

# ***David Slays Goliath***

And "Cinderella Takes Home the Prince" are just a couple of the cliches that one could use to describe the 8th and wildest season in the history of the SouthWest Baseball Association. With the MLB being cut short due to strike, many players got at-bats in the SWBA that they wouldn't normally have received. The result - a lot of new records and some great pennant races.

Let's start with Cinderella, okay we'll call him David. David is the Dobson Ranch Bashers, managed appropriately by David Kruper. The Bashers fully expected a fourth place finish in the always tough Clemente Division. What Dave found was opponents were saving their number one and two starters for the more talented Arizona Apaches, Arizona Arrows and SouthWest Roughnecks. The result, a good-hitting Basher team chomping at the bit at the 3-4-5 and sometimes 6 starters. Dobson Ranch finished 94-68 to tie the Arizona Apaches for the division crown. Offensively, the Bash Boys were led by veteran Kirk Gibson. He was just cozy in Tiger Stadium, finishing the season at .283 with 44 HR, 32 doubles, 92 runs and 108 RBI. Rookie Bob Hamelin was also very productive with a .267 average, 31 doubles, 30 HR and 96 RBI. On the hill, Ron was just Darling posting a 3.39 ERA and an 18-11 record. Jeff Fassero (14-11, 3.04) and Paul Wagner (14-7, 4.49) rounded out a very productive top three. Rick White was Mr. Versatility splitting time between the pen and starting to go 9-4 with a 2.99 ERA and a pair of saves. Billy Taylor was the closer, posting a 3.43 ERA with 36 saves.

In the Aaron Division, the Cape Crusaders won their 2nd division title in a row. Brian Pelletier managed them to a 93-69 season to beat out the Richmond Stallions by 6 games. Lenny Dykstra was the spark plug of the Crusaders. He batted .304 with an on-base of .404 which led to 99 runs scored in only 481 at-bats. He also had 30 doubles, 11 triples and 8 dingers. Barry Larkin hit .278 with 33 doubles, 6 triples, 9 HR and scored 112 times. Joe Carter (28 HR, 116 RBI) and Bobby Bonilla (37 HR, 102 R, 140 RBI) were the muscle men. A pair of 18 game winners Pat Hentgen (18-11, 3.71) and Denny Neagle (18-10, 4.18) were the cornerstone of this staff. The bullpen featured Super Set-Up Man Mel Rojas who went 15-6 with 5 saves and a 2.34 ERA and the fat lady always sang when Mike Jackson took the hill (6-4, 33 saves, 1.50 ERA).

In the American League, the Carew Division also ended in a tie between the Oklahoma Switzers and San Diego Rangers, both with 95-67 records. The Switzers put the Big Hurt on everyone all year. Frank Thomas shattered the SWBA and MLB record for homeruns with 66. As if that wasn't enough, he batted .366 with 127 walks, 48 doubles, 149 runs scored and 187 (count 'em), 187 RBI (another record). Robin Ventura completed the best corner duo of the league with a .317 average, 29 doubles, 17 HR, 97 runs and 118 RBI. Four other players hit 20 plus homeruns: Tony Phillips (26), Juan Gonzalez (25), Ray Lankford (21) and Phil Plantier (20). Steve Avery went 20-7 with a 4.14 ERA to lead the starters. Wilson Alvarez (17-12, 4.48) and Tom Gordon (15-13, 4.80) rounded out the top 3. Manager Pat Burroughs would have won the division outright with a better bullpen. Jeff Montgomery did manage 30 saves, but had a 5.24 ERA. Steve Scott's San Diego Rangers played tough all year finishing with the franchise's best record ever. The main Ranger was Chili Davis. Chili was red hot with a .305 average, 27 doubles, 44 HR, 12 runs and 146 RBI. Junior Felix did all he could batting .292 with 43 doubles, 21 dingers and 105 runs. Charlie Hayes belted 22 homers and John Kruk hit .318 to contribute as well. Pedro J. Martinez was the anchor of this pitching staff. P.J. boasted a 20-6 mark with a 3.23 ERA. Right behind was Ricky Bones at 3.87 and 19-12. In the bullpen, John Hudek closed down 30 contests with a 4.13 ERA.

