major League debut last season. The knuckle-balling right-hander could position himself for another promotion if he continues to pitch well.

**Items of Interest:** 2009 marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pawtucket's last Governors' Cup championship, which came in 1984.....The PawSox will play in a pair of games outside the traditional IL circuit of ballparks. On June 14 Pawtucket will play Syracuse at Doubleday Field in Cooperstown, while on August 8 the PawSox battle Norfolk at Fenway Park in Boston.



### **ROCHESTER RED WINGS**

*www.RedWingsBaseball.com*      **Affiliate:** Minnesota Twins  
**Year in IL (Rochester, NY):** 122<sup>nd</sup>      **Record:** 8,955-8,505  
**Governors' Cups:** 10      **Last Cup:** 1997  
**2008 Finish:** 74-70, 3<sup>rd</sup> in North (-14.0)  
**Manager:** Stan Cliburn (4<sup>th</sup> year in Rochester)  
**Coaches:** Bobby Cuellar (1<sup>st</sup> year), Riccardo Ingram (2<sup>nd</sup> year)  
**Ballpark:** Frontier Field (10,840)

**Probable Starters:** 1B – Brock Peterson; 2B – Matt Macri; SS – Trevor Plouffe; 3B – Luke Hughes; C – Drew Butera; LF – Dustin Martin; CF – Jason Pridie; RF – David Winfree; DH – Justin Huber.

**Key Pitchers:** *Starters* – RH Anthony Swarzak, RH Kevin Mulvey, RH Jason Jones, RH R.A. Dickey. *Relievers* – LH Jose Mijares, LH Sean Henn, LH Ben Julianel, LH Mike Gosling, RH Tim Lahey, RH Bobby Keppel, RH Carmen Pignatello, RH Rob Delaney.

**Strengths of the Club:** Swarzak and Mulvey are a strong 1-2 combination leading the starting rotation.....The Wings will have a solid, defensive-minded outfield.....The offense should pack some power, led by Justin Huber. Luke Hughes also has power and can hit for average.....Matt Macri can play anywhere. Overall the team is very versatile, with many players capable of playing different positions.

**Weaknesses of the Club:** The bullpen is suspect at best.....The Red Wings will be weak offensively at the catcher position. Butera hit .219 at Double-A New Britain last year, four points higher than his career average.....The back end of the rotation is a question mark.

**Top Prospects:** Australian Luke Hughes hit 8 homers for Double-A New Britain in April 2008, then added 4 more in May. Two separate injuries delayed his promotion to Rochester, but he displayed strong power at Triple-A. The Twins added him to their 40-man roster last November.....OF Dustin Martin hit .290 with 10 homers and 72 RBI for New Britain. He also stole 22 bases. He came over from the Mets in the Luis Castillo trade in July 2007. Normally a center fielder, he'll move to left because of Pridie..... SS Trevor Plouffe, a Twins 1<sup>st</sup> round draft pick in 2004, has steadily made his way up the ladder. He can play second, short or third, and many think he could be the Twins' starting shortstop in 2010..... OF David Winfree hit 19 homers and drove in 87 runs for Double-A New Britain last year, and didn't turn 23 until August. He was moved from third base to right field at the start of the season, but it only seemed to help his offense.....RHP Anthony Swarzak has four big-league pitches, including a low-90's fastball and a devastating curve. He struggled at New Britain last year (3-8, 5.67 ERA) but shined in a surprise promotion to Rochester (5-0, 1.80 ERA).

**Other Organizational Prospects:** RHP Jeff Manship is a steady hurler who is 25-15 with a 2.91 ERA for his career. He averages 8 strikeouts and only 2.3 walks per nine innings.....INF Steve Tolleson is a career .280 hitter with good speed and some pop. He hit .300 at New Britain last year.

**Veterans to Watch:** Jason Pridie was voted the top defensive outfielder in the IL by the managers last year in a *Baseball America* poll. He was hitting .214 in May but batted .324 the final three months and could be one of the IL's top hitters again this season.

**Items of Interest:** Minnesota has produced a winner in Rochester five consecutive seasons. That's the longest stretch for the Red Wings since the 1966-76 clubs finished above .500 under Baltimore.....PBS cameras will follow the Red Wings this season for a reality show called "Minor League" set to air internationally next spring.....The Red Wings have won a record 10 Governors' Cups, but they haven't won one since 1997.

## 2009 International League Preview – North Division



### SCRANTON/WILKES-BARRE YANKEES

*www.SWBYankees.com*      Affiliate: New York Yankees  
Year in IL (Scranton/WB, PA): 21<sup>st</sup>      Record: 1,477-1383  
Governors' Cups: 1      Last Cup: 2008  
2008 Finish: 88-56, North Champs, def. PAW & DUR for Gov. Cup  
Manager: Dave Miley (3<sup>rd</sup> year in Scranton/WB)  
Coaches: Scott Aldred (1), Aaron Ledesma (1), Butch Wynegar (3)  
Ballpark: PNC Field (10,310)

**Probable Starters:** 1B – Juan Miranda; 2B – Kevin Russo; SS – Ramiro Pena/Doug Bernier; 3B – Justin Leone; C – Chris Stewart; LF – Todd Linden; CF – Austin Jackson; RF – Shelley Duncan; DH – Eric Duncan.

**Key Pitchers:** *Starters* – RH Phil Hughes, RH Ian Kennedy, LH Kei Igawa, RH Alan Horne, RH Jason Johnson. *Relievers* – RH Mark Melancon, RH Steven Jackson, RH Dave Robertson, RH Anthony Claggett.

