**PIPPIN’S NOTHING BUT A DOG - 2019**

The season’s just getting started and things are already beginning to shake out in a way that looks an awful lot like this author’s expectations for the final standings.

The tiers are:

**Better Luck Next Year:**

Angry Young Men/Buddha - The weaknesses are simply too overwhelming to sustain a shot at the title, but there are ingredients for future greatness in each of these teams. Expect them both to consolidate and look to 2020.

**The Drive for Five:**

Brats/Klein/Lubeasts – Each of these teams has enough deficiencies to make a run for the roses just a little out of reach. But the Drive for Five seems like a readily attainable goal.

**In or Out??:**

Nukes - Can they pull a Riptorn-esque turnaround and go from what was clearly a rebuilding effort at the draft to a run for the Damon? The ingredients are here – it’s just a question of whether the Nukes are willing to take the shot.

**Bridesmaids:**

Calamari/Hoosiers – Two teams with the chance to challenge for the Damon, but will likely come up just a little bit short. Each team would need both of the top dogs to slip and then a few lucky breaks for their own teams. But it wouldn’t take much for these teams to find their way to the top.

**Mano a Mano (Round 7):**

Berliners/Bombers – The top two slots have been occupied by some combination of the Berliners and the Bombers 6 previous times, including last year. If things proceed according to form, 2019 will mark the 7th time. The current standings are 4-2 Berliners. This author says the Bombers narrow the gap this year…..but he also predicted that outcome last year.

**Individual Team Assessments:**

10th – Buddha – Guerrero, Bauers, Sanchez and Ohtani provide plenty of reason for optimism, but the pitching is way too weak (Gibson, Cessa, Norris, Scott, etc.) to hope for much beyond a climb out of the dungeon.

9th – Angry Young Men – A potentially promising campaign fell apart quickly with the injuries to Upton, Severino and Strickland. The Severino injury is the most devastating since it leaves the AYM with a rotation dependent upon the arms of guys like Harvey, King Felix and Carlos Rodon. Better luck next year.

8th – Klein Nine – The offense is plenty good enough to contend, but at what cost. The Klein Nine’s continuing attempts to put together a pitching staff with spit and string is once again destined to fail. When two of your best three starters are Jake Junis and Jake Odorizzi and the ace is Marco Gonzalez, well….enough said.

7th – Brats – Coming into the draft, the Brats seemed like the team to beat, but the additions left a lot to be desired: Nunez and Adrianza in the middle infield (ugh), Voit and White in the corners (yuck) and Vazquez and Viloria at catcher (blech) and you have your answer as to why this team went from contender to pretender.

6th – Nukes – Will he or won’t he? The pitching is awesome (Snell, Sale, Clevinger) and the offense is built around Mookie Betts and a few top bats like Schoop, Cron, Choo and Martin. The problem is that there are lots of holes in the offense. But if the Nukes mortgage the future and try to plug those holes, they could surprise.

5th – Lubeasts – A little hubris and what happens? Olson breaks his hamate bone and Volquez’ season ends early. If Keuchel ends up in the AL things will get a little more interesting and if Moncada and Jimenez are as good as they look, things will get even more interesting. But this team has more reasons to get excited about 2020 than 2019. Patience will be required.

4th – Hoosiers – Coming out of the draft, this looked like the team to challenge the Bombers for the Damon, but then Andujar hurt his shoulder, Stanton hurt his biceps, Luzardo’s injury looked more serious than original expected, no one really sknows how quickly Sano will be back and the next thing you know, the Daddies looked like mere boys.

3rd – Calamari – The best term to describe this team is balanced. But when you’re playing for the Damon, balance is a curse. The offense if good….but just not good enough. The pitching is good….but just not good enough. If Lindor gets healthy and Buxton turns into something more than the bust he’s been, the offense could be good enough. But with a pitching staff populated by guys like Green, Yarbrough, Petit, Herrera and Smyly, there just isn’t a high likelihood that the pitching can ever get to anywhere near good enough. Another season that’s good….but not good enough looms.

2nd – Berliners – Back to back is an exceedingly difficult maneuver to pull off and the Berliners look to be short of the depth necessary to overcome the inevitable injuries that await. But they’re in it to win it and that makes them dangerous once again. And if trade chips like Perez, Frazier, Lowe, Trienen, etc. can be turned into assets, the Bombers had better beware.

1st – Bombers – Even with the loss of Pillar, this team is locked and loaded. The Bombers pitching staff is truly awesome and falls short in comparison only to the juggernaut that is the Nukes staff. And the offense is as strong as any team not named the Berliners. Shandler and I agree….this is the team to beat.

That is all….