In the Kaline Division, the SWBA's version of the '27 Yankees ran away with the league and the record book. Kevin Griffin's Chicago Cobras streaked to a 118-44 finish, 22 games better than cross-town rival and good friend Dan Castagna's Chicago Gangsters. Ironically, the Gangster crew would have won any of the other three divisions with their 96-66 performance. The Cobras went through more balls than any other team, clobbering 281 round-trippers. Kevin Mitchell said "Good Bye Mr. Spalding" 42 times en route to a .345 average with 31 doubles, 119 runs and 132 RBI. His brother in bash was Moises Alou, posting a .325 average with 49 doubles, 36 HR, 133 runs and 121 RBI. Other members of this deadly lineup were: Marquis Grissom (.312, 45-2B, 23 HR), Cal Ripken (.325, 23 HR, 110 RBI) and Jose Canseco (.297, 23 HR in 276 AB). This team didn't need a pitching staff, but unfortunately for the rest of the AL, they had a good one. Roger Clemens was the ace (22-7, 2.29) followed by Bret Saberhagen (22-8, 3.27). The number 3 guy was Charles Nagy (19-9, 3.54), need I say more! The pen was nasty by committee with Mark Acre (5-3, 21 saves, 2.21 ERA), Paul Assenmacher (2-0, 7 saves, 1.72 ERA) and Johnny Ruffin (5-1, 8 saves, 2.76). There are not enough superlatives to describe this once-in-a-lifetime team.

Before the post-season could start, we had to decide winners in the Clemente and Carew Divisions. In the Carew, the Oklahoma Switzers sent Wilson Alvarez to face John Burkett. The Rangers limped into the playoffs with some key players having to rest due to exhaustion. The Switzers chased Burkett after two innings and held a 4-2 lead when he hit the showers. A four run 4th put Oklahoma up 8-3 and they never blinked the rest of the way. Ivan Rodriguez and Walt Weiss collected three hits on the day. Ray Lankford hit a grand slam and had a sacrifice fly for 5 rbi. In the National League, the Bashers got a big break by not having to face Greg Maddux who had just pitched two days earlier. Ken Hill took the hill for the Arizona Apaches and Jeff Fassero for the Bashers. The Bashers were held to just 4 hits by Hill and 3 relievers, but this scrappy team tallied four runs on one rbi to win 4-2.

In the league championship, Dobson Ranch lost game one 6-4 at home to the Crusaders and it looked as if their luck had run out. Everything suddenly turned their way again as they won game two at home and took the next three

straight in the Crusaders park to advance to the World Series. Billy Taylor was named NLCS MVP pitching 3.1 innings, with 7 strikeouts, 0.00 ERA and 4 saves.

A wild one was expected between the Switzers and Cobras for the AL pennant. Game one saw Tom Gordon defeat Roger Clemens 2-1 in a nail-biter. The Cobras plated one in the 4th, but Oklahoma came back with a single run in the 8th and 9th to pull it out. The next two games were Cobra romps (9-0, 15-4) as Chicago's pitching dominated Big Hurt and company. The Cobras pulled out one-run decisions in games 4 & 5 to take the AL crown. Kevin Mitchell was the MVP in this one, going 9-20 (.450), with a double, 5 homeruns, 7 runs scored and 12 RBI.

The Bashers went in to Comiskey Park for game one with nothing to lose. The Bash Bros. were loose and responded with a 12-4 pounding of the heavily favored Cobras. Kirk Gibson led the way with a pair of homeruns in 5 trips to the dish. Kevin Gross hung on for 6 innings to get the win. Game one only made the Cobras angry. They responded with an 11-3 rout as Cal Ripken and Paul O'Neill went 3-4. Bret Saberhagen got the win, Ron Darling the loss. The Bashers were happy to get home to Tiger Stadium with a split. Game 3 was a close pitchers duel with each team collecting only 5 hits. Jeff Fassero scattered 4 hits over 7 innings for the win, Billy Taylor came on to strike out the side in the 9th for the save. Nagy was the loser. The Bashers shocked the baseball world by taking game four 5-3 and having a 3-1 edge in the Series. This one was another scrappy win by the Bashers with 7 players collecting the 8 hits. Rick White got the W, Clemens the L and Taylor the save. Skipper Kevin Griffin had a long meeting with his players before the final game. They had coasted through the regular season and ALCS, never to have their backs to the wall. He tried to spark his club, but he was up against the Bashers with a 3-1 edge in the friendly Tiger Stadium filled with Basher fans. The Bashers stunned Bret Saberhagen for 5 runs in the bottom of the third inning and never looked back. They went on to win 9-1 and claim their first ever World Series. They are the 7th different franchise in the SWBA's 8 seasons to win it all. Kirk Gibson was named MVP with 4 homeruns, 5 runs scored and 10 RBI.