**Strengths of the Club:** The pitching staff will once again be the strength of the Yankees club. The rotation will be led by prospects Phil Hughes and Alan Horne, along with two key members of the 2008 champion club in Ian Kenney and Kei Igawa. The bullpen shouldn't have any weak links.

**Weaknesses of the Club:** 2B Kevin Russo is unproven at the Triple-A level entering his fourth professional season..... The same goes for Ramiro Pena, the possible starter at shortstop.

**Top Prospects:** OF Austin Jackson is being billed as the Yankees center fielder of the future. Tutored by Reggie Jackson, Austin has helped lead Double-A Trenton to consecutive Eastern League Championships..... RHP Mark Melancon is being groomed as the next Mariano Rivera. Entering 2008 with just seven professional innings under his belt, and coming off of Tommy John surgery, Melancon was 8-1 at three levels and helped Scranton/Wilkes-Barre win the Governors' Cup in September..... RHP Phil Hughes is a former 1<sup>st</sup> round draft choice, and with the spring he had in 2009 he would have made the big league roster in most years. Hughes had a 2.19 ERA in big league camp.

**Other Organizational Prospects:** RHP Humberto Sanchez may make his way to Scranton/WB this season. In his only previous Triple-A experience, Sanchez went 5-3 with a 3.86 ERA in nine starts for Toledo in 2006..... LHP Michael Dunn got his first taste of Double-A baseball last season, winning his only appearance with Trenton. In three seasons Dunn has posted a career record of 20-12..... C Francisco Cervelli hit .315 for Trenton in his first-ever action above the Class-A level. Cervelli was even promoted to New York for the first three games of his Major League career..... RHP Eric Hacker was 7-4 with a 2.76 ERA at Double-A last season. He pitched (and won) one game for SWB in 2007.

**Veterans to Watch:** It's a make-or-break season for Eric Duncan, who will be a 6-year Minor League free agent come the fall. Duncan hit .233 with 11 HR and 60 RBI for the SWB Yankees a year ago. He enjoyed a terrific spring in 2009..... Shelley Duncan (no relation) is no longer on New York's 40-man roster. After hitting 37 home runs for SWB the past two seasons, Duncan is playing for a job in 2009.

**Items of Interest:** Scott Aldred takes over as Scranton/Wilkes-Barre's pitching coach in 2009. Aldred is entering his fourth season as a coach in the Yankees organization. Last year he helped guide Double-A Trenton to an Eastern League-best 3.13 ERA en route to the League Championship.



### SYRACUSE CHIEFS

*www.SyracuseChiefs.com*      Affiliate: Washington Nationals  
Year in IL (Syracuse, NY): 95<sup>th</sup>      Record: 6,353-6,908  
Governors' Cups: 8      Last Cup: 1976  
2008 Finish: 69-73, 4<sup>th</sup> in North (-18.0)  
Manager: Tim Foli (1<sup>st</sup> year in Syracuse)  
Coaches: Darnell Coles (1<sup>st</sup> year), Steve McCatty (1<sup>st</sup> year)  
Ballpark: Alliance Bank Stadium (11,071)

**Probable Starters:** 1B – Brad Eldred; 2B – Pete Orr; SS – Freddie Bynum; 3B – Joel Guzman; C – Luke Montz; LF – Roger Bernadina; CF – Justin Maxwell; RF – Ryan Langerhans; DH – Jorge Padilla.

**Key Pitchers:** *Starters* – RH Tyler Clippard, LH Michael O'Connor, RH Marco Estrada, LH Gustavo Chacin, RH Josh Towers, RH Collin Balester. *Relievers* – RH Ryan Wagner, RH Gary Glover, LH Justin Jones, RH Preston Larrison, RH J.D. Martin.

**Strengths of the Club:** The Chiefs seem to have a nice blend of speed and power in the lineup. Manager Tim Foli's club should be able to put up a lot of runs this year..... The infield is made up of a nice core of veteran players, particularly the likes of Eldred, Orr, and Guzman.

**Weaknesses of the Club:** Even with the veterans, the Chiefs will still have a pretty young team in 2009, most notably amongst the outfielders and pitchers. How quickly will the young talent be able to adjust to Triple-A?

**Top Prospects:** LF Roger Bernadina was an undrafted free agent in 2001, but last year he made his Major League debut (hitting .211 in 26 games). He batted .323 for Double-A Harrisburg in 73 games last year, then hit .351 in 47 games with Columbus. He stole a career-high 40 bases for Harrisburg in 2007..... CF Justin Maxwell was limited to just 43 games last season because of injuries. Maxwell was a 4<sup>th</sup> round pick out of Maryland in 2005 and made his Major League debut with the Nationals in 2007..... RHP Collin Balester was a 4<sup>th</sup> round selection in 2004, and has been rated as the #3 prospect in the Washington system. He made his Major League debut last season, a year in which he went 9-3 in 15 starts for Columbus.

**Other Organizational Prospects:** RHP Jordan Zimmerman is considered by many to be Washington's top prospect. He went 7-2 with a 3.21 ERA in 20 starts for Double-A Harrisburg last season, and is likely on the fast track to the big leagues..... LHP Ross Detwiler also has a pretty high ceiling, and has hopes of being in the big leagues by September..... Other prospects who could be in Syracuse later this season include OF Leonard Davis and SS Ian Desmond.

