

Werth will have a full season's worth of plate appearances to build on his 20-20 season. Offensively, the Phillies have been potent in the recent past and this looks to continue in 2009. Howard will likely improve a bit, but the real question will be if Ibanez really can replace Burrell's offensive production.

The Phils didn't upgrade the rotation to the level of CC Sabathia, A.J. Burnett, or Derek Lowe, but the team will start the year with four guaranteed durable starters in Hamels, Myers, Moyer, and Blanton, with the fifth spot open to Happ, Kendrick, Carrasco or Park.

With most of the same players returning next season, the confidence factor will loom large as well. Many players said that now that they knew they could win, it was easier and less stressful to play.

Reasons to be Pessimistic:

Utley and Feliz underwent offseason surgery, with their timetables indefinite. Utley could return in May, or not until June or July if complications persist. Losing one of the 10 best players in the sport for any amount of time will hurt the team. The Phillies have struggled in April over the last four or five seasons, and while it is not realistic to replace Utley's contributions, they need to mitigate the loss if they want to be competitive after the season's first month. Otherwise, the only real reason for this fan to be pessimistic is wondering how Manuel will handle this year's team: Will he bat lefty after lefty after lefty? Will he realize Ibanez, like Burrell, needs a defensive replacement in the late innings? Will Ruiz be pulled if he stinks offensively, as he did last season?

Our Favorite Phillies Blogs:

Crashburn Alley (<http://www.crashburnalley.com>)
 Beer Leaguer (<http://beerleaguer.typepad.com>)
 The Good Phight (<http://www.thegoodphight.com>)
 Todd Zolecki's Philadelphia Inquirer blog, The Phillies Zone (http://www.philly.com/philly/blogs/phillies_zone)

Still Left to Do:

Amaro said he's finished shopping this winter, and with virtually an entire team assembled, there is not realistically anything left to do. Adding another starting pitcher would be nice, given the relative uncertainty surrounding the fifth spot and given pitchers' susceptibility to injuries.

Most Likely Team Outcomes:

Utley is probably the most underrated and underappreciated player in baseball, and his time lost in April will loom large on the Phillies' success in 2009. Back in 2007, Tadahito Iguchi filled in admirably while Utley missed time, but he was not even good enough to hold down a major league job the next year, and the other replacements are an untested Donald and the below-average-hitting Eric Bruntlett. With that in mind, the Phillies are probably an 84-87 win team. With Utley in the lineup, the Phillies are bumped up to an 88-90 win team. If he misses two months, it is not likely that the team is going to be playoff-bound. Utley is the key component to the team, and his time absent will determine its fate.

Player Projections

Batters

Eric Bruntlett (Shortstop)

PA	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	SO	BB	SB	CS	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS	3-Year	Fielding	Reliability
329	37	72	14	2	3	25	54	33	11	1	.251	.332	.345	.677	-0.03	C	Average

Bruntlett is the prototypical no-hit, above-average-fielding utility player. He served as Pat Burrell's late-inning replacement most of the season and filled in when Jimmy Rollins went down with an injury. His only true fantasy value will occur if Chase Utley misses significant time; he is likely heading the pack of potential replacements.

Pat Burrell (Left Field)

PA	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	SO	BB	SB	CS	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS	3-Year	Fielding	Reliability
574	77	123	27	1	29	88	124	93	0	1	.260	.382	.505	.887	-0.03	F	Very High

A three-true-outcomes hitter (one with a high percentage of walks, strikeouts, and home runs), Burrell has another one or two good years left before his skills vastly decline. He has been incredibly consistent over the past four seasons, making his projected OBP and SLG all the more attractive. One has to wonder, though, if playing away from the friendly confines of Citizens Bank Park will affect his offensive output.