

EXCELSIOR & GOTHAM THE TEAMS TO WATCH IN '61

PAIR OF N.Y. METRO TEAMS EXPECTED TO BE MOST IMPROVED IN N.B.B.O.

BROOKLYN & NEW YORK CITY (April 10, 1861) – During the National Base Ball Association offseason many teams stay mostly the same at the top end of their roster, but that does not mean that those who wish to bring in new players or improve at specific positions do not have ample opportunities to do so. Examples of such can be found in the two teams expected to improve more than any other as the N.B.B.O. heads into April Training: Excelsior & Gotham.

Excelsior B.B.C. was the second-worst team in the entire N.B.B.O. last season, finishing 19-51 with a Run Differential of -145 (-2.1 R/G). Thanks to additions made over the winter, the Writers Pool thinks the Brooklyn-based team could finish around the .500 mark this season, which would be a sixteen-win improvement. The Excelsior improvement is expected thanks to six new additions to their starting lineup:

- Henry Andrews: RF for Knickerbocker B.B.C. 1857-60 – 1859 N.Y.L. All-Star
- Wesley Leone: 25 y/o Scouting Discovery rated 3.5 stars as a 3B
- John Murphy: LF for Nassau Co. 1858-60 – 1858 Golden Glove (LF), expected to start at CF
- Lou Springer: 1B for Scranton B.C. 1858-60
- Ruby Watson: C for Nassau Co. 1858-60 – 1858 N.Y.L. Team of the Year
- John Williams: SS for Quaker St. 1857-60 – 1857 N.E.L. Team of the Year, 1859 N.E.L. All-Star

There is a bit of a gamble involved in the signing of most of the above players. Aside from Leone, four of the five N.B.B.O. veterans who signed with Excelsior are players who experienced a fall-off in their level of play in 1860. Andrews' average fell from .314 to .288, and his W.A.R. from 1.3 to 0.5. Murphy's average fell from .350 to .267 and his O.P.S. from .808 to .639 – a 169-point dive. Watson went from T.o.t.Y. form two years ago to Nassau County's backup catcher last year. Williams' average & O.P.S. saw decreases similar to Murphy's: average from .339 to .276 (63 pts.) and O.P.S. from .808 to .642 (166 pts.).

Excelsior signed the players with the idea that their play in 1860 was an aberration and not representative of a permanent change to their abilities. If all four return to pre-1860 form, Excelsior could beat the Writers Pool projection of a .500 record. If the quartet struggle once again this season, then Excelsior might not see the upturn in fortunes that they are hoping for.

Gotham B.B.C. was a decent side in 1860. They were 36-34, finishing third in the New York City Championship at eight games behind Mutual. However, as base ball's oldest existing club – they were formed in 1837 – the front office feels their finishes of 6th, 5th, 6th, & 3rd over the four years of N.B.B.O. have not been good enough. An ambitious plan was undertaken to improve the senior squad with newcomers over the winter, and based on returns everything went according to plan:

- Hamish Barclay: 28 y/o Newcomer rated 4.5 stars as 2B – 70 Contact, 65 Gap, 65 2B Fielding
- Taliesin Buckley: 24 y/o Newcomer rated 4 stars as LF – 65 Contact, 60 Gap, 80+ Baserunning, 65/75 LF Fielding
- Sullivan Jackson: 28 y/o Newcomer rated 3.5 stars as 3B – 65 Contact, 60 Gap, 60 3B Fielding
- Wilbert Schrader: 25 y/o Newcomer rated 3.5 stars as C – 65 Contact, 45 Gap, 50 C Fielding
- William Titus: 24 y/o Newcomer rated 3/3.5 stars as P – 40/50 Stuff, 75 Movement, 65 Control

Gotham is not anticipated to win sixteen more games like Excelsior, but thanks to their crop of highly regarded first-year players the Writers Pool is anticipating them to be one of the two favorites to win the always highly competitive New York City Championship this season. The main question with Gotham's group of greenhorns is: will their fielding be up to par? Barclay & Jackson are regarded as a bit above average at their positions, while Schrader is seen as a strictly average backstop whose batting ability makes him a potential star. Buckley is the one new signing who observers think could be very good at his place in the field.

The batsmanship of the new signings is expected to significantly improve the Gotham offensive attack. The team scored 448 runs last year (6.4 R/G), and this year the Writers Pool's preliminary report has Gotham scoring 525-550 runs, which would be an increase of at least one run per game. On top of that, new pitcher Titus is expected to be someone whose control & command will allow him to be a consistent #1 pitcher for Gotham.

Two teams & two different methods to improve their squads over the winter. Either way, Excelsior & Gotham look to be the two most improved sides in the National Base Ball Organization for 1861.