**Veterans to Watch:** 1B Brad Eldred has been one of the International League's top power threats in recent years. Last season with Charlotte he paced the circuit with 35 home runs and 100 RBI to earn a spot on the IL Postseason All-Star Team..... 3B Joel Guzman also has plenty of pop. He hit 20 homers and drove in 72 runs last season for Durham..... OF Cory Patterson still has good speed, and his presence is a positive for youngsters like Bernadina and Maxwell..... RHP Gary Glover is a solid presence in the bullpen and will be a good sounding board for younger pitchers..... RHP Josh Towers provides similar leadership in the starting rotation.

**Items of Interest:** After 31 seasons affiliated with the Toronto Blue Jays, a new era begins in Syracuse with the arrival of the Washington Nationals..... The Chiefs will participate in the second annual Cooperstown Classic, squaring off against Pawtucket on Sunday, June 14 at Doubleday Field.

## 2009 International League Preview – West Division



### **COLUMBUS CLIPPERS**

*www.ClippersBaseball.com*      **Affiliate:** Cleveland Indians  
**Year in IL (Columbus, OH):** 49<sup>th</sup>      **Record:** 3,642-3,282  
**Governors' Cups:** 7      **Last Cup:** 1996  
**2008 Finish:** 69-73, 3<sup>rd</sup> in West (-18.0)  
**Manager:** Torey Lovullo (1<sup>st</sup> year in Columbus)  
**Coaches:** Jon Nunnally (1<sup>st</sup> year), Scott Radinsky (1<sup>st</sup> year)  
**Ballpark:** Huntington Park (10,100)

**Probable Starters:** 1B – Jordan Brown; 2B – Luis Valbuena; SS – Juan Merchan; 3B – Wes Hodges; C – Chris Gimenez; LF – George Lombard; CF – Michael Brantley; RF – Matt LaPorta; DH – Michael Aubrey.

**Key Pitchers:** *Starters* – LH David Huff, LH Aaron Laffey, LH Jeremy Sowers, RH Kirk Saarloos, RH Jack Cassel. *Relievers* – LH Tony Sipp, RH Matt Herges, RH Vinnie Chulk, LH Rich Rundles, RH John Meloan.

**Strengths of the Club:** The offense could be off the charts depending on how often the Columbus-to-Cleveland shuttle runs this season. It has nice blend of speed and power with solid contact hitters in the mix.....The chance to jump the shuttle should be a good incentive for Huff, Laffey and Sowers to form the front end of a very good Triple-A rotation.....The number of prospects and overall youth, especially among position players, should make this an enjoyable season for manager Torey Lovullo.

**Weaknesses of the Club:** Youth sometimes means inconsistency, and that could drive Lovullo crazy.....Top pitching prospect Adam Miller looked like he would be the Columbus closer until he had complications from surgery on the middle finger of his right hand. The 2009 season probably begins with a closer-by-committee approach.

**Top Prospects:** RF Matt LaPorta, acquired from Milwaukee in the CC Sabathia trade, is the top power-hitting prospect in the organization. He could be in Cleveland this season.....LHP David Huff appears to have passed Laffey and Sowers on the Indians' depth chart. He was a 1<sup>st</sup> round supplemental draft pick in 2006.....CF Michael Brantley was also part of the Sabathia trade. The speedy son of former major leaguer Mickey Brantley has the potential to lead off.....3B Wes Hodge, a 2<sup>nd</sup> round pick in the 2006 draft, has jumped a level each season and comes to Columbus after batting .290 with 18 homers and 97 RBI at Akron last season. His defense has yet to catch up with his offense.....2B Luis Valbuena was acquired from Seattle in a three-way deal that included the Mets. Last season Valbuena rose from Double-A to Triple-A and finished the year with the Mariners. He has speed, good defensive range, and is a contact hitter.....LHP Tony Sipp has recovered from Tommy John surgery in 2007 and could reach Cleveland this season.....OF Trevor Crowe will likely begin 2009 with the Indians, but when David Dellucci returns from an injury Crowe may be ticketed for Columbus.

**Other Organizational Prospects:** Other Indians prospects who could reach Triple-A this season include C Carlos Santana, RHP Frank Herrmann, LHP Ryan Edell, and RHP Josh Tomlin.

**Veterans to Watch:** Pitchers Matt Herges, Vinnie Chulk, Kirk Saarloos, and Jack Cassel, along with former Clippers Andy Cannizaro and George Lombard, were all veteran free agents signed for character as much as their ability to help the Major League club if called upon to do so.

**Items of Interest:** A new era begins in Columbus baseball history in 2009. The Clippers have said goodbye to Cooper Stadium and hello to Huntington Park, the team's new home in downtown Columbus' Arena District.....Many local fans are also delighted to see the Clippers partner with the Cleveland Indians.....The new affiliation also means new logos and uniforms, bringing about the end of the Clippers in pinstripes.



### **INDIANAPOLIS INDIANS**

*www.IndyIndians.com*      **Affiliate:** Pittsburgh Pirates  
**Year in IL (Indianapolis, IN):** 13<sup>th</sup>      **Record:** 873-857  
**Governors' Cups:** 2      **Last Cup:** 2000  
**2008 Finish:** 68-76, 4<sup>th</sup> in West (-20.0)  
**Manager:** Frank Kremblas (1<sup>st</sup> year in Indianapolis)  
**Coaches:** Jeff Branson (1<sup>st</sup> year), Ray Searage (2<sup>nd</sup> year)  
**Ballpark:** Victory Field (15,500)

**Probable Starters:** 1B – Steve Pearce; 2B – Shelby Ford; SS – Brian Bixler; 3B – Neil Walker; C – Robinson Diaz; LF – Jeff Salazar; CF – Andrew McCutchen; RF – Garrett Jones; DH – Andy Phillips.

**Key Pitchers:** *Starters* – RH Virgil Vasquez, LH Tom Gorzelanny, RH Daniel McCutchen, RH Jimmy Barthmaier, RH Brian Slocum. *Relievers* – RH Evan Meek, RH Chris Bootcheck, RH Jesse Chavez, RH Denny Bautista, LH Dave Davidson.

**Strengths of the Club:** The Indians look to have a very balanced offense with legitimate power threats and consistent on-base guys mixed throughout. It's also important to note that of the projected starters, all but one has Triple-A experience.....How strong the rotation is going to be is questionable, but the Pirates have noted that they like the starting depth in Triple-A much more now than in years past. Gorzelanny, just two years removed from a 14-win season, will lead the rotation and is looking to regain his once-dominant form. McCutchen has the stuff to get out Major League hitters already, but just needs to refine his approach.

**Weaknesses of the Club:** Other than McCutchen, the Indians don't have enough speed on this club to be much of a threat to steal often. McCutchen, who was caught trying to steal a League-leading 19 times last year, will continue to refine his base stealing approach.

**Top Prospects:** Andrew McCutchen, 22, is starting his second season in Triple-A. The five-tool outfielder is expected to be in Pittsburgh at some point in 2009.....Steve Pearce, MiLB's Minor League Player of the Year in 2007, had a bit of a decline in production in 2008. He's still splitting time between first base and right field to increase his value to the Pirates, but it is his bat and power that will carry Pearce.....3B Neil Walker is Major League-ready defensively, despite this being just his third full season there. However, the Pirates would like to see more consistency offensively from the 2004 1<sup>st</sup>-round pick.....Shelby Ford profiles as a player who doesn't have a lot of power but gets on base consistently..... Daniel McCutchen, acquired from the Yankees last July, is a command pitcher with a fearless approach. He relies heavily on a three-pitch mix: fastball, changeup, and breaking ball.

**Other Organizational Prospects:** Other Pirates prospects who could reach Triple-A this season include OF Jose Tabata, 3B Pedro Alvarez, RHP Brad Lincoln, RHP Jeff Sues, LHP Daniel Moskos.

**Veterans to Watch:** A back injury may have cost Andy Phillips a spot on the Pirates Opening Day roster. The utility man can play first, second, third, left, or right field.....Jeff Salazar, a former Rockies prospect, dropped twenty pounds in the offseason while improving his speed. He's also reverting to his former batting stance in an attempt to help him drive the ball better.

**Items of Interest:** Frank Kremblas becomes the 58<sup>th</sup> manager in Indians history this year, having also played in Indianapolis from 1993-96. Another former Indian, Jeff Branson, is also a new coach.....Garrett Jones is nearing some personal Minor League milestones. He is 34 games away from 1,000, 29 runs scored away from 500, 99 hits away from 1,000, four home runs away from 500, and 20 RBI away from 600.....Andy Phillips is also approaching some career milestones. He needs 30 more hits to reach a career-mark of 900 and 11 more RBI to reach a career total of 500.

## 2009 International League Preview – West Division

### LOUISVILLE BATS



**www.BatsBaseball.com**      **Affiliate:** Cincinnati Reds  
**Year in IL (Louisville, KY):** 17<sup>th</sup>      **Record:** 1,193-1,100  
**Governors' Cups:** 1      **Last Cup:** 2001  
**2008 Finish:** 88-56, West Champs, lost to DUR in First Round  
**Manager:** Rick Sweet (5<sup>th</sup> year in Louisville)  
**Coaches:** Smokey Garrett (7<sup>th</sup> year), Ted Power (4<sup>th</sup> year)  
**Ballpark:** Louisville Slugger Field (13,200)

**Probable Starters:** 1B – Kevin Barker/Wes Bankston; 2B – Danny Richar; SS – Paul Janish/Luis Bolivar; 3B – Adam Rosales/Michael Griffin; C – Craig Tatum/Humberto Cota; LF – Drew Anderson; CF – Norris Hopper; RF – Drew Stubbs/Shawn Cumberland; DH – Lance Nix.

**Key Pitchers:** *Starters* – RH Daryl Thompson, LH Matt Maloney, LH Adam Pettyjohn, RH Ramon Ramirez, LH Ben Jukich. *Relievers* – RH Josh Roenicke, RH Carlos Fisher, RH Justin Mallett, RH Robert Manuel, LH Pedro Viola.

**Strengths of the Club:** Starting pitching and veteran leadership will be the team's strengths. Four of the Bats' potential starters were with Louisville last season and Thompson, Pettyjohn and Ramirez all pitched for the Reds at some point during the 2008 season. Kevin Barker, Lance Nix, Norris Hopper and Drew Anderson are veterans who will help lead Louisville's young players such as Drew Stubbs, Michael Griffin and Shawn Cumberland. Adam Rosales and Paul Janish are two young infielders who had their first taste of the big leagues last year with the Reds.

**Weaknesses of the Club:** Depth could be a weakness as some of the organization's Double-A players (such as Chris Valaika, Yonder Alonso, Todd Frazier and Sam Lecure) may not be ready for Triple-A if they're needed sooner than the Reds anticipated.

**Top Prospects:** Drew Stubbs, selected by the Reds 8<sup>th</sup> overall in the 2006 draft, entered the 2009 season rated the 3<sup>rd</sup> best prospect in the organization. Last season he played at three levels (Sarasota, Chattanooga, and Louisville) and was named MVP of the Florida State League All-Star Game. In 19 games with the Bats, he batted .293 with 2 HR and 10 RBI.

**Other Organizational Prospects:** Todd Frazier was a *Baseball America* high Class-A All-Star in 2008 and twice was named FSL Player of the Week. He batted .291 combined at Class-A Dayton and Double-A Sarasota, while hitting 19 home runs and knocking in 74 runs. Yonder Alonso enters 2009 rated as the organization's No. 1 prospect by *Baseball America*. He played in six games with Class-A Sarasota last season, batting .316 with two RBI. In 2008 Chris Valaika received the Chief Bender Award as the organization's Minor League Player of the Year. He batted .317 combined with Sarasota and Chattanooga with 18 HR and 81 RBI.

**Veterans to Watch:** Kevin Barker, Louisville's MVP last season, is the franchise's all-time leader with 151 extra base hits, 260 RBI, six multi-home run games (tied), and four grand slams (tied). He is 2<sup>nd</sup> in team history with 67 HR and 4<sup>th</sup> in runs scored with 221. LHP Adam Pettyjohn returns after leading the IL with 15 wins. The 15 wins tied Ralph Citarella (1982) for the most wins in franchise history. OF Darnell McDonald is still fighting for a spot with the Reds, but could end up in Louisville. He appeared in 93 games with Rochester last season, batting .268 with 11 home runs, 25 doubles and 57 RBI.

**Items of Interest:** The 2009 season is the 10<sup>th</sup> at Louisville Slugger Field and as a Cincinnati Reds affiliate. Barring rainouts or cancellations, the Louisville franchise will play its 4,000<sup>th</sup> game on August 27 versus Columbus. The Louisville franchise has won 1,935 regular season games, meaning win #65 will get the franchise to 2,000 wins. This season is the fourth straight year the team's coaching staff has stayed intact. Manager Rick Sweet (5<sup>th</sup> season), hitting coach Smokey Garrett (7<sup>th</sup> season) and pitching coach Ted Power (4<sup>th</sup> season) are all back.



### TOLEDO MUD HENS

**www.MudHens.com**      **Affiliate:** Detroit Tigers  
**Year in IL (Toledo, OH):** 46<sup>th</sup>      **Record:** 3,005-3,347  
**Governors' Cups:** 3      **Last Cup:** 2006  
**2008 Finish:** 75-69, 2<sup>nd</sup> in West (-13.0)  
**Manager:** Larry Parrish (7<sup>th</sup> year in Toledo)  
**Coaches:** Leon Durham (9<sup>th</sup> year), A.J. Sager (2<sup>nd</sup> year)  
**Ballpark:** Fifth Third Field (10,300)

**Probable Starters:** 1B – Ryan Roberson; 2B – Will Rhymes; SS – Brent Dlugach/Danny Worth; 3B – Mike Hessman; C – Dusty Ryan; LF – Wilkin Ramirez; CF – Clete Thomas; RF – Brent Clevlen; DH – Ryan Raburn/Timo Perez.

**Key Pitchers:** *Starters* – RH Chris Lambert, RH Ron Chiavacci, RH Ruddy Lugo, LH Lucas French, RH Scot Drucker. *Relievers* – RH Freddy Dolsi, RH Casey Fien, LH Clay Rapada, LH Fu-Te Ni, RH Nick Rigilio, RH Matt Rusch.

**Strengths of the Club:** Offense shouldn't be a problem thanks to hitters such as Hessman, Raburn, Perez and Clevlen. All are experienced and should provide both power and high averages. The outfield defense should be excellent with Raburn, Thomas and Clevlen available. Hessman at third and either Dlugach or Worth at shortstop will make the left side of the infield solid defensively. The bullpen looks solid with Dolsi a potential closer and experienced relievers such as Fien, Rapada and Rigilio available.

**Weaknesses of the Club:** The rotation is a question mark because of its inexperience and lack of depth. RHP Eddie Bonine, originally thought to be slated for the Toledo rotation, made the Tigers roster this spring. The middle-infield combination of Rhymes at second and either Dlugach or Worth at shortstop is inexperienced, as is Ryan Roberson at first. How will manager Larry Parrish find playing time for all of the outfielders on the roster?

**Top Prospects:** OF Wilkin Ramirez is considered the 6<sup>th</sup>-best prospect in Detroit's organization by *Baseball America*. Ramirez hit .303 with 19 HR, 73 RBI, and 26 steals for Double-A Erie last season. C Dusty Ryan is ranked 9<sup>th</sup> by *Baseball America*. He hit 15 home runs for Erie, then batted .315 for the Mud Hens and .318 in Detroit. RHP Freddy Dolsi spent most of last season with the parent Tigers, collecting a pair of saves and posting a 3.97 ERA in 42 games.

**Other Organizational Prospects:** If they struggle in Detroit, the Mud Hens may see RHP Rick Porcello and RHP Ryan Perry. They are the two top prospects in the Tigers organization and considered among the best young pitchers in baseball. Two of Detroit's best middle infield prospects, SS Cale Iorg (3<sup>rd</sup> by BA) and 2B Scott Sizemore (7<sup>th</sup> by BA) will begin the season with Double-A Erie.

**Veterans to Watch:** 3B Mike Hessman has been voted to the IL's Postseason All-Star team each of the past two seasons after crushing more than 30 home runs both years. He was the IL MVP in 2007. OF Ryan Raburn was named to the IL's mid-season All-Star Team in 2006 and 2007 and is a proven Triple-A home run threat. OF Timo Perez has hit .300 or better for Toledo each of the past two seasons and was a mid and postseason IL All-Star. RHP Chris Lambert won 12 games for Toledo last year and finished 5<sup>th</sup> in the IL with a 3.50 ERA. OF Brent Clevlen hit 22 home runs and collected 82 RBI for the Mud Hens last season. RHP Ron Chiavacci won 12 games for the Hens in 2007 and finished 3<sup>rd</sup> in the League in wins, 4<sup>th</sup> in strikeouts (126), and 5<sup>th</sup> in ERA (3.39).

**Items of Interest:** *Baseball America* ranked Toledo's Fifth Third Field as the fourth-best ballpark in Minor League Baseball. A new scoreboard has been added in left field for 2009. In March the Hens extended their affiliation with Detroit through the 2012 season. The two teams have been partners since 1987.

## 2009 International League Preview – South Division



### **CHARLOTTE KNIGHTS**

*www.CharlotteKnights.com*      **Affiliate:** Chicago White Sox  
**Year in IL (Charlotte, NC):** 17<sup>th</sup>      **Record:** 1,116-1,161  
**Governors' Cups:** 2      **Last Cup:** 1999  
**2008 Finish:** 63-78, T-3<sup>rd</sup> in South (-9.5)  
**Manager:** Chris Chambliss (1<sup>st</sup> year in Charlotte)  
**Coaches:** Richard Dotson (2<sup>nd</sup> year), Gary Ward (1<sup>st</sup> year)  
**Ballpark:** Knights Stadium (10,002)

**Probable Starters:** 1B – Ben Broussard; 2B – Eider Torres; SS – Gordon Beckham; 3B – Dayan Viciedo; C – Cole Armstrong; LF – Michael Restovich; CF – David Cook; RF – Josh Kroeger; DH – Brian Myrow.

**Key Pitchers:** *Starters* – LH Aaron Poreda, RH Lance Broadway, RH Jack Egbert, LH Wes Whisler, RH John Van Benschoten. *Relievers* – RH Justin Cassel, RH Jon Link, RH Ehren Wassermann, RH Adam Russell, RH Franklyn German.

**Strengths of the Club:** Lefty Aaron Poreda will lead a very talented starting pitching rotation that includes Wes Whisler (12-game winner in the IL in 2008) and Lance Broadway (19 wins in Charlotte since 2007). Righty Jack Egbert is reportedly healthy following offseason surgery..... The Knights will have some power in the lineup. 3B Dayan Viciedo is a raw, power hitting rookie from Cuba. OF David Cook was among the organization's home run leaders in 2008 (19 between Double-A and Triple-A). Last season, SS Gordon Beckham led all NCAA Division 1 players with 28 home runs.

**Weaknesses of the Club:** The White Sox farm system isn't very deep with outfield prospects. Expect the Charlotte outfield corps to consist mainly of veterans..... There isn't much speed in the lineup. 2B Eider Torres is the only regular who stole more than 20 bases last season..... Middle relief may also be a concern, depending on who the White Sox promote to the majors.

**Top Prospects:** SS Gordon Beckham is the top prospect in the White Sox organization. At the University of Georgia, Beckham finished among the NCAA 2008 leaders in homers (T-1<sup>st</sup>, 28), runs (2<sup>nd</sup>, 97), total bases (2<sup>nd</sup>, 221), hits (4<sup>th</sup>, 113), and slugging (5<sup>th</sup>, .803). He was the 8<sup>th</sup> overall selection in the June draft, and last fall he was named to the Arizona Fall League Top Prospects team..... RHP Jon Link joins the staff after a successful Double-A season in 2008. Link led all Minor Leaguers with 35 saves and was named to the Southern League mid and post-season All-Star teams..... LHP Aaron Poreda is considered one of the organization's top prospects, thanks in large part to his ability to consistently reach 95 miles per hour with his fastball.

**Other Organizational Prospects:** OF Jordan Danks (younger brother of White Sox pitcher John Danks) was a 2008 draft choice from the University of Texas. Danks hit .325 with low Class-A Kannapolis and .308 in the Arizona Fall League..... C Tyler Flowers was acquired in a trade with the Braves. Flowers has been cited by ESPN.com as the #51 prospect in baseball. Last season he hit 17 home runs for Class-A Myrtle Beach.

**Veterans to Watch:** John Van Benschoten hopes to follow in the footsteps of Gavin Floyd and John Danks by finding new success in the Chicago organization. He's a former Pirates 1<sup>st</sup>-round pick..... OF Josh Kroeger is a former 4<sup>th</sup>-round pick of the Arizona Diamondbacks. In 2008 with Triple-A Iowa, Kroeger hit .307 with 15 home runs and 69 RBI.

**Items of Interest:** 3B Dayan Viciedo faces a big adjustment. It has been less than a year since the 20-year-old Viciedo defected from Cuba..... The Knights will be led in 2009 by a new manager in Chris Chambliss. Chambliss is a former All-Star with the New York Yankees. He also was hitting coach for the Yankees during their last four World Series championships in 1996, 1998, 1999 and 2000.



### **DURHAM BULLS**

*www.DurhamBulls.com*      **Affiliate:** Tampa Bay Rays  
**Year in IL (Durham, NC):** 12<sup>th</sup>      **Record:** 831-744  
**Governors' Cups:** 2      **Last Cup:** 2003  
**2008 Finish:** 74-70, South Champs, lost to SWB in Finals  
**Manager:** Charlie Montoyo (3<sup>rd</sup> year in Durham)  
**Coaches:** Xavier Hernandez (3<sup>rd</sup> year), Dave Myers (1<sup>st</sup> year)  
**Ballpark:** Durham Bulls Athletic Park (10,000)

**Probable Starters:** 1B – Chris Richard; 2B – Adam Kennedy; SS – Reid Brignac; 3B – Elliot Johnson; C – John Jaso; LF – Jon Weber; CF – Ray Sadler; RF – Justin Ruggiano; DH – Matt Joyce.

**Key Pitchers:** *Starters* – LH David Price, RH Wade Davis, RH Mitch Talbot, LH Carlos Hernandez, LH Jason Cromer. *Relievers* – RH Dale Thayer, RH Jason Childers, LH Randy Choate, RH Calvin Medlock.

**Strengths of the Club:** The pitching will be solid, both in the starting rotation and in the bullpen. Newcomers to the rotation include Carlos Hernandez (2-1 with a 1.04 ERA for Class-A Vero Beach) and Jason Cromer (5-3 with a 3.96 ERA at Double-A Montgomery). The bullpen includes two of the IL's top relievers from a year ago in Dale Thayer (3-1, 2.77 ERA, 9 saves) and Jason Childers (4-2, 2.72 ERA, 17 saves for Charlotte), both members of the 2008 IL All-Star Team..... Manager Charlie Montoyo says the club should have a good number of "professional hitters", such as Ruggiano, Richard, and Weber.

**Weaknesses of the Club:** There shouldn't be many glaring weaknesses on the Bulls this year, except perhaps the lack of a player capable of stealing 30 bases at the top of the lineup.

**Top Prospects:** LHP David Price went from being the first overall pick of the 2007 draft to pitching in the 2008 World Series. Price went 12-1 with a 2.30 ERA between three Minor League levels last season, including a 1-1 record in four starts with Durham..... RHP Wade Davis was Tampa Bay's Minor League Pitcher of the Year in 2007. Last season he went 9-6 with a 3.85 ERA for Double-A Montgomery, starting the Southern League All-Star Game along the way. He was also stellar in Durham, going 4-2 with a 2.72 ERA. *Baseball America* ranks Davis as the Rays' 3<sup>rd</sup>-best prospect..... SS Reid Brignac was an International League mid and post-season All-Star in 2008..... C John Jaso was a Double-A All-Star in 2007 for the Montgomery club that won the Southern League Championship.

**Other Organizational Prospects:** OF Fernando Perez was among the fastest players in the IL last season. Perez hit .288 and stole 43 bags, tied for 3<sup>rd</sup> in the League. A wrist injury has sidelined Perez for 4-5 months, but if he returns this season he would likely see time in Durham.

**Veterans to Watch:** Questions surround SS Reid Brignac concerning whether or not he can regain the combination of power and average he displayed at lower levels of the minors. Brignac hit .326 with 21 HR and 83 RBI for Class-A Visalia in 2006. In his first season at Triple-A in 2008, Brignac hit .250 with 9 HR and 43 RBI..... If 3B Elliot Johnson can improve upon his three-to-one strikeout-to-walk ratio, it could mean a big season. He struck out 105 times in 107 games in 2008..... RHP Mitch Talbot was 13-9 with a 3.86 ERA last season, but he needs to prove he can avoid the occasional nightmare outing among otherwise solid starts.

**Items of Interest:** Durham has been part of the last two Governors' Cup Finals, but came up short in 2007 (to Richmond) and 2008 (to Scranton/Wilkes-Barre). The Bulls have missed the playoffs only three times in their first 11 seasons in the International League.

## 2009 International League Preview – South Division



### **GWINNETT BRAVES**

*www.GwinnettBraves.com*      **Affiliate:** Atlanta Braves  
**Year in IL (Lawrenceville, GA):** 1<sup>st</sup>      **Record:** 0-0  
**Governors' Cups:** 0  
**2008 Finish (Richmond):** 63-78, T-3<sup>rd</sup> in South (-9.5)  
**Manager:** Dave Brundage (1<sup>st</sup> year in Gwinnett)  
**Coaches:** Derek Bothelo (1<sup>st</sup> year), Jamie Dismuke (1<sup>st</sup> year)  
**Ballpark:** Gwinnett Stadium (10,427)

**Probable Starters:** 1B – Barbaro Canizares; 2B – Brooks Conrad/J.C. Holt; SS – Diory Hernandez; 3B – Van Pope/Wes Timmons; C – Clint Sammons/Alvin Colina; LF – Brandon Jones, CF – Jordan Schafer/Gregor Blanco; RF – Reid Gorecki; DH – Joe Borchard/Matt Young.

**Key Pitchers:** *Starters* – RH Tommy Hanson, LH Jo-Jo Reyes, RH Todd Redmond, RH Charlie Morton, RH Kris Medlen. *Relievers* – RH Luis Valdez, LH Mariano Gomez, RH Manny Acosta, RH Vladimir Nunez.

**Strengths of the Club:** Gwinnett should have an excellent pitching staff, both in the rotation and in the bullpen. LHP Jo-Jo Reyes and RHP Charlie Morton both have previous success pitching in the International League, as does reliever RHP Manny Acosta, one of the heroes for the IL at the 2007 Triple-A All-Star Game.

**Weaknesses of the Club:** Don't expect this club to launch a lot of home runs. While the lineup consists of several good hitters, there isn't much power.

**Top Prospects:** RHP Tommy Hanson is rated by *Baseball America* as the #4 overall prospect in baseball. Hanson had a great spring with Atlanta on the heels of being named the Arizona Fall League MVP. Hanson will start the season in Gwinnett but is certainly destined for Atlanta at some point.....OF Jordan Schafer may open the season in Atlanta after a great spring. Schafer has put his 50-game suspension from last year behind him along with a finger injury he sustained in the Mexican Summer League.....RHP Kris Medlen is also ranked among Atlanta's top ten prospects by *Baseball America*. Medlen has the versatility to fit in as a starter, swingman, or reliever depending on the club's needs. In 2008 he went 7-8 with a 3.52 ERA for Double-A Mississippi, striking out 120 batters in 120 IP.

**Other Organizational Prospects:** Atlanta wants to keep CF Gorkys Hernandez and SS Brandon Hicks at Double-A Mississippi for most of 2009, but both players appear ready for Triple-A. Hernandez, along with Jordan Schafer, is among the premier center field prospects in baseball today.....A pair of 19-year-old future stars, OF Jason Heyward and 1B Freddie Freeman will open the year at Class-A Myrtle Beach. Freeman hit .316 and drove in 95 runs for low Class-A Rome in 2008.

**Veterans to Watch:** OF Joe Borchard is coming off of Tommy John surgery. Borchard is a veteran of 301 games in the Major Leagues (with the White Sox and Marlins) and 640 games at the Triple-A level (with Charlotte, Albuquerque, and Richmond).....2B Brooks Conrad has been a staple of the Pacific Coast League for the past four years, during which time he's averaged just under 24 home runs per season.....1B Barbaro Canizares hit .300 last season and led Richmond with 67 RBI, helping him earn a trip to the Triple-A All-Star Game.

**Items of Interest:** The brand new Gwinnett Stadium is right on schedule and should be one of the best in the minors. 37 miles separate Gwinnett Stadium from Atlanta's Turner Field. The field dimensions of the two parks are identical.....Gwinnett County, Georgia has nearly one million residents, lying to the northeast of downtown Atlanta.



### **NORFOLK TIDES**

*www.NorfolkTides.com*      **Affiliate:** Baltimore Orioles  
**Year in IL (Norfolk, VA):** 41<sup>st</sup>      **Record:** 2,904-2,742  
**Governors' Cups:** 5      **Last Cup:** 1985  
**2008 Finish:** 64-78, 2<sup>nd</sup> in South (-9.0)  
**Manager:** Gary Allenson (3<sup>rd</sup> year in Norfolk)  
**Coaches:** Mike Griffin (1<sup>st</sup> year), Dallas Williams (4<sup>th</sup> year)  
**Ballpark:** Harbor Park (12,067)

**Probable Starters:** 1B – Oscar Salazar; 2B – Donnie Murphy; SS – Blake Davis; 3B – Craig Brazell; C – Matt Wieters; LF – Nolan Reimold; CF – Justin Christian; RF – Luis Montanez; DH – Scott Moore.

**Key Pitchers:** *Starters* – RH David Hernandez, RH Brad Bergesen, RH David Pauley, RH Chris Tillman, LH Chris Waters, RH Jason Berken. *Relievers* – RH Bob McCrory, RH Radhames Liz, RH Jim Miller, RH Kam Mickolio, RH Andy Mitchell.

**Strengths of the Club:** This team should be able to hit, pitch and field well. Loaded with up-and-coming players, the Tides will be completely different than they were in the first two years as an Orioles affiliate. A group of starting pitchers from Double-A Bowie will move up a level along with Baysox pitching coach Mike Griffin. They will be throwing to Matt Wieters, who is considered the best prospect in baseball.

**Weaknesses of the Club:** The team should have no glaring weaknesses. Many of these players are familiar with each other, so chemistry should not be a problem. The Tides, by virtue of the Orioles' recent strategy of building their farm system, are built to win and compete for the Governors' Cup.

**Top Prospects:** *Baseball America's* 2008 Minor League Player of the Year was C Matt Wieters, who combined to hit .355 with 27 HR and 91 RBI in Class-A and Double-A; not bad for his first full professional season. Wieters is also the publication's top prospect in all of baseball entering 2009. He is a polished switch-hitter, and his above-average arm behind the plate gunned down 46% of base stealers in the Carolina League and 32% in the Eastern League. While he isn't the most athletic of catchers, he figures to find his way to Baltimore sometime this season.....Also ranked among *Baseball America's* top 25 prospects in baseball is RHP Chris Tillman, acquired in the trade that sent Erik Bedard to Seattle. Tillman went 11-4 with a 3.18 ERA at Double-A Bowie last year. The 2<sup>nd</sup> round draft pick in 2006 won't turn 21 until the second week of the season.....RHP Kam Mickolio, also part of the Bedard deal, can reach 97 MPH with his fastball and compliments it with an above-average slider.

**Other Organizational Prospects:** RHP Jason Berken had a nice effort last year in Double-A Bowie, going 12-4 with a 3.58 ERA and 125 strikeouts. Berken should make his Triple-A debut at some point in 2009.

**Veterans to Watch:** 1B Oscar Salazar was an International League All-Star in 2008, establishing himself as one of the circuit's top offensive threats. Salazar was 2<sup>nd</sup> in the IL with a .316 average and tied for 5<sup>th</sup> with 85 RBI. He also hit .284 with 5 homers in 34 games with the Orioles, just his second stint in the big leagues (.190 in 8 games for Detroit in 2002).

**Items of Interest:** Last season Harbor Park surrendered the fewest long balls in the International League (0.83 per game), but an offseason change may make things a bit easier for hitters. A new party deck in right field has pushed the fence in from 338' down the line to '318. The deck will provide fans with outstanding views of the field and the Elizabeth River.