

PLAY BALL! THE 1868 NBBO PREVIEW

NORTHEAST USA (May 6, 1868) – The National Base Ball Organization enters its twelfth season of play on Wednesday afternoon, and it will bring with it another winter of changes on & off the field while more fans than ever before expected to attend games in 1868.

Ahead of the new season, more tweaks have been made to pitching. The Pitcher's Area is now a square 6' by 6' area, and the pitcher may lift a foot off the ground while making his delivery. Also, home plate remains a plate, but it will now be a square 12" plate that can be made of any hard substance – not just iron – so long as it is painted white.

Defending champions Knickerbocker remain the most talented team in the NBBO, but they have made two changes to their lineup after Hugh Harris & Albert Jones left. They have been replaced by 3x All-Star Luc Billon and eleven-year vet James Heilman, both top-ten talents at their corner outfield spots.

If Knickerbocker wins NYC again, it will not be without a big fight from Gotham, who overhauled their pitching with Carl Bancroft & Rainer van der Hout while adding venerable champion 1B Collin Henderson, 2x All-Star CF Hiram Majors, and 4.5-star newcomer Clive Strachan to the lineup.

Kings County is projected to lead Brooklyn for the first time in four years, with the additions of SS Henry Fitzgerald & P James Peters, as well as the debut of five-star prospect Garfield Koonce, anticipated to put them back on top even though they lost Cormack Alexander to Quaker State. In Upstate NY, Niagara's winter overhaul that included 1864 MVP 1B Walter Driscoll, 3x All-Star 2B/SS Ernest Lewis, and 2x All-Star C Wilbert Schrader has made them heavy favorites.

The other four projected regional champions are repeats from last year, with Alleghany & St. John's tipped to be the 1868 season's two 50-win teams thanks to their perennially dominant offensive attacks.

It should be another fantastic season of base ball in the NBBO.

NEW YORK LEAGUE PROJECTIONS

NORTHEASTERN LEAGUE PROJECTIONS

BROOKLYN	W	L	PCT	GB	R	RA	RD	COASTAL	W	L	PCT	GB	R	RA	RD
Kings County	47	23	.671	--	610	407	+203	Shamrock	46	24	.657	--	562	394	+172
Excelsior	46	24	.657	1	595	458	+137	American	45	25	.643	1	652	511	+141
Continental	35	35	.500	12	517	544	-27	Mass. Bay	41	29	.586	5	593	510	+73
Atlantic	34	36	.486	13	520	550	-30	Trenton United	34	36	.486	12	485	562	-77
Bedford	32	38	.457	15	466	496	-30	Newark	32	38	.457	14	461	543	-82
Eckford	31	39	.443	16	492	556	-74	Olympic	31	39	.443	15	442	527	-85
Empire	28	42	.400	19	468	547	-79	Quaker State	27	43	.386	19	512	639	-127
Nassau County	28	42	.400	19	475	587	-112	Port Jersey	26	44	.371	20	453	575	-122
N.Y.C.	W	L	PCT	GB	R	RA	RD	INLAND	W	L	PCT	GB	R	RA	RD
Knickerbocker	46	24	.657	--	582	427	+155	Alleghany	50	20	.714	--	620	424	+196
Gotham	45	25	.643	1	552	381	+171	Pioneer	37	33	.529	13	479	451	+28
Orange	45	25	.643	1	551	409	+142	Merrimack	37	33	.529	13	462	479	-17
Hilltop	32	38	.457	14	430	499	-69	Lake Erie	34	36	.486	16	541	514	+27
Metropolitan	31	39	.443	15	466	479	-13	Susquehanna	33	37	.471	17	527	505	+22
Union	31	39	.443	15	443	480	-37	Scranton	32	38	.457	18	438	526	-88
Mutual	26	44	.371	20	471	654	-183	Sportsman's	31	39	.443	19	509	559	-50
Harlem	25	45	.357	21	457	623	-166	Reading A.C.	28	42	.400	22	458	576	-118
UPSTATE	W	L	PCT	GB	R	RA	RD	N. ENGLAND	W	L	PCT	GB	R	RA	RD
Niagara	49	21	.700	--	601	395	+206	St. John's	52	18	.743	--	631	423	+208
Flour City	41	29	.586	8	571	502	+69	Oceanic	42	28	.600	10	529	457	+72
Syracuse	36	34	.514	13	507	484	+23	S.o.t.O.	37	33	.529	15	520	503	+17
Victory	36	34	.514	13	502	490	+12	Green Mtn.	35	35	.500	17	527	528	-1
Minuteman	34	36	.486	15	473	503	-30	Quinnipiac	34	36	.486	18	501	538	-37
Utica	34	36	.486	15	494	526	-32	Portland	30	40	.429	22	504	538	-34
Binghamton	32	38	.457	17	501	542	-41	Granite	27	43	.386	25	449	572	-123
Eagle	19	51	.271	30	399	605	-206	Cantabrigians	25	45	.357	27	475	595	-120

Four of six regional favorites – ALL, KNI, SHA, STJ – made the Tucker-Wheaton Cup last year. Kings County has won Brooklyn six times, last in 1864, and the TWC twice (1860-61). Niagara has won Upstate NY once (1863).

WRITERS POOL PREDICTIONS & GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

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 most talented batsmen in both leagues at each position (*represents newcomer):

NYL – C: Everett Schreiber (24 y/o, ORA), 1B: Mario Fusilli (30 y/o, SYR), 2B: Anderson MacGyver (33 y/o, MUT), 3B: Jerald Peterson (33 y/o, KNI), SS: Edward Huntley (32 y/o, KNI), OF: Clive Strachan* (25 y/o, GOT), CF: Taliesin Buckley (31 y/o, NIA), OF: Francis Smith (23 y/o, MET)

NEL – C: Harvey O'Donnell (25 y/o, CAN), 1B: Cormack Alexander (28 y/o, Q.S.), 2B: Peter Boyce (25 y/o, AME), 3B: Samuel Kessler (32 y/o, ALL), SS: Anthony Mascherino (29 y/o, SHA), OF: Royal Altman (26 y/o, ALL), CF: Willie Davis (31 y/o, AME), OF: Konrad Jensen (28 y/o, STJ)

- The ten most talented pitchers in the NBBO (*represents newcomer):

Jim Creighton (27 y/o, EXC), James Goodman (30 y/o, MIN), Tom Hauser* (26 y/o, AME), Monroe Munson (25 y/o, NIA), Tom Ricks (29 y/o, SHA), William Tighe (30 y/o, STJ), Sammie Cato* (26 y/o, G.M.), Elmer Seabold (24 y/o, SUS), Grover Wright (34 y/o, CON), Peadar Daly (32 y/o, KNI)

- The ten best newcomers in the NBBO:

Clive Strachan (25 y/o OF, GOT), Tom Hauser (26 y/o P, AME), Garfield Koonce (23 y/o 1B, K.C.), Sammie Cato (26 y/o P, G.M.), Martin Hales (24 y/o P, BIRM), William Johannessen (24 y/o P, VIC), Dennis Foster (24 y/o P, UNI), Reginald Roper (22 y/o OF, F.C.), Charles Hormel (25 y/o OF, GOT), Tarmo Kuopio (27 y/o 1B, STJ)

- The ten best reserve squad prospects in the NBBO:

Frank Bulger (21 y/o 2B, SHA), Charles Sturch (23 y/o P, Q.S.), George Cerven (23 y/o P, GOT), William Hatch (20 y/o P, GRA), William Spears (21 y/o P, P.J.), Will Dickerson (21 y/o 3B, Q.S.), Troy Oberst (21 y/o OF, MET),

Sherman Friday (20 y/o P, CON), Gerald Strong (22 y/o SS, ALL), Washington Kihlstedt (22 y/o P, SPO)

- Brooklyn is projected to return to the top of Brooklyn because of their changes and Excelsior's roster. Brooklyn added quality Atlantic SS Henry Fitzgerald and underrated Eagle P James Peters, and even though they lost Cormack Alexander they have potential .375 hitter Garfield Koonce taking over first base in his first season as a senior player.

Meanwhile, Excelsior added former Orange All-Star Ralph Hunt to their outfield and have brought on highly-rated newcomer Gino Cappelletti to play 3B, but they go into Opening Day ranked in the bottom third of the NBBO at three positions: C (35th/48), 2B (37th/48), & LF (45th/48). If they make the cup, it will be solely due to Jim Creighton.

- Knickerbocker is favored to take New York City for the fourth straight year, but it will be a tough fight. Hugh Harris left for Massachusetts Bay after refusing to become a full-time OF and Albert Jones joined Quaker State after eleven years as a regular in the Knick OF. They have been replaced by 3x All-Star Luc Billon and dependable veteran OF James Heilman (N.C. 1857-63, K.C. 64-65, SUS 66-67). Their lineup should be almost as good as last season while still having excellent pitching & defense.

Gotham has responded to Knickerbocker's recent dominance with a roster overhaul. They have recruited 3x Champion & All-Star 1B Collin Henderson from St. John's, added 4x All-Star P Carl Bancroft, signed champion P Rainer van der Hout, brought in 2x All-Star & Golden Glove CF Hiram Majors, and gained the services of a pair of highly-talented newcomer OFs: 4.5-star Clive Strachan & 3.0-star defensive specialist Charles Hormel. The changes should make them the toughest team in the NYL to score against, and that could allow them to overtake Knickerbocker.

Orange is expected to finish a game behind Knickerbocker because of their infield. Everett Schreiber has been rated the most talented C in the sport, 1B Hawk Peterson is a 3x All-Star, 2B Ilari Morino is an above-average player at the position, 3B Will Chaffin is nearly a top-five talent, and SS Jake Johnson is one of the best defenders at his position.

- In a departure from the norm, Upstate NY is expected to belong to one team: Niagara. Their winter additions of 3x All-Star & 1x MVP Walter Driscoll, 3x All-Star middle infielder Ernest Lewis, 2x All-Star C Wilbert Schrader, and ten-year veteran OF Will Maier have made the team easily the most talented in New York outside of the metro area.

- Shamrock is expected to win Coastal once again, but they should be in a tough battle with American and possibly Mass. Bay. They lost Golden Glove 3B Jerrick Stoner but have replaced him with respectable veteran Ralph Weber: an upgrade with the bat but a bit of a downgrade with the glove. They have also made hard-hitting backup William McCrory their new 1B, and the team hopes that trading a bit of defense for some offense will win them the TWC.

American added five-star newcomer Tom Hauser as their #1, and that means they now have top-three players no less than five positions: 1B William Busby (2nd/48), 2B Peter Boyce (1st), 3B Werner Verstegen (2nd), CF Willie Davis (1st), & P Hauser (3rd/48 #1 P's). However, they are in the bottom third of the NBBO at three other positions – C (33rd), SS (40th), & LF (39th) – which leaves them with a boom-or-bust lineup that could just as easily be historically good or fall short of Shamrock again.

Massachusetts Bay made some fine winter additions to address their club-worst 6th place finish last year. Their new C is talented Dutch newcomer Falco van der Vaart (#6 C), fellow newcomer George Carver should be a very dependable glove at 1B if nothing else, Franklin Skaggs could be a top-five RF, former Knick Hugh Harris should return to All-Star form now that he will be a full-time 3B again, and former Harlem CF Harold Severson should give them a fine glove even if his bat work is lacking. Their only big weakness is at 2B.

Quaker State looks great on paper. The top of their order – Greg Rohrmann, Albert Jones, Cormack Alexander, & Ned Morganti – is as good as any in the NBBO. However, they have the 42nd-ranked 2B & 3B, their infield defense is likely to be an issue, and their pitching is just okay. That will hurt them in the very deep Coastal Championship.

- Inland should be all Alleghany. Now that Arthur Waltrip is on the wrong side of 35 and has lost some OF range, the team has brought in highly regarded CF Joe Thatcher. That means they have quality defense across the outfield, and Thatcher's bat should be a healthy upgrade over the OF he is replacing: Harmon Melville. Retaining the Altman-Duffy-Kessler-Waltrip quartet means they will score loads of runs, and the pitching duo of Fred Richards & Jonathan Scott should be very good.
- No surprise at the top of New England: St. John's is favored to waltz into the postseason. They lost Collin Henderson but have replaced him with Finnish newcomer Tarmo Kuopio, whose bat and 1B defense could be just as good. 24-year-old SS John Baddley, previously a backup, looks ready to be a regular and should be great with the glove. Cathan Morgan, who was excellent in limited starts last season, should do well as their new 2B. As always, their outfield of

Jensen, Johnson, & Townsend is easily the best in the NBBO and should propel them to another season of 600+ runs.

The one potential New England surprise is that Oceanic, who has never finished in the top half of the standings, looks like they could be a solid 2nd-place team. Oceanic did not make any major additions over the winter, but on paper their defense is outstanding and other teams in the region have lost quality players.

- This could be the year that Jim Creighton crosses two major single-season milestones. After pitching a record 361 innings last season, he has been tipped to become the first pitcher to win more than 30 games in a season – John Anderson won 30 in 1857 – and also to become the first pitcher to strike out more than 150 batters in a season.
- Five-star prospect Garfield Koonce will be the man to watch as Kings County tries to take the Brooklyn pennant back from Excelsior. He is expected to be one of three NYL first basemen, the others being Mario Fusilli (SYR) & Ilkka Kivivuori (BING), to hit .375 this season. He is projected to have an OPS slightly over .900.
- Famed newcomer Clive Strachan is seen as a Batsman of the Year candidate in the NYL. He has been projected to have a .360 average, an OPS in the mid .900s, and nearly 50 stolen bases in his debut season with Gotham.
- William Busby is viewed as a serious Triple Crown threat in the NEL. After leading the league in HR's & RBI last season, he is projected to be among the league leaders in average while driving in nearly 90 runs and becoming the first player to hit 10+ home runs in a season. Doing so would guarantee him BotY honors.