

Los Angeles Dodgers

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2009 Dodgers Projections

Record: 79-83

Division Rank/Games Behind: 3rd, 6 games back

Runs Scored: 721, 12th in the league

Runs Allowed: 757, 8th in the league

Park Factor: .98, still a pitcher's park, but not like it used to be.

What Happened Last Year:

The Dodgers won the National League West title with an 84-78 record, edging the Arizona Diamondbacks by two games. Los Angeles swept the Chicago Cubs in the NLDS but was beaten by the Philadelphia Phillies in five games in the NLCS.

The NL West champs scored 700 runs and allowed 648, which computes to a Pythagorean win-loss record of 87-75. The team fell short of its expected win total based on run differential due to a 19-24 record in games decided by one run and a 6-12 record in extra-inning contests. Keeping the small sample size in mind, the poor record in close contests is more likely a function of bad luck than any inherent deficiency in the makeup of the club's personnel or management. All else being equal (which it never is), one would expect the Dodgers to win a few more games in 2009 than they did in 2008.

The Dodgers' success was built on run prevention. The club allowed fewer runs than any other team in the NL last year. The pitching staff was fifth in strikeouts (1,205) while giving up the second-fewest walks (480) and the fewest number of home runs (123). More than anything else, it was the latter stat category that separated the Dodgers from the league. The next-closest competitor allowed 20 percent more long balls.

The Dodgers also had a pronounced home/road split, going 48-33 at home and 36-45 on the road. L.A. tied Cincinnati and Colorado for the fourth biggest home and away differential. Look no further than the number of runs allowed at home (3.27 per game) vs. the road (4.73) for the reason why the Dodgers performed so well in Chavez Ravine and so poorly outside of Los Angeles. Amazingly, the team's offense actually scored more runs at home (4.33/game) than on the road (4.31).

All in all, it was a mixed season for the Dodgers. The team, which was 67-70 as it entered the final month of the season, tied the Phillies for the best record in baseball during September (17-8). While it would be easy to point to the acquisition of Manny Ramirez as the reason for the huge improvement, it must be noted that the Dodgers were only 13-16 in August and going nowhere fast. L.A.'s fantastic finish explains why the club spent only 40 days atop the NL West all season long. Arizona, on the other hand, was in first place for 154 days, yet found itself on the outside looking in at the conclusion of the regular season.

Players Lost from Last Year's Team:

Unless the Dodgers don't retain slugger Ramirez, the biggest loss will be Derek Lowe, who averaged 200-plus innings with a FIP under 4.00 during a four-year contract that former GM Paul DePodesta wisely negotiated. The shiny Brad Penny—the one that started the 2007 All-Star Game for the NL—will also be missed. But the tarnished Penny—the one that went 6-9 with a career-high 6.27 ERA in 2008—wasn't worth keeping around. As such, he was tossed in the “take one, leave one” jar.

Takashi Saito was non-tendered and his production over the past three seasons will be difficult, if not impossible, to replace. He has been one of the best and most cost-effective relievers in the majors during his tenure with the Dodgers. Closers like Saito don't fall out of trees or Japan too often. Also missing from last year's outstanding bullpen will be Joe Beimel, Chan Ho Park, and Scott Proctor.

Infielders Jeff Kent (retirement), and Nomar Garciaparra (free agency or retirement) are big names but neither produced as expected last year. Angel Berroa, who was signed last summer to help fill in for the injured Rafael Furcal, was also non-tendered. He is nothing more than a replacement-level player and won't be missed in the least.

Greg Maddux, who announced his retirement on the first day of the winter meetings, will be missed more by the game of baseball than the Dodgers, who picked him up in a waiver deal with the Padres in August. He made just seven starts, going 2-4 with a 5.09 ERA. It was the second time in three years that the four-time Cy Young Award winner had joined the Dodgers during the stretch